

Grammaticalization and typology in Australian Aboriginal Languages: Word order and the grammaticalization of second position clitic complexes.

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In terms of grammatical typology, Indigenous languages of Australia are perhaps best known for their morphological features. Most have elaborate morphological case-marking with ergative systems for marking core arguments. Many languages have morphologically marked noun classes, complex predication (verb-coverb systems), dual pronoun systems (free and bound), and elaborate demonstrative and locational systems (expressed as free forms and affixes) (see Dixon 1980, 2002 for overviews). Typological studies of Australian languages have focused far less on syntactic typology.

In this paper I explore a key aspect of Australian syntactic typology – second position clitics and the respective ordering of elements in initial and subsequent positions. Australian languages are often described as ‘non-configurational’, having syntactically free word order (eg. Hale 1983, Pensalfini 2004), with many also featuring discontinuous noun phrases (eg. McGregor 1997, Austin 2001). A number of studies have shown however that ordering patterns and noun phrase discontinuity are tightly constrained by principles of information packaging and prosody (eg. Mithun 1987, Simpson & Mushin 2008, Schultze-Berndt & Simard 2012). There are however some constraints on ordering in many Australian languages which cannot be accounted for by pragmatic principles alone (eg. Blake 1983, Laughren 2002). The occurrence of second position clitic complexes is one such grammaticalized constraint. Second position clitic complexes occur across a wide range of languages cross-cutting language families within Australia. Although there is some variation in the kinds of grammatical information encoded in these clitics, most minimally include person marking of core arguments (pronominal clitics), with some also including TAM features (Mushin 2005).

In this paper I extend the analysis begun in Mushin (2006) which examined clitic complexes in three languages, arguing that they serve as a mechanism for offsetting pragmatically prominent initial position information from the rest of the utterance. Using a larger set of languages, I examine more closely the extent to which second position clitic phenomena, and their grammatical, pragmatic and prosodic relationships with initial and subsequent position, are grammaticalised across the Australian language family, and consider the paths by which this feature of syntactic architecture developed.

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