

Syntactic Change in Bardi

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Overview

- Bardi (Non-Pama-Nyungan language from NW Australia)
- Data from texts recorded by Gerhardt Laves (late 1920s) and my fieldwork data from 1999-.
- Rapid syntactic change (reanalysis) over two generations

Data

- Speakers:¹

Laves' corpus (= "older Bardi")	Aklif, Bovern (= "modern Bardi")
Gudarra (Jacob Cesar) (c. 1905-c2003)	Bessie Ejai (c1928-)
Jambu (Sambo) and Muju (c. 1890-after 1965)	Jimmy Ejai (c1925-)
Binjarra (c. 1880-?)	Nancy Isaac (c1927-2004), Jessie Sampi (c1934-)
Agumu (c. 1885- c1950?)	Margaret Davey (c1925-2004)
Sydney and Angus (c. 1905 – after 1974)	Katie Wiggan Drysdale (c1911-2002)
Young Wiggan (c. 1895 – 1961)	
- Almost all speakers are from the same family/traditional area (*Iwany/Banarrad*) (related patrilineals)
 - Young Wiggan was Nancy Isaac's father and Katie Drysdale's husband
 - Agumu was Nancy Isaac's grandfather.
 - Angus and Jambu are also close relations of that family.
 - Binjarra is closely related to the Ejais.
- Therefore we can rule out patrilineal differences between the varieties as a source of variation.

Differences in discourse connectors

- Modern Bardi:
 - several second position clitics, including =*min* and =*gid* which mark topic changes.
 - *ginyinggon* 'and then', *ginyinggo* 'from there' (both mark advances in the narrative)
- Laves' texts
 - (=)*rali*, *raanana* used most often.
 - =*min* and =*gid* used occasionally; about a quarter as often as in the modern texts.²
- *rali* in modern Bardi is just an adverb meaning 'quickly'.
- *raanana* doesn't exist; *ra(a)ni* 'straightaway' (adv) is rare.

Changes in agreement

- In Laves' records, object quantification and direct object agreement can both appear.
- In modern Bardi the two occupy the same agreement slot and such examples are ungrammatical.

- 1) *Inamanan=irr nidi.*
3sg-put-PAST-CONTINUATIVE=3PL.OBJ COLLECTIVE
"He was putting them (together in a heap)." (Older Bardi)
- 2) *Inamanan=irr.*
3sg-put-PAST-CONTINUATIVE=3PL.OBJ

¹ It's difficult to discuss 100-years of genealogy without using the names of people who have passed away so I have included names here. Saying these names aloud in the presence of close family members may cause distress or offense.

² That is, of sentences containing discourse connectives (approx. the same proportion of each corpus) =*min* and =*gid* are approximately four times as common.

*Inamanan=***nid**.

3sg-put-PAST-CONTINUATIVE=**COLLECTIVE**

“He was putting them (together in a heap).” (Modern Bardi)

Inamanan=*irr=nid(i)**.

(Modern Bardi)

- (Laves is unreliable about cliticisation, although he tends to overcliticise so the fact that *nidi* in (1) is not cliticised is potentially significant.)
- Another quantifier has fused with agreement (indefinite singular =*bal* and indef. plural =*balirr*).
- Free pronouns more common (almost never found in my texts, except in sentences like (3)).

3) *Anjala! arra ngay bard arr ngandan!*
look! it's **me** coming along!

- Agreement for oblique arguments is optional in the Laves texts (4), but not in modern Bardi (5). No agreement in (5) is ungrammatical; *arra milarga* means ‘don’t be frightened (*of someone)’.

4) “*Ngayə arra milarga,*” *injoonin.*
1sg NEG 2SG-IRR-be frightened he said.
“Don't be frightened of me,” he said. (Older Bardi)

5) “*Ngayə arra milargajan,*” *injoonin.*
1sg NEG 2SG-IRR-be frightened=**1SG.OBJ** he said. (Modern Bardi)

- (Modern Bardi has possessor raising; Older Bardi doesn't.)
- (Collective singular subjects are possible in Older Bardi, not in Modern Bardi.)
- These patterns make the Bardi of the Laves texts considerably more similar to the syntax of other languages in the family.

The fate of the ‘dative’ *-ji ~ *-yi

- The Proto Nyulnyulan dative *-ji is a causal case in other Western Nyulnyulan languages.
- It survives in Modern Bardi in a single phrase (6):

6) *Oorany-ji irmonyji.*
Woman-‘DATIVE’ 3PL-fight-REFLEXIVE/RECIPROCAL
“They are fighting each other over a woman.”

- In the Laves corpus, however, there are several examples of reflexes of the dative *-ji (usually written -yə) with both purposive and causal readings:³

7) ... *ginyingganjamba aarlimayə ingarrjarrmina.*
Then-thus food-DATIVE 3PL-get up-PAST.
“Then they got up for food.”

³ The lenition from j > y is regular; Laves frequently writes final /i/ (here [ɪ]) as schwa. See also (5) above.

Discussion

- Summary of reanalyses

Older	Modern
a. • DO agreement for person and number only	• DO agreement for person and number, but also marks quantification in third person (Bower 2004:197ff) for objects and optionally unaccusative subjects too
b. • Collective singular subjects	• Strict numeral subject agreement
c. • More free pronouns	• Fewer free pronouns
d. • Oblique agreement is optional	• Oblique agreement obligatory; absence of agreement signal change in argument structure for such verbs
e. • No possessor raising	• Optional possessor raising
f. • dative case	• no dative case; dative found only in frozen causal phrase
g. • goals and causes usually not marked on verb	• goals/recipients always marked on verb; causes not usually marked

(+ a few other changes not mentioned here)

- No loss of intelligibility, despite radical underlying reanalyses.
- Many changes (all but (b)) examples of head migration.
- (b) could be symptomatic of greater nonconfigurationality.
- Language death phenomenon? (but change was already complete before the real pressure on Bardi started (post 1964))
- Evidence for rapid syntactic analysis: Metcalfe's recordings from the early 1970s don't show any evidence for the dative or agreement patterns; -nid seems to be a clitic by then too.
- cf Reid (2001) for another example from Australia.
- Therefore, contra Longobardi (2001), syntax **not** a good marker of deep genetic relationships (cf. also Nichols (1986; 1992) for suggestions that certain profiles might be diachronically stable and indicators of deep genetic relations).

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