

7. THE GRAMMAR

When looking at Walmatjari from an English background, the features which will stand out most noticeably are word order, suffixation, the verbal auxiliary and the lack of conjunctions. ³

In English the order in which words are used is very important. For instance, the sentences Can I go and I can go sometimes differ only in the order of the words though they mean very different things. Walmatjari does not use word order to show different meanings such as this but the words are changed in some other way. Often a suffix is added or one letter in the word is altered.

Walmatjari is a suffixing language and many words in English have suffix equivalents in Walmatjari. In English brother becomes brother's by adding the suffix -s. In Walmatjari ngaja 'younger brother' becomes ngajakura 'younger brother's' by adding the suffix -kura. The root of a Walmatjari word is always first and they may be many suffixes. In the next word, the suffixes are separated by hyphens.

karla-ngu-jangka-warnti-wu-mipa

'The ones from the west only.'

The verbal auxiliary is a combination of suffixes used in each sentence. Their function is to identify participants of the sentence.

Walmatjari has few conjunctions. The English words but, or, because, and if have no equivalents in Walmatjari, though these concepts can be expressed by other means. The Walmatjari sentence is usually short.

This section does not cover all features of Walmatjari grammar, but it presents a summary of the salient features and is designed as an introduction only. The serious student of Walmatjari who wishes to converse in the language will need to consult the fuller description for details (Hudson forthcoming).

7.1 WORDS AND THEIR PARTS (MORPHOLOGY)

Many of the things that are expressed in English as separate words are, in Walmatjari, expressed as suffixes. Suffixes are pieces added to the end of the word giving extra meaning. In English brother becomes brothers by adding the suffix -s.

7.11 Suffixes on Nouns

Number.

In English there is a distinction made between singular and plural. The suffix -s is added to the noun to show plural as in boy-s and horse-s. In Walmatjari distinction is made between singular and plural but there is an extra distinction made for two things. This is called dual. As in English the singular noun has no suffix; dual and plural are shown by suffixes.

parri	'boy'
parri-jarra	'two boys'
parri-warnti	'boys (3 or more)'

The dual is important in Walmatjari and it is distinguished also in pronouns and some verbs.

Equivalents of English prepositions.

Where English uses prepositions such as at, Walmatjari often uses suffixes.

at, on, in = -nga

In Walmatjari there is no distinction between at, on and in. One suffix, -nga, covers the three areas of meaning. A person may be on the bank of a river or in the river, yet the same suffix will be used to describe either location.

manga pa ngapa-nga nguja
girl she water-at was

'The girl was in, at or near the water.'

from has two equivalents, -jangka and -ngurni

ngurra-ngurni pa yani manga
camp-from she went girl

'The girl went from the camp.'

to = -karti

ngapa-karti pa manga yani
water-to she girl went

'The girl went to the water.'

for = -wu

kuyi parla kamparni manga-wu
meat he-for-her cooked girl-for

'He cooked meat for the girl.'

with = -nga

yani manyanta manga-nga
went he-with-her girl-with

'He went with the girl.'

Descriptive Suffixes.

There are other suffixes in Walmatjari which, when they go on the end of nouns or verbs, make them function like adjectives describing a noun in the sentence. The noun mimi 'sore' becomes an adjective when -jarti is added as in parri mimi-jarti 'the sick boy'. The English equivalents of these suffixes are often a word or a phrase. The suffix -jiliny is equivalent to English like as in kunyarr-jiliny 'like a dog'.

Following are some of these suffixes with examples in sentences.

-mulu 'without'

Piyirn pa tikirryani ngurra-karti kuyi-mulu
man he returned camp-to meat-without

'The man returned to the camp without meat.'

-jarti 'having' (See also Instrument in Section 7. 27)

Marnin pa yapa-jarti yani
woman she child-having went

'The woman with the child went.'

-juwal 'habitual'

Kuyi nyanarti pa pajanu-juwal
animal that he bite-habitual

'That animal is always biting.'

-jiliny 'like'

Minyarti ngarlka pa pinat-jiliny
this bush nut it peanut-like

'This bush nut is like a peanut.'

Another suffix of interest is -warlany 'another'. The word with the suffix -warlany added still functions as a noun.

yutantinya palu ngapa-warlany-ja
sat they water-another-at

'They camped at another waterhole.'

7.12 Verbs

All verbs in Walmatjari are in the active voice. There are no passive verbs. To show tense in Walmatjari, suffixes are added to the verb. This is in contrast to English where it may be shown in other ways. Note the verb 'to run'; runs, will run, is running, ran, should have run.

Tenses

The tenses in Walmatjari are past, present, customary and future.

Examples of these tenses, shown by suffixes, are given for the verb yan 'to go'.

yan-i marna 'I went.'
go-past I

yanan-a marna 'I am going.'
go-present I

Customary tense describes an action as taking place habitually as in the sentence, I sweep the house and she bakes the bread every day.

yan-any marna 'I go.'
go-customary I

The future tense is used for such things as desire, I want to go; intention, I will go; non-abrupt imperative, You go; and necessity, He must go.

yan-ku marna 'I will go.'
go-future I

Another form of the verb is the imperative used for direct commands.

Yanta 'Go!'

The imperative is different from other verbs in that the form changes according to the number of people addressed. The form yanta is used when addressing one person. To address two people, yanta-pila is used, and for three or more the form is yanta-lu.

Classes

Walmatjari verbs each fall into one of five classes. Verbal suffixes for tense, aspect and mood vary in shape according to the class of the verb. These classes are not predictable and so it is necessary to learn the class of each verb individually in order to use the correct tense suffixes. Details of verb classes, and verb suffixes are given in Hudson (forthcoming).

7.13 Pronouns

Walmatjari pronouns are similar to English pronouns, but there are some very important differences of meaning between the two.

Walmatjari distinguishes between inclusive (incl) we and exclusive (excl) we, but English has no such distinction. The choice between inclusive and exclusive forms is made depending on whether the hearer is included or excluded. If the inclusive form is used, then the person being spoken to is included. If the exclusive form is used, the person being spoken to is not included. The English sentence We have been invited out for lunch is ambiguous. It could mean You and I have been invited (incl) or He and I have been invited (excl). Walmatjari does not allow this particular ambiguity. The former would use the pronoun ngaljarra 'you and I' and the latter would be ngajarra 'he and I'. If more than two people are involved there are different forms again, ngalimpa 'all of us including you' and nganampa 'all of us but not you'. Pidgin makes these same distinctions. Words like mipela 'all of us but not you' and yunmi 'you and I' are commonly used.

Whereas Walmatjari has four different pronouns for English we, it has only one form to equate with English he, she and it. There is no gender distinction in Walmatjari pronouns.

The chart below gives the Walmatjari pronouns with the English equivalents in brackets.

Chart 6 Pronouns

	Singular (1)	Dual (2)	Plural (3 or more)
1st person incl		ngalijarra (we)	ngalimpa (we)
1st person excl	ngaju (I)	ngajarra (we)	nganampa~ nganimpa (we)
2nd person	nyuntu (you)	nyurrajarra (you)	nyurrawarnti (you)
3rd person	nyantu (he/she/it)	nyantujarra (they)	nyantuwarnti (they)

These pronouns function in much the same way as do the English pronouns except that they do not occur so often. They are used to emphasise rather than to replace a noun. Suffixes which can be added to nouns can also be added to these pronouns.

7.2 SENTENCES AND THEIR PARTS (SYNTAX)

7.21 Transitive and Intransitive Sentence Types

In English the order of words is most important. In the sentence The boy hit the girl, the subject the boy comes before the verb and the object the girl is after the verb. The two sentences The boy hit the girl and The girl hit the boy have very different meanings. The change of word order in the second sentence identifies the girl as the subject and the boy as the object. Walmatjari has a different means of signalling which word is the subject and which is the object. This is done by the use of the suffix -ngu.

Before presenting this suffix, a little more background in grammar may help. There is a basic division of sentence types, that of "transitive" and "intransitive" types. This basic division has to do with whether or not an object is present. Transitive sentences have an object while intransitive sentences have none.

A transitive sentence - The boy hit the girl.

An intransitive sentence - The boy went.

The functional meaning of the verbs is different. The transitive verb hit carries the meaning in itself that something, the girl, was the recipient of the hitting action. In contrast to this is the intransitive verb went. This has no object and the verb carries the meaning in itself that there is no recipient of the action of going.

In Walmatjari, the subject (subj) of a transitive verb is marked by the suffix -ngu. The word marked for subject can be first or last in the sentence and it is still identified as the subject. The object (obj) of a transitive verb has no suffix and this absence of a suffix distinguishes it from the subject. The absence of a suffix is marked in examples to help in identifying the object. The symbol ϕ is used. (The second word in these examples will be described later.)

parri- ϕ pa	manga- ϕ nyanya	'The boy saw the girl.'
boy-subj	he-her girl-obj saw	

parri- ϕ pa	nyanya manga- ϕ	'The girl saw the boy.'
boy-obj	she-him saw girl-subj	

The above examples show that the order of words is not the important thing but the placement of the suffix -ngu is what matters.

The subject of an intransitive verb has no suffix marking it as there is no subject-object distinction in an intransitive sentence. So the subject of an intransitive verb looks the same as the object of a transitive verb. Compare the last two transitive sentences with two intransitive sentences below, and note that there is no -ngu present.

parri- ϕ pa	yani wurna	'The boy went for a walk.'
boy-obj	he went walk	

yani pa	manga- ϕ wurna	'The girl went for a walk.'
went	she girl-obj walk	

Again word order is not important, though there are preferences of word order which will be mentioned later.

The suffix -ngu has several forms. The form -ngu is used following a word of two syllables which ends in a vowel such as manga-ngu 'girl (subj)'. If the word ends in a vowel and is longer than two syllables the form -rlu is used, as with ngamaji-rlu 'mother (subj)'. If the word ends in a consonant the forms -u, tu, rtu, ju are used. English does the same with the prefix meaning 'not' in such words as

in-adequate, im-polite, ir-regular, il-legible,

where the form of the prefix differs according to the first letter of the word which follows.

There are other suffixes like -ngu which identify the case of the noun. These are called case-marking suffixes and are described under 7.11.

7.22 Equational Sentence

The equational sentence has no verb in Walmatjari. The boy is big is translated into Walmatjari as parri pa purlka. The word pa is not a verb. It indicates that the sentence is a statement and not a question. Some other equational sentences are

manga pa lamparn	'The girl is small.'
girl small	

pukarr pa nyanarti	'That is cooked.'
cooked that	

7.23 The Ditransitive Sentence

The sentence in English The boy gave the book to the girl has a direct object, book, and an indirect object, the girl. In a similar sentence with the verb to give, Walmatjari has no indirect object but two direct objects. There is no suffix equivalent to the English preposition to. This is called the ditransitive sentence because of the two objects.

yinya parla manga- ϕ kuyi- ϕ	'He gave meat to the girl.'
gave he-her girl-obj meat-obj	

The only way to tell who received it and what was given is to notice the context. There is almost no confusion because it is normally obvious which was given and who received it.

manga-ngu parla parri- ϕ yinya laliwarnti- ϕ
 girl-subj she-him boy-obj gave lollies-obj

'The girl gave lollies to the boy.'

7.24 The Verbal Auxiliary

In the examples given so far, the second word has been assigned several meanings. This word belongs to a set of words called verbal auxiliaries (abbreviated as aux). This feature is often described as a catalyst. (See Hudson forthcoming.) There is no equivalent to these in English. One auxiliary is required in each sentence, and it is almost always the second word of the sentence.

kuyi- ϕ marna ngurrakarti kanya 'I took the meat to camp.'
 meat-obj aux-I to-camp took

The verbal auxiliary has two main functions.

1. It shows which person and how many persons were involved in the action of the verb. For example, the auxiliary distinguishes between I, you, and he and between one, two and three (or more). It also shows how these persons were related to the action. This is called case. For instance, if the boy (1 person) does something TO the girl (1 person), the auxiliary has the form pa. If the boy (1 person) does something FOR the girl (1 person) the auxiliary is parla. If the boy (1 person) ACCOMPANIES the girl (1 person) the auxiliary is manyanta. If other people are involved the auxiliary changes. With so much information contained in the auxiliary, the sentence can be reduced to two words. The verb tells the action and the verbal auxiliary tells who was involved in the action. These two words form a mini-sentence.

yani manyanta 'He went with him/her.'
 went he-with-him

nyanya palupinya 'Those (three or more)
 saw they pl - those 2 saw those two.'

This mini-sentence does not show exactly who was involved. If that information is needed, nouns are added to make it clear, as in the following sentences.

parri- \emptyset manyanta yani manga-nga 'The boy went with the
 boy-obj he-with-her went girl-with girl.'

marninwarnti-rlu palupinya nyanya parri-jarra- \emptyset
 women-subj they pl-they-2 saw boy-two-obj

'The women (three or more) saw the two boys.'

2. By changes in the root of the auxiliary, the mood of the sentence is changed. The change from pa to nga in the next examples changes the sentence from a statement to a question. (The forms pa and ma shown elsewhere are identical in meaning.)

parri-warnti- \emptyset palu wurna yani 'The boys went for a
 boy-plural-subj they walk went walk.'

parri-warnti ngalu wurna yani 'Did the boys go for a
 walk?'

There are numerous possible forms for the auxiliary. Each combination of numbers in the subject and object requires separate forms in the auxiliary when the action is for someone or with someone. The full range is given in Hudson (forthcoming), but a few most commonly used forms are listed below. Others are used in examples throughout the paper.

Forms used in intransitive statements:
 (for explanation of exclusive see pronouns 7.13)

<u>Auxiliary form</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Example</u>	
marna	I	yani marna	'I went.'
pajarra	we two exclusive	yani pajarra	'We 2 went.'
marnalu	we all exclusive	yani marnalu	'We all went.'
man	you (1)	yani man	'you went.'
manpila	you (2)	yani manpila	'You 2 went.'
manta	you (3)	yani manta	'You all went.'
pa	he	yani pa	'he went.'
pila	they two	yani pila	'They 2 went.'
palu	they all	yani palu	'They all went.'

This set is also used in transitive sentences when him, her or it, is the object.

pinya marna 'I hit him, her, it.'

pinya pajarra 'We two hit him/her/it.'

7.25 Questions

There are four ways to form questions in Walmatjari.

1. The verbal auxiliary. One way to indicate a question is to use the question form of the verb auxiliary. Whereas the statement form of the auxiliary begins with pa or ma, the question form begins with nga.

yani palu manga-warnti 'The girls went.'
went they girls

yani ngalu mangawarnti 'Did the girls go?'
went they girls

2. Interrogative particle payi. A statement can have the word payi added at the end to turn it into a question in the same way as English adds isn't it to a sentence.

It is a good car, isn't it?

English uses several different words for this purpose. The words in the tag question, isn't it, are chosen to agree with the main sentence in tense and person.

It is a fine day, isn't it?

He went to town, didn't he?

The payi in Walmatjari does not change according to the main sentence, but always retains the same form.

ngurti pa wulyu, payi 'The car is good,
car it good isn't it isn't it?'

tawurnkarti pa yani, payi 'He went to town, didn't he?'
to-town he went didn't he

This question in Walmatjari always expects a positive answer. It is not possible to turn it to solicit a negative answer as can be done in English in sentences such as

He isn't very big, is he?

He didn't go to town, did he?

Sometimes payi is used alone to prompt an answer from someone.

3. Question words. Walmatjari question words function very much like those in English. They usually occur as the first word in a sentence. Some have meanings equivalent to the English, but others are quite different. The words are:

wanyjurla, wanyjarra 'where' as used in 'Where are you going?'

Wanyjurla man yanany.
where you going

nyangurla 'when' as used in 'When will you go?'

Nyangurla man yanku.
when you will-go

ngana 'what' or 'who' as used in 'What/Who did you see?'

Ngana man nyanya
what you saw

The question word ngana acts like a noun in that it requires the suffix -ngu to be added if the question asks who the actor of the sentence was, as in:

ngana-ngu pa pinya parri- ϕ
who-subj he-him hit boy-obj

'Who hit the boy?'

However, to ask who was hit, no suffix is added because the object has no suffix.

ngana- ϕ pa pinya manga-ngu
who-obj she-him hit girl-subj

'Who did the girl hit?'

nyapartu, nyapartukarra 'what, how' as in 'How did he get in?'

Nyapartukarra pa takurryani
how he inside-went

These words cannot be used in the question, 'How are you?'

4. Tone of voice. A statement can be changed to a question by raising the voice at the end of the sentence similar to English, but this is not preferred in Walmatjari.

yani pa	'He went.'
yani pa	'Did he go.'

7.26 The Noun Phrase

Case-marking suffixes are attached to the nouns in Walmatjari sentences as described earlier under 7, 21

parri-ngu pa	manga- ϕ pinya	'The boy hit the girl.'
boy-subj he-her	girl-obj hit	

When a descriptive of some kind is used with a noun, the combination of noun and descriptive is called a noun phrase. In English, the big boy is an example of a noun phrase. In Walmatjari all words of the noun phrase have case-marking suffixes attached. It is not sufficient to add -ngu to one word only (except in special circumstances). The first two words of the next sentence with identical suffixes make up a noun phrase.

parri-ngu purlka-ngu pa	manga- ϕ pinya
boy-subj big-subj he-her	girl-obj hit

'The big boy hit the girl.'

Since the words parri and purlka are both shown by the suffix -ngu to be the subject of the sentence, the words can be shuffled and put together in a different way and the subject will still be identified.

manga- ϕ pa	parri-ngu pinya	purlka-ngu
girl-obj he-her	boy-subj hit	big-subj

'The big boy hit the girl.'

7.27 Instrument

An interesting feature of Walmatjari grammar is the way instrument is expressed. To say He hit her with a stick, there is no word for with but a combination of two suffixes is used.

The suffixes are -jarti 'having' and -rlu 'subj of transitive verb'. They have been described separately before in 7.11 and 7.21 respectively. The use of -jarti without the -rlu is shown in the next example.

yani pa nganpayi kuyi-jarti	'The man carried meat
went he man meat-having	(went with meat).'

The suffix -rlu occurs without the -jarti as in

nganpayi-rlu kartiya-rlu pa parri- ϕ pinya
man-subj whiteman-subj he-him boy-obj hit

'The white man hit the boy.'

In the next example the -jarti and -rlu both occur, showing the stick to be the instrument.

nganpayi-rlu mana-jarti-rlu pa parri- ϕ pinya
man-subj stick-having-subj he-him boy-obj hit

'The man hit the boy with the stick.' or 'The man with the stick hit the boy.'

lani pa ngapurlu-rlu niyitil-jarti-rlu
speared he-him sister-subj needle-having-subj

'The Sister gave him a needle. (speared him with a needle)'

This combination may also occur when it does not mean instrument.

pinya pa parri- ϕ kuyi-jarti-rlu
hit he-him boy-obj meat-having-subj

'The one who had the meat hit the boy.'

The one who hit the boy could have just been carrying the meat or he could have actually used the meat to hit the boy. There is no distinction made in the grammar of the sentence. It is the sense of the statement that tells which it is.

To illustrate the type of thing which can be done with this combination of -jarti and -rlu some sentences are given below. Not all occurrences of -jartirlu can be translated by English 'with', as will be obvious from the following sentences. In fast speech the -jartirlu changes to -jawurlu. All further examples are given with this more natural form.

mana-jawurlu pa kunyarr- ϕ pinya
stick- he-him dog-obj hit

'He hit the dog with a stick.'

nganpayi-rlu pa mana-jawurlu nyanya
man-subj he-him stick- saw

'The man with a stick saw him.'

nganpayi-rlu pa yawarta-jawurlu nyanya
man-subj he-him horse saw

'The man on the horse saw him'

If the instrument used is a body part, there is no need for -jarti to be used.

nganpayi-rlu pa kurrapa-rlu pinya kunyarr- ϕ
man-subj he-him hand-subj hit dog-obj

'The man hit the dog with his hand.'

7.28 Conjunctions

The most commonly used connective is the suffix -la 'then'. It is attached to the first word of the second part of the sentence.

Nganpayirlu pa pinya kuyi kakaji, kanya-la pa
man he hit animal goanna carried-then he

ngurrakarti, kamparni-la pa kuyi
to-camp cooked-then he meat

'The man killed a goanna, then he took it to camp, then he cooked it.'

Another conjunction is -jaa 'and'. This joins nouns together. It cannot join sentences, so it is not an exact equivalent of English 'and'.

Ngarni marna kuyi-jaa miyi 'I ate meat and vegetable food.'
ate I meat-and food

Other conjunctions of interest are: kitangarni 'until', yarnta 'again, also', yangkala 'so that', (sometimes it means 'but'), and kula 'it seemed to be but it wasn't'.

luwarni marnalu nyanarti pirninypal, wali, kitangarni lalypatjarrinya
grind we that wood alright until became-soft

'We used to grind that pirninypal wood until it was soft.'

marnpangkurrawurti mukurr-jawurlu luwalany, yarnta jirnal-jawurlu
close-from hittingstick-with hits also spear-with

lanany
spears

'He can hit with a hitting stick from close up and also with a spear.'

ngapa pa ngarni, yangkala wirriya nguniny.
water he ate so that happy is

'He drank water so now he is happy.'

pinat-jiliny miyi, yangkala nyantu kanarlanyparni niyarra
peanut-like food, so-that he different taste

'The food is like a peanut, but it has a different taste.'

kula walirni kurrkantinya minya pa ngapa nguniny
it seemed all right dried up really he water is

kaninykaniny munku
inside ground

'It seemed as though (the waterhole) had dried up but there is water under the ground.'

There is no Walmatjari word meaning 'because'. The Pidgin word tumaj has been borrowed and this is now in common use in Walmatjari.

yangkartijal mangulu miyi pujumani, tumaj man warrarni
that-certainly they-your food finished because you still

wirlmarnani
out of sight

'They ate all of your food because you were still away.'