

# AGREEMENT PUZZLES IN MURRINH-PATHA

Rachel Nordlinger

University of Melbourne

Murrinh-Patha (non-Pama-Nyungan, Australia) has a serial verb construction that is used to encode imperfective aspect. In this construction, one of a set of seven intransitive verbs is serialised to the end of the main verb, as shown in the examples below in which the serial verb is given in bold font. Note that Murrinh-Patha is one of a number of northern Australian languages in which main verbs are usually complex predicates (see McGregor 2002 for general discussion). In Murrinh-Patha main verbs are generally formed by combining one of 38 bound classifier stems (traditionally glossed with a number) with a bound lexical stem; these are both underlined in the following examples.

- (1) dirran-nintha-nu-bath  
3sS.28.nFut-du.m-RR-watch  
'They (two) looked at each other.'
- (2) dirran-nintha-nu-bath=**pirrim**  
3sS.28.nFut-du.m-RR-watch=3sS.STAND(3).nFut  
'They two are looking at each other (while standing)'

Previous descriptions of Murrinh-Patha (e.g. Walsh 1976, Street 1987) state that the serial verb in the imperfective aspect construction must agree with the main verb in terms of subject person and number, and tense/aspect/mood. While this is generally true, in fact the situation is not as straightforward as this would suggest and agreement mismatches arise in a number of ways. Firstly, the serialised verb encodes a different set of subject number categories than the main verb so that serial verbs and main verbs operate according to a different set of number agreement principles. Secondly, the serial verb actually agrees with the object, not the subject, in experiencer object constructions as the following example demonstrates:

- (3) dem-**ngi-ralal**=**ngurran**  
3sS.POKE:RR(21).nFut-1sO-thirsty=1sS.GO(6).nFut  
'I'm thirsty.'

This phenomenon is related to the agreement with the object marker in Walsh's (1996) 'vouns', in which the logical subject is likewise encoded with the object marker:

- (4) pakpak-mam-**ngi-be**=**ngurran**  
cramp-3sS.HANDS(8).nFut-1sO-arm=1sS.GO(6).nFut  
'My arm is [habitually] cramped' (Walsh 1996: 241)

In this paper I present the full range of these agreement puzzles in Murrinh-Patha serial verb constructions and discuss the challenges they pose for linguistic analysis. I argue that they can be accounted for through the use of different types of underspecification and show how this can be captured using the formal theoretical framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar. A particular benefit of this approach is the unified treatment it affords for the object agreement in experiencer object verbs (as in 3) and 'vouns' (as in 4).

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**Contact:** Rachel Nordlinger, Linguistics, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia.  
Ph +61 3 8344 4227. Fax +61 3 8344 8990. Email: racheln@unimelb.edu.au.