

Markedness in number features: Evidence from Ganggalida (Yukulta)

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This paper presents data from Ganggalida (Tangkic family, Australia) which suggests that the featural representation of plural number is more highly marked than dual in this language. This challenges the number feature geometry proposed by Harley and Ritter (2002), in which dual is more highly marked than plural. I show that the Ganggalida facts follow naturally from Cowper's (2005) geometry. Ganggalida normally has a three-way singular/dual/plural distinction in its pronominal clitic system. However, in particular contexts (namely, clauses with third person non-singular subjects acting on second person non-singular objects) the contrast between dual and plural is neutralised. In neutralised contexts the normal dual clitic 'rr' cross-references both dual (1a) and plural (1b) entities. In these contexts it has a 'non-singular' meaning, analogous to the meaning of a plural in a two-way singular/plural number system.

(1a) 3DU>2DU

ngamathu-yarrngga=**rrawa-rra** garna-ja wurlank-i girrwa gunawuna-ntha
 mother-two.ABS=2DU.DAT-DU cook.IND food-LOC 2DU.DAT child-DAT

Your mothers are cooking food for you two children. (Keen 1983:206#34b)

(1b) 3PL>2PL

dathin-da=**rrawa-rr**-ingg-a gurri-ja gilwan-ji
 that-ABS=2DU.DAT-DU-NPRES-RLS look-IND 2PL-OBL

Those fellows are looking at you lot. (Keen 1983:236#155a)

This pattern is captured naturally by Cowper's (2005) feature geometry, given in (2). In Ganggalida's regular three-way system (2a) the dual vocabulary item (VI) 'rr' spells out [>1] and the plural VI 'l' spells out the dependant feature [>2]. In the neutralised system, however, only a subset of the plural features is spelled out; spellout of [>2] is blocked and [>1] is spelled out by the dual VI instead. This model accounts for the distribution of VIs and allows for unique and consistent lexical feature specifications for each VI.

(2) Cowper (2005) (boxed features are spelled out)

(a) three-way system

(singular)	(dual)	(plural)
[#]	[#]	[#]
	>1	>1
		>2

VI ∅/rn

rr

l

(b) neutralised system

(singular)	(dual)	(plural)
[#]	[#]	[#]
	>1	>1
		>2

∅/rn

rr

rr

The geometry proposed by Harley and Ritter (2002), given in (3), does not effectively capture the Ganggalida system. Under Harley and Ritter's approach the dual VI would normally spell out [group, minimal] while the plural VI spells out [group] (3a). In neutralised contexts, the dual must also be able to spell out [group] in order to cross-reference plural entities (3b).

(3) Harley & Ritter (2002)

(a) three-way system

(singular)	(plural)	(dual)
[#]	[#]	[#]
[minimal]	[group]	[group][minimal]

∅/rn

l

rr

(b) neutralised system

(singular)	(plural)	(dual)
[#]	[#]	[#]
[minimal]	[group]	[group][group][minimal]

∅/rn

rr

rr

This forces us to claim that the dual VI has two lexical representations, [group, minimal] and [group], and also results in there being two VIs with the identical lexical representation [group]. This account has less explanatory power due to these added specifications. Ganggalida data, therefore, provides evidence in support of a highly marked plural featural representation, and against a highly marked dual.

References

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