

## LEGENDARY PERIPHRASTIC TIME ADVERBS IN WARAO

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### *1. Introduction*

Since the mid 60's, linguistics has increasingly directed part of its efforts to the study of the relationship between language use and sociocultural organization. The basic assumption behind this linguistic trend is that speakers as members of a particular culture internalize speech codes widely employed by other members of their society. Labov (1966) made far-reaching observations that concern the heterogeneity of all known speech communities, and the extent to which variation in use carries socio-stylistic meaning. Based on Labov's views, Sankoff (1972) pointed out that in speech behavior, as in many other kinds of behavior, there is a great deal of statistical variability that might be conveniently approached in a quantitative manner. This quantitative paradigm advocated by Labov and his followers implies a number of procedures for data collection and analysis, which form the unique and coherent system widely used in present-day sociolinguistic studies. Grounded in the context mentioned above, the present study is based on a corpus that represents adequately the speech performance of members of a Warao community. An initial analysis of the corpus, in terms of the relationship between speech acts and participant roles, has shown the existence of at least three speech styles in Warao: DERI 'council' style, DENOBO, 'legend' style and ARE 'common' style (See details in Romero-Figueroa: 1993, 1996b).

The corpus has also revealed that some structure-dependent features correlate with the speech styles, which exist in the language. For instance, it has been demonstrated in quantitative terms that some suffixal subject pronouns are only used in the DERI 'council' style (see Romero-Figueroa, 1996a). Further analysis has proven as well that diverse manifestations of the past, as a time parameter, exhibit a distribution that markedly intersects with one of the existing styles. Warao possesses noun and prepositional phrases which function as adverbs. They are heard exclusively in mythological narratives and tales referring to the ancestors. Such adverbs usually describe, by means of periphrases, specific moments (and particular places) that are part of the state of affairs in stories which belong to the Warao DENOBO: 'legends to be transferred from generation to generation'. The speech acts associated with the teaching of the DENOBO define the use of a particular style, which I have called the DENOBO 'legend' style. The use of these adverbs may be contrasted with the use of adverbs which denote everyday life routines. The latter are based upon points in the daily or seasonal movement of the sun and the moon (or places of the village or the household), and prevail in the DERI 'council' and ARE 'common' styles.

## 2. *Periphrastic past time adverbs*

As an introduction to this section, some general aspects of the Warao adverbial system must be presented to facilitate the understanding of the analysis. Heinen & Lavandero (1973) offer interesting data about spatial and temporal deixis in Warao. They mention that the Warao are prone to place phenomena in a spatial framework. It seems that *-noko* 'place' is a key term in the language: from the Warao house *hanoko* 'place of the hammock' to the name of remarkable spots and rivers or villages, for instance *osibukahunoko* 'place where the *morokoto* fish jump out' or *wirinoko* 'place to paddle'. The latter word gave rise to the name of the Orinoco River.

Space intersects with Time in Warao, bringing about a complex network of time/place adverbials. For instance, the seasonal abundance or scarcity of fish in particular spots in one of the Orinoco 'caños' and the ease or difficulty to paddle due to seasonal variations in the volume and speed of water that flows down the Orinoco Delta streams, are part of the orientations that the Warao use in their speech. Because such details are vital for their survival they need to be expressed either overtly or implicitly. Given this natural setting, the language offers a variety of adverbs, which indicate simultaneously both particular locations and specific moments in time. We thus may conclude that time division on the basis of natural periods, is the resource most commonly used in the Warao speech community to point out 'time' and 'space'. To denote 'time' in everyday conversation, Warao uses parameters that correlate with the movement of the sun, the moon, some stars and constellations, as well as seasonal circumstances linked to the environment, such as the Orinoco river annual flood and the tidal fluctuations of the water levels in the mouth of the delta and subsidiary streams. The basic time expressions in Warao are grouped into (i) periods of days, (ii) month and the passing of the months, (iii) year and the passing of the years and (iv) proximate, remote and punctual time (Romero-Figueroa, 1996b).

Adverbial items of the sort specified above appear profusely in Warao speech. They generally fill sentence margins, and function as oblique arguments whose main role is to increase cohesion among pieces of discourse. Apart from these adverbial expressions, Warao possesses a reduced set of adverbs with past time connotation, which are infrequently used. These adverbs are mainly nominals and postpositional periphrastic phrases, which provide time (or space) orientation in legends and stories about ancestors and mythological beings. The latter kind of adverbs has an ideological motivation quite different from that found in the rest of the time/space items of the adverbial system. The following fragments illustrate the use of these adverbs in stories about the Warao forefathers, delivered in the DENOBO 'legend' style:

- (1) ## *kaina hiro* / *tira isaka ha yama* ## *tai tira hakotai kokoho haha yama* / *atae auka tira rakate ha yama* ## *auka tira a wai mohaba / aranima a wai kokoho tane ama* ## *Katukamo nibora isaka isia nakae / tirasi isia ribunae orinisaki* ## *tane orinisanæ yama* ##

‘## when the world was still very new / it is said that there was a woman ## It is said that that woman that had a dove also had a daughter ## The name of the daughter was ‘bee’ / the name of the mother was ‘dove’ ## One man from there approached her and said (to her): “Let’s get together” ## It is said that they got together ##’.

In fragment (1), *kaina hiro* ‘the world was still very new’ provides orientational time and space features, and occupies an peripheral slot in the sentence, which follows the prevailing OSV order of the language (Romero-Figueroa, 1985; 1986ab; 1996b). In Warao, adverbs tend to be fronted (a mechanism used for topicalization). Thompson & Longacre (1985:229) have argued that at the level of the sentence, any adverb whose role is to maintain cohesion within the discourse as a whole is functioning as a TOPIC with respect to the sentence to which it belongs.

The adverb *kaina hiro* in (1) is a noun phrase that conveys its past time meaning periphrastically, i.e., by describing a context which defines or characterizes an early epoch. It refers to a trait of a place that existed solely in a primitive era. Other periphrastic adverbs are shown in (2-4).

(2) ## *hukunu ekira* / *isaka noniobuira* / *sike* / *hukunu arotu ama* ## warao hukunu ekira ## warao nahoro iha nahoroae ## maniobuira a hanoko taesi inabatae yama ##.

‘## (in the times when) there was not fire / a frog / a giant one / was the owner of the fire ## The Warao ate raw food ## It is said that a Warao had a parakeet ## That one searched the frog’s house for fire ##’.

(3) ## *oko ekira* / warao ohidu kawana ubya yama ## tata ubayakore / seke / Warao isaka wabae ## wabakore waraotuma hanoko tabanae / ama naba kuare nakae ##.

‘## (when) we inexisted / it is said that the Warao lived in the heart of the palm forest ## when living in there, a Warao died ## When that Warao died / the Warao left the place and spent the night ##’.

(4) ## *waraotuma nahamutu arai* / waraotuma a hanoko aware anare ha roko kuaiwitu ha ## tai hakotai akua yata / anakuarika / kuahene eraha narubuya / imaya eku takitane ##.

‘## (when) the Warao (lived) on the clouds / near the house of the Warao / there were palm trees with very high leaves ## on the top of them / in the afternoon / wild turkeys arrived to spent the night ##’.

Fragment (2) exemplifies the noun phrase *hukunu ekira* (lit) ‘fire-nothing’ (often paraphrased as ‘in the times when there was no fire’), which highlights a primeval feature of the Warao society, once they left the clouds and settled down on earth. It is often heard in narratives about the genesis of the Warao nation. Fragment (3) contains the noun phrase *oko ekira* (lit) ‘we-nothing’, which combines the pronoun *oko* ‘we’ with the indefinite determiner *ekira* ‘nothing’. It defines a stage of evolution during which the Warao, with all their present terrestrial assets, still lived on the

clouds. Fragment (4) shows the postpositional phrase *waraotuma nahamutu arai* (lit.) ‘Warao-clouds-on’ (to be paraphrased as ‘when the Warao lived on the clouds’).

The fragments of Warao speech in (1-4) are illustrative for the speech style in which legends have to be transferred from generation to generation. They support my claim that the narration of the ancestral tales is associated with a particular vocabulary and manner of delivery that defines a speech style in the language. This speech style, that I have called the DENOBO ‘legend’ style, correlates with a social act in which participants observe very particular roles. When the DENOBO ‘legend’ style is in use, one speaker, necessarily an old man, delivers the story to a very attentive audience of youngsters that never disrupt the speaker’s discourse until he has finished. A small group of elders attends the meeting to evaluate the quality of the narrative and to judge the ability of the speaker, performing the task which has been bestowed upon him (Romero-Figueroa, 1993).

The corpus reveals that adverbial periphrases such as those in (1-4) above, all of which have a temporal/spatial connotation, which place actions within narratives in a remote past time, mostly are used in speech events delivered in the DENOBO ‘legend’ style in Warao. Data arranged in quantitative terms in Table 1 evidence such a tendency:

PERIPHRASTIC ADVERBIALS	STYLES			
	DERI ‘council style’	DENOBO ‘legend style’	ARE ‘common style’	TOTAL
<i>kaina hiro</i> ‘earth-new’	0	26	0	26
<i>hukunu ekira</i> ‘fire-nothing’	0	16	0	16
<i>oko ekira</i> ‘we-nothing’	2	11	0	13
<i>waeaotuma nahumutu arai</i> ‘Warao-clouds-on’	1	27	0	28

Table 1: Occurrence of periphrastic past time adverbs in 2-hour recording in different styles

The distribution in Table 1 points out that the DENOBO ‘legend’ style, which is heavily dependent on ‘referential content’ (Romero-Figueroa, 1993), possesses particular means of expressing temporality which are not transferable to other styles. These elements provide orientation in stories about the origin of the Warao. By means of this resource, community leaders try to emphasize the historic origin of the

Warao values and beliefs. Their intent is to give continuity to these values and beliefs in present times as a part of the cultural heritage.

Conversely, the daily time/space adverbials of the language exhibit a uniform distribution over different styles, whether the one in use is the DERI ‘council’ style, the ARE ‘common’ style, or the DENOBO ‘legend’ style. Quantitative evidence is presented in Table 2:

DAILY TIME/SPACE AD- VERBIALS	STYLES			TOTAL
	DERI ‘council style’	DENOBO ‘legend style’	ARE ‘common style’	
<i>hokohi soro</i> ‘dawn’	36	25	38	99
<i>ima uto</i> ‘midnight’	11	15	24	50
<i>waniku</i> ‘month’	7	7	10	24
<i>ama eku</i> ‘in this moment’/ ‘at this point’	66	52	59	177
<i>ama u</i> ‘then’	6	5	3	14
<i>hoira</i> ‘year’	3	2	7	12

Table 2: Occurrence of daily time/space adverbs in 2-hour recording in different styles

The even distribution of the time/space adverbs over the different styles reveals that they may be used in all speech styles, irrespective of their morphological make-up and meaning. Use of these adverbs does not correlate with the kind of style in use. Adverbs such as *ima uto* (lit.) ‘night-center’ or ‘midnight’, *waniku* ‘moon/month’, *hoira* (lit.) ‘water-AUGM/big flood/year’, etc., may be heard in a council meeting in which the DERI ‘council’ style will predominate, in a gathering to tell ancestral stories delivered in the DENOBO ‘legend’ style, or in a family interaction in the ARE ‘common’ style.

### 3. A final remark

This paper has focused on aspects of lexical variation in correlation with style. It is widely accepted that 'particular vocabularies' and 'particular speakers' make a natural duet present in all societies, and the Warao should not be an exception. However, the Warao case presented here extends beyond the use of particular vocabularies by particular speakers, such as the use of technical terms by technicians. In the analysis of the use of Warao adverbials, particularly the legendary periphrastic past time adverbials, greater attention should be paid to stylistic-variation parameters as *Referential Content* (particular vocabulary) and *Person* (particular speaker). Additionally, *Time/Space* factors must be taken into account, not only to delimit the boundaries of the setting in which the vocabulary is used, but also as factors that define the meaning of such vocabulary items.

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