

## LEGENDARY PERIPHRASTIC TIME ADVERBS IN WARAO

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### RESUMEN

Los datos cuantitativos de naturaleza sociolingüística obtenidos por el investigador evidencian que las diversas manifestaciones del pasado como parámetro temporal en Warao tienen una distribución que intersecta marcadamente con ciertos estilos conversacionales utilizados por aquellos que intervienen en un determinado acto conversacional. El estudio demuestra que warao posee frases nominales y frases postposicionales que funcionan como adverbios y aparecen mayormente en narraciones mitológicas y en textos que hacen referencia a los antepasados de dicha etnia. Tales adverbios de tiempo (y algunos de lugar) usualmente describen a través de perífrasis lugares particulares y momentos específicos que forman parte del estado de las cosas dentro de leyendas pertenecientes al DENOBO 'narraciones que se transmiten de generación a generación'. Los actos conversacionales asociados con la enseñanza del DENOBO exhiben un estilo de hablar entre los warao, el cual ha sido identificado como el estilo DENOBO 'estilo de las leyendas'. Este contrasta con otros estilos, tales como el estilo DERI 'estilo del consejo comunal', y el estilo ARE 'estilo cotidiano', en los cuales predominan expresiones adverbiales de tiempo y lugar que más bien hacen referencia a puntos rutinarios del movimiento del sol, la luna y las estrellas, o que señalan cualquier lugar de un poblado, una vivienda, un caño, o un morichal.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Perífrasis, adverbio, pasado.

### ABSTRACT

Quantitative data as part of a sociolinguistic project to study Warao have revealed that different ways of expressing past as a time parameter intersect with

certain speech styles used by specific speakers who play primary roles in the development of diverse conversational acts. The results have proven that Warao possesses noun and postpositional phrases functioning as time adverbs which are commonplace in mythological narrative. Such time adverbs often describe by means of periphrases particular moments (and even places) that are part of the state of affairs within legends about the Warao genesis. These legends are known as DENOBO 'bulk of stories to be transferred from a generation to another'. A session for telling DENOBO stories implies certain behaviors on the part of speakers and hearers which together with a very particular lexicon define a speech style that I have called the DENOBO 'legend' style. This style contrasts with two other styles—the DERI 'council' and ARE 'common' styles—in which the periphrastic past time adverbials here alluded are seldom heard, and in which temporal adverbials of astronomical motivation appear instead.

KEY WORDS: Periphrasis, adverb, past

### I. INTRODUCTION.

Since the mid 60's, linguistics has increasingly directed part of its efforts to examine the relationship between language usage and sociocultural organization. The basic assumption behind this linguistic trend is that speakers as members of a particular culture internalize speech usages widely employed by other member of their society. Labov (1966) added far-reaching observations concerning the heterogeneity of all known speech communities, and the extent to which variation in use carries sociostylistic meaning. Based somewhat 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 a present-day

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sociolinguistic studies. Grounded in the context mentioned above, this study has departed from a corpus that represents adequately the speech performance of members of a Warao community. An initial analysis of the corpus, on the bases of the relationships between speech acts and participant roles, has evidenced 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, 1966b).

The corpus has also revealed that some structure dependent features correlate with the speech styles isolated in the language. For instance, it has been demonstrated in quantitative terms that some suffixal subject pronouns only appear when the DERI 'council' style is in use (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 functioning as adverbs which 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 pieces belonging to the Warao DENOBO 'stories to be transferred from a generation to another'. 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. This situation contrast with the use of adverbs denoting everyday life routines which are based upon points in the daily or seasonal movement of the sun and the moon (or places of the village or the household), which prevail in the DERI 'council' and ARE 'common' styles.

## II. PERIPHRASTIC PAST TIME ADVERBS.

In the way of 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'. This latter gave rise to the name of the Orinoco River.

Spatiality intersects with temporal parameters in Warao bringing about a complex network of time/place adverbials. For instance, the seasonal abundance or

scarcity of fish (or of any variety of aquatic animal) in any particular spot in one of the Orinoco 'caños', or 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 offer in their speech because such details are vital for their survival: hence they need be expressed either overtly or implicitly. Given this characteristic of the setting, the language offers a variety of adverbs which indicates simultaneously both particular locations and specific times. From all of the above, it might be logical to conclude that periodization, or time division on the basis of natural periods, is the resource most commonly used in the Warao society for pointing 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 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 generally filling sentence margins, and mainly functioning as obliques whose main role is to increase cohesion among pieces of discourse.

As well, Warao possesses a reduced set of adverbs with past time connotation unfrequently used. These adverbs are mainly nominals and postpositional phrases—arranged in the manner of periphrases—which provide time (or space) orientation in legends and stories about ancestors and mythological beings. These latter kind of adverbs have an ideological motivation quite different from that found in the rest of the time/space items of the language adverbial system. (1) below illustrates the behavior of one of these adverbs in a stretch of a story 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 orinisanee yama ##

## *when that he 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 ## He 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  
##.

(1) shows that *kaina hiro* ‘the world was still very new’, which provide orientational time and space features occupies a peripheral slot in the sentences hinging around the prevailing OSV (Romero-Figueroa, 1985; 1986ab; 1996b) order of the language. In Warao, adverbs tend to be fronted (a mechanism used for topicalizing in the language). 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 appearing 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. *kaina hiro* refers to a trait of a place that existed solely in a primitive era. Further 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 naka ##.

‘## (when) we inexist / 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 ##’.

(2) exemplifies the noun phrase *hukunu ekira* (lit) ‘fire-nothing’ (often paraphrased such as ‘in the times when there was not fire’), which stresses a primeval feature of the Warao society once they left the clouds and settled down on the earth. It is often heard in narratives about the genesis of the Warao nation. (3) contains the noun phrase *oko ekira* (lit) ‘we-nothing’, which morphologically combines the pronoun *oko* ‘we’ with the indefinite determiner *ekira* ‘nothing’, to mean a stage of evolution during which the Warao—with all their present terrestrial assets—were inexistent because they still lived on the clouds. (4) shows the postpositional phrase *waraotuma nahamutu arai* (lit.) ‘Warao-clouds-on’ (closely paraphrased such as ‘when the Warao lived on the clouds’).

The pieces of Warao speech in (1-4) were taken from the DENOBO ‘stories to be transferred from a generation to another’, which strongly supports my contention that the narration of the ancestral tales is associated to a particular vocabulary and manner of delivery that defines a speech style in the language. Such a 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—an old man necessarily—delivers the story to a very attentive audience of youngsters that never disrupt the speaker’s discourse until the latter has finished. As well, a small group of elders stays in the place of the event to evaluate the quality of the narrative and judge the ability of the speaker for performing the task with which has been granted (Romero-Figueroa, 1993).

The corpus reveal that adverbial periphrases such as those in (1-4) above, all of which have temporal/spatial connotation—always placing actions within narratives in a remote past time—mostly take place in speeches 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’		26	0	26
<i>hukunu ekira</i> ‘fire-nothing’		16	0	16
<i>oko ekira</i> ‘we-nothing’	2	11	0	13
<i>waraotuma nahamutu arai</i> ‘Warao-clouds-on’	1	27	0	28

TABLE 1: Occurrences of periphrastic past time adverbs in 2-hour recording in every style by different informants.

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. The temporal items listed in TABLE 1 give orientations in stories about the Warao genesis. By handling this resource, community leaders try to emphasize on the remoteness of the origin of the Warao values and beliefs with the basic purpose of keeping them into effect in present times as a part of their cultural heritage.

Conversely, the daily time/space adverbials of the language exhibit a uniform distribution along styles—whether that one in use is the DERI ‘council’ style, ARE ‘common’ style, or DENOBO ‘legend’ style. Quantitative evidence is offered in TABLE 2.

DAILY TIME/SPACE ADVERBIALS	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: Occurrences of daily time/space adverbs in 2-hour recording in ever style by different informants.

TABLE 2—Given the homogeneous amount of tokens corresponding to each adverb in the list—clearly reveals that such time or space items, irrespective of their morphological configurations and meaning—may appear in any piece of speech, keeping no apparent relationship 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., are equally heard in a council meeting in which the DERI ‘council’ style will predominate, or in a gathering to tell ancestral stories delivered in the DENOBO ‘legend’ style, or in a family exchange developed in the ARE ‘common’ style.

### III A FINAL REMARK.

This paper has stressed on aspects of lexical variation in correlation with style. The Warao case presented here extends beyond the use of particular vocabularies by particular speakers in a fashion that might be thought to be analogous to that existing between technical terms and technicians. Since it is widely accepted that ‘particular vocabularies; and ‘particular speakers’ make a natural duet present in all societies, the Warao should not be an exception. Hence, it is clear that for studying Warao adverbials—particularly the legendary periphrastic past time ones—consideration to a greater degree should be given to such stylistic-variation parameters as REFERENTIAL CONTENT (particular vocabulary) and PERSON (particular speaker). Additionally, TIME/SPACE factors must be taken into account, not only to set up the boundaries of the setting in which the vocabulary is used, but as elements that define the meanings of such vocabulary items also.

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