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Noun phrase complexity and contiguity in a Papuan language

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Abstract: This article considers NP complexity and discontinuity in the Papuan language Coastal Marind. First, I give an overview of NP structure in the language, which is characterized by extremely limited possibility of elaboration and modification. I connect this to the observation that Papuan languages are characterized by exceptionally simple NP structures. The lack of research makes it difficult to evaluate the significance of such observations, but I suggest that Coastal Marind is an example of a Papuan language that imposes very strict upper boundaries on NP complexity. Second, while an argument could be made that Coastal Marind NPs allow considerable discontinuity, more thorough consideration of the facts reveals a fundamental, tight-knit, left-branching NP structure, which contrasts with relatively rarely employed looser nominal configurations, including discontinuous nominal expressions. The discontinuous construals are restricted primarily by information structure. Although considered grammatical by speakers, they are extremely rare in corpus data. I propose that aboutness is an important factor constraining the choice of nominal construal types in Coastal Marind discourse.

Keywords: Coastal Marind; information structure; noun phrases; Papuan languages; syntax

1 Introduction

In research on Papuan languages (i.e., the non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea and surrounding islands), the issue of the cohesion of nominal expressions (henceforth NEs) has never enjoyed the attention it has received in research on Australian languages (see references in Schultze-Berndt and Simard [2012], Louagie and Verstraete [2016]). The difference in attention most likely reflects structural differences between the languages of New Guinea and Australia. The

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grammars of many Australian languages allow the component parts of nominal expressions to appear in non-continuous orders across the clause, which led linguists to analyze these languages as lacking NPs (e.g., Blake 1983; Hale 1983). Meanwhile, researchers working on Papuan languages have commented on the lack of complex NPs, suggesting that the grammars of many Papuan languages disfavor elaboration of the NP. Instead of multiplying NP-internal modifiers, speakers seemingly prefer to spread the nominal material across separate clauses, by repeating the nominal head, and successively adding modifers at each mention, until reference has been narrowed down (de Vries 2006).

In this article, I take the Australianist emphasis on discontinuity, and the Papuanist emphasis on NP simplicity, as starting points for investigating NP complexity and configurationality in Coastal Marind. Section 2 gives some background information on the language (Section 2.1) and its parts of speech system (Section 2.2). Section 3 addresses NP-internal syntax in Coastal Marind and emphasizes its limited elaboration, with a single modifier slot and absence of an NP-internal adjective phrase. Section 4 addresses the distribution of non-contiguous NEs in the language. Nominal discontinuity has received little attention in the Papuanist literature, but has been described for Ngkolmpu, a neighboring language of Coastal Marind (Section 4.1). I follow the previous literature on NP discontinuity in distinguishing true discontinuity from apparent discontinuity (Section 4.2). Having identified true discontinuous NEs, it turns out that their prevalence in corpus data is very limited, and restricted to certain information-structural configurations, and I suggest that aboutness is one feature that restricts the use of discontinuous NEs (Section 4.3). Section 5 concludes the article.

2 Coastal Marind: preliminaries

2.1 Language background and typological characteristics

Coastal Marind is a Papuan language spoken in the southernmost part of mainland New Guinea, along the coast and some of the rivers of the Indonesian territory near the international border with Papua New Guinea. The Coastal Marind language, and two closely related neighboring languages spoken inland, form the Marindic subgroup of the Anim languages, a geographically discontinuous family of 20 or so languages spread across Southern New Guinea. It is very likely that the Anim family will prove to be a member of the tentative large-scale grouping known as the Trans-New Guinea languages, although it is also clear that the Anim languages – with their intricate prefixal verb morphology, pervasive four-gender systems, and lack of clause chaining and switch-reference – are structurally quite different from typical Trans-New Guinea languages (Evans et al. 2018a; Fedden 2020; Usher and Suter 2015).

Coastal Marind has a long research history compared to most Papuan languages, with sources of information including a valuable missionary grammar (Drabbe 1955) and more recent grammars (Olsson 2017, 2021) based on my own fieldwork. The material collected during my fieldwork, carried out mostly between 2014 and 2017, is the source of all the Coastal Marind data used in this article, which are drawn mostly from a corpus of transcribed and annotated video recordings. At the time of writing, the transcribed corpus consists of 45 recordings totaling 9 h 40 min. All corpus data cited in this article are followed by a code of the format xxxx.ddmmyyyy.z.abc, with 'xxxx' indicating line number in the corresponding ELAN annotation file, followed by date and number of the recording ('z'), and ending with a code indicating in which of three neighboring villages the recording was made.[1] Examples without a code are taken from my field notes containing elicited material and overheard utterances.

Constituent order in Coastal Marind is relatively free, with a preference for placing argument NPs before the verb (Olsson 2021: 482). The major exception to the free ordering are focused constituents, which are obligatorily placed in the immediately pre-verbal position (focus and its relevance for NP contiguity will be further discussed in Section 4.3.1). There is no case marking of core roles, but verb morphology indexes up to four participant roles. Within the verb, the prefixal complex marks person and number of agents (by means of so-called Actor prefixes, glossed A), recipient-like roles (Dative prefixes, DAT) and certain possessors (Genitive prefixes, GEN). About 50% of the Coastal Marind verbs index person/number (or, in the case of inanimates, grammatical gender) of the patient-like participant. Patient indexing is marked by means of alternations (sometimes non-concatenative) in the verb stem, which have been left unsegmented in this article, but indicated in the glossing (Undergoer, U). The details of participant indexing are often counter-intuitive (a frequent case is A-indexing defaulting to 3SG despite the agent being 3PL), but these points are not crucial for the understanding of NP syntax (the interested reader is referred to Olsson 2021).

2.2 Parts of speech

The Coastal Marind parts of speech system makes a clear distinction between verbs and nominals. Syntactically, only verbs may form the predicative nucleus of the clause, and non-verbal predication requires the presence of a copula. Morphologically, only verb stems may combine with the rich inflectional marking that

1 See Olsson (2015) for a preliminary version of the corpus, accessible online at https://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/BRO1.

characterizes the Coastal Marind verb: an intricate prefixal template with 17 position classes, various processes affecting the stem, plus one or two optional suffixal slots. Nominals are mostly invariant, except for possessor prefixes on some kinship terms, and overt gender/number marking on some common words.

Among the nominals, distributional criteria do not motivate a distinction between 'thing words' and 'property words', i.e., there is no distinction between the syntactic categories nouns and adjectives. Modification of a nominal head by means of another nominal involves the same structure when the modifier is a property word (e.g., *ndom-muy* 'bad meat') and when the modifier is a thing word (*basik-muy* 'pig meat'). Property words can head NPs without the support of a thing word ('the small one'), as in (1), an ability that they share with demonstratives (2), numerals (3) and even some postpositional phrases (4).

(1) [*koyhu*]$_{NP}$ *anupanda-d-ø-om-laɣ*
white: II CONT:II-DUR-3SG.A-3SG.GEN-speak
(Talking about some dogs hunting a deer)
'The white one kept on barking at it.'
(0510.20052015.3.mkl)

(2) *epe* *k-ak-i-ɣadawn* [*ipe*]$_{NP}$
there DIR-1.A-RE-leave:2|3PL.U DIST:I/II.PL
'I left them there again.'
(0024.14052015.2.dmh)

(3) *upe* [*hyakod*]$_{NP}$ *m-ak-o-han*
DIST:II one OBJ-1.A-3SG.DAT-put:III.U
(About some previously mentioned bags)
'I gave her one.'
(0251.17102016.2.wbi)

(4) [*maɣay lik*]$_{NP}$ *menda-b-ø-umah*
front from:PL PERF-ACT-3SG.A-go:2|3PL.U
'The first ones (lit. the ones from the front) had already gone.'
(0160.27112016.3.wbi)

A potential criterion for distinguishing nouns and adjectives is that thing words, but not property words, are assigned by convention to one of the four genders of the language (labelled I–IV), whereas property words receive the gender value from the context. As discussed in Olsson (2021: 49–51), this is not a particularly strong criterion, for various exceptional thing words lack conventionalized gender assignment, and only a small subset of the property words show obligatory

morphological agreement (the rest being invariant; see also Olsson 2019: 202–204). In this article I remain agnostic as to whether the lack of a distributional contrast entails that there is no noun–adjective distinction in the language, or whether the argument from gender membership entails that there is one. Henceforth, I use the labels noun and adjective as shorthands for 'thing word' and 'property word', but none of the claims in the article depend on this being a morphosyntactic category distinction in the language.

Schultze-Berndt and Simard point out that the ability of all nominals, even those that translate to adjectives in other languages, to head referring expressions, as in Coastal Marind, has been an argument in claims about the "flat" structure of Australian languages, as each part in a discontinuous referring expression can achieve reference independently, without any need to assume a phrasal NP at some level (Schultze-Berndt and Simard 2012: 1020). I will not explore this issue further here, but I note that the distributional similarity of nouns and adjectives is shared with the neighboring, but unrelated, Ngkolmpu language, which also allows adjectives to head noun phrases (Carroll 2020). Further below, I discuss discontinuous NEs in Ngkolmpu (Section 4.1) and Coastal Marind (Section 4.3).

3 NP structure in Coastal Marind: tight and loose construals

The vast majority of multi-word NEs in the Coastal Marind corpus are contiguous. I will present the facts of contiguous NEs and show that there seems to be some variability in ordering. But rather than free constituent order within the NP, it appears that two distinct structural configurations (referred to as 'construals' in this article) must be distinguished: a tight-knit, left-branching construal with modifiers strictly preceding the head, and a much looser construal in which a modifier may follow the head. First, I discuss adjectival modification, which is realized by an adjective–noun compound forming a complex head within the NP.

The standard method for combining a nominal head with a modifying element is illustrated in (5). I follow Olsson (2021) in referring to these as compounds. Some of the most common combinations appearing in this structure are noun–noun compounds (5a)–(5b), verb stem–noun compounds (5c) or a verb stem compounded with its object noun, and then compounded with another noun (5d). Adjective–noun compounds are in (5e)–(5h), which is the main use of attributive adjectives.[2]

2 Note also that three common adjectives (*ndom* 'bad', *tanama* 'old' and *noɣ* 'new, young') are obligatorily bound and do not occur outside compounds at all (Olsson 2021: 61).

(5)	a.	*sayam-muy*	wallaby-meat	‘wallaby meat’	N-N
	b.	*kwemek-tamuɣ*	morning-food	‘breakfast’	N-N
	c.	*asik-manemna*	hunt-story	‘hunting story’	V-N
	d.	*da-ɣol-say*	sago-beat.sago-place	‘sago beating place’	[N-V]-N
	e.	*sam-sayam*	big-wallaby	‘big wallaby’	ADJ-N
	f.	*wagituk-tatih*	long-hair	‘long/straight hair’	ADJ-N
	g.	*kunayhi-adaka*	black-water	‘coffee’	ADJ-N
	h.	*gaw-onggat*	stupid-coconut	‘coconut without contents’	ADJ-N

Compounds display a mixture of word-like and phrase-like prosodic properties. They do not pattern with unitary phonological words, because rules that take the phonological word as their domain (such as epenthesis and vowel gradation; Olsson 2021: 37, 40) apply independently to each member of the compound. An exception is the sandhi-like (optional) appearance of consonants that are lost word-finally, but retained word-internally, such as a [b] segment in *sam-aha* ‘big-house’, pronounced [sambaha] (cf. proto-Marindic **samb* ‘big’). Prosodic prominence can only be assigned to the compound as a whole, by stressing the root-final syllable of the first member of the compound, e.g., [kwe.mek-ta.muɣ] ‘breakfast’.

Compounds are syntactically fixed, as reflected in the following two restrictions. Firstly, compounds only allow further modification of the whole and not of their individual parts. Most conspicuously, the postposed intensifier *ɣa* ‘very, real’ cannot be added directly to the adjective in an adjective–noun compound (*[*sam ɣa*]-*sayam*) but must be added to the compound as a whole: [*sam-sayam*] ɣ*a* ‘a very big wallaby’, i.e., literally ‘a real big-wallaby’. Secondly, it is not possible to stack multiple adjectives before the head, so there is no way of expressing ‘big angry dog’ in a single Coastal Marind NP.[3] These are surprising limitations of the modificational possibilities of the NP, which make the [AdjP N] structures of familiar European languages seem luxurious in comparison.

The head of the NP (which may be a simplex word or a compound) is preceded by a slot that can host a single modifier, typically a demonstrative (6a), a numeral or other quantifier (6b) or a phrase headed by a postposition (6c). Recall from Examples (2)–(4) that these categories may also head NPs on their own.

3 The modifying member of a compound can be a compound, as in [[da-ɣol]-say] ‘sago beating place’ in (5d). There are in fact adjective-adjective compounds that can enter the modifier slot of another compound, but these have idiomatic meanings: *yaba-wagatok* means ‘very long’ (rather than its literal translation ‘big long’), and *papes-yaba* means ‘pretty big’ (literally ‘small big’). Thus, *yaba-wagatok-aha* (big-long-house) means ‘very long house’, not ‘big, long house’.

(6) a. *ehe noɣ-anem*
PROX:I young-man(I)
'this young man'
b. *inah ɣanid*
two day
'two days'
c. [[*mandin*]$_{NP}$ *lik*]$_{PostP}$ *anim*
long.ago from:PL people
'people from long ago, old-timers'

The NP is optionally followed by a demonstrative, primarily if it is a topic (7).

(7) [[*uhe nikna*]$_{NP}$ *uhe*]$_{Topic}$ *waɣuklu ø-d-a-ola*
PROX:II 1:son's.wife PROX:II young.girl NTRL-DUR-3SG.A-be:3SG.U
'My daughter-in-law here, she was still a young girl.'
(0045.16092016.1.wbi)

As suggested by the bracketing in (7), I prefer to analyze the postposed demonstrative as occurring outside the NP, basically heading a 'Topic Phrase' within which the NP is embedded. The main evidence for this analysis is that postposed demonstratives may not occur in the complement of a postposition (since this slot only accepts NPs, and not Topic Phrases; Olsson 2021: 152) and the fact that postposed demonstratives also occur after non-NP constituents, such as subordinate clauses (Olsson 2021: 525).

But non-demonstrative modifiers are not always preposed. Corpus data shows that modifiers such as numerals often occur after the head that they modify, as in (8), suggesting that NP order is free, and not strictly left-branching as described above. There are several arguments against the 'free word order' NP analysis, showing that a tight, left-branching NP must be distinguished from a loose construal. The loose construal seen in (8) is restricted to pragmatically marked contexts such as lists, presentational sentences and, as in Example (8), constituent focus (Olsson 2021: 155). The latter two, which are contexts that also allow discontinuous NEs, will be discussed further in Section 4.3.

(8) *rusa inah ø-d-a-waɣamat-a*
deer two NTRL-DUR-3SG.A-stand.PL-RSLT
'Two deer were standing there.'
(0024.20052015.1.mkl)

Additionally, two syntactic facts indicate that the left-branching, continuous NP structure is a separate, arguably more fundamental, construal that must be distinguished from the loose construal. The first indication of this is that in all

contexts in which an NP is embedded within another phrase, the internal order of the embedded nominal constituent is always strictly left-branching, with no possibility of reordering. For example, within an NP that is embedded as the complement of a postposition, only the order Num-N is possible, as in (9). The N-Num variant *ahakla inah* 'two packages' is a perfectly well-formed bigram, but cannot be used in this context.

(9) [[*inah* *ahakla*]$_{NP}$ *nanggol*]$_{PostP}$ *k-a-kamem* *anep*
two package for DIR-3SG.A-suffice EMPH:III
'There was enough [sago] for two packages.'
(0222.27112016.3.wbi)

The second indication that strictly left-branching NPs represent a separate construal type from the looser combinations of nominal material is that constituents filling peripheral roles in the clause always show this order. Adjuncts, such as *hyakod say* 'one place' in (10a), or *hyakod ɣanid* 'one day' in (10b), do not permit postposed or discontinuous modifiers.[4] A tendency for discontinuous NEs to be restricted to core argument positions has been noted for some Australian languages by Louagie and Verstraete (2016: 51). In Coastal Marind, adjunct NPs do not allow the syntactic freedom that argument NPs allow, and therefore reveal the 'true' left-branching nature of the NP, an issue I return to in Section 4.3.4.

(10) a. [*hyakod* *say*] *ka-mo-ibotok*
one place DIR-FUT:2SG.A-put.PL
'Put them in one spot!'
(0171.17102016.1.wbi)

b. *epe* *nda-d-a-ka-hamat-a* [*hyakod* *ɣanid*]
there LOC-DUR-3SG.A-PRI-sit.PL-RSLT one day
'They sat there for one day.'
(0249.17102016.1.wbi)

Note finally that a clause with a relativizing function can occur before, after, or separated from the nominal that it modifies. However, I do not consider the positioning of relative clauses to be relevant for the question of NP constituency in Coastal Marind, because rather than relative clauses proper, such clauses are instances of a general, semantically under-specified subordinate clause construction, which can only occur in the periphery of the main clause and whose

4 I consider locative expressions to be adjuncts even with 'put'-verbs such as *ibotok* in (10a), as they show no behavioral properties (e.g., obligatoriness) that would suggest argumenthood. See also Olsson (2021: 479–481) for the argument/adjunct distinction in Coastal Marind.

interpretation is completely context-dependent (i.e., what is known as adjoined clauses in the Australianist literature; see Olsson 2021: 531–533 for discussion).

In this section, I argued for the existence of an unusually simple NP in Coastal Marind. It can be headed by any member of the nominal subclasses (nouns, adjectives, numerals, demonstratives, etc.). The head of an NP is often a compound, typically a noun compounded with a preceding modifier, usually another noun or an adjective. A slot before the head may host a modifying phrase containing e.g., a demonstrative or a numeral. This tight, left-branching NP contrasts with a loose construal that I will return to in Section 4.3. The most remarkable aspect of the tight NP structure is the absence of an adjectival phrase within the NP, this niche being taken by adjective–noun compounding. Compounding as the only technique for adjectival modification is rare, but far from unattested, and has been discussed (under the labels compounding, incorporation or pseudo-incorporation) by Dahl (2004: 225–236; 2015: 127–134) for various languages, by Creissels for languages of sub-Saharan Africa (2018: 733–737) and by Haude (2006: 114–117) for Movima (an isolate of the Bolivian Amazon). It has, to my knowledge, not been described for any other Papuan languages.[5]

Claims about the exceptionally simple structure of Papuan NP structures have been made by several authors (see e.g., de Vries 2006: 825; 2010). Multiple modifiers are avoided within the same NP: if there is a need for more than one modifier to narrow down reference, it is better to distribute the modifiers, by repeating the head noun, than stacking them within one phrase. For the Papuan speaker, says de Vries, " 'two fat pigs' is preferably expressed as 'two pigs, fat pigs' " (2010: 340).[6] Unfortunately, no systematic reviews of the NP simplicity claims have been published, so it is not clear whether these generalizations hold for most Papuan languages, and whether NP complexity sets them apart from other languages in a significant way. It is also important to make the distinction between discourse preferences and grammaticalized restrictions on noun phrase complexity, because it is well known that even in languages that allow extremely complex noun phrases, such structures may be near-absent from spontaneous discourse – this is

5 The pre-nominal, compounded adjectives of Coastal Marind are exceptional even within the Anim family. The neighboring, closely related Bian Marind has postnominal adjectives, and all other Anim languages for which there are data (Yaqay, Bitur, Ipiko) have postnominal adjectives, and there is no evidence suggesting compound rather than phrasal status. It seems likely that proto-Anim had postnominal adjectives, which is the dominant order in New Guinea (Dryer 2013).
6 For statements on NP simplicity in individual languages, see e.g., Feldman (1986: 130) on Awtuw (Sepik), Heeschen (1994: 58, 1998: 49) on Eipo (Mek, Trans-New Guinea), Westrum (1988: 157) on Berik (Tor-Orya). A rare example of a Papuan language whose grammar, like that of Coastal Marind, disallows more than one adjective within the noun phrase is Abun (Berry and Berry 1999: 70).

the case for English (Miller and Weinert 1998: 139–153). NP complexity in Papuan languages is clearly an interesting area for future typological research, especially as more corpora of spontaneous language use become available, which makes it possible to broaden the investigation from structural limitations on NP elaboration to the ratio of NP complexity found across different corpora.

In the next section, I turn to packaging of nominal information beyond the tight-knit NP of Coastal Marind, as reflected in non-contiguous NEs.

4 Non-contiguous nominal expressions and their causes

4.1 Discontinuous nominal expressions in Papuan languages

One could ask whether the avoidance of complex NPs and presumed preference for 'distributed' construals, as described for some Papuan languages, are matched by availability of discontinuous construals of NEs. Given the little attention paid to this issue in the Papuan literature, the answer seems likely to be no. Claims about free ordering of modifers within the NP are not uncommon in grammars of Papuan languages (e.g., in the Menggwa dialect of Dera, of the Senagi family; de Sousa 2006: 198), but there are only two mentions of truly discontinuous NEs in the Papuanist literature: Yimas and Ngkolmpu. I will briefly review those cases below.

Foley (1991: 180–191) describes two patterns of nominal modification in Yimas (Lower Sepik-Ramu). The first is a tight-knit combination of a head noun with one (and only one) preceding modifier, which lacks a gender/number agreement suffix, as in (11a). The second is what Foley calls a "scrambled pattern" in which one or more modifiers carry gender/number agreement suffixes and can be ordered freely with respect to the head. Foley reports that all six possible permutations of the scrambled pattern in (11b) are grammatical. As shown in (11c), the NEs in the scrambled pattern may even be interrupted by verbal material.

(11) a. Yimas (Lower Sepik-Ramu)
ama-na *matn*
1SG-POSS brother(I.SG)
'my brother'
(Foley 1991: 180)

b. *ama-na-kn* *mpa-n* *patn*
1SG-POSS-V.SG one-V.SG betelnut(V.SG)
'my one betelnut'
(Foley 1991: 181)

c. *patn* *wayk-k* *ama-na-kn* *wa-n*
betelnut(V.SG) buy-IRR 1SG-POSS-V.SG go-PRS
'Go buy my betelnut.'
(Foley 1991: 181)

The first pattern, which Foley refers to as a "tightly knit noun phrase" (1991: 181), does not allow further elaboration, meaning that multiple modifying adjectives, and even adjectives modifying compound nouns, are disallowed within a single noun phrase (1991: 184). Such expressions instead require the use of the scrambled pattern, in which each expression forms a noun phrase standing in loose parataxis to the others. Foley does not elaborate on the factors that make speakers choose one pattern over the other in actual discourse, and it is unclear whether he considers the lack of noun phrase recursion in itself to be the driving force behind the use of the paratactic pattern (cf. the alleged preference in Papuan discourse for spreading out nominal modifiers over several clauses cited above).

The only work on the lack of noun phrase coherence in a Papuan language that explicitly refers to claims about non-configurationality (as discussed in the Australianist literature) is Donohue (2011) on Ngkolmpu (called Kanum by Donohue). The family to which Ngkolmpu belongs – the Yam languages of Southern New Guinea – is according to some observers (e.g., Evans 2019) one of the Papuan families that share some structural similarities with Australian languages. These similarities are admittedly mostly restricted to phonology, but it is perhaps noteworthy if discontinuities similar to those reported for (some) Australian languages are found in the Papuan languages that are closest to the Australian landmass. Donohue claims that Ngkolmpu NPs display word order flexibility to a higher degree than other Papuan languages (although he does not cite the Yimas data given above), but that the word order flexibility in Ngkolmpu is constrained by grammatical function and the presence of morphological case. The evidence for these claims consists of elicited sentences such as (12), here cited from Carroll's more recent work, and using Carroll's orthography.

(12) Ngkolmpu (Yam)
ntop-w *mo* ***piengku*** *sreyerknt* ***yrye-w***
big-SG.ERG wallaby DIST.ERG SG>3.FUT.DUR:stalk man-SG.ERG
'The big man will stalk the wallaby.'
(Carroll 2020: 701; Donohue 2011: 505)

Donohue's data are fascinating from both areal-typological and theoretical perspectives, but appear to suffer from some empirical shortages, as extensive fieldwork on Ngkolmpu has failed to find evidence of nominal scrambling in the language. Carroll (2020) suggests that some instances of non-contiguous NEs in

Ngkolmpu can be analyzed as topicalization or afterthoughts, and he reports that speakers unanimously reject sentences such as (12). His conclusion is that the data do not support the claim that Ngkolmpu displays "truly non-configurational" NP structures.

No claims have been made about the possibility or prevalence of discontinuous NEs in Coastal Marind (e.g., in Drabbe [1955] or Geurtjens [1926], which are the two missionary era grammars of the language), unlike for the neighboring language Ngkolmpu. A careful selection of data from Coastal Marind would provide the opportunity for such claims. An example is (13), in which the nominal head *nggat* 'dog' appears separated from its modifier *inah* 'two'.

(13) ***nggat*** *ahyaki* ***inah*** *m-a-yalok*
dog snake two OBJ-3SG.A-stab:2|3PL.U
'The snake bit two dogs.'

Such examples could be used to make a claim for the unconstrained nature of NEs in the language. I investigate discontinuous NEs in corpus data in Section 4.3 and confirm that discontinuous construals of NEs are possible, but highly constrained and very rare in corpus data. Before this, I turn to the issue of distinguishing truly discontinuous NEs from those that only exhibit apparent discontinuity.

4.2 Apparent discontinuities

I follow Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) and Reinöhl (2020) in distinguishing apparent discontinuities from actual discontinuities. One example of apparent discontinuities is 'afterthought' additions: expressions that are added at the end of an utterance to clarify or further develop previous material. These are common in the Coastal Marind corpus, but mostly easy to distinguish as they typically involve prosodic demarcation (such as pitch reset) and repetition of the head noun (in the case of addition of a modifying element such as adjectives; see also Himmelmann, this issue). Afterthoughts will not be discussed further here, instead I will consider some other structures that superficially look like discontinuous NEs, but on closer examination turn out to be independent noun phrases: external possession and part-whole relationships (Section 4.2.1), secondary predicates (Section 4.2.2), left-dislocated topics (Section 4.2.3) and measure phrases (Section 4.2.4). The first three of these closely mirror points made about apparent discontinuities in Jaminjung by Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012). Finally, Section 4.2.5 shows an interesting case in which agreement between nominal constituents is completely independent from constituenthood.

4.2.1 External possession and part-whole relationships

In several construction types, possessive relationships are not expressed by the standard possessive structure (with the postposition *en*, as in *Maria en aha* 'Maria's house') but by independent NPs, which then can give the appearance of nominal discontinuity. This is most obvious in situations involving actions on a body part, which typically are expressed by casting both the body part and its owner as arguments of the verb, i.e., in an external possession construction (see Schultze-Berndt and Simard 2012: 1030–1032). Each of the arguments is indexed by a different index set on the verb: the affected body part is indexed by Undergoer affixes (or, rather, alternations, since Undergoer exponence is often non-concatenative) and the owner of the body part is indexed by means of the Dative prefix series (Olsson 2021: 203–212). The separate indexing is evidence that each participant is realized as an independent argument, which corresponds to their expressions as separate, often non-adjacent, noun phrases in the clause. An example of external possession is in (14).[7] Here, the body part *pa* 'head' is indexed in the lexical verb stem, which appears in the gender form matching the Gender III feature of *pa* 'head'. The person/number features of the possessor *bongso* 'youngest sibling'[8] are registered in the Dative prefix. Importantly, the seemingly discontinuous expression *bongso…pa* could not form a grammatical noun phrase on its own.[9]

(14) ***bongso*** *wis* ***pa*** e=k-ø-*o*-*wa*
youngest.sibling yesterday head(III) PROX=DIR-3SG.A-3SG.DAT-AUX:3SG.U
ay, *ah-ø-ikuwad* *wati epe*
become:III.U DEP-3SG.A-drink.kava kava DIST:III
'Uncle's head was like this yesterday, when he drank kava.'
(0062.24082015.1.wbi)

The same method of expressing possession by means of two independent noun phrases, with each participant being an argument of the verb, is also found with non-body part expression, as in the similar example in (15). The principle is the same, with the exception that possessors of non-body part possessums are indexed by means of the so-called Genitive prefix series, rather than the Dative seen in (14).

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7 Note that the deictic manner meaning 'be like this' in Examples (14) and (15) comes from the construction with the auxiliary and a preposed proximal or distal deictic element.

8 A Malay loan, here referring to the speaker's father's youngest brother, i.e., the uncle.

9 The possessor can be expressed adnominally with support of the standard possessive postposition *en* (*bongso en pa* 'uncle's head'), but adnominal possession of body parts is extremely rare in my data. It is attested with dead animals ('remove the wallaby's fur'), so its use is perhaps restricted to contexts in which the affectedness of the owner of the body part is less relevant.

Again, the seemingly discontinuous constituents *manemna* and *Alamem* could not merge to form a possessor-possessum noun phrase on its own.[10]

(15) ***manemna*** *epe* *k-ø-om-wa* *ola* ***Alamem***
story DIST DIR-3SG.A-3SG.GEN-AUX:3SG.U be:3SG.U A.
'The story of Alamem is like that.'
(0316.21112014.1.dmh)

4.2.2 Secondary predicates

Another type of structure that must be distinguished from discontinuous modification are secondary predicates (Schultze-Berndt and Himmelmann 2004). An expression such as *kandi* 'raw' in (16) must be analyzed as a secondary predicate, and not as a modifier that has been separated from its original position in a continuous expression *kandi-awe* 'raw fish', for essentially the same reasons given by Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012: 1029). For example, secondary predicate structures as in (16) always express temporary properties, but unlike attributive adjectives, they never express permanent characteristics.

(16) ***kandi*** *ma-d-ø-aheb-ti* ***awe***
raw OBJ-DUR-3SG.A-eat:3SG.U-DUR fish
'S/he ate the fish raw.'

Another argument for distinguishing secondary predicates from discontinuous modification is that there are some expression types in Coastal Marind that can only function as secondary predicates, and not as attributive modifiers. One such type is participles with on-going activity readings, which are common as secondary predicates, as seen for *ihwluk* 'crying' in (17).[11] Participles with ongoing activity readings do not occur in the attributive use, as opposed to participles with resultative state readings, such as *kahwidluk* 'dead', which are fine in the attributive use (*kahwidluk-basik* 'dead pig'). See Olsson (2021: 76–83) for further discussion and exemplification.

10 In this case, the phrase *Alamem en manemna*, using possessive *en*, would be a common alternative, although only with the meaning 'Alamem's story', and not with the meaning intended here, 'the story about Alamem'.

11 The verb 'enter' is intransitive, but is used as a transitive verb in (17) as signaled by the 'Separative' applicative *is-*. The use of the Separative (which often has quite verb-specific semantics) results in a mening similar to English *walk in on someone*. The secondary predication refers to the applicative object, Tepes, and not to the subject of the clause.

(17) ***ihw-luk*** *k-ø-is-ap-kwamin* ***Tepes***
be.crying-PTCP:II DIR-3SG.A-SEPAR-CONTESS-enter:3SG.U T.
'He entered as Tepes [=female, Gender II] was crying.'
(0056.26102016.1.wbi)

Because of these differences, it is not possible to use data such as that in (16)–(17) as evidence for discontinuous NEs in Coastal Marind, because such structures are licensed by a separate construction, secondary predication. This construction involves two separate NPs, one of which is referential, e.g., *awe* in (16), the other being a depictive predicate, like *kandi* in (16).

4.2.3 Topics

A minor source of apparent discontinuous NEs can be found in some utterances with topic-comment articulation. Here I use 'topic' to mean a constituent found at the beginning of an utterance that is overtly distinguished from the rest of the utterance (the comment) by means of a pause, by intonation, or by overt morphological material such as a postposed demonstrative or the particle *a* (Olsson 2021: 138, 485–487). Semantically, the topic identifies some entity about which the rest of the utterance provides information (an aboutness topic), or, more broadly, it functions as a general "frame setting" topic that specifies the setting that is relevant for the rest of the utterance. A superficial look at a sentence such as (18) could suggest that it contains a discontinuous NE, with the possessor *epe anem* 'that man' separated from the possessum *wah* 'mother'. These two expressions could indeed be merged to form a grammatical noun phrase, as kinship terms often allow possession without the postposition *en*. But it is clear from the intonational pattern that *epe anem*, as well as the intervening placename *Alatep*, are prosodically marked topics, as suggested by my translation. The pitch excursions marking the final syllable in each of the words *epe*, *anem* and *Alatep* are seen in Figure 1 and

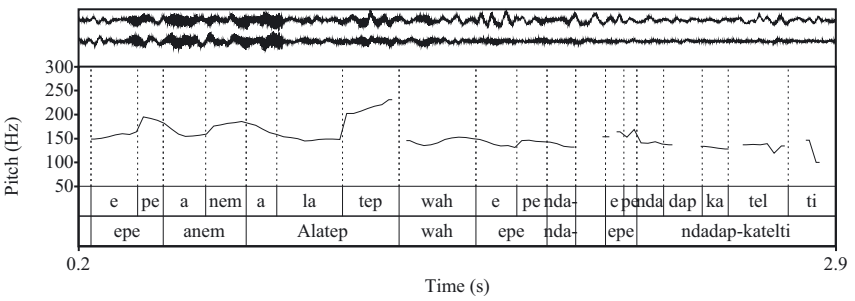

Figure 1: Annotated pitch track showing two topicalized phrases, *epe anem* 'that man' and *Alatep*

identify the two initial constituents as topics. The pitch movements of the first three words (the last of which stretches into the upper range of the speaker) contrast with the relatively flat intonation associated with the comment 'his mother died (lit. was lying) there'.

(18) [***epe*** ***anem***]$_{TOP1}$ [*Alatep*]$_{TOP2}$ **wah** *epe*
DIST:I man(I) A. mother:3SG there
nda-d-a-p-ka-tel-ti
LOC-DUR-3SG.A-CONTESS-INESS-be.lying-DUR
'As for that man, in Alatep, his mother died there.'
(0124.08092016.1.wbi)

4.2.4 Measure phrases

Measure phrases are another frequent case of apparent discontinuity. In (19), the measure phrase *inah plastik* 'two plastic bags' specifies the amount of *kanis* 'betelnut' although the expressions are not adjacent.

(19) *nok* ***kanis*** *ye* *ma-ø-kaw-eg* ***inah*** ***plastik***
1 betelnut INGRS OBJ-1.A-INESS-dig two plastic.bag(m)
'I started digging up two plastic bags of betelnut.'
(0250.17102016.2.wbi)

The main reason for not treating measure phrases as part of discontinuous NEs is that measure phrases never seem to be part of the NP in Coastal Marind. Unlike English, which allows a measure phrase and the measured substance to be expressed within one NP (*one bag of rice*), in Coastal Marind all attestations of measure phrases are either separated from the expression denoting the quantified entity, or, if the measure phrase is added directly after the quantified expression, marked by a prosodic reset suggesting apposition. My interpretation of these facts is that measure phrases in Coastal Marind are expressed as adjuncts on the clause level, and that contiguous NPs lack a slot for a modifying measure phrase.

4.2.5 Gender agreement and constituency

The gender system of Coastal Marind offers a splendid, albeit rather extreme, illustration of Louagie and Reinöhl's (this issue) reminder that gender agreement between nominals is often not a straightforward indicator of constituenthood and, conversely, that 'non-conventional agreement' (Louagie and Reinöhl, this issue) does not exclude syntactic unithood. Nominal agreement targets in Coastal Marind exhibit so-called external agreement (see e.g., Chumakina et al. 2019), whereby a

target unexpectedly agrees with a non-local controller. In (20), the postposition *lek* 'from' appears in its plural form *lik* in accordance with the gender of the subject *isahih* 'children', despite being a locational adverbial and not a dependent of the subject NP. If agreement were local, we would have expected the postposition to agree with its complement NP, *sakola* 'school'. (Note that this example features an actual discontinuous NE, *ipe…isahih* 'the…children', but this does not affect the external agreement on the postposition.)

(20)	*ipe*	*sakola*	*lik*	*nd-a-huh*	*isahih*
	DIST:PL	school(m)(III)	from:PL	LOC-3SG.A-emerge:2|3PL.U	children

'when the children came out from school'
(0247.17102016.1.wbi)

An even more flamboyant example illustrating both agreement with a non-local controller and non-agreement between modifier and its head is in (21).[12] The question-word *Vn* 'which' does not agree with the noun that is modifies, *milah* 'village', but takes its gender specification from the subject of the clause, despite the lack of syntactic dependency between the controller and target. This is very surprising, because *un* 'which' is part of a clear syntactic constituent with *milah*, yet the agreement target finds a long-distance controller in the higher subject NP. These agreement phenomena, which are restricted to a small (but systematic, nevertheless) set of environments in Coastal Marind,[13] show how nominal agreement can be surprisingly disconnected from constituenthood.

(21)	[[*un*	*milah*]	*luk*]	*ka-ha-b-ø-Ø*	*upe*
	which:II	village(III)	from:II	NEUT-ROG-ACT-3SG.A-be.NPST	DIST:II
	anum	*upe?*			
	woman(II)	DIST:II			

'From which village is that woman?'

The preceding section described a number of structures that do not qualify as instances of discontinuous NEs. In the next section I examine those discontinuous NEs that cannot be subsumed under any of these structures, and must be treated as actual discontinuous NEs.

12 In non-past contexts, the copula lacks a verb stem, and consists only of a string of inflectional prefixes; I indicate this 'zero stem' by means of upper case Ø in examples.

13 The environments in which a target agrees with a noun with which it has no syntactic or semantic connection are: (i) question words and demonstratives embedded under the agreeing postposition *lek*, as in (21), and (ii) the emphatic demonstrative *anep* when it is part of the adverbial expression *anep mayay* 'therefore', which seems to show agreement with the most topical NP of the clause (see Olsson 2021: 491–492).

4.3 Discontinuous NEs in the Coastal Marind corpus

In order to estimate the frequency of discontinuous NEs in spontaneous discourse, I performed a corpus count on a conversational Coastal Marind text. In the first 1,000 intonation units of the recording, I counted 124 complex NPs, of which 8, or 7%, were discontinuous. I estimate (based on counts of other texts) that simple NPs (containing only a single noun) outnumber complex NPs by a ratio of 6:1, which would suggest that discontinuous NEs constitute less than 1% of all NPs in discourse. I conclude that although discontinuous NEs are possible in Coastal Marind, they are employed to a very small extent in spontaneous speech.[14]

This is in line with the estimate given for Jaminjung by Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012: 1032), who counted complex NPs (defined as any NP consisting of more than one word) across 4,000 intonation units, and found 21 discontinuous NEs among a total of 253 complex NPs, i.e., 8%.[15]

In the remainder of this section, I investigate the discourse circumstances that appear to favor non-contiguous NEs. In Section 4.3.1, I show that constituent focus targeting only a subpart of a nominal expression (e.g., the modifier, but not the head) is a trigger for discontinuous NEs in Coastal Marind, echoing the findings of Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) for Jaminjung. Another utterance type with a particular informational-structural function is presentational sentences, which introduce novel participants into the discourse (discussed in more detail by Schultze-Berndt, this issue). In Section 4.3.2, I show that this seems to be a context that favors non-contiguous contruals in Coastal Marind, again paralleling Schultze-Berndt and Simard's findings for Jaminjung. In Section 4.3.3, I address a separate type of discontinuous NEs, consisting of a noun in the beginning of the utterance and a corresponding demonstrative placed utterance-finally. This type of discontinuity does not relate directly to focus, or the lack thereof, but seems to follow from the attention-managing function of utterance-final demonstratives. In

14 In the corpus as a whole, I am aware of 36 clear instances of discontinuous NEs, and a systematic manual corpus count would probably add a few more candidates to this count.

15 These numbers are not directly comparable, however, because it is not clear how simple and complex NPs should be counted across languages. For Coastal Marind, NPs were counted as complex if they contained an attributive postpositional phrase (e.g., *nok en nggat* 'my POSS dog(s)'), a juxtaposed possessor (*Maria e-ham* 'Maria 3-husband'), a numeral (*inah ɣap* 'two night(s)') or a demonstrative (*uhe nggat* 'PROX:II dog'). For the purposes of this corpus count, I also counted adjective–noun compounds (*waninggap-aha* 'good-house') as complex NPs, in order to make the numbers more comparable to the Jaminjung findings. Noun–noun compounds were not counted as complex, and their inclusion would cause the number of complex NPs to increase by more than the double. Regardless of the comparability of the Coastal Marind and Jaminjung corpus counts, the conclusion that discontinuous NEs are extremely rare still holds.

Section 4.3.4, finally, I propose that aboutness is a property that constrains the use of loose NP construals in general, and discontinuous NEs in particular, in Coastal Marind, and that this property is reflected by the observation that adjunct NPs are always contiguous.

4.3.1 Discontinuous NEs under constituent focus

Constituent focus is often invoked as a motivation for discontinuous NEs (e.g., Reinöhl 2020: 86; Siewierska 1984; see references in Schultze-Berndt and Simard 2012: 1038; Louagie and Verstraete 2016: 52). For Jaminjung, Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012: 1034–1047) argue in detail that discontinuous expression is motivated when an NP has a focused sub-part (e.g., a modifier). The focused subpart is expressed in the beginning of the intonation unit, which is the normal position for focused constituents, while the non-focused, or given, part of the NP is expressed in a post-verbal position. Examples that provide exact parallels of this situation can be found in Coastal Marind, suggesting that focus on a nominal subconstituent is a motivation for discontinuous NEs in this language too. Consider (22), which was uttered by a member of a hunting party that had just returned to the village. The important game animals are wallabies, pigs and deer, and the speaker specifies how many of each were caught. In this context, the animals are the givens, and the numbers of each animal are the unknown variables that an interlocutor might ask for. The modifier *hyakod* 'one' is in focus, and appears in the immediately preverbal position, while *rusa* 'deer' appears at the end of the clause, after the verb.

(22)

Niko	***hyakod***	*m-a-deh*	***rusa***
N.	one	OBJ-3SG.A-shoot:3SG.U	deer

'Niko shot one deer.'
(Next utterance: 'Kors' dogs caught three wallabies.')
(0024.02062015.1.dmh)

Focus expression in Coastal Marind shows some typologically rare characteristics, and I will give a brief outline of the focus system before discussing its relevance for discontinuous NEs. A focused constituent must be expressed in the syntactic position immediately preceding the verb, as in (22) above, which is not uncommon cross-linguistically. A more uncommon feature is that this obligatory syntactic placement is accompanied by morphological marking, not on the focused constituent itself, but instead by prefixes on the verb, marking the role of the focused constituent. These prefixes are called Orientation prefixes in Olsson (2021: 253–296), and mark the verb as being 'oriented' towards a focused constituent in a certain role. The prefixes shown in the examples in this article are: the 'Neutral' prefix *k(a)-* (with a zero allomorph ø- in non-present contexts) which primarily

marks a focused constituent in the S/A role, the 'Object' *m(a)-* marking the O role, 'Directional' *k(a)-* (making no tense distinctions) which primarily marks the role of goal (in motion events) or recipient (with transfer verbs), and the Restrictive *s-*, meaning 'only' (the Restrictive is purely quantificational and does not distinguish the grammatical role of the focused constituent). This intricate system of focus marking (combined with contextual and prosodic cues) often makes it straightforward to determine whether a speaker intends to convey focus on a constituent, which in turn makes it possible to show that some cases of discontinuity correspond to focus on one part of a complex NE.

A mini-dialogue (without discontinuous NEs) illustrating the workings of the Coastal Marind focus system is in (23), taken from discussion of a set of pictures (described in San Roque et al. 2012). In this picture, a person is seen getting beaten up by some others. The two speakers, A and B, are trying to decide whether it is the wife or the husband, seen in earlier pictures, that is getting beaten up. The expressions *uhyum* 'his wife' and *eham* 'her husband' occur in the focus positions in the two utterances.

(23) 1. *uhyum ma-n-l-isetok-e*
3:wife OBJ-3PL.A-PLA-cut:3SG.U-IPFV
2. *ane, uhyum mbya k-a-Ø,*
EXCLAM 3:wife NEG PRS.NTRL-3SG.A-be.NPST
eham ma-n-usak-e
3:husband OBJ-3PL.A-beat.up:3SG.U-IPFV
1. (A:) 'They're cutting his wife.'
2. (B:) 'No, that's not his wife, they are beating up the husband.'
(0185–0186.19052015.2.dmh)

The utterances in (23) would be appropriate answers to a question such as 'Who is in the picture?' or 'Who is getting cut/beaten up?', which can be understood as implicit in the context of (23). Content questions and their answers are typical contexts for the use of this focus structure. The conversational excerpt in (24) gives an explicit content question (line 1) and its answer (line 2). The focused expressions *ta* 'who' (line 1) and *kaka Budi* 'elder brother Budi' (line 2) are obligatorily placed in the immediately pre-verbal slots.

(24) 1. *onggat ta ø-b-ø-in-kahek?*
coconut who NTRL-ACT-3SG.A-ALL-climb
'Who climbed for coconuts?'
2. *kaka Budi ø-d-ø-in-kahek*
elder.sib(M) Budi NTRL-DUR-3SG.A-ALL-climb
'Budi climbed for coconuts.'
(0082–0083.16092016.1.wbi)

More generally, speakers combine pre-verbal placement and the use of the Orientation prefixes on the verb in contexts where some alternative is emphasized to the exclusion of other potential alternatives, e.g., in corrections to some previous statement.

Constituent focus targeting one part of a NE is a source of discontinuity in Coastal Marind. When a clause contains a nominal head and a modifying element, and the modifying element, rather than the head, is the focal part of the utterance (e.g., because it corresponds to the information asked for in a content question, or singles out some property among other alternative properties), speakers of Coastal Marind have the choice to place only the modifier in the pre-verbal focus slot, leaving the nominal head stranded elsewhere in the utterance. In their study of Jaminjung, Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) find that the types of modifers that occur separated from their head under contrastive focus are interrogative expressions (i.e., *wh*-phrases), possessors, quantifiers and attributive property expressions (2012: 1035–1036). Discontinuous expression of these four types are possible in focus contexts in Coastal Marind, and are attested in the corpus, with the exception of attributive property expressions, which so far remain unattested in spontaneous speech data. I will give some examples illustrating discontinuous NEs associated with constituent focus, before commenting on their significance.

Discontinuous interrogative expressions are found mostly in elicited data, but this is probably an artefact of interrogatives having been a common target for elicitation due to their complicated morphological paradigms (involving the verb prefixes *h-* and *b-* seen in the examples), and more discontinuous interrogatives would probably turn up with more conversational corpus data. Examples (25) and (26) illustrate discontinuous interrogative expressions. In (25), the interrogative phrase *ta en* 'whose' is in the preverbal position associated with focus, and the nominal head *yaba-ember* 'big bucket' added at the end of the utterance. It is likely that the presence of the adjective *yaba* 'big' is a contributing factor to the discontinuous construal: a contiguous NP *ta en yaba-ember* would be grammatical in the preverbal position, but speakers seem to prefer to narrow down the material that is placed in the focus position to the part that is most relevant for interpretation, in this case *ta en* 'whose'.[16] In (26), which was volunteered during an elicitation session, the interrogative *intagi* 'how many' is separated from *awe* 'fish'.

(25) *awi* ***ta*** ***en*** *ka-ha-b-ø-Ø* ***yaba-ember****?*
what.about who POSS PRS.NTRL-ROG-ACT-3SG.A-be.NPST big-bucket
'And whose big bucket is it?'
(0132.27082015.1.wbi)

16 The spontaneous corpus contains only three instances of 'whose X' questions, but in all of these the possessor phrase *ta en* is placed in the pre-verbal slot, and the possessed nominal elsewhere in the clause. Content questions with contiguous possessed NPs are only attested in elicited data.

(26) ***intagi*** *ma-h-o-b-ap-olab* ***awe***?
how.many: PL OBJ-ROG-2SG.A-ACT-CONTESS-buy:2|3PL.U fish
'How many fish did you buy?'

Figure 2 shows the prosodic properties of (25). The focused interrogative phrase *ta en* 'whose' has the main prominence of the utterance, as seen by the waveform in the upper panel and the peak in the pitch track. After the utterance-initial discourse particle *awi* 'what about', which has its own rising pitch, there is a pitch rise during the focused interrogative *ta en*, and the high pitch is then maintained for the copula, before dropping sharply to mark the de-emphasized head, *yaba-ember* 'big bucket'. This seems to parallel the pattern of de-accenting in partially focused discontinuous NEs in Jaminjung, described by Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012: 1036).

Focused numerals are a source of discontinuous NEs in the corpus. A clear example of an emphasized numeral involving a discontinuity is (27), in which the focused expression *hyakod ɣa* 'really one' is separated from the noun *basik* 'pig'.

(27) ***upe anup hyakod ɣa*** *m-am-b-e-aheb* ***basik upe***
DIST:II EMPH:II one real OBJ-1.A-ACT-1PL-eat:3SG.U pig(II) DIST:II
'Indeed, we ate that one entire pig.'
(0054.14052015.2.dmh)

Figure 3 shows the prosodic properties of (27). Again, the focused numeral phrase *hyakod ɣa* 'really one, one entire' is accompanied by a rise in the pitch, reaching a high plateau that is maintained throughout the verb, and then drops sharply before the head, *basik upe* 'that pig', which is made much less prominent.

Discontinuous NEs involving focused adjectival expressions appear to be possible, but are not attested in corpus data. The elicited utterance in (28) shows a focused adjectival expression, dislocated from its semantic head *aha* 'house'. This

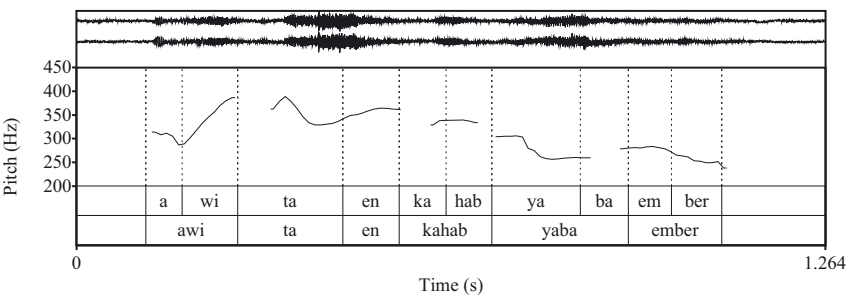

Figure 2: Annotated pitch track of Example (25).

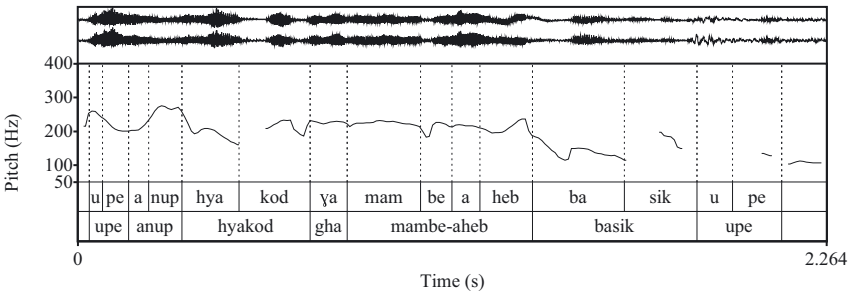

Figure 3: Annotated pitch track of Example (27).

structure was judged well-formed by other speakers, but remains unattested in the corpus, and I was not able to elicit it with adjectives other than 'big' and 'small'. The limited occurrence of focused adjectives separated from their heads is unsurprising given the tight bondedness between adjectives and their heads noted in Section 3.

(28) ***sam*** ***ɣa*** *m-o-ambad* ***aha***
big very OBJ-2SG.A-build house
'You're building a very big house.'

It should be noted that examples of discontinuous NEs in which only a subpart (such as the modifier) is focused are infrequent, and I have only found six clear examples of the phenomenon in corpus data. Note, however, that argument NPs in which only a subpart is focused, but which retain the standard modifier-head order of tight NPs (Section 3), are completely unattested in the corpus. Complex NPs in the focus position are not uncommon in the corpus, especially with expressions of temporal duration.[17] Example (29) is from a story, and can be thought of as answering an implicit question 'How long did you stay there?'. This example shows that complex NPs with the standard modifier-head order are possible in the focus position, but are used when the scope of the focus includes both the modifier and the head.

(29) *inahinah* *ɣanid* *m-an-d-e-nahwalah*
four day OBJ-1.A-DUR-1PL-be:1.U
'We stayed there for four days.'
(0018.28062015.4.wbi)

17 At least 22 attestations, most consisting of a numeral plus a noun such as *ɣanid* 'day', *mandaw* 'month' or *ɣap* 'night'.

This suggests that constituent focus on subparts of NEs explains some of the discontinuous NEs in the Coastal Marind data, as was argued for Jaminjung by Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012). Note, however, that a typological difference between the focus systems of the two languages probably results in a lower proportion of discontinuous NEs associated with constituent focus in Coastal Marind. The focus position in Coastal Marind is immediately pre-verbal, and not clause-initial like in Jaminjung, and it is common for the remainder of the NP to be placed clause-initially, preceding the focused pre-verbal modifier.[18] This sequence of an initial (non-focused) nominal, followed by a (focused) modifier in the pre-verbal position does not result in a discontinuous NE, but simply a deviation from the standard modifier-head order of tight NPs. A clear example is (30), in which the emphasis on *hyakod* '(not a single) one' motivates its placement in the pre-verbal position. (In negated sentences with focus, like this one, the negative morpheme *mbya* intervenes between the focused constituent and the verb.) The noun *awe* 'fish' is not part of the focus and so does not qualify for placement in the pre-verbal position (as part of a tight NP).

(30) ***awe*** ***hyakod*** *mbya* *me-ø-ɣakeh*
fish one NEG FUT-3SG.A-catch:3SG.U
'He wouldn't catch a single fish.'
(0783.23092016.1.wbi)

The preceding discussion has suggested that constituent focus on a subpart of the NE is a causal factor behind some instances of non-contiguous NEs in Coastal Marind. The structural prerequisites that seem to be involved are, firstly, the possibility of discontinuous NEs, and secondly, the existence of a dedicated slot in the architecture of the clause that hosts a focused constituent, and thirdly, a preference for placing only the focused subconstituent in the pre-verbal focus slot, rather than the entire constituent of which the focused material is a part.

4.3.2 All-new, presentational sentences

In their study of Jaminjung, Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) identify "sentence focus" as one of the contexts that frequently trigger discontinuous NEs. The data they cite are strikingly similar to Coastal Marind utterances such as (31) and (32),

18 The exact frequency of the sequence noun + focused modifier is beyond the scope of this article, but it can be mentioned that out of the 73 corpus attestations of the numeral *hyakod* 'one' used as a modifier, in 12 cases the numeral occurred in the pre-verbal focus position, with the quantified, non-focused noun preceding the numeral. See further Section 4.3.4 for the ordering of 'one' and the quantified noun.

which also involve discontinuous NEs. These are "all-new" sentences introducing a new participant. Referring to the works of Sasse (1987) and Lambrecht (1994), Schultze-Berndt and Simard describe such utterances as "thetic" and involving focus on the whole sentence. The vagueness of the theticity notion makes its application to novel languages somewhat difficult, and in earlier work on Coastal Marind I reserved this label for certain structures involving an auxiliary with a postposed verb stem (Olsson 2021: 461). This structure is commonly used to answer the question 'What happened?', at least if the reply is cast as containing no presupposed information. The utterances in (31) and (32) represent a different type of thetic statements, in which a stative positional verb predicates the location and existence of some new participant, which I will refer to as presentational here.

(31) *yah* ***iwag*** *e=nda-d-a-p-hamat-a* *ehe*
but woman PROX=LOC-DUR-3SG.A-CONTESS-many.sit-RSLT PROX
inhyakod
three
'But there were three women sitting there.'
(0176.21112014.1.dmh}

(32) ***isi*** *upe* *tu-k-a-kw-itala* ***sam***
other DIST:II GIV:II-PRS.NTRL-3SG.A-INESS-be.standing big
'Another big [pig] is standing in there.'
(0269.23092016.1.wbi)

The pitch track in Figure 4 shows the prosodic characteristics of the presentational sentence in (31). The head *iwag* 'woman' is given prominence since it is the most informative element of the utterance, and introduces a set of new participants. But the rest of the utterance differs prosodically from the ones involving focus seen before (Figures 2 and 3). Unlike clauses with focus, there is no high pitch plateau stretching across the focused preverbal constituent and the verb, and no sharp pitch drop marking the de-accented post-verbal material.

Presentational utterances of this type are common in the corpus, but the vast majority involves simple noun phrases, typically just a bare noun.[19] I have only found nine instances of complex NEs (involving e.g., a numeral or property word) in such presentational sentences, and five of those show discontinuity of the same type as in (31) and (32). In each instance the pattern is the same, with the head

19 I counted at least 150 instances of presentational sentences introducing new participants in the corpus; this was made using the regular expressions `\b([uei]pe |[uei])t[eui]k\w*` and `epe nd\w*d\w*-\w*a\b`, and then manually excluding sentences that did not introduce new participants.

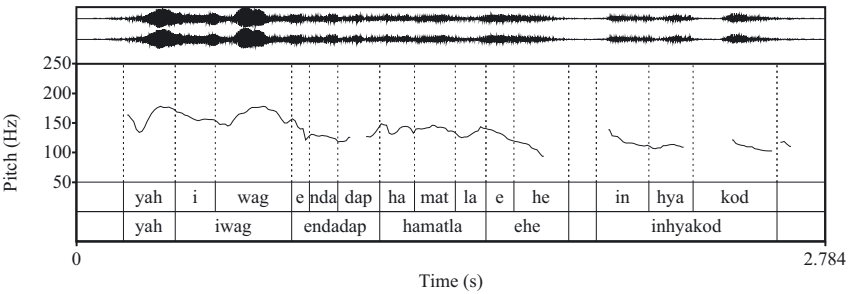

Figure 4: Annotated pitch track of Example (31).

noun, or some other item identifying the referent, such as *isi* 'another (one)' in (32), in the beginning of the utterance, followed by a demonstrative element preceding the verb, and the modifying element after the verb. This is exactly the pattern identified by the pattern identified by in their data on discontinuity under "sentence focus" (2012: 1041).

Why do discontinuous NEs occur in presentational, or thetic, utterances? For Jaminjung, Schultze-Berndt and Simard argue that discontinuous NEs are one of several strategies used to signal that an utterance is thetic, and they conclude that "NP discontinuity needs to be added to the list of crosslinguistically available strategies associated with sentence focus" (2012: 1046). For Coastal Marind, it seems that the discontinuous construals in (31) and (32) correlate with the all-new status of the referents, but it is unclear whether the discontinuous NEs can be said to 'signal' presentational or thetic utterances. The discourse functions of (31)–(32) are already conveyed by the use of positional verbs with preceding locational specifications, and these functions can be conveyed equally well in presentational sentences in which the subject is a bare noun (which cannot be given discontinuous expression). I suggest that an important feature of the discontinuous NEs in (31)–(32) is that the postverbal modifiers introduce additional information describing the entity that the utterance as a whole is about. I will return to the issue of aboutness in Section 4.3.4.

4.3.3 Utterance-final demonstratives

Utterance-final demonstratives that form a discontinuous expression with a noun earlier in the clause, with which they agree in gender or number (indicating that they are not locational adverbials), are common in corpus data. This phenomenon occurs mainly in face-to-face conversation and in reported speech in narratives, but the precise discourse function of these expressions is unclear. Utterances with

final demonstratives are similar to the presentational sentences discussed in Section 4.3.2 as they mostly involve novel participants, but the information-structural status of the new participant seems to differ between instances, and the introduction of main participants does not seem to be the main function of these utterances.

Typical examples are in (33)–(34). The contexts suggest that the function of the utterance-final demonstratives involves an attentional element, i.e., that they serve to bring the speaker's attention to some novel situation, as has been described for utterance-final demonstratives in other Papuan languages (Evans et al. 2018b; Kratochvíl 2011).

(33) *nggays* *ay!* ***yahun*** *mend-ø-am-tamak* ***ehe!***
mate VOC canoe(III) PERF-3SG.A-2SG.GEN-float:III.U PROX:III
'Hey mate! Your canoe drifted away!
(0259.21112014.1.dmh)

(34) *ah-k-u-timin-em!* ***tuban*** *ah-kasip-em*
IMP-INESS-PLA-wake.up-PL.IMP bandicoot(II) IMP-scorch:3SG.U-PL.IMP
uhe!
PROX:II
'Wake up! You singe the bandicoot!'
(0719.20052015.4.mkl)

Example (35), taken from the same narrative as (33), is evidence that these clauses do not serve to introduce new participants into the discourse. Here, the same canoe as in (33) is mentioned again. The canoe is old information, but the mode of expression is identical to its first mention.

(35) *nggays* *ay!* ***yahun*** *mend-ø-amb-i-ihon*
mate VOC canoe(III) PERF-3SG.A-2SG.GEN-AGAIN-run.away:III.U
ehe!
PROX:III
'Hey mate! Your canoe got away again!'
(0268.21112014.1.dmh)

Examples (33)–(35) lack the focused-presupposed dichotomy of the utterances discussed in Section 4.3.1, but other utterances with final demonstratives do contain focused constituents in the pre-verbal position. Examples (36)–(37), taken from a narrative, involve first mentions of participants, but are in fact focus constructions, as shown by the presence of the Neutral Orientation prefix *ka-* on the verbs. They can be thought of as answering implicit questions of the type 'Who is that coming there?', and the context following (36) does indeed involve discussion of the person's identity (*Have a good look at him, oh, it is really him*, etc.).

(36) ***onos*** *ka-bat-ø-man-em* ***ehe***
cross.cousin PRS.NTRL-AFF-3SG.A-come-VEN PROX:I
'My (male) cross-cousin is coming.'
(0314.08092016.1.wbi)

(37) ***Basim-Bak-Kidub*** *k-a-ɣet* ***upe***
B.(II) PRS.NTRL-3SG.A-be.moving DIST:II
'Basim-Bak-Kidub is walking along.'
(0611.08092016.1.wbi)

I conclude that the use of discontinuous NEs in (33)–(37), caused by the utterance-final demonstratives, does not primarily follow from the information-structural status of the participants, but seems to correlate with the attention-directing function of these utterances.

4.3.4 Aboutness and discontinuous NEs

In this section, I discuss a discourse feature that seems to be a central factor in the distribution of discontinuous NEs in Coastal Marind, which I refer to as ABOUTNESS. This feature holds between an utterance and a referent, so that an utterance can be described to be about a referent. Aboutness is an important notion in philosophy (Yablo 2014), library science (Hutchins 1978), and, in linguistics (Krifka 2008), where it is seen as one of the prerequisites for topicalization (Endriss and Hinterwimmer 2008; Reinhart 1981).

In Coastal Marind, aboutness is correlated with discontinuous NEs in the following way: when the head of a NE ranks high in aboutness (i.e., the utterance can be understood as providing information about the referent of the NE), further modifiers added to the utterance can be expressed outside the tight NP structure described in Section 3, possibly forming a discontinuous NE. This observation accounts for the discontinuous NEs with constituent focus described in Section 4.3.1, for a sentence such as (25) easily allows paraphrases with 'about X', e.g., "About that bucket: whose is it?". The aboutness prerequisite is naturally compatible with the presentational sentences in Section 4.3.2, as those sentences provide information about the participant they introduce. A paraphrase of (31), for example, would be "About the women: they were sitting there and there were three of them". The utterances with final demonstratives in Section 4.3.3 invariably involve participants that rank high in aboutness.[20]

20 A reviewer asks how I can reconcile my statement that Coastal Marind topics occur at the left edge of the clause (Section 4.2.3), whereas in cases with discontinuous NEs, material expressing a topical referent occurs in other positions of the clause, including at the right edge. But this

Importantly, I do not claim that aboutness explains why speakers sometimes produce discontinuous NEs. My claim is merely that referents that rank high in aboutness are possible targets for discontinuous expression (or expression as loose NEs more generally), whereas those that rank low in aboutness are not. The aboutness restriction is a possible explanation for the observation that discontinuous nominal expressions are unattested in adjunct roles. All instances of discontinuous NEs in the Coastal Marind corpus involve core arguments of verbs, a pattern that has been noted for other languages (Louagie and Verstraete 2016: 51). Adjuncts typically provide additional specifications about the state-of-affairs expressed by an utterance, and it is rarely the case that a clause and its core arguments primarily provide information about the referent expressed by some adjunct.

For an illustration of this, consider the locative adjunct 'one place' in (38). The discourse context suggests that contrastive focus on the numeral 'one' would be intended here, as animals fleeing a hunter are unlikely to fall in the same spot. Yet, the whole expression is placed in the focus position, rather than only the numeral, which was the construal that was seen with core arguments containing focused numerals in Section 4.3.1. Rather, the whole expression is placed in the pre-verbal position, without any discontinuity – just like numerous other parallel examples involving adjuncts in the corpus. The reason for this, in my view, is the relative lack of aboutness of the adjunct 'one place'. The paraphrase "About the place: there was one, and the deer fell there" is pragmatically odd, while the translation and contextual clue ('About deer …') given in (38) seem natural.

(38) ***hyakod*** ***say*** *ka-d-ø-hihih*
one place DIR-DUR-3SG.A-fall.PLA:2|3PL.U
(About deer that had been shot) 'They fell in one place.'
(0048.28062015.1.wbi)

This pattern is confirmed by studying all attestations of the numeral 'one' in attributive use in the corpus. Table 1 gives corpus counts for all 73 attestation of this word according to its ordering with respect to the head noun: numeral–noun (which is the order found in the tight NP), noun–numeral and non-contiguous orders. The table also presents the distribution of these orderings across argument and adjunct roles in the clause.

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confuses the general conceptual notion of topic (what a sentence is about) and my very narrow notion of syntactic topic in Coastal Marind (or rather, Topic, since it is used as a language-specific descriptive notion). Only a fraction of topical referents are expressed as prosodically and/or segmentally marked topics, and other modes of expression include e.g., zero (or expression by indexes on the verb), and loose and discontinuous NEs.

Table 1: Nouns modified by the numeral *hyakod* 'one' in the Coastal Marind corpus.

ORDERING	Total	Role of NP in the clause			
		ARGUMENT		ADJUNCT	
		n	%	*n*	%
Numeral noun	43	5	12	38	88
Noun numeral	21	21	100	0	0
Discontinuous	9	9	100	0	0

Table 1 shows that all deviations from the tight numeral–noun orders involve NEs in argument roles. Example (39) illustrates both of these orderings, noun–numeral (in its first clause) and non-contiguous ordering (in its second clause). The aboutness status of the nominal heads is clear. One could ask "what was that utterance about?", and "some wallaby" would be a natural response. The remaining 28 instances of *hyakod* in these two orderings conform to the aboutness criterion.[21]

(39) ***sayam*** ***hyakod*** *ma-no-deh*,
wallaby one OBJ-1.A-shoot:3SG.U
kosi-sayam *e=nda-no-deh* ***hyakod***
small-wallaby PROX=LOC-1.A-shoot:3SG.U one
'I shot one wallaby, I shot one small wallaby over here.'
(0346.21092016.1.wbi)

Of the 43 instances of the order numeral–noun (i.e., that of tight NPs), 38 were in adjunct roles. As in the case of Example (38), I was unable to identify any indications that the clauses in which these adjuncts were found somehow could be interpreted as providing information about the adjunct. However, the remaining five instances of numeral–noun order are in argument roles. I will provide some brief comments on these examples, as they are a potential problem for the aboutness account, unless they turn out to be arguments that rank low in aboutness.

21 The first clause in (39) illustrates focus on a numeral, while the information structural configuration in the second clause is less clear. Focus is not a motivating factor in the second clause, because the verb is preceded by the Proximal clitic *e=* (reduced version of *ehe* 'here') and accordingly carries the Locational Orientation prefix *nd-*, which shows that the O-argument 'small wallaby' is not in focus.

Three of the examples are rather complex, and I will not give them in full here, in interest of space. All of them involve transfer events (with three participant roles), and the relevant NPs arguable rank lower in aboutness than the other participants in the events (which are given zero expression, as they are contextually given).[22] Here I focus on the remaining two examples, which are easier to summarize.

In the first example, given in (40), the expression *hyakod yahun* 'one canoe' is in an argument position, licensed by the Instrumental-Comitative applicative prefix *ka-* on the verb. While it does not seem unreasonable to claim that this utterance says something about a canoe, there is clearly a more central participant that this utterance is about, viz. some previously mentioned men, as indicated by the clause-initial topic. The phrase *hyakod yahun* ranks lower in aboutness, which makes non-contiguous expression less likely.

(40) *ihe* *inah* *ihe* ***hyakod*** ***yahun*** *ø-a-ka-naɣam-em*
PROX:PL two PROX:PL one canoe NTRL-3SG.A-WITH-come.PL-VEN
'The other two, they were coming in one canoe.'
(0316.21092016.1.wbi)

In the second example, given in (41), the speaker was talking about two men in another village who he suspected were married to the same woman. Like in the previous example, the utterance is about the referent of the NP (the woman) to some degree, but this referent is outranked by the referents of the subject of the clause (the men), which are discussed in the preceding and following turns. Note that this clause involves some disfluency, as marked by the use of the pro-word *ago* (in its Gender II form *agu*) instead of a lexical noun, but this has no affect on the ordering of the words.

(41) ***hyakod*** ***agu*** *ma-d-na-kisa-la-ti,* *wananggub*
one whatchamacallit:II OBJ-DUR-3PL.A-marry-RSLT-DUR daughter
ma-d-na-kisa-la-ti
OBJ-DUR-3PL.A-marry-RSLT-DUR
'They were married to one uh…they were married to [one] girl.'
(0524.08092016.1.wbi)

Based on the preceding discussion, I suggest that aboutness is a necessary condition for discontinuous NEs (as well as the loose noun–numeral order) in Coastal

22 These three examples also feature verbs that are Malay loans (*bagi* 'share s.t. with s.b.', *dapat* 'get s.t. from s.b.'), which perhaps favors the numeral–noun order of that language. In the corpus, which can be inspected online, these examples have the codes 0647.16092016.1.wbi, 0304.16092016.1.wbi and 1114.16092016.1.wbi.

Marind. The discontinuous NEs associated with partial constituent focus (Section 4.3.1), in presentational utterances (Section 4.3.2) and utterances with final demonstratives (Section 4.3.3) all rank high in aboutness. Adjuncts rank low in aboutness, which is reflected in the absence of discontinuous NEs in adjunct roles in the corpus. In Examples (40)–(41), I gave some counterexamples to the tendency for argument NPs with the modifier *hyakod* 'one' to be expressed either non-contiguously or with the noun–numeral order. I suggested that the use of the tight numeral–noun order in these examples follows from the relatively lower aboutness rank of the expressions, which are outranked by other, more topical, participants.

It is worth stressing that aboutness, as understood here, is only a condition for non-contiguous NEs, and does not explain why they exist in Coastal Marind in the first place. The explanation for why the grammar of Coastal Marind allows, and – in some circumstances – encourages discontinuous NEs is probably related to the lack of elaboration within the tight NP structure, a preference for distribution rather than accumulation of information, a fixed pre-verbal focus position, and perhaps the prosodic properties of the language (as suggested by Schultze-Berndt and Simard [2012: 1049] for Jaminjung). Language contact has perhaps played a role, as the neighboring Ngkolmpu language features discontinous NEs, although apparently to a more limited extent than Coastal Marind (Carroll 2020).

5 Conclusions

In this article, I described the architecture of the Coastal Marind NP as one marked by relative simplicity and lack of elaboration, and I suggested that this probably represents an extreme in the fairly underexplored field of Papuan nominal syntax. I then turned to another little explored area in Papuan syntax, discontinuous NEs, and attempted to emulate the approach of Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) for identifying discontinuous NEs and examining their distribution in Coastal Marind. I showed that discontinuous NEs are attested in the language, perhaps to a greater degree than in other Papuan languages, but that they are very infrequent in spontaneous speech. This mirrors the findings of Schultze-Berndt and Simard (2012) for the Australian language Jaminjung, and I also made similar observations about discourse contexts that favor discontinuous NEs (such as constituent focus). Finally, I suggested that aboutness of referents constrains the use of discontinuous NEs, as reflected in the lack of discontinuous NEs in adjunct roles.

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