N. Waanyi (1/2)

1.	I | am | sitting | in the camp.
2.	Then | they both | ask(ed) | this man.
3.	Now | I am | not | hungry.
4.	Jungku | bula | nawunu | burrurri, | kirriya.
5.	Jarrba | nyulu | nanangkani | kirriyaa | kaku.
6.	Dabarraba nyulu nana waliji nangkani burrurrii karrinjana kundana.

N. Waanyi (2/2)

This is an exercise in exploring the structure of a language with very different grammatical rules from English. The real challenges lie in the syntax, as explained below.

- Finding the lexical correspondences (i.e. the dictionary words or vocabulary) is relatively easy, especially when you recognise that some words contain a long suffix (e.g. *kirriyawurru* in 7 contains *kirriya* in 1). Fortunately the morphology is very straightforward, so endings are easy to recognise; but pay attention to small differences such as that between *kirriya* in 1 and *kirriyaa* in 9.

- The first syntactic problem concerns words like *nyulu* and *bula*, which don't seem to correspond systematically to anything in the English. Almost every sentence contains one of these words (or some other bisyllabic non-vocabulary word: *yalu, nayi, ninji, ngawu*), so you might suspect (rightly) that they're like auxiliary verbs; so let's call them auxiliaries. But what distinction do these verbs indicate? You might consider alternatives such as tense or positive/negative, but it turns out in fact that it's the 'person' and number of the sentence's 'actor' (more on this below): *ngawu* = 'I', *ninji* = 'you', *bula* = 'the two of them', *yalu* = 'they', *nyula* = 'he/she/it'. (*Nayi* in 24 is a puzzle; maybe it just means 'there isn't'.)

- The second syntactic problem is word order. One regularity is that the auxiliary is very often the second word in the sentence, especially if you ignore on the one hand introductory material separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma (e.g. 6), and on the other the word *barri*, which means 'then'. With these two exclusions, there are no exceptions: the auxiliary always follows just one word. Moreover, that one word is very often the main verb of the sentence – but not always. For instance, 31 starts *rajiwurru barri bula*, 'they both returned then', but 32 moves the verb *rajiwurru* after the auxiliary: *Balikajini bula kannga rajiwurru*, 'hungry they both return'. Apart from these two rules, the order of elements in a sentence is free.

- The third problem is that nouns have more than one form which varies from sentence to sentence; for instance, 'woman' is *kirriya* in 1 and 5, but *kirriyaa* in 9 and 10. In some examples the extra material seems to express the same meaning as an English preposition; for example, *kirriyawurru* is translated as 'to the woman' (combined with *kanungku*, translated as 'approaching' in 19 and 21). But this doesn't help with the variation between *kirriya* and *kirriyaa*, or the similar alternation between *burrurri* and *burrurrii* for 'man' in 2 and 4. You may think it's like the 'case' changes found in languages like German (or in English pronouns, such as *he* and *him*), but that contrasts grammatical subjects and objects (e.g. *he came, and she saw him*).

- This pattern is called a 'nominative-accusative' case system, where 'nominative' and 'accusative' are the traditional names for the cases used as subjects and objects. That's not what's happening in Waanyi, where the short form is used both as subject in 1 or 2 (X is standing/sitting ...) and also as object in 17 and 19 (... saw X). Waanyi follows a completely different system, called a 'nominative-ergative' case system, where a special form (in Waanyi, the longer one) is used for the 'actor' in a two-part action, where the actor does something to someone or something else – in other words, for the subject of a verb that also has an object. For instance, 'woman' is normally *kirriya*, but in 9 it's *kirriyaa* because it means 'that woman takes that meat ...' and likewise in 10 meaning 'that woman eats that meat'.