once. In sentence (1), the stating of *Buy(x, y)* is interrupted by the stating of the the other predicates *Brother(x, Paul)* or *Get(John, y, z)*. The intricate embedding of these predicates during utterance may be more obvious in *He gives the book that John got from Jack's sister to his brother*, where the third argument of *Give* remains undetermined until after the full stating of *Get(John, y, z)*. This structural embedding is the price syntax must pay for making it possible to bring together predicates that share a variable. Representation on the basis of named variables (p. 000), by being struc-   AQ2
turally 'flat', avoids this drawback, but it requires a detailed interplay of variables and multiple repetitions.

Evolution set us on the path to structurally recursive expression of semantics. Fundamental aspects of syntax owe their existence to the need to express meaning with the least possible ambiguity, examples being the way phrases are interlinked or can move, as we have seen. If we bear in mind the principles stated in Chapter 6, we must assume that syntax is locally optimal for its function. If that is the case, we are bound to wonder why such a system of interlinking of phrases should coexist with a second system which, as we are about to see, seems to fulfil the same function.

10.5 Another form of syntax

Languages like French or English rely largely on the position of their words for the expression of meaning. Any change in the word order within a sentence usually results in an incorrect sentence or in a change of meaning. This strict order is the result of fitting together the components of the sentence in a way which, starting with the basic words, produces bit by bit an edifice in which everything hangs together. But there are other languages with syntax that is radically different from this; and an encounter with them can be extremely disconcerting. Sentences spoken in Dyirbal, one of the Aboriginal languages of Australia, give no appearance of requiring a set word order:

ba-la-n   *ɖugumbil-ø*   *ba-ŋgu-l*   *yaɽa-ŋgu*   *buɽa-n*
the-ABSII   woman-ABS   the-ERG-I   man-ERG   see-PAST
'the man saw the woman'