Anatomy of a conference abstract

Primary and secondary objects in Upper Necaxa Totonac

Title (author usually omitted to allow anonymous review)

Background to the problem

Upper Necaxa Totonac (UNT), a member of the Totonacan language family, has a rich system of causatives and applicatives that allows the derivation of verbs with up to five syntactic objects. The lack of morphological case, adpositions, and fixed constituent order makes determination of the grammatical relations assigned to these objects problematic; previous work (Beck 2006) has shown that the only syntactic property that distinguishes object types is the antipassive voice. This diagnostic consistently targets basic (non-applied) objects, causees in causative constructions, and the non-theme object of underived trivalent verbs, while consistently failing to target applied objects. This places UNT in the class of primary-object languages (Dryer 1986) and categorizes UNT causatives as direct causatives (Beck 2009). UNT applicatives, on the other hand, are non-direct applicatives and consistently add secondary rather than primary objects to the clause.

THESIS OF THE TALK

In UNT, the antipassive voice is expressed by the suffix *-nV̨n* (where V is a harmonic copy of the last vowel of the base). The syntactic effect of this voice is to suppress an object of the verb. For underived bivalent stems, this creates intransitive stems with the reading of an activity performed on an unspecified or generic object (e.g., *ka:* 'X chops Y' > *ka:nán* 'X chops'). For underived trivalent verbs such as *maškí:* 'X gives Y to R', the antipassive suppresses the non-theme object of the verb:

Evidence for your thesis, including data and a summary of your argumentation

(1) na–i̧k–kaː–maškíː–nin (*kin–stánku̧) kin–kawaːyúx–nu̧
FUT–1SG.SUB–PL.OBJ–give–ANTIPAS 1PO–sibling 1PO–horse–PL
'I'm going to give away my horses (*to my brother).'

As seen in (1), the THEME in the antipassive voice continues to be expressible and is a potential controller of agreement. Given that being the pivot of the antipassive is the only property that differentiates object-types in UNT, this makes the non-THEME a more privileged and, hence, primary object in the sense of Dryer (1986).

Further testing reveals that this primary object property accrues (exclusively) to a) the object of an underived bivalent verb, b) the causee of a causative construction, and c) the basic (non-applied) object of any multi-valent verb, as in the object-suppressive form of *ta̧:liːtanká:* 'X fells Y with Z aided by C' (derived from *tanká:* 'X fells Y'):

(2) na–i̧k–kaː–ta̧ː–liː–tankáː–nan–yaː–n wi̧šinán kin–mačíːta̧ (*pú̧skni̧)
FUT–1SG.SUB–PL.OBJ–CMT–INST–fell–ANTIPAS–IMPF–2OBJ you.guys 1PO–machete Spanish.cedar
'I will fell trees (*a/the Spanish cedar) with you guys using my machete.'

Significantly, bi- and multi-valent bases created from monovalent roots with applicatives do not have object-suppressive forms, meaning that applied objects do not show primary-object properties and must be considered secondary objects. Applicatives in UNT must then be considered non-direct applicatives in the sense of Beck (2009), and derived bi- and multi-transivitive applicative constructions must then be considered intransitive constructions.

Summary and conclusions; should reprise and point to the wider implications of your findings

Give references cited in the abstract

References

Beck, David. (2006). Control of agreement in multi-object constructions in Upper Necaxa Totonac. In Atsushi Fujimori & Maria Amelia Reis Silva (eds.), *Proceedings of the 11th Workshop on Structure and Constituency in the Languages of the Americas.* Vancouver: UBCWPL.

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