

Deconstructing the person hierarchy as an explanation of the synchrony and diachrony of Tupi-Guarani indexing systems

oral presentation for *Theme 2: Typological hierarchies in synchrony and diachrony*

Among the typological hierarchies, the hierarchies called 'empathy / animacy / saliency / referential or inherent topicality / nominal / indexability hierarchy' (Kuno and Kaburaki 1977, Comrie 1981, DeLancey 1981, Klaiman 1991, Dixon 1994, Givón 1994, Bickel and Nichols 2007) all posit a person hierarchy, generally $1 > 2 > 3$. A remarkable application of the person hierarchy in descriptive linguistics lies in the explanation of hierarchical and inverse indexing systems (Nichols 1992, Zúñiga 2006). Tupi-Guarani languages are cited as perfect examples of a hierarchical indexing system, where the relative ranking of A and P on the hierarchy determines the selection of the person markers (see for ex. Payne 1997), as are Algonquian languages for the inverse systems including a direction marker. The person hierarchy is systematically used as an explanation of the indexing system in Tupi-Guarani studies, be they comparative (Monserat and Soares 1983, Jensen 1998), general (Payne 1994) or on individual languages. The person hierarchy is also suggested as an explanation for the supposed development of the hierarchical system out of an ergative system (Jensen 1998). This paper questions the relevance of the person hierarchy as a synchronic and diachronic explanation for the Tupi-Guarani systems.

A recent survey of 28 Tupi-Guarani indexing systems surprisingly shows that only two of these systems (those of Ava-Canoeiro and Kayabi) can be said to follow perfectly the 'model' of a hierarchical indexing system based on a $1 > 2 > 3$ hierarchy as outlined above. Some languages follow different hierarchies or different indexing systems, but the great majority of them show a clear $SAP > 3$ hierarchy along with an opaque marking of local configurations (when a speech act participant is acting on another speech act participant). This opacity is such that the systems can hardly be said to derive from a person hierarchy. This non-transparency of local configurations has been well studied for Australian and Amerindian languages by Heath (1998). It is explained as avoidance of pragmatically sensitive combinations (resembling the common pragmatic restrictions on the use of transparent 2SG pronominals), interpretable as face threatening acts, as Brown and Levinson (1987) put it (Siewierska 2004)). Heath suggests that linguists have 'denying' reactions in front of this opacity, for instance imposing hierarchies with artificial segmentation and labeling of surface morphemes. Our survey confirms this 'meta-analysis'.

The relevance of the person hierarchy is questionable when it explains only part of the facts that it is supposed to cover, and when it is reduced to $SAP > 3$. In the case of Tupi-Guarani languages, the $1 > 2 > 3$ hierarchy is an inefficient tool and it does not explain the synchronic facts in a simple manner. A close examination of Algonquian data led to the same conclusion (Macaulay 2009), and an alternative explanation of the system was offered by Zúñiga (2008).

The variation among the 24 languages of the survey that manifest some hierarchical organization (at least $SAP > 3$) is great: there are five types of $2 \rightarrow 1$ encoding, and 8 types of $1 \rightarrow 2$ encoding. Considering this variation, it seems very speculative to reconstruct an indexing system based on a clear $1 > 2 > 3$ hierarchy. The genesis of the present-day systems has not yet been satisfactorily explained (Gildea 2002). Investigating the presupposed role of the person hierarchy in the development of Tupi-Guarani systems is the next step, after having deconstructed its role as both a descriptive tool and an explanatory device for synchronic data. I suggest it may only be an epiphenomenon of the distinction between nouns and pronouns, on the basis of Anambé data.

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