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Reference-tracking in Hinuq

When looking at Hinuq texts two features catch the eye: the texts are full of complex sentences which (i) contain many converbal clauses but (ii) have only few overt arguments. Thus, one can find ambiguous sentences like (1) and parts of a discourse which are implicit about referents.

(1) $y_{i/j}$-aq'e-n   iyoy$_i$ kedez$_j$ mecxer   neƛ-iš
     II-come-CVB mother.ERG girl.DAT   money   give-PST
     'The mother came and gave the girl money.'
     'The girl came and the mother gave her money.'

Referential devices in Hinuq are: proper names, other full noun phrases, personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, class prefixes and zero anaphora. What is special about the Hinuq reference tracking system are the class prefixes which are used to mark agreement between nouns in the absolutive case and verbs, and also coreferential adjectives or adverbials. Only verbs that begin with a vowel can have a class prefix. In the absence of overt arguments class prefixes may help to identify the absolutive argument (S or P) of the verb.

The first part of the talk will be devoted to the possible influence of the class prefixes on the referential system in comparison with the other coding devices. If there is such an influence one may expect that clauses with class prefixed verbs contain fewer other reference-tracking devices (e.g. NPs or pronouns) than clauses where the verb does not have a class prefix. In addition, the *referential distance* (Givón 1983) of class prefixes will be compared with the referential distance of other reference-tracking devices. Class prefixes encode almost as much information as third-person pronouns (gender, number, case) so they may be expected to have a referential distance value similar to that of pronouns.

In the second part of the talk the differences between finite and non-finite clauses in relation to the Hinuq reference-tracking system are explored. Many sentences in Hinuq are composed of one or more non-finite converbal clauses together with a finite clause. The converbal clauses often express temporal, causal or other circumstances of the main event described by the finite clause. Therefore, main clause and converb often share a number of arguments which are usually overt only in one of the clauses. This observation will be explored by comparing the *referential density* (as defined in Bickel 2003) of the finite clauses with the referential density of the non-finite clauses.

The following example illustrates referential distance and referential density. The clauses are given in brackets. Referential distance assesses the number of clauses boundaries between the previous occurrence in discourse of a referent and its current occurrence in a clause. For instance, the NP *xexbe* ('children') in clause (iv) has the referential index 3 in this clause because the last reference to the children is made in clause (i), whereas the NP *hago uži* ('this boy') in the clause gets the referential index 1 in this clause because it has been mentioned in the immediately preceding clause.

As for referential density, which is the ratio of overt to possible argument NPs (nouns or pronouns), it is 1 for clauses (i), (ii) and (iv) because all possible arguments are overtly expressed. But for clause (iii) it is 0.5 (1/2) because the agent is not overtly expressed.

(2) [Hagze   xexza-y   toλ-iš   hayɫo-qor   hag]ᵢ.
     these.OBL   children-ERG   give-PST   he-SRLAT   this(IV)

     [Hago uži   i -iš]ᵢᵢ   [k'onk'a-n   b-iž-in]ᵢᵢᵢ.
     this boy   go-PST   bike-and   III-take-CVB

     [Hezo xexbe   b-aq'e-s   hayɫo   rek'u-de]ᵢᵥ.
     then children   I/II.PL-come-PST   that.OBL   person-APUDESS

'(i) These children gave it to him. (ii) This boy went, (iii) taking the bike. (iv) Then the children came to that person.'

References
1. Bickel, Balthasar. (2003) 'Referential density in discourse and syntactic typology'. *Language* 79: 709-736
2. Givón, Talmy. (1983) *Topic continuity in discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins