Exploring the historical relationship between information structure and syntactic headedness in Tuparí, a Tupían language indigenous to the Brazilian Amazon[1]

This talk seeks to make sense of the development of mixed syntactic headedness in Tuparí, a Tupían language spoken by approximately 400 people in the Brazilian state of Rondônia, in light of the broader literature on headedness changes in natural language syntax (Svenonius 2000; Whitman 2008). We examine the expression of INFORMATION STRUCTURE in the language (Krifka 2008), more specifically on the interaction between headedness and focus.

As detailed in our prior publications, the Tuparí VP is strictly head-final: the direct object must linearly precede the transitive verb that selects it. Strict head-finality is also evident in several functional projections located above the VP proper, including aspectual and evidential projections, and it is observed in the nominal domain as well (modulo the placement of adjectives). It is only at the very top of the Tuparí clause that we encounter head-initiality: a set of clause-typing particles (CTPs) sit in SECOND POSITION, defined in terms of strict syntactic constituency. In our past publications we have analyzed these CTPs as instantiating a head-initial rather than head-final Complementizer Phrase.

This head-initial CP has a significant effect on how Tuparí expresses the information structural notion of focus. Multiple pieces of evidence show that when it comes to expressing focus, Tuparí patterns like better-described head-initial languages – in particular, those of the Mayan family (Aissen 1992, 2017) or the Polynesian branch of Austronesian (Potsdam and Polinsky 2011). For reasons of space, I describe only two pieces of evidence here:

- Tuparí has obligatory WH-movement. The WH-word must occur in clause-initial position, immediately to the left of the second position CTP. The CTPs are very sensitive to whether the clause-initial constituent is [+WH] or [−WH]. If CTPs instantiate the C head, as we have argued before, it is clear that Tuparí WH-words move to Spec,C. (See Brandon and Seki 1984 for early discussion of WH-movement in Tupían.)
- Morphosyntactically, [+WH] arguments behave like fronted nominal predicates. That is, *apo* 'who' and *kat'at* 'what' pattern just like any other nominal predicate that has moved for information structural reasons to Spec,C. In a similar way, Tuparí has a [+WH] interrogative verb, *katke* 'how, in what fashion, doing what', which behaves syntactically like any normal (which is to say, [−WH]) VP that has fronted to Spec,C.

Note that there is no evidence in Tuparí for a preverbal focus position of the sort found in many OV languages of Eurasia (such as Hungarian: Horváth 1986, É. Kiss 1998, Szendrői 2003).

After discussing the synchronic ramifications of this high layer of syntactic head-initiality on the expression of information structure in Tuparí, we turn to the diachronic question: where did this mixed headedness come from? Its precise origin is unclear, given the absence of unambiguous second position effects in the other members of the Tupían family's Tuparían branch (Galucio 2001; Nogueira 2019), though it may be related historically to the VERB SECOND effects found in the distantly related Karitiana language (Storto 1999, 2020). We can nonetheless reach some conclusions using the tools of grammaticalization theory and internal reconstruction. In particular, we show that at least one of the second position CTPs, the explicitly [−WH] *nãkop* 'maybe', developed out of the head of an auxiliary projection which still exists in the language and which is head-final. We will conclude our talk by examining the viability of the hypothesis that ALL of the second position CTPs in Tuparí originated in lower syntactic material that behaved, at least historically, head-finally rather than head-initially.

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[1] Submitted for inclusion as a talk in the workshop 'Consequences of the OV-to-VO change on different levels of clause structure.' References to our prior publications are omitted for the purpose of anonymity.

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