Sources of Subordination in Nheengatu

Daven Hobbs
University of New Mexico

Keywords: Nheengatu, Old Tupi, Tupi-Guarani, subordination, usage-based

Nheengatu, or Modern Tupi, is a Tupi-Guarani language spoken predominantly in the Upper Rio Negro region of the Amazon rainforest. It is a descendent of Old Tupi, a language that was spoken along much of the Brazilian coastline at the time Europeans arrived into the Americas in the late 15th century. Old Tupi was initially adopted as a *língua geral*, or general language, throughout colonial Brazil, and the language changed dramatically as a result of this. Most of the previous work that has looked at the development of Nheengatu from Old Tupi has focused on identifying differences and discussing the sociohistorical setting within which these changes would have taken place (e.g., Rodrigues 1996, Bessa Freire 2004, Rodrigues & Cabral 2011, Lee 2005, Moore 2014). Very little research has looked in detail at the processes of change themselves or has proposed explanations for how and why they occurred in terms of well-known mechanisms of language usage and change. The present study aims to address this gap by focusing in on the domain of subordination and offering detailed diachronic analyses of two subordination constructions in Nheengatu which have been chosen as case studies.

This study examines one purposive construction and one relative construction. These are exemplified in (1a-b). Examples of their Old Tupi source constructions are given in (2a-b). In Nheengatu, *arama* is a subordinator of purpose linking two finite clauses, while in Old Tupi it source *-rama* marks futurity on nominals. In Nheengatu, *uaa* links two finite clauses and functions as a relativizer that builds headed and headless relative clauses. Any participant within the subordinate clause can be relativized. Its Old Tupi source, however, *-ba'e*, produces only subject-oriented headless relative clauses.

1. a. *a-pitá   ne   r-uka   upé   [a-purungitá **arama** ne   irũmu]*
      1SG$_A$-stay 2SG$_S$ R-house LOC   1SG$_A$-speak PURP 2SG$_S$ INS
      'I'll stay at your house [so that I may speak with you.]' (Navarro 2011: 40)
   b. *kunhã-itá   [indé re-maã   **uaá**] ne   mimbira*
      woman-PL 2SG 2SG$_A$-see REL 2SG$_S$ child
      'The women [whom you see] are your daughters.' (Navarro 2011: 31)

2. a. *a-î-monhang   xe   rembi'u-**rama***
      1SG$_A$-3OBJ-make 1SG$_S$ food-FUT
      'I make my food (which is not yet ready).' (Navarro 1998: 113)
   b. *nda   abá   ruã   [o-îase'o-**ba'e**]*
      NEG man NEG   3SG$_A$-cry-REL
      'He who cries is not a man.' (Navarro 1998: 262)

The question that this study addresses, then, is: how can these changes be accounted for in terms of mechanisms? Drawing on data from three different stages of Tupi, this study finds empirical support for the following claims. First, both constructions underwent a kind of "restructuring" through paradigmatic influence from other formally and semantically related constructions that already existed in the language. Second, in both cases, this restructuring involved processes of finitization, or movements from less finite to more finite grammatical units. Finally, it is shown that these processes of restructuring can be modeled in terms of the cognitive process of blending as it applies during language usage (Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002). These findings contribute to our understanding of how change is often rooted in speakers' creative repurposing of their linguistic knowledge to address the contingencies of real-time communicative interaction.

References

Bessa Freire, José Ribamar (2004). *Rio Babel: A História das Línguas na Amazônia*. Rio de Janeiro: EDUERJ Atlantica.

Fauconnier, Gilles, and Mark Turner (1996). *Blending as a Central Process in Grammar*. In A. Goldberg (ed.) Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fauconnier, Gilles, and Mark Turner (2002). *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books

Lee, Kittiya (2005). *Conversing in Colony: The Brasílica and the Vulgar in Portuguese America, 1500-1759*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of Johns Hopkins University.

Moore, Denny (2014). Historical Development of Nheengatu (Língua Geral Amazônica). In S.S. Mufwene (ed.) *Iberian Imperialism and Language Evolution in Latin America*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Navarro, Eduardo de Almeida (1998). *Método Moderno de Tupi Antigo: A Língua do Brasil dos Primeiros Séculos*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Ltd.

Navarro, Eduardo de Almeida (2011). *Curso de Língua Geral (Nheengatu ou Tupi Moderno) A Língua das Origens da Civilização Amazônica*. São Paulo: PAYM Gráfica e Editora.

Rodrigues, Aryon D. (1996). As línguas gerais sul-americanas. *PAPIA* 4(2), pp. 6-18.

Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna & Anna Suelly Arruda Câmara Cabral (2011). A contribution to the linguistic history of the língua geral amazônica. *Alfa* 55(2), pp. 613-639.