Information structure and index placement: a corpus-based analysis of Gutob (Munda)

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Gutob (Munda) displays a special kind of differential indexing in that S/A indexes (aka bound subject markers) can attach to hosts apart from the verb. Unlike in the closely related languages Kharia and Santali, where the indexes either encliticize to the verb or to a constituent immediately preceding it, S/A indexing in Gutob is exceptional in that indexes can attach to any hosts and that their placement is largely unconstrained by syntax. (1) and (2) show indexing in the verb phrase, with and without free subject pronoun. Example (3) is a minimal pair from a conversation and shows how the index attaches to different constituents in otherwise identical clauses: the object noun specifying what was brought by the guests in the first sentence, and the amount in the third sentence.

Previous studies have addressed this issue, ascribing deviations from verbal clitics to exceptional disocurse conditions (Zide 1997) or emphasis (Griffiths 2008); however, a corpus based analysis has still been owing.

Comparative studies on variation in the placement of indexes (Capell 1972, Barbosa 1996, Harris 2000, Baker 2002, Dixon 2002) show that this phenomenon not confined to Munda languages. There is not only a lot of variation between languages with regard to index placement, but in some cases also language internal variation (see Cysouw 2003).

Against this background, we present a case study from Gutob based on corpus data. It is based on 2318 clauses (32669 words, comprised of 12 narratives and stories from everyday life) annotated for the kind of overt S/A reference (index or and/or pronoun), its position, and the type of host for indexes. This quantitative analysis is complemented by a qualitative evaluation of the contexts for non-verbal index placement. Our analysis shows that index placement in Gutob is in fact conditioned by discourse effects often related to focus, but, contrary to what has been claimed before, non-verbal clitics cannot be considered particularly exceptional. Furthermore, we observe that index placement does not succumb to discourse, but can itself be used as a means to structure it.

Examples

(1)   *niŋ   ar-goŋ-a=**niŋ**=be*
        1SG NEG-be.able-NEG.MID.FUT=**1SG**=HON
        'I can't do this any longer.'

(2)   *mapru=lai   dubduŋgia   beḍ-oʔ=**niŋ***

god=OBJ   incense.stick   give-ACT.PST=**1SG**

'I offered an incense stick to the god.'

(3a) S: *iŋḍiʔ   solop=**nen***   *gor-ek   riŋ-oʔ   ḍugu*

HES   palm.wine=**3PL**   goria-one   bring-ACT.CVB   be.PST

'Eh, they had brought one goria of palm wine.'

(3b) A: *riŋ-oʔ=**nen***   *ḍugu*

bring-ACT.CVB=**3PL**   be.PST

'Had they brought it?'

(3c) S: *ũ   solop   gor-ek=**nen***   *riŋ-oʔ   ḍugu=su*   [...]

yes   palm.wine   goria-one=**3PL**   bring-ACT.CVB   be.PST=and

'Yes, they had brought a goria full of palm wine and [...].'

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