Past Remoteness in the ‘Graded Tense’ System of Tenetehára

The goal of this paper is to describe the temporal system of Tenetehára, an endangered Tupi-Guarani language spoken in the states of Pará and Maranhão, Northern Brazil. We provide empirical evidence to argue that Tenetehára exhibits a set of markers encoding temporal remoteness. These markers are part of a graded-tense system (Cable 2013; Comrie 1985; Dahl 1985; Hayashi 2011), which makes temporal distinctions in the domain of the ‘past’. A paradigm of past time reference markers was observed in the data used to convey three degrees of past remoteness. The degrees of remoteness are presented as follows: immediate past (IMMP), near past (NRP), and remote past (REMP). In addition to temporal remoteness distinctions some of these markers also express evidentiality. In particular, the immediate past marker *kwez*, the near past marker *rakwez* and the remote past marker *kakwez* express direct evidence (DEV), where the speaker or the referent of the subject has witnessed the event talked about (see Barnes 1984, 2006 and Ramirez 1997 for conflation of evidential and temporal meanings in East Tukano languages). These are illustrated in (1a), (2a), and (3a).

(1) a. Context: João’s mother asks him where his kids are. He replies:

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axak      kwez       wà    pa
a-exak    kwez       wà    pa
1sg-see   IMMP.DEV   3pl   APEL.MF
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‘I just saw them.’

b. Context: João’s mother asks him where his kids are. A friend of his saw them and told him about their location. He replies:

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ka’i       we         zapo   wà-’àgàg       iko   ‘y   pe   a’e   wà   ra’a
monkey    IEV        3pl-imitate PROG    river in 3sg 3pl IMMP
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‘The kids were imitating the monkey by the river.’

(2) a. Context: It is 6pm; A is on campus and tells B that that morning she didn’t have enough cash to take the bus. B asks how A made it to campus. A says:

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amoawa    rakwez     umur      temetarer
amoawa    rakwez     u-m-ur    temetarer
a          man        NRP.DEV   3sg-CAUS-come money
          ihewe       y
          ihe-we      y
1sg.DAT-for APEL.FM
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‘A man gave me money.’ [Lit.: A man gave money for me.]

b. Context: Fábio’s neighbor told him his father fell and broke a leg the day before. Fábio tells his mother the story.

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karumehe   zapo      hemyry     partu      u’ar
karumehe   zeaipo    he-myry     par-tu      u’ar
yesterday   IEV   my-friend   his-father   fall
uzuhaw     w-etymà   a’e        ri’i       ty   wà
u-zuhaw    w-etymà   a’e        ri’i       ty   wà
3sg-break  3CORR-leg 3sg NRP APEL.MM PL
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‘It is said that, yesterday, my neighbor’s father fell and broke a leg.’
The rain stopped a long time ago and the speaker witnessed it. The rain stopped to us/to our benefits.'

Graded tenses are not rare across languages (see Nurse 2003, 2008; Mugane 1997; Cable 2013 for Bantu languages). We claim that the tense system of Tenetehára diverges from other well-known patterns in that the graded tense markers found in Tenetehára are not truly tenses as formally defined by semanticists (Klein 1994; Cover & Tonhauser 2015). They have certain semantic properties typical of tenses but differ in other respects. Specifically, Tenetehára sentences marked with graded tense morphology do not locate the topic time with respect to the utterance time but rather locate the eventuality time with respect to the utterance time (see Cable 2013 for Gĩkũyũ; and LaCross, unpublished manuscript, for Kimanianga).

To conclude we want to call attention to the fact that Tenetehára presents a curious pattern with respect to the way it encodes both evidentiality and temporality. On the one hand, there is a set of morphemes encoding solely temporal remoteness, and on the other hand Tenetehára exhibits another set of morphemes encoding both remoteness distinctions and direct evidence. These patterns make Tenetehára a unique case among languages exhibiting both evidentiality and graded tense marking.

SELECTED REFERENCES


