

The Use of Coreferential and Reflexive Markers in Tupí-Guarani Languages

Cheryl Jensen

1998 *Journal of Amazonian Languages* 1(2): 1-49

ABSTRACT—One characteristic of the Tupí-Guaraní language family of lowland South America is a system for marking coreferentiality. Coreferential prefixes may occur on nouns, postpositions, or dependent verbs, when the referent is coreferential with the subject (S or A) of the independent verb. On nouns the coreferential prefixes refer to the possessor (genitive). On postpositions they refer to the object. On dependent verbs (such as intransitive serial verbs and the verb of adverbial subordinate clauses), which have an absolutive cross-referencing system, the coreferential prefixes occur when the referent (S or O) is the same as the subject of the independent verb. Reflexive or reciprocal prefixes occur on the verb when the object is coreferential with the subject. These prefixes also occur, together with the coreferential prefixes, to refer to the object of a postposition.

The set of coreferential prefixes is one of four sets of person markers which I have reconstructed (in previous works) for the language family. Set 1 prefixes refer to A and S of independent verbs as part of a mixed cross-referencing system; with transitive verbs they are only used when the object is third person. In this context Set 2 person markers refer to hierarchically superior O in transitive verbs and to S in nonagentive intransitive verbs. Set 4 person markers refer simultaneously to first-person A and second-person O. The set 1 and set 4 prefixes are limited to the mixed cross-referencing system. Set 2 person markers (called pronouns by some Tupí-Guaraní linguists, prefixes by others) occur in a variety of contexts: with dependent verbs in an absolutive cross-referencing system, with nouns to refer to the possessor, and with postpositions to refer to its object. The referent of the set 2 person markers is not coreferential with the subject of the independent verbs. When the referent is coreferential, the coreferential (set 3) prefixes replace the set 2 person markers.

The degree to which the coreferential system is used varies from one language to another. I have divided the languages into three groups: 1) those which make maximal use of this system, 2) those which make minimal use of the system, and 3) those which fall somewhere in between.

In the first group, which I believe to most closely represent the protolanguage, there are 6 coreferential forms, one for each person - number distinction, and this system extends to the coreferential referent of the subordinate clause verb. In two languages its use even extends beyond the sentence to serve certain discourse functions. Data are presented from the following languages which show maximal use of this system: Asurini do Tocantins and Tapirapé from Subgroup 4 (tentative classification by Rodrigues, 1984/1985), and Asurini do Xingu and Kayabi from Subgroup 5.

In the second group, those which make minimal use of coreferential forms, there is only a third-person prefix and its occurrence with verbs is reduced. In this group of languages,

the absolute cross-referencing system has been largely replaced by the mixed system used with independent verbs, with a consequent elimination of the context in which the coreferential prefixes originally occurred. Data are presented from the following languages which show minimal use of this system: Mbyá Guarani from Subgroup 1 and Wayampi from Subgroup 8.

The third group of languages shows evidence of transition, with a reduction either in the number of coreferential prefixes or in the number of syntactic constructions in which they occur. Data are presented for the following languages which show evidence of being in transition: Guarayu (subgroup 2), Tupinambá (3), Guajajara (4), Parintintin (6), and Kamayurá (7).

Apart from these groups, data is presented for Urubu-Kaapor (8), the one language in which the entire set of coreferential prefixes has been eliminated.

In all languages reflexive prefixing is retained, although in three languages the distinction between reflexive and reciprocal has been neutralized.

KEY WORDS—Brazil, comparative linguistics, historical linguistics, coreference, pronominal systems, Tupi-Guarani, Mbyá Guarani, Tocantins Asurini, Asurini do Tocantins, Xingu Asurini, Asurini do Xingu, Tapirapé, Kayabi, Wayampi, Guajajara, Parintintin, Kawahíb, Guarayu, Tupinambá, Kamaiurá, Kamayurá, Urubu-Kaapor