

On symptoms and their causes: the apparently exceptional properties of embedded clauses in Movima

[oral presentation]

In Movima (unclassified, lowland Bolivia), clausal embedding is carried out through nominalization: the predicate is morphologically marked, and like all Movima noun phrases, the embedded clause is introduced by an article. The resultant NP is a complement (1) or (when marked as oblique (2)) an adjunct to the main clause.

(1) *kem<a:>ye=Ø* [os *jayna kayni-wa='ne]*
take_for<DR>=1SG ART.N.PAST already die-NMZ=3F

‘I assumed she had already died.’ [lit.: ‘I assume(d) her already past-dying.’]

Embedded clauses in Movima have the peculiar property that they specify more typically “verbal” features than main-clause predicates do. In embedded clauses, unlike in main-clause predicates,

- tense is consistently overtly encoded;
- the aspectual class of the predicate (event vs. state) is overtly indicated;
- person is obligatorily indexed on both transitive and intransitive predicates, while in main-clause predicates, intransitive person marking is optional.

These features seem to contradict the cross-linguistic pattern that embedded clauses do not display more overt TAM and person distinctions than main clauses (cf. Cristofaro 2003; Croft 2003), and it may seem all the more surprising that they appear on nominal constituents. However, it is just their appearance as nominal constituents that accounts for the unusual properties of Movima embedded clauses.

First of all, in every Movima NP, the obligatory article marks the difference between ongoing and ceased existence of the nominal referent. In (1) above, the use of the article *os* indicates that the event of dying occurred in the past. Unless cancelled by some overt morphological device in the main clause, this temporal interpretation has scope over the main clause as well, as seen in (1).

Second, the nominalizing morphology provides information on the lexical and aspectual class of the predicate. Nominal and verbal intransitive main-clause predicates are normally not overtly morphologically distinguished. However, in embedded clauses they receive different morphological markers: a verb is nominalized through *-wa* (1), a nominal predicate undergoes reduplication. On ambiguous bases, the two processes serve as indicators of lexical aspect, distinguishing between an eventive (2a) and a stative (2b) reading:

(2) a. *n-as dolmi-wa=a* b. *n-as dolmi~mi=a*
OBL-ART.N full-NMZ=3N OBL-ART.N full~NMZ=3N
‘when it is filled’ ‘when it is full (= a full one)’

Third, all nominalized predicates are obligatorily possessed, the possessor being encoded by the same marker as the referentially higher-ranking participant on transitive verbs, which is also obligatorily encoded. On intransitive main-clause predicates, in contrast, person marking is optional.

It is a side-effect of these unusual properties of Movima noun phrases and nominalizing devices that the properties of embedded clauses seem to contradict cross-linguistic universals.

References:

Cristofaro, Sonia 2003. *Subordination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Croft, W. 2003. *Typology and Universals*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Abbreviations: ART=article; DR=direct; F=feminine; N=neuter; NMZ=nominalizer; OBL=oblique; SG=singular