When only nominals are marked for tense

The case of Ticuna (isolate, Western Amazonia)
Objective

Describe some features of a semantic category (Tense) encoded by the grammar of a Ticuna variety:

- morphosyntax of exponents
- syntactic scope
- semantic content
The language’s grammar displays a Tense category:

- whose main exponents are syntactically part of NPs
- whose scope is limited to NPs (NOT entire clauses)
- which truly is tense (NOT aspect)

=> case of nominal tense in the narrow sense
1. Introduction to language and data

2. Relevant typological information

3. Exponents of Tense

4. Syntactic scope of Tense is NP

5. Tense is not aspectual

6. Conclusions
Language

Ticuna ≈50,000~60,000 speakers (Peru, Colombia, Brazil), vital as a whole

SMA Ticuna ≈550 speakers

Isolate (or Yuri-Ticuna?: Carvalho 2009, Goulard & Montes 2013)
1. Introduction to language and data

Language

Goulard (2009)
Data

Fieldwork (2015-2017, PhD project, supervisor: Antoine GUILLAUME, DDL research center & Université Lumière–Lyon 2, ASLAN Labex)

San Martín de Amacayacu (SMA) Ticuna

Mostly elicitation with Javier Sánchez Gregorio (♂34 y.o.) and Loida Ángel Ruiz (♀50 y.o.) (extrapolated from spontaneous uses, strongly contextualized and double-checked)

Lesser use of spontaneous/staged data (corpus ≈ 20,000 words)
=> preliminary
Phonology

Relatively simple segmental inventory and syllable structure (≈/(C)V(ʔ)/)

Highly tonal (rich toneme inventory + toneme alternations for morphosyntactic purposes)

**N.B.:** practical orthography in this talk (=> no claims as to phonology, but all contrasts maintained)

Relatively straightforward, but please note:

\[ x \] low toneme  \[ x^\prime \] high toneme
Morphosyntax

Mostly agglutinative (morpheme boundaries often correspond to syllable boundaries)

5 agreement classes (C1-C5, ≈genders) in nominals: at least partially lexical property; agreement within NP + in 3rd person indexing on predicative head
Morphosyntax

No clear-cut basic word order

(ADJUNCT) ARG ARG SBJ=PRED
S O V

(ADJUNCT) SBJ=OBJ=PRED CON ARG CON ARG (CON ADJUNCT)
V S O
V O S

(ADJUNCT) ARG SBJ=OBJ=PRED CON ARG
S V O

(ADJUNCT) ARG SBJ=PRED CON ARG
O V S

(only *OSV)

Arg’s/adjuncts that follow predicative head require “CONNECTORS”
Morphosyntax

Basic word order within NP is somewhat similar:

ADNOMINAL GP deictics indef. article
HEAD CON ADNOMINAL GP embedded clauses apposition

Adnominals that follow NP’s head require “CONNECTORS”
Main exponents of Tense

Belong syntactically to NPs:

Anaphorics, both non locative and locative (“there”) ones

Connectors

⇒ two series of forms for each: one series has UNSPECIFIED(.TENSE) value, the other series is marked for PAST(.TENSE)

In this talk focus on cases where exponents of Tense are connectors only
### Connectors: paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNSPECIFIED</th>
<th>PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1 í</td>
<td>gó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 í</td>
<td>gó (~gà)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3/4 yá (~yà)*</td>
<td>gó (~gà)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5 yá</td>
<td>gó</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Variant found in older speakers.*
Syntactic scope of Tense

In most contexts, all connectors in a clause have the same Tense value and selecting their past form triggers a past temporal reading of the whole clause:

(1)

Námá’ā chāyärū-ū gá curaca.

ná-má’a  chā=yà=rū=ú          gá  curaca (Sp.)
3C1/3-COM    1SG=ASS.MOV=PRED.CL=to.go  CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST  community.leader

‘I met the community leader.’
Syntactic scope of Tense

In examples (2-4) however, the temporal interpretation of the whole clause is *non-past*, while one argument’s connector is marked as PAST:

(2)

Năgú í[chārū]-ǐnū gá chô’rū pāpắ.

nă-gū i=chā=rū=ǐnū gá chô-’rū păpắ

3C5-LOC PROG=1SG=PRED.CL=to.think CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST 1SG-GEN father.c5

‘[What are you thinking about? –] I am recalling my (deceased) father.’
4. Syntactic scope of Tense is NP

Syntactic scope of Tense

(3)

Kû’ ū tá chāyà-wë gá chòpátà-ya tâ’ ūnè.

kû-’ ū tá chā=yà=wë
gá
chò=pátà
2SG-ACC FUT 1SG=PRED.CL.3C1/3/5.OBJ=to.show con.c1/2/3/4/5.past 1sg-building.c3

yá tâ-’ ūnè

con.c3/4/5 to.be.big-NMLZ.c3

‘I will show you my (former) big house [which is Juan’s now, but is still big].’
Syntactic scope of Tense

(4)

‘But now the (former) hunter stays at home [as there is no more game in the jungle].’
Syntactic scope of Tense

⇒ the value of Tense in NPs and the temporal interpretation of the clause they belong to are in themselves independent (although there is a tendency towards past temporal interpretation of clauses that contain NPs with a PAST connector)

⇒ “independent nominal tense”, “in which the nominal itself is temporally situated independently of the proposition as a whole” (Nordlinger & Sadler 2004:801)

≠ from more tense-agreement-like marking of NPs
Syntactic scope of Tense

Depending on several factors, different features of the referent of the NP may be situated in the past: its very existence (ex. 2):

(2)

Năgū ĭchârṹ-înṹ gá chốrṹ pāpā́.

na-ģū̀ ĩ=châ=rû=înṹ  gá  chô-’rṹ  pāpā́

3C5-LOC  PROG=1SG=PRED.CL=to.think  CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST 1SG-GEN  father.c5

‘[What are you thinking about? –] I am recalling my (deceased) father.’
Syntactic scope of Tense

Depending on several factors, different features of the referent of the NP may be situated in the past: its very existence (ex. 2), its belonging to someone (3):

(3)

*Kû’ũ tá chāya-ʷé gá chòpáta’ yá tâ’ûnè.*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kû-’ũ} & \quad \text{tá} \quad \text{chā=ya=we} \quad \text{gá} \quad \text{chò=pa\text{ta}’} \\
2\text{SG-ACC} & \quad \text{FUT} \quad 1\text{SG=PRED.CL.3C1/3/5.OBJ=to.show} \quad \text{CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST} \quad 1\text{SG-building.c3} \\
yá & \quad \text{tâ’ûnè} \\
\text{CON.C3/4/5} & \quad \text{to.be.big-NMLZ.c3}
\end{align*}
\]

‘I will show you my (former) big house [which is Juan’s now, but is still big].’
Syntactic scope of Tense

Depending on several factors, different features of the referent of the NP may be situated in the past: its very existence (ex. 2), its belonging to someone (3), one of its properties (4):

(4)

\[ \text{ñũmá wâ’í mārū năchí’ūgú nárū-āu gá fěnēèkū.} \]

\[ \text{ñũmá} \quad \text{wâ’í} \quad \text{mārū} \quad \text{nă-chí’ū-gú} \quad \text{ná=rū=āu} \]

\[ \text{present.time} \quad \text{CONTR} \quad \text{PFV} \quad \text{3C5-home-LOC} \quad \text{3C1/3/5=PRED.CL=to.stay} \]

\[ \text{gá} \quad \text{fěnēè-kū} \]

\[ \text{CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST} \quad \text{to.hunt-NMLZ.C5} \]

‘But now the (former) hunter stays at home [as there is no more game in the jungle].’
Syntactic scope of Tense

Depending on several factors, different features of the referent of the NP may be situated in the past: its very existence (ex. 2), its belonging to someone (3), one of its properties (4), etc.
Syntactic scope of Tense

Depending on several factors, different features of the referent of the NP may be situated in the past: its very existence (ex. 2), its belonging to someone (3), one of its properties (4), etc.

Conflict between Tense value of NPs and temporal reading of whole clause yields interesting meaning effects: death of referent (2), loss of ownership (3), end of activity (4), etc.
Syntactic scope of Tense

In (1), it can be argued that it is only the *role* of the referent of the NP in the state of things referred to by the whole clause that is situated in the past, which *secondarily* requires a past time interpretation for the whole clause.

(1)

*Námá’ā chāyārutū-ú gá curaca.*

ná-má’a chā=ya=rū=ú gá curaca (Sp.)

3c1/3-com 1sg=ass.mov=pred.cl=to.go con.c1/2/3/4/5.past community.leader

‘I met the community leader.’
Semantic content of Tense

Example (1) again shows that the SMAT category of Tense is not aspectual (as so-called “nominal tense” in several languages, such as Tupinambá and Paraguayan Guarani): at event time the person met still is the community leader

(1)

*Námá’ā chāyārū-ū gá curaca.*

ná-má’a chā=yà=rū=ú gá curaca (Sp.)

3C1/3-COM 1SG=ASS.MOV=PRED.CL=to.go **CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST** community.leader

‘I met the community leader.’
Semantic content of Tense

Some cases of modal interpretation of PAST Tense as irrealis:

(5)

Ná-mù chí gá chô’rū pūrākú i ŋũmá.

ná=mù Chí gá chó’rū pūrākú i ŋũmá
3c1/3/5-be.many IRR CON.C1/2/3/4/5.PAST 1SG-GEN work CON.C1 present.time

‘I would have a lot work now [if I looked for it].’
Nominal tense in the narrow sense

Perhaps a true case of nominal tense as described in Tonhauser 2008:337-338)
References


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