

Karitiana – a language with no DPs
Ana Müller (University of São Paulo)

Focus: This paper investigates the semantics of Noun Phrases (NPs) in Karitiana (Tupi-Arikém family, spoken by approximately 400 people in northwestern Brazilian Amazonia).

Thesis: The paper claims that the simpler hypothesis for Karitiana NPs is that they always denote predicates that get bound by sentential quantifiers or by existential closure. Since Karitiana is a language in which NPs are always bare, a typological consequence of this claim is that there are languages in which NPs can occupy argumental positions (Chierchia 1998).

Background: There is much cross-linguistic variation in the syntax and semantics of BNs. The two most influential theories that account for it are Longobardi 1994 and Chierchia 1998. According to Longobardi, only DPs may be argumental. BNs in argumental positions are either DPs with empty Ds or DPs in which N has moved to D. Empty Ds must be governed; and N to D movement is only possible for Ns that get a kind interpretation. Chierchia's theory, on the other hand, allows Ns to denote either predicates or kinds (arguments), depending on parametrization. However, he posits type-shifting operations that may turn kinds into predicates and vice-versa. These operations may occur only as last resort.

Problem: Karitiana NPs are always bare and occur with definite, indefinite, and kind (or generic) interpretations in all argument positions. Karitiana has no inflectional morphology, such as gender, case, or number, on its NPs. It is also determinerless and has no functional words comparable to Romance or Germanic definite and indefinite articles and demonstratives, or quantifiers similar to *some/any* or *each/every* (Müller *et al* 2006). Sentence (1), for ex., is totally undetermined for the number or (in)definiteness of its NPs. However, unlike better-known bare-noun languages, such as Chinese, Karitiana is not a classifier language.

- (1) **Taso** \emptyset -naka-'y-t **boroja**
man 3-DECL-eat-NFT snake
'A/the/some man/men ate a/the/some snake(s)'/ 'Men eat snakes'

Following Longobardi, one could posit the existence of an empty D, a three-way ambiguous determiner that shifts a NP predicate into a definite/indefinite/kind denoting NP. This claim cannot be falsified in Karitiana, because the three readings are available in the same contexts (*modulo* lexical entailments). The same problem shows up if we try to implement Chierchia's theory, since three non-overt and indistinguishable type-shifters, be it from kinds to predicates and to definite and indefinite NPs; or from predicates to kinds and to definite and indefinite NPs, would have to be posited. Consequently, the most economic theoretical claim for the language is that its NPs are always predicates and that these predicates possibly get bound by sentential quantifiers and by existential closure.

Predictions: This claim predicts that: (i) Karitiana BNs should be able to occur in both definite and indefinite contexts; (ii) they should be able to occur with both existential and generic (universal) interpretations; (iii) they should not behave as kind-denoting NPs.

Evidence: It is well known that indefinites do not entail/presuppose uniqueness/familiarity, and introduce novel entities into the common ground; whereas definites entail/presuppose uniqueness/familiarity, and do not introduce novel entities into the common ground. The first piece of evidence for (i) comes from pairs of coreferential Bare Nouns (BNs) (2), in which the same BN is used both as novel and as familiar to the common ground.

- (2)a. **Professor enfermera** \emptyset -na-aka-t koot i-ambyk-t escola.
teacher nurse 3-DECL-cop-NFT ystday NMZ-come-ABS.AGR school
'A teacher and a nurse came to school yesterday.'

b. **Professor** Ø-na-aka-t i-le-t livro-ty Maria hot.
 teacher 3-DECL-cop-NFT NMZ-read-ABS.AGR book-POS Maria to
 ‘The teacher read a book to Maria.’

The second piece of evidence for (i) is that BNs in Karitiana are used both in situations in which the referent is unique (2) and in situations in which the referent is not unique (3).

(3) 3-pyry-kii-n **geladera** akan pip.
 ASST-cop.PL-NFT frige village POS
 ‘There are refrigerators in the village.’

A third piece comes from the fact that both anaphoric (4) and disjoint (5) interpretations are possible for BNs.

(4)a. Yn i-so’oo-t **ombaky-ty.**
 I NMZ-see-ABS.AGR jaguar-POS
 ‘I saw a jaguar.’

b. Yn i-so’oo-t sojxa **ombaky** i-’y.
 I NMZ-see-ABS.AGR boar jaguar 3p-eat
 ‘I saw that the jaguar was eating a boar.’

(5)a. Pyry-’a tyka-n **irip** akan.
 3-ASST-have IMPF-NFT tapir village
 ‘There is a tapir in the village.’

b. Pyry-’a tyka-n **irip** akan gooto pip tyym.
 3-ASST-have IMPF-NFT tapir village new in too
 ‘There is a tapir in the new village too.’

Evidence for (ii) comes from the fact that there is nothing in the morphosyntax of the BN that can tell apart generic/kind from existential definite or indefinite readings (6).

(6) **Ombaky** i-pykyna-t.
 jaguar NMZ-run-ABS.AGR
 ‘Jaguars run’ *generic*
 ‘The jaguar(s)/A jaguar/Jaguars ran.’ *episodic*
 ‘The jaguar(s)/A jaguar/Jaguars is/are running/ran.’ *episodic*

Finally, evidence for (iii) comes from facts like the one illustrated in (7), in which that Bare NPs in Karitiana may have both narrow and wide readings.

(7) **Enfermera** otām tykiri Ø-na-osedna-j Luiz.
 nurse arrive when 3-decl-be.happy-fut Luiz
 ✓ ‘Luiz will be happy if any nurse arrives.’
 ✓ ‘Luiz will be happy if a certain nurse arrives.’

Abbreviations: ASST: assertative mood; ABS.AGR: absolutive agreement; COP: copula; DECL: declarative mood; IMPF: imperfective; NFT: non-future; NMZ: nominalizer; POS: posposition.

References

- Longobardi, G. 1994. ‘Reference and Proper Names: a Theory of N-Movement in Syntax and Logical Form.’ *Linguistic Inquiry* 25:609-665.
 Chierchia, G.1998. Reference to kinds across languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6: 339-405.
 Müller, A., L. Storto & T.Coutinho-Silva 2006. Número e a distinção contável-massivo em Karitiana. *Revista da ABRALIN*, 5: 185-213.