

Argument Linking without Grammatical Functions

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In this talk, I present an analysis of argument linking in Yucatec Maya which does not make any reference to grammatical functions. I demonstrate that the discourse function of event participants (which is coded by word order and morphological marking on nominal dependents) together with the voice of the verb (which is sensitive to the discourse status of event participants) fully determines argument linking, and that this approach is empirically superior to an account of Yucatec Mayan argument linking which relies on a configurationally defined positions for grammatical functions.

Transitive verbs in Yucatec Maya can be realized with zero, one or two lexical arguments, which in turn can be realized in a number of positions relative to the transitive verb. The examples in (1) and (2) illustrate some of the possible variations. The transitive verb *il* ‘see’ in (1a) cross-references its A- and O-argument with the preverbal cross-referencing clitic *uy* ‘A3sg’ and the suffix *-∅* ‘B3sg’, respectively. (The aspectual markers can be ignored here.) Neither of the two arguments of the verb are lexically realized, i.e., they are only identified via the cross-reference markers and their referents need to be contextually retrieved. In (1b), the verb *il* ‘see’ also cross-references two 3rd person arguments, but co-occurs with the indefinite noun phrase *jun-p’e péek* ‘a dog’, which is interpreted as the O-argument of the verb. In (1c) and (1d), the verb *il* ‘see’ again cross-references two 3rd person arguments and co-occurs with two lexical arguments, i.e., the indefinite noun phrase *jun-p’e péek* ‘a dog’ (linked to the O-argument of the verb) and the definite-marked noun phrase *le winik-o* ‘the man’. Note that this definite noun phrase, which is linked to the A-argument of the verb, is realized in post-verbal position in (1c) and in pre-verbal position in (1d).

- (1) a. T- uy il -ah -∅ .
 PERF- A3 see-CMP -B3sg
 ‘S/he saw him/her/it.’
 b. T- uy **il-ah** -∅ [jun -p’e péek].
 PERF- A3 see-CMP -B3sg a -CL dog
 ‘S/he saw a dog.’
 c. T- uy **il-ah** -∅ [jun -p’e péek] [le winik -o’].
 PERF- A3 see-CMP -B3sg a -CL dog DEF man -D2
 ‘The man saw a dog.’
 d. [Le winik -e’] t- uy **il-ah** -∅ [jun -p’e péek].
 DEF man -TOP PERF- A3sg see-CMP -B3sg a -CL dog
 ‘As for the man, he saw a dog.’

The examples in (2) further illustrate that lexical noun phrases that are linked to the A- or O-argument of a transitive verb are not realized in particular positions relative to the transitive verb. The transitive verbs *jant* ‘eat’ and *il* ‘see’ in (2a) and (2b), respectively, co-occur with two third

person lexical arguments. In (2a), the first NP, i.e., *le huerfano-o* ‘the orphan’ is linked to the A-argument while the second preverbal NP *chen bu’ul* ‘only beans’, is linked to the O-argument. In (2b), on the other hand, the first NP, i.e., *Juan-e* ‘Juan-TOP’, is linked to the O-argument while the second preverbal NP, i.e., *leti* ‘s/he’, is linked to the A-argument of the transitive verb.

- (2) a. [Le huerfano -o'] [chen bu'ul] k- u **jant-ik** -∅ .
 DEF orphan -D2 only beans IMPF- A3sg eat-INC -B3sg
 ‘The orphan, it’s only beans that she eats.’
 b. [Juan₁ -e'] [leti₂] il-∅ -∅ -eh!
 Juan -TOP s/he see.AF-SBJ -B3sg -TM
 ‘As for Juan₁, it is him/her₂ who saw him₁!’

Summarizing, the arguments of a transitive verb need not be lexically realized, and, if lexically realized, the position of the lexical argument does not determine whether it is linked to the A- or O-argument of the transitive verb. Thus, it is evident that word order does not identify the grammatical function of an argument. Furthermore, note that Yucatec Maya is a head-marking language and, in particular, that nominal dependents are not case-marked: for instance, neither of the two nominals in (2a), i.e., *le huerfano-o* ‘the orphan’ nor *chen bu’ul* ‘only beans’, occur with any markers which would indicate their relationship to the transitive verb.

The standard view of argument linking maintains that (i) a verb specifies the semantic roles of its arguments, (ii) the grammatical function of a nominal argument of a verb is determined in the syntax (e.g., by word order (English), by case (Wambaya, Australia) or by a combination of the two (German)), and (iii) that voice links an argument to its semantic role via the grammatical function of the argument. In a series of papers, Aissen (1992, 1996, 1999) has proposed a syntactic analysis of several Mayan languages which specifies a verb-initial basic word order with configurationally definable post-verbal positions for subject and object. Given this syntactic analysis, argument-linking in Mayan languages can proceed via the (configurationally defined) grammatical functions, just like in English. However, while this approach is theoretically appealing for its uniform treatment of apparently different languages, I argue in this talk that the empirical evidence does not support such an approach for Yucatec Maya, a language where word order does not identify the grammatical function of a nominal argument, and nominal dependents in this language are not case-marked. I propose an alternative approach to argument linking in Yucatec Maya which has the following components: (i) a verb specifies the semantic roles of its arguments, (ii) the discourse function of the denotation of a nominal argument of a verb is determined in the syntax (by word order and morphological marking), and (iii) voice links an argument to its semantic role via the discourse function of the denotation of the argument. While argument linking in Yucatec Maya can proceed without reference to grammatical functions, there may be other syntactic processes which provide independent evidence for the existence of grammatical functions in this language.

References

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