

Information structure and reference tracking in Zenzontepec Chatino discourse

The syntax of Chatino languages has so far received little attention, aside from some work on the Yaitepec variety (Rasch 2002; Pride 1965). This is in part due to the complexity of Chatino phonology (Cruz 2011; Cruz & Woodbury 2014) and morphology (Campbell 2016; McIntosh 2015; Sullivant 2015; Villard 2015), both of which must be understood in order to understand the syntax. This talk’s goal is to demonstrate that information structure is also crucial for any understanding of Zenzontepec Chatino (ISO 639-3 *czn*) syntax, which displays flexible constituent order, prolific zero anaphora, and rich morphosyntactic encoding of information structure.

Basic constituent order is VS in intransitive clauses and VAO in transitive clauses (1).

- (1)
- | | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------|-----|-------------|------|
| | V | | A | | O |
| | lēʔ | [nkay-ukwā=kāʔá] | [na | nkwítzə=Vʔ] | [ji] |
| | then | PFV-grab=also | DEF | child=NVIS | ash |
| | ‘Then the child also grabbed some ash.’ [nkwitzan tiʔi 4:19] | | | | |

Other orders are possible, and common, such as OVA for focusing the object:

- (2)
- | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|-------------|------|-------|
| | O | | V | | A |
| | [nkuti chojo] | | [nch-ujwiʔ] | tī | [kwa] |
| | seed squash | | PRG-sell | TPLZ | LEXCL |
| | ‘We were selling squash seeds.’ [natenʔ miçen 5:36] | | | | |

Example (3) illustrates zero anaphora; there are three semantically transitive finite verbs but only one overt NP. Reference for all other NPs is recoverable from context, and thus they are omitted.

- (3)
- | | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|-----|
| nch-áʔnā | | n-te-xūʔú | soʔ | yaka. | n-te-tyúwe | ∅ |
| PRG-clear.field(.3) | | PRG-cut(.3) | base | tree | PRG-chop.up(.3) | (3) |
| ‘(He) was clearing (the field) and (he) was cutting down trees. (He) was chopping (them) up.’ | | | | | | |
| [kunaʔa kusuʔ 2:43] | | | | | | |

Example (4) provides a glimpse of how encoding of information structure pervades the morphosyntax:

- (4)
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|------|------|------------|-------------|-----|-------|---------------|
| [nka-s-atīʔ] | | tī | [niʔ | kūʔwí=Vʔ] | jiʔi | [nā | lateʔ | chaja=Vʔ] |
| PFV.CAUS-TRN-untie | | TPLZ | 3RSP | drunk=NVIS | OBJ | DEF | cloth | tortilla=NVIS |
| ‘The drunk untied the tortilla cloth.’ [kwiniʔ laja 9:23] | | | | | | | | |

- (i) objects are preceded by the particle *jiʔi* if they are **topical** (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011)—compare with the bare objects in examples (1)–(3);
- (ii) the O argument occurs with the definite article and a discourse or “non-visible” demonstrative;
- (iii) the A argument is preceded by the particle *tī*, a topicalizer that may occur with multiple—and just about any—constituents in a clause;
- (iv) and the A argument NP also contains the non-visible demonstrative enclitic.

All of this rich apparatus is determined by discourse—not intraclausal syntactic rules. Therefore, the study of natural language use is absolutely essential for understanding the syntax of Zenzontepec Chatino, and this will be shown by following information structure and reference tracking in the context of a narrative tale.

References

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