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The Semantics of Guaraní Agreement Markers*

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0. Introduction. The purpose of this paper is to describe and elucidate the semantic/functional motivations underlying the person marking system of Guaraní, a language of the Tupi-Guaraní family spoken in Paraguay and parts of neighboring countries. Specifically, the paper attempts to explain a morphological split in the agreement system in terms of two semantic parameters: i) the nature of participant involvement and ii) the inherent changeability expressed by the predicate stem.

It has been claimed (Bybee 1985) that the function of agreement markers is that of indexing the argument of verbs and that "agreement categories have less relevance for a verb stem than any other inflectional category" (p. 102). By relevance Bybee means the degree of effect that the meaning of a morpheme has on the semantic content of the base. I hope to show in the course of the discussion that agreement morphology in Guaraní goes beyond just indexing event participants and that it provides clues to the nature of participant involvement and the component states of the process designated by the predicate.

0.1. The problem. In Guaraní, the function of predication can be performed by lexical items of virtually every semantic type. Every predicate is obligatorily marked for either subject or object agreement. Agreement prefixes index the number and person of the argument cross-referenced on the predicate. In addition to marking number and person, these prefixes also seem to be sensitive to the semantic content of the predicate, as is suggested by a morphological split of this inflectional category into two sets of prefixes. One set attaches to forms designating objects, properties, and most states. Another set attaches to one- and two-place predicates designating activities and actions. For reasons that will become obvious in the course of the discussion, I will call the first set inactive, and the second, active. The inactive prefixes are also used to indicate the possessor in a nominal construction, and the direct object of a transitive verb. Table 1 below shows the two sets of prefixes.

	Inactive	Active
1 singular	che-	a-
1 inclusive	fiáne-	ja-
1 exclusive	ore-	ro-
2 singular	ne-	re-
2 plural	pene-	pe-
3	i-/ij-/iñ	o-

Table 1: agreement markers.

As a first approximation to the problem, let us discuss Klimov's interpretation of similar morphological splits in agreement systems for languages of the same family (cf. Seki 1990, Klimov 1979). Along with the traditionally recognized ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative systems, Klimov posits a third typological type, namely that of the active-stative system. According to Klimov, the structure of active/stative¹ languages (among which he includes languages of the Tupi-Guarani family) is not oriented toward the expression of the subject/object relation, but towards the relation between active and inactive participant roles. Among other structural manifestations of this distinction Klimov mentions the existence of different sets of person markers for coding active and inactive participants. According to Seki's interpretation of Klimov's claims, the active-inactive distinction correlates with the semantic parameter of control versus lack of control of the participant involved. Thus, verbs such as *ñe?e* 'to talk', *guata* 'to walk', and *nupā* 'to beat' are marked with active morphology because they are "volitional verbs", while *rasy* 'be sick', *porā* 'be pretty', and *mandu?a* 'remember' are marked with inactive morphology because they are non-volitional (Seki p. 5). In other words, the opposition active-inactive correlates with the degree of agentivity of the participant role.

While I think there is certain validity to this analysis, I do not think this parameter alone will account for the range of data under consideration here. While it is true that agents always trigger active morphology, participants of very low agentivity such as inanimate movers and inanimate and animate undergoers of involuntary change of state generally take active agreement markers, eg., *kacha* 'swing, rock', *mano* 'die', *kai* 'burn'. I believe that this analysis needs to be expanded to include a series of interrelated semantic parameters, agentivity being only one of them. This paper will show that activity is a complex notion that can be assessed from different perspectives, and that the different factors involved can be exploited differently in different lexical items.

1. General framework. The description and interpretation of the data will be based on notional or semantic parameters developed by functional/cognitive linguists. Specifically, I will be making reference to notions of participant role archetypes and inherent processual composition developed by Langacker (1987, 1990).

In order to facilitate the discussion of the factors involved in the morphological split and choice of agreement markers, I will provide a sketch of the conceptual framework that I will be using. According to Langacker (1990 pp. 209-260), our conception of processual participants is based on a number of participant role archetypes, among which AGENT (AG), EXPERIENCER, PATIENT (PAT), MOVER (MVR) and ZERO will be of importance in the present discussion. An agent is defined as a human actor who is deliberately involved in a given action. An experiencer is defined as an individual engaged in some type of mental process. A patient is a participant which undergoes an internal change of state. A mover is a participant which changes position with respect to its surroundings. Zero is described as an empty role, or a participant that undergoes neither change, nor motion, nor experience. These role archetypes are not viewed as unrelated

categories; instead it is believed that they participate in "systemic relationships", very much like the inventory of phonemes of a given language. It is claimed that languages organize their role archetypes in terms of hierarchies which follow certain identifiable semantic parameters and which are exploited for linguistic purposes. It is important to note that these role archetypes constitute an abstraction and that in practice they seldom occur in pure form. Thus we often find a combination of roles in one single participant. Additional variation can be found depending on whether or not these participant roles are conceptualized independently of energy transfer. Thus a patient or a mover can be conceived of independently of the source that causes the change. Langacker's term for this situation is ABSOLUTE (ABS). Thus we can have an absolute patient or an absolute mover, and so on.

A related but different semantic parameter that will be appealed to is the internal configuration of the process designated by the predicate. Processes can be conceived of as evolving through time or as remaining unchanged through time. Changeability or time-stability has been considered an important semantic parameter for linguistic organization (cf. Givón 1984), yet it lacks a precise characterization. In this paper, I will appeal to one aspect of Langacker's characterization of the imperfective/perfective distinction, which I believe captures in a precise way the difference between changeable and static predicates. According to Langacker (1987), both perfective and imperfective predicates are composed of a series of states which are accessed sequentially. In the case of static predicates, which he calls imperfective, the component states are identical, while in the case of active predicates, which he calls perfective, the component states are different. So changeability amounts to differentiation of the component states while non-changeability is the absence of differentiation of the component states. With this conceptual framework in mind, let us now turn to the description and analysis of the data. I will proceed with a discussion of one-place predicates first, and then I will discuss agreement marking of two-place verbs.

2. Description and Analysis of the Data. The present analysis claims that besides indexing the number and person of the event participant/s, Guarani agreement markers have additional semantic content and function which motivate the morphological split. The function of these prefixes is to focus on a participant endowed with special conceptual salience.² The inactive markers indicate that the focused participant is minimally involved in the process and that the component states of the process are undifferentiated. In general, the active markers indicate that the involvement of the focused participant in the process is relatively active and that the process designated by the predicate evolves through time.

2.1. One-place predicates. In this case, there is only one event participant and therefore only one choice for focus. All participants, except agents, will be absolute since energy transfer will not be a factor.

2.1.1. One-place predicates with inactive morphology. Objects and properties always trigger inactive morphology in a predication. Consider the following examples:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1a. (Che) che-roga
I 1s-house
'I have a house' | 1b. (Che) che-memby (objects)
I 1s-offspring
'I have a son/daughter' |
| 2a. (Che) che-karape
I 1s-low
'I'm short' | 2b. (Che) che-resa?yju (properties)
I 1s-yellow
'I'm pale' |

Constructions 1a-b, with object predicates, have a possessive meaning, while constructions 2a-b, with property predicates, attribute a quality to the participant involved.³ What is relevant for the purposes of this paper is that the involvement of the participant in 1a-2b is minimal. The participant role is to serve only as a point of reference for a certain relation.

Objects and properties in predication constitute the inactive end of the inactive-active spectrum. These predicates designate non-events, that is, the designated relation is not seen as evolving through time. Therefore, the component states of the process are identical and the participant role can be characterized as ZERO.

Predicates designating states are also generally marked with inactive markers:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 3. (Che) che-kyryi
I 1s-tickle
'I'm tickled/ticklish' | 4. (Che) che-retia?e
I 1s-happy-mood
'I'm in a happy mood' (a joyful person) |
| 5. (Che) che-kane?õ
I 1s-tired
'I am tired' | 6. (Che) che-vare?a
I 1s-hungry
'I'm hungry' |

As can be seen in the translation of 3 and 4, some predicates of this semantic class can designate temporary as well as more permanent states. The permanent states are closer in meaning to the predicates which designate properties in the sense that the participant involvement is minimal. The involvement of the participants of temporary states, while not active, is somewhat greater in the sense that the participant experiences the state. In this case, the component states of the process are also identical, but the participant is more involved than in the case of objects and properties. All of these participants are sentient entities and can be said to be engaged in an internal process. Their role can be characterized as EXPERIENCER. The overwhelming inactive marking of these predicates can then be explained by the lack of changeability of the designated process and the relatively inactive role of the participant. There are indications, however, that in a continuum of increasing degree of activity, an EXPERIENCER is out of the purely inactive realm. The formal clues that this is the case are provided by the fact that a few states are marked with active morphology.⁴

2.1.2. One-place predicates with active morphology. At the active end of the spectrum, we find predicates which designate motion. Thus, predicates

which involve translational and non-translational motion (Talmy's term) are always marked with active morphology:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 7a. (Che) a-guata
I 1s-walk
'I walk' | 7b. (Che) a-poñy (translational)
I 1s-crawl
'I crawl' |
| 8a. (Che) a-ku?e
I 1s-move
'I move' | 8b. (Che) a-kacha (non-translational)
I 1s-swing/rock
'I swing/rock' |

These predicates designate evolving situations that clearly include different component states. The participant is actively involved in the changing situation, either by willfully initiating the movement (AG MVR) or by simply changing positions (ABS MVR).

Other human or animate activities that do not exclusively involve motion, but are nevertheless highly dynamic, are also marked with active morphology:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 9. (Che) a-geroky
I 1s-dance
'I dance' | 10. (Che) a-jahu
I 1s-bathe
'I bathe' |
| 11. (Che) a-ndyvu
I 1s-spit
'I spit' | 12. (Che) a-ñe?e
I 1s-talk
'I talk' |

The participant of animate activities, such as *dance*, *talk*, etc, is usually involved in performing the complex changing pattern, often willfully but in some cases involuntarily (as in the case of bodily functions). These participant roles cannot be easily labeled even with a combination of the role archetypes because additional domains are crucially invoked in their meanings. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that their involvement in the dynamic situation described by the predicate is pivotal.

A special case of animate activity is that of body posture predicates, which can designate the action of changing body posture or the state resulting from that action, and take active markers in either case, as in 13a and 13b:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 13a. (Che) a-ñesu
I 1s-kneel
'I kneel' | 13b. (Che) a-guapy
I 1s-sit
'I sit' |
|--|---|

Examples 13a and 13b can mean either the act of kneeling or sitting respectively, or the description of the state resulting from that action. With either meaning the agreement morphology is active. All body posture predicates present this double semantic possibility, which does not result in a morphological split. Other such predicates are: *ñeno* 'to lie down', *javyv* 'to bend', *jeko* 'to lean'. It is obvious why the action should be marked with active morphology, but it is

puzzling that they are also marked active when they designate a state. There are two possible non-competing explanations for this. The first one was suggested to me by Suzanne Kemmer and is as follows: The state designates a static situation (same component states), but is marked active because of the strong semantic similarity and situational link between the state and the event that has originated it. Another possible explanation is that even though the situation is static, the participant is normally viewed as having control over his/her own body posture. This explanation would be valid only if we can prove that volitionality or control alone can be a factor in determining active vs. non-active marking. This seems to be the case, as we will see later in eg. 25 *lose grip* vs. *drop*, in which the act of involuntarily dropping something triggers inactive marking while voluntarily dropping something requires active marking. This is so despite the fact that in both cases the processes described by the predicate are dynamic events.

Agentivity alone, however, is not always the determining factor. We have already seen that inanimate movers are marked active. In such cases the participant is dynamic but non-volitional. Another class of predicates that are marked with active morphology despite their low agentivity are those that involve involuntary change of state; the participant can be animate, as in 14a-b, or inanimate, as in 15a-b:

14a. (Che) a-mano
I 1s-die
'I die'

14b. (Che) a-pay (animate)
I 1s-wake up
'I wake up'

15a. Y o-pupu
water 3s-boil
'The water boils'

15b. oga o-kai (inanimate)
house 3s-burn
'The house burns'

The role of the participant in examples 14a-15b, while non-agentive, is not minimal, since it undergoes an internal change of state. Since the energy source is not a factor, this role can be characterized as an ABSOLUTE PATIENT. When viewed absolutely, this role is a relatively active one since the change of state is portrayed as originating from the participant's own internal resources. In addition to the more than minimal participant role, the nature of the process is dynamic since it suggests different component states.

To conclude the analysis of one-place predicates, I will address the effect of active or inactive marking on those predicates which can take both.

2.1.3. One-place predicates that allow alternate construals.

Finally, there are predicates which can take both the inactive and the active agreement marker resulting in two related but different meanings. Consider the following list :

Inactive**Active**

16. che-yta	'I can swim'	a-yta	'I swim'
17. che-monda	'I'm a thief'	a-monda	'I steal'
18. che-karu	'I'm a big eater'	a-karu	'I eat'
19. che-ka?u	'I'm a drunk'	a-ka?u	'I get drunk'
20. che-kakuaa	'I am big'	a-kakuaa	'I grow'
21. che-guata	'I'm a fast walker'	a-guata	'I walk'
22. che-kiriri	'I'm a quiet person'	a-kiriri	'I stop talking'
23. che-tyarō	'I'm mature'	a-tyarō	'I mature'
24. che-vevui	'I'm light'	a-vevui	'I float'
25. che-poi	'I lose grip'	a-poi	'I drop'

Except for the last example, none of these predicates designate an event when marked with the inactive prefix. Instead, their meaning is very much like that of predicates which attribute a property to the participant involved. Participant involvement is therefore minimal, just as in the case of predicated properties. When these same predicates are marked with the active prefixes, however, their meaning becomes more dynamic in the sense that they designate actual events, which are performed by the participant involved. In other words, the role of the participant is relatively more active than in the cases with inactive markers. Even in the active version of example 24, which is not as dynamic as the active versions of the other predicates, it can be argued that the participant is more actively involved than in its inactive counterpart. The actual event of floating implies certain resistance to a natural tendency on the part of the participant, while in the descriptive use of the same predicate the participant is only viewed as a reference point for the relation described by the predicate.

The ambivalent roots given in 16-24 highlight the semantic differences between the two agreement marking sets. The lexical content is the same in both cases and generally includes a process of change. What the inactive marking does is to impose a static construal on the inherently dynamic lexical content. Thus, the designated processes are conceived of as types of actions that characterize the participant rather than actual instantiated actions performed by the participant. The participant role is reduced to ZERO in much the same way as the participant in a predicated property.

The case of the last example in the list is an interesting one. Unlike in the previous cases, the inactive version of the predicate does designate an actual event, just as in the active version. The difference between the two versions is that the inactive one implies lack of volitionality while the active one suggests deliberateness on the part of the participant. In this case, activity or inactivity is assessed on the basis of agentivity alone.

2.1.4. Summary. It seems, then, that the language recognizes degrees of activity among the role archetypes. The continuum below represents a progression of dynamic participant involvement ranging from minimal to maximal involvement.

ZERO < EXPERIENCER < PATIENT < MOVER < AGENT⁵

Degree of changeability generally correlates with the degree of active involvement of the event participant. We have seen, however, that this relationship is not always proportionally maintained. One case in point is that of the PATIENT role, which does not have the highest degree of active involvement, but which, nevertheless, can be paired with highly dynamic processes.

In one-place predicates, ZERO and EXPERIENCER are marked inactive while PATIENT, MOVER, and AGENT are marked active. With one-place predicates, all these roles, with the exception of AGENT, are viewed absolutely (i.e., factoring out energy source). However, the dynamicity assessment of some of these roles changes when an energy source enters into the picture. We will see in the next section, for example, that in the presence of an AGENT, the PATIENT role is marked as inactive.

2.2. Two-place predicates. Before discussing active/inactive marking in two-place predicates, it will first be necessary to provide some background information on which participants are cross-referenced on two-place predicates. Two-place predicates must exhibit agreement for either subject or object, but not both. Which participant gets marked on the verb is determined by two hierarchies: one of persons and another of participant roles⁶. The person hierarchy is such that the higher one in the following hierarchy gets marked on the verb: 1 > 2 > 3. The participant role hierarchy is such that when the two participants are of the same person, the AGENT gets marked on the verb. For a participant to be "higher" in these two hierarchies then means that it will be the one cross-referenced on the verb, not necessarily that the verb will receive active or inactive marking. The relevant hierarchy for the present discussion will be that of participant role. The person hierarchy is an interesting phenomenon in and of itself, but it does not bear on the choice between active and inactive markers, and will not be further considered here (for additional discussion on this matter see note 6).

The relevant question to be answered here is what determines the choice of markers. In a sense, the case of two-place predicates is less complicated since the presence of more than one participant allows for a comparative assessment of active involvement. Let us start with prototypical transitive events with an AGENT and a PATIENT. AGENTs and PATIENTs are consistently marked with active and inactive markers respectively, as can be seen in 26-30:

Active marking:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>26. Maria oi-nupā i-memby
M. 3sACT-beat 3s-offspring
'Maria beats her child'</p> | <p>27. (Che) ai-nupā la-jagua
I 1sACT-beat the-dog
'I beat the dog'</p> |
| <p>28. (Nde) rei-nupā la-jagua.
you 2sACT-beat the-dog
'You beat the dog'</p> | |

Inactive marking:

29. Nde **che**-nupã.
you 1sINACT-beat
'You beat me'

30. Petei jagua **nde**-su?u
One dog 2sINACT-bite
'A dog bit you'

Since the agent outranks the PATIENT in level of active involvement, the AGENT receives an active marking while the PATIENT, which is static in relation to the AGENT gets marked inactive. Thus the following hierarchy is in operation:

AG > PAT

Stative two-place predicates behave like the highly dynamic ones. Thus verbs like *rayhu* 'to love', *pota* 'to want', *kuaa* 'to know', *rovia* 'to believe' take active subject agreement markers:

31. (Che) **ai**-kuaa nde-rera.
I 1sACT 2s-name
'I know our name'

32. (Che) **a**-hayhu che memby
I 1s-love 1s-offspring
'I love my son/daughter'

Despite the fact these verbs do not designate processes with component state differentiation, their subject agreement marking is active in Guarani. In these cases, EXPERIENCER (the sentient participant) outranks ZERO, whose participation is null. The hierarchy of active involvement here is the following:

EXPERIENCER > ZERO

It has been suggested (Langacker 1990, among others) that stative two-place processes such as the ones mentioned above are conceived of as abstract analogues of more energetic processes which have actual transfer of energy. Despite the fact that we do not have actual energy transfer, there is a directedness similar to that of an energetic interaction. Thus the EXPERIENCER is portrayed as directing some mental energy towards the second participant.

A special case of stative two-place predicates is that of the verb of possession *reko* 'have', which is also marked with active subject agreement:

33. (Che) **a**-reko petei kygua.
I 1s-have one comb
'I have a comb'.

In this case, the possessor is active with respect to the possessed entity, whose role is ZERO, by virtue of exerting control over it:

POSSESSOR > ZERO

In Velázquez 1989, I compared this verbal possessive construction with non-verbal ones such as those given in examples 1 and 2, and found that when it is expressed

with a verb, the possession is an alienable one while in the non-verbal case, the possessive relationship is an inalienable one. It can be argued, in the light of the present analysis, that the possessor in the verbal construction is a more active participant than in the non-verbal construction, since more control would be exerted over an alienably possessed entity than over an inalienably possessed one.

3. Conclusion. Contrary to traditional claims that agreement markers are purely structural devices devoid of meaning, this paper has shown that Guarani agreement markers are meaningful. It is claimed that their semantic contribution to the main predicate is more than just indexing participant number and person. The formal difference between the two sets of Guarani agreement markers corresponds to identifiable semantic differences of two sorts: i) degree of changeability contained in the process designated by the predicate, and ii) the nature of the involvement of the focused participant in that process.

It was found that the morphological split in Guarani agreement markers is motivated by the opposition activity vs. inactivity. The notion of activity is seen here as the result of the interplay between participant involvement and inherent changeability of the process designated by the predicate. Another point of crucial importance is that the opposition activity vs. inactivity is not a rigid dichotomy but a parameter that is present in varying degrees, with prototypical cases of inactivity (eg. predicated objects and properties), prototypical cases of activity (motion and energetic verbs), and many intermediate cases (inanimate changes of state). Since the language has only two sets of markers to signal a gradient opposition, each set covers a range of varying degrees of activity or inactivity. It was found that predicates with inherent changeability favor active marking while predicates which designate static relations favor inactive marking. Activity, however, is not judged solely on the basis of the internal configuration of the process; participant involvement was also found to be of crucial importance. Thus, volitionality or simple control, or effecting change, can qualify as active participant involvement. Typically, inherent changeability and active participant involvement correlate, but not all the factors need to be equally present for a form to qualify as active or inactive. We have seen, for example, that a form designating an essentially static situation can be marked active on account of perceived control by the focused participant; or a form designating an inherently changing situation can be marked inactive to signal lack of participant control. The several factors involved in the active/inactive opposition create a pool of possible construals that are exploited by the language in several different ways.

By including other relevant semantic parameters besides control, the analysis presented here is essentially an elaboration and application of Klimov's analysis of active/stative systems. By showing that a language can be sensitive to more factors than just initiation or control, the paper offers a new interpretation of the notion "active", and suggests that "activity" is a complex notion involving several parameters; hence the need for a careful characterization of the factors involved.

Notes

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¹The use of the term "stative" as a counterpart of "active" is a little misleading since it suggests aspectual differences (such as durativity or perfectivity) that are irrelevant in the present case. I will replace the term "stative" by the term "inactive" to avoid confusion.

²This conceptual salience is generally characterizable in terms of semantic hierarchies such as the one based on the "empathy" or person hierarchy, or that based on energy flow or role hierarchy.

³These two meanings are related in the sense that the property being attributed can be interpreted as possessed by the participant involved. Indeed, with certain predicators the difference between the two meanings is completely blurred, e.g., *che-jare* (1s-dirt) 'I'm dirty' or 'I have dirt'.

⁴EXPERIENCER roles, while mostly marked inactive, are not totally consistent. In particular, the semantic areas of emotion and knowledge/belief do not exhibit a consistent behavior in respect to the agreement markers. There are some forms indicating emotions which are marked with inactive agreement when functioning predicatively, while others are marked with active morphology. Thus, *kuera* 'bored'; *pochy* 'angry', and *aguara* 'flattered' take inactive markers, while, *vy?a* 'happy' and *kyhyje* 'afraid' the active set. We can explain this small inconsistency by appealing to the sentient character of the participant and the internal process implied in this role. The marking suggests that the EXPERIENCER role has at least some degree of activity.

⁵The continuum presented here is meant to be valid for this particular phenomenon in Guaraní, not necessarily for languages in general. It was already previously said that languages organize their role archetypes in different ways. Langacker 1986, for example states that EXPERIENCER and AGENT often group together as "active" participant types for some linguistic phenomena, while MOVER, PATIENT and ZERO group together as "passive" participant types. In his article, activity is viewed from a different perspective than here. Thus MOVER, PATIENT AND ZERO are passive in the sense that they do not initiate the interaction or energy flow in a prototypical transitive event, while EXPERIENCER and AGENT are viewed as having a high degree of initiative in the interaction designated by the predicator.

⁶Hierarchy of participant roles: If the two participants have the same person, the agent outranks the patient: AG > PAT. In example 26 (*Maria oi-nupã i-memby* 'Maria beats the child'), the agreement marker cross-references the AG, not the PAT as evidenced by the active prefix. As stated before, PAT's are marked with inactive morphology.

Person hierarchy: first person outranks second and third persons and second person outranks third person: 1 > 2 > 3. This hierarchy outranks the role hierarchy discussed above. Thus, a higher participant in the person hierarchy will be marked on the verb regardless of its role, as can be seen in example 29 (*Nde che-nupã*

'You beat me'), where the first person is cross-referenced on the verb, and in example 30 (*Petei jagua nde-su?u* 'A dog bit you'), where the second person is cross-referenced on the verb. In all of these cases, the patient is cross-referenced because it outranks the agent in terms of person. When first or second person act on 3rd person, the verb is marked with first or second active prefix, since the AG in these cases is higher in both hierarchies (examples 27 and 28).

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