

Evidentiality, grammatical number and physical position in Tuparí

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Native South American languages are renowned for their nuanced and elaborate systems of evidentiality (Chafe and Nichols 1986; Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998; Aikhenvald 2004), with the most famous systems hailing from Northwest Amazonia and the Peruvian lowlands (Aikhenvald 2003; Valenzuela 2003; Fleck 2007; Stenzel 2008; Stenzel and Gómez-Imbert 2018). Less is known about the realization of evidentiality in indigenous languages from elsewhere in Amazonia, including the widespread Tupían family. In this talk I describe and analyze evidentiality in Tuparí, a Tupían language for which only minimal description has been previously available (Caspar and Rodrigues 1957; Seki 2001; Alves 2004). All data come from fieldwork carried out by myself in the Brazilian state of Rondônia.

Within the genealogical context of Tupían, Tuparí is an outlier: while many languages in the rest of the family express evidentiality through freestanding particles (Moore 1984; Gabas 1999; Seki 2000), in Tuparí the distinction between witnessed and non-witnessed past tense utterances is expressed within the verbal morphology. The Tuparí evidential suffix exhibits other properties that are crosslinguistically peculiar: it agrees in number with the grammatical subject (singular *-pnẽ*, plural *-psira*) and it occupies a low position in the clausal structure, beneath T/Infl. As a result of the low position of *-pnẽ/-psira*, the witnessed/non-witnessed distinction is maintained even in embedded clauses – clauses incapable of hosting epistemic particles. In this regard the Tuparí facts diverge sharply from the typological tendency of evidentials to resist embedding, as expected of speech act operators (Faller 2002; Speas 2008; Murray 2017).

I will first lay out the synchronic properties of the *-pnẽ/-psira* and will argue that its meaning simply encodes whether or not the speaker witnessed the event being described, without epistemic overtones. Several structural diagnostics – including the incompatibility of *-pnẽ/-psira* with certain epistemic clause-typers – will be employed to buttress this claim. Second, I will advance a diachronic hypothesis that relates *-pnẽ/-psira* to a largely homophonous stativizer, one that encodes not only a singular/non-singular contrast but also a positional distinction (subjects in repose versus ones standing up). I will claim that the retention of number agreement (but not physical position) by the evidential relates to a broader pattern in Tuparí discourse of treating respected in-laws as paucals rather than singulars. Ultimately, we will account for the peculiar realization of evidentiality in Tuparí through a combination of synchrony and diachrony, with reference as well to present-day politeness strategies.

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