Pragmatic definiteness in Selkup

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This study is a corpus-based analysis of the Samoyedic language Selkup and is taking a closer look at the different strategies of expressing pragmatic definiteness in different speech settings. The corpora used are Budzisch et al. (2019) and Brykina et al. (2020), both covering Northern, Central and Southern Selkup with a total of 409 texts (17,092 sentences, 97,562 tokens).

Based on Hawkins' (1978: 106ff.) taxonomy, the aim is to present an overview of expressing anaphoric, direct situational and associative anaphoric references in Selkup and exploring the different strategies in use. A common marker are e.g. demonstrative determiners which can be used as devices for marking anaphoric reference, i.e. the mentioning of an aforementioned entity, as shown in example (1).

(1) *Na   šoːqor-t   paːr-o-nd   siga-l-ba-dɨt.*
    DEM   stove-GEN   top-EP-ILL   climb-INCH-PST.REP-3PL
    'They climbed on top of the oven [which is been introduced before].'
    (Budzisch et al. (2019); TMR_1981_Robbers_flk.044)

In example (1), the anaphoric demonstrative *na* is used, but for direct situational reference - the reference to an entity which is in the immediate vicinity – the deictic demonstratives *taw* (proximal) and *to* (distal) can be used, as shown in example (2b) in which the piece of meat present in the direct situation is referred to:

(2) a.   *Teb-a-nni   pol'ena-kka-n   paːr'-i-ndɨ   wed'i-kussoːg-ə-m*
        3SG-EP-DAT/ALL   log-DIM-GEN   top-EP-ILL   meat-piece-EP-ACC
        pen-na-t,   qal.
        put-CO-3SG.O   say.PST
   b. *"Taw am-di!"*
       DEM   eat-2SG.O
       'He puts a piece of meat on top of a log for her and said: "Eat this!"'
       (Budzisch et al. (2019); KMS_1966_TwoSisters_flk.022)

For associative anaphoric reference (mentioning of a referent linked to an anchor), the referent is usually marked possessively with a genitive marking or a possessive suffix, the

anchor can be expressed explicitly or it is only recognizable from the context. Example (3) illustrates this for *ɔːq* 'door' which is marked to be the house's door:

(3) *ɔːmtɨ-lʼ*   *qoː-n*   *m ɔːt* *šeːr-na,*   *m ɔːt-ɨ-n*   *ɔːq-qɨt*
   horn-ADJZ   head-GEN   house enter-CO.3SG.S   house-EP-GEN door-LOC

nɨl-lɛ-ja.
stand-RES-CO.3SG.S

'He enters the house of the tsar and stands at the door.'

(Budzisch et al. (2019); BEP_1977_Itja3_flk.012)

Beyond demonstratives and possessive marking, Selkup employs additional means to indicate pragmatic definiteness. Unmarked noun phrases (NPs) can be pragmatically definite based on contextual cues, particularly through word order (e.g., sentence-initial objects before an overt subject, though overt subjects are rare in Selkup). Furthermore, definite reference can be achieved through superlatives, universal quantifiers, and generic phrases, though their usage is context-dependent. Personal and zero pronouns, as well as proper names, are employed according to accessibility hierarchies (Ariel 1990).

References

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