Revista Brasileira de

Linguística Antropológica

UnB   LALLI

Inverse system, agreement and distribution of clitics and free pronouns in Tenetehára

Sistema inverso, concordância e distribuição de clíticos e pronomes livres em Tenetehára

Fábio Bonfim Duarte[1]

ORCID: 0000-0002-3009-7654

Abstract

This paper focuses on the agreement system of the Tenetehára language in order to investigate how the person features are grammaticalized. The hypothesis proposed is that the occurrence of the person features on the verb morphology is regulated by the nominal hierarchy in which the [+participant] feature systematically outranks the [-participant] feature. As such, the transitive verbs will systematically agree with the argument that carries the [+participant, +/-speaker] feature regardless of the syntactic position it is merged to. However, when both the external and internal arguments exhibit the same set of semantic features [+participant, +/-speaker], a set of [+participant, +speaker, +hearer] prefixes is triggered. Furthermore, when both the subject and the object carry the [-participant] feature, syntactic and pragmatic constraints will regulate which argument markers will be used on the verb stem. As to the free pronouns, it is proposed that they only coindex the person φ-feature of the subject, since they do not refer to the person φ-feature of directs object nor of indirect objects.

Keywords: Agreement; Clitics; Free Pronouns; Person Hierarchy; Inverse System.

Resumo

Este artigo examina o sistema de concordância na língua Tenetehára e tem por objetivo investigar como os traços de pessoa são realizados na morfologia verbal. A hipótese que assumimos é a de que a ocorrência desses traços é regulada pela hierarquia nominal. Assim sendo, o sistema de concordância é sensível ao traço [+participante], o qual é sempre

---

[1] Full Professor at the School of Letters of the Federal University of Minas Gerais. He is currently a CNPq research productivity fellow - Level 1D, process number (311175/2021-0). He is the head of the Indigenous and African Languages Laboratory (Laliafro) at the School of Letters of UFMG. He is member of the Graduate Program in Linguistic Studies (Poslin) at the Faculty of Letters of UFMG and develops the research project *Description, Documentation, Revitalization, and Theoretical Analysis of Brazilian Indigenous Languages and Bantu Languages*. fbonfim@ terra.com.br

ranqueado mais alto do que o traço [-participante]. Nesse sistema, os verbos transitivos sistematicamente concordam com o argumento que contiver o traço [+participante, +/-falante], não importando a posição sintática em que esse argumento é gerado na estrutura sintática. Não obstante, em contextos em que ambos os argumentos (o externo e o interno) exibem os mesmos traços semânticos [+participante, +/-falante], outra série de prefixos é acionada. Essa série é realizada morfologicamente por meio de prefixos que aglutinam o conteúdo semântico de ambos os argumentos. Por sua vez, quando tanto o sujeito como o objeto carregam o traço [-participante], restrições sintáticas e pragmáticas determinarão qual o marcador de pessoa será acionado na morfologia verbal. Já em relação aos pronomes livres, propomos que esses somente recuperam o conteúdo semânctico do sujeito. Em vista disso, não podem codificar os traços semânticos do objeto direto nem do objeto indireto.

Palavras-chave: Concordância; Clíticos; Pronomes Livres; Hierarquia de Pessoa; Sistema Inverso.

1. Introduction

This paper[2] investigates the expression of the person feature in the cyclic agreement system of Tenetehára. The hypothesis that I advocate in this article is that the occurrence of this feature on the verb morphology is regulated by the nominal hierarchy in which the [+participant] feature systematically outranks the [-participant] feature. In line with this, we assume that transitive verbs systematically receive the person φ-feature of the core argument (either the subject or the object) that displays the feature geometry below:

(1) [+participant (+/-speaker), (+/-hearer), (+/-plural)].

In this sense, a way to decompose the person φ-features encoded by the person markers is to follow Harley & Ritter's (2002) and Camargos's (2017a, 2017b,) proposal, according to which the featural composition of the person markers can be subdivided in a tripartite system as following:

(2)

[+participant, +speaker]	→ first person
[+participant, -speaker]	→ second person
[-participant]	→ third person

Given the featural decomposition shown above and the fact that verbs in Tenetehára[3] have only one syntactic slot for encoding the person φ-features on the verbal morphological template, the proposal assumed in this article is that transitive verbs will systematically agree with the argument that carries the [+participant, +/-speaker] feature regardless of the syntactic position it is merged to, as the examples below illustrate:

(3)   a.   A > O[4]
            a-(à)ro-putar   *awa*
            A1SG-wait-want   man
            'I will wait for the man.'

       b.   O > A
            *he-r-*àro-*putar*   *awa*
            B1SG-REL-wait-want   man
            'The man will wait for me.'

Another objective is to demonstrate that when both arguments of the verb exhibit the [-participant] feature, the transitive verb will agree with the one that is more salient in the discourse flow; this argument tends to be the one that carries the contrastive focus interpretation, as follows:

(4)   [-particpant^{+focus}] > [-participant^{-focus}]

This system resembles the Tupinambá strategy of encoding the [+/-focus] feature in the sense that the choice of the person φ-feature on the verbal morphology is sensitive to the semantic differences in (4). In this

---

[3] Cabral (2002, 2012) offers a detailed analysis on the Tupian linguistic Stock. See also Rodrigues (1985, 1986) and Dietrich (2010) for an overview of the Tupi-Guarani linguistic family.

[4] Following Dixon (1979, 1994), the constituent that typically bears the [+agent] feature and functions as the subject of transitive clauses is referred to as (A). The single argument of an intransitive verb is called (S). Finally, the object of transitive clauses, which typically bears the [+patient] feature, is referred to as (O). In languages with a split-S system, the S argument may be further distinguished as S_a, when the intransitive subject bears agent-like properties, or S_o, when it bears patient-like properties. Silverstein (1976) and Comrie (1978) also adopt a similar analysis.

regard, I will adopt Rodrigues's (1990) theory according to which agreement in Tupí-Guaraní languages may be regulated either by information structure or by the person hierarchy, since focused constituents and first and second person pronouns tend to be overtly marked in the morphological template of transitive verbs. With these theoretical assumptions in mind, the next sections aim to address how the agreement system and the feature geometry proposed above regulate the strategies of argument encoding in transitive and intransitive verbs.

This article is organized in seven sections: Section 2 presents the two sets of person markers that encode the core arguments of the sentences. In Section 3 the differential subject and object agreement marking is investigated. The proposal is that the [+participant] feature regulates the choice of the person marker that is triggered on the verbal morphology. Section 4 examines the context in which both core arguments of the transitive verbs exhibit the [+participant, +/- speaker] feature. It is shown that in such contexts, the verb receives a set of agglutinative morphemes, which are fused as one single morpheme. In Section 5, the analysis investigates the contexts in which both the subject and the object are realized as non-pronominal arguments. In such sentences, agreement will be determined by the argument that is highest in the information structure hierarchy, usually the one that bears contrastive focus interpretation. Section 6 seeks to determine the syntactic distribution of the free pronouns. The proposal is that they systematically occur at sentence-final position in order to co-index only the core argument that occupies the syntactic position of subject. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. The distribution of person markers

In Tenetehára, nominal phrases in the syntactic function of subjects and objects do not exhibit morphological Case marking. However, two sets of person markers are added to the verb stem to encode these syntactic functions: the prefixes of Set A, and the absolutive clitics (referred to hereafter as Set B). These are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: First- and second-person markers of Set A and Set B

Set A: Subject Prefixes		
	Singular	Plural
1st person	*a-*	*xi-/za-*inclusive *uru-*exclusive

2nd person	*(e)re*	*pe-*
Set B: Absolutive Clitics		
1st person	*he*	*zane* _{inclusive}
		ure _{exclusive}
2nd person	*ne*	*pe*

Table 2 below shows the allomorphic inventory of the third-person prefixes of Set A and Set B. For Set B, it should be noted that the third-person markers are not clitics, but agreement prefixes, in contrast to the first- and second-person clitics seen in Table 1 above. This distinction is further addressed in the following sections.

Table 2: Third-person markers of Set A and Set B

Third-person Prefixes		
	Set A: Subject Prefix	Set B: Subject and Object prefix
3rd person	*u- ~ o- ~ w-*	*i- ~ h-*

3. The differential agreement system

Tenetehára is like other Tupí-Guaraní languages in that a definiteness hierarchy determines the occurrence of the person markers when the sentence has a transitive verb. In this hierarchy, the first person is higher than the second person. The second person is, in turn, higher than the third person argument. This hierarchy can be informally stated as seen in the nominal hierarchy below:

(5)   Nominal Hierarchy:

1>2>3 (personal pronouns) > proper name > definite and topic NP > indefinite specific NP > non-specific NP > focused NP

Within the typological literature (Givón 1976, Comrie 1981, Croft 1988, 1990, and Aissen 2003), it has been assumed that the definiteness and animacy hierarchy triggers differential subject and object agreement across languages. Based on these theoretical assumptions, one may propose that the [+participant], [+focus] and [+topic] features are the main factors that constrain the occurrence of the person markers on the verb. Thus, I will

posit that the non-subordinated verb[5] in Tenetehára always agrees with the core argument that presents the feature geometry below, regardless of the syntactic position it occupies in the sentence:

(6)   [+participant (+/-speaker)]

Since there is just one verbal slot for person markers to occur on the verb stem, the person markers of Set A are used on the verb stem whenever the A subject is higher than the O object in the nominal hierarchy proposed above. Therefore, in contexts of transitive clauses, either the subject (A) or the object (O) can be encoded on the verb morphology depending on which of them carries the relevant feature. Thus, when it is the subject that carry the [+participant] feature, it is the nominative prefix that will be used, as the data below demonstrate:

(7) {-*pytywà*} 'help'

<u>a</u>-pytywà-putar			'I will help (him)'
<u>ere</u>-pytywà-putar			'you$_{sg}$ will help (him)'
<u>uru</u>-pytywà-putar			'we$_{exclusive}$ will help (him)'
<u>xi</u>-pytywà-putar			'we$_{inclusive}$ will help (him)'
<u>pe</u>-pytywà-putar			'you$_{pl}$ will help (him)'
<u>u</u>-pytywà-putar	a'e		'he will help (someone)'
<u>u</u>-pytywà-putar	a'e	wà	'they will help (someone)'

(8) {-*àro*} 'wait for'

<u>a</u>-(à)ro-putar			'I will wait (for him).'
<u>ere</u>-àro-putar			'you$_{sg}$ will wait (for him).'
<u>uru</u>-àro-putar			'we$_{exclusive}$ will wait (for him).'
<u>xi</u>-àro-putar			'we$_{inclusive}$ will wait (for him).'
<u>pe</u>-àro-putar			'you$_{pl}$ will wait (for him).'
<u>w</u>-àro-putar	a'e		'he will wait (for someone).'
<u>w</u>-àro-putar	a'e	wà	'they will wait (for someone).'

---

[5] It is important to point out that this system is neutralized in the subordinated clauses. For a detailed analysis on the agreement in these clauses, I refer the reader to Duarte (2007, 2012, 2018, 2025), in which it is shown that the nominative prefixes of Set A are not used to refer to the subject of transitive and intransitive verbs. As such, in these clauses, only person markers of Set B may appear on the verb morphology in order to encode the (O) object and the (S) subject of intransitive verbs, producing an absolutive alignment (O=S).

Nevertheless, when the O object is higher than the A subject, the object is always morphologically expressed with the person markers of Set B, thereby giving rise to an inverse system[6]. In this system, the relational prefix {r- ~ Ø-} must obligatorily appear between the pronominal clitics and the verb stem. The relevant contrastive data are shown below with transitive predicates -*pytywà*, 'help' and -*àro*, 'wait for,' where the former occurs with the Ø- prefix and the latter, *r-*.

(9) <u>*he*</u>-*Ø-pytywà-putar*   *tentehar*   *a'e*
     B1SG-REL-help-FUT   tentehára   he
     'The Tenetehára will help me.'

(10) <u>*ne*</u>-*Ø-pytywà-putar*   *tentehar*   *a'e*
     B2SG-REL-help-FUT   tentehára   he
     'The Tenetehára will help you$_{singular}$.'

(11) <u>*ure*</u>-*Ø-pytywà*-putar   *tentehar*   *a'e*
     B13$_{exclusive}$-REL-help-FUT   tentehára   he
     'The Tenetehára will help us.'

(12) <u>*zane*</u>-*Ø-pytywà*-putar   *tentehar*   *a'e*
     B12$_{inclusive}$-REL-help-FUT   tentehára   he
     'The Tenetehára will help us.'

(13) <u>*pe*</u>-*Ø-pytywà-putar*   *tentehar*   *a'e*
     B2PL-REL-help-fut   tentehára   he
     'The Tenetehára will help you$_{plural}$.'

(14) <u>*he*</u>-*r-àro*   *Pet*   *a'e*
     B1SG-REL-wait   Peter   3
     'He, Peter, waits for me.'

---

[6] I refer the reader to Camargos (2017:325), in which he derives this system and adopts an analysis based on cyclicity and locality of agreement. According to him, '*the agreement displacement phenomena – which are sensitive to person hierarchies – come from the mechanism of Agree, that operates on articulated φ-feature structures in cyclic syntax. .... such agreement displacement shows that cyclicity and locality derive a preference for agreement control by the internal argument, rather than by the external.*'

(15) <u>ne</u>-r-àro   *Pet*   *a'e*
     B2SG-REL-wait   Peter   he
     'He, Peter, waits for you_{singular}.'

(16) <u>ure</u>-r-àro   *Pet*   *a'e*
     B13-REL-wait   Peter   he
     'He, Peter, waits for us.'

(17) <u>zane</u>-r-àro   *Pet*   *a'e*
     B12-REL-wait   Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for us.'

(18) <u>pe</u>-n-àro   *Pet*   *a'e*
     B2PL-REL-wait   Peter   he
     'He, Peter, waits for you_{plural}.'

Tupian literature treats the phenomenon seen in the examples above as an "inverted sentence" [see Bendor Samuel (1972)]. Harrison (1986:417)], for example, notes that this grammatical device "is not a true promotion, in the sense where passive promotes a direct object to subject." Payne (1994:395) suggests that this pattern really corresponds to an inverse system, arguing that "the notion of inverse is crucially dependent on its occurrence in transitive clauses."

Based on the data outlined thus far, I propose that [+participant, +/-speaker] features are the main factors that constrain the occurrence of the differential subject and object agreement in Tenetehára. I will thus posit that the verb in Tenetehára always agrees with the core argument that presents the feature geometry proposed in (1) and (6), thereby emerging the inverse system and an intricate system of differential subject and object agreement marking.

4. Contexts in which both arguments are high in the person hierarchy

The attentive reader might be wondering what happens when both arguments exhibit the [+participant, +/- speaker] feature. In such context, both the subject and the direct object will control the agreement on the verb stem, with a distinct set of person markers that refer to both syntactic roles, i.e., the [+participant, +speaker, +hearer] prefixes[7], as is shown in the table below:

_____
[7] Seki (1990) and (2000) refers to these prefixes as "portmanteaus."

Table 3: [+participant, +speaker, +hearer] prefixes

EA>IA[8]	
I > you$_{singular}$	*uru-*
I > you$_{plural}$	*apu-*
We$_{exclusive}$>you$_{singular}$	*uru-*
We$_{exclusive}$>you$_{plural}$	*urupu-*

The empirical data below illustrate each context in which these [+participant, +speaker, +hearer] prefixes must appear. Notice that, when the object is second person singular, the morphological structure of the prefix is ambiguously {*uru-*} regardless of whether the subject refers to the first-person singular or to first-person plural exclusive. Thus, contexts in which the prefix {*uru-*} refers both to a first-person singular subject and to a second-person singular object, the pronoun *ihe* 'I' is required in sentence-final position to disambiguate the person of the subject, as shown in (19).

(19)   *uru-exak   ka'a   r-upi   ihe*
       1SG/2SG-see   forest   REL-in   I
       'I saw you$_{sg}$ in the forest.'

Likewise, when the prefix[9] refers to a first-person plural subject and to a second-person singular object, the free personal pronoun *ure* 'we' is placed in sentence-final position, as is shown in (20).

(20)   *uru$_{exclusive}$-exak   ka'a   r-upi   ure$_{exclusive}$*
       1PL/2SG-see   forest   REL-in   we$_{exclusive}$
       'We$_{exclusive}$ saw you$_{sg}$ in the forest.'

---

[8] The symbol '>' indicates that an XP argument outranks an YP argument in the referential/person hierarchy. Notice also that the label EA refers to the external argument of transitive verbs, whereas IA, to the internal arguments.

[9] Some dialects of Tenetehára are replacing *uru* 'I>you for the second person prefix *ne* 'tu', as follows:
       Standard Dialect
(i)   *uru-amutar   katu   ihe*
       1SG/2SG-love   a lot   I
       'I love you so much.'

       Non-Standard Dialect
(i)   *ne-Ø-amutar   katu   ihe*
       B2SG-REL-love   a lot   I
       'I love you so much.'

In short, the agglutinative morpheme *uru-* 'I>you' is being substituted for the dependent clitic *ne* 'you'. In this system, it is the second person singular that is higher than the first pronoun, since the verb receives only the morphology of the second person on the verbal template.

As the reader may conclude, the occurrence of the free sentence-final pronoun is needed to avoid ambiguity in identifying the person of the subject. Nonetheless, such a homonym does not occur when the referent of the object corresponds to a second person plural. In such cases, both first-person singular pronouns and first-person plural pronouns fuse with the second-person plural pronouns, resulting in the agglutinated forms: *apu* 'I>you_{plural}' and *urupu* 'we>you_{plural}'. The examples below illustrate the contexts where the prefixes are used.

(21)   *apu-exak*   *ka'a*   *r-upi*   *ihe*
       1SG/2PL-see   forest   OBL-in   I
       "I saw you_{(pl)} in the forest"

(22)   *urupu-exak*   *ka'a*   *r-upi*   *ure*
       1EXCL.2PL-see   forest   OBL-in   we
       "We_{exclusive} saw you_{(pl)} in the forest"

Another question the reader might ask is what grammatical constraint regulates the agreement system when both arguments exhibit the [-participant] feature. The next section aims to examine such contexts. As it will be shown, either the nominative prefix {u- ~ w- ~ o-} or the absolutive prefix {h- ~ i-} of third person may be triggered. The choice depends on pragmatic factors such as whether the subject is more prominent than the object or whether the object bears contrastive focus.

5. What happens when both arguments exihibit the [-participant] feature?

The analysis of the data has shown that, when both the subject and the object are realized as non-pronominal arguments, there are no agglutinative prefixes to encode the fact that both arguments are realized by means of the [-participant] feature. As such, it will be syntactic and pragmatic factors that will determine which core argument will control agreement on the verb stem in root and independent clauses. According to this view, agreement will be determined by the argument that is more salient in the discourse flow. In other words, the high referential and definite argument outranks the low referential and non-definite one. Following these lines of reasoning, when the A argument outranks the O argument in the nominal/referential hierarchy, it must be the A argument (=the transitive subject) that is encoded on the verb morphology by means of the nominative prefix {u- ~ w- ~ o-}, as examples (23a) and (24a) illustrate.

(23) a. A > O

     w$_i$-exak   *Tentehar$_i$*   *pira*   *a'e*   *wà*
     A3SG-see   Tenetehára   fish   3   PL
     'The Tenetehára people saw (some) fish.'

(24) a. A > O

     u$_i$-'u   *teko$_i$*   *pira*
     A3SG -eat   people   fish
     'The people ate (some) fish.'

However, when it is the object that carries a contrastive focus interpretation, the object is raised to a position before the verb and receives a quantified interpretation by means of the indefinite pronoun *upaw*[10] 'all'. In such contexts, we argue that the O object outranks the A subject in the nominal/referential hierarchy, so that it is usually dislocated to an A'-position. That the O argument actually outranks the A argument is evidenced by the fact that the A argument (= the transitive subject) cannot be encoded on the verb morphology in such contexts. Therefore, when the object is dislocated to the left-periphery of the sentence, as is shown in (23b) and (24b), it is coindexed on the verb stem by means of the absolutive prefix {h- ~ i-}. Moreover, notice that the base word order changes from VSO[11] to OSV. Compare the examples below:

(23) b. O > A

     upaw   *pira$_i$*   *Tentehar*   *h$_i$-exak*   *a'e* (*wà*)
     all   fish   Tenetehára   B3SG-see   3   PL
     "<u>All the fish</u>, the Tenetehára saw (them)."

(24) b. O > A

     upaw   *pira$_i$*   *teko*   *i$_i$-'u-n*
     all   fish   people   B3SG-eat-DISLOC
     'All the fish, the people ate (them).'

The data shown above, collected from speakers of the Tembé dialect of Tenetehára, contrast with the data taken from the Guajajara dialect;

---

[10] The lexeme *upaw* has grammaticalized as an indefinite pronoun. It is important to note that it originates from the intransitive verb *upaw* that can be translated as follows:

(i) *u-paw*
   A3SG-finish
   'Something has finished'.

[11] VSO order is the more frequent one in spontaneous discourse, although it may alternate with SVO, OVS and SOV. The latter occurs mainly in subordinate clauses.

principally, the focused object and the indefinite pronoun *upaw* in the Guajajara dialect may appear in scrambled positions. In such contexts, the object may be placed immediately before the verb, whereas the indefinite *upaw* 'all' is placed in the left periphery of the sentence, thereby producing the discontinuous word order [*Upaw* S O i-V(n)], as the example below illustrates:

(25) *upaw$_i$*   *Fábio$_j$*   *pira$_i$*   *i$_i$'u-n*   *a'e$_j$*   *ra'e*
      all$_i$ Fábio$_j$ fish$_i$ B3SG$_i$-eat-DISL   he$_j$ HPAST
      'All the fish, he, Fábio, ate.'

In another syntactic context, it is the focused object that is moved to the left periphery, whereas the indefinite *upaw* 'all' remains in a preadjacent verbal position, producing the word order [O S *upaw* i-V-n], as follows:

(26) *ne-r-a'yr$_i$*   *zàwàruhu$_j$*   *upaw$_i$*   *i$_i$-'iu-n*   *a'e$_j$*   *wà$_i$*   *y*
      B2SG-REL-siblings$_i$ jawar$_j$ all$_i$ B3SG$_i$-eat- DISL   he$_j$ PL$_i$ FF
      'All the siblins, the jaguar has eaten.'

[Guajajara (1988:10)]

Notice that, in both (25) and (26), the verb -'*u* 'eat' receives the prefix {i-} in order to encode that the object *pira* 'fish' bears focus interpretation. Nonetheless, the subject is not marked on the verb morphology, since it is less salient than the object in the pragmatic context. Moreover, the suffix {-n} is triggered in order to indicate that the verb is in the Indicative II mood. This suffix occurs on the verb morphology whenever the base word order of the constituents is changed from VSO to OSV/SOV, owing to the fact that the object carries focus interpretation.

In sum, based on data analysed thus far, one can conclude that Tenetehára exhibits two sets of third person prefix, depending on which of the [-participant] argument carries the focus interpretaion. In this regard, when it is the subject that is semantically more prominent, it is marked with the third person prefix {u- ~ w- ~ o-}, whereas, when it is the object that outranks the subject in the information structure hierarchy, the third person prefix {h- ~ i-} is used to refer to the focused object.

This system resembles the one Tupinambá exhibits regarding the strategy of encoding [+/-focus] feature of the core arguments. As such, I will claim that the choice of the person φ-feature on the verb morphology is sensitive to this semantic difference. Rodrigues (1990), for example, shows that in Tupinambá verbal morphology, the person marker {o-} is used when

third person participant in subject function is in focus and when 'there is no contrast between the speaker and the hearer'. As a consequence, the prefix {o-} encodes the following bundle of φ-features {(you, I and (he)$^{+focus}$}. It can refer to a third person subject when this argument is in focus, as follows:

(27) *Kunumi^{+f}* *pira^{-f}* *o^{+f}-y-pisik*
      the boy   fish   3^{+f}-rel-catch
      'The boy caught a fish.'

(Rodrigues, 1990:394)

Moreover, there are other contexts in which this prefix may refer to a first plural subject '*we all*', as follows:

(28) *asé$^{+f}$* *pirá* *o^{+f}-y- pisik*
      We.all$_i$ fish   123$_i$-REL-catch
      'We all caught fish.'

Based on this semantic-pragmatic distinctions, Rodrigues (1990:402) concludes 'the verbal person marker o- means that 3rd person is in focus and that there is no contrast between the speaker and the hearer; that is to say, it means ((you, I, and he^{+focus}} as well as { he^{+focus} }.'

In addition, Rodrigues notes that the prefix {ya-} is used to indicate that the third person participant in subject function is out of focus and there is no contrast between the speaker and the hearer. In such context, one may conclude that the object is more prominent than the subject in the discourse flow and is, then, the constituent that displays the semantic interpretation of contrastive focus, as follows:

(29) *Pedro$_i$$^{-focus}$* *moya^{+focus}* *ya$_i$-Ø-yuka*
      Pedro$_i$ snake   3$_i$$^{-focus}$-kill
      'Pedro killed a snake.' (='It was the snake that Pedro killed')

(Rodrigues, 1990:397)

It is important to highlight that this prefix as used in (29) refers back to the subject *Pedro* who is out of focus, in a context where the object bears the focus interpretation. However, in (30), the prefix {*ya-*} may refer to 'you and I', when the hearer is included in the conversation, as follows:

(30) *pira* *ya-y-pisik*
      fish   12^{+focus}-catch
      'We$_{inclusive}$ caught some fish.'

This grammatical distribution led Rodrigues (1990) to conclude that the prefix {*ya-*}[12] presents the following feature geometry {(you and I)[+focus] and he[-focus]}. In sum, based on these grammatical distributions, I will argue that both Tenetehára and Tupinambá display the following sets of prefixes that refer to the core argument of a transitive verb that displays [+/-focus] interpretation.

Table 4: The semantic-pragmatic denotation of the [-participant] prefixes

	Tupinambá		Tenetehára	
	{ya-}	{o-}	u- ~ w-~ o-	h- ~ i-
Subject	[-focus]	[+focus]	[+focus]	[-focus]
Object	[+focus]	-focus	[-focus]	[+focus]

The following section will address the distribution of the free pronouns that are placed in sentence-final position both in transitive and intransitive sentence. The proposal that will be advocated is that these pronouns occupy a specific syntactic slot in sentence-final position and have a complementary distribution when compared with full DPs. More to the point, the free pronouns cannot be merged into the internal syntactic positions of transitive and intransitive predicates, whereas full DPs may do so.

6. The syntax of sentence-final personal pronouns

In addition to the sets of person markers described in the previous sections, there is a further set that is systematically placed in sentence-final position.[13] This set is composed of free personal pronouns that can only refer back to arguments in subject position of transitive and intransitive verbs and are given in Table 5.

Table 5: Free sentence-final personal pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1st person	*ihe*	*ure*exclusive *zane*inclusive
2nd person	*ne*	*pe*
3rd person	*a'e*	*a'e wà*

---

[12] Rodrigues (1990:402) states that '*Analogously, ya- means that 3rd person is out of focus and that there is no contrast between the speaker and the hearer; it means ((you and I)+focus and he-focus).*'

[13] For more details on the syntactic properties of these pronouns I refer the reader to Duarte's (2025) analysis in which a formal approach is adopted.

The empirical examples below show that the pronouns must appear in sentence-final position to encode the (A) subjects. Their occurrence in this slot is not ranked according to the person/referential hierarchy, but has the role of coindexing the person φ-feature of the (A) subject. Compare the examples below.

Agreement when the A subject carries the highest semantic features

(31) a_i-àro   Pet ihe_i
      A1SG-wait   Peter   I
      'I wait for Peter.'

(32) re_i-àro   Pet ne_i
      A2SG -wait   Peter   you
      'You wait for Peter.'

(33) xi_i-àro   Pet $zane_i$
      A12-wait   Peter   we
      'We wait for Peter.'

(34) uru_i-àro   Pet ure_i
      A13 -wait   Peter   we
      'We wait for Peter.'

(35) pe_i-àro   Pet pe_i
      A2PL -wait   Peter   you
      'You wait for Peter.'

(36) w_i-àro   Tenetehára   Pet $a'e_i$
      A3SG-wait   Tenetehára   Peter   he
      'He, the Tenetehára, waits for Peter.'

For encoding the object, the clitics of Set B are used in preadjacent verb position, whereas the free personal pronoun a'e '*he*' must be placed at the sentence-final position, as is shown in these examples that contain both:

Agreement when the object carries the [+participant] features

(37) he-r-àro Pet_i $a'e_i$
      B1SG-REL-wait   Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for me.'

(38) *ne-r-àro*   *Pet$_i$*   *a'e$_i$*
      B2SG -REL-wait Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for you.'

(39) *zane-r-àro*   *Pet$_i$*   *a'e$_i$*
      B12- REL-wait   Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for us.'

(40) *ure-r-àro*   *Pet$_i$*   *a'e$_i$*
      B13- REL-wait   Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for us.'

(41) *pe-n-àro*   *Pet$_i$*   *a'e$_i$*
      B2PL- REL-wait Peter   he
      'He, Peter, waits for you$_{plural}$.'

Based on these data, it may be concluded that the Tenetehára grammar provides us with the paradigm of free personal pronouns given in Table 5. It is important to note that, while the object pronouns of Set B can be realized as dependent pronouns, appearing in a preadjacent verb position, in examples (37-41), the subject in (A) function can be coindexed by means of both the nominative prefixes and the free sentence-final pronouns in examples (31-36).

Evidence that the free pronouns really occupy a syntactic position at final sentence position to refer only to subjects and not to objects come from the examples below in which the pronoun cannot refer back to object. As such, a free pronoun in clause-final position referring to the object cannot occur, since these pronouns may only encode the φ-person feature of the subject. This constraint becomes clear by considering the ungrammaticality of the sentences below:

(42) O > A

  a. *awa*   **he$_i$*-r-àro-*putar*   *ihe$_i$*
      man   B1SG.REL-wait-want   I
      'The man will wait for me.'

  b. **ne$_i$*-r-exak   *rakwez*   *kwarer ka'a r-upi ne$_i$ ri'i*
      B2SG-REL-see NDPAST.ATTESTED boy   forest REL-in you PHPAST
      'The boy certainly saw you in the forest.'

In stative intransitive predicates, it is observed that the free pronouns can indeed co-occur with the co-referent clitic pronouns of set B, a situation that brings more evidence that they are really merged in a specific syntactic position at final-sentence position to refer only to subject arguments either in (A) or (S) function, as follows:

(43) he_i-Ø-katu ihe_i no
        B1SG-REL-good   I   also
        'I am also fine.'

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that there is only one syntactic slot in which the free pronouns can be appear. In this sense, if we drop the subject in the sentence below, the free pronoun may occur at sentence final position, but, in this context, this pronoun can refer only to the person of the subject. Compare the examples in (44a-b).

(44a) w_i-enu $Maria_i$ u_i-men $a'e_i$ kury
        A3SG-hear   Mary   her-husband   she   now
        '(She) Mary hears her husband now.'

(44b) w_i-enu pro_i u_i-men $a'e_i$ kury
        A3SG-hear   her-husband   she   now
        'She hears her husband now.'

These examples contrast with (45), wherein the object cannot be co-referenced by the free pronoun, as is indicated by the ungrammatical indices. Therefore, the object referential content is given by the context of the immediate conversation produced by the speakers, since it is realized by a null pronoun and cannot be coindexed by the free pronoun *a'e*, as follows:

(45)   w-enu $Maria_i$ pro_j $a'e_{i/*j}$ kury
        A3SG-hear   Mary   she/*he   now
        '(She) Mary hears hears him (= her husband) now'

More evidence in favour of this analysis comes from contexts in which both arguments can be dropped, i.e., in which they have been given in a previous discourse. In such contexts, nonetheless, the free personal pronoun *a'e* 'she' must obligatorily encode the [-participant] person feature of the subject and not the [-participant] person feature of the object. Compare the indices in the example below:

(46) w_i-*enu*   *pro$_{(subject)i}$* *pro$_{(object)j}$* $a'e_{i/*j}$ *kury*
      A3SG-hear   she/*him   now
      'She hears him (= her husband) now.'

As the indices above reveal, the free pronoun *a'e* can be coindexed only with the null pronoun in subject position, but not with the one in object position. More evidence in favour of this proposal comes from the restriction indicated below in which the two arguments cannot both be substituted by the free pronoun *a'e* 's/he', with one for the subject and another for the object, as follows:

(47) *w_i-*enu*   *pro$_{(subject)i}$* *pro$_{(object)j}$* $a'e_i$ *a'e*
      A3SG-hear   she   him
      'She hears him now.'

Notice that the ungrammaticality of the sentence above is due to the fact that there is just one syntactic slot per sentence for the free pronoun to occur. Therefore, two free pronouns *a'e* cannot co-occur at sentence-final position, with one referring back to the subject and another, to the object. The same restriction also holds in contexts in which the person φ-features of the arguments differ. In this sense, the ungrammaticality of the sentence below is due to the fact that the direct object cannot be referred by the free pronoun *ure* 'we' that appears after the free pronoun *a'e* 'he' at the end of the sentence. Compare the examples below:

(48a) *ure*-*r*-*àro*   *Pet$_i$* $a'e_i$
       13$_{exclusive}$- REL-wait   Peter   he
       'He, Peter, waits for us.'

(48b) **ure$_j$*-*r*-*àro*   *Pet$_i$* $a'e_i$ *ure$_j$*
       13$_{exclusive}$-REL-wait   Peter   he   we
       'He, Peter, waits for us.'

In sum, the data analysed above clearly demonstrates that the free pronoun is never used for encoding the object (O), but only the (S) or (A) subjects of intransitive and transitive verbs respectively. In this line of reasoning, two free pronouns cannot appear in sequence in sentence-final position, insofar as there is just one syntactic slot to host one of them. Consequently, these data confirm our working hypothesis that (i) there is just one syntactic slot per sentence to merge the free pronouns; (ii) this

slot corresponds to a sentence-final position and (iii) the free pronouns that occupy this position can only encode the person φ-feature of the subject.

7. Final remarks

We have shown that agreement in Tenetehára is regulated by the inverse system and by the person hierarchy. In this subsystem, arguments that carry the features [+participant, +/-speaker] systematically control the argument indices that are triggered on the verb stem, regardless of whether these arguments are in subject or object position.

However, when both the external and internal arguments exhibit the same set of semantic features [+participant, +/-speaker], a set of [+participant, +speaker, +hearer] prefixes is triggered. Furthermore, when both the subject and the object carry the [-participant] feature, syntactic and pragmatic constraints will regulate which argument markers will be triggered on the verb stem. As to the free pronouns, I have proposed here that they can only be coindexed with subject, since they do not encode the [-participant] feature of the object nor with the indirect object. In sum, their position is systematically at the end of the sentence.

Bibliography

Aissen, Judith. 2003. Differential object marking: Iconicity vs. economy. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 21:435-483.

Bendor-Samuel, David. 1972. *Hierarchical structures in Guajajára*. Oklahoma: Norman University of Oklahoma Press.

Cabral, Ana Suely Arruda Câmara & Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. 2002. Revendo a classificação interna da família tupí-guaraní. In Ana Suely Arruda Câmara Cabral & Aryon dall'Igna Rodrigues (eds.), *Línguas indígenas brasileiras: Fonologia, gramática e história* (Atas do I Encontro Internacional do Grupo de Trabalho sobre Línguas Indígenas da ANPOLL), **(**Vol 1, pp. 327-337). Belém: EDUFPA.

Cabral, Ana Suely Arruda Câmara & Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. Tupían. 2012. In Lyle Campbel and Verónica Grondona (eds.), *The indigenous languages of South America: a comprehensive guide*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Camargos, Quesler Fagundes. 2017a*. Aplicativização, causativização e nominalização: Uma análise unificada de estruturas argumentais em Tenetehára-Guajajára (família Tupí-Guaraní)*. Doctoral Dissertation. Belo Horizonte: Federal University of Minas Gerais.

Camargos, Quesler Fagundes. 2017b. Exploring agreement from the IA to the EA in the Tenetehára language. *Revista Diadorim* 19: 325-342.

Comrie, Bernard. 1981. *Language universals and linguistic typology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Croft, William. Agreement vs. Case marking and direct objects. 1988. In Michael Barlow & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *Agreement in natural language: Approaches, theories, descriptions*, (pp. 159-179). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Croft, William. 1990. *Typology and Universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dietrich, W. 2010. O tronco tupi e as suas famílias de línguas. In Wolf Dietrich & Volker Noll (eds.), *O português e o tupi do Brasil*, (pp. 9-25). São Paulo: Editora Contexto.

Dixon, Robert M. W. 1979. Ergativity. *Language* 55(1), 59-138.

Dixon, Robert M. W. 1994. *Ergativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Duarte, Fábio Bonfim. 2007. *Estudos de morfossintaxe Tenetehára*. Belo Horizonte: Editora da Fale UFMG.

Duarte, Fábio Bonfim. 2012. Tenetehára: A predicate fronting language. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 57(3), 359-386.

Duarte, Fábio Bonfim. 2018. The split-S system and the source of the absolutive case in Tenetehára. *Revista Linguística* 13(2), 252-302.

Duarte, Fábio Bonfim. 2025. *Tenetehára Syntax: an anti-symmetric approach*. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Guajajara, Santinho Gomes. 1988. Tapixi imume'u haw a'e kury. In *Estórias Indígenas escritas por autores Guajajára* (*Ma'e mume'u haw Tenetehar wanemimue'u*). Belém: Instituto Linguístico de Verão (Summer Institute of Linguistics).

Givón, Talmy. 1976. Topic, pronoun and grammatical agreement. In Charles Li (ed.), *Subject and topic*, (pp. 151-188). New York: Academic Press.

Harley, Heidi & Ritter, Elizabeth. 2002. "Person and number in pronouns: A feature-geometric analysis". Language 78, pp. 482-526.

Harrison, Carl. 1986. Verb prominence, verb initialness, ergativity, and typological disharmony in Guajajára. In Desmond C. Derbyshire & Geoffrey K. Pullum (eds.), *Handbook of Amazonian languages*, (pp. 407-439). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Payne, Doris. 1994. The Tupí-Guaraní inverse. In Barbara Fox & Paul Hopper (eds.), *Voice: Form and function*, (pp. 313-340). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. 1953. Morfologia do verbo tupi. *Letras* 1:121-152.

Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. 1985. Relações internas na família linguística Tupi-Guarani. *Revista de Antropologia* 27/28:33-53.

Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. 1986. *Línguas brasileiras: para o conhecimento das línguas indígenas*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola.

Rodrigues, Aryon D. 1990. You and I = Neither you nor I: The personal system of Tupinambá. In Doris L. Payne (ed.), Amazonian linguistics. Studies in Lowland South American Languages, (pp. 393-405). University of Texas Press.

Seki, Lucy. 1990. Kamaiurá (Tupí-Guaraní) as an active-stative language. In Doris L. Payne (ed.), *Amazonian linguistics: studies in lowland South American languages*, (pp. 367-391). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Seki, Lucy. 2000. *Gramática do Kamaiurá: Língua Tupí-Guaraní do Alto Xingu*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.

Silverstein, Michael. 1976. Hierarchy of features and ergativity. In R. M. W. Dixon (ed.), *Grammatical categories in Australian languages*, (pp. 112-171). Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.