

Referring to persons and groups in Gorum conversation

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This talk presents preliminary findings of the study of person reference and backchannels in Gorum. It describes grammatical phenomena relevant to establishing reference and analysis patterns of reference in interaction.

Reference is a situated interactional endeavour and the establishment of person and group reference involves a situated, socially negotiated representation of social structure. Speakers draw from grammatical and lexical as well as cultural and social resources to achieve reference (cf. for example Sacks & Schegloff 1979; Stivers, Enfield & Levinson 2007).

Reference to individuals requires identification of the intended referent and speakers have a wide range of terms – proper names, kinship terms, and descriptions, among others – at their disposal to identify the intended referent. The choice of terms is informed by the requirements and thus can highlight the situational relevance of a particular property or social category.

Reference to groups can be particularly revealing about local concepts of social structure. As an example, associative plurals draw heavily from cultural and social knowledge to identify the intended group of individuals. The situation is made even more complex by the fact that associatives plurals are constructionally identical to normal nominal plurals. This does not pose a particularly big problem with proper names such as *Liti* in (1). Here, the very nature of semantics of proper names suggests an associative plural meaning. However, to identify *amku'j=niη=gi* (wife=1sPOSS=PL) in (2) as an associative plural in a society where polygyny is common requires situational knowledge. While determining the reference of these associative plurals requires considerable cultural and social knowledge beyond simple situational information.

(1) *liti=n=gi*

Liti(PN)=DEF=PL

'Liti and so'

(2) *no'dgi*

3pDIR.PRO

ɖuku-r-εj

be-MID:PST-3pS

uj-j-εj

go-MID:PST-3pS

amku'j=niη=gi

wife=1sPOSS=PL

'My wife and so ended up staying.'

Gorum is an endangered (moribund) Munda language and conversations in Gorum are increasingly rare. This talk will present data from natural conversation and describe the grammatical constructions as well as conversational patterns crucial in referring to persons or groups.

The talk will address the syntax of proper names as well as definiteness and associative plural constructions. Furthermore, conversational phenomena such as backchannels will be discussed.

References

Sacks, Harvey and Emanuel A. Schegloff (1979) "Two Preferences in the Organization of Reference to Persons in Conversation and Their Interaction." In G. Psathas (ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*. New York: Irvington. p. 5-21.

Stivers, T., Enfield, N. J., & Levinson, S. C. (2007). "Person reference in interaction." In N. J. Enfield, & T. Stivers (eds.), *Person reference in interaction: Linguistic, cultural, and social perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 1-20.