On the syntactic status of reported discourse in Kafire (Senufo, Côte d'Ivoire)

Abstract

The study of reported speech has been the interest of numerous fields, namely stylistics, philosophy of language and linguistics. In the latter, one of the issues addressed is the (syntactic) status of reported discourse. Many studies support the idea that reported discourse is comparable to a nominal constituent. It is then a Noun Phrase (Martin Vigo 2012: 21) or is among the noun clauses , i.e., subordinate clauses that can occupy the same functions as noun phrases (Haumann 2011: 9). From this perspective, reported discourse is considered to be a complement of the speech verb as would be a direct nominal object (Noonan 1985).

However, Munro (1982) crosslinguistic study on 'say' verbs reveals that the transitivity of those verbs is problematic. They 'are often less than perfectly transitive' and 'the quotations they introduce are often very different from normal object or object clauses' (Munro 1982: 302).

Given the non established transitive status of 'say' verbs and the peculiarity of reported speech in relation to the other syntactic categories, what is the (syntactic) status of reported discourse ?

In this study, I am going to address that issue in Kafire, a Senufo language spoken in Côte d'Ivoire. I am going to show that reported discourse does not behave like a typical direct nominal object, hence it is not comparable to that. Moreover, it patterns in many respects with some categories in the language, especially those which are sometimes included among the marginal, non propositional and expressive categories. These are interjections, ideophones, onomatopoeia, gesture representations. I will show that Kafire is not the only language for which we find such a similarity between such categories. I will then suggest to include all of them in a general syntactico-functional class.

References

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