The philological interpretation of small corpora in extinct languages, illustrated by relative clause data from Lule (Argentine Chaco)

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The philological interpretation of small corpora in extinct languages, illustrated by relative clause data from Lule (Argentine Chaco)*

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Keywords: Lule-Vilela, philology, small corpora, Gran Chaco, Antonio Machoni or Maccioni, Jesuits, catechism, relative clauses.

1. Introduction

Lule was spoken by a semi-nomadic people who lived in the Gran Chaco between the Pilcomayo river and the Andean foothills of northwestern Argentina. It is an extinct language, which was also spoken by other groups of the present-day Argentine provinces of Tucumán and Santiago del Estero. Virtually all of our documentation of Lule comes from the Sardinian Jesuit missionary Antonio Maccioni (1688-1753) in his Arte y vocabulario de la lengua lule y tonocoté, published under the name Machoni in Madrid in 1732. Mentions of Lule disappear from the historical record after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1776. We may surmise that the Lule language lost its last speakers sometime in the course of the early 19th century.

2. Genetic affiliation and philological challenges

The Lule language is generally considered to be genetically related to the Vilela language, forming a Lule-Vilela family, but it remains possible that the lexical similarities are due to contact rather than to shared ancestry. The language described in Machoni (1732) provides interesting challenges for the study of linguistic diversity in the Chaco area, because it is typologically rather distinct from the other known Chaco languages as well as from neighboring Andean languages, and because we have to rely almost entirely on Maccioni’s examples and linguistic abilities in trying to reconstruct its grammar in modern terms. The total corpus is estimated at 602 lines of examples or text in Machoni’s (1732) grammar and text sections; the dictionary section of Machoni (1732) contains about 2,550 lexemes. The retranscription and morphological analysis in this paper is based on the comprehensive grammar of Lule which is being written by Raoul Zamponi and myself.

*An earlier versión of this paper was read by de Reuse and Raoul Zamponi at the Diversity Linguistics Conference at the Max Planck Institute For Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, on May 2nd, 2015. I thank my collaborator Raoul Zamponi for his work on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful for comments by Willem Adelaar, Pier Marco Bertinetto, Rodolfo Cerrón-Palomino, Swintha Danielsen, Matthew Dryer, Claude Hagège, Danny Law, Pieter Muysken, Zachary O’Hagan, and Roberto Zariquiey.
3. Relative clause formation in Machoni’s (1732) grammar section

3.1. Introduction

There are 18 examples that can be interpreted as relative clauses in Machoni’s (1732) grammar section, so it is possible to present the whole corpus of examples here. Each example is presented in five lines, so no information is lost: the first line is the sentence in the original spelling, the second line is Maccioni’s translation or gloss in Spanish (with archaic spellings normalized to modern Spanish practice), the third line is a phonemic spelling with morpheme and clitic boundaries indicated, the fourth line is the word by word and morphological analysis, and the fifth line is a fairly literal translation into English. On that line, there is also a number in parentheses, which is the page number in Machoni’s (1732) grammar section. One can distinguish four types of relative clause formation strategies, discussed in sections 3.2 through 3.5.

3.2. The agent nominalizer -ton

One type of construction involves the agent nominalizer -ton, as in examples (1) through (8):

(1) pelè in lè otiqueyuton, vecinèp
    el indio que trabajó ayer murió
    pele inle wotikeyu-ton wetsi-[i] ne-p
    man yesterday work-NMLZ die-[THEM] P.REC.VIS-3sSBJ
    ‘the man who worked yesterday died’ (56)

(2) pelè in lè otiqueyuton, vyetip
    el indio que trabajó ayer murió
    pele inle wotikeyu-ton uyê-ti-p
    man yesterday work-NMLZ NEG-do-3sSBJ
    ‘the man who worked yesterday died (lit. was no more)’ (56)

(3) pelè in lè otiqueyuton, vecip
    el indio que trabajó ayer murió
    pele inle wotikeyu-ton wetsi-p
    man yesterday work-NMLZ die-3sSBJ
    ‘the man who worked yesterday is dead’ (56)

(4) ecitòn zotà Dios meticant
    Dios llevará al Cielo al que fuere bueno
    etsi-ton tso=ta Dios metika-n-t
    be.good-NMLZ heaven=LOC God take-FUT-3SBJ

1 Abbreviations used follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the addition of: ANA ‘anaphoric’; COLL ‘collective’; P.REC.VIS ‘recent visual past’; P.REM ‘remote past’; PRO ‘independent pronoun’; •RED ‘reduplicative process, meaning uncertain’, and THEM ‘thematic’ (suffixed to imperatives and to the V1 of a serial verb construction). Material in square brackets are my philological interpretations or additions.
‘God will take the one who is good to heaven’ (56)

(5) yuisinis yetòn Petro cumuepinèp
he oído al que dice, o dijo que Pedro se casó
iwis-i ni-s ye-ton Petro kumue-p-ne-p
‘I heard the one who says/said that Peter got married’ (56)

(6) yuisinis yetòn Petro cumuep
he oído al que dice, o dijo que Pedro se casó
iwis-i ni-s ye-ton Petro kumue-p
‘I heard the one who says/said that Peter is getting married’ (56)

(7) quys yepnicsintòn
yo tengo la obligación de enseñar
kis yepniks-in-ton
1sPRO teach-FUT-NMLZ
‘I am one who will teach’ (56)

(8) pelè quis tacevinstòn tià vyè
el indio que tengo de castigar no está aquí
pele kis tak-tseu-in-s-ton tia uye
man 1sPRO INS-punish-FUT-1sSBJ-NMLZ here NEG
‘the man I will punish is not here’ (64)

3.3. The agent nominalizer -ton and the anaphoric and resumptive pronoun mima
Another type of construction involves the agent nominalizer -ton, as well as the anaphoric and resumptive pronoun mima, as in example (9). There is only one example of this construction in the corpus. I will deal with the clause translated as ‘what God commands’ in section 4.3., so let us ignore it for now.

(9) Dios amaicitòn mimà tit vsa Dios nequequèsip
el que ama a Dios guarda sus mandamientos o lo que Dios manda
Dios amaitsi-ton mima tit-usa Dios ne-kekes-p
God love-NMLZ ANA.DIST do-3sSBJ what God INS-command-3sSBJ
‘the one who loves God, that one observes what God commands’ (64)

3.4. The anaphoric and resumptive pronoun mima only
Another type involves no nominalization, but only the anaphoric and resumptive pronoun mima, as in examples (10) through (15). The pronoun mima can be optional, as in examples (10) and (11).

(10) pelè Dios alapip, zotà cant, o mimà zotà caànt
el hombre que Dios escogió, irá al Cielo
pele Dios alap-ip (mima) tso=ta ka-n-t
man God choose-3sSBJ (ANA.DIST) heaven=LOC go-FUT-3sSBJ
‘the man God chooses, (that one) will go to heaven’ (64)

(11) pelè Dios alapinèp, zotà cant, o mimà zotà caànt
el hombre que Dios escogió, irá al Cielo
pele Dios alap-i ne-p (mima) tso=ta
man God choose-THEM P.REC.VIS-3SSBJ (ANA.DIST) heaven=LOC
ka-n-t
go-FUT-3SSBJ
‘the man God chose, (that one) will go to heaven’ (64)

(12) tanta quis cayç mimà poòp
el pan que estoy comiendo o que como, este es blanco
tanta kis kai-ts mima p’o-p
bread 1sPRO eat-1SSBJ ANA.DIST be.white-3SSBJ
‘the bread I am eating, that one is white’ (65)

(13) talà quis ceinicè, mimà palap
el vestido que me diste es nuevo
tala kis tse-i ni-tse mima palʔa-p
dress 1sPRO give-THEM P.REC.VIS-2SSBJ ANA.DIST be.new-3SSBJ
‘the dress you gave me, that one is new’ (65)

(14) talà quis ceinicè, mimà palatòn
el vestido que me diste es nuevo
tala kis tse-i ni-tse mima palʔa-ʔa-ton
dress 1sPRO give-THEM P.REC.VIS-2SSBJ ANA.DIST be.new-NMLZ
‘the dress you gave me, that one is a new one’ (65)

(15) saycç meticapssè, mimà saycsnis vyè
la carta que has de llevar o llevarás aun no está escrita
s-aiks-∅ metika-p-tse mima s-aiks[-i]
INS-write-NMLZ carry-FUT-2SSBJ ANA.DIST INS-write[-THEM]
ni-s uye
P.REC.VIS-1SSBJ NEG
‘the letter you will carry, that one I have not written’ (65)

3.5. An unclear case: no relativization marking at all, or possession
Finally, the grammar section contains three potential examples (16-18) of null head relativization without either the agent nominalizer -ton, nor the resumptive pronoun mima. But the verbs following Dios could conceivably be analyzed as possessed nouns, as in the
Latin model, as shown in (17). However, only \textit{o}lom- ‘word’ is attested elsewhere as a noun.

(16) \textit{Dios yelem ti}
\textit{fac secundum legem Dei (Latin), haz lo que Dios dice o manda}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
 Dios & yelem[-p] & t[i][-i] \\
 God & command[-3sSBJ] & do[-THEM] \\
\end{tabular}

‘do what God commands!’ (78)

(17) \textit{Dios olómp ti}
\textit{fac secundum legem Dei (Latin), haz lo que Dios dice o manda}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
 Dios & oлом-p & t[i][-i] \\
 God & speak-3sSBJ & do[-THEM] \\
\end{tabular}

(alternatively: \textit{o}lom-p)

‘do what God says!’ (78)

(18) \textit{Dios nequequesp ti}
\textit{fac secundum legem Dei (Latin), haz lo que Dios dice o manda}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
 Dios & ne-kekes-p & t[i][-i] \\
 God & INS-command-3sSBJ & do[-THEM] \\
\end{tabular}

‘do what God commands!’ (78)

3.6. Discussion

The following is a table of morphosyntactic features of the 18 examples presented so far:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example(s):</th>
<th>Overt head sentence-initially:</th>
<th>Head is subject of the main clause:</th>
<th>NP position relativized:</th>
<th>Strategy:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1-3, 7)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>NMLZ on verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4-6)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>NMLZ on verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>NMLZ on verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>NMLZ on verb AND mima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10-11)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>mima OR no marking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12-14)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>mima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>mima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16-18)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>no marking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tentative conclusions regarding these 18 examples are the following. I suggest that the nominalizer is the preferred strategy when the NP position relativized is Subject. Example (8) is the only counterexample to this, but then example (8) is suspicious in any case, because it is an example with the nominalizer following a verb inflected for subject person, so it is hard to know what to make of this. If sentence (8) actually contained a passive, and could be translated as ‘the man who will be punished by me…’, it would no
longer be a counterexample, but then of course I would have to argue that the 1st person subject inflection on ‘punish’ is actually something else.

I also suggest that *mima* is the preferred strategy when the NP position relativized is Object, unless, as shown in example (9), there is no overt head sentence-initially and the head is the subject of the main clause, in which case the nominalizer is also present. It is possible that the resumptive pronoun strategy is due to Spanish influence, as is the case with the resumptive demonstrative pronoun *chay* in Quechua relativization (R. Cerrón-Palomino, p.c.).

I will not further comment on the ‘no marking’ strategy, illustrated by (16-18) alone, because these three sentences are close variants of each other, clearly considered just one example by Maccioni, and they might not be cases of relativization at all. Let us note for now that sentence (18) bears a similarity to part of sentence (9).

4. Relative clause formation in Machoni’s (1732) texts section

4.1. Introduction

I counted 33 sentences that can be interpreted as containing relative clauses in Machoni’s (1732) texts section. Only a few examples will be provided here, as the texts are quite repetitive. The texts, which are separately paginated, are all parts of 18th century Catholic Church doctrine, including prayers, and two catechisms. Except for the second catechism, no Spanish translation is given by Maccioni, which shows that he expected the Jesuits who were to use his book to be familiar with the texts. So in the examples below, I do not provide a Spanish gloss.

4.2. Examples of relative clause formation in Machoni’s (1732) texts section

The texts section shows, overwhelmingly, the relative clause strategy with the agent nominalizer -to(n), (examples 19-21) and also the strategy with no marking at all (examples 22-23), but significantly, I think, no example of the resumptive pronoun *mima* at all.

(19) *Dios ué ayopép Reyna Umuè auei titó,*

God 2sPRO greet-FUT-3sSBJ Queen Mother compassion have-NMLZ

‘May God greet you, Queen (and) Mother who has compassion’

(Salve Regina prayer)

(20) *Yaupecélé yauptó uyáp cepssé.*

village-2sPOSS=LOC walk-3sSBJ-NMLZ house-3sPOSS give-FUT-2sSBJ

‘you give his house (to) the traveller (lit. one who walks to your village)’

(Works of Mercy)

(21) *Uaton, ueciton tayule Christianospan Dios uasipssé.*

live- NMLZ die- NMLZ BEN Christians-COLL God
waʔas-ip-tse
pray-FUT-2sSBJ
‘you will pray to God for Christians who are living (and) who are dead’
(Works of Mercy)

(22) lopsauy eycupticén, mequequetó uá ticazpan lopsáucén:
lopsawi[-j] eikupti-tsen meke[•ke]-to wa
forgive[-THEM] sin-1pPOSS be.like[•RED]-NMLZ 1pPRO
tik-as-pan lopsawi-tsen
INS-get.angry-3pSBJ forgive-1pSBJ
‘forgive our sins as we forgive those who offend us (lit. make us angry)’ (Lord’s Prayer)

(23) Tamócx Dios Pé, zó, há tiatép;
takmoks-ts Dios Pe tso ?a tif-[i] ate-p
believe-1sSBJ God Father heaven earth make[-THEM] P.REM-3sSBJ
‘I believe in God the Father, who made heaven (and) earth’ (Credo)

But in addition, there is quite a common construction not discussed in the grammar, with the pronoun usa ‘what’ i.e. ‘that which’, which in the grammar occurs only once, in sentence (9) above. Examples in the texts are quite common, and include (24-25):

(24) Usa Christiano tamocxynt ysyauomp locuép
usa Christiano takmoks-in-t is yawon-p lokwe-p
what Christian believe-FUT-3sSBJ hand be.all-3sSBJ be.four-3sSBJ
‘the things that the Christian will believe (are) fourteen (lit. all hands and four)’
(Articles of the Faith)

(25) Pelé eciptó zó cent ussiqué, usá Dios nequequesp tyatepán;
pele etsi-p-to tso tse-n-t
man be.good-3sSBJ-NMLZ heaven give-FUT-3sSBJ

usike usa Dios
because what God

ne-kekes-p ti[-i] ate-pan
INS-command-3sSBJ do[-THEM] P.REM-3pSBJ
‘He will give heaven (to) the man who is good, because they have done what
God commands’ (Articles of the Faith)

4.3. Discussion
What one notices in the texts section, is more unusual syntax, possibly calqued on Spanish or maybe on Latin. For example, in (21), the benefactive postposition taʔyule ‘for’, precedes Christianos, although everywhere else, Lule postpositions follow their object. But it is also possible that taʔyule heads the preceding nominalized verbs wato[to]/n and wetsiton, thus meaning ‘for the living and the dead’, in which case the placement of Christianospan is odd. Also, since the language tends to be SOV in basic constituent order, the initial ‘I believe’ in example (23), must follow the word order of the Latin ‘credo’.

Another unusual thing, occurring often in the texts, is the nominalizer following an inflected verb, as in yaʔu-p-to in example (20) and etsi-p-to in example (25). This also occurs in the grammar, as shown in example (8), but example (8) is the only occurrence in the grammar.

It is also suspicious that there are no examples of the resumptive pronoun mima in the texts. This is presumably because a resumptive pronoun sounds clumsy or colloquial in Spanish (and in Latin). Look again at examples (10-15). It is possible that Maccioni did not use mima in the texts to improve on their style. After all, these are religious texts, and should not be so colloquial.

Finally, it is also suspicious that there is only one example of usa ‘what, that which’ in the grammar (example 9), although this usa is very common in the texts; two examples are (24) and (25). It is also instructive to compare usa Dios nekekesp ti ‘do what God commands’ in example (25), with Dios nekekesp ti ‘do what God commands’, which is example (18) from the grammar section. So one wonders if this usa is really necessary. I suggest that this usa is a calque on Spanish ‘lo que’. In the grammar, usa is simply the interrogative pronoun ‘what?’. I suggest, then, that the portion usa Dios nekekesp in example (9), is taken out of the texts, although it is preceded by a portion containing mima, which sounds more colloquial. Example (9) is interesting then, as it shows characteristics of a more natural syntax evidenced in the grammar, as well as a characteristic of the more stilted syntax found in the texts.

In general, the syntax (and maybe the morphology) of Machoni’s (1732) religious texts is more stilted and somewhat less reliable than the examples in the grammar, presumably because of a requirement that religious texts must follow the formal Spanish (or Latin) models closely.

5. Conclusions

I suggest that it is possible to draw tentative conclusions about Lule relative clauses from this very small corpus, following the terminology of WALS (Comrie and Kuteva 2013a, b), and ordering them from the most genuine strategy (i.e. likely to be original Lule) to the least genuine strategy (i.e. likely to be entirely calqued on Spanish or Latin). The most genuine strategy for relative clause formation in Lule is likely to be the gap strategy, normally with a nominalizer at the end of the clause. Maybe less genuine is the non-reduction strategy, in the guise of the paratactic relative clause, with a resumptive pronoun, which might well be from Spanish colloquial influence. Least genuine are the relative clauses with the head usa, since these only occur in the texts, and are quite likely the result of a calque on Spanish.
Let me conclude further with some observations regarding the validity of philological interpretations of early missionary writings of extinct languages. Needless to say, the model of Latin grammar is always prevalent among the early missionaries, but beyond that, one can detect innovative ideas, indigenous voices, and, crucially for this paper, places where the missionary accurately observed actual language, and places where he thought it was better to calque the language on Spanish (or Latin) models. I suggested that this happened in the Lule texts, but less so in the Lule grammar section. The moral of all this is, of course, that when studying missionary grammars, we need to make careful comparisons between example forms in the grammatical discussions and forms from texts. We may not assume, as we may safely in later documentary traditions, that the texts represent a more natural language than examples in the grammatical discussions.

6. Bibliographical references