‘DERIVATIONAL VERBS’ AND OTHER MULTI-VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN AWETÍ AND TUPÍ-GUARANÍ

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This study investigates the “gerund” forms in Awetí—they co-occur with finite verbs, sharing their subject. Typically, in gerund constructions (GC), one light verb expresses motion or position, and one verb indicates purpose, direction or manner of the situation expressed by the other. Gerund verbs may be converbs (heads of adverbial modifier phrases). However, as the finite and gerund verb often can be exchanged without propositional meaning changes, sometimes the gerund and finite verb form one complex predicate. After a corpus-based investigation of the semantics of GCs and of morpho-syntactic features (aspect, mood, negation), GCs in Awetí are compared to their Tupí-Guaraní equivalents. Finally, a historical development of Awetí’s GC is postulated, and the two structures (adverbials / complex predicates) are made explicit. Importantly, the semantic effect of GCs as complex predicates is derivational. This corroborates the theory that form building, derivation and composition are orthogonal to the morphology-syntax division.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the formal and semantic properties of the ‘gerund’ in Awetí, a Tupian language spoken by ca. 150 people in central Brazil in the Upper Xingu area.¹ Awetí does not belong to, but is arguably the closest relative of the well-known Tupí-Guaraní subfamily, the largest branch of the Tupí family (Figure 8.1).² Together with Mawé, Awetí

¹ The following analysis is a preliminary result of ten years of work on Awetí, including a total of around fourteen months of fieldwork. From 2001 to 2005, the project was supported by the Volkswagen Foundation within the DoBeS (Documentation of Endangered Languages) program, focusing on documenting the language and aspects of the culture. From 2008 on, my research has been supported by a Diltthey-fellowship which again allows me to do fieldwork and to invite speakers to the Museu Goeldi in Belém. I am very grateful for the support by funding agencies, the Museu Goeldi and my Awetí teachers. I also owe thanks to several reviewers of earlier versions of this paper, in particular to the editors and Hein van der Voort. Remaining shortcomings are mine alone.

² Figure 8.1 represents the major branches of the large Tupí family, including recent results by the Tupí Comparative Project at the Museu Goeldi, Belém, Brazil.

Figure 8.1. The position of Awetí in the Tupí family.

and Tupí-Guaraní constitute a major branch of Tupí, ‘Mawetí-Guaraní’ (Drude 2006, Drude & Meira in prep., Rodrigues & Dietrich, 1997). I also give an overview of the ‘gerund’ in Tupí-Guaraní languages (§7).

This work is based on a rich corpus of Awetí speech data (including more than 80 hours of audio recordings), a large part of which has been transcribed (see *Awetí Documentation* in the references). A major part of the transcribed texts has also been translated. In the transcribed texts, I found more than 900 occurrences of gerund forms (and more than 200 of semantically similar purposive forms). For this study I analyzed and classified a sample of 200 gerund occurrences, allowing me to present quantitative observations and to advance hypotheses on the syntactic structure concerning the different constructions.

After an introduction to nouns and especially to verbs and their moods in Awetí (§2), I give a general description of the gerund constructions (§3) and present a particularly intriguing feature, the possibility to ‘invert’ the finite and gerund verb (§4). In §5, I distinguish different semantic types of constructions involving the gerund, and then (§6) observe the occurrence of mood, aspect and negation in gerund constructions, while in both cases providing a quantitative analysis of my sample of 200 gerund sentences. Finally, in §7 I present related forms and structures reported for Tupí-Guaraní languages, which allows me to present a hypothesis for the development of the gerund in Awetí (§8). My proposal for syntactic structures of gerund sentences (also §8) distinguishes two construction types. In one type the gerund forms are analyzed as converbs in a traditional sense: verbal nuclei of adverbial modifiers (i.e., subordination). The other type of gerund constructions are analyzed as complex predicates (grammaticalized converb constructions)—the syntactic functional equivalent to morphological derivation, by means of verb forms: gerunds as ‘derivational verbs’.