Not your TP-cal non-finites - on interpretation of tense in Kazym Khanty modifiers[1]

Daria Sidorkina
sidorckina.darya@yandex.ru
Lab of Formal Models in Linguistics, HSE University, Moscow

This paper aims to investigate the functions of non-finite tense markers *-əm* (NFIN.PST) and *-ti* (NFIN.NPST) in Kazym Khanty relative clauses (RCs). Kazym Khanty implements non-finites for almost all subordination patterns. These non-finites, despite their morphological similarity, contain different amounts of syntactic structure (Bikina et al. 2022). RCs, in particular, are estimated to project up to AspP. Therefore, they supposedly lack a deictic temporal pronoun, which is located in T-projections and gives rise to absolute tense (Grønn & von Stechow 2010, (Arregui & Kusumoto 2015). In that line, RCs are expected to only allow for relative interpretations of tense. However, it is not the case. In this talk, I show that non-finite tense in RCs can receive both what appears to be an absolute and a relative interpretation. I argue that tense in RCs is always evaluated in the local domain and is, therefore, relative. Absolute interpretations are derived through Quantifier Raising (QR) of the RC-bearing NP higher than tense into the domain of Speech Time, as suggested by O'Leary (2022) for nominal tense. The hypothesis is supported by data on low-scoping NPs that only acquire relative interpretations and raised subjects that only allow for absolute tense.

▲ Relative vs absolute tense

In most cases, tenses in RCs are relative, i.e. interpreted in relation to the event time of the matrix clause (MT) and not the Speech Time (ST), see (1). NFIN.PST means that the prejacent event precedes the event described in the matrix clause and NFIN.NPST – that the prejacent follows the matrix event or happens simultaneously.

(1) pasan-ən ma [χʉλ λɛw-**əm**] iki šiwaλ-əs-əm[2]
    table-LOC I fish eat-**NFIN.PST** man see-PST-1SG
    'I saw a man who was eating fish at the table (a little while ago)'

RC ------- MT ------- ST --->

(2) pasan-ən ma [χʉλ λɛ-**ti**] iki šiwaλ-əs-əm
    table-LOC I fish eat-**NFIN.NPST** man see-PST-1SG
    'I saw a man eating fish at the table'

However, in certain cases non-finite tense acquires an absolute interpretation. In (3), the book falling down happens after Vasya has read it, and yet the relative clause is marked with NFIN.PST and not NFIN.NPST. Hence, tense is relative in (1) and absolute in (3) with inner structure of a non-finite clause remaining constant.

(3) tăm [iλ pit-**əm**] kinškaj-en muλχătəλ waśaj-en-ən λʉŋət-s-a
    this down fall-**NFIN.PST** book-POSS.2SG yesterday V.-POSS.2SG-LOC read-PST-PASS
'The book that has just fallen down from the table is the one that Vasja read yesterday'

MT ------- RC ------- ST --->

▲ Analysis

Following (Grønn & von Stechow 2010), let us assume that the NFIN.(N)PST morphemes themselves are existential quantifiers over times stating that an event took place later or not later than a certain

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[2] Data were acquired through elicitation in Kazym village in the KhMAO Region, Russia in 2023-2024

time interval. Finite clauses contain a deictic temporal pronoun, that makes reference to ST, introduced above temporal operators. Then, essentially, finite clauses create two local temporal domains – the domain of MT and domain of ST. Following O'Leary (2022), I assume that NPs are always evaluated in their local domain. Argument NPs are base-generated in the MT domain, hence, by default, tense in RCs is relative. However, when an NP is raised into the ST domain, then it is interpreted with absolute tense. If QR is blocked, then we expect the absolute readings of tense to be unavailable as well. On the contrary, if raising is obligatory, than relative readings are expected to be absent.

▲ Blocking QR

One way to ensure that NP has low scope is binding by a higher-scoping quantifier. In (5), the 3sg possessive is bound by a quantifier 'nobody'. As predicted, the absolute past tense is unavailable, since the RC-bearing NP cannot access the ST domain.

(4) nobody$_j$ … [dog [who bit his$_j$ child]]

(5) [A: Let's take a dog!
      B: And what if it bites someone?]
      mʉŋ joχ-λ-əw   nɛm χujat ńawrɛm-əλ   pur-{**əm**/$^{??}$ti}   amp
      we   people-PL-POSS.1PL nobody   child-POSS.3SG bite-NFIN.PST /$^{??}$NFIN.NPST dog
      šaλ-ti   ănt pit-əλ
      pity-NFIN.NPST   NEG turn-NPST[3SG]

      'Nobody (from our people) will take pity on a dog that bit his child'

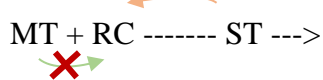   ST ------- RC ------- MT --->

▲ Subjects always absolute

Subjects are commonly assumed to move to Spec,TP which is higher than temporal operators and is located in the ST domain. Consequently, RCs on subjects are expected to disallow relative tense, as they are obligatorily moved to ST domain. That is what we observe in (6), where non-past tense cannot be interpreted as overlapping with MT and is therefore disallowed.

(6) [juχan kimaλ-ən χop-ən oməs-{**əm** / #ti}]   iki   manɛm
      river   bank-LOC boat-LOC seat-{NFIN.PST/#NFIN.NPST} man   I.DAT
      još-ɛm   wanəλt-əs-λe
      road-POSS.1SG   see-PST-3SG>SG
      'A man sitting in a boat near the shore showed me the way'
      Consultant's comment on *oməs-ti*: 'It means he is sitting there all the time. Or I just left him a
                                          moment ago and he is still sitting there'

MT + RC ------- ST --->

▲ References.

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