

Some problems of Mande pronominal systems: terminology and interpretation

Despite the traditional interpretation of Mande languages as analytical, some of them (especially those of South Mande) demonstrate a considerable complexity of pronominal morphosyntax. It raises some important problems of their analysis and terminology used for that.

Two aspects of this problem will be discussed in the paper: the number of pronominal series and the problem of morphosyntactic distinction between subject pronouns and the so called “pronominal predicative markers” [Vydrine 2010].

In many descriptions of South Mande languages we can see numerous series of pronouns (or “pronominal predicative markers”) the only distinctive element of which is 3 SG (all South Mande). In some languages (proto-South Mande, proto-Dan and Kla-Dan) there is a distinction in 3 PL as well. In Dan-Blo, Dan-Gweta, and Tura the distinction also takes place in 1 SG. The interpretation of all non-distinctive forms as a neutralization (and that seems to be the only way) looks rather problematic. The fact that some features can be neutralized in some paradigms is obvious, but the specific semantic characteristics of non-neutralized forms argue in favor of their interpretation as a specific split taking place under the specific conditions of M. Silverstein rules [Silverstein 1976]: 3 person tends to be marked as Subject/Agent, while 1 SG – as Object/Patient. The appearance of distinctions can be explained by the split motivated by Silverstein’s “animacy hierarchy split”. Then we analyze the formal means of this split and argue that they seem to be almost the same for all the languages under consideration.

The morphosyntactic distinction between subject pronouns and the so called “pronominal predicative markers” is really motivated by different morphosyntactic patterns of forms with pronominal semantics (FPS): 1) predicative semantics, 2) co-appearance with nominal actant, 3) the opportunity to be used without other predicative markers in nominal predication, 4) non-deletion in coordinative and subordinate phrase. We try to argue that even consequently using just these criteria it is necessary to distinguish more types of FPS than just two: subject pronouns and “pronominal predicative markers”. The latter show absolute morphosyntactic similarity with pronominal affixes in such pro-drop languages as Latin and Swahili. Then we make an attempt to put forward a hypothesis explaining this functional similarity.

References

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В.Ф.Выдрин [V.F.Vydrine] Еще раз о "субъектных местоимениях" в южных манде: местоимения или предикативные показатели? [Once again about "subject pronouns" in South Mande: pronouns or pronominal predicative markers?] // *Основы африканского языкознания. Синтаксис глагольных и именных групп*. М., 2010, с. 385-400.