The (dis)association between classifiers and anaphora: the case of nG in Kadiwéu

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This paper investigates the grammar and the interpretation of the morpheme nG- in Kadiwéu, a South American language of the Waikurúan family. nG- has traditionally been described as a proximity marker (see Sandalo 1997), used to form demonstratives, when attached to one of the six roots available in the language that encode different positions of an object in the visual domain of the speaker (1). Aikhenvald (2000) has described these clusters of morphemes as ‘deictic classifiers’. Instead we argue that the classifier is the positional root alone (so such roots will be glossed CL), while nG- is an independent morpheme that may or may not attach to the root. We further propose that nG- is in fact a grammatical element that can encode all kinds of anaphora, in the broadest possible sense of the term, and not in the strict/narrow binding-theoretic sense. Also, words which are used as reflexive pronominal forms (2) and pronominal intensifiers are compatible with having nG- as their underlying phonological representation: in this language, sonorants are deleted at word-final position but they surface if a suffix starting with a vowel or another sonorant consonant is added (in this latter case, there is assimilation and gemination, as in (2)). To sum up, in our analysis, when attached to classifiers, then, nG- does not really derive demonstratives but rather anaphoric expressions.

(3-5) are examples of a bare noun, a noun preceded by a classifier and a noun preceded by nG-CL, respectively. What all elements with classifiers have in common is that they contribute an atomized/individualized interpretation of the NP. So, we further show that Kadiwéu is a true classifier language similar to Chinese but classifiers are an obligatory ingredient of all determiner-like elements, such as quantifiers, numerals, and wh-words for arguments (6-7). A classifier may also appear by itself as seen in (4), with no entailment of anaphoricity of any sort (4 vs. 5). Note that CL’s inflect for gender and number. So, in our view, deictic classifiers are elements of the same category as numeral classifiers, but occur inside D elements. Bare nouns are normally interpreted as number neutral (3, 8): in the case of count nouns, a bare singular NP is interpreted as a group (of 1 or more representatives of the kind), while a bare singular mass noun is interpreted as an unspecified amount of a substance. Even bare plurals of count nouns are interpreted as denoting several groups rather than individuals (9). Once a classifier is present, count nouns are seen as atoms in the singular, and as more than one individual in the plural, and masses are necessarily interpreted as packaged/coming in (a number of) containers.

Numeral classifiers are known to start out as anaphoric elements and retain this use (Lehmann 2008). Classifiers in Kadiwéu, on the other hand, can show up when no notion of anaphora is relevant, e.g. when participants in a story are mentioned for the first time, or even just once (first line of 10: title of the narrative). When any sort of anaphora is needed, e.g. textual anaphora/endophora, either as anaphora to an antecedent (strictu sensu anaphora), as in the second line of 10) or reference to a postcedent (cataphora) to a lesser extent, or even exophora, reference through pointing at objects present in the context (5), or even placed in a foreseeable future nG- must be employed; nG- is probably an innovation of Kadiwéu, as no cognate morphemes seem to be used for similar functions in any other Waikurúan languages, e.g. Toba (Messineo, 2001), Pilaga (Vidal 1997), Mocovi (Grondona 1998). Thus, classifiers themselves in Kadiwéu are independent from anaphorics; instead they can and must be introduced if and only if nouns are to be interpreted as atoms or units and are thus compatible not just with numerals and demonstratives (as in e.g. Mandarin) but all sorts of determination.

The fact that nG- attaches to the right of pronouns but to the left of classifiers is indeed compatible with what we know about the base position of each (D vs. just above NP), with the proviso that they undergo local dislocation (Embick & Noyer 2001) at PF, rather than via head movement (11).
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(2) e: em:Ga  id:inema:
   /em:  em-nG  i-d:-n-ema:/
   1 1-nG 1ABS-inverse-ANT/REFL-love
   ‘I love myself’

(3) joão dawi negediogo
   John 3-buy jaguar
   John buys jaguar/jaguars (one or more)

(4) João dawi  ijo negediogo
   John 3-buy  masc-CL  jaguar
   John buys a jaguar

(5) Joao dawi  nGijo  negediogo
   John 3-buy  nG-masc-CL  jaguar
   John buys this jaguar (pointing at it)

(7) in:iwatale Gonel:egiwa
   i-ni-wa-tale Gonel:egiwa
   masc-CL-pl-2 man
   ‘Two men’

(8) apolikanaGa  oyeligo manga
    horse 3pl-eat mango
    Horses eat mangos

(9) Gonel:egiwatedi
    Gonel:egiwa-tedi
    man-pl
    ‘Groups of men’

(10)

(11) [DP  [d (Pronoun)] ...  [nG  [ClassP  (Classifier)  [NP ]]]]