The Meaning of Pluractionality in Karitiana

This paper focuses on the meaning of pluractical affixes in Karitiana, a native Brazilian language of the Tupi stock. Kratzer 2005, based on work by Krifka 1986 and Landmann 1996, argues that all predicates are born cumulative. Consequently, lexical cumulativity should be available in any language at no cost, which seems to be true for Karitiana. In Karitiana, nominal phrases are not marked for (in)definiteness, or for singular/plural, as illustrated by the many possible interpretations of sentence (1). Sentence (2), on the other hand, can be truthfully asserted of one to an indefinite number of jumping events, which may happen collectively, cumulatively or distributively.

(1) Taso naka'yt   boroja
    taso naka-'yt boroja
    man DECL-eat-NFUT snake
    '(The/a/some) man/men ate (the/a/some) snake(s)'

(2) Jonso naakat ikysep
    jonso naakat i-kypse-Ø
    woman DECL 3-jump-NFUT
    'The woman jumped'/'The women jumped'

Somewhat suprisingly, Karitiana is a pluractical language - it makes use of pluractical markers. These markers are verbal affixes that indicate that a multiplicity of events has occurred, which may involve multiple participants, times or places (Lasersohn 1995). The contrast between sentences (3) and (4) shows that plurality is expressed by the reduplication of the verb pon ('shoot') since this is the only difference between the two sentences. Note that the expression sojxaty ('boar') remains unchanged in the two sentences. Intransitive verbs agree with the subject and transitive verbs agree with the object, but agreement only expresses person, not number.

(3) João naakat ipon sojxaty kyn
    João naakat i-pon-Ø sojxaty kyn
    João DECL 3-shoot-NFUT boar at
    'João shot at the boar'

(4) João naakat iponpon sojxaty kyn
    João naakat i-pon-pon sojxaty kyn
    João DECL 3-shoot-PL-NFUT boar at
    João shot at the boars'

What would be the role of pluractical affixes in a language in which verbs and nouns combine cumulatively providing singular, cumulative and distributive readings to sentences like (1) and (2)? We claim that pluractical affixes denote a pluralization operation on cumulative predicates - they exclude atomic events from the cumulative denotations of verbs (Ferreira 2005 for verbs and nouns, Müller 2001 for nouns). This operation is described in (5),
If this is the correct interpretation of PL(uractional) affixes in Karitiana, we expect that they should be able to show up with any predicate denoting any two or more events, and this is so (see sentence (6)). We also predict that predicates denoting a singular event should not be able to duplicate, which is shown true by the contrast in grammaticality between the two verb forms in (7). Another prediction that is born out is that sentences with distributive readings should not allow PL-affixes, as is shown by the contrast in grammaticality between the use of the two forms in (8).

(6)  
\[
\text{Sympomp nakaponpon João sojxaty kyn.} \\
\text{two DECL-shoot-PL-NF João boar at} \\
'\text{João shot twice at the boar}'
\]

(7)  
\[
\text{Ôwā nakhit/ *nakhithidn myhint goojoty João.} \\
\text{owā naka-hit- Ø/ naka-hit-hidn myhint goojo-ty João} \\
\text{kid DECL-give-NF/ DECL-give-PL-NF one canoe-OBL João} \\
'\text{The kids gave a canoe to João}'
\]

(8)  
\[
\text{Tamiry tamiry nakam'at/ *nakam'atat gooj ówā} \\
\text{tamiry tamiry naka-m'at-Ø/ naka-m'at-at- Ø gooj kid} \\
\text{Each each DECL-build-NF/ DECL-build-PL-NF canoe kid} \\
'\text{Each child built a canoe}'
\]

The availability of a plural operation for verbs supports the view that noun phrases and verb phrases have parallel syntactic structures and semantic operations. An interesting typological question to pursue would be the universality of the Plural/Pluractional semantic operation.

References: