SOME REMARKS ON DISAMBIGUATING MECHANISMS IN DIEGUEÑO*

Superficial observation of Diegueño sentences[1] suggests that the occurrences of numerous affixes and other devices which function as markers of case, subordination, and the like, are almost never predictable. However, this situation can be explained by the hypothesis that the various markers are in fact almost totally optional, and are inserted regularly only when the discourse would be ambiguous without them (in much the same manner that the English word "that" may come and go relatively freely except when ambiguity would result from its absence.)[2]

A number of sentences elicited from the informant will be examined in this paper, to determine exactly why they are or are not ambiguous. The distinctions to be examined will be mainly those which correspond to "nominative-accusative" differentiation.

There appears to be a single "normal" syntactic pattern for Diegueño sentences of the type "I see the tree", corresponding to the English NP VP NP construction, where the first NP is the subject and the second the object of the verb. With regard to word order, in the normal pattern the following situation prevails:

1) the nominative NP position is first in the sentence;

2) if there is an object NP present it is between the subject and the verb;

3) if the subject is a pronoun, it need not appear overtly, since the verb is already marked for person. (In this case there is a possible ambiguity, since the sequence NP VP could be interpreted as either Subject/Verb or Object/Verb. It is precisely in such cases that disambiguating mechanisms will be needed.)

The unmarked order is then Subject-Object-Verb, as in the following sentence:

(1)   ña: i:pač   'um
       I   the-man   I-see

       I see the man

More complex constructions show the same SOV configuration. For example, the Diegueño equivalent of the English sentence "I see a man working" is the following:

(2)   ña: i:pač   truxa:r   'um
       I   the-man   he-works   I-see

In addition to the unmarked SOV sentence, Diegueño has two alter-native word order patterns. The following sentences are described by the informant as synonymous with (2) above:

(3)   ña: 'um - i:pač   truxa:r

(4)   i:pač   truxa:r - ña: 'um

In sentences (3) and (4) the dashes indicate a marked pause in the sentence as spoken; however, the informant states explicitly that they, like (2), constitute single sentences. Of the two variant orders, the least common is that exemplified by (3).

In the two variant sentences the possibilities for ambiguity are very limited, as would be consistent with the hypothesis that marking is speci-fically aimed at preventing ambiguity.

The tree structure proposed for (2) is as follows:
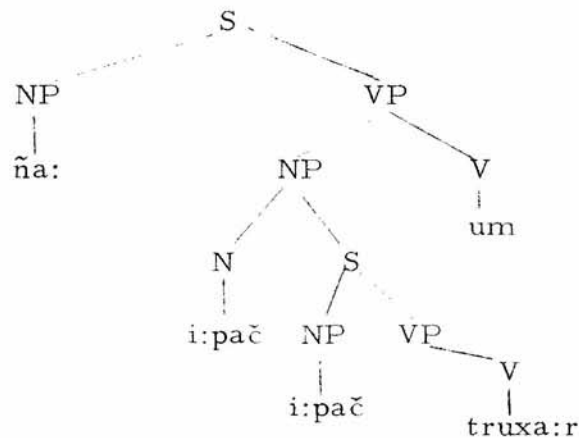
We find /i:pač/ 'man' functioning as the object of the matrix sentence, as indicated by its position immediately between the subject and the verb of the matrix S. It also functions as the subject of the embedded sentence, indicated by its position immediately before the embedded verb with no other NP preceding. This sentence may be derived by raising the subject NP of the embedded sentence into the matrix X, taking with it the entire S. One occurrence of /i:pač/ is then deleted by a subsequent transformation based upon identity of the two NP's. [3]

In addition to word order there are three suffixes which can be used to indicate function within the sentence. The first, the suffix /c/, may be attached to a subject NP to mark its status as such. The second, the suf-fix /bo/, performs the same function for the object NP. The following set of sentences illustrates the operation of these two affixes, all three examples being equivalent to "Did you see who hit the man?":

(5) map   i:pač   a:řap   məwú:w-a
     who   the-man he-hits   you-see-?

(6) mapč   i:pač   a:řap   məwú:w-a

(7) mapč   i:pač-bo a:řap   məwú:w-a

In (5) the NP's bear no overt case marking. The first NP, "who", is in subject position. [4] The second NP, "man", is in accusative position. Therefore no overt case marking is necessary.

In (6) the subject NP is marked both by its position and by the nominative suffix /č/. The object NP is marked only by its position.

(7) bears the fullest possible marking, with both NP's in the appropriate linear order, the subject being marked by /č/ and the object by /bo/. This sort of sentence, fully marked, was extremely rare in elicitation, as would be expected from the redundancy of the markers.

What happens when there are a number of nouns in the same sentence, and when, presumably, word order alone will not disambiguate. We can now examine a number of such sentences. For example:

(8) i:pač   siñ   xək^{w}añ-bo   wəpis
     the-man the-woman the-baby+ACC   he-kissed

(9) .:pač   siñč   xək^{w}añ   wəpis

These sentences are described by the informant as totally synonymous, both being equivalent to the English "the man kissed the woman's baby."

We find /i:pač/ in subject position in both sentences, establishing that "the man" is subject. It is followed by another NP, /siñ/ "the woman". There is then a third NP, /xək^{w}añ/ "the baby", and finally, there is the verb "to kiss", which in both sentences bears a prefix /w/ indicating that both subject and object are third person.

An examination of the markers shows a possible ambiguity. In sentence (8) we find /i:pač/ unmarked, as would be expected. The word for baby bears the accusative suffix and is immediately before the verb, in object position. However, the word for woman is also in object position. Since there is no Diegueño morpheme meaning "and", but conjunction may in some cases take the form of simple juxtaposition, it should be possible for the sentence to mean "the man kissed woman and the baby."

Again, in (9) we find "the baby" marked as accusative by its linear order in the sentence, but "the woman" bears a nominative affix. It should then be possible for this sentence to mean "the man and the woman kissed the baby."

But in both cases ambiguity is precluded by a conjoining mechanism used in Diegueño sentences with either conjoined subjects or conjoined objects. The speaker in such cases will insert the word /xᵊwak/, "two", after the conjoined pair. Thus "the man and the woman kissed the baby" would be /i:pač siñ xᵊwak **xᵊkʷañ**(bo) wᵊpis/. If the sentence were "the man kisses the woman and the baby" the word /xᵊwak/ would be inserted after the word /xᵊkʷañ/.

Since no numeral is present to allow either of the conjoined alternatives, and since the verb does not bear a plural marking, there should be no necessity for any marking of the NP's by affixes. Why did the informant find it necessary to include the affix /bo/ in (8) and the affix /č/ in (9)?

It is proposed that the two sentences represent the result of different deep structures and that the markers are present to indicate that fact. It should be noted first that /xᵊkʷañ/ may be either a verb meaning "to give birth" or a noun meaning "baby" derived from it by a common process of nominalization. For (8) the relevant steps of the derivation are as follows:

1. Nominalization of the verb /xᵊkʷañ/,

2. formation of the possessive NP /siñ xᵊkʷañ/ "the woman her child",

3. formation of the S, with the possessive NP marked for object.

There is no embedding involved, and the result is a straightforward SOV sentence. For (9), however, the derivation provides for the embedding of an entire S, as follows:

1. formation of the S /siñč xᵊkʷañ/ "the woman has a baby",

2. nominalization of the entire S,

3. formation of (9) embedding the nominalized S in object position.

In this case, although the semantic distinction between the two sentences appears to the non-Diegueño speaker to be very minor, the nominative affix /č/ gives surface evidence for the difference between a simple lexicalization and an actual embedding transformation.

Further examples of the use of these markers can be seen in the following sentences:

(10)   i:pač   ga:t-bo   xat-bo   a:řap
        the-man the-cat+ACC the-dog+ACC he-hits

        The man hits the cat and the dog

In this sentence, since both object NP's are overtly marked as such, and since there is no verbal origin for /xaṭ/ "dog", domesticated animal, to which /ga:t-bo/ could be object, there is no need for the overt number /xəwak/ and it does not appear.

(11)	i:pač	siñ	xakʷa:l	xəwak	wəpis
	the-man	the-woman	the-child	they-be-two	he-kissed

The man kissed the woman and the child

Diegueño numerals are basically verbs which can be nominalized and subsequently embedded. The interpretation of the sentence thus shows "the woman and the child be-two" nominalized and embedded in the normal accusative position in the matrix sentence "the man kissed." No further overt marking is necessary, nor does any appear.

(12)	i:pač	xəwak	siñ	šin	ču:r̃ap
	the-man	they-be-two	the-woman	she-be-one	they-hit

In this sentence, which means "the two men hit the one woman", the number of men and the number of women are overtly marked, with the accusative status of the middle NP being indicated by the embedding of "the woman be-one" between the subject and the verb of the matrix S.

The third affix which is used in Diegueño to avoid ambiguity is the suffix /(ə)m/, which serves to indicate that the verb involved has a different subject than the subject of the full S in which it appears. In the following sentence:

(13)	ña:	i:ma:m	'wu:
	I	somebody-dances	I-saw
		+DIFF SUBJ	

The sentence "somebody dances" has been embedded in accusative position in the matrix S "I see". Instead of a second NP appearing after /ña:/ to serve as subject for the verb "to dance" the embedded sentence has no overt subject, and the marker which signifies that a different subject than the upper one is involved has been added to the verb to indicate that it was not "I" who did the dancing. (It should be noted that it could not be a second person subject either, because second person is always overtly marked.) The sentence thus translates "I saw somebody else unspecified (except for third person) dance."

Consider next an example of a full S, itself containing a verb and a direct object, embedded as the object of a matrix sentence.

(14) i:pač   xəma:y   xaṭ-bo   a:řap-əm   wəwu:
      the-man the-boy   the-dog+ACC he-hits   he-sees
                                        +DIFF SUBJ

The man saw the boy who hit the dog

In this sentence, the NP "the dog" is marked by both the accusative suffix and linear order as being the object of the embedded sentence, which is itself marked as object of the matrix verb by its linear position. The suffix on the embedded verb indicates that the subject of the "hitting" cannot be "the man".

As would be expected, in those cases where the subject of a verb is a pronoun, and where there is no possible ambiguity, the subject may be dispensed with. Thus the overt pronouns, which are quite rare in ordinary speech, appear to function only as redundant discontinuous elements with the verb and are inserted only when needed for clarification. An example is the following:

(15) minsap   i:pač   ñəsiñ   a:řap   'wu:x
      tomorrow   the-man   his-wife   he-hits   I-will-see

Tomorrow I'll see the man who hits his wife

There is no overt first person singular pronoun in this sentence. If one were present it would presumably be the word /ña/, "I", before the word /i:pač/ "man". However, the verb form / 'wu: / is one which can only be first person singular and for which therefore the subject could not be the third person singular /i:pač/, the first NP in the sentence. It is therefore possible to omit the overt subject without any ambiguity being created by its absence.

Finally, there is a type of Diegueño sentence, rather infrequent in elicitation, which corresponds to English "dislocation" sentences. For example, to provide an equivalent to the English "the man hit the dog, the dog that bit the child", the informant gave the following sentence:

(16) i:pač   xaṭ   a:řap - xaṭ   xəkʷa:l   ču:kawčəm
      the-man the-dog   he-hit the-dog the-child   he-bites
                                                      +INTENSIFIER
                                                      +DIFF SUBJ

As before, the dash indicates an intonational pause.

Here we find a standard SOV sentence, "the man hit the dog", followed by a second one, also quite standard, meaning "the dog bites the child". The only indication that the speaker considers it to be one sentence rather than two is the presence of the marker /əm/ on the verb "to bite" which says in effect "there is another NP subject in this sentence besides 'the dog', but this verb does not go with it." (The infixed / č/ in ču:kawčəm

is an intensifier in many other examples in my data, and may mean that the dog "really bit" the child.)

In summary, then, the data show that Diegueño is unquestionably a language in which the normal unmarked order is SUBJECT-OBJECT-VERB. Mechanisms do exist in the language for use in those instances in which word order alone is not adequate to make clear the relationships among various elements of the sentence. However, these mechanisms are used only in those cases in which ambiguity would result from their absence.

FOOTNOTES

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1.   This paper is based upon data obtained during the last two quarters of the academic year 1968-69 in a field methods class at the University of California, San Diego.   The informant, Mrs. Florence Barrett, is a native Diegueño speaker from the Viejas (Baron Long) Reservation near Alpine, California.

2.   In addition, the markers will appear in Diegueño discourse when the speaker wishes to talk in an elaborate style.   The informant often answered queries as to the suitability of various markers by observing that they were certainly appropriate if "you want to be fancy".

3.   Alternatively, of course, it could be postulated that the matrix S contains only a marker indicating the proper place for embedding of the lower sentence to take place, the marker then being obligatorily deleted after the embedding.   Either alternative seems possible, and a decision between the two would require native intuitions about the language which the writer does not possess.   However, the empirical results appear to be the same in either case.

4.   It is significant in this regard to note that the same morpheme means "someone"; it is only the suffix -a in /mawú:w-a/ which indicates that the sentence is interrogative.