Overt choice-functions: two Mayan languages

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This paper investigates the way two Mayan languages encode specificity and (in)definiteness. Based on original fieldwork in Chuj and Kaqchikel, I show that both languages possess morphemes that appear in definite, specific indefinite, and pronominal contexts. While Kaqchikel uses the morpheme *ri* in definite and specific indefinite contexts, Chuj makes use of one of ist 16 noun classifiers. To illustrate, consider the following Chuj examples:

(1) a. ***(nok')** tz'i'
CLF dog
'the dog'

b. jun **(nok')** tz'i'
INDF CLF dog
'a dog'

c. **nok'** *pro*
CLF *pro*
'it (animal)'

As shown above, the classifier for animals *nok'* is obligatory in definite contexts, optional in indefinite contexts, and also appears in pronominal contexts. The same contexts allow for the presence of *ri* in Kaqchikel.

I suggest that *ri* (in Kaqchikel) and the classifiers (in Chuj) represent the overt representation of a choice-function. This analysis allows for a unified account of all contexts in which these morphemes arise. It also accounts for cases in which they are not allowed, which include with nominals that do not denote entities, with property-denoting nominals, with nominals whose descriptive content cannot be presupposed by the speaker, and with bound variables in pronominal contexts. Finally, this analysis supports work by von Heusinger (2004) and Chierchia (2005) which analyze both definites and indefinites with choice-functions.

I offer various tests that support the proposed analysis. For instance, one example is that noun classifiers and *ri* express the distinction between wide-scope and narrow-scope indefinites.

Selected references: • Chierchia, G. (2005): (In)definites, locality and intentional identity, in G.N Carlson and F.J. Pelletier, eds., 'Reference and quantification: The Partee effect', CSLI Publications; Von Heusinger, K. (2004): 'Choice functions and the anaphoric semantics of definite NPs', Research on Languages and Computation 2