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Publication date

2018

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Linguistics in Amsterdam

License

Unspecified

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hengeveld, K., & Fischer, R. (2018). A'ingae (Cofán/Kofán) as a transparent language. *Linguistics in Amsterdam*, 11(2), 7-14.

<http://www.linguisticsinamsterdam.nl/download?type=document&identifier=649465>

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A'ingae (Cofán/Kofán) as a transparent language

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This article studies the degree of transparency of A'ingae, a language isolate spoken in Colombia and Ecuador. It closely follows Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018), an article that applies a set of parameters to establish the degree of transparency of a broad sample of languages, in order to establish a transparency hierarchy. The current study shows, applying these parameters to A'ingae, that this language neatly fits into the hierarchy and belongs to the more transparent language type.

1 Introduction

A'ingae (Cofán/Kofán) is a language isolate spoken in Colombia and Ecuador. A first grammar sketch of the language is provided in Fischer & Hengeveld (to appear). A first look at a sentence from this language gives the impression that it is a language that is quite transparent, in the sense that it displays a one-to-one relation between meaning and form.¹

- (1) Rande kuri-fi'ndi=ma=ngi ke=nga=ja afe.
big gold-SHAPE.BITS=ACC1=1 2.SG=DAT=CONTR give
'I gave you big money.' (20040218-EC-Interview-190)

Example (1) shows an important aspect of A'ingae: it is very rich in clitics, which have a fixed form, are therefore clearly identifiable, and have a single

¹ The examples in this chapter are taken from the data collected by Rafael Fischer between 2001 and 2006 in the villages of Dureno, Sábalo and Sinangoe in Ecuador. These data are coded in the following way: Date of recording – Abbreviations of names of speakers involved – Topic – Time code/line number. Other examples are taken from legends told by Enrique Criollo and presented in Borman (1990). These data are coded by the abbreviation 'BC' followed by the legend number and the line number within the legend.

meaning, as there is hardly any homonymy in the language. To the extent that clitics are used, they are agglutinative in nature. These too normally have a clear meaning, as in the case of *-fi'ndi* in (1). This is a classifier-like nominalizer used for objects that manifest themselves as small bits.

However, as is shown in Hengeveld (2011) already, transparency does not only matter at a superficial morphological and phonological level, but also at a less visible level, especially in syntax. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to establish whether A'ingae is transparent at a deeper level as well. In order to do so, we will, in Section 2, determine how A'ingae behaves as regards the parameters studied in Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018), in which these parameters are applied to a world-wide sample of languages. We will only briefly introduce these parameters in this article, as a detailed description is available in the aforementioned article. In Section 3 we will then show how A'ingae fits into the typological picture emerging from Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018). The paper is rounded off with conclusions in Section 4.

2 Transparency and opacity features in A'ingae

2.1 Transparency features

Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) use the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2018; henceforth FDG) to define different groups of parameters for the study of transparency. FDG is a model of grammar that recognizes four different levels of organization: The Interpersonal (pragmatic) Level, the Representational (semantic) Level, the Morphosyntactic Level, and the Phonological Level. They state that full transparency obtains if there is a one-to-one relation between all these levels. This means that lack of transparency, i.e. opacity, obtains when there is no one-to-one relation between any two of these levels. These relationships are shown through descending arrows in Figure 1.

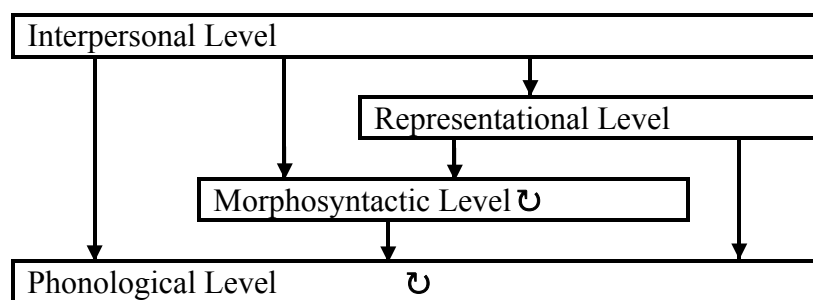


Figure 1. Interactions between and within grammatical levels

Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) furthermore argue that there are non-transparent relationships that originate within one of the form-based levels: the Morphosyntactic and Phonological ones. Within these levels, operations may take place that have a formal motivation only, i.e. that do not express meaning. These relationships are indicated by means of the symbol ‘ \cup ’ in Figure 1.

2.2 Transparency between levels

2.2.1 Introduction

We follow Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) here in describing transparency between levels in A'ingae in terms of three cumulative groups of relationships. Those between the Interpersonal and Representational Level (2.2.2), those between the Interpersonal and Representational Levels on the one hand and the Morphosyntactic Level on the other (2.2.3), and those between the Interpersonal, the Representational, and the Morphosyntactic Levels on the one hand and the Phonological Level on the other (Section 2.2.4).

2.2.2 Interpersonal – Representational

Apposition

Apposition is non-transparent, as two (pragmatic) acts of reference target a single entity in the external world. Apposition can be found in A'ingae:

- (2) Chiga Quitsa
 god father
 ‘God the father’ (BC01.017)

Crossreference

In the case of crossreference, too, there are two (pragmatic) acts of reference targeting a single entity in the external world. In this case there is apposition between a person marker and a noun phrase describing the entity involved. A'ingae displays crossreference and is therefore non-transparent as far as this parameter is concerned. In (3) the third person subject marker *tsû* is coreferential with the noun phrase *iyu* ‘snake’. This can be analyzed as an appositional construction as either the subject marker or the noun phrase can be left out.

- (3) Iyu tsû asi'thaen dû'shû.
 snake 3 think child
 ‘It is a snake, the children thought.’ (BC08.015)

2.2.3 Interpersonal/Representational – Morphosyntactic

Grammatical relations

A language is non-transparent if it applies grammatical relations such as subject and object, as these neutralize the semantic functions of arguments. A'ingae is non-transparent in this respect, as is evident from the fact that it has a passive construction, shown in (4):

- (4) Ūnji=nga tûi-ye a'i.
 rain=DAT be.wet-PASS man
 ‘The man was wettened by the rain.’ (BC10.003)

In the corresponding active construction *a'i* ‘man’ would receive accusative marking, which is suppressed in (4), where *a'i* has been turned into the subject of the construction.

Discontinuity

Discontinuity is non-transparent as a single semantic and/or pragmatic unit is mapped onto two morphosyntactic units. Discontinuity has not been attested in A'ingae.

2.2.4 Interpersonal/Representational/Morphosyntactic – Phonological

Morphophonological alternations

Morphophonological alternations also lead to non-transparency, since a single meaning as expressed by a certain morpheme receives a different formal manifestation in different phonological circumstances. There is only one morpheme in A'ingae that exhibits this type of alternation. The causative morpheme has three different realizations, as shown in (5) – (7):

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| (5) tsa'u-ña
house-CAUS
‘build a house’ | (6) khûsha-en
recover-CAUS
‘heal’ | (7) amûnde-an
dirty-CAUS
‘make dirty’ |
|--|--|--|

The causative is realized as *-ña* as in (5) when it follows a mono-syllabic stem or a two-syllabic stem of the type /CV.ʔV/; it is realized as *-en* as in (6) when it follows a stem of two or more syllables that end in /a/, /ã/, /u/, or /ũ/; and it is realized as *-an* as in (7) when it follows a stem of two syllables that ends in /i/, /ĩ/, /î/, /ĩ/, /ε/, /ẽ/. This is the only morphophonological alternation encountered in A'ingae.

2.3 Transparency within levels

2.3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Section 2.1, non-transparency may also arise due to operations that take place within the Morphosyntactic and Phonological Levels. These operations are triggered by formal considerations and have no semantic or pragmatic counterpart.

2.3.2 Within the Morphosyntactic Level

Expletive elements

The use of expletive elements is a non-transparent feature of language, as these elements are introduced for syntactic reasons and do not contribute to the meaning of a sentence. Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) take pronominal expletives in meteorological expressions as their test case. In A'ingae no expletives are introduced in such expressions.

- (8) Khûtsû=si ûnjin pa'chu=a=ve tûi.
 stop=DS rain hard=ADJR=ACC2 fall
 'When he stopped, it was raining hard.' (BC 138)

The verb *tûi* 'fall' here has a lexical subject *ûnjin* 'rain', rather than an expletive subject, such as *it* in the English translation of (8).

Morphological alternations

A language has morphological alternations in its stems if it displays suppletion. It has morphological alternations in its affixes if it displays declension and/or conjugation classes. A'ingae has neither of these.

Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is non-transparent as nouns are arbitrarily assigned to classes that behave differently morphologically and/or syntactically. Grammatical gender is not present in A'ingae. It does have nominalizing shape suffixes with a classifying function, but these are semantically based.

Agreement within the noun phrase

Grammatical gender may manifest itself in agreement patterns in the noun phrase. These patterns are absent in A'ingae too.

Clausal agreement

Obligatory syntactic agreement at the clausal level is absent from A'ingae. It uses a system of cross-reference instead, as shown in Section 2.2.2.

Tense copying

Tense copying is non-transparent, as an element from the main clause is copied to the subordinate clause. A'ingae does not allow this.

*2.3.3 Within the Phonological Level**Phonological stem of affix alternation*

There are several phonological rules that lead to the adaptation of the underlying phonological form of a stem or affix. We will restrict ourselves to two cases here. The first concerns the insertion of a glottal stop after the second of a string of three vowels in order to avoid the formation of a triphthong, as shown in (9):

- (9) bia'a /^mbia.a/ → [bja.ʔa]
big=ADJR

The second process concerns the prenasalisation of a voiceless plosive if preceded by a nasal vowel, as illustrated in (10):

- (10) ûnji-mba /'ĩ.hĩ.pa/ → ['ĩ.hĩ.^mba]
rain-NR

3 The transparency of A'ingae

After studying the behaviour of A'ingae with respect to the transparency features discussed in Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018), the language may now be evaluated as to its degree of transparency. This is done here by comparing the degree of transparency in A'ingae to the degrees of transparency in the languages studies in Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018). The result is shown in Table 1. Note that for reasons of space not all the languages discussed in Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) are listed here. For every language type the name of one language representative of that type is given. When there is more than one language of a type the language name is followed by 'etc.'.

Table 1 shows first of all that A'ingae neatly fits the overall typological pattern. The data in this table shows that there are implicational relationships between the different non-transparent features, such that if a language has a feature higher in the Table 1 it will also have the ones lower in Table 1; and if it does not have a feature lower in Table 1, it will neither have the features higher in Table 1.² These generalisations also apply to A'ingae.

² The only exception to this concerns the feature of Discontinuity, which cannot be fully included in this hierarchical statement.

Table 1: The transparency of A'ingae from a typological perspective

<i>Language</i>												
<i>Property</i>	French	Egyptian Arabic	Georgian	Basque	Sheko etc.	West Greenlandic	Hupa etc.	Fongbe etc.	A'ingae	Bantawa etc.	Teiwa	Mapudungun etc.
Nominal expletives	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clausal agreement	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grammatical gender	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tense copying	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Phrasal agreement	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Morphologically-based stem or affix alternation	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Discontinuity	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+
Morphophonologically-based stem or affix alternation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	na	+	+	-	-
Grammatical relations	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Crossreference	na	+	+	+	+	+	+	na	+	+	+	+
Apposition	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+
Phonologically-based stem or affix alternation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

A second interesting point concerns the cut-off point in the hierarchy reflected in Table 1. It is well known from the typological literature that languages may show exceptional behaviour with respect to the feature that constitutes the cut-off point in the hierarchy. The last feature available for A'ingae is morphophonologically-based stem or affix alternation. As shown in Section 2.2.4, there is only one such alternation within the grammar of A'ingae.

The third property of A'ingae that may be derived from Table 1 is that it belongs to the group of languages of the more transparent type. As shown in Hengeveld & Leufkens, the non-transparent features that languages are most resistant to are the ones that originate within the Morphosyntactic Level: nominal expletives, clausal agreement, grammatical gender, tense copying,

phrasal agreement, and morphologically based stem or affix alternation. A'ingae does not have any of these.

4 Conclusions

In this short contribution we set out to establish the degree of transparency of A'ingae. It turns out that, as suspected at first sight, A'ingae is a language with a high degree of transparency. It fits the transparency hierarchy proposed in Hengeveld & Leufkens (2018) without any counterexamples. A new aspect that A'ingae adds to the discussion of transparency is that it nicely displays a reduced degree of non-transparency for the feature that constitutes its cut-off point in the hierarchy.

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