The role of adverbs and context in Tzutujil: A look at temporal reference

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While temporal reference in many Mayan languages can be communicated in many ways, I argue that Tzutujil Maya lacks tense markings and instead relies on aspectual markers, context and adverbials to convey temporal reference.

In this study, I follow Reichenbach 1947, Dowty 1986, and Klein 1994 (and others) in assuming that temporal reference of an utterance is the time interval at which the event realization is temporally interpreted. In this presentation, I argue that Tzutujil does not have grammatical tense. Using Cover & Tonhauser’s diagnostics (2015), contextually constrained temporal reference and temporal adverbs can be used to limit temporal reference. Similar to Yucatec Maya (Bohnemeyer 2002), Tzutujil uses the aspectual perfective and imperfective markers to trigger completive or incompletive status respectively.

The data show that Tzutujil is similar to other Mayan languages in its reliance upon context and adverbials to constrain temporal reference instead of a grammatical tense system. However, unlike some Maya languages, Tzutujil does not require a prospective aspectual marker to communicate future temporal reference. This presentation includes discussion of aspectual and modal markers that occur with future temporal reference.

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