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Katharina Haude

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“She kisses her late husband” = “She kissed her husband”: nominal tense in Movima

Katharina Haude
University of Cologne
khaude@uni-koeln.de

1 Introduction

Tense marking, a grammatical means to “locate situations in time” (Comrie 1994: 4558), is typically an inflectional category of verbs. In general, definitions of tense explicitly or implicitly claim that tense marking will be found in the verbal morphology of a language. In languages that do not have verbal tense markers, temporal reference is usually made through either aspectual or modal morphology (Smith in press; Comrie 1985: 50ff.), which also belongs to the verbal domain. The fact that temporal reference is typically carried out in the verbal domain is of course no coincidence. Verbs conventionally denote situations (events, processes, states) that are not time-stable, in contrast to nouns, which predominantly denote things, i.e. time-stable concepts.

In this paper I discuss the case of Movima, a linguistic isolate of the Bolivian Amazon area with still several hundred speakers. Movima has no verbal tense morphology. Unlike other tenseless languages, Movima does not recur to mood or aspect morphology, but instead uses a rich system of referential elements (articles, pronouns, demonstratives) to express temporal relations. This strategy can be described as “nominal tense marking” as defined by Nordlinger and Sadler (2004). However, Movima proves to be different from the languages that were investigated by Nordlinger and Sadler in their cross-linguistic study, because in Movima, the same markers that indicate temporal properties of a nominal referent, can also determine the temporal interpretation of a clause as a whole.¹ This conflation of “independent” and “propositional” nominal tense marking (Nordlinger and Sadler 2004) has so far not been identified in any other language and can be considered a cross-linguistic rarity.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, Nordlinger and Sadler’s concept of nominal tense marking is introduced. In section 3 it is shown that Movima has no verbal tense morphology (3.2), and that tense categories are optionally expressed by particles (3.3). Section 4 presents the system of articles, which indicate spatial and temporal properties of nominal referents. Section 5 shows how the temporal-deictic function of the articles by implicature determines the temporal interpretation of the clause (5.1), and that the article can also serve as a marker of temporal reference in discourse (5.2). Section 6 concludes by presenting the possible pathway from independent to propositional tense marking.

The data on which the analysis is based were collected in Santa Ana del Yacuma, Bolivia, between 2001 and 2004. Most of the data presented here stem from spontaneous discourse; elicited examples are explicitly marked.²

¹ I owe the characterization of Movima nominal tense marking in the title of this paper to Djoekje Veninga, moderator of the Netherlands radio station VPRO.

² I wish to thank the Movima speakers who taught me their language, in particular the following, who contributed the data presented here: Esaltación Amblo, Julia Malale, Balvina Almaquio, Eligardo Chirimani, Etelvina Gualusna, Griselda Cáumol, Herlan Rojas. I furthermore thank Loretta O’Connor and Michael Cysouw for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 Nominal tense marking

In their study on nominal tense marking, Nordlinger and Sadler give the following definition of nominal tense, aspect and mood (TAM) marking:

- (i) Nouns (or other NP/DP constituents) show a distinction in one or more of the categories of tense, aspect, and mood, where these categories are standardly defined as they would be for verbs (e.g. Crystal 1997).³
- (ii) This TAM distinction is productive across the whole word class and not restricted to a small subset of forms (such as *ex-* in English).
- (iii) The TAM distinction is not restricted to nominals functioning as predicates of verbless clauses but is encoded on arguments and/or adjunct NP/DPs in clauses headed by verbs.
- (iv) The TAM marker is a morphological category of the nominal word class and cannot be treated as a syntactic clitic that merely attaches phonologically to the NP/DP. (Nordlinger and Sadler 2004: 778)

I will return to these criteria later when discussing the Movima data (5.1).

A major observation of Nordlinger and Sadler is that the languages that display nominal tense marking do this in one of two ways: either the marker indicates temporal properties of the entity denoted by the nominal, or it determines the temporal interpretation of the entire proposition, similar to tense marking on verbs. In the first case, the marking of temporality on the nominal is independent from clausal tense, which is why Nordlinger and Sadler label it “independent nominal tense marking”. In the second case, called “propositional nominal tense marking”, nominal marking either cooccurs with verbal tense marking or is the only marker of tense in the clause. Their definitions (extended to TAM in general) are as follows:

1. Independent nominal TAM
“operates completely independently of the TAM of the clause and serves to locate the time at which the property denoted by the nominal holds of the referent or, in the case of possessive phrases, the time at which the possessive relation holds” (Nordlinger and Sadler 2004: 779)
2. Propositional nominal TAM
“contributes TAM information relevant to the clause as a whole” (ibid.: 790)

Of Nordlinger and Sadler’s sample of approximately 22 languages, 12 languages display independent nominal tense and 10 show propositional tense. None of the investigated languages displays both phenomena, the message being that nominal tense marking has either one or the other function, but not both (see also Nordlinger and Sadler 2004: 778).

In the following sections I will show that Movima does not have verbal morphology for tense. Tense is expressed through particles, which are not grammatically obligatory. Temporal reference comparable to verbal tense marking in other languages is conveyed through the form of the article, an obligatory part of a referential phrase. I will show that this type of marking can be described in terms of Nordlinger and Sadler’s criteria (i)–(iv) above. However, in comparison to the languages studied there, Movima is unusual in that the same mechanism marks “independent” as well as “propositional” tense.

3 Note that Nordlinger and Sadler’s definition is a bit vague, as it does not state in what way “tense” on nouns should be the same category as on verbs. See also the discussion in Tonhauser (2006).

3 Time reference in Movima

3.1 Basic features of Movima clause structure

For a better understanding of the examples below I will provide here a brief account of Movima clause structure (see Haude 2006 for a detailed description).

Movima clauses are generally predicate-initial with a preverbal slot for a topicalized pronoun:

(TOP) PRED=ARG (ARG)

An argument can be represented through a bound or free pronoun or through a referential phrase, which consists of an article and a content word. At any point, even inside a referential phrase, TAM and discourse particles can occur (see 3.3 below). Example (1) illustrates a basic transitive clause, which consists of a predicate and two referential phrases representing the arguments.

- (1) *man<a>ye=is pa:ko os rulrul*
encounter<DR>=ART.PL dog ART.N.PST jaguar
'The dogs met the jaguar.'⁴

Non-core arguments are marked by an oblique case marker prefixed to the referential element (article or pronoun):⁵

- (2) *ilo:ni--y'fi n-os chapmo*
walk--1PL OBL-ART.N.PST forest
'We walked in the forest.'

The content word in a referential phrase does not necessarily have to be a morphological noun, as in the above examples. It can also be a verb, in which case the phrase refers to an event participant (see Haude 2009), as in (3).⁶ Still, for the sake of simplicity I will refer to referential phrases as noun phrases (NPs) from here on.

- (3) *is yey-na=n*
ART.PL want-DR=2
'the ones you want'

I will now turn to temporal reference in Movima. In 3.2 it is shown that there is no verbal tense marking morphology, 3.3 illustrates the function of tense particles, and in the subsequent sections I describe the deictic properties of the article.

⁴ The Movima article does not indicate definiteness (see section 4); however, for the sake of consistency, it is here generally translated with the English definite article.

⁵ The symbol -- represents "external cliticization", whose only phonetic effect is a resyllabification with a host-final consonant; it contrasts with "internal cliticization", represented as =, which triggers stress shift and the appearance of an epenthetic /a/ on consonant-final hosts (Haude 2006: 97ff.). The two processes, which are restricted to referential elements, mark the status of a nominal constituent as internal or external to the head.

⁶ While nouns and verbs in Movima have many properties in common, they can be distinguished by the fact that certain morphemes can occur only on nouns, but not on verbs. Adjectives form a subclass of nouns.

3.2 The lack of verbal tense morphology

Movima has no verbal tense marking morphology. Depending on the context, the clause in (4) can have a past, present, or future interpretation.

- (4) *yolmoʔ--isne*
 stroll--3F.AB
 ‘She (absent) went / is going / will go for a walk.’

The only verbal affix that can have a temporal reading is the irrealis infix <(k)a’>.7 In affirmative contexts, it indicates that the speaker believes that the situation will take place some time in the future:

- (5) *sal<a’>mo*
 return<IRR>
 ‘I’ll be back!’

Aspect affixes in Movima cover meanings such as “repeatedly” or “at once”. None of them locates the denoted situation temporally. On the whole, the major TAM categories are expressed through particles, most of which are not formally related to the verb. I will give an outline of the relevant particles in the following section.

3.3 Tense particles

Movima has a large array of particles and adverbs that express temporal, modal, and aspectual categories. Temporal relations are mainly established by the following ones:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|------------------|--|
| (6) | <i>kwil</i> | ‘remote past’ | (a long time ago) |
| | <i>la’</i> | ‘anterior’ | (previous occurrence, before the day of speaking) |
| | <i>kwey</i> | ‘immediate past’ | (same day, but before the time of speaking) |
| | <i>loy</i> | ‘intention’ | (future, normally directly after the time of speaking) |
| | <i>nokowa</i> | ‘future’ | (any future time) |

As will become apparent below (section 4.2), the major temporal categories in Movima are “past” (before the day of speaking), “immediate past” (on the same day, but before the time of speaking),8 and nonpast. Accordingly, the above particles can be grouped into two forms pertaining to past (*kwil* and *la’*), one that pertains to immediate past (*kwey*), and two that pertain to nonpast (*loy* and *nokowa*).

The following examples illustrate the way in which these particles convey temporal relations. Examples (7) and (8) illustrate the particles *kwil* (REM) and *la’* (ANT). They occur frequently inside an NP (i.e., between the article and the noun), which indicates that they are not syntactically part of the verb phrase.

- (7) *n-os kwil bayʃim-a=y’ʃi rey mo: maj<a’><ni:~>ni=Ø*
 OBL-ART.N.PST REM field-LV=1PL MOD yet child<IRR><NMZ.N~>=1SG
 ‘In our field, long ago, I didn’t have children yet, you see.’

7 This morpheme is inserted after the first iambic foot of the base and appears with an initial /k/ after vowels (cf. Haude 2006: 78ff.).

8 Bybee et al. (1994: 98) characterize these past-tense categories as “hodiernal” and “pre-hodiernal”, respectively; see also Dahl and Velupillai (2005).

- (8) *jo'yaj--us n-os la' walaylo*
 arrive--3M.AB OBL-ART.N.PST ANT afternoon
 'He arrived yesterday afternoon.' (lit.: "on the previous afternoon.")

The particle *kwey* (IMM) usually occurs before the predicate, as in (9), but it can also occur inside a referential phrase, as shown in (10):

- (9) *kwey joy-cheŧ us pa:pa=kinos majni=Ø*
 IMM go-R/R ART.M father_of=ART.F.AB child=1SG
n-as ra:diyo
 OBL-ART.N radio
 'The father of my daughter went to the radio (station) (earlier today).'

- (10) *no-kos kwey ŧu:vuy jayna kiro' joy-cheŧ*
 OBL-ART.N.AB IMM twilight DSC DEM.PL.AB go-R/R
 '(Today) at dawn they left already.'

The occurrence of the particle *nokowa* (FUT) before the predicate and inside a referential phrase is illustrated by (11) and (12), respectively:

- (11) *n-as tojeŧ-wa=as piyesta nokowa jiwa-ŧe-na=y'ŧi*
 OBL-ART.N pass-NMZ=ART.N fiesta FUT come-APPL-DR=1PL
rey
 MOD
 'When the *fiesta* is over we will bring (her) again.'

- (12) *di:ra ŧat koro' kos nokowa piyesta*
 still EV DEM.N.AB ART.N.AB FUT fiesta
 'There will still be a *fiesta*, they say.'

The TAM particle *loy* (ITN) is the only one that never occurs inside a referential phrase, but normally right before the predicate, as in (13).⁹

- (13) *jayna loy rey t joy-cheŧ ma'*
 DSC ITN MOD 1INTR go-R/R my_mother
 'I'm leaving again already, mother.'

None of these particles is grammatically obligatory. For example, the particle *la'*, which indicates the previous occurrence of an event, is not needed to indicate past tense in general. The phrase *nos walaylo* 'in the afternoon' in (14) also refers to an afternoon in the past (as indicated by the article *os*, see section 4 below), but it is not specified as the previous afternoon, as in (8) above.

- (14) *lassinko os joyaj-wa=i, n-os walaylo*
 five_o'clock ART.N.PST arrive-NMZ=3PL OBL-ART.N.PST afternoon
 'At five o'clock (was) their arrival, in the afternoon.'

⁹ Inside an NP *loy* is a marker of negation.

Likewise, the particle *kwey* is not obligatory in contexts that refer to the immediate past, as is the case in (15) (see 4.2 below for the “immediate past” interpretation of the Absential article *kos*):

- (15) *jayna kino' chi:~chi no-kos ima:yoj*
 DSC DEM.F.AB MD~go_out OBL-ART.N.AB morning
 ‘She has gone out (today) in the morning.’

The particles *loy* and *nokowa*, finally, are not obligatory for indicating nonpast tense. The pair in (16) shows this for *loy*:

- (16) a. *n-as sot-tino:nak loy iʃ sal-na=Ø*
 OBL-ART.N other-year ITN 1 search-DR=1SG
 ‘Next year I will look for (you).’
- b. *n-as sot-tino:nak iʃ sal-na=Ø*
 OBL-ART.N other-year 1 search-DR=1SG
 ‘Next year I will look for (you).’

Example (17) is comparable in structure with (11) above. Here, however, reference to nonpast (future) tense is made without the particle *nokowa*.¹⁰

- (17) *n-as vakasyon [...] it joy-cheʃ n-as vayeʃ-wa=Ø*
 OBL-ART.N holiday 1INTR go-R/R OBL-ART.N see-NMZ=1SG
n-iyʹbikweʃ
 OBL-PRO.2PL
 ‘In the holidays [...] I’ll come to see you.’

In texts, the tense particles generally occur only to establish the time of the narrated events, typically at the beginning of a text or passage (see, for instance, (7) above). Once the discourse time has been established, the particle does usually not occur again. For example, in the discourse preceding the sentence in (14) above, the discourse time had been established as the previous day.

The exact status of the tense particles requires further research. Still, I hope to have shown that they serve to indicate temporal relations, but that they are not grammatical markers of tense.

4 Spatio-temporal reference

Despite the fact that there is no verbal tense morphology in Movima and that the tense particles are not grammatically obligatory, sentences like those in (14)–(17) above do contain information as to their temporal interpretation. In (14), it is asserted that the described situation has occurred in the past, i.e. before the day of speaking. Example (15) is unambiguously interpreted as describing a situation that has occurred on the same day, but previous to the moment of speaking. Example (16) and (17) clearly refer to a nonpast time. These meanings are brought about by the form of the article of one or more referential phrases in the clause, as will be shown in this and the following sections.

¹⁰ Depending on the context, this clause can also have a habitual meaning: ‘... I always come to see you’ (cf. 4.2).

Movima has a rich inventory of referential elements: personal pronouns, articles, and demonstratives. They all have highly specific deictic properties, always indicating number, gender, and physical presence at or absence from the speech situation. For absent referents, articles (but not pronouns, and demonstratives only in restricted contexts) additionally indicate whether the referent is still in existence (Absential) or whether it has ceased to exist (Past). This property makes the article the main carrier of temporal information in Movima. Its forms are given in Table 1.

Tab. 1. The Movima article

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
Presential	<i>us</i>	<i>i'nes</i>	<i>as</i>	<i>is</i>
Absential	<i>kus</i>	<i>kinos</i>	<i>kos</i>	<i>kis</i>
Past	<i>us (usos)</i>	<i>isnos</i>	<i>os</i>	<i>is (isos)</i>

The article is defined by the fact that it is obligatorily followed by a content word, together with which it forms an NP (see 3.1 above). Note that it does not indicate definiteness. For definite reference to an entity present at the speech situation, a demonstrative can be used.¹¹ For definite reference to an entity absent from the speech situation, the deictic adverb *ney* ‘here’ is placed before the content word:

- (18) *ma'nes* *kis* ***ney*** *nonlo:-ba*
 tasty ART.PL.AB here milk-BR.round
 ‘Those milk cakes are tasty.’

The temporal-deictic function of the article will be elaborated on in the following sections.

4.1 Concrete referents: presence, absence, ceased existence

Let us first consider the function of the article in NPs that refer to concrete entities, illustrated in (19):

- (19) a. ***as*** *pa:ko*
 ART.N dog
 ‘the dog’
- b. ***kos*** *pa:ko*
 ART.N.AB dog
 ‘the/a dog’
- c. ***os*** *pa:ko*
 ART.N.PST dog
 ‘the/a dog’

The NP in (20a), with the Presential neuter article *as*, is used for reference to a dog that is present near the speech situation, for example in sight or somewhere in the same house or compound. It can also have a generic meaning, referring to the species of dogs.¹² The NP in

¹¹ In addition to gender and number, Presential demonstratives indicate perceivability, position, and relative distance of the referent (see Haude 2006).

¹² Because of the broader applicability of the Presential article (see also 4.3), it is not marked in the gloss as ‘Presential,’ but left unmarked.

(20b), with the Absential article *kos*, refers to a dog that exists somewhere, but is not near the speech situation. The NP in (20c), which contains the Past article, is used to refer to a dog that has ceased to exist. The article thus distinguishes two temporal categories: ongoing and ceased existence of the referent.

It can be seen in Table 1 that only the neuter and the feminine article distinguishes formally between presence, absence, and ceased existence, by having a Presential (*as*, *i'nes*), an Absential (*kos*, *kinos*), and also a distinct Past (*os*, *isnos*) form. By contrast, in the masculine and the plural paradigm, the Presential and Past categories are expressed by the same form (*us* and *is*, respectively); the Past forms given in brackets (*usos* and *isos*), are hardly ever used and, according to speakers, imply that the referent has ceased to exist a long time ago. The forms *us* (masculine Presential and Past) and *is* (plural Presential and Past) are best seen as each representing two homophonous morphemes with different meanings: when the referent is absent, *us* and *is* are automatically interpreted as Past articles, implying ceased existence of the referent, since otherwise, the Absential forms (*kus*, *kis*) would be used.

In order to apply the Past article, the referent must have ceased to exist completely. It is not possible, as in other languages that display similar phenomena (cf. Nordlinger and Sadler 2004), to use this form to refer to dead bodies or to objects that have simply lost their function, or that a possessive relation has ended while the possessed entity still exists. Hence, it is not equivalent to nominal temporality markers such as the English prefix *ex-*, which indicates a loss of function or termination of a possessive relation, but not that the referent itself has ceased to exist. In Movima, for the Past article to be applied, the referent must be physically “gone”; otherwise, the Presential or Absential article is used.

Example (20) illustrates this for a glass that is broken, but whose remainders are still around, and which is accordingly referred to by the Presential article (note, however, that the bound pronoun =*us* refers to an absent agent); (21) shows it for a person that has died, but whose body is still in existence (at the time of the actual utterance, it is being taken to the cemetery); since the body is absent from the speech situation, the Absential form is used.

- (20) *bay<a>cho=us as wa:so*
 break<DR>=3M.AB ART.N glass
 ‘He (absent) has broken the (present) glass.’ (elicited)

- (21) *kinos senyo:ra jala:yij n-os kayni-wa=sne*
 ART.F.AB madam angry OBL-ART.N.PST die-NMZ=3F.AB
 ‘The woman was angry when she died.’ (lit.: “... in her dying.”)

A further condition for the applicability of the Past article is that the referent must have ceased to exist before the day of speaking. When it has ceased to exist on the same day, then inevitably the Absential article is used, and the Past article would be ungrammatical:

- (22) a. *kwey it kay~kay no-kos jokme*
 IMM 1INTR MD~eat OBL-ART.N.AB bird
 ‘Today I ate a chicken.’
 b.* *kwey it kay~kay n-os jokme*
 IMM 1INTR MD~eat OBL-ART.N.PST bird (elicited)

While the Past article asserts that the referent has ceased to exist before the day of speaking, there is no similar marker for future existence, as in some other languages with nominal tense

marking (e.g. Guaraní). For entities that will come into existence in the future, either the Presential or the Absential article is used:

(23) *loy iʃ ji:sa:-na=∅ kis lo:kwa*
 ITN 1 make-DR=1SG ART.PL.AB stew
 ‘I’ll make stew.’

(24) *loy iʃ jisa:-na=∅ is narasa:-mi*
 ITN 1 make-DR=1SG ART.PL orange-BR.water
 ‘I’ll make orange juice.’

The choice of either the Presential or the Absential article for entities that are not yet in existence, as in (23) and (24), is not entirely obvious. It may have to do with modal implications of Absential marking. It will be shown in the following section, however, that NPs denoting future times and situations always contain the Presential article.

4.2 Times and situations: a three-way temporal distinction

The temporal function of the article is still more differentiated in NPs that refer to times (i.e., points in time or time spans) and situations (events, processes, states etc.). This type of NP always contains the neuter article. Points in time are denoted by words such as *je:mes* ‘day’, *tino:nak* ‘year’ etc. NPs referring to situations contain derived nouns. The suffix *-wa* derives nouns from verbs; reduplication and the suffixation of *-ni-wa* derive nouns from nonverbal predicates. Situation-denoting NPs are extremely common in Movima because they are used for subordination.

With time- and situation-denoting NPs, all three forms of the article (Presential, Absential, Past) receive a temporal interpretation. The Presential article is used in present (25), future (26), and habitual (27) contexts:

(25) *jayna tojeʃ po:la as salmo-wa=nkweʃ*
 DSC very late ART.N return-NMZ=2PL
 ‘You (pl) are coming back very late.’ (lit.: “Your returning is very late.”)
 (Context: addressees are just coming back)

(26) *n-as sot-tino:nak loy iʃ sal-na=∅*
 OBL-ART.N other-year ITN 1 search-DR=1SG
 ‘Next year I’ll look for you.’

(27) *jampa inʔa chot n-as kay-wa=∅*
 do_like PRO.1SG HAB OBL-ART.N eat-NMZ=1SG
 ‘I always do it when I eat.’ (lit.: “... at my eating.”)

The Absential article indicates that the time or situation has occurred earlier on the same day, as is the case in (28) (partly repeated from (15) above):

(28) *jayna kino’ chi:~chi no-kos ima:yoj*
 DSC DEM.F.AB MD~go_out OBL-ART.N.AB morning
 ‘She (absent) has gone out (today) in the morning.’

The occurrence of the Absential article with a temporal function could also be observed in (10) above.

The Past article indicates that the time or situation has occurred before the day of speaking, as in (29) (partly repeated from (14) above) and (30).

(29) *lassinko os joyaj-wa=i*
 five_o'clock ART.N.PST arrive-NMZ=3PL
 'At five o'clock (was) their arrival.'

(30) *n-ɔf¹³ dichi<ye:~>ye=∅ toʃ manes-pa:-na=∅ as*
 OBL-ART.N.PST.1 child<NMZ.N~>=1SG very tasty-APPL-DR=1SG ART.N
tadoy-ni
 sweet-PRC
 'When I was a child, oh dear how much I liked sweets.'

The three-way temporal distinction with phrases referring to times and situations can be explained by the fact that these are abstract concepts that, unlike concrete entities, do not have a spatial location (see also Haude 2006: 169f.). Therefore, the Absential article can unambiguously be used for temporal instead of spatial deixis.

There is a direct parallel with NPs denoting concrete entities, whose referent must have ceased to exist in order to be referred to with the Past article. In the case of times and situations, the Absential and Past forms can be used only when the situation is concluded. A situation that has started in the past but is going on in the present is always referred to with the Presential article:

(31) *jayna rey kaw-tino:nak as rey ney-ni-wa=y'fi*
 DSC MOD much-year ART.N MOD here-PRC-NMZ=1PL
 'It's been many years already that we've been here.'

Its function in time- and situation-denoting NPs shows clearly that the article distinguishes the same major tense categories that are distinguished by the tense particles (see 3.3): past (before the day of speaking), immediate past, and nonpast. A closer observation of the examples in 3.3 (in particular, (7), (8), (10), and (11)) reveals that the form of the article in this type of NP coincides with the tense particle that establishes the time of the context.

4.3 Absolute concepts: no spatio-temporal differentiation

Certain NPs do not participate in the three-way distinction of deictic reference, but generally contain the Presential article. These NPs refer to concepts that are highly time-stable, do not change location, and are assumed to be generally known, and that can therefore be seen as targets of absolute reference. Geographical locations (32), institutional buildings (33), and personalities of religious worship (34) are concepts of this type:

(32) *bo rey isne kino' n-as Tirinra*
 because MOD PRO.F.AB DEM.F.AB OBL-ART.N Trinidad
 'Because she (absent) is in Trinidad.'

(33) *ʃek-ka-ye:-cheʃ ena' nosdé n-as ele:siya*

¹³ The first-person marker *ʃ* is fused with the article in possessive NPs.

kick-MLT-BE.person-R/R DUR.std over_there OBL-ART.N church
 ‘They are kicking each other over there at the church.’ (speaker being at home, far from the church)

- (34) *uʃ pa:pa=n n-as ari:wa che i'neʃ*
 ART.M.1 father_of=2 OBL-ART.N top and ART.F.1
ma:ma=n di' ma:ma=u
 mother_of=2 REL mother_of=3M
 ‘our (incl.) father up there and our (incl.) mother, who is his mother (i.e. Jesus and Mary)’

A similar case is generic reference, which is also carried out with the Presential form (see 4.1 above). Consider (35) (and cf. also the phrase *as tadoyni* ‘sweets’ in (30) above):

- (35) *kilmo is itila:kwa*
 mischievous ART.PL man
 ‘Men are wicked!’

NPs referring to habitually occurring times and situations, which also contain the Presential article (see (27) above), can be considered as belonging to this class as well.

5 Independent and propositional nominal tense marking

5.1 Independent nominal tense marking with an implicature effect

The spatio-temporal marking on referential phrases in Movima can be described in Nordlinger and Sadler’s term of “nominal tense marking” (section 2): the article marks a temporal relation between the existence of the referent and the moment of speaking (cf. Nordlinger and Sadler’s criterion (i)); the combination with different forms of the article is not restricted to particular types of content words (criterion (ii)), the few exceptions only involving reference to absolute concepts; the article occurs on dependent phrases and not on predicate nominals (criterion (iii)). As for criterion (iv), it was mentioned in 3.1 that not only nouns, but also morphological verbs can occur inside an NP; however, reference is functionally a nominal category (see Croft 2003), and hence the categories encoded by the article can be considered nominal.

The question remains whether we are dealing with the “independent” or the “propositional” type of nominal tense marking here. The previous sections have shown that the spatio-temporal deictic properties of the article indicate properties of the referent in relation to the time and place of the utterance. The deictic categories can vary, depending on the type of referent (concrete entity vs. time/situation). They are summed up in Table 2.

Table 2. The spatio-temporal categories encoded by the article

	entity	time/situation
Presential	present absolute	present future habitual
Absential	absent but still in existence	concluded earlier on the same day

Past	absent and out of existence (before the day of speaking)	concluded before the day of speaking
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It can thus be concluded that Movima nominal tense marking is of the “independent” type: it locates the time at which the property denoted by the noun holds of the referent. This is independent of the contextual tense, as shown by (36)–(38). These examples all contain an NP with a past article, but they also contain a marker that rules out a clausal past-tense interpretation. In (36), this is the imperative suffix (-*ti*), (37) contains a tense particle implying future reference (*loy*, cf. 3.3 above), and the referential elements in (38) indicate a difference in temporal properties of possessor and possessee (the Presential pronoun *a'ko* for the possessum, the past article for the possessee). In all three examples, the past article indicates ceased existence of the referent, but this is independent of the interpretation of the clause as a whole. These examples, therefore, clearly identify the past article as a marker of independent nominal tense.

- (36) *ajlomaj-ti os naye-wa=n*
 tell_about-IMP.DR ART.N.PST marry-NMZ=2
 ‘Tell (her) about your (past) marriage!’
- (37) *loy it to'baycho-poj-cheŋ n-isnos nonok=Ø*
 ITN 1INTR remember-CAUS-R/R OBL-ART.F.PST grandparent=1SG
 ‘I’ll remember my late grandmother.’ (elicited)
- (38) *a'ko rey ɬaɬa<kwa~>kwa=os dokwe=Ø*
 PRO.n MOD seam<INAL~>=ART.N.PST dress=1SG
 ‘This (a stitched strip of cloth) is the seam of my dress (which does not exist anymore).’ (elicited)

However, except in cases like these, which contain elements indicating nonpast tense, the past article always determines the interpretation of the entire clause. Consider (40c) in comparison with (40a) and (40b):

- (39) a. *kay-a:-poj=Ø as pa:ko*
 eat-DR-CAUS=1SG ART.N dog
 ‘I fed/am feeding/will feed the dog (present).’¹⁴ (elicited)
- b. *kay-a:-poj=Ø kos pa:ko*
 eat-DR-CAUS=1SG ART.N.AB dog
 ‘I fed/will feed the dog (absent).’ (elicited)
- c. *kay-a:-poj=Ø os pa:ko*
 eat-DR-CAUS=1SG ART.N.PST dog
 ‘I fed the dog (that is now dead and gone).’ (elicited)

The past interpretation of a clause like (40c) can be understood easily, since it is most common to talk in a past context about entities that have ceased to exist. If the article only

¹⁴ Direct-marked transitive verbs imply a first-person singular actor, unless specified otherwise.

indicated a loss of function or possession, such as *ex-* or *former* in English, we would expect to find it used more frequently in nonpast contexts, as well.

With phrases referring to times and situations (see 4.2 above), the link between the actual existence of the referent and the discourse time is even more immediate, as is illustrated by the effect of the situation-denoting phrase in (41a–c) (these examples were offered spontaneously during elicitation):

- (40) a. *jayna it ba:lomaj n-as ji:sa-na:-wa=∅ as chakdi*
 DSC 1INTR finish OBL-ART.N make-DR-NMZ=1sg ART.N fence
 ‘I’ll finish making the fence.’ (I’m still building it)
- b. *jayna it ba:lomaj no-kos ji:sa-na:-wa=∅ as chakdi*
 DSC 1INTR finish OBL-ART.N.AB make-DR-NMZ=1sg ART.N fence
 ‘I’ve just finished making the fence.’ (today)
- c. *jayna it ba:lomaj n-os ji:sa-na:-wa=∅ as chakdi*
 DSC 1INTR finish OBL-ART.N.PST make-DR-NMZ=1sg ART.N fence
 ‘I’ve finished making the fence.’ (before today)

Thus, we are dealing here with independent nominal tense marking that has an effect on the temporal interpretation of the proposition. So far, this is an effect of implicature only, and not genuine tense marking (cf. Comrie 1985: 23ff.).

However, even though implicational, the article provides temporal information consistently throughout the discourse. This is mainly due to the fact that in Movima, subordination is carried out through nominalization, which produces nouns that are highly sensitive for temporal location (see 4.2). Whereas other verbally tenseless languages use aspect and mood morphology for temporal reference, the lack of verbal tense marking in Movima is compensated by the deictic properties of the article.

Still, while the propositional tense-marking effect of the article is largely due to implicature, there are signs that the article also has the potential of indicating propositional tense directly, as the following section will show.

5.2 The article as a marker of propositional tense

In the previous sections I have shown how the article indicates the location and existence of its referent. However, this was a slight simplification of the facts. First of all, it has to be kept in mind that a speaker cannot always know for sure whether an absent discourse referent is still in existence or not. The choice of the article only reflects the speaker’s assumptions to that effect.

Second, also for Movima speakers it does often not really matter whether an entity still exists or not. In fact, entities that are not relevant to the speaker at the time of speaking are generally referred to with the past article in past-tense contexts, no matter whether they still exist or not. Typically, inanimate objects, like the car in (41), are referred to with the past article in past-tense contexts, even though they may still be existing somewhere (the situation narrated in (41) had only taken place on the previous day):

- (41) *jayna lista da’ n-os joyaj-wa=os awto jayna*
 DSC ready DUR.NSTD OBL-ART.N.PST arrive-NMZ=ART.N.PST car DSC
 ‘She was ready when the car arrived.’

Example (42) illustrates the use of the past article with reference to a spider that has explicitly not been killed and may still be alive. However, as in (41) above, the past article is used, because what is relevant to the speaker here is to maintain temporal reference in discourse, and not the possible ongoing existence of the spider:

- (42) *kas rey tikoy-na:-wa=Ø--as, os si:wa merek*
 NEG MOD kill-DR-NMZ=1SG--3N.AB ART.N.PST spider big
 ‘I didn’t kill it, the big spider.’

In past contexts, even NPs referring to living human beings can contain the past article. This is also the case when the person referred to is not relevant for the speaker at the time of speaking. In (43), for example, some kind of clerk is referred to:

- (43) *jayna baw<a>ra='ne os itila:kwa nokodé*
 DSC pay<DR>=3F ART.N.PST man over_there
 ‘She has already paid the man over there.’¹⁵

In contrast, human referents that still play a role in the speaker’s life are normally referred to by the Presential or Absential article (depending on their location), even if the narrated situations have occurred a long time ago:

- (44) *n-os to<chi~>chik-a='nes majni=Ø*
 OBL-ART.N.PST little<NMZ.N~>-LV=ART.F child=1SG
as-na=y'fi n-as Peru
 sit-LOC=1PL OBL-ART.N Peru
 ‘When my daughter was little (lit.: “at the (past) being small of my (present) daughter”), we lived in El Perú.’¹⁶

However, sometimes the past article is used (by some speakers more often than by others) even when the nominal referent is present at the speech situation or when its existence is relevant for the speaker. For instance, in (45) the speaker refers to her own body part with the past article, something which is not normally done. In (46), the speaker’s parents are referred to with the past article, even though shortly before, it had been pointed out that they are still alive. The article is chosen here not according to a deictic property of the referent, but according to the time of the context.

- (45) *jayna n-os imayni jayna tivijni os chodo:wi=Ø*
 DSC OBL-ART.N.PST night DSC hurt ART.N.PST stomach=1SG
 ‘Then at night, my stomach hurt.’

- (46) *n-asko ela-na=us pa' isnos ma'*
 OBL-PRO.N.AB stay_behind-DR=ART.M my_father ART.F.PST my_mother
 ‘At that (time) my father left my mother.’ (both absent, but alive)

These examples show that the choice of the article is not only determined by properties of the referent, thereby having an implicational effect on the temporal interpretation of the

¹⁵ The neuter article can be used for nonspecific or derogatory reference to humans.

¹⁶ Note that in this example, also cited in Haude (2004: 84), it is not the case that the same person is referred to twice (cf. Tonhauser 2006: 347); rather, the referent of the first NP is the state of being small, whereas the second, underlined NP refers to the possessor of that state (as shown by the literal translation).

proposition. It can also serve as a device for directly marking temporal relations in discourse. In such cases the Movima article is clearly a marker of propositional nominal tense.

6 From independent to propositional nominal tense

I have shown that in principle, nominal tense marking in Movima is of the independent type, the choice of the article depending on deictic properties of the referent and having only an implicational effect on the temporal interpretation of the clause. However, the Past article can also be used to mark discourse tense directly, thereby functioning as a marker of propositional nominal tense. There appears to be a gradual shift of nominal tense marking in Movima from purely independent towards propositional, as represented in Figure 1:

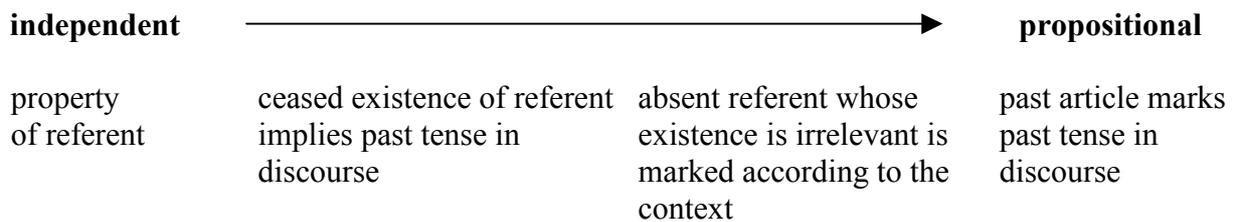


Figure 1. The shift from independent to propositional tense marking

In Figure 1 prototypical independent nominal tense marking is given on the left-hand side. Here, a temporal property of the referent is marked independently of the discourse tense (see (36)–(38) above). The fact that this marking usually has an effect on the interpretation of the proposition as a whole (as shown in (39) and (40)) is a step towards propositional temporal marking. When entities are referred to by the past form, even though they are still in existence (as in (41)–(43)), and even present or relevant to the speaker (as in (45)–(46)), then the article does not indicate a temporal property of the referent anymore. It serves as a propositional nominal tense marker that provides temporal information of the clause as a whole.

To conclude, there are basically three factors that contribute to the unusual, perhaps even unique, way of marking temporal reference in Movima:

1. The lack of verbal tense marking is not compensated by modal or aspectual morphology on the verb, but by the temporal-deictic function of the article, an element inherent to nominal expressions.
2. The article, by indicating ongoing or ceased existence of the referent, can by implication indicate clausal tense.¹⁷
3. The article can also be chosen to indicate clausal tense directly. This use is comparable to verbal tense marking in other languages.

¹⁷ However, the examples of propositional nominal tense marking in the Arawak language Chamicuro given in Nordlinger and Sadler (2004) and Parker (1999) hint at a possible conflation of the two types in this language as well: in all examples of propositional past-tense marking, the referent has either ceased to exist, or the examples do not hint at the contrary. More data would be needed to establish whether in Chamicuro, too, propositional nominal tense marking is an implicature effect of independent nominal tense marking.

Thus, while primarily of the independent type, this nominal tense system also has a propositional tense-marking function. This conflation of independent and propositional nominal tense marking has so far not been described for any other language.

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Abbreviations:

1=first person; 2=second person; 3=third person; AB=Absential; ANT=anterior; APPL=applicative; ART=article; BE=bound nominal element; BR=bound root; CAUS=causative; DEM=demonstrative; DR=direct; DUR=durative; DSC=discontinuous; EV=evidential; F=feminine; FUT=future; INAL=inalienable; INTR=intransitive; ITN=intentional; LOC=location; LV=linking vowel; M=masculine; MD=middle; MLT=multiple; MOD=modal; N=neuter; NMZ=nominalization; NMZ.N=nominalization of noun; NSTD=nonstanding; OBL=oblique; PL=plural; PRO=free pronoun; PST=Past; REL=relativizer; REM=remote past; R/R=reflexive/reciprocal; SG=singular; STD=standing