Clause linkage in spontaneous spoken Latgalian: Dialectology meets spoken language research.

A standard variety usually starts as a (or “the”) variety used in writing. In Central Europe the standard is consequently called “literary language”. Dialects, on the other hand, are primarily used in spoken form. Some grammatical differences between a dialect and the standard variety of the same language are grounded in this difference of preferred modality. Clause linkage is an area where this becomes quite evident. While clauses and clause complexes can be identified in both modalities, the “sentence” and the “complex sentence” are units of written texts which have been proven inadequate for the description of spontaneous spoken language (see Miller & Weinert 1998; Biber et al. 1999, Ch. 14.3). Typological research does not always take these differences into account; for example, Gast & Diessel (2012) declare the “complex sentence” as their research object, although their overview covers data from both written and spoken language varieties. While a framework for the adequate study and comparison of clause linkage in different modalities is still lacking, research on clause linkage phenomena in typologically diverse languages has challenged and changed the traditional understanding of such presumably basic concepts as “subordination” or “adverbial clause” (for example, Cristofaro 2003, 2014; Hetterle 2015). Parallely, a growing number of studies on clause linkage in unplanned spoken language has added new important aspects to the research agenda: the function of clause linkage in discourse, the role of prosodic and non-verbal features in distinguishing types of linked clauses, or the emergent nature of clause-linkage patterns (see, among many others, Chafe 1984; 1988; Couper-Kuhlen 1996; Hopper & Thompson 2008; Mithun 2009; contributions to the volume edited by Laury & Suzuki 2011 or the thematic issue edited by Ehmer & Barth-Weingarten 2016).

On this background I will discuss clause-linkage patterns in interviews that are part of the TriMCo Subcorpus of Latgalian dialects. The speakers represent different dialect areas (northern, central-eastern, and southern Latgalian). Selected fragments will be analyzed in detail, using a “bottom-up” approach: first, I divide the text into clauses (see example below), and in a second step I determine lexical, grammatical and prosodic means used in linking clauses – without assuming that they form a “complex sentence”. As neither Latgalian nor Latvian have so far been analyzed with such an approach, one aim is to give some first answers to the general question:

Which patterns of clause linkage can be formally distinguished, and how do these patterns relate to concepts such as subordination, embedding, deranking, etc.?

As I cannot discuss all possible patterns, I will focus on those that most resemble adverbial clauses (in the traditional understanding and as defined by Hetterle 2015) expressing temporal and causal relations.

The second half of my talk will be devoted to patterns involving the connective ka, which in different contexts can be interpreted as a complementizer (‘that’) or an adverbial subordinator for several semantic relations (‘when’, ‘if’, more rarely ‘because’). Questions I seek to answer include:

Which grammatical and prosodic features correlate with the different functions of ka?

Is ka a “universal subordinator” (Lehmann 1988) or a polysemous connective, or are there several homonymous connectives ka?

Given the primarily oral nature of dialects, the study of dialect syntax should be informed by research on spontaneous spoken language as well as by linguistic typology. On the other hand, dialect data will enrich this research, which so far has focused on spoken varieties of a few languages which have a well-defined standard (English, French, Japanese, Finnish).
Example
Speaker AL (female, 1961). Discourse markers and connectives are highlighted. The translation is as literal as possible. The lines are clauses (or non-clause units), not intonation units. The speaker answers the question “What were your treats when you were a child?”.

(a) bija kuļite pi cepļa ti vot pi tuo lyluo cepļa pakārta
we had a little bag hung at the stove vot at that big stove
(b) kur ir kaļtietī uobuly
where there are dried apples
(c) vot es išuožu rūku
vot I stuck my hand into it
(d) izvalku
pulled out
(e) ādu
ate
(f) vot tys bija muns gordums
VOT this was my treat
(g) ā ka jau uobuly
there was some apple for winter
(h) nu tys bija reti
well that was seldom
(i) dieļ tuo kam nabija pagroba
because there was no cellar – in our house
(j) nu moš ir kaut kur kur ja
in general in Latgale I don’t know
(k) bet ir pamatā tuos muojas
but mostly there are those houses
(l) kurim tūmār pagrobu vieļ nabeja
which however did not yet have cellars
(m) myusim ir tuos dziļuos dūbes kambarie tuodas
we have those deep holes in the pantry such ones
(n) bet ē jā
but ē yes
(o) uobulus ka jau saglabovam
apples KA JAU we kept
(q) ta jau tys beja pats gorduokīs vot
TA JAU that was the most delicious thing VOT

References