

Referential density in N!uu

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It has often been noted that languages differ in the degree to which speakers use overt noun phrases in continuous texts. This ratio of the overt argument noun phrases to the available noun phrase argument slots (i.e. possible arguments) is referred to as referential density (Bickel 2003, Noonan ms.). This paper reports on an investigation of N!uu where we explore the referential density in narratives and dialogues and compare it to the results of similar investigations carried out for a number of other languages (Bickel 2003).

N!uu is a highly endangered San language of South Africa and the last member of the linguistic lineage !Ui (a sub-branches of the isolate family Tuu, commonly known as Southern Khoisan). For this investigation we utilize narrative discourses recorded during the field work in 2007-2008. To test whether such factors as text length, genre or ideolects affect the referential distance value we include a few texts for each of the known 8 speakers of the language. Finally, we discuss how such factors as the local discourse tradition, sociology of communication and some structural properties of the grammar affect the referential density.