The discourse dynamics of agreement class assignment in Tikuna narratives (isolate, Western Amazonia)

San Martín de Amacayacu Tikuna (SMAT; Amazonas, Colombia) displays a system of five nominal agreement classes (CI-CV). Agreement for class, an obligatory and pervasive feature, is classically realized through the inflection of several adnominal and pronominal elements, both within the NP and on the predicative head.

A few nouns, because they always trigger agreement for the same class, may give the misleading impression of an Indo-European-like lexical gender system. Most nominal phrases (NPs), however, show the ability to alternatively trigger agreement for several of the five classes. In fact, although they are homogeneously realized from a morphosyntactic perspective, SMAT's five agreement classes are functionally heterogeneous. While three of them do indeed correspond to genuine lexical genders (which can legitimately be called "masculine", "feminine", and "neuter"), the other two specify the referent for what can be roughly identified as "social deixis", a pragmatic dimension (inclusion within *vs.* exclusion from the reference center's personal sphere) orthogonal to gender (see FIGURE 1).
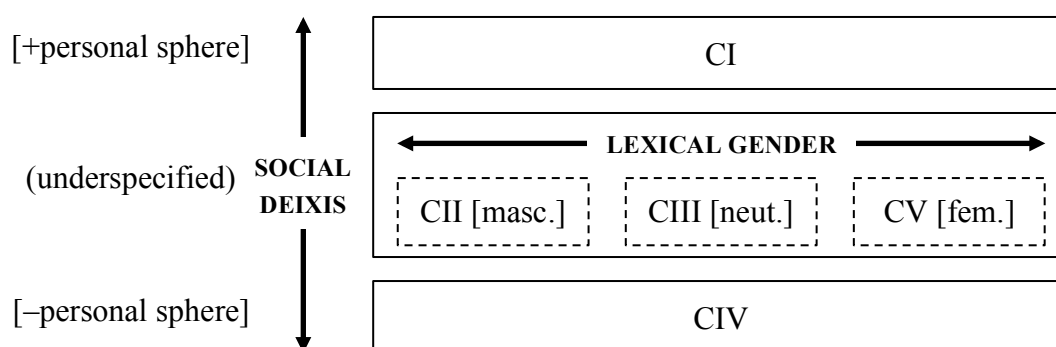

FIGURE 1 | *An outline of SMAT's functionally two-dimensional system of nominal agreement classes*

In actual speech, an NP may alternatively trigger agreement according to the lexical gender of its head (in which case it is underspecified for social deixis) or according to the desired social deixis effect (in which case its gender is left unrealized). It is common for the assignment of a referent to shift from a given agreement class to another along the social deixis axis within a single speech event.

In this talk, I will first give a brief outline of the local effects (or semantic functions, as identified by Contini-Morava & Kilarski 2013) of agreement class assignment in SMAT. I will then focus on the *discourse dynamics* (or discourse functions; Contini-Morava & Kilarski 2013) of agreement class assignment along the social deixis axis, *i.e.* not on the effects and functions of agreement class assignment in single or isolated mentions of a referent, but on the effects and functions of agreement class assignment *and reassignment* over repeated mentions of a referent in

whole stretches of connected speech. As a first approach and for want of good-quality conversational data, scope will be restricted to narrative data.

What rules or tendencies underlie the *evolution* of agreement class assignment along the social deixis axis in SMAT narratives? How often does reassignment occur? Does it typically occur at pivotal moments from a narrative perspective, or does it mostly occur for ease of reference-tracking? Are some reassignment patterns more common than others (*e.g.* CIV at first mention then CI, rarely the opposite)? Does reassignment require the use of specific morphosyntactic devices (*e.g.* it might only be possible when referring to the referent by means of an independent pronoun or a full NP, not mere indexes on the predicative head)? These questions will be addressed through the systematic analysis (as illustrated in TABLE 1) of first-hand narrative texts from various genres collected in SMA from 2015 to 2018.

	l. (1-22)	l. (23-28)		l. (29-47)		l. (48-71)
NARRATIVE STEP	*the hunter goes hunting*	*a jaguar comes up*		*noble fight between them*		*the hunter takes over and wins*
HUNTER	CII	CII	→	CI		CI
JAGUAR		CIV	→	CII	→	CIV

TABLE 1 | *Evolution of the agreement class assignment of the hunter and the jaguar along a version of the tale of The Hunter and the Jaguar told by Loida Ángel Ruiz*

Reference

Contini-Morava, E. & Kilarski, M. 2013. Functions of nominal classification. *Language Sciences,* 40:263-299.