Two Noun Class Systems in Mixtec

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Words in Mixtec languages are typically disyllabic. A number of nouns having general meaning can substitute for other nouns and so function as pronouns. When they occur as a subject following a verb, or as a possessor following a noun, and are not further modified themselves, they are shortened to a single syllable (Pike 1944:131). These pronominal enclitics effectively divide Mixtec nouns into genders which minimally include feminine, masculine, animal, and usually sacred.

Another feature of Mixtec is the use of superordinate terms in compounds with nouns (in a few cases with verbs or adjectives) to indicate certain lexical classes. Both full and cliticised nouns occur in the function of classifiers. A further shortening of certain classifier plus noun compounds has resulted in their being reduced to a single disyllabic word. This process of morphological layering in which affixes tend to coalesce with the root has been described by Gibson and Bartholomew (1979:309 n2) as characteristic of the Otomanguean family in general.

There are, then, two independent noun class systems: one, a gender system, the other a partial system of lexical classification. As we examine the two we will see that even though the classifying terms of both systems are, in a few cases, phonologically identical and semantically related, they have very different syntactic functions. And while the pronominal enclitics are not closely enough attached to the words
they follow to be termed affixes, the monosyllabic morphemes of the lexical class system are intimately connected to the word they precede and are properly called prefixes.

Mixtec is, in fact, not a single language, but a complex of perhaps as many as thirty mutually unintelligible dialects. Data for this study are from Atatlajua (Alexander 1980), San Miguel (Pike 1944 and Dyk and Stoudt 1965), and Chalcatongo (author's field notes), three neighboring towns in the former district of Tlaxiaco; Peñoles (Daly 1973) spoken in the district of Etla; and two southern dialects, Jicaltepec (Bradley 1970) and Chayucu (Pensinger 1974). Figure 1 gives their approximate geographical locations, and identifies their subgroups as given by Bradley (1970:1).

The Gender System

Greenberg (1978:50) defines a noun gender system as:

a system in which the noun stems of a language are divided into a set of genders, the distinction being based on the fact that the choice of a noun belonging to a particular gender determines the choice among a set of alternative "agreeing" forms in one or more other classes of morphemes or words, e.g., articles, demonstratives, adjectives, unbound anaphoric pronouns, pronouns incorporated in a verb complex, etc.

In the case of Mixtec, the agreeing forms are the pronominal enclitics which mark possession on nouns and subjects on verbs. In most cases the derivation of the enclitics from a full noun form is obvious. Table 1 shows the third person pronominal enclitics of six Mixtec dialects and their full noun forms. Some of the blanks in the chart would probably be filled in if more complete data were available. All six dialects have a feminine, masculine, and animal gender. All but Chayucu have a
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* -či* is realized as /či/, /če/, or /ča/ in various environments.

Table 1. Third person pronouns in Mixtec
sacred gender. Atatlahuca and San Miguel have an -i enclitic derived from suči 'child.' In Atatlahuca it also has the more general meaning of 'person.' Peñoles, Jacaltepec, and Chayuco have an inanimate gender, not shared by the central dialects. Several groups also have a human collective gender 'people.' Chayuco has a separate gender for trees and vehicles. This unlikely pairing may be explained by the fact that trees and wooden objects are often classed together, and that the first wheeled vehicles seen by the Mixtec were undoubtedly made of wood. Atatlahuca is unique in having a separate gender for water and rain.

Peñoles has two encliticized forms for the feminine. -a may be derived from 'woman' na-dξ7ξ as is the case with the other dialects, and is used for women of high respect. The other form -xi is the less formal pronoun, and may be related to xiita 'grandmother.'

The following examples show the enclitics used with nouns to indicate the gender of the possessor:

(1) sò7o - i (Atatlahuca)
    ear 3S Child
    'his/her (child's) ear'

(2) k'ayú - de (San Miguel)
    horse 3S Masculine
    'his horse'

(3) nu7u - de (Chalcatongo)
    tooth 3S Masculine
    'his tooth'
(4) sátá - dē (Peñoles)
back 3S Animal
'its (animal's) back'

(5) sa7ma - rá (Jicaltepec)
clothes 3S Masculine
'his clothes'

(6) za7ma - ūa (Chayuco)
clothes 3S Feminine
'her clothes'

Pike (1944:132) illustrates how in San Miguel full noun forms are used whenever there is further modification by another noun or adjective:

(7) yá7a kúu ve7e - i
this is house 3S Child
'This is the child's house.'

(8) yá7a kúu ve7e sük' líi
this is house child little
'This is the little child's house.'

These examples show how the omclitics function as person markers with verbs to indicate the gender of the subject:

(9) nǔ7q' yú ñikó - ūa staǔ nũ maestro (Atatlahuca)
woman the sells 3S Fem. tortillas to teacher
'The woman sells tortillas to the teacher.'
(10) h'weves ɔako - yo ञायजु ह्नु (Chalcatongo)
Thursday come from 3S Coll.people town(s)
'On Thursday people come from many towns.'

(11) nì ƙiƙi - yà (San Miguel)
Past sleep 3S Sacred
'She/he (the god or saint) slept.'

(12) nị - ƙeƙi - di nỳa-yọ7ọ (Peñoles)
Past eat 3S Animal dried cornstalks
'It (the animal) ate dried cornstalks.'

(13) kƙiƙi - ɲa (Jicaltepec)
came 3S Feminine
'She came.'

(14) ndito - tu (Chayuco)
live 3S Tree
'It (the tree) is living.'

In many, perhaps all, Mixtec dialects, the use of the enclitic following the verb is optional if the subject is given in its full form as in (9) and (10) above.

The Lexical Class System

For the purposes of this paper we will define a lexical class system as a noun class system in which the nouns of a language are divided into classes by the use of superordinate terms, which are combined with the noun itself, but do not involve agreement with any other class of
morphemes. It also differs from a gender system in that it does not include every noun in the language, unless we posit a large and heterogeneous class with a zero marker. Greenberg (1978:51) notes that such a class system has no syntactic function, and therefore is not grammatically relevant. In Mixtec the superordinate term can be either a full noun or an affix which precedes the noun in question.

Examples of noun-noun compounds, in which the second stands in a genitival relationship to the first are frequent in Mixtec. The following are from Chalcatongo:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mûù bikò} & \quad \text{town + cloud} \quad \text{‘town of clouds’} \\
\text{čii kečù} & \quad \text{belly + animal} \quad \text{‘belly of the animal’} \\
\text{nda7a yuča} & \quad \text{hand + river} \quad \text{‘tributary of the river’} \\
\text{nduči í7a} & \quad \text{eye + god, holy one} \quad \text{‘the eye of the Virgin’}
\end{align*}
\]

This can extend to even longer sequences such as:

\[
\text{rayu í7a ndikandi} \quad \text{ray + god + sun} \quad \text{‘rays of the sun god’}
\]

To the degree to which certain body-parts used as locative prepositions can be called noun-noun constructions, they do not violate this pattern:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{šlnì yuna} & \quad \text{head + tree} \quad \text{‘above the tree’} \\
\text{nuù yuku} & \quad \text{face + mountain} \quad \text{‘on the mountainside’} \\
\text{čii mësa} & \quad \text{belly + table} \quad \text{‘under the table’}
\end{align*}
\]

The same construction occurs with the lexical class system in which nouns of general meaning are modified by other nouns to create what Greenberg calls lexicalized phrases (1978:51). In Chalcatongo, for example, we find the following town names:
The Chayuco dictionary lists nine different kinds of buildings, all beginning with ve7e 'house.' For example:

- ve7e kaa: house + metal 'jail'
- ve7e ndiši: house + whiskey 'bar'
- ve7e tyiño: house + authority 'town hall'

Other classes marked in Mixtec by compounds of two nouns include 'beans,' 'snakes,' 'words,' 'flowers,' 'birds,' 'sicknesses,' and 'men.'

A second type of compound consists of a classificatory prefix followed by a noun. In Atatlahuca the word for 'tree, wood' is yuhnu. It is shortened to nu and used as a prefix on names of trees and on objects made of wood:

- nunde7e: 'fruit tree'
- nuyuhé: 'ocote grove'
- nu7isá: 'loom'
- nuhií: 'rifle'

In a few cases classifying prefixes are phonologically and semantically related to encliticized pronouns.
The following examples from Chayuco begin with the shortened form of ña7a 'woman':

ñà tə7a yɔ woman + relative 'female companion; cousin of a man'
ñà tyivaa woman + noisy one 'girl, young woman'
ñà yoko woman + marriageable 'senorita, virgin'
ñà zə7a woman + mother 'woman'

A large majority of animal names in all Mixtec dialects begin with tə- or ti-. Words for objects such as 'blanket' and 'onion' are also included in this group. According to Longacre (1957:148), the prefix tə-/ti- represents the merger of two historically different morphemes. One is the Proto-Mixtecan classificatory noun *ru 'egg, fruit, round object' (Rensch 1976:213) which has extended its range of meaning to include 'thing.' The other is *kitu 'animal' which has become kitə. So while the animal gender suffix -tə is a shortened form of the word 'animal,' at least some of the classificatory prefixes which are identical to it come from an entirely different source. In fact, in the examples below, etymologies of words beginning with tə- are offered using only the more general meaning of 'thing.' These words are from San Miguel, but nearly all of them are also used by Chalcatongo speakers (often with a difference in tone).³

təka tə 'thing' + kaa 'go up' 'grasshopper'
təkəči tə 'thing' + kači 'cotton' 'blanket, poncho'
tikokə tə 'thing' + kókó 'swallow' 'maggot, beetle'
tikaňa tə 'thing' + kaňa 'snarl' 'disturbance'
tikası tə 'thing' + kası 'toast' 'corn bread'
tikью tə 'thing' + tiu 'face' 'owl'

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Longacre (1957:66) notes that tVY- becomes Ꝕ- in the central dialects, and ty- in Jicaltepec (Chayuco). This amounts to a fusion of the Ꝕ- prefix with words which begin with Ꝕ. San Miguel has both fused and unfused forms.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{t✿yókó, çókó} & \quad \text{(San Miguel)} \\
\text{tyoko} & \quad \text{(Chayuco)} \\
\text{'ant'} & \\
\text{t✿yô7ô, çô7ô} & \quad \text{(San Miguel)} \\
\text{tyo7ô} & \quad \text{(Chayuco)} \\
\text{‘flea’}
\end{align*}
\]

For some words in San Miguel only the fused form is used:

\[
\text{čuku rê} \quad \text{t✿yuku rê} \quad \text{t✿ + yuku ‘louse’ + rê ‘lamb’ ‘tick’}
\]

A number of animal names and objects also begin with ndâ-/ndi- and li-/li. Many are analyzable in the same way as words beginning with Ꝕ-, although the meanings of the prefixes are not clear. The cognate sets in Longacre (1957) show that ndâ- and Ꝕ- prefixes were separate at the level of Proto-Mixtecan. Some examples from San Miguel with recognizable second elements are:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ndikó̂} & \quad \text{ndi- + kō̂ ‘snake’ ‘lizard’} \\
\text{ndîyunu} & \quad \text{ndi- + yunu ‘tree, wood’ ‘an insect’}
\end{align*}
\]

In one example the prefix is added to a Spanish loan:

\[
\text{ndîšî7û} \quad \text{ndi- + Spanish chivo ‘goat’ ‘goat’}
\]

This is evidence that the process of prefixing has been operative at some period since Spanish contact.

In the six Mixtec dialects examined in this paper, there are two words for ‘tree’: yunu in the central dialects, and yutu in Peñoles and
Jamiltepec. What is interesting is that \( \text{yu-} \), \(-\text{nu}\), and \(-\text{tu}\) have all been used as classifiers for 'tree.' In San Miguel we find the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yulà} & \quad \text{'herb'} \\
\text{yukû} & \quad \text{'shrub, herb'} \\
\text{yuha} & \quad \text{'foliage'} \\
\text{yuśa} & \quad \text{'foliage'} \\
\text{yuśi} & \quad \text{'hay'}
\end{align*}
\]

Most of these words are also found in Chayuco and other dialects. However, in languages that have \( \text{yumu} \) for 'tree,' \(-\text{nu}\) is also used as a classifier as in the examples from Atatlahuca given above, and in San Miguel:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nundókó} & \quad \text{'zapote grove'} \\
\text{numa} & \quad \text{'tree leaves'} \\
\text{nupélē} & \quad \text{'pear tree'}
\end{align*}
\]

The last example is another case of a classifier added to a Spanish loan (\( \text{pélē} \) from \( \text{pera} \)).

In Chayuco and Peñoles where 'tree' is \( \text{yutu} \), \(-\text{tu}\) is used as a prefix:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tu yavi šuu ve7e} & \quad \text{'cross beam'} \\
\text{tu yoo} & \quad \text{'reed grass'} \\
\text{tu yusa} & \quad \text{'ocote stick'} \\
\text{ty-tši} & \quad \text{'avocado tree'} \\
\text{ty-yoo} & \quad \text{'cane'}
\end{align*}
\]

The use of the first syllable of 'tree' as a prefix is probably older since the \( \text{yu-} \) compounds are now disyllabic, while compounds with \(-\text{nu}\) and \(-\text{tu}\) are usually trisyllabic, often analyzable. The incorporation
of a Spanish loan confirms the fact that this process has been productive since the Spanish conquest.

In Chayuco, the one dialect we have looked at that has a 'tree' gender, it is -tu, the second syllable of yutu 'tree' which is the encliticized pronoun. While the lexical class system seems to have used different prefixes at different points in history, we do not have evidence of a similar sequence in the gender system.

Discussion

A certain amount of caution must be exercised in trying to establish the relative ages of the two noun class systems. For example, since nearly every gender is so clearly identified with a full noun form, the gender system would appear to be a very recent development. And since the prefixes used in the lexical class system have, in some instances, fused with the noun itself, it would seem to be older. However, both gender systems and the tendency to use lexical classifiers are found throughout the Otomanguean family. The external realization of the gender system in Mixtec may not be ancient; the idea of the system is. Within the lexical class system there exist noun-noun compounding which is productive at the present time, prefix-noun compounding which has been productive at some time since the Conquest as attested by the incorporation of Spanish loans, and much older disyllabic nouns in which the prefix has completely fused with the stem.

The fact that the pronominal enclitics have not undergone fusion with the words they follow, can perhaps be explained by their syntactic relationship with them. When they serve as subject markers following
verbs, they are part of the subject noun phrase, separated from the verb phrase at the highest node. For example:

```
     S
    / \
   VP  NP
  /   /
kusu tê
```

will sleep it (the animal)

'It (the animal) will sleep.'

The superordinate terms of the lexical class, however, are always part of the same noun phrase as the word they classify, and are thus more intimately bound to it, and more easily affected by it on a phonological level. Therefore, the difference in the degree of fusion of the two noun class systems, which might appear to indicate that the lexical class system is older, is actually explained by syntactic differences.⁴

In summary, Mixtec appears to have two independent noun class systems which, although they sometimes define similar semantic classes, function in very different ways. The gender system is a covert system in which the marker does not appear on the noun itself, but is an enclitic which marks subjects of verbs and possessors of nouns. The lexical class system, on the other hand, is an overt system in which the classifying terms are marked directly on the noun itself. This prefixing may take the form of a lexicalized phrase, in which the classifier word occurs before a full noun, a trisyllabic word which includes a classifying prefix, or a disyllabic word which consists of a prefix and a cliticized root.
What are needed now are more detailed studies of the noun class systems in Mixtec itself, as well as descriptions of the systems in neighboring, related languages. The rich variety of such systems in the Otomanguean family may provide insights into the more general problem of their genesis and development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Leanne Hinton for her encouragement and comments during the time I was writing this paper. I would also like to thank Nicolas Cortez from Chalcatongo, Oaxaca, who shared with our class his language and his friendship.

Footnotes

1The orthographies of the sources have been kept, with the following exceptions: the voiceless velar stop is represented by k rather than ç and qu, the glottal stop by z rather than h, the glottal fricative by h rather than j, the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative by s rather than x, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate by Ç rather than ch, and the voiced palatal fricative/approximant by y rather than ñ. Vowel nasalization is indicated by y. High tones are marked by V, low tones by ñ. Mid tones are unmarked.

2In this paper we are considering only the third person singular.

3Identifications of the second elements in the following compounds should be considered tentative.

4I am grateful to Leanne Hinton for this important observation.
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STUDIES IN MESOAMERICAN LINGUISTICS

Report #4
Survey of California and Other Indian Languages
Reports from the Survey
of California and Other Indian Languages

Edited by Alice Schlichter, Wallace L. Chafe, and Leanne Hinton

Report #4

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cover design (Santa Barbara Chumash rock painting) by Leanne Hinton
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