Exuberant Complexity in Amuzgo: Triple marked plural verb phrases and other morphological operations
Bien DoBui
Université Paris-Sorbonne

This poster will propose an X-bar visualization of a complex construction in Xochistlahuaca Amuzgo (XA) which we call exuberant plural marking. A typical verbal phrase is constructed thusly: PRE-\(\sqrt{=}\)SUB. The subject marker typically conveys number, but number is also marked on the verbal root, on preceding light verbs and TAM markers. In all, a verb phrase may be triple-marked for number. This is what we call lending “exuberance” to complexity.

An example of such triple-marked verbs:

\(a\) ma\(=\) kà\(n\) \(=\)a\(\) PROG.SG= ask A1SG
I am asking.

\(b\) kwi\(=\) tà\(n\) \(=\)já PROG.SG= ask.PL =A1PLINCL
We are asking.

\(c\) ma\(=\) nto? \(-\)ntjö\(\) PROG.SG= lean out-B1SG
I am leaning out.

\(d\) kwi\(=\) hntö? \(-\)ntjö PROG.PL= lean out.PL-B1PLINCL
We are leaning out.

\(e\) ma\(=\) tse\(=\) ki\(á\) \(=\)ja\(=\) tassa PROG.SG= CAUS.SG= knock/lay down=A1SG cup
I am knocking a cup down.

\(f\) kwi\(=\) la\(=\) ki\(á\) \(=\)já tassa PROG.SG= CAUS.SG= knock/lay down=A1PLINCL cup
We are knocking a cup down.

\(g\) ma\(=\) tse\(=\) köntù\(=\) ntjö\(\) PROG.SG= CAUS.SG= lie-B1SG
I am gossiping.

\(h\) kwi\(=\) la?\(=\) köntù\(=\) ntjö PROG.PL= CAUS.PL= lie-B1PLINCL
We (incl) are gossiping.

In the plural examples on the right-hand side, all preverbs encode plural information. Number is also expressed by subject pronouns. In the case of the non-causative constructions, verb roots are also marked for number typically mark the plural through consonant mutation, most commonly to t-like (\(b\)). Interestingly, verb phrases appear to be maximally triple marked for plurality, as when an opportunity for quadruple marking appears (examples (e-h)) the language seems to blocks against it. In this case, all but the verb root are plurally marked (examples (i-l) below).

\(i\) ma\(=\) lhe \(=\)ja\(=\) kwi tészá PROG.SG= encounter, obtain-A1SG one banana
I got a banana.

\(j\) kwi\(=\) liù PROG. =A1PLINCL
They got a banana.

\(k\) ma\(=\) tsé= lhe \(=\)ja\(=\) n-tse=ja\(=\) na tjua?
PROG.SG= CAUS.SG= accustom-A1SG PL.child=1SGPOSS COMP early
I accustom my children to waking up early.

\(l\) kwi\(=\) la\(=\) lhe \(=\)já n-tse=ja\(=\) na tjua?
PROG.SG= CAUS.PL= accustom-A1PLINCL PL.child=1PLINCLPOSS COMP early
We accustom our children to waking up early.

As XA is a VSO language, we follow the proposed D-structure in which the verb is assumed to have raised above the subject. By raising, the verb takes on agreement, in the case of XA for number. For phrases like (l), the verb root \(lhe\) ‘accustom’ does not take on a plurally marked form as it does in (j), \(liù\)
even though both sentences bear the [-SG] feature in Spec under AGR. We posit that, in causative constructions, where \( tse = \) (the weak form of \( tfe \)'do, make') precedes the strong verb, the relationship is actually not one of auxiliary and verb, or light and strong verb but a PRO-construction in which an empty category projects a finite and featureless phrase to the right. The causative is thus not quite a prefix, but remains a full verb in its own right. Its status as a clitic may underlie this behavior in some way. Confer to sentence (l) of which the S-structure is represented below:

References:
