Exuberant Complexity in Amuzgo:
Triple marked plural verb phrases and other morphological operations

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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-√=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:
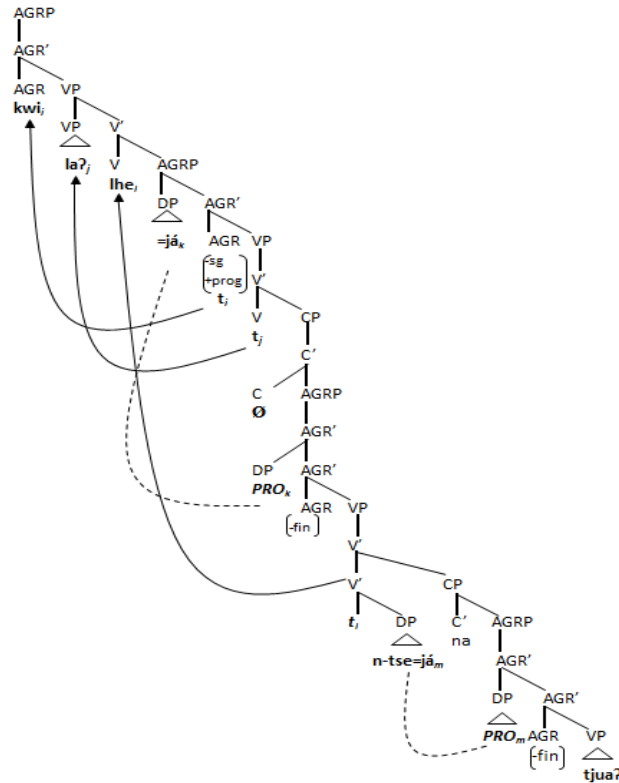
a)
ma=	kàⁿ	=a·
PROG.SG=	ask	A1SG

I am asking.

b)
kwi=	tàⁿ	=já
PROG.SG=	ask.PL	=A1PLINCL

We are asking.

c)
ma=	ntoʔ	-ntjɔ·
PROG.SG=	lean out	-B1SG

I am leaning out.

d)
kwi=	hntòʔ	-ntjɔ́
PROG.PL=	lean out.PL	-B1PLINCL

We are leaning out.

e)
ma=	tsé=	kíá·	=ja·	tassa
PROG.SG=	CAUS.SG=	knock/lay down-	=A1SG	cup

I am knocking a cup down.

f)
kwi=	laʔ=	kíá	=já	tassa
PROG.SG=	CAUS.SG=	knock/lay down-	=A1PLINCL	cup

We are knocking a cup down.

g)
ma=	tsé=	kàntù·	-ntjɔ·
PROG.SG=	CAUS.SG=	lie	-B1SG

I am gossiping.

h)
kwi=	laʔ=	kàntù·	-ntjɔ́
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 with (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 tèsá
PROG.SG=	encounter, obtain	=A1SG	one banana

I got a banana.

j)
kwi=	lìu	=já	kwi tèsá
PROG. PL=	encounter, obtain.PL	=A1PLINCL	one banana

They got a banana.

k)
ma=	tsé=	lhe	=ja·	n-tse=ja·	na	tjuaʔ
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=já	na	tjuaʔ
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), *lìu*

even though both sentences bear the [-SG] feature in Spec under AGR. We posit that, in causative constructions, where *tse=* (the weak form of *tʃeʔ* '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 (I) of which the S-structure is represented below:

I) kwi-laʔ+[$_{CP}$[$_{AGR}$PRO$_k$ lhe=já$_k$ n-tse=já$_m$[$_{CP}$[$_{AGR}$ na [PRO$_m$ tjuaʔ]]]]].

kwi-laʔ+lhe=já n-tse=já na tjuaʔ.

We accustom our children to waking up early.

References:

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