

Two Noun Class Systems in Mixtec

Martha J. Macri

University of California, Berkeley

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 Otomanguan 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 Atatlajuca (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).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.² 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



DIALECT	SUBGROUP	DISTRICT
Peñoles	eastern	Etla
San Miguel	central	Tlaxiaco
Chalcatongo	central	Tlaxiaco
Atatlahuca	central	Tlaxiaco
Jicaltepec	southern	Jamiltepec
Chayucu	southern	Jamiltepec

Figure 2. Mixtec dialects cited

Atatlahuca San Miguel Chalcatongo Penoles Jicaltepec Chayuco

Feminine						
pron	-ña	-ña	-ña	-a	-ña	-ña
noun	ñq7q	ñq7q	ña7a	ña-di7i	ñq7q	ña7a
gloss	woman	woman	woman	woman	woman	woman
Masculine						
pron	-de	-de	-de	-dé	-rá	-ra
noun	tèc			tée	ráí	rayi:
gloss	man			man	man	man
Animal						
pron	-t:	-t:	-t:	-d:	-ri	-t:
noun	kit:	kit:	kit:	kit:	kiti	kit:
gloss	animal	animal	animal	animal	animal	animal
Sacred						
pron	-ya	-ya	-ya	-ká	-yá	
noun	yaà	i7yà	i7a			
gloss	god	god	god			
Inanimate						
pron				-si	-çi*	-si
noun						
gloss						
Human, collective						
pron			-yo	-yu	-ní	-ñu
noun			ñayau	ñayau	ñiwí	ñiyivi
gloss			people	people	people	people
Child/person						
pron	-i	-i				
noun	sùçí	sùçí				
gloss	child	child				
Tree/vehicle						
pron						-tu
noun						yutu
gloss						tree
Water/rain						
pron	-te					
noun	ndute					
gloss	water					

* -çi is realized as /çi/, /çe/, or /ça/ in various environments.

Table 1. Third person pronouns in Mixtec

sacred gender. Atatlahuca and San Miguel have an -i enclitic derived from sùčí '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.

Penoles has two encliticized forms for the feminine. -a may be derived from 'woman' ñá-dē74 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 šita '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 ^w ayú - de | (San Miguel) |
| | horse 3S Masculine | |
| | 'his horse' | |
| (3) | nu7u - de | (Chalcatongo) |
| | tooth 3S Masculine | |
| | 'his tooth' | |

- (4) sátá - d̥i (Peñoles)
 back 3S Animal
 'its (animal's) back'
- (5) sa7ma - rá (Jicaltepec)
 clothes 3S Masculine
 'his clothes'
- (6) za7ma - ña (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 sùčí ílíl
 this is house child little
 'This is the little child's house.'

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

- (9) ñq7q̄ y šíko - ña staà nuù maestro (Atatlahuca)
 woman the sells 3S Fem. tortillas to teacher
 'The woman sells tortillas to the teacher.'

- (10) h^weves šako - yo ñayáu ñuu (Chalcatongo)
 Thursday come from 3S Coll.people town(s)
 'On Thursday people come from many towns.'
- (11) nì kišì - yà (San Miguel)
 Past sleep 3S Sacred
 'She/he (the god or saint) slept.'
- (12) ní - šeši - di ndà-yo7o (Peñoles)
 Past eat 3S Animal dried cornstalks
 'It (the animal) ate dried cornstalks.'
- (13) kíči - ña (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:

ñuù bikò	town + cloud	'town of clouds'
čii kət̀t̀	belly + animal	'belly of the animal'
nda7a yuča	hand + river	'tributary of the river'
ndučí í7a	eye + god, holy one	'the eye of the Virgin'

This can extend to even longer sequences such as:

rayu í7a ndikandi	ray + god + sun	'rays of the sun god'
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To the degree to which certain body-parts used as locative prepositions can be called noun-noun constructions, they do not violate this pattern:

šinì yuna	head + tree	'above the tree'
nuù yukú	face + mountain	'on the mountainside'
čii' m̀sa	belly + table	'under the table'

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:

ñuù kava	town + boulder	'Boulder Town'
ñuù viko	town + cloud	'Cloud Town'
ñuù nde7eyu	town + mud	'Mud Town'

and in San Miguel:

ñuù yoskuíá	town + ?	'Juxtlahuaca'
ñuù šinḷ ñúú	town + head + town	'Chalcatongo, Town above the Towns'
ñuù šinḷ víkó	town + head + cloud	'San Juan Mixtepec, Town above the Clouds'

In the Chayuco dictionary nine different kinds of buildings are listed, 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 Atlatlahuca 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:

nunde7é	'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':

ña tɔ7ɔ yo	woman + relative	'female companion; cousin of a man'
ña tyivaa	woman + noisy one	'girl, young woman'
ña yoko	woman + marriageable	'senorita, virgin'
ña zɔ7ɔ	woman + mother	'woman'

A large majority of animal names in all Mixtec dialects begin with tɔ- or ti-. Words for objects such as 'blanket' and 'onion' are also included in this group. According to Longacre (1957:148), the prefix tɔ-/ti- represents the merger of two historically different morphemes. One is the Proto-Mixtecan classificatory noun *tu '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 kitɔ. So while the animal gender suffix -tɔ 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 tɔ- 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

tɔka	tɔ 'thing' + kaa 'go up'	'grasshopper'
tɔkɔtɔ	tɔ 'thing' + kačɔ 'cotton'	'blanket, poncho'
tɔkokò	tɔ 'thing' + kókó 'swallow'	'maggot, beetle'
tɔkañà	tɔ 'thing' + kañà 'snarl'	'disturbance'
tɔkasù	tɔ 'thing' + kasù 'toast'	'corn bread'
tɔñuu	tɔ 'thing' + ñuu 'face'	'owl'

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

t̄yókó, čókó	(San Miguel)
tyoko	(Chayuco)
'ant'	
t̄yò7ó, čò7ó	(San Miguel)
tyo7o	(Chayuco)
'flea'	

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

čuku r̄á̄ *t̄yuku r̄á̄ t̄ + yuku 'louse' + r̄á̄ 'lamb' 'tick'

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

ndikóó	ndi- + kòò	'snake'	'lizard'
ndìyunu	ndi- + yunu	'tree, wood'	'an insect'

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

ndíí7ú 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 yu-, -nu, and -tu have all been used as classifiers for 'tree.' In San Miguel we find the following:

yuà	'herb'
yukù	'shrub, herb'
yuha	'foliage'
yuša	'foliage'
yuši	'hay'

Most of these words are also found in Chayuco and other dialects. However, in languages that have yunu for 'tree,' -nu is also used as a classifier as in the examples from Atlatlahuca given above, and in San Miguel:

nundókó	'zapote grove'	nu- + ndoko	'zapote'
numa	'tree leaves'	nu- + ma	?
nupélé	'pear tree'	nu- + pélé	'pear'

The last example is another case of a classifier added to a Spanish loan (pélé from pera).

In Chayuco and Peñoles where 'tree' is yutu, -tu is used as a prefix:

tu yavi šuu ve7e	'cross beam'	(Chayuco)
tu yoo	'reed grass'	(Chayuco)
tu yusa	'ocote stick'	(Chayuco)
tɥ-tìč̣i	'avocado tree'	(Peñoles)
tɥ-yoo	'cane'	(Peñoles)

The use of the first syllable of 'tree' as a prefix is probably older since the yu- compounds are now disyllabic, while compounds with nu- and 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.

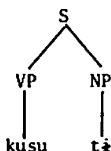
In Chayuco, the one dialect we have looked at that has a 'tree' gender, it is -tu, the second syllable of yutu 'tree' which is the encliticized pronoun. While the lexical class system seems to have used different prefixes at different points in history, we do not have evidence of a similar sequence in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



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.

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Footnotes

¹The orthographies of the sources have been kept, with the following exceptions: the voiceless velar stop is represented by k rather than c and qu, the glottal stop by ʔ rather than h, the glottal fricative by h rather than j, the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative by ɬ rather than x, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate by ɬ rather than ch, and the voiced palatal fricative/approximant by ɟ rather than ʝ. Vowel nasalization is indicated by ̃. High tones are marked by ́, low tones by ̀. 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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