

Morphological encoding of prosodic phrasing and the placement of clitics in Yucatec Maya

This contribution relates to the thematic session ‘Boundaries of Morphology to Phonology and Syntax’. In particular, it discusses a rather uncommon phenomenon in which the occurrence and the placement of certain morphological elements is conditioned by the (syntactically determined) prosodic structure:

Yucatec Maya displays a class of enclitics which obligatorily follow definite NPs and contrast for the encoding of different regions of spatial deixis: localization ‘near the deictic center’, ‘far from deictic center’, and ‘outside from visible field’ (see Bohmeyer 1998a, 1998b, Verhoeven 2007), see (1).

(1) *táan u wen-el le xibpal*(-a’/-o’/-e’)*
PROG A.3 sleep-INCMP L DEF man:child-D1/D2/D3

‘The boy (here/ there/ afore mentioned) is sleeping.’

Interestingly, these clitics are not necessarily adjacent to the licensing head, but they often surface at the end of the clause, see (2) in which the enclitic *-o’* is licensed by the definite object.

(2) *k-u xímbat-ik le h-mèen hun-túul h-k’iin-o’.*
IPFV-A.3 visit-INCMP L DEF M-shaman one-CL.AN M-priest-D2

‘A priest visits the shaman.’

Additionally, the unmarked member of the class (*-e’*) appears at the right boundary of a topic constituent (also when it is not definite), and at the right edge of a clause that is not final in the discourse unit (=this is a thematic unit and not exactly a sentence), see (3).

(3) *Pèedróoh-e’ k-u y-a’l-ik-e’ k-u xok-ik analte’*
Pedro-D3 IPFV-A.3 0-say-INCMP L-D3 IPFV-A.3 read-INCMP L book

‘Pedro says that he reads a book.’

This talk presents evidence that Yucatec enclitics are associated with particular prosodic properties (F_0 targets a high peak aligned with the right boundary of the clitic) and they define intonational phrases (the same argument was advocated by Aissen 1992 for a similar class of clitics in Tzotzil). When an enclitic is licensed by a definite NP, as in (1) and (2), it has to be placed to the right edge of the containing intonational phrase, as (2) proves. Apart from the clitics that are licensed by definiteness, enclitics occur in discourse in order to mark intonational boundaries, which is the case in (3). In these cases, it is the intonational boundary itself that licenses the clitic and there is no semantic contrast for the encoding of deixis (only the unmarked member of the class occurs). Clitics of this type are exponents of phonological entities (intonational boundaries) and are functionally equivalent to the ‘continuation rise’ in intonational languages.

The talk gives an exhaustive account of the kind of syntactic environments in which the clitics occur as well as the positions in the utterance in which deictic clitics are placed. The presentation is based on evidence from a production experiment that examines the spontaneous production of clitics in the following contexts: restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses; focused and topicalized NPs; right dislocation; different types of subordinate clauses (16 native speakers, Yucatán, Mexico, April 2008).

References: Aissen, J. 1992, Topic and Focus in Mayan. *Language* 68.1, 43-80;
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Bohnemeyer, J. 1998b: Sententiale Topics im Yukatekischen, in: Zaefferer, Dietmar (ed.), *Deskriptive Grammatik und allgemeiner Sprachvergleich*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 55-85;
Verhoeven, E. 2007: *Experiential constructions in Yucatec Maya: A typologically based analysis of a functional domain in a Mayan language*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.