

# Pluractionality and Verbal Derivation

Robert Henderson

University of Arizona

Tucson, Dec 11, 2023

# Introduction

---

The goal for this module is to introduce pluractionality in Mayan languages, and then, through this lens, look at Mayan root classes and their derivational morphology—e.g., verbs, positionals, affect words.

# Pluractionality

---

Definition. Pluractional verbs are morphologically complex verbs that cannot be true in “single-event scenarios.”

TSELTAL (Polian 2013: 350, ex.6)

Ya y-uts'in-la-on-ik.

INC A3-molestar-Vlay-B1-PL

‘They bother me all the time.’

The morphemes that form pluractional verbs, we call pluractionals.

---

# The Event-Internal / Event-External Distinction

---

One broad distinction we can make between pluractionals is between those that involve so-called event-internal pluralities and those that involve event-external pluralities. Roughly,

- Event-external pluractionals involve repetitions of independent events (belonging to the event-type that the verb characterizes).
- Event-internal pluractionals involve repetitions of some internal phase of an event (belong to the event-type that the verb characterizes) which sum to a new kind of event.

# A Kaqchikel Event-Internal Pluractional

---

In Kaqchikel we can form one kind of pluractional with the affix -VC1a'

(a) X-Ø-in-ch'ar-**ach'a'** ri tros.

CP-B3SG-A1SG-split-C1a' the stump

'I kept chopping at the stump.' {ELIC}

SPEAKER COMMENT: It's like if your axe is really dull.

(b) X-Ø-u-yuch'-**uya'** ri su't.

CP-B3SG-A3SG-fold-C1a' the wrap

'She kept folding over the wrap.' {ELIC}

SPEAKER COMMENT: Like if you can't get it lined up even.

# A Kaqchikel Event-Internal Pluractional

---

A primary piece of evidence that we have an event-internal pluractional is that we do not get entailments to the base-predicate.

X-Ø-in-ch'ar-**ach'a'**            ri tros,

CP-B3SG-A1SG-split-**C1a'**    the stump,

po man x-Ø-ch'ar            ta.

but NEG CP-B3SG-split.PAS IRR

'I kept chopping at the stump, but it didn't split.' {ELIC}

# A Kaqchikel Event-External Pluractional

---

We can contrast the event-internal case with the event-external pluractional -(V)löj

(Ojër kan) x-i-ch'ar-**alöj**.

(before) CP-B1SG-split-**löj**

'I used to split (wood).' {ELIC}

SPEAKER COMMENT: like as a profession

# Pluractionals as derivation

---

If you were eagle-eyed, you might have noticed some interesting transitivity facts. The -C1Va' examples were transitive, but the -(V)löj example, even with the same root, was intransitive.

- In general, pluractionals in Mayan often select for stems / roots of a particular transitivity class, or even change the argument structure of the stem / root in question.
- We have to say stem / root because some pluractionals select for roots and not stems.
- All of this is not surprising! Mayan languages are obsessed with transitivity and classifying their lexical morphemes into CVC roots vs derived stems.



# Roots vs Stems

---

In the cases we have already seen there is a distinction. The event-internal pluractional selections for roots, while the event external pluractional has no such requirement.

ch'är *split*

-ch'aralöj

-ch'arach'a'

b'iyin *walk*

-b'iyinilöj

\*-b'iyinib'a'

It is these kind of facts that have lead me to propose that event-internal pluractionals apply closer to the root, morphosemantically speaking.

---

# Change of Valence

---

The Kaqchikel event-internal pluractional -VC1a' has somewhat of a strange pattern. It occurs with transitive roots without issue, but replaces the derived transitive morphology on derived transitive.

xinch'är            I split it.

xinch'**arach'a**    I kept splitting (at) it.

Xink'ojij            I hit it (hard object).

Xink'**ojok'a'**        I kept hitting it (hard object).

# Change of Valence

---

With positionals, it seems even more clearly to be transitivizing the root.

sir (siril,siran)

*seated, round thing*

\*xusir

X-Ø-u-sir-isa'

ri koloch'.

CP-B3SG-A3SG-roll-**C1a'** the ball

'He kept rolling the ball (back and forth in place).'

# Change of Valence

---

With the event-external pluractional, we see the opposite effect, where the pluractional has a detransitivizing effect, while also occurring with stems that are already intransitive.

X-i-b'iyin-**ilöj**.

CP-B1SG-walk-**löj**

'I kept having to walk.' {ELIC}

X-Ø-tz'am-**alöj** ri säqmolo'.

CP-B3SG-take-**löj** the eggs

'The eggs were taken over time.' {ELIC}

SPEAKER COMMENT: It's like you're selling eggs at the market and they were sold a few at a time all afternoon until gone.

# Beyond Verbs

---

We have already seen examples where pluractionals are operating outside the verbal domain—i.e., deriving transitive verbs from positional roots.

X-Ø-u-sir-isa'                      ri koloch'.

CP-B3SG-A3SG-roll-C1a'    the ball

'He kept rolling the ball (back and forth in place).' {ELIC}

We also find pluractionals deriving verbs from ideophone roots!

---



# Ideophones / Affect Words

---

But these ideophones have pluractional derivations that

b'it' 'the sound of cloth tearing'

Yalan ni-Ø-b'it'-it'                      ri kej ch-u-xe'                      ri r-ejqa'n.  
very ICP-B3SG-fart-**PLRC**    the horse PREP-A3SG-under the A3SG-burden

The horse farted a lot under its burden.' {ELIC}

qitz' 'squeak produced by chairs, beds, or loose cargo'

Ri ch'ich' ch'at yalan ni-qitz'-iqöt                      taq y-a-wär  
the metal bed very ICP-Ø-B3SG-squeak-**PLRC** when ICP-B2SG-sleep

ch-u-wäch

PREP-A3SG-front

'The metal bed squeaks a lot when you sleep in it.'                      (Cojtí et al 1998:250)

# Ideophones / Affect Words

---

The pluractional affixes we see with ideophones are also seen deriving verbs from positional roots.

Rip (ripil) stretched out, extended, wide and smooth thing

Ri wuj ni-Ø-rip-**iröt** r-uma ri kaq'iq'.

The paper ICP-B3sg-rip-**PLRC** A3sg-because the wind

'The paper was billowing due to the wind.' (Cojtí et al 1998:289)

The semantics of these items has not been investigated.

---



# Takeaways

---

Mayan languages tend to have many pluractional derivations.

- These derivations care about the root / non-root distinction.
- These derivations implicate transitivity in complex ways.
- There are interesting overlaps between verbs, positionals, and ideophones whereby we can form verbs out of the later categories using pluractional derivations.

# references

---

Cojtí, Narciso, Martín Chacach & Marcos Cali. 1998. *Diccionario Kaqchikel*. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.

Henderson, Robert. 2012. *Ways of pluralizing events*. PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz.

Pérez González, Jaime. 2012. *Predicados expresivos e ideófonos en tseltal*. MA thesis. CIESAS.

Polian, Gilles. *Gramática del tseltal de Oxchuc*. Vol. 1. México: cieras, 2013.

# this lecture

---

is part of the series *Glottothèque: Mayan languages*. Berlin, Göttingen, Mexico City: online resource.

visit glottothèque at:

<https://spw.uni-goettingen.de/projects/maya/>



glottothèque  
**MAYAN LANGUAGES**  
ONLINE RESOURCE

El Colegio de México  
Humboldt University of Berlin  
University of Göttingen

funded by the DAAD

SPONSORED BY THE



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service