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Mayan languages

Microvariation in Mayan agent focus

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Introduction

A large subset of the Mayan languages restricts the extraction of transitive subjects (= Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC); Aissen 2017a).

(1) Chuj (Coon et al. 2021: 272)

a. Ix-in-y-il ix ix.
PFV-1SG.N-3.E-see CLF woman
'the woman saw me'

b. Ha ix ix ix-in-il-an-i.
FOC CLF woman PFV-1SG.N-see-AF-STAT.ITR
'THE WOMAN saw me' [subject focus]

[E: ergative; set A; N: absolutive affix; set B; STAT:ITR: intransitive status marker]

Introduction

Extraction of objects and intransitive subjects does not trigger agent focus.

(2) Chuj (Kotek & Erlewine 2019: 67)

a. Mach ix-∅-ulek'-i?
who PFV-3.N-come-STAT.ITR
'Who came?'

b. Mach ix-∅-w-il-a'?
who PFV-3.N-1SG.E-see-STAT.TR
'Who did I see?'

c. Mach ix-in-il-an-i?
who PFV-1SG.N-see-AF-STAT.ITR
'Who saw me?' [subject question]

Introduction

Agent focus may also be triggered by relativization of transitive subjects.

(3) Chuj (Kotek & Erlewine 2019: 68)
winh unin [ix-∅-man-an ixim pastel]
CLF.MASC child PFV-3.N-buy-AF CLF.GRAIN cake
'a boy who bought the cake'

In some Mayan languages certain indefinite transitive subject may also trigger agent focus.

(4) Chuj (Hou 2013: 10)
Ma#laj mach ix-il-an winh.
NEG who PFV-see-AF CLF.MASC
'Nobody saw him'

Properties of agent focus

Mayan agent focus (AF) exhibits the following properties:

- AF is used when the transitive subject is extracted.
- The pronominal ergative affix (= set A-affix) is blocked.
- The verb bears a special AF marker.
- The verbs show intransitive morphology (intransitive status suffixes in the respective contexts of appearance).
  $\Rightarrow$ Syntax-morphology mismatch

Mayan languages

Branch	Languages
Huastecan	Huastec, †Chicomuceltec
Yucatecan	Yucatec, Lacandon, Itzaj, Mopan
W: Ch'olan-Tseltalan	Ch'ol, Yokot'an, Ch'orti; Tsotsil, Tseltal
W: Q'anjob'alan	Q'anjob'al, Akatek, Popti', Mocho', Chuj, Tojolab'al
E: K'ichean	Q'eqchi', Uspantek, Poqom, Poqomchi', K'iche', Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Sakapultek, Sipakapense
E: Mamean	Mam, Tektitek, Awakatek, Ixil

Table: Mayan languages

[W: Western branch; E: Eastern branch]

Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC)

Ergative Extraction Constraint (Aissen 2017a): All contexts that trigger agent focus involve extraction ("(wh/Ā)-movement") of a core argument to a non-argument position.

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Question:

Why does topicalization not fall under the EEC (even in languages that exhibit moved/"internal" topics)?

Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC)

Mayan languages differ in the position of set B affixes: these may be realized as verb-final suffixes (= ”low ABS”) or may precede the verb stem and the set A affixes (= ”high ABS”).

(5) Affix order in the Mayan verb
TMA – {set B} – {set A} – [Root – (Voice) – (Status)] – {set B}

(6) a. Sakapultek (DuBois 1981: 172)
k-in-ā-čˇay-aŋ
INC-1SG.N-2SG.E-hit-STAT.TR
‘you hit me’

b. Yucatec (Dayley 1981: 49)
k-in-kı´ins-ik-ech
INC-1SG.E-kill-STAT.TR-2SG.N
‘I killed you’

Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC)

Tada (1993: 104ff.) observed a strong, though not perfect correlation between the position of the absolutive markers and the presence of the EEC (see also Coon et al. 2014, Coon et al. 2021).

	"High ABS"	"Low ABS"
+ EEC	Q'anjobal, Akaktek, Popti', Chuj, Q'eqchi,' Uspantek, K'iche,' Poqomam, Poqomchi', Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Sakapultek, Sipakapense, Mam, Awakatek	Yucatec, Ixil
– EEC		Lacandon, Mopan, Itzaj, Ch'ol, Chontal, Tseltal, Tojolab'al

Table: Position of the ABS marker and the presence of the EEC (Coon et al. 2014)

Parameters of Mayan microvariation in AF

- Contexts in which the EEC applies: content interrogatives, argument focus, relative clauses, certain indefinite constructions
- Restricted vs. generalized AF: subject/object settings in which AF is used
- Agreement of the absolutive (B) affix
- Formal overlap with antipassive
- Use of agent focus with reflexives and extended reflexives
- Use of AF in non-finite embedded clauses (as a workaround for transitivity restrictions; see Berger 2023)

Variation wrt. the contexts of the EEC

WH	Focus	Relative clause	Languages
✓	✓	✓	Tsotsil, Ixil, Tz'utujil, Sakapultek, Q'eqchi, Kaqchikel, Q'anjob'al, Chuj
✓	✓		(Yucatec), Popti', Sipakapense
	✓	✓	K'iche'
	✓		Chuj, Akatek, Awakatek
(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	Poqomam, Poqomchi'
✓	(✓)	(✓)	Mam

Table: Contexts of the ECC (Stiebels 2006 updated)

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	✓	✓	K'iche'
	✓		Chuj, Akatek, Awakatek
(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	Poqomam, Poqomchi'
✓	(✓)	(✓)	Mam

Table: Contexts of the ECC (Stiebels 2006 updated)

Question:

Can this variation of EEC-contexts be attributed to language-specific morphosyntactic properties of the respective structures?

Agreement patterns

In a number of languages the ABS marker indexes the direct object.

(7) Popti': object agreement (Dayley 1981: 38)
mak k=ach ʔil-ni
who ASP=2SG.N see-AF
'who saw you?'

Subject agreement is typically found if the internal argument is realized obliquely.

(8) Poqomchi': subject agreement (Dayley 1981: 22)
reʔ hin x-in-b'-uhyu-n-ik r-eh.
the 1SG ASP-1SG.N-quiet-AF-STAT.ITR 3SG.E-to
'I am the one who quieted him down'

Agreement patterns

Some Mayan languages follow a salience hierarchy. The argument higher on the salience hierarchy in (9) is indexed by the absolutive affix.

(9) Salience hierarchy
1/2 > 3pl >3

(10) Tz'utujil: salience-based agreement (Dayley 1985: 349f.)

a. inin x-in-ch'ey-ow-i jar aachii
1SG COMPL-1SG.N-hit-AF-STAT.NON.PERF.ITR the man
'I was the one who hit the man'

b. jar aachi x-in-ch'ey-ow-i
the man COMPL-1SG.N-hit-AF-STAT.NON.PERF.ITR
'the man was the one who hit me'

Agreement patterns

Agreement in AF	Case of int. arg.	Languages
obj	-obl	Yucatec, Chuj, Popti', Akatek, Q'anjobal, Ixil
obj/(subj)	-obl	Tsotsil, Awakatek
sal	-obl	K'iche', Kaqchikel
sal/subj	±obl	Tz'utujil, Sakapultek, Sipakapense
subj	+obl	Mam, Q'eqchi'
subj	±obl	Poqomam, Poqomchi'

Table: Agreement patterns in agent focus (Stiebels 2006; simplified)

Restricted vs. generalized agent focus

Mayan languages differ as to which subject-object settings trigger AF.
[SAP = 1st/2nd person]

Stage I	→	Stage II	→	Stage III	→	Stage IV
3-3		3-3		3-3		3-3
		3-SAP		3-SAP		3-SAP
				SAP-3		SAP-3
						SAP-SAP
Tsotsil		Popti'		K'iche'		Generalized AF
Proto-pattern?		Chuj				
		Sipakapense				
		Q'anjob'al				

Table: Extension of agent focus to subject–object settings other than 3-3 (Stiebels 2006)

Agent focus vs. antipassive

- Wide sense of "agent focus": set of strategies to circumvent the EEC (including antipassive); e.g. Aissen (2017a)
- Narrow sense of "agent focus": specific voice (morphologically intransitive, syntactically transitive) to circumvent the EEC; e.g. Coon et al. (2021)

(11) Chuj antipassive (Coon 2013)

a. Ix-in-jaw-w-i ixim.
PFV-1SG.N-grind-ANTIP-STAT.ITR corn
'I ground corn'

b. Tz-tum-waj ix s-nun winh chi' t'a hin.
IPFV-scold-ANTIP CLF.FEM 3SG.E-mother CLF DEM P 1SG.N
'His mother scolds me'

Agent focus vs. antipassive

Mayan languages differ in the formal overlap of agent focus and antipassive. The overlap may involve (partial) identity of the verbal markers, the case pattern (use of oblique case) and the agreement patterns.

Identity of AF/ANTIP marker	Languages
distinct	Proto-Maya, Yucatec, Tsotsil, Chuj, Popti', Akatek, Q'anjob'al, Sipakapense
partially identical	K'iche', Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Sakapultek
almost identical	Awakatek
identical	Mam, Ixil, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'eqchi'

Table: Identity of agent focus and antipassive marker (Stiebels 2006)

Agent focus vs. antipassive

Question:

Which instances of "agent focus" that exhibit (partial) formal identity of AF and ANTIP markers and show oblique case marking of the internal argument should still be considered to be a voice that is distinct from antipassive? [see Aissen 2017a and Coon et al. 2021]

- Mam: no difference between AF and ANTIP!
- Q'eqchi': AF_{obl}; no oblique patient in ANTIP!
- Tz'utujil, Sakapultek, Sipakapense, Poqomam, Poqomchi': $\text{AF}_{obl/dir}$; no oblique patient in ANTIP!

Exceptions to the EEC

Reflexives (12a) and extended reflexives (12b) represent exceptions to the EEC.

(12) Q'anjob'al (Coon et al. 2011: 28f.)

a. maktxel max-Ø-y-il s-b'a?
who ASP-3.N-3.E-see 3.E-self
'Who saw herself?'

b. maktxel max-Ø-s-b'on s-na?
who ASP-3.N-3.E-paint 3.E-house
'Who$_i$ painted his$_{i/*j}$ (own) house?'

(13) Chuj (Hou 2013: 14)
mach {ix-il-an/ ix-y-il} s-b'a t'a k'en nen?
who ASP-see-AF/ ASP-3.E-see 3.E-self at CLF mirror
'Who saw himself in the mirror?'

Exceptions to the EEC

Reflexive	Extended Reflexive	Languages
TV	TV	Tsotsil, K'iche', Q'anjob'al
TV	TV/AF	Popti'
TV	AF_{obl}	Q'eqchi'
TV/AF	$AF_{dir,obl}$	Tz'utujil
TV/AF	TV/AF	Chuj

Table: Use of agent focus in (extended) reflexives (Aissen 2017a)

EEC in complement clauses?

Questions:

- Which clausal complement types allow extraction?
- Is the EEC also effective in the respective clausal complements?
- If so, do we find the same structures as in non-embedded clauses?

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