

Morphosyntactic structure of Mixe-Zoquean languages: A typological overview

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Abstract

The languages of the two branches of the Mixe-Zoquean (MZ) language family (Mexico) exhibit several morphosyntactic traits associated to OV and polysynthetic languages although only a few languages present a rigid OV word order. MZ languages present productive noun incorporation patterns with unusual noun incorporation types, lexical affixes, rich complex predicates that include nuclear verbal root serialization, adverbial and non-verbal compounds, rich applicative and voice morphology, and one-word verbal constructions that are expressed as subordinate complex construction in non-polysynthetic languages. The verbal word is sentential since it includes pronominal arguments in the forms of affixes or clitics. The verbal template exhibits multiple morphological slots which need not all be filled, some of them are bound morphemes (lexical affixes and a few bound predicates) but also there are complex predicates resulting from the integration of morphological forms coming from different root classes. Although morphology is highly complex in these languages, not less important is the syntactic complexity found in phrases and clause formation. All the languages of the family show a hierarchical system for coding core arguments. Mixean languages and Jitotoltec show inverse morphology, whereas only Mixean languages show obviation. All the languages exhibit ergative alignment in part or in the whole paradigm. Other alignments are present in the languages are neutral, accusative and tripartite. All languages of the family show two types of verb conjugations: independent and dependent. Independent verb conjugation occurs in simple clauses, whereas dependent verb conjugation takes place in complex constructions, following auxiliaries and, in Mixean languages following adverbs. All the languages of the family exhibit different types of complement clauses which show different degrees of clause integration going from completely finite clauses to non-finite and colexicalized structures. The family present three main types of relative clauses: (i) externally headed relatives using the gap strategy; (ii) externally headed relatives with relative pronouns; and (iii) internally headed relatives. In the family, one finds embedded relative clauses in the Zoquean branch whereas adjoined relative clauses are found in the Mixean languages of Oaxaca. The relatives using a gap strategy are postnominal both in OV and VO Zoquean languages, but prenominal in Chimalapan Zoque, in the Zoque languages of Chiapas, and in Jitotoltec. Relatives with relative pronouns are always postnominal and they do not constitute a basic strategy within the family. In some languages, they are only found in the relativization of obliques by means of pied-pipping or pied-pipping with inversion; by preposition stranding; or by both strategies together. The internally headed relative clauses are found in the Chimalapa Zoquean languages of Oaxaca and in the Zoquean dialects spoken in Chiapas. In this paper, I discuss the contribution these findings in this family under a comparative, areal and typological perspective.