The instability of Eastern Mayan interrogative pronominals

Interrogative pronominals as complex constructions

Interrogative pronominals (IPs)

- Interrogative pronominals (Idiatov 2007):
  - non-selective, such as English who? and what?
  - selective, such as English which one?
- They are often constructions, sometimes complex ones (multimorphemic, multiword)
  - English which one?
  - San Juan la Laguna Tz’utujil (Eastern Mayan, Quichean; Dayley 1985:151, 239)
    
    anq chi k-e ‘which one?’ (lit.: ‘who/what among them?’)
    
    IPN PREP 3PL.GEN-RN

Instability

- Constructional complexity is expected to be favourable to the diachronic instability of IPs due to its natural interaction with the two diachronic tendencies particularly active with IPs:
  - substance reducing frequency effects which are often irregular and rather radical
  - the tendency for substance accretion, largely related to their prominent information-structural status and to the very strong tendency for continuity in the evolution of interrogative pronouns
- One of the most extreme cases of such instability is found among the Eastern Mayan languages.
- Besides the constructional complexity of IPs, a major factor that seems to have been pushing the instability to the extreme in the Eastern Mayan case is that the reduction and accretion of substance tend to occur at the opposite sides of IPs.

EM IPs: a deviant pattern

- “Mayan languages are so similar that the propriety of grouping them as a language family is readily apparent” (Fox 1978:1) and this relationship “was also recognized early, long before formal linguistic procedures have been formulated” (Campbell & Poser 2008:118).

- The extreme diversity of IPs in EM strongly deviates from this general pattern
  - different languages of the same branch, such as ‘who?’ in Mamean (Mayers 1986:275):
    - Mam: ‘alkyee’
    - Ixil: ‘ab’i
    - Awakatek: ‘na’
  - different dialects of a single language, such as ‘with what?, how?’ in K’iche’ (Par Sapón & Can Prueba 2000:94, 203):
    - Totonicapán: ‘jas’
    - Santa Cruz de El Quiché: ‘sa’
    - Cubulco: ‘naq’
  - within one dialect, such as ‘who?’ in Cubulco K’iche’ (Par Sapón & Can Prueba 2000:95, 203):
    - Chinoq, Chona, na and po

EM IPs: a deviant pattern

- The extreme diversity of IPs in EM is not reducible to regular sound changes.
- IPs have not been convincingly reconstructed for Proto Mayan or the major branches of the family yet (cf. Kaufman 2003:1516-1517).
- An additional peculiarity of EM IPs is an important number of cases of IPs that do not differentiate between the meanings ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ (cf. Idiatov 2007:492-513):
  - Tz’utujil (Quichean)
  - Kaqchikel (Quichean)
  - Uspantek (Quichean)
  - Mam (Mamean)
Explanation

- In their origin, EM IPs are complex clause-level constructions, more specifically main clauses within a cleft construction.
- These clausal IPs have undergone cycles of truncation, contraction (as typical of frequently used items), and later accretion with the material of the new constructions built on their basis.
- A major factor that seems to have been pushing the instability to the extreme in the EM case is that the reduction and accretion of substance tend to occur at the opposite sides of IPs.

IPs as clauses

- Some very transparent cases of IPs as clausal origin
  - San Juan la Laguna Tz'utujil (Quichean; Dayley 1985:237-239)
    - san \( \rightarrow \) k-te (person or thing)
  - San Juan la Laguna Te'umijil (Quichean; Dayley 1985:237-239)
    - san \( \rightarrow \) k-te (person or thing)

Truncation & Accretion

- Kaqchikel 'what for?; what?' (Par Sapón & Can Pixabaj 2000:95, 96) :
  - Cubulco 'who?'
  - Totonicapán 'where?'
  - San Juan la Laguna Te'umijil (Quichean; Dayley 1985:237-239)
    - san \( \rightarrow \) k-te (person or thing)

 IPs as clauses

- Some very transparent cases of IPs as clausal origin
  - Beléjú Poqomchi' (Quichean; Malchic et al. 2000:94-95)
    - laq 'which one?' 'this'
  - Cubulco K'iche' 'who?' (Par Sapón & Can Pixabaj 2000:95, 96) : "who?"
  - Totonicapán Baj (Quichean; Dayley 1985:237-239)
    - san \( \rightarrow \) k-te (person or thing)

Truncation & Accretion

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Truncation & Accretion

San Juan la Laguna Tz’utujil (Dayley 1985) ‘who?, what?’:

Proto EM *ja ‘who?, what?’

1. *ja > naq ‘… among them’; in I dialect as ‘who?, what?’ (<*... chi k-e,e t c.  [ = PREP GEN-RN] ‘which one?’)
2. *ja chi k-naq’ ‘… to us (1 PL.GEN-RN)’

In Tz’utujil, chi ‘at, to’ sometimes > cha /__q, as in cha-q-e ‘to us’ (Dayley 1985:155-6). In Sakapultek, unstressed i > (optionally) e ~ a /__q, q’ or q, q’__(DuBois 1981:182)


most dialects anchike and the like

→ selective ‘which one?’

→ ‘how?’

→ ‘which one (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

→ ‘where?’ * customers _

Proto Mam:

*ja ‘what?, what?’

*’ha’ ja qe > kaq ‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

Ilk. SP INDECMP-3SG.S-name-PASS

Proto EM IPs

Proto EM *ja ‘who?, what?’

‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

Ilk. SP PREP 3PL.GEN-EN

‘where? (it is it?)’

Ilk. SP 3SG.GEN-EN

Truncation & Accretion

The evolution of the in Mam dialects (cf. Pérez et al. 2000, Dienhart 1997)

Some major sources of accretion of IPs:

1. *ja > naq ‘… among them’; in I dialect as ‘who?, what?’ (<*... chi k-e,e t c.  [ = PREP GEN-RN] ‘which one?’)
2. *ja chi k-naq’ ‘… to us (1 PL.GEN-RN)’

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Truncation & Accretion

The evolution of the JAL-like IPs in Mam languages:

Mam dialects: al(e)ch(e) ~ al(q)i(e) ~ al(j)i(e) ~ an(e)k(e) and the like mostly as ‘who?, what?’ in I dialect as ‘who?, what?’ (<*... chi k-e,e t c.  [ = PREP GEN-RN] ‘which one?’)

Telko (Dienhart 1997)

Ixl dialects (Lengyel 1991; Dienhart 1997)

‘who?‘ and ‘who?‘

‘which one (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

Avakatek (Lengyel 1991; Mayers 1996; Dienhart 1997)

‘who?‘ and ‘who?‘ ‘which one (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

→ ‘where?’

Proto Mam:

*ja ‘what?, what?’

*’ha’ ja qe > kaq ‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

Ilk. SP INDECMP-3SG.S-name-PASS

‘which one? (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

→ ‘where?’

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Truncation & Accretion

Besides the constructional complexity of IPs, a major factor that seems to have been pushing the instability to the extreme in the Eastern Maya case is that the reduction and accretion of substance tend to occur at the opposite sides of IPs.

Some major sources of accretion of IPs:

1. *ja > naq ‘… among them’; in I dialect as ‘who?, what?’ (<*... chi k-e,e t c.  [ = PREP GEN-RN] ‘which one?’)
2. *ja chi k-naq’ ‘… to us (1 PL.GEN-RN)’
3. *ja > naq choq ‘… among them’; in I dialect as ‘who?, what?’ (<*... chi k-e,e t c.  [ = PREP GEN-RN] ‘which one?’)

→ selective ‘which one?’

→ ‘how?’

→ ‘which one (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

→ ‘where?’

Proto Mam:

*ja ‘what?, what?’

*’ha’ ja qe > kaq ‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

Ilk. SP INDECMP-3SG.S-name-PASS

Truncation & Accretion

The default use of 3PL.GEN-EN within IPs is attested in southern and central varieties of Mam, such as Cajolá: the meaning ‘by whom?’ (agent) or ‘with what?’ (instrument) is expressed by the combination [a/’i n q-ja] (~ [a/’i n q-ja]) (cf. Pérez et al. 2000:108, 263-4)

In Tz’utujil, chi ‘at, to’ sometimes > cha /__q, as in cha-q-e ‘to us’ (Dayley 1985:155-6). In Sakapultek, unstressed i > (optionally) e ~ a /__q, q’ or q, q’__(DuBois 1981:182)

→ ‘which one (person or thing)?’

→ ‘where?’ ‘why?’ etc., as well as ‘what?’

→ ‘which one (person or thing)?’ *ma-ky-aste

→ ‘where?’ * customers _

Proto Mam:

*ja ‘what?, what?’

*’ha’ ja qe > kaq ‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

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Truncation & Accretion

San Juan la Laguna Tz’utujil (Dayley 1985) ‘who?, what?’:

Proto EM *ja ‘who?, what?’

‘which one? (it is who/what among them?)’

Ilk. SP PREP 3PL.GEN-EN
Truncation & Stress

- The stress in EM languages is generally right-edge bound (cf. Fox 1978:37-41).
- Sometimes, especially in Mamean, it is also weight-sensitive with varying weight hierarchies (cf. Fox 1978:37-41), which may be further complicated by interaction between morphemes that are dominant or recessive with respect to vowel length.
- Since the process of substance reduction primarily affects unstressed segments, its outcomes should largely be conditioned by variation in accentuation patterns.

An example of various stress-related phenomena in Sakapulte (DuBois 1981:124-6, 141-55):
- There is a primary final stress and a secondary stress (usually on alternating stem syllables counting back from the primary stress, and frequently on the first stem syllable... Note that pre-stem vowels remain unaccented).
- A stressed short vowel becomes long in non-phrase-final position.
- Long vowels are shortened in non-phrase-final syllables (except when VV < *Vh/C).
- A noninitial short unstressed vowel is optionally deleted, unless deletion would produce an unacceptable consonant cluster.
- Unstressed words: Some classes of words do not ordinarily receive word stress. These are often monosyllables which do not follow the CVC canon (that is, they are CV or VC), and generally occur in non-final position in a phrase. They include articles, prepositions, and particles.
  - In some CVC function words, the final C is deleted when they are unstressed.

Truncation

- The process of substance reduction primarily affects unstressed segments, and therefore, it is primarily conditioned by variation in accentuation patterns.
- Another factor may be the relevance of a given segment for the construction as a whole, in terms of its semantics, syntactic function or its distinctiveness from other similar constructions.
### ALMG orthography for the phonemes of Mayan languages

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### ALMG convention for palato-alveolar and retroflex consonants

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These vowels and signs are only used in Kaqchikel.

In tonal languages (primarily Yucatec), a high tone is indicated with an accent, as with "a" or "éé".

For the languages that make a distinction between palato-alveolar and retroflex affricates and fricatives (Mam, Ixil, Tektitek Awakatek, Q'analbal, Poptí', and Akatek in Guatemala, and Yucatec in Mexico) the ALMG suggests the following set of conventions.

(source: en.wikipedia.org)

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**Figure 1.** The Mayan Language Family According to Kaufman (1990:62).

(via Law 2009:219)
References:


Fox, James Allan. 1978. Proto-Mayan accent, morpheme structure conditions, and velar innovations. University of Chicago PhD.


Idiatov, Dmitry. 2007. A typology of non-selective interrogative pronouns. Antwerp: University of Antwerp PhD.


