

Junu=muran=jo=h=nu (river=LOCATIVE=PAST:3=EPENTHETIC=DECLARATIVE) '(s)he drowned' and other wordhood challenges in Amahuaca (pano, Peru)

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Early Typological work has proved that the alleged clear-cut distinction between morphology and syntax is cross-linguistically problematic (Dixon 1977, Zwicky 1977; see also Bickel 2007 and Tallman and Auderset 2022, for more recent and innovative discussions of this issue). Indeed, data from several languages around the world challenge the claim that we can define prototypical morphological and syntactic units, based on the assumption that relations between elements at the morphological level are rigid and tight, whereas relations between elements at the syntactic level are flexible and loose. Non-prototypical linguistic elements are often referred by terms such as (simple, special, phrasal, Wackernagel) clitics; (phrasal, Wackernagel, non-cohering) affixes, and/or (clause-final, clause-initial, Wackernagel) particles, among many others. As this vast and to some extent confusing terminology suggests, the nature of such elements is not fully understood yet (Anderson 2006, Spencer & Luís 2014, Van Gijn & Zúñiga 2016, Bickel & Zúñiga 2017). This posits fundamental questions on the notion of word as both a comparative category and a descriptive concept (Dixon & Aikhenvald 2002, Haspelmath 2011, among many others).

Amahuaca, an endangered Panoan language spoken in Peru, is particularly interesting in this respect. Most Amahuaca's grammatical morphemes exhibit a high degree of freedom in terms of position and host; are phonologically rich (many of them even carry lexical high tones), and can easily be manipulated by syntax. Let us see some examples. In (1), we find the verbal word *vu=hi=ki=nu*, where the root *vu* 'bring' is followed by the imperfective marker *=hi*, the realis and 2/3 person marker *=ki* and the declarative marker *=nu*. However, in (2) the construction radically changes, being the case that the verb stem appears as an independent word, separately from inflecting morphemes such as those indicating tense and mode, which now follow the pronominal subject. Such morphological freedom is even more radical in constructions like (3) and (4). In (3), the tense and mode markers appear directly on a noun in a verbless copula clause, whereas in (4), the same tense and mode markers follow a postpositional phrase, *Junu=muran* 'water=inside', to express the meaning '(s)he drowned'. The construction *Junu=muran* exhibits some degree of lexicalization but it is still fascinating from the perspective of wordhood.

These examples clearly illustrate the challenges of determining whether tense and mode markers are morphological or syntactic elements in Amahuaca, based on criteria related to rigidity and tightness. Assuming that these criteria are indeed measured across different grammatical dimensions, in this talk we advance a first thorough account of the nature of morphosyntactic units in Amahuaca, carefully teasing apart the different criteria that compose a multi-dimensional category such as word (Bickel 2007). Amahuaca data will be highly informative to better understand the possible variation parameters among non-prototypical morphosyntactic units from a cross-linguistic perspective, and might radically change our current beliefs on how Proto-pano may have looked like.

Examples¹

- (1) Joni ravutanmun nonti vuhikinu.
[joni ravuta]=n=mun nonti vu=hi=ki=nu
man two=A=FOC canoe:Pbring=IPFV=REA:2/3=DECL
'Two men are bringing the canoe.'
- (2) Vintinmun nonti vina janhkinu.
vinti=n=mun nonti vina jan=h=ki=nu
oar=INST=FOC canoe row 3:NOM=EP=REA.2/3=DECL
'He rows the canoe with the oars.' (Hyde 1980: 91)
- (3) Un vunumun mushpihnu.
un vunu=mun mushpi=jo=h=nu
1SG.POS husband:S=FOCbad.fisher/hunter=PST.3=EP-DECL
'My husband was a bad fisher/hunter'
- (4) Vakuxmun junumuranjohnu.
vaku=x=mun junu=muran=jo=h=nu
child=S=FOC river=inside=PST.3=EP=DECL
'The child drowned.'

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¹ 1 'first person', 2 'second person', 3 'third person', A 'most agentive argument of a transitive construction', DECL 'declarative', FOC 'focus', INST 'instrumental', IPFV 'imperfective', NOM 'nominative', P 'most patientive argument of a transitive construction', POS 'possessive', PST 'past tense', REA 'realis', S 'single argument of an intransitive construction', SG 'singular'.

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