

The Impact of Phonological Change on Morphology: A Case Study from Maya Languages

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This paper will discuss the impact of phonological change on the organization of morphology and its cumulative effect on the structure of tense-aspect systems. My discussion will be based on the comparative analysis of historical changes in the tense-aspect morphology of two Maya languages, Kaqchikel and Q'eqchi', from the 16th century through the present. Kaqchikel and Q'eqchi' are K'ichean languages with a rich verbal morphology including ergative/absolutive marking and a complex tense-aspect system. Their tense-aspect morphologies have undergone parallel and diverging changes triggered by similar phonological processes. Based on the quantitative study of colonial and contemporary texts I will show how Neogrammarian and lexically-diffused changes have led to a reorganization of the tense-aspect systems of the two languages. In particular I will focus on the incompletive morpheme "tan-" and its evolution from inflection morpheme to auxiliary verb in Kaqchikel, and its opposite evolution in Q'eqchi' from auxiliary-like particle to bound morpheme. I will make comparisons with the tense-aspect systems of other Maya languages, especially Yucatec and Mam, and will briefly discuss possible structural and typological constraints, if any. I will attempt to establish the extent to which changes in tense-aspect systems have arisen independently in Maya languages and to assess the importance of language contact in the evolution of these changes. In particular I will try to establish the influence of the Maya lowland language area formed exclusively of non-K'iche'an language with the exception of Q'eqchi' on the verbal morphology of the latter.