

The Origin of (Apparent) Homophony Avoidance in Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec Person Marking

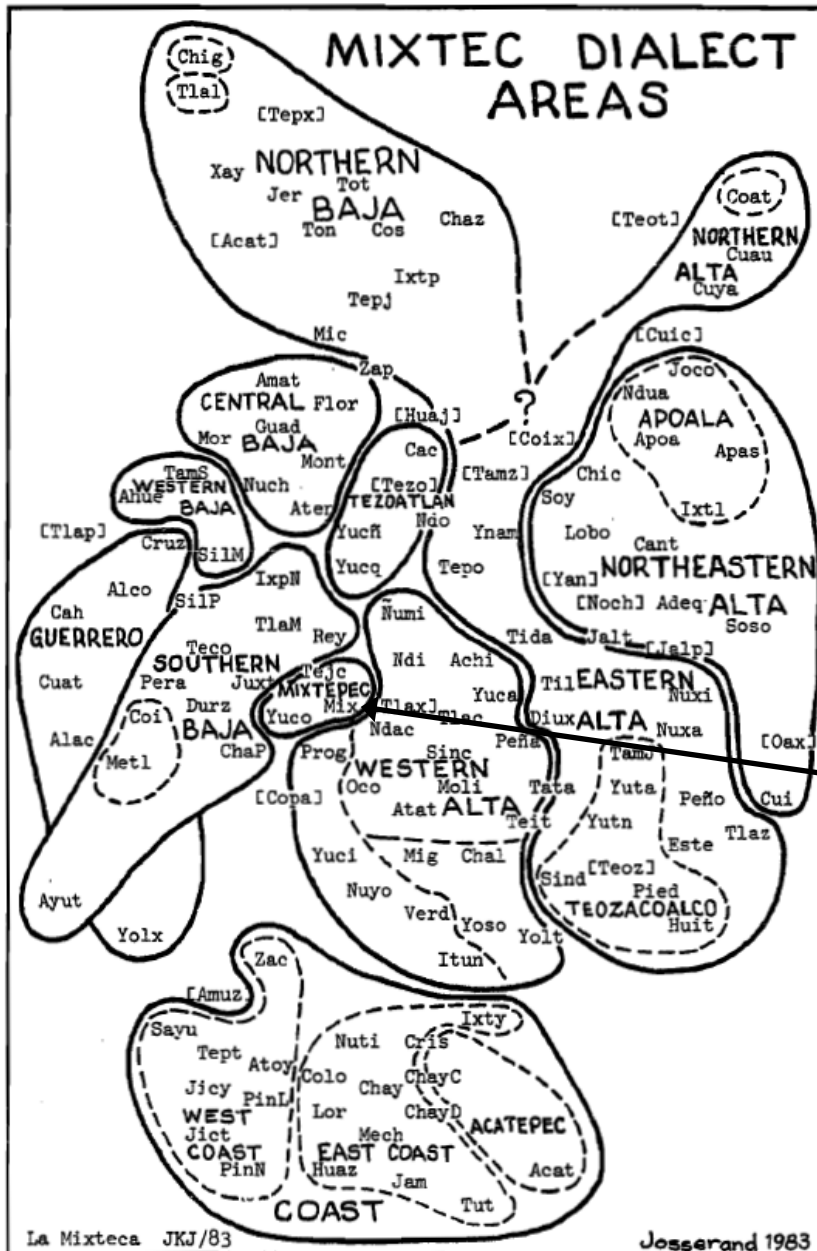
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1. Introduction

The Yucunany dialect of Mixtepec Mixtec (henceforth ‘Yucunany’) exhibits suppletive allomorphy in the person-marking (subject/possessor) clitics that seems on its surface to be driven by homophony avoidance.

- What is the origin (in Proto-Mixtecan and smaller subgroups) of these allomorphs?
- Is morphological homophony avoidance (a) a real driving force in morphological change, (b) a phenomenon that exerts a real effect in synchronic morphologies, or (c) just a metaphorical way for linguists to describe surface morphological patterns?
- Based on evidence from Yucunany, my responses are: (a) maybe, (b) no, and (c) yes.

2. Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec



Josserand 1983: 470

San Juan Mixtepec

Previous studies: Pike and Ibach 1978 (on Mixtepec Mixtec) Paster and Beam de Azcona 2004a,b, Paster 2005

Yucunany pronouns

Table 1: Yucunany person-marking pronoun suffixes/enclitics

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg				yù / L
					incl
	pl				excl
2	sg	polite			ní
		familiar			gú / ú
	pl	polite			weèní
		familiar			weèyú
3	sg	polite	masc	raà	
			fem	í	
		familiar			à / ì / (ñàà)
	pl	polite	masc	weèrà	
			fem/mixed	weènà	
		familiar			wiì

Homophony ‘avoidance’ in Yucunany

First person singular

1sg is marked by *-yu* when the stem has final L tone, and a floating L suffix elsewhere (underlining indicates nasalization; orthography does not reflect vowel length; data are from Paster and Beam de Azcona 2004a: 73)

(1) a.	nà má	‘soap’	nà má <u>à</u>	‘my soap’	
	kw <u>í</u>	‘narrow/thin’	kw <u>í</u>	‘I am narrow/thin’	
	ví lú	‘cat’	ví lú <u>ù</u>	‘my cat’	
	tì inà nchá á	‘blue dog’	tì inà nchá <u>á</u>	‘my blue dog’	
	tzá áku	‘corral’	tzá áku <u>ù</u>	‘my corral’	
	yù úti	‘sand’	yù úti <u>ì</u>	‘my sand’	
	sì ’ì	‘leg’	sì ’ <u>ì</u>	‘my leg’	
	kwà ’a	‘man’s sister’	kwà ’ <u>à</u>	‘my sister’	
b.	sòkò	‘shoulder’	sòkò <u>yù</u>	‘my shoulder’	*sòkò
	tutù	‘paper’	tutù <u>yù</u>	‘my paper’	*tutù
	chá ’à	‘short’	chá ’à <u>yù</u>	‘I am short’	*chá ’à
	ve ’e nchá ’ì	‘black house’	ve ’e nchá ’ì <u>yù</u>	‘my black house’	*ve ’e nchá ’ì

If all stems took the floating L tone, then the 1sg form of underlyingly L-final stems would be homophonous with the plain form. Example: *sòkò* ‘shoulder’ vs. *sòkò yù* ‘my shoulder’ (**sòkò*).

Third person singular familiar

3sg familiar is *-à* when stem-final vowel is [i], and *-ì* elsewhere (except *-ñàà* with certain lexical items, esp. C-final Spanish loanwords) (data are from Paster and Beam de Azcona 2004a: 74)

(2) a.	sà má	‘clothing’	sà m <u>í</u>	‘his clothing’	
	vá á’a	‘bad’	vá á’ <u>ì</u>	‘it is bad’	
	tá ’a	‘relative’	tá ’ <u>ì</u>	‘his relative’	
	nda ’á	‘hand’	nda ’ <u>í</u>	‘her hand’	
	ma tzá ’n <u>u</u>	‘grandmother’	ma tzá ’n <u>ì</u>	‘her grandmother’	
	kù ’ù	‘woman’s sister’	kù ’ <u>ì</u>	‘her sister’	
b.	sì ’ì	‘leg’	sì ’ <u>à</u>	‘his leg’	*sì ’ <u>ì</u>
	kachì í	‘cotton’	kachì <u>á</u>	‘his cotton’	*kachì <u>í</u>
	tzí ’ì	‘be dying’	tzí ’ <u>à</u>	‘she is dying’	*tzí ’ì

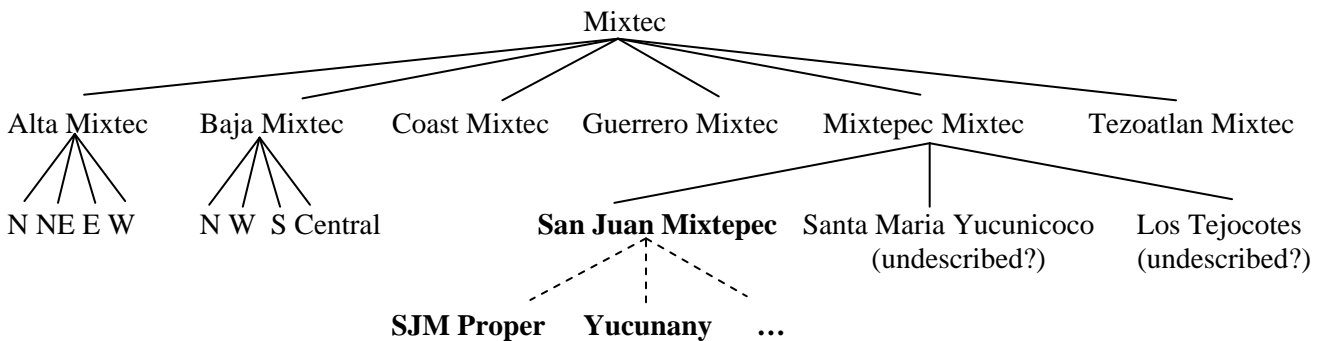
If all stems took *-ì*, homophony would result btwn. plain and 3sg forms of stems with final /ì/. Example: *tzì'ì* ‘be dying’ vs. *tzì'à* ‘she is dying’ (**tzì'ì*). But plain form of stems with final /i/ or /í/ would still be distinct from 3sg. Example: *sì'ì* ‘leg’ vs. **sì'ìì* ‘his leg’ would not be homophonous.

In addition, the use of *-à* prevents homophony btwn. the 3sg and 1sg forms when the stem has final /i/ or /í/. Example: *sì'ìì* ‘my leg’ vs. *sì'àà* ‘his leg’ (**sì'ìì*).

3. Mixtec pronouns

Mixtec internal classification

Figure 1: Mixtec internal classification (inferred from Josserand 1983: 470 and embellished by me)



-But note that Mixtepec Mixtec and Baja may also form a subgroup to the exclusion of the other four groups

SJM (Mixtepec Mixtec) pronouns

Table 2: San Juan Mixtepec person-marking pronoun suffixes/enclitics

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form	
1	sg	polite			yù	
		familiar			L	
	1 pl			incl	kwé	
				excl	kó / ó	
2	sg	polite			ní	
		familiar			kú / ú	
	2 pl	polite			kwèmeéni (no bound form)	
		familiar			koyú	
3	sg	polite	masc		rà	
			fem		ñá	
		familiar	masc		à / ì	
			fem		á / í	
	3 pl	unspecified	inanimate			ñà
						nà
		familiar	masc			koyì
			fem			koyí

Jicaltepec (Western Costa Mixtec) pronouns

Table 3: Jicaltepec person-marking pronoun suffixes/enclitics (Bradley 1970: 25, 45, 49-50)

Person	Number	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg			í / é
	pl	incl		yòò (free form)
		excl		dúʔú (free form)
2	sg			ú / ó
	pl			dí
3	sg	masc		rá
		fem		ña
	pl			ñí

Ayutla (Southern Baja Mixtec) pronouns

Table 4: Ayutla person-marking pronoun suffixes/enclitics (Pankratz and Pike 1967: 298)

Person	Number	M/F	Incl/Excl	Form
1	sg			ì
	pl	incl		èʔ
		excl		ʔ
2	sg			ùʔ
	pl			ʔ
3	sg	masc		rà
		fem		àʔ
	pl			ña

Chalcatongo (Central Alta Mixtec) pronouns

Table 5: Chalcatongo person-marking pronoun suffixes/enclitics (Macaulay 1996: 139)

Person	Number	Pol/Fam	M/F	Form
1	sg	polite		na
		familiar		rí
	pl			žó
2	polite			ní
	familiar			ro
3	familiar	masc		đe
		fem		ña
	polite			to

4. The origin of homophony ‘avoidance’ in Yucunany

First person singular

In SJM (Pike and Ibach 1978), yù marks 1sg polite, while floating L marks 1sg familiar.

-Yucunany has polite vs. familiar distinction in 2sg and 3sg, suggesting earlier distinction in 1sg as well

SJM has homophonous 1sg familiar – plain forms when stem is L-final (Pike and Ibach 1978: 281)

- (3) *SJM homophony:*
- | | | | | |
|--|------|--------------|------|----------------|
| | šiši | ‘aunt’ | šiši | ‘my aunt’ |
| | tívi | ‘is blowing’ | tívi | ‘I am blowing’ |

A proposed history of Yucunany 1sg allomorphy:

(4) a. *Mixtepec Mixtec* (attested in SJM proper, Pike and Ibach 1978)

<u>Root type</u>	<u>Plain form</u>	<u>1sg informal</u>	<u>1sg polite</u>
final L	final L	final L	-yù
final M	final M	final L	-yù
final H	final H	final L	-yù

b. *Early Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec*: semantic distinction between informal and polite in the 1sg has been lost; both forms of the 1sg marker still exist in free variation.

<u>Root type</u>	<u>Plain form</u>	<u>1sg</u>
final L	final L	final L ~ -yù
final M	final M	final L ~ -yù
final H	final H	final L ~ -yù

Each type of stem has two possible 1sg forms, but L-final stems have only one form that is not homophonous with the stem itself.

In some contexts where a L-final root is marked with a redundant final L tone, the intended 1sg form may be mistaken for a plain form if the 1sg meaning is not of critical relevance in the discourse.

Therefore, assuming that the two allomorphs are used by speakers with equal frequency, the majority of underlyingly L-final stems that are understood by the listener to be 1sg forms will have the yù allomorph rather than the floating L tone.

Since it is used more frequently than the floating L tone, the yù allomorph ultimately ‘wins out’, becoming the only 1sg marker to be used with L-final roots, as in (c).

c. *Intermediate Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec*

<u>Root type</u>	<u>Plain form</u>	<u>1sg</u>
final L	final L	-yù
final M	final M	final L ~ -yù
final H	final H	final L ~ -yù

At this stage, one possible development is for the 1sg of M- and H-final roots to be marked only by yù by analogy with L-final roots.

Instead, in the modern dialect, the M- and H-final roots converge on the floating L tone as the marker of 1sg (d).

One explanation for this is that speakers picked up the discrepancy between the existence of the L-final 1sg forms for M- and H-final roots vs. the lack of L-final 1sg forms for L-final roots.

This could have led to the generalization that yù is used with L-final roots while the floating L tone is used with M- and H-final roots.

d. *Modern Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec* (Paster and Beam de Azcona 2004a,b, Paster 2005)

<u>Root type</u>	<u>Plain form</u>	<u>1sg</u>
final L	final L	-yù
final M	final M	final L
final H	final H	final L

Thus, the pattern of tone-conditioned suppletive allomorphy emerged in Yucunany Mixtepec Mixtec without necessarily being *driven* by homophony avoidance.

This accommodates the otherwise inconvenient fact that Mixtepec Mixtec probably did exhibit homophony btwn. 1sg and plain forms with final L tone.

Third person singular familiar

Suppose that the pre-Mixtepec Mixtec (Proto-Mixtec?) 3sg was something like this (i.e., like SJM but without 3sg familiar allomorphy):

Table 6: Hypothetical pre-Mixtepec Mixtec 3sg pronouns

3	sg	polite	masc	*rà
			fem	*ñá
		familiar	masc	*à
			fem	*í
			inanimate	*ñà

The changes in Mixtepec Mixtec would be as follows:

Table 7: Change from pre-Mixtepec Mixtec 3sg pronouns to Mixtepec Mixtec 3sg pronouns

3	sg	polite	masc	*rà
			fem	*ñá
		familiar	masc	*à + ì
			fem	*í + á
			inanimate	*ñà

(5) *Pre-Mixtepec Mixtec plain vs. 3sg forms*

	<u>Plain</u>	<u>3sg</u>	
a. 'shoulder'	sòkò	sòkà (masc.)	sòkí (fem.)
'cat'	vílú	vílà (masc.)	vílí (fem.)
'house'	ve'e	ve'à (masc.)	ve'í (fem.)
b. 'bird'	saà	saà (masc.)	saí (fem.)
'hat'	xîní	xîná (masc.)	xîní (fem.)
'salsa'	nchá'á	nchá'áà (masc.)	nchá'í (fem.)
'black'	nchá'ì	nchá'à (masc.)	nchá'í (fem.)

A possible context for the introduction of ì and á allmorphs in Mixtepec Mixtec would be one where the gender of a possessor was unknown or not particularly relevant, e.g. 'I saw *his* bird' (saà), 'I took *her* hat' (xîní).

These could be mistaken for plain forms, contrasting only with a single (animate) 3sg form.

Most nouns would have had separate masculine vs. feminine 3sg forms, both distinct from the plain form (5)a.

But on the basis of words like 'bird' and 'hat', a possible generalization is that the 3sg of *i*-final roots is formed with *a*, while the 3sg of *a*-final roots is formed with *i* (admittedly this ignores tone, so it doesn't work perfectly for other words like 'salsa' or 'black').

The changes in Yucunany would be as follows:

Table 8: Hypothetical Mixtepec Mixtec 3sg pronouns to Yucunany 3sg pronouns

3sg	polite	masc	*rà > raà
		fem	*ñá > Ø
	familiar		*à ~ *ì
			*í ~ *á > Ø
		masc/fem/inan	*ñà > ñaà

In Yucunany, the masculine/feminine/inanimate distinction is lost in the 3sg familiar. As these categories collapsed, the *á* allomorph was lost entirely, the *í* allomorph was reinterpreted as 3sg feminine polite, and the *ñà* allomorph, now *ñàà*, became restricted to occurring with a small number of lexical items.

In this scenario, the change from Proto-Mixtec to Mixtepec Mixtec would have introduced the *i ~ a* allomorphy in the 3sg and this would not have been driven by homophony avoidance *per se*, but by ‘listener error’ in parsing forms that were already homophonous with other forms in the same paradigm.

5. Theories about homophony avoidance and how Yucunany bears on them

On homophony avoidance in language change, Anttila 1972 claims that the prospect of homophony can block change from occurring (here, sound change):

‘Greek has a general sound law whereby intervocalic *s* drops out. In most dialects *s* is the sign for future... [but some forms violate] the law *VsV > VV*... If these forms had remained, they would have undergone a change whereby vowels are shortened before other vowels, and would have ended up homophonous with the presents... The situation is the same as in some of the Baltic Finnic cases...: if a morpheme could afford to lose some part of itself, it did, provided that something remained to mark the function... Thus we see that grammatical conditioning of sound change and analogy need not merely scavenge the debris of sound change; it can prevent sound change from happening in tight-knit morphological systems’ (Anttila 1972: 98-99).

Anttila cites several cases of putative grammatically conditioned sound change, and it is not clear whether they all yield to analyses in terms of, e.g., loss via sound change and reintroduction via analogy. Might some also be analyzed in terms of misparsing as I have attempted for Yucunany?

On homophony avoidance in synchronic grammar, Crosswhite (1999: 8, 11) (but cf. Ichimura 2006):

‘...Trigrad Bulgarian shows systematic blocking of vowel reduction with three different grammatical endings—the only three where homophony effects would be expected. In order to account for this effect, I will propose a constraint on anti-homophony. This constraint, called ANTI-IDENT is based on the familiar IDENT constraints of McCarthy and Prince’s theory of Correspondence... we postulate that the ANTI-IDENT constraint can only compare morphologically related items.’

An ANTI-IDENT analysis of Yucunany 3sg requires comparison of 3sg forms to both plain and 1sg forms, so this relies on a word-based theory of morphology where paradigms are preexisting linguistic entities whose members can be compared vis-à-vis OT constraints.

Alternatively, a *subcategorization-based approach* (Lieber 1980, Kiparsky 1982b, Selkirk 1982, Inkelas 1990, Orgun 1996, Yu 2003, Paster 2006) straightforwardly captures the distribution of allomorphs without reference to multiple members of a paradigm. For example, the *yù* 1sg marker left-subcategorizes for a L-final stem, and the *à* 3sg marker left-subcategorizes for an *i*-final stem.

I conclude (see also Gessner and Hansson 2004) that homophony avoidance need not be encoded in synchronic grammars although it may play a role in diachronic change. In this view, homophony avoidance is primarily a metaphorical way for linguists to describe surface patterns in which homophony could arise but doesn’t.

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