
Uninflectedness in Amuzgan verbal inflection

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In this paper, I address the problem of "uninflectedness" from a systemic point of view, when a large part of the lexicon of a language with complex and rich inflection is suddenly insensitive to a given morphosyntactic feature.

The case is shown in the Amuzgan branch of the Oto-Manguean stock from Mexico. The data come the Amuzgo language from San Pedro Amuzgos in the state of Oaxaca (Feist et al. 2015). In this language, the verbal lexicon is split into two major classes, which are traditionally referred to as "active" and "inactive" (Stewart & Stewart 2000; Smith-Stark 2002). These labels are descriptively convenient, because many active verbs designate prototypical actions carried out by actor subjects, and many inactive verbs designate states or situations affecting subjects as undergoers, but there are also many cases where the lexical semantics of the verbs is not really helpful in determining class membership, so the phenomenon is best viewed as a case of inflection classes where there are certain semantic tendencies of class membership.

What is interesting for our purposes is that inactive verbs are completely insensitive to the person and number feature of the subject. This is especially surprising when compared to active verbs, where the realization of the person/number feature values of the subject is carried out by a very complex set of five different subsystems, all lexically conditioned, which involve: (i) changes in person/number affixes; (ii) tonal changes; (iii) stem changes with partial or total suppletion; (iv) stem changes displaying glottalization patterns; and (v) stem changes involving vowel harmonization. All these changes split the lexicon of active verbs into subsequent inflection classes, but within them we note that while all active verbs are distinguished from inactive verbs by the subsystem in (i), they can also be subdivided in the sensitivity they present to the changes from (ii) to (v). This opens the question of whether those verbs also show "uninflectedness" at a different level. The general question that Amuzgo proposes to the discussion is the following: given the existence of an inflectional operation that in principle can be applied to any lexeme under certain conditions affecting the form (i.e., that the phonological properties of the base are the right ones), why and how are there lexemes that pass through the inflectional screening without being subject to these operations when they are realized in similar morphosyntactic contexts.

References: • Feist, T., E. L. Palancar & F. Tapia (2015). Oto-Manguean Inflectional Class Database: San Pedro Amuzgos Amuzgo. University of Surrey. • Smith-Stark, T. C. & F. Tapia García (2002). El amuzgo como lengua activa. In P. Levy (ed.), *Del cora al maya yucateco: Estudios lingüísticos sobre algunas lenguas indígenas mexicanas*. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 81-129.