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Tzeltal Phonesthemes

by

Overton Brent Berlin

(November 18, 1970)

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November 18, 1970

(1)

Professor Norman A. McQuown
Department of Anthropology
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Dear Mac:

After looking at Durbin's paper given at the Mayan Ethnolinguistics Conference in New Orleans last year--as well as the earlier paper of Alvarez from which the former takes off--I began rethinking some of the things I brought up in my ms. on Tzeltal glottalized consonants. This led me to look for possible sub-morphemic semantic features in the remainder of the Tzeltal segmental phoneme inventory. The enclosed listing includes all verb roots that I have been able to elicit in the language characterized by the following phonemes: t'-, -t', ~~ʃ~~, l-, -l, -s, ~~ʃ~~-, -~~ʃ~~, -w, c'-, -c', and t. I'm in the process of working through the remainder. I have put ~~off~~ working with nouns for the time being.

I am frankly amazed by the amount of patterning in the data which suggest that each of the above may in fact be treated as phonesthemes, or what ever you would rather choose to call them. Some (like t') are better than others (like c') but something funny is going on in all of them.

There are several possible explanations, the most conservative of which is one that would suggest that the segments represent fossilized single-~~morph~~ phoneme morphemes. This is a possibility, but one that I don't think is borne out in the reconstructions of proto-Mayan. The most speculative explanation--and one which I would like to think about more after hearing your comments--is that Tzeltal fails to exploit the principle of duality as effectively as some other languages, e.g., English. There are numerous ways that one could test this with native speakers, one being to present them with a potential but unused CVC root, one phoneme of which one hopes to prove a phonestheme, and give the individual a choice of three or more possible 'glosses'. My guesses are that ones theory would quickly be borne out by informant response in selecting the 'correct' gloss.

I'm bringing the data to the meetings in hopes that you'll have time to look them over and then visit a bit on your honest feelings about the matter.

Best@-

*There are several types
for which I apologize.*

Xant

Possible glosses: Tzeltal phonesthemes

- t'- 'rapid, individuated movement downward, optionally accompanied by sound'
-t' 'sustained and continued pressure caused by motion downward or within'

-č 'warped bends or change in state to bend-like position'

l- 'flat, moreorless horizontal units' (2)
-l 'oblong, cylindrical shapes or objects'

-s 'slices, cuts, sweeping movements'
š-, -š 'by hand manipulation'

-w^r 'openings'

c' 'stabbing and twisting motion in downward direction'
-c' 'stabbing and twisting motion in downward direction'

t 'standing, erect, movement up, tautness'

t'ar	'sounds of objects rapidly passing ear'
t'as(t'uy)	'strike with the open hand'
t'ay	'dribble sp drops of liquid'
t'ehk	'sounds of footfalls'; t'ekln '(to) turkey-dance'
t'es	'strike with a broad board'
t'el	'strikes raising welts on body'
t'elan	to form into wedge
t'en	to strike a drum
t'ib	to cause drops of water to fall
t'io	to balance precariously on both ends
t'is̄	to flip rapidly ;with finger
t'is	to ram into an object
t'il	to break into pieces
t'im	to stretch slender flexible object tautly, to pluck violing
t'oh	to strike with axe
t'ox	to strike with hand on face
t'ok	to form into ball-like form, hair after washing
t'os	to crack in sun, due to heat
t'os	to strike on body, legs, to snap fingers
t'olan	to make vertical piles of granular objects
t'om	to explode
t'om	exaggerated mouthfuls
t'oš	to split with axe down the middle
t'uh	to break off
t'nb(an)	to nourish a fetus
t'Uč	to place on vertical end rapidly, first walk of child
t'uš	to drop, ghrow down rapidly
t'us	to break with finger pressue
t'ul	to dribble drops of liquid
t'un	to stalk
t'uy	to hand up with contents, such as bag

(3)

-vt'

bot'(kin)	to tip over
but'	to fill containess to maximum
hat'	to break at base
het'	to stretch into exagerated V shape
hit'	to make lash-loops around object
hot'	to scrape, scratch
hot'	to squat down
lit'	to raise up on toes
lot'	to squeeze between legs
lut'	to close opening or net bag by pulling drawstring
mit'	to bind tightly in middle
mut'	to snuff out fire
net'	to press down with ball of hand
pit'	to press hard with fingers
set'	to cut with sixzors (place object between two objects coming together)
sit'	to bind things tightly
ššššsiht'	to swell up(i. e., expand skin surface tightly)
sut'	to tie up in bundles
šat'	to split it
šet'	to tear into small fragments
šot'	to cut into chunks
šut'	to pinch small pieces, to pinch with fingernails

(4)

bač	warped, slender, non-flexible objects with ends raised	
beč	warped, slender non-flexible objects with ends raised	
bič	balance one end of non-flexible objects on raised platform	(5)
boč	to put bends in objects	
buč	to extend buttocks (by bending over)	
čeč	place non -upright (i. e., upside down) legged objects	
hač	raise up from extended position, to sit up	
heč	sides of object	
huč	to dislodge, pry up, raise up	
keč	to form hitching-like sections	
k'eč	to lift up heavy items	
k'oč	bob head back and forth	
lač	thin objects in vertical position, e. g., rabbit's ears	
leč	thin, nonflexible objects, to pick up thin objects	} NB: interaction of meaning of /l/ and /č/
lič	to pick up hold in hand, thin flat objects	
loč	to raise up, both hands under objects	
meč	warped slender non-flexible objects	
peč	non-flexible flat disk like objects	
pič	to pry up one end	
poč	to extend flexibly, broad objects	
poč̄	to measure across with hand	
p'ič	remove threads, b rk	
tač	to lift up head	
teč	raised welts on both	
tič	nonflexible objects in non-balanced state	
toč	remove bark, surface covering	
tuč	object in vertical position by outside force	
t'ič	balance precariously non-flexible objects	
t'uč	place in vertical position, up-right position	

-Vc (continued)

bq̇c	open container	☺
hoc	pull along ground	
ku̇c	to carry it	
lu̇c	to take out of open container	
pȧc	open container	
yȯc	to loosen rope	

(6)

lac	stacked non-flexible objects
lač	thin, flexible objects in vertical position, e.g., rabbits' ears
lač'	blows with rope-like objects
lap	to put on clothing
lak'	individual strands of rope
lam	broad flat-like objects in stack
leč	thin, non-flexible objects, to pick up thin objects
leč'	thin peels of fruit
lep	flat loads
les	flattened, tapered edges, semi-disk
len	flattened, tapered edges, semi-disk
lič	to pick up, hold in hand, thin flat objects
lič'	thin flat objects in extended position
lik'	slender, flexible objects
lim	broad objects in extended position
lac'	objects wedged in fork
lek'	'laps of liquid'
lem	'to ignite'
lew	'act of opening'
lif'	'raise on toe'
liw	'opening of mouth'
lo?	'bites of soft food'

①

bal	'cylinders'
bul	'obj. uprooted'
cal	'space-lines between columns, between rows'
cel	'stacks of non-flexible objects'
c'al	'loads of non-flexible objects'
cal	'prongs as forks on fingers'
col	'columns of corn, piled grains'
c'ul	'planing rods, straightening wood'
hal	'weaving'
hil	'slender, flexible objects in non-manipulated state'
hol	'act of opening items with pliable covering'
hul	'pricks, stabs'
kil	'action of pulling rope like objects'
kul	'vertically erect oblong object'
mol	'in div. layers'
pal	'total bunch'
pol	'lane, sow'
pol	'to unroll mat'
pul	'buds, sprouts'
sil	'slivers'
sal	'prongs'
sel	'wedge-like cuts'
tel	'oblong, vertically erect'
t'el	'oblong, non-erect solid object'
wel	'slices of objects'
cul	'action of lowering price'
c'ul	'frying'
c'ol	'pouring liquids'
c'ol	'planting chili seeds'
hel	'to change it'
k'al	rooms in house
k'al	object broken into pieces'
k'ol	'spherical solid object'
mal	'porus of liquid'

(46)

- VI (continued)

mel	'times'
mul	'object in liquid'
nel	'to change direction by 180°'
nol	
nul	'bites of grain-like food'
p'al	'blink eyes'
p'al	' walk words, speech'
p'il	'blinks'
p'ol	'groups of objects'
sel	'to pry up weeds'
fol	'times grabbed'
tul	'actions of plucking fruits'
t'il	'pieces of broken pottery'
t'ol	'small pieces'
t'ul	'drops of liquid'
wil	'jumps'
wol	'round things'

9

bis	'draw a line'
c'is	'individual stiches'
hes	'slice of hide'
his	'slicing strips
hos	'cutting hair-like objects'
kus	'to clean exterior of object'
mes	'sweeping actions'
pis	'to ball up thin object, e. g. thread'
tas	'to pull out of container'
tes	'to comb hair'
was	'to cut, scrape'
kes	'cutting, slicing'
kis	'to cut in sawing fashion'
k'as	'complete breakage'
p'as	'sever at oblique angles'
p'ihš	'measure'
t'os	'cracks due to sun'
bus	'small piles'
c'us	'to cover over'
les	'form into disk shape'
pas	'to make it'
p'us	'to bend it'
t'os	'blows on body legs'
t'us	'break with fingers'

10

ša?	'to wash hair' (hand)
šac'	'to stretch it' (hand)
šat'	'human group, standing, random', piece of work'
šal	'pronged object, as fingers on hand' (hand)
šay	'handful-size bunches' (hand)
šek	'place object in container' ? (see šoh) (by hand)
šet	'tear off fragments' (by hand)
šet'	'tear off small fragments' (by hand)
šel	'wedge-like cuts, making prong-like effect' (like-hand)
šew	'to open cuts, sores' ?
ši?	'to frighten' ?
ših	'to direct, extend in, as cane through rollers' (by hand)
šoh	'fill containers by individual items' (by hand)
šok'	'draw up knees' ?
šot	'form into rolls' ?
šot	'form into rolls' ?
šot'	'chunks, in situ' ?
šut'	'pinch with fingernails' (by hand)

(11)

b'ihš	'spurts of liquid'
masš	'to mix corn dough in liquid' (by hand)
miš	'to mix elements by hand'
niš	'rubbing motion with fingertips'
nuš	'to grind it (as corn masa)'
haš	'to rub with hand'
česš	'hold severed leaf in hand'
č'osš	'bind tightly in middle (by hand?)'
piš	'to wrap up completely' (by hand)
p'asš	'blows at oblique angles'
t'ašš	'strike with open hand'
t'esš	'strike with broad board'
t'išš	'to encounter obstacle' ?
wasš	*'place in vertical position' (by hand?)

12

ʔaw	'sown, as a field'
caw	'run hand through hair', 'openings'
čew	'grind corn, first time'
č'lw	'squint eyes'
haw	'open it'
haw	'measure'
lew	'to open it'
liw	'open mouth, lips'
low	'stop cow, to kill it' ('open throat?')
p'ew	'to separate groups, objects' (open)
sew	'cut with vertical pressure' (separate)
šew	'to open cuts, sores'

(13)

c'-

c'ap stabbing with a pointed obj
c'am place in liquid to make pliable
c'et blows on objects which are cut down
c'b to make marks, letters, scratches
c'is to make stiches
c'it to clean, wipe interior of obj
c'ok to twist off ba rk
c'ot to twist rope like obj's
c'oy to turn, twist
c'u? to put point on a stick, by twisting
c'u? to bite sugar cane (by twisting in mouth)
c'up actions of stabbing
c'un to plant with a digging stick (i.e., to stab the earth)
c'ak to tie ends of two flexible objects
c'al to make preparatory loads
c'ik actions of enduring pain from stabs
c'ir sounds, objects dragged across floor
c'o? to blink eyes
c'ub to suck liquid
c'uh drops of liquid
c'us to close cover, objects
c'uy hanging objects

(14)

bic'	make thin flexible objects, i.e., rope, by twisting in middle
boc'	to become untied, to slip (twist?)
buc'	to suck soft foods
hic'	stripping leaves from branch by twisting motion
hoc'	pull out messy handfuls
kac'	grip between the teeth
kie'	draw bow on violin
koc'	short, shallow stabs
lac'	objs. wedged in object (i.e., to put in, wedge in, by twisting)
luc'	to carry hidden in clothing
mac'	ingest only juices (i.e., sugar cane)
mic'	decrease in thickness by twisting
moc'	thrusts on intercourse (stazbs)
muc'	squint eyes
pic'	press on objs. to extrude pulp
poc'	press to make indentations
puc'	bends in thin object
tac'	to pull out
tuc'	to form into tear shape
wec'	to press downward forcefully, twisting
woc'	mix corn gruel (by moving hands)
wuc'	to press downward

(15)

tab'	'twenty'
tač'	'to pull it along'
tač	'to lift head'
tas	'to pull out of container'
tam	'to pick up from ground'
teb'	'small quantity of something'
teč	'to bind unsu ^{er} vered something'
teč	'raised welts, wounds over body'
tek	'living plants'
tek'	'to stand it up'
tes	'to comb it'
tel	'to put in vertical position'
ten	'classes of items, kinds of items'
ten	'to pound it'
ti?	'to eat flesh'
tih	'to knock down'
tikč	'to place in balanced position'
tik'	'to gather together'
tim	'to stretch between two points'
toh	'to pay'
toč	'to pull out, roots attached'
toč	'to remove surface covering'
tok'	'actions or objects pulled from ground, item breaking in half'
top'	'to cut in half'
tol	'to grab fistfuls'
tom	'to bind together'
toy	'to raise up'
tuč	'to bind near base, flexible objects'
tuč'	'to form into tear-shape (as certain tamales)'
tuč	'to place in upright position'
tuč'	'to cut it'
tul	'human beings'
tul	'to pluck certain fruits'
tuy	'to cut, especially flesh'

END
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