

## **Morphosyntactic and semantic issues on polycategoriality in Yucatecan Mayan languages**

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In previous work on Yucatec and Itza’ Maya (Lois & Vapnarsky, 2003, 2006), absence of category determination at the root level has been argued for, based on morphophonological and syntactic criteria. In the last few years, we have extended the analysis of this property -- which we consider a manifestation of polyvalence or polycategoriality-- to other Mayan languages as well as to other language families. Our research is also complemented by a rich database of 350 representative roots in Yucatec and Itza’, containing in-depth information on the array of morphosyntactic and semantic possibilities of all forms for each root.

The paper will present the results of this research, with special focus on the different levels at which polycategoriality appears in Yucatec and Itza’, compared to other languages; we also add new semantic evidence to the issue.

This new analysis shows that polycategoriality in Yucatecan languages is a more extended phenomenon than previously argued for. It operates not only at the root level (*chu’uch* ‘breast, suckle, suckling’) but also in affixed bases (*kim-il* ‘die, death’), including derived forms (*kin-s-aj* ‘kill, killing, killer’). This is an important result for the comparative analysis of polycategoriality, as well as for theories on category determination. It confirms that languages may vary with respect to the level at which the phenomenon occurs. For example, whereas Choctaw (Haag, 2006) shows multi-level manifestations of polycategoriality similar to Yucatec and Itza’, in Wolof it is restricted to bare roots (Kihm 2009). A related aspect is that polycategoriality only concerns intransitive forms in Yucatecan languages, as in Nêlêmwa (Bril, 2009), contrary to French or English.

One requirement for polycategoriality is arguably predictability of meaning (Carter, 2006). The research presented here gives a detailed analysis of all types of nominal meaning that polycategorial forms may have. Based on this, we show that some meanings (action and agent nouns) are predictable and very general to all classes of roots whereas others (result, instrument, theme, etc.) are more contingent to other features such as type of predicate and semantic domains.

These results offers important contributions to the study of lexical categories on a typological perspective, as well as to the understanding of contrastive behaviours observed among Mayan languages with respect to polycategoriality, and nominality more generally.

### References

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