Direct affix borrowing: Evidence from two Mayan perfect suffixes

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This paper will discuss the phenomenon of direct affix borrowing with reference to two suffixes, *-ɓil* and *-maχ,* which mark the perfect participle in several Mayan languages of Mesoamerica. Direct affix borrowing is assumed to be rare crosslinguistically; affixes are normally thought to diffuse indirectly by way of loanwords (Weinreich 1953, Winford 2005). However, distributional evidence shows that *-ɓil* and *-maχ* spread through direct affix borrowing over a wide area. I will show how linguistic and social factors permitted this normally rare type of borrowing to happen so widely. This research will contribute to our knowledge of when and how morphological borrowing can occur.

The first suffix considered here is *-ɓil,* which creates a perfect participle of transitive verbs in many Mayan languages. Due to its wide distribution, Kaufman (2015) reconstructs **-ɓil* to proto-Mayan. However, the languages that have *-ɓil* fall into a contiguous area that is consistent with the Maya Lowlands contact area described in prior literature (Justeson et al. 1985; Law 2014, 2017). Another suffix, *-Vm,* forms perfect participles in two geographically disconnected subgroups, Wastekan and Eastern Mayan. This suggests that **-Vm* is the older suffix and that *-ɓil* later diffused in the Lowlands. As further evidence of contact, the only Eastern Mayan language with participial *-ɓil* is Q'eqchi', which also has high levels of lexical borrowing from Lowland languages (Wichmann and Brown 2003).

The second suffix, *-maχ,* diffused on a smaller scale within the Eastern Mayan subgroup. I argue that in the Eastern Mayan language Poqom, perfect **-Vm* combined with a passive suffix **-χ,* creating the perfect participle suffix *-maχ. -maχ* then spread westward into Uspanteko, Sakapultek, Sipakapense, and northern Mam. These languages fall along a known salt trade route (Hill and Monaghan 1987). In northern Mam, this contact actually led to double-marking of the perfect participle: the regular reflex of proto-Eastern Mayan participial **-Vm* in Mam is *-ʔn* (Kaufman 2015), but northern Mam uses *-ʔn* interchangeably with *-ʔn-maχ,* where the latter is more emphatic (England 1983). Reinforcing an inherited morpheme with a borrowed morpheme has been observed in other languages (Harris 2017), but the Mam case is distinctive in that both affixes are cognate.

Seifart (2015) proposes that direct and indirect affix borrowing form a scale: both can be involved for a given affix, but may vary in how salient each process is. If the affix appears frequently in loanwords, then this suggests that loanwords were a major vehicle of transfer. However, if the affix is productive with native roots, but there are very few loanwords, this suggests more direct transfer that relies on speakers' knowledge of the donor language affix. In Mayan, *-ɓil* and *-maχ* are fully productive in the languages that have them, applying freely to native verb roots. Crucially, this is true in languages like Tsotsil, which has borrowed very few verbs from other Mayan languages (Brown 2009) as well as languages like Q'eqchi' with many loan verbs (Wichmann and Hull 2009). This strongly points to direct affix borrowing.

Structural and social factors in Mayan languages create a plausible environment for this kind of diffusion. Structural similarity between the source and target construction facilitates direct affix borrowing (Winford 2005, Thomason 2015). This condition is met: in all Mayan languages, the perfect participle is expressed by a suffix that attaches directly to the verb root. Recipient language speakers must have some competence in the donor language, beyond knowledge of isolated words (Seifart 2015); this was clearly the case in the Maya Lowlands, since other syntactic patterns have diffused (Law 2014). A factor that can block affix borrowing is language loyalty, which is often signaled through morphology (Matras 2015). Law (2014), in discussing other Lowland areal innovations, suggests that in the Maya area before the Spanish conquest, language boundaries were less salient: one's identity was more closely tied to one's town or larger political unit than to one's language. These factors render direct affix borrowing very plausible in the Maya area.

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