

**Voice and agreement in multi-object constructions
in Upper Necaxa Totonac**

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Upper Necaxa Totonac (UNT) has a rich system of valency-increasing morphology (Beck 2004) which includes two causatives and four applicatives which can be used to create verb stems that license up to five objects in a single clause. The morphosyntactic behaviour of these objects is surprisingly uniform, making it difficult to determine their grammatical relation to the verb (Beck 2006). The problem is illustrated here with respect to the effect of grammatical voice on agreement in multi-object constructions. Upper Necaxa has, in addition to the active voice, two grammatical voices — the *indefinite* and the *object -suppressive*. In the active and indefinite voices, object-agreement can be controlled by *any* non-subject argument. In the object-suppressive voice, however, it turns out that only the basic object of the mono-transitive radical is suppressed. This apparently indicates that the object-suppressive voice is a diagnostic for the grammatical relation of direct object; however, this is not an entirely satisfactory solution to the problem in that multi-object constructions in the object suppressive voice can still have up to four objects, any one of which may control object agreement. Likewise, multi-object verbs formed from basic verbs of motion do not have object-suppressive forms and have also multiple objects which are potential controllers of agreement. In addition, there seem to be other possible explanations for the interaction of the object-suppressive voice with the basic object. This makes

* Upper Necaxa Totonac, a member of the isolate Totonac-Tepohua language family, is spoken in the Sierra Norte of the state of Puebla, Mexico. Uncited data are from my field notes. I would like to thank my consultants and friends in Patla and Chicontla, particularly Don Longino Baragán Sampayo and Porfirio Sampayo Macín, who had the imagination and patience to work with me on this topic. Thanks also to Donna Gerds, Paulette Levy, Igor Mel'čuk, Frank Trechsel, and the audience of the 11th meeting of WSCLA for advice on this presentation. This research was funded by a SSHRC grant to the Upper Necaxa Field Project. The abbreviations used here are: 1,2,3 = first-, second-, third-person; ALTV = allative; BEN = benefactive; CLS = classifier; CMT = comitative; CTN = containing instrument; FUT = future; IMPF = imperfective; INST = instrumental; OBJ = object; PL = plural; PFV = perfective; PO = possessive; SG = singular; ST.PL = stative plural; SUBJ = subject. Data are given in practical orthography (x = /ʃ/; lh = /ʎ/; j = /x/; h = /ʔ/; ch = /tʃ/; y = /j/; tz = /ts/; V: = V:; V' = V').

the object-suppressive diagnostic of rather limited value in defining a direct object, and still leaves the problem of non-unique grammatical relations in multi-object constructions.

1. AGREEMENT IN TRANSITIVE CLAUSES

Transitive verbs in UNT agree in person and number with their subject and objects:

- (1) a. **ik**la'htziná:**n**
ik-la'htzin-ya:-**n**
 1SG.SUBJ-see-IMPF-2OBJ
 'I see you'
- b. **kil**a'htzina:**tít**
kin-la'htzin-ya:-**tít**
 1OBJ-see-IMPF-2PL.SUBJ
 'you guys see me'

Number and person of objects are marked by separate affixes:

- (2) a. **ika**:la'htzín
 ik-**Ø**-**ka**:-la'htzin
 1SG.SUBJ-3OBJ-PL.OBJ-see
 'I see them'
- b. **ika**:la'htziná:**n**
 ik-**ka**:-la'htzin-ya:-**n**
 1SG.SUBJ-PL.OBJ-see-IMPF-2OBJ
 'I see you guys'
- c. **kinka**:tala'htziná:**n**
kin-**ka**:-ta-la'htzin-ya:-**n**
 1OBJ-PL.OBJ-3PL.SUBJ-see-IMPF-2OBJ
 'they see us'

The full set of object markers is given in Table 1:

Person	
kin- '1obj'	-n '2obj' Ø '3obj'
Number	
Ø 'sg.obj'	ka:- 'pl.obj'

Verbs in multi-object constructions are thus inflected for two separate inflectional categories: number of object and person of object.

2. AGREEMENT IN DITRANSITIVE CLAUSES

In ditransitive constructions, the verb may agree in person with a second object. Because the object markers used for the second object are the same as those for the first object, the result is an ambiguous form with two possible readings:

- (3) a. wix, kuchí:lu, **kili**:lhtukuyá:**n** cha:tín hótni'
 wix kuchí:lu **kin**-li:-lhtuku-ya:-**n** cha:-tín hótni'
 you knife 1OBJ-INST-stab-IMPF-2OBJ CLS-one drunk
 'you, knife, a drunk stabs me with you'
- b. wan kuchí:lu, **kili**:lhtukuyá:**n** cha:tín hótni'
 wan kuchí:lu **kin**-li:-lhtuku-ya:-**n** cha:-tín hótni'
 say knife 1OBJ-INST-stab-IMPF-**2OBJ** CLS-one drunk
 'says the knife, a drunk stabs you with me'

Both the verbs here agree in person with both an INSTRUMENT and a PATIENT, though context is necessary to disambiguate which person, first or the second, corresponds to which semantic role.

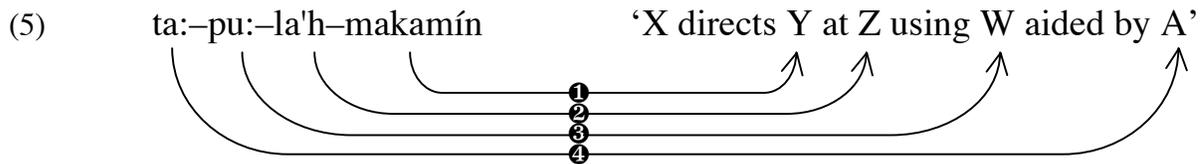
Although double agreement is possible, it occurs in relatively limited circumstances — specifically, only when the two objects are first- and second-person and only when they are both singular. There is never overt agreement with two objects if one or both objects are plural (cf. the situation in Misantla — MacKay & Trechsel, to appear)

- (4) a. **kinka**:li:lhtukuyá:**n** cha:tín hótni'
kin-ka:-li:-lhtuku-ya:-**n** cha:-tín hótni'
 1OBJ-PL.OBJ-INST-stab-IMPF-**2OBJ** CLS-one drunk
 'a drunk stabs us with it'
 'a drunk stabs him with us' (no other interpretation possible)
- b. **ka**:li:lhtukuyá:**n** cha:tín hótni'
ka:-li:-lhtuku-ya:-**n** cha:-tín hótni'
 PL.OBJ-INST-stab-IMPF-**2OBJ** CLS-one drunk
 'a drunk stabs you guys with it'
 'a drunk stabs him with you guys' (no other interpretation possible)

As shown by the ambiguity of these forms, person agreement in ditransitives can potentially be controlled by either of two objects.

3. AGREEMENT IN DERIVED MULTI-OBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS

As in ditransitive constructions, in multi-object constructions formed with applicatives there are multiple potential controllers of agreement: the *basic object* which comes with the verb root and the new *applicative object(s)* added by the valency-increasing affix(es). In these cases, any object can control number (Beck 2006). Consider, for example, the verb in (5), which has four objects, the basic object Y and three applicative objects:



Any of these four objects can control number agreement:

- (6) a. **a'htú: chiwíx ika:**ta:pu:la'hmakamílh tzakát kistánku' tzamá: chixkú (❶ controls)
a'h–tu: chiwíx ik–**ka:**–ta:–pu:–la'h–makamin–lh tzakát
 CLS–two stone 1SG.SUBJ–PL.OBJ–CMT–CTN–ALTV–direct–PFV sling

kin–stánku' tzamá: chixkú
 1PO–brother that man

'I and my brother threw two stones at that man with a sling'

- b. **chixkuwín ika:**ta:pu:la'hmakamílh chiwíx kistánku' tzamá: tzakát (❷ controls)
chixku–wín ik–**ka:**–ta:–pu:–la'h–makamin–lh chiwíx
 man–PL 1SG.SUBJ–PL.OBJ–CMT–CTN–ALTV–direct–PFV stone

kin–stánku' tzamá: tzakát
 1PO–brother that sling

'I and my brother threw a stone at those men with a sling'

- c. **a'htú: tzakát ika:**ta:pu:la'hmakamílh chiwíx kistánku' tzamá: chixkú (❸ controls)
a'h–tu: tzakát ik–**ka:**–ta:–pu:–la'h–makamin–lh chiwíx
 CLS–two sling 1SG.SUBJ–PL.OBJ–CMT–CTN–ALTV–direct–PFV stone

kin–stánku' tzamá: chixkú
 1PO–brother that man

'I and my brother threw stones at that man with two slings'

- d. **kinta:timín ika:**ta:pu:la'hmakamílh chiwíx kintzakatkán tzamá: chixkú (❹ controls)
kin–ta:timín ik–**ka:**–ta:–pu:–la'h–makamin–lh chiwíx
 1PO–brothers 1SG.SUBJ–PL.OBJ–CMT–CTN–ALTV–direct–PFV stone

kin-tzakát-kan tzamá: chixkú
 1PO-sling-PL.PO that man
 ‘I and my brothers threw a stone at that man with our sling’

Similarly, any two of the four objects can control person agreement:

- (7) a. **wix**, chiwíxni', **ika:ta:pu:la'hmakaminá:n** kintzakatkán kistánku tzamá: chixkú (❶)
wix chiwíx-ni' ik-**ka:**-ta:-pu:-la'h-makamin-ya:-**n**
 you stone-PL 1SG.SUBJ-PL.OBJ-CMT-CTN-ALTV-direct-IMPF-2OBJ

kin-tzakat-kán kin-stánku' tzamá: chixkú'
 1PO-sling-PL.PO 1PO-brother that man
 ‘you, stones, I and my brother throw you guys at that man with our slings’

- b. **ika:ta:pu:la'hmakaminá:n** chiwíx kistánku' kintzakatkán (❷ *controls*)
 ik-**ka:**-ta:-pu:-la'h-makamin-ya:-**n** chiwíx
 1SG.SUBJ-PL.OBJ-CMT-CTN-ALTV-direct-IMPF-2OBJ stone

kin-stánku' kin-tzakat-kán
 1PO-brother 1PO-sling-PL.PO
 ‘I and my brother throw stones at you guys with our slings’

- c. **wix**, tzakát, ikta:pu:la'hmakaminá:n chiwíx kistánku' tzamá: chixkú' (❸ *controls*)
wix tzakát ik-ta:-pu:-la'h-makamin-ya:-**n** chiwíx
 you sling 1SG.SUBJ-CMT-CTN-ALTV-direct-IMPF-2OBJ stone

kin-stánku' tzamá: chixkú'
 1PO-brother that man
 ‘you, sling, I and my brother throw stones at that man with you’

- d. tzakát ikta:pu:la'hmakaminá:n chiwíx tzamá: chixkú' (❹ *controls*)
 tzakát ik-ta:-pu:-la'h-makamin-ya:-**n** chiwíx tzamá: chixkú'
 sling 1SG.SUBJ-CMT-CTN-ALTV-direct-IMPF-2OBJ stone that man
 ‘I and you throw stones at that man with a sling’

- e. tzamá: chixkú' **kin**ta:pu:la'hmakaminá:n chiwíx tzakát (❶ *and* ❹ *control*)
 tzamá: chixkú' **kin**-ta:-pu:-la'h-makamin-ya:-**n** chiwíx tzakát
 that man 1OBJ-CMT-CTN-ALTV-direct-IMPF-2OBJ stone sling
 ‘that man and you throw stones at me with a sling’
 ‘that man and I throw stones at you with a sling’

In multi-object constructions, object-agreement can thus be controlled by *any* of the non-subject arguments of the verb, the competition for control of agreement being resolved by a 1,2 > 3 person hierarchy, animacy, and the relative salience of third-person arguments in communicative structure (Beck 2006). The problem with this is that control of agreement is a common property

cited as diagnostic of a direct object, yet according to this test all of the objects in multi-object constructions qualify as direct objects. With so many potential candidates for direct object in a clause, this raises the question of what other processes might single out one object as more highly-ranked than the others.

4. VOICE

Voice is a tool commonly used by linguists to investigate the syntactic status of verbal arguments (among others, Comrie 1982; Dryer 1983, 1986; Keenan 1976; Mel'čuk 1988). Upper Nacaxa has two voices, the *indefinite voice* and the *object-suppressive*, either of which might present potential diagnostics for distinguishing different grammatical object relations.

4.1 *The indefinite voice*

In the indefinite voice, the expression of the subject is suppressed and the verb continues to agree with its object(s) for person, as in (8):

- (8) a. **kin**ta'htzíl'h tzamá: chixkú'
kin-ta-la'htzin-lh tzamá: chixkú'
 1OBJ-3PL.SUBJ-see-PFV that man
 'the men saw me'
- b. **ki**la'htzínka'
kin-la'htzin-ka'
 1OBJ-see-IDF:PFV
 'I was seen' or 'I saw myself'

The verb in the active voice in (8a) agrees with a first-person object, the PERCEPT; its indefinite form in (b) continues to agree with a first-person object, also the PERCEPT. Thus, the syntactic effect of the indefinite voice is to remove the expression of the subject from the clause, giving either a passive-like reading or a reflexive reading. This voice fits the definition of the *subject-suppressive voice* (Mel'čuk 1993), though the term "indefinite voice" has been chosen here be-

cause of morphological complications in the second person, where a second-person object is realized using subject morphology (Beck 2001, 2004).

The same agreement pattern is seen for number, as shown in (9):

- (9) a. **ika:**la'htzílh tzamá: chixkú'
ik-ka:-la'htzin-lh tzamá: chixkú'
 1SG.SUBJ-PL.OBJ-see-PFV thatman
 'I see the men'
- b. **ka:**la'htzínka'
ka:-la'htzin-ka'
 PL.OBJ-see-IDF:PFV
 'they were seen'

Here, the verb in the active voice in (9a) agrees with a plural object, the PERCEPT, and its indefinite form in (b) also agrees with a plural object — again, the PERCEPT. Note that, unlike active voice forms, verbs in the indefinite voice can not have both an object-number and an object-person marker as first- and second-person plurals do not have indefinite voice forms.

In multi-object indefinites, the verb may agree for person with any of the objects, as in these forms based on *halha:ní* 'steal something ❶ from someone ❷':

- (10) a. **kin**halha:níka' a'htín kintapíxnu' (❷ *controls agreement*)
kin-halha:n-ni-ka' a'h-tín kin-tapíxnu'
 1OBJ-steal-BEN-IDF CLS-one 1PO-necklace
 'I had my necklace stolen'
- b. **kin**halha:níka' cha:tín puská:t, wan tapíxnu' (❶ *controls agreement*)
kin-halha:n-ni-ka' cha:-tín puská:t wan tapíxnu'
 1OBJ-steal-BEN-IDF CLS-one woman say necklace
 'I was stolen from a woman, says the necklace'

Either object can also control number agreement on the verb:

- (11) a. **puská:n ka:**halha:níka' a'htín ixtapíxnu' (❷ *controls agreement*)
puská:t-n ka:-halha:n-ni-ka' a'h-tín ix-tapíxnu'
 women-PL PL.OBJ-steal-BEN-IDF CLS-one 3PO-necklace
 'the women had their necklace stolen'

- b. **ka:**halha:níka' cha:tín puská:t **a'htú: tapíxnu'** (① controls agreement)
ka:-halha:n-ni-ka' cha:-tín puská:t **a'h-tú: ix-tapíxnu'**
 PL.OBJ-steal-BEN-IDF CLS-one woman CLS-two 3PO-necklace
 'the woman had two of her necklaces/her two necklaces stolen'

Thus, unlike the passive voice in many languages, the indefinite voice does not single out any particular object as the direct object.

4.2 The object-suppressive voice

The object-suppressive voice (Mel'čuk 1993) blocks the syntactic expression of an object. As a result, it excludes person agreement with the object that controls agreement in the active form of the verb:

- (12) a. nakhalha:yá:**n wix**
 na-ik-halhá:n-ya:-**n** **wix**
 FUT-1SG.SUBJ-steal-IMPF-2OBJ you
 'I'm going to steal you'
- b. nakhalha:nán
 na-ik-halhá:n-nan-Ø
 FUT-1SG.SUBJ-steal-OBJ.SUPP-IMPF
 'I'm going to steal'

The transitive verb in the active voice in (12a) agrees with a second-person THEME, while the object-suppressive form in (b) does not allow object-agreement (**nakhalha:naná:n*) or the presence of an object pronoun (**nakhalha:nán wix*). In a similar way, the object-suppressive voice makes number agreement with a object impossible, as shown in (13):

- (13) a. **ka:**halha:mpá:' **isandía**
ka:-halha:n-pa:' **ix-sandía**
 PL.OBJ-steal-PRG:2SG.SUBJ 3PO-watermelon
 'you're stealing his watermelons'
- b. halha:nampá:'
 halha:n-nan-pa:'
 steal-OBJ.SUPP-PRG:2SG.SUBJ
 'you're stealing'

is, by lexical choice) rather than via grammatical voice. According to this view, it is not the relative syntactic “privilege” (that is, its status as a direct object) of the basic object that causes it to be targeted by the object-suppressive voice so much as the fact that it is unnecessary for the object voice to target any other object — if this object is not wanted in the clause, a form without the corresponding applicative is chosen. Thus, it is far from clear that the object-suppressive voice is a good indicator of which of the arguments of a verb in a multi-object construction is its direct object.

6. CONCLUSION

UNT builds complex predications from transitive and ditransitive roots, allowing up to five objects in a clause. According to most theories of grammar, each of these objects should be assigned a grammatical relation or position in the argument structure of that predication. Most theories require that the grammatical relation assigned to an argument be unique — as per, for example, the Stratal Uniqueness Law (Perlmutter & Postal 1983). According to these views, the grammatical relations assigned to different types of objects should be identifiable in terms of their morphosyntactic properties (Comrie 1982; Dryer 1983, 1986; Keenan 1976); from a methodological point of view, in order to be considered distinct argument-types, each object should show some sort of differentiated morphosyntactic behaviour. A common tool used by linguists to differentiate objects in this way is grammatical voice. In many languages, for instance, voices such as the passive target particular objects. Given that UNT has two grammatical voices, the indefinite and the object-suppressive, we might expect that these voices could give us clues as to the grammatical relations of the various objects in multi-object constructions. As it turns out, however, the indefinite voice does not target any particular object. The object-suppressive voice,

on the other hand, targets only the basic object for suppression, suggesting that this basic object might be considered to be the direct object in a multi-object construction.

This idea is not as promising as it seems at first blush. Although the object-suppressive does single out the basic object in certain constructions, it is by no means clear that this makes it a direct object in the sense that this term is used to describe the grammatical relations of more familiar languages — as an object that is more “highly-ranked” or privileged in syntactic structure. It may simply be the case that the object-suppressive voice targets the basic object because it is only way to remove an “unwanted” object from the clause. And even if we accept the object-suppressive diagnostic, the larger problem does not go away: when one object is suppressed in a multi-object construction, this can leave up to four more non-oblique objects which seem not to be assignable unique grammatical relations. The fact that these applicative objects are not syntactically peripheral, optional, or inert, and that they are clearly arguments subcategorized for by the derived verb stem, marks them as non-oblique objects. Their apparent non-uniqueness may thus force us to reconsider the universality of the requirement that (non-oblique) grammatical relations be unique.

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