Some thoughts on Oaxaca Chontal morphophonology and historical phonology

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The 17th Sergei Starostin Memorial Conference on Comparative-Historical Linguistics

(Moscow, HSE University, March 25, 2022)

Highland Chontal (San Matías Petacaltepec) phonology [Turner & Turner 1971: 319-320]

CONSONANTS

	Central					
Voiceless						Lateral
Obstruent	p	t, c	č	k		
Glottalic	f'	c'	č'	k'	ʔ	ł'
Continuant	f	s, N	š	W	h	ł
Voiced						
Obstruent	b	d		g		
Continuant	m	n	y	ŋ, w		l

VOWELS

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Stop voicing

Voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /k/ are mainly found after voiceless fricatives, /k/ also word-finally. In other positions, voiceless consonants are rare and are found mostly in loans.

According to Turner and Waterhouse, there is much variation in voicing of stops between HCh dialects. SIL orthography does not distinguish voiced and voiceless stops.

I reconstruct only voiceless stops for for Proto-Chontal: *p, *t, *k.

Their morphophonemic reflexes in Highland Chontal are |p|, |t|, |k|

Phonotactics

Stops /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/, /g/ are not found in preconsonantal position, except clusters /kw/ and /gw/: *i-škwá-hmaʔ* 'empty', *ł-á-gwi* 'rain'.

These may be viewed as unitary phonemes /kʷ/ and /gʷ/, also Turner's /W/ can be viewed as /hʷ/.

/p/, /t/, /b/, /d/, /g/ are also banned word-finally.

/k/ is possible word-finally, but corresponds in this position to Lowland Chontal /h/: HCh *al-ʔek* 'tree', LCh *ʔeh* 'tree'.

Spirantization

The ban on preconsonantal /k/ and /g/ results in the alternation of prevocalic /g/ with preconsonantal /h/:

|k| > g /_ V

|k| > h /_C

a-mág-eʔ 'five (inanimate)' ~ *a-máh-ši* 'five (animate)' < |-mak-|

al-ʔóg-ay 'below, under' ~ *al-ʔóh-ga* 'a little below' < |-ʔok-|

di-máh-ʔma 'it will get ripe' ~ *di-mág-i* 3 sg. pres. < |-mak-|

di-fʼáh-ʔma 'he will go up' ~ *ga-fʼág-i* 1 sg. pres. < |-fʼak-|

Glottalization: plural suffix |-ʔ| in nouns

SG.

l-á-ʔu 'eye' < |ʔu|

l-á-ʔay 'tooth' < |ʔay|

l-á-bof 'arrow' < |pof|

al-ʔek 'tree, wood' < |ʔek|

l-á-šʔmas 'ear' < |šʔmac|

gál-moł 'sheep' < |moł|

PL.

l-a-ʔúʔ < |ʔu-ʔ|

l-a-ʔáyʔ < |ʔay-ʔ|

ł-a-bófʼ < |pof-ʔ|

laŋ-ʔékʼ < |ʔek-ʔ|

ł-a-šʔmácʼ < |šʔmac-ʔ|

láŋ-mołʼ < |moł-ʔ|

Glottalization: causative suffix |-ʔe-|

di-bí-ʔma 'it will burn' < |-pi-|

di-biʔé-ʔma 'he will burn it' < |-pi-ʔe-|

di-škáy-ʔma 'he will hurt himself' < |-škay-|

di-škayʔé-ʔma 'he will hurt it' < |-škay-ʔe-|

di-škáf-ʔma 'it will lightning' < |-škaf-|

di-škaf'é-ʔma 'he will cause him to blink' < |-škaf-ʔe-|

Glottalization: causative suffix |-ʔe-|

di-dóh-ʔma 'it will grow', *ał-dóg-i* pres 1 sg < |-dok-|

di-dok'é-ʔma 'he will make it grow' < |-dok-ʔe-|

di-máh-ʔma 'it will get ripe; it will be well cooked', *di-mág-i* pres 1 sg < |-mak-|

di-mak'-é-ʔma 'he will cook it, bake it' < |-mak-ʔe-|

Glottalization: causative suffix |-ʔe-|

d-enás-ʔma 'he will point to it, point it out with his finger' < |-enac-|

d-enac'é-ʔma 'he will point it out' < |-enac-ʔe-|

di-húɫ-ʔma 'it will dry out' < |-huɫ-|

di-huɫ'é-ʔma 'he will dry it out' < |-huɫ-ʔe-|

Glottalization: causative suffix |-ʔe-|

di-ším-ʔma 'he will see it, find it, know it', *ga-šín-a* pres 1 sg < |-šin-|

di-šiʔné-ʔma 'he will find it, find out' < |-šin-ʔe-|

i-fén-a 'loose, wiggly' < |-fen-|

di-feʔné-ʔma 'it will shake, tremble, be loose' < |-fen-ʔe-|

It would be more elegant to posit glottalized nasals /mʼ/ and /nʼ/ instead of Turner's clusters /ʔm/ and /ʔn/:

|VnʔV| > /VnʼV/ is just another case of |VCʔV| > /VCʼV/

nominal prefix |k|

Some fixed collocations of two nouns have a morpheme |k| prefixed to the second noun.

It replaces definite articles *l-, ł-, al-, gal-*.

Before vowels it is realized as /g/

Before consonants other than glottal stop it is realized as /h/ (<u>this /h/ is written as part of a previous word in Turner's orthography</u>)

Before a glottal stop, it merges with it as /k'/

All these are regular realizations of morphophonemic |k|.

Turner does not recognize it as a morpheme, treating it as a purely phonetic phenomenon, which is clearly wrong.

nominal prefix |k|

*łibíba **g**-abóne* 'the prickly pear cactus flower'

l-abóne 'the prickly pear cactus'

*líba-**h** múniš* 'the orange or lemon flower'

gal-múniš 'the lemon'

*líba **k'**-áwa* 'the squash flower'

gal-ʔáwa 'squash'

nominal prefix |k|

*gal-bocáde **g-**agáʔno* 'widow'

ł-agáʔno 'woman'

*gal-bocáde-**h** šans* 'widower'

gál-šans 'the man, male'

*gal-bocáde-**h** gúwe* 'widower'

a-gúweʔ 'old, male'

nominal prefix |k|

*ɬébi **k'**-ék* 'the sawdust'

al-ʔek 'the tree, the wood'

*ɬébi **g**-úŋa* 'the ashes'

ɬ-úŋa 'fire'

nominal prefix |k|

łinnéha 'animal'

*łinnéha **g**-ahá?* 'the fish'

l-áha? 'the water'

*łinneha-**h** šimálo* 'the wild animal'

gal-šimálo 'the wild one'

Stems in |-nk-|

|VnkV| > /VŋV/ - <u>this is where velar nasal comes from</u>

|VnkC| > /VNC/ - <u>this is where voiceless nasals come from</u>

|Vnk?V| > /Vŋk'V/

di-báM-?ma 'he will live at; he will be, exist' < |ti-pank-?ma|

ga-báŋ-a pres 1 sg < |ka-pank-a|

di-baŋk'é-?ma 'he will stay just a little while' < |ti-pank-?e-?ma|

Stems in |-nk-|

di-láM-ʔma 'it will become solid, firm' < |ti-lank-ʔma|

i-láM-ba 'fixed' < |i-lank-pa|

i-láŋ-eʔ 'it is firm, secure, fixed in place' < |i-lank-eʔ|

di-laŋk'é-ʔma 'he will make/repair/fix/construct it' < |ti-lank-ʔe-ʔma|

Stems in |-nk-|

no need to reconstruct *ŋ

no need to reconstruct voiceless nasals

both go back to *nk

Thank you!