

In spite of its weaknesses, *The Creek Verb* may be of interest to native speakers desiring a brief, nontechnical introduction to the structure of their mother tongue. But for the linguist, it is of limited use.



KAREN M. BOOKER, *University of Kansas*

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THE CORRECT LANGUAGE: TOJOLABAL, A GRAMMAR WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES. By Louanna Furbee-Losee. New York: Garland Publishing, 1976. Pp. xxii + 394.

This book is a lightly edited version of the author's 1974 University of Chicago dissertation of the same title.¹ It is a competent, thorough, and useful grammar in all respects, and has considerable theoretical interest as well.

Much of the value of the book lies in its modular structure. As the author notes, there are several audiences for a grammar; she has responded with several largely self-contained minigrammars, each written in the metalanguage appropriate to the specific topic area. Since each is quite different in approach, coverage, technical terminology, and methodology, all four of them together provide a multidimensional view of the language. Naturally, they differ considerably in how accessible they make the information to the reader; still, there is visible both a commitment to rigorous formulation and a desire to make the study useful. The result is an interesting grammar of an interesting language.

There are four substantive chapters: (1) "The Tojolabal-Maya" (pp. 1-51), an ethnographic study centering on language identification; (2) "Elements of Tojolabal Morphology" (pp. 52-145), a descriptive presentation of the derivational and inflectional morphology of this richly synthetic language, couched in strict American Structuralist terms; (3) "Phonology" (pp. 146-99), a highly formalized treatment in generative terms; and (4) "Some Aspects of Syntax and Semantics" (pp. 200-273), a Generative Semantics analysis of a number of topics in the language. Also included are appendixes with lists of municipios, fincas, and colonias, an index of inflectional and derivational morphemes, two texts transcribed both phonetically and phonemically, and glossed both morpheme-by-morpheme and in free translation, a complete list of phonological rules with sample derivations, a 58-page lexicon, an 8-page bibliography, and no topical index.

¹ The author now uses the name Louanna Furbee.

Chapter 1 is a useful and concise ethnographic study focusing on the self-concept of the Tojolabales as a community whose identity is determined almost entirely by language use: "What truly defines a Tojolabal to the outside world as well as to himself is his language" (p. 6). Notable features of this chapter are a taxonomy of speaking which categorizes Tojolabal metalinguistic terms by means of an interesting feature system, a catalog of variation types, a "tentative and preliminary" dialect survey, and a foldout map. It serves as a good introduction because it introduces both the Tojolabales and their language, gives a feeling for their attitudes about it, and frames the following chapters by describing the circumstances under which the data were gathered, and therefore their limitations.

Chapter 2 is a very thorough description of the morphology, both derivational and inflectional, organized in a fairly rigid slot plus filler format. This treatment has its limitations and excesses, as I discuss below; however, it has the benefit of making most information readily available. It contains 13 tables (several multi-page), charting the verbal and nominal morphology, accompanied by discussion with copious examples of every affix in each filler class, together with root classes and subcategorizations. For the most part the author is very careful with terminology, taking care to use appropriate category names and giving examples to show the semantic effect of the alternation.² A considerable amount of the derivational morphology is unglossed (and probably unglossable, as derivation so often is) and its mysteries are by no means completely plumbed here, but we get a good picture of the nature and variety of the resources available in this area.

This description, dependent on slot class as a primary categorization device, does not lend itself to multidimensional paradigms, such as might be constructed for tenses and aspects in semantic terms. The discussion of these matters is slim, and there is some difficulty in developing a paradigmatic approach to the pronoun agreement system, because of the desinential nature of the ergative pronoun set. Despite the many tables, I found myself wanting more paradigms

² There are two serious exceptions to this statement. First, the question of "nominative." Tojolabal is a typical Mayan language in that it possesses two sets of pronominal affixes, one used for possessive on nouns and for agent on transitive verbs, and the other used for agent or patient with intransitives and for patient on intransitives. This is obviously an ergative system, and the first class is accordingly named "ergative." The other class is here given the name "nominative." While there is ample precedent (cf. Catford 1976) for the use of this term for the nonergative term (instead of "absolute") in such a system, its use makes an implicit claim that the nonergative marking (pronoun, agreement, case, etc.) in an ergative system and the nonaccusative marking in an accusative system are somehow the same. This claim has empirical relevance only in split-ergative languages like Georgian (Catford 1976) or Sumerian (Michałowski 1980), where the hypothesis that the marking to be termed "nominative" represents a single grammatical relation evidenced both in ergative and nonergative construction types can actually be tested. In languages, like Tojolabal, which display no discernible nominative-accusative characteristics, the use of "nominative" instead of "absolute" is pointless and confusing. Second, the discussion of zero morphs (see below) is not up to the standards of the rest of the book regarding justification and terminological nicety.

and fewer lists of functionally unrelated fillers for particular slots. Since the justification for inclusion of affixal morphemes in a slot class is a negative one – the morphemes do not cooccur – and since there are many possible reasons, including limited data, for the lack of cooccurrence, the value of slot classes as natural categories for affixes is dubious. It can be improved by careful paradigmatic analysis, showing the interrelationships among the class members, but information of this type is harder to find in this grammar than it ought to be.

There are two other complaints I have to make about this chapter: one rather petty one about the notation, and one more serious one about the use of zero morphs. The notation is “systematic phonemic,” which means it is to be used to represent the output of a fully specified lexicon and the input of a fully specified phonological component; the latter is given in chapter 3. It is not destined for use as a practical orthography. As such, it utilizes many subscripts, useful for recognizing homophonous morphemes, and a number of boundary symbols which figure prominently in the phonological rules. This is all appropriate for the special needs of a reference grammar. What is not appropriate is the use of \emptyset to represent the phoneme $ʔ$, a strategy adapted to practical orthographic considerations. The author does not suggest any tradition of literacy in Tojolabal, much less one in which \emptyset is regularly used for glottal stop. It is particularly out of place with the highly formalized phonological rules presented in this grammar. In following these rules, one is always having to check whether a \emptyset represents a term in a structural description or is a segmental phoneme itself.³

The more serious and more interesting problem arises from the five zero morphs (\emptyset_1 through \emptyset_5) posited by the author; two of them are presented as allomorphs, the others as full morphemes. Four of them are unnecessary and represent the logical extremes to which one may be forced in a structuralist account: the grammar would benefit from a reanalysis of these forms – if that is the word for the absence of a form.

\emptyset_1 is described as a transitivity marker: it “appears” on noun stems and on intransitive stems derived with a long list of affixes. This obviously means that such stems are ambivalent with regard to transitivity and may appear either transitively or intransitively. The fact that the author categorizes a stem as either transitive or intransitive, with no overlap, requires her to posit a dummy transitivity marker to account for the use of intransitive stems in transitive constructions. For example: *mac* TV ‘to blink’; *mac-al₂* n ‘blinking’; *mac-al₂- \emptyset_1* tv ‘to blink at s.o.’ (p. 71). It would be simpler and more illuminating to consider transitivity to be a feature of a construction, rather than a verb subcategorization.

\emptyset_2 is described (p. 97) as an allomorph of *eʔ₁*, ‘cardinal numeral’. Numerals in Tojolabal end in *-eʔ₁*, with the exception of *hun* ‘one’. \emptyset_2 is thus the allomorph after *hun*. It should surprise no one to find the numeral for ‘one’ to be irregular; it certainly does not call for a specific zero marking.

\emptyset_3 is a very troublesome case. It is presented as the completive aspect morpheme, filling a prefixal slot in which it alternates with *ʃ₂-la*, the “incomplete-

³To be fair, I should mention that the book is reproduced lithographically from the author’s typescript.

tive aspect.” There are no other morphemes in the slot class. We must thus compare the presence of $\check{s}_2 \sim la$ with its absence, but the author has certain a priori ideas about which of the absences are instances of \emptyset_3 and which are real absences. Worse, she has based some very important claims on the “presence” or absence of \emptyset_3 . Finally, the description of the allomorphy of $\check{s}_2 \sim la$ is very vague, leading to some doubts about its validity, which further prejudice the case against \emptyset_3 .

We are told that “The \check{s}_2 allomorph of the incomplete inflects transitive verbs” (p. 134). From this we might conclude that *la* inflects intransitive verbs, and the three examples of *la* in this book are all on verbs of deictic motion (glossed ‘go’ and ‘go to another place’). However, there are indications of many other complexities. First, the two texts differ in their usage patterns. The first text (appendix 3) contains one instance of *la* and one of \check{s}_2 , while the second contains five instances of \check{s}_2 (four of which are transcribed as \check{s}_1) and no instances of *la*.⁴ Second, three of the instances of \check{s}_2 in the second text are with intransitive verbs. Third, a cryptic reference to *la* appears at the end of chapter 4 in the context of a discussion of ergativity: it appears that *la* “carries also the meaning of first and second persons” (pp. 271–72), which seems to mean that it is constrained to appear with first- or second-person reference in the absolutive: the second-person absolutive (“nominative”) affix does not cooccur with *la*, even when the reference is clearly second person, while the first-person absolutive affix does occur. The situation is not one in which a suppletive allomorphy can be confidently posited, certainly not without a full description of the conditioning factors.

To go from the occurrence of \check{s}_2 or *la* to cases where they do not occur and categorize these as “completive” \emptyset_3 in some cases but not in others leads to problems of consistency. For example, the author claims that “ \emptyset_3 marks the completive aspect with transitive verbs; it cannot occur with either of the progressive tenses” (p. 134). This is surely gratuitous; how could one tell? The reason for the exclusion is illuminating in its inconsistency: \check{s}_2 is obligatory with the present progressive *wa*, so that \emptyset_3 , which contrasts with \check{s}_2 , cannot be posited since \check{s}_2 is already present. With the future progressive *ʔoh*, however, \check{s}_2 is not allowed, so the category of completivity in aspect cannot be justifiably extended to this construction. It seems that in one case \emptyset_3 is excluded because \check{s}_2 does

⁴ In compiling these facts, I came across the following errata:

Page	285, #8	Gloss:	<i>3p.erg.</i>	should be	<i>3p.sg.nom.</i>
"	287, #12	Sys.	Phon:	\emptyset	should be \emptyset_3
"	288, #16	"	"	\emptyset	should be \emptyset_3
"	291, #25	"	"	\emptyset	should be \emptyset_3
"	293, #34	"	"	\emptyset	should be \emptyset_3
"	298, #9	"	"	\emptyset_3	should be \emptyset_3
"	301, #22	"	"	\emptyset	should be \emptyset_3
"	" #23	"	"	\check{s}_1	should be \check{s}_2
"	302, #26	"	"	\check{s}_1	should be \check{s}_2
"	307, #42	"	"	\emptyset_3	should be \emptyset_3
"	308, #46	"	"	\check{s}_1	should be \check{s}_2
"	309, #49	"	"	\check{s}_1	should be \check{s}_2

occur, while in the other it is excluded because \bar{x}_2 does not occur: such are the complexities of the zeros. (I note in passing that the semantics of the "completive" is not discussed very much, so that there is no semantic reason to maintain a specific zero morpheme for it.)

The most serious complication of \emptyset_3 is the claim the author makes for it: "The aspect of completive/incompletive defines true verbs since none of the infinitive or participial forms may carry it" (p. 135). The desire to have a good test for "true verbs" is understandable, but this is not one, since it is not falsifiable. There are no instances of \emptyset_3 (or any of the other zero morphs, for that matter) as input or conditioning environment for any phonological rule or process, so the relevance of \emptyset_3 is strictly syntactic, and the purported defining characteristic is obviously arbitrary and nonempirical. \emptyset_3 is largely imaginary, and it is unfortunately not a minor point, like \emptyset_1 or \emptyset_2 ; revision of the analysis of the language to eliminate it will require pruning many of the tree structures in chapter 4 at the root, since \emptyset_3 appears as the highest predicate in many of them.

\emptyset_4 is described as a suffix of the imperfect aspect, an allomorph of ay_2 (which inflects a class of transitive verbs derived by various devices, including \emptyset_1); the remainder of derived transitives is said to utilize \emptyset_4 (p. 133). Unfortunately, there are no examples given in the discussion, and no description is given of how extensive the class that utilizes \emptyset_4 is. This is a minor point, but again the analysis does not support the positing of a zero, even as an allomorph, which is easier to motivate than a zero morpheme. Luckily, not much hangs on this zero, unlike \emptyset_3 .

\emptyset_5 is the third-person singular absolutive (= "nominative") suffix. It is the sole motivated zero morph in the language (judging from the information in this book); the others should be abandoned. This is a clear paradigmatic zero, well motivated and useful; it is also by far the most common of all the zero morphs and correlates with third-person reference. It is as perceptible, one assumes, as the \emptyset past tense allomorph in *he cut it*, and for the same reason – paradigmatic pressure: since there are two well-defined dimensions of paradigmatic variation, correlated with reference, that intersect in a zero, it can be posited with confidence.

Chapter 3 begins with a phonological feature analysis and proceeds through thirteen segmental redundancy rules, seventeen sequential redundancy rules, eighteen phonological rules, five prosodic rules, and fourteen phonetic realization rules, all formalized either in Feature Arrow or Structural Description/Structural Change format. These are presented with some discussion in chapter 3, and the last three groups are summarized in appendix 5 (pp. 314–28), with sample derivations. The discussion does not, for the most part, concentrate on the forms, or on the overall phonological shape of the language, but rather on the rules, their specific features, and their order of application. Thus it is principally of theoretical interest; practical information is difficult to extract, due to the interrelatedness of the rule systems. One has to check in a number of places (or memorize the entire schema) in order to be sure that one process is not fed or bled by another; but this is the price one pays for a fully specified phonology with minimal redundancy.

Chapter 4 is an attempt, largely successful, to describe the syntax of the language on a Generative Semantics model. It is rare to see a full Generative

Semantic treatment of a natural language these days, especially of a synthetic language, which is a shame, since this variety of syntax is better adapted to synthetic than analytic languages. Since it is based ultimately on making as many semantically justifiable distinctions as possible evident in the phrase markers, it shines as a descriptive device for a language which has inflectional categories that actually instantiate those distinctions. A Generative Semantic treatment of English tends to make it look like a polysynthetic language with a lot of deletion rules, but this undesirable abstractness is at a minimum when the deletions are less necessary, in a synthetic language.

Except for the zeros, as noted, most of the rules delete only under identity; which is to say that only those items which represent instances of multiple relations, like an NP being simultaneously a term in a main and a subordinate clause, are deleted in one or another of their underlying relational specifications.

There is discussion of a number of theoretical issues. Many of them have ceased to have the same importance as issues in the decade since the grammar was written: lexical insertion, for example, is not the burning question that it once was, and Gapping is no longer considered an ironclad test for underlying word order.⁵ There is, for my taste, too much discussion of conjunction reduction and far too little of complementation; it is not clear just how many types of complement there are, what their peculiarities and significances are, how they are conditioned, nor what their formal characteristics are.

On the whole, though, the discussion is interesting, the analyses clear and (except for the zeros) fairly well motivated, and an interesting picture of the complexities of the syntax of a synthetic language emerges. While this chapter does not by any means settle all questions that arise concerning syntax, it does settle some, and it gives a context for raising the others, which is no small contribution.

This grammar, on balance, is a good job. It brings a very sophisticated commitment to rigor and formalization to bear on a complex and little-known language, and it manages to present a sympathetic and coherent portrayal of the speakers and their language, full of interesting and relatively accessible detail. If the theories that underlie the metalanguages used in the separate studies do not always support discussion of everything, that cannot be blamed on the author, whose command of the metalanguages involved is impressive. I would recommend this grammar especially as a model for graduate students preparing for dissertation fieldwork. It does practically everything that one would like to have done in a dissertation grammar; even the mistakes are understandable and largely irrelevant to the value of the grammar as a whole. In addition, it is a treat to see Generative Semantics applied to a language where it is appropriate.

JOHN M. LAWLER, *University of Michigan*

⁵ Indeed, Tojolabal appears to tolerate Gapping in both directions. In this it resembles Latin (cf. the famous first sentence in Caesar's *Gallie Wars* for Latin examples of bidirectional Gapping). The author claims Tojolabal is a VOS language, while Latin is, if anything, SOV. Both are claimed to possess a Scrambling rule, but this merely means that word order and therefore Gapping direction are not strictly syntactic matters.

(references omitted)