

The la'a 'Base' plus enclitic pronoun phrase

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The Zapotec Grammar Files

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1 Introduction

This paper¹ discusses the use of the morpheme *la'a* /*laʔ*/ (as in Isthmus, [zai]) or its cognate.² This morpheme is distinguished here from the Focus morpheme *le'e* (see [The *le'e* phrase: structural aspects, this series](#)), although in some varieties the morphemes are homophonous (see Appendix A). The morpheme *la'a* is glossed 'Base' in this paper as in some previous work.³ Its primary function — perhaps its only one — is to provide a phonological host for a prosodically dependent pronoun when a pronoun is needed in a position where a prosodically dependent pronoun is not permitted.⁴ These positions are mentioned in separate sections below. The prosodically dependent pronoun may be of either the syntactically dependent type (written with an equals sign (=) before it in the technical orthography line of this paper) or of the syntactically independent type (written without an equals sign before it and also without an indicator of stress; the latter distinguishes these from prosodically independent pronouns).

While many varieties of Zapotec have the morpheme *la'a* (or its cognate), many do not. In some cases, there would be no function for this morpheme because the variety does not have the pertinent

¹The following are found in other files: [Transcription Conventions](#) and [Data Sources](#) for Zapotec. The abbreviations used in this paper are: 2SG = second person singular, 3AL = third person alternate, 3AN = third person animal, 3FO = third person formal, 3H = third person human, 3IN = third person inanimate, 3INFO = third person informal, BASE = base for dependent pronouns, C = completive, CAUS = causative, DIST = distal, FOC = focus, H = habitual, P = potential, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, Q = question particle/marker, QE = question emphazier, S = stative.

²Piper (1995:67, note 3) suggests that *la'a* is the form “nearest to the supposed reconstructed form”.

³Other glosses have appeared in the literature, including * (asterisk) (Piper 1995) and 'X' (Kreikebaum 1987). The gloss 'base' was used in (Pickett, Black & Marcial 2001). Kreikebaum 1987 also distinguished (and glossed differently) two homophonous forms *la'a* /*laʔ*/ in Santo Domingo Albarradas Zapotec [zas].

⁴See [Personal pronouns: inventory, this series](#) and [Personal pronouns: distribution, this series](#), which update the presentation in Marlett (1993).

types of pronouns or the necessary conditions (as explained below). In other cases, there is always a prosodically independent pronoun that corresponds to the prosodically dependent pronoun, and this pronoun is used in positions where the prosodically dependent pronoun is not possible. In Texmelucan [zpz], however, despite not fitting into the previous two groups, there is nevertheless no cognate of *la'a*.

The morpheme *la'a* may be separated from the prosodically dependent pronoun by one or more morphemes: the plural morpheme that occurs before the noun or pronoun that it pluralizes (see example (2) below), or an adverb such as /*si*/ in Isthmus [zai] *la'a si be /la' si =be/ 'BASE only 3H' 'only him/her'* (Pickett, Black & Marcial 2001:80).

2 Situations requiring phonologically independent pronouns

At least five contexts in Zapotec require a constituent that is phonologically independent, whether an NP or a phonologically independent pronoun. When a pronoun does not have that characteristic, it cannot be used in these contexts without first being put into a larger construction, most commonly a phrase headed by *la'a*. In all the examples in this section, parallel examples without *la'a* are ungrammatical. (See [Personal pronouns: distribution, this series](#) for ungrammatical examples.)

2.1 In isolation

In some varieties a pronoun may appear in isolation in either a question or a declaration. Of the pronouns, only phonologically independent ones may appear in that context. When a phonologically dependent pronoun is used in this context, it must appear with *la'a*.

- (1) *ʔLë bi'?*
 [zpc] *læ =bi'?*
 BASE 3INFO
 'ʔEs él/ella?'
 '*Is it him/her?*'

[H. Lyman (2007:39)]

2.2 With question particle

If a pronoun occurs only with a question particle as a simple question, it must be a phonologically independent one. When a phonologically dependent pronoun is used in this context, it must appear with *la'a*.

- (2) *La'a be ya'?*
 [zai] *la' =be ja'?*
 BASE 3H QE
 'ʔ(Y) él/ella?'
 '*(And) him/her?*'

[Marlett (1993:84)]

2.3 In preverbal position

A phonologically dependent pronoun that appears preverbally (typically to emphasize or contrast in some way) must appear with *la'a*.

(3) La'a be bi'ni be ni.

[zai] la^ʔ =be biʔni =be ni
 BASE 3H C.do 3H 3IN
 'Él/ella lo hizo.'
 'S/he did it.'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:29)]

(4) Kadi la'a be bi'ni be ni.

[zai] kadi la^ʔ =be biʔni =be ni
 not BASE 3H C.do 3H 3IN
 'No era él/ella quien lo hizo.'
 'It wasn't s/he who did it.'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:78)]

(5) Lle ga'ak e' nnabe ne' nakin' gon e'.

[zav] le ga^ʔk =eʔ n:abe =neʔ nakinʔ g-on =eʔ
 BASE PL 3FO P-ask 3FO S.how P-do 3FO
 'Va a preguntarles cómo debe hacer.'
 'S/he is going to ask them how to do it.'

[Butler (1980:173)]

(6) Lë bi' bē bi' kana'.

[zpc] læ =biʔ bæ =biʔ kanaʔ
 BASE 3INFO C.do 3INFO thus
 'ÉL/ELLA hizo así.'
 'S/HE did it that way.'

[H. Lyman (2007:163)]

Example (7) has no verb but the facts are similar for obvious reasons.

(7) La'a be nga.

[zai] La^ʔ =be nga
 BASE 3H Pronoun.DIST
 'Ése es él/ella.'
 'That one is him/her.'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:94)]

Example (8) illustrates this restriction as applying to a phonologically dependent pronoun that is shown by other criteria to be syntactically independent.

(8) La bi nna bede bi tu iya.

[zaa] la bí n:a bedè =bi tu ijà
 BASE 3INFO Emph C.give 3INFO a/one flower
 'Él/ella dio una flor ...'
 'S/he gave a flower ...'

[Nellis & Nellis (1983:149)]

2.4 After Spanish preposition

A phonologically dependent pronoun that appears as the object of a Spanish preposition must appear with la'a.

- (9) ti palasiu raka para la'a be
 [zai] ti palasju raka para laʔ =be
 a/one palace Loc-DIST for BASE 3H
 ‘un palacio allí para él/ella’
 ‘a palace there for him/her’

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:107)]

- (10) bajw lle ga'ak e'
 [zav] bax^w l:e gaʔak =eʔ
 under BASE PL 3FO
 ‘bajo el dominio de ellos’
 ‘under the authority of them’

[Butler (2000:5)]

2.5 As subject of predicate nominal clause

A phonologically dependent pronoun that appears as the subject of a predicate nominal clause must appear with *la'a*.

- (11) Maystru la'a be.
 [zai] majstru laʔ =be
 teacher BASE 3H
 ‘Es maestro.’
 ‘S/he is a teacher.’

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:93)]

- (12) Bya snya lë ba'.
 [zpc] bja snja læ =baʔ
 animal ferocious BASE 3AN
 ‘Es un animal feroz.’
 ‘It is a ferocious animal.’

[H. Lyman (2007:152)]

3 Situations allowing phonologically dependent pronouns in some varieties

Some contexts show greater variability in Zapotec in that the conditions on the type of pronoun permitted vary between varieties. That is, what is permissible in one variety is not the same as what is permissible in another.

3.1 As object of the verb following an NP subject

In some varieties of Zapotec, only syntactically independent pronouns are permitted as the object of the verb when it follows an NP subject. A syntactically dependent pronoun must be accompanied by *la'a* in this context.

- (13) Gudiñe ba'du' ka la'a be.
 [zai] gu-dije baʔduʔ ka laʔ =be
 C-hit child DIST BASE 3H
 ‘Ese niño le pegó.’
 ‘That child hit him/her.’

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:39)]

- (14) Rusidxaga dxi'iña ka la'a be.
 [zai] r-usidɟaga ɟi'ɲa ka laʔ =be
 H-CAUS.be.tired work DIST BASE 3H
 'El trabajo le cansa.'
 'The work tires him/her out.'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:51)]

- (15) ... kwenda bo ilë'ë benë' lë yak e'.
 [zpc] kwenda bo i-læʔ benæʔ læ jak =eʔ
 so.that not P-see person BASE PL 3FO
 '... para que la gente no los vea.'
 '... so that people do not see them.'

[H. Lyman (2007:110)]

In these same varieties, the same facts hold when the subject has been extracted either by question formation or by relative clause formation. In Isthmus Zapotec [zai] the same is true following the zero "alternate" pronoun.

- (16) ... bidxidxi ka' Ø la'a me.
 [zai] ... b-iɟiɟi kaʔ =Ø laʔ =me
 ... C-laugh PL 3AL BASE 3AN
 '... se rieron de él.'
 '... they laughed at it.'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:89)]

3.2 After interrogative pronoun

After an interrogative pronoun in a predicative construction, only syntactically independent pronouns are permitted, but phonological independency is not required (see [Personal pronouns: distribution, this series](#)). If a pronoun is syntactically dependent, it is not permitted in this construction unless accompanied by *la'a*. This includes the null pronoun (3AL) in Isthmus Zapotec [zai].

- (17) ɿTu la'a Ø?
 [zai] tu laʔ =Ø
 who? BASE 3AL
 '¿Quién es?'
 'Who is it?'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:38)]

- (18) ɿZhi la'a Ø?
 [zai] ʒi laʔ =Ø
 what? BASE 3AL
 '¿Qué?' o '¿Qué cosa?' o '¿Qué dice?'
 'What?' or 'What thing?' or 'What is s/he saying?'

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:38)]

3.3 In conjunct

When pronouns are conjoined, syntactically independent pronouns or *la'a* plus a pronoun must be used.⁵ Example (19) shows an enclitic pronoun with *la'a* after the conjunction for ‘or’ (a Spanish loanword) in an alternative question.

- (19) ¿Tu bi'ni ni? ¿Li'i la o la'a be?
 [zai] tu bi?ni ni li[?] la o la[?] = be
 who C-do 3IN 2SG Q or BASE 3H
 ‘¿Quién lo hizo? ¿Tú o él/ella?’
 ‘Who did it? ¿You or him/her?’

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:29)]

Example (20) has a conjunct with a Zapotec conjunction for ‘and’.

- (20) la'a be ne xamigu be
 [zai] la[?] = be ne ʃ-amigu = be
 BASE 3H and POSS-friend 3H
 ‘él/ella y su amigo/a’
 ‘s/he and his/her friend’

[Pickett, Black & Marcial (2001:27)]

Appendix A: Base form used with enclitic pronouns

ISO 639-3 code	Identifier as in Ethnologue	Form	Comparison with FOC
zaa	Sierra de Juárez	la	la [?] (distinct) ⁶
zab	San Juan Guelavía	la [?]	(does not exist)
zac	Ocotlán	li [?]	li [?] (homophonous)
zad	Cajonos	le	
zae	Yareni	la	la [?] (distinct) ⁷
zaf	Ayoquesco		
zai	Isthmus	la [?] ⁸	(does not exist)
zam	Miahuatlán		
zao	Ozolotepec		le [?]
zaq	Aloápam	la	la [?] (distinct) ⁹
zar	Rincón		

⁵These facts are not well documented in any variety of Zapotec, however.

⁶Used in a very restricted fashion.

⁷Used in a very restricted fashion.

⁸The form is /la[?]/ in the San Blas Atempa subdialect.

⁹Used in a very restricted fashion.

ISO 639-3 code	Identifier as in Ethnologue	Form	Comparison with FOC
zas	Santo Domingo Albarradas	laʔ	laʔ (homophonous)
zat	Tabaa		
zav	Yatzachi	l:e	(does not exist)
zaw	Mitla	laʔ	laʔ (homophonous)
zax	Xadani		
zca	Coatecas Altas	læʔ	læʔ (homophonous)
zoo	Asunción Mixtepec		
zpa	Lachiguiri		
zpb	Yautepec		
zpc	Choapan	læ	læ (homophonous)
zpd	Southeastern Ixtlán		
zpe	Petapa		
zpf	San Pedro Quiatoni	(does not exist)	laʔ
zpg	Guevea de Humboldt	leʔ	(does not exist)
zph	Totomachapan		
zpi	Santa María Quiévolani	laʔ	le (distinct)
zpj	Quiavicuzas		
zpk	Tlacolulita		
zpl	Lachixío	(does not exist)	(does not exist)
zpm	Mixtepec		lãʔ
zpn	Santa Inés Yatzechi	laʔ	laʔ (homophonous)
zpo	Amatlán	(does not exist)	leʔ
zpp	El Alto		
zpq	Zoogocho	l:e	(does not exist)
zpr	Santiago Xanica		leʔ
zps	Coatlán		
zpt	San Vicente Coatlán	leʔa	læʔ (distinct)
zpu	Yalálag	l:e	(does not exist)
zpv	Chichicapan	laʔ	aʔ (distinct)
zpw	Zaniza		
zpx	San Baltazar Loxicha		

ISO 639-3 code	Identifier as in Ethnologue	Form	Comparison with FOC
zpy	Mazaltepec		
zpz	Texmelucan	(does not exist)	(does not exist)
zsr	Southern Rincón		
zte	Elotepec		
ztg	Xanaguía	(does not exist)	læʔ
ztl	Lapaguía-Guivini		
ztm	San Agustín Mixtepec		
ztn	Santa Catarina Albarradas		
ztp	Loxicha		
ztq	Quioquitani-Quierí	læʔ	læʔ (homophonous)
zts	Tilquiapan	laʔ	laʔ (homophonous)
ztt	Tejalapan		
ztu	Güilá		
ztx	Zaachila		
zty	Yatee		

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