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Tentative Tone Analysis of Guerrero Amuzgo

Introduction

The tone perturbations which occur in noun paradigms and verb conjugations of Guerrero Amuzgo have not yet been explained in a coherent fashion. It appears that floating tones and possibly the ballistic syllable with its laryngeal features may be contributing to the many tone patterns that are seen in the verb and noun stems as person endings are suffixed to them.

Amuzgo is a member of the Amuzgoan family and of the larger Otomanguean language family. Amuzgo of Guerrero is spoken by about 20,000 people in the southeastern part of the state of Guerrero near the border of Oaxaca. This data was collected by Amy Bauernschmidt and Marjorie Buck while living in the municipio town of Xochistlahuaca from the early 1950's to 1976. A great number of Amuzgo language associates and friends have contributed to the data from which this study was made.

This practical orthography was designed using letters of the Spanish alphabet as much as possible in order to help new readers learn the sounds and symbols of Spanish as well as the letters needed to represent their own extensive phoneme inventory.

Amuzgo Alphabet:

a aⁿ ạ ạⁿ b c ch cw e eⁿ ei eiⁿ i j ' l m n nd ndy ñ o om
 ọ ọⁿ p q r s t ts ty u w x y

CHART OF VOWELS AND VOWEL CLUSTERS

Oral vowels and clusters				Nasal vowels and clusters			
a	ia	ua		a ⁿ	ia ⁿ	ua ⁿ	
ạ	ịạ	ụạ		ạ ⁿ	ịạ ⁿ	ụạ ⁿ	
e	ie	ue		e ⁿ		ue ⁿ	
ei				ei ⁿ		uei ⁿ	
i		ui					
o	io			om	iom		
ọ	ịọ	ụọ		ọ ⁿ	ịọ ⁿ	ụọ ⁿ	
u	iu						

CONSONANT CHART

	Labial	Alveolar (Velarized)	Alveo- palatal	Palatal	Velar		Laryngeal
voiceless stop	p	t	ty		c, qu	cw	?
voiced stop	b				(g)		
affricate		ts		ch			
fricative		s		x		j	
nasal	m	n	ñ				
occluded nasals		nd	ndy				
syllable nasal		nn					
liquids		l					
semi- consonants				y		w	
vibrants		r r					

Basic Syllable Structure

Syllables may have the following basic shapes: V, CV, CV', CVV and CVV'. The consonant position may be filled by one to three consonants. All CV patterns may occur in word roots. In non-roots the usual patterns are V, CV and CV'.

In syllables with VV the first vowel is filled only by high vowels [i] and [u]. All combinations of VV may occur except /uo/. The high vowels are not nasalized. Single V pattern occurs on an unstressed syllable word initial. It is usually filled with syllabic consonants with high tone which functions grammatically to indicate future tense. All the nasals and the lateral can be syllabified and may occur in this V slot.

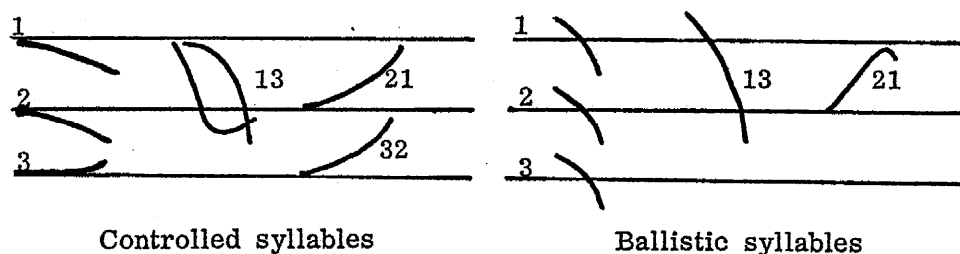
Words consist of from one to seven syllables. Stress occurs on the root syllable of the word, that is, the final syllable of the stem. Verbs and possessed nouns both use a pronoun suffix set to indicate the person who is the actor or possessor. These pronoun suffixes do not receive stress nor do the tones change on them.

Syllable Types and Tone

There are two syllable types, ballistic and controlled. Both types may occur stressed or unstressed. "Controlled syllables are characterized by a smooth, sustained release, which continues to a peak of intensity at about the mid point of the syllable nucleus, and is followed by a gradual, controlled decay. The nucleus terminates with a lenis glottal stop in checked syllables.

Ballistic syllables are characterized by a quick, forceful release and a rapid crescendo to a peak of intensity early in the nucleus, followed by a rapid, uncontrolled decrescendo with fade of voicing. In unchecked syllables there is fortis aspiration, varying to post velar friction after central and back vowels. In checked syllables the final glottal stop is fortis and often followed by a ballistic release, freely fluctuating from oral to nasal quality. In connected speech the aspiration is much less apparent, if not altogether absent, particularly when the syllable is not stressed.”

Chart from *Amuzgo Syllable Dynamics*
(Bauernschmidt 1965)



The surface tone patterns are levels: high, mid and low and contours: high-low, mid-high and low-mid. All level and contour tones occur on both ballistic and controlled syllables, except for the LM glide which does not occur on the ballistic syllable.

Examples of tones

	Controlled		Ballistic	
High	w'aa 'ndyoo	<i>house</i> <i>mouth</i>	w'a-ya 'ndy _o -ya	<i>my houe</i> <i>my mouth</i>
Mid	ts'eii ⁿ s'ioo' tscaa'	<i>frond</i> <i>antenna</i> <i>board</i>	ts'ei ⁿ tyue' tsca'	<i>skunk</i> <i>arid land</i> <i>cloth</i>
Low	ty' <u>oo</u> ndaa	<i>saint</i> <i>echo</i>	ts'o xca' tyme ⁿ	<i>dirt</i> <i>comb</i> <i>templero</i>
High-Low	nljoo' jnda <u>al</u> juii	<i>jola (coin)</i> <i>underbrush</i>	mpei ⁿ x'a ta	<i>taut</i> <i>bird (tordo)</i> <i>papá (voc.)</i>
Mid-High	jnduu-ya tsuii	<i>my bed</i> <i>turtle</i>	jndu-' st'ei ⁿ snom	<i>your bed</i> <i>zopilote</i> <i>burro</i>
Low-Mid	ñ'oom jnda <u>a</u> jndyoo' l'aa	<i>palabra</i> <i>monte</i> <i>rubber</i> <i>marta</i>		

It appears that level tones H, M and L are basic underlying tones, as well as HL glide.

The two rising glides appear to be derived contours due to a floating high.

Other tone changes in verb and noun stems may be due to the effects of a floating low tone associated with the ballistic syllable. The interplay of ballistic and controlled syllables and the presence of one or more moras in the underlying structure still remain to be investigated.

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