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20.6 Yurakaré

Rik van Gijn

1 Introduction

Yurakaré (also Yuracaré, Yurújare) is a small, isolate language, spoken in central Bolivia. The number of speakers can only be estimated, and lies between 2,500 and 3,500. Attempts have been made to connect Yurakaré with larger genealogical groups, but none of these attempts have had lasting success, and in fact most classifications regard Yurakaré as an isolate. The language is endangered, as the younger generation acquires at best a passive knowledge of it in the vast majority of communities, and it is giving way to Spanish as the preferred language of communication.

The Yurakaré people live in small settlements along one of the many rivers of the area, and practise small-scale farming, fishing and hunting. They are surrounded by other ethnic groups, such as the Trinitario (Arawak) to the north, the Chimane (Mosetenan) to the north-west, Bolivian Quechua (Quechuan) to the south and south-west, and the Tupí-Guaraní languages Yuki and Sirionó to the east. The use of Spanish is omnipresent both within and outside the Yurakaré community.

Yurakaré is a polysynthetic, agglutinating (both prefixing and suffixing) and head-marking language. Subjects and direct objects are indexed on the verb, and full NPs can, but need not be expressed overtly. The alignment pattern of Yurakaré is nominative–accusative, determined only by the form and position of the pronominal affixes: direct objects are prefixed, subjects are suffixed. A system of applicative markers can increase the type and number of head-marked arguments. The language distinguishes the following lexical classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, ideophones, interjections and enclitic particles. Nouns and adjectives can be used predicatively without any additional derivational marking or the use of copula. More detailed information can be found in Van Gijn (2006).

2 Evaluative morphology

Different kinds of evaluations in Yurakaré are marked by the suffixes *-nñu* DIMINUTIVE, *-mashi* MEDIAL DEGREE, *-lë* AUGMENTATIVE, and prefixed partial reduplication INTENSIFICATION. Although the markers can all be described under the heading of evaluative morphology, they form a heterogeneous group in the sense that they do not form a morphosyntactic system or paradigm: the hosts they combine with are not entirely equivalent, and they occupy different positions in the morphological template. They can also combine with each other in some circumstances. In spite of these differences, their functions sometimes overlap. I describe each of the markers in the following subsections.

2.1 Diminutive -nñu

The diminutive marker -*nñu* /ɲːu/ on nouns marks small size:[1]

(1)   a. *Anakkimaya ajachanñu!*
        ana-kka-ima-ø=ya   a-katcha-nñu
        DEM-MEA-COLL-3=REP 3SG.P-axe-DIM
        'This size, his little axe was.'
    b. *Lëttima katcha, latijsha amashtunñu anakkima.*
        lëtta-ima   katcha latijsha a-machitu-nñu   ana-kka-ima
        one-COLL   axe   then   3SG.P-machete-DIM DEM-MEA-COLL
        'He had an axe, and his little machete was of this size.'

This marker can also appear on property words or – less frequently – on event words expressing processes, where it can refer either to the size of the referent about which the property or action is predicated, as in (2a), or to the degree to which the predicate applies, as in (2b):

(2)   a. *Todito anu shuyulënñu aalparatunñu, bënama animal bëshënñu.*
        todito   anu   shuyulë-nñu   a-alparatu-nñu   bë-nama
        all   like.this beautiful-DIM 3SG.P-apparatus-DIM ATN-be.like.this
        animal   bëshë-nñu
        animal   thing-DIM
        'It has all these beautiful little adornments (apparatus), like these little animal things.'
    b. *Ottonñunaja kummëw!*
        otto-nñu-ø=w=naja   kummë=w
        go.out-DIM-3=PL=NSIT   tree=PL
        'The trees have come out a little.' (the tips come out above the subsiding water)

The suffix is also marginally used to encode endearment:

(3)   *Nij amakkay balitu, birikinñu?*
    nij   ama-kka=y   bali-tu   biriki-nñu
    NEG   WH-MEA=LOC go.PL-1PL.S   Brigida-DIM
    'We did not go far, did we, little Brigida?'

The suffix -*nñu* is related to a number of roots related to suckling, small child, such as -*ñu*- 'child' (obligatorily possessed), *iñuma* 'procreate', *ñuñu* 'suckle', *ñuña* 'breastfeed' and *ñuñuta* 'nipple'.

2.2 Augmentative -lë *and* -ilë

The suffix -*lë* is found on modifiers, and augments what is expressed in the root it applies to. It is used more or less productively in the context of comparative constructions, even though it is not required there:[2]

(4)   *Sëja pëpëli mëjsha.*
    së=ja   pëpë-lë-y   më=jsha

1SG.PRO=THM   old-AUG-1SG.S   2SG.PRO=ABL
'I am older than you.'

It is also used in non-comparative constructions, as in (5), where it simply indicates that what is expressed in the property or manner expression applies to a high degree:

(5) a. *Kamishëlë werejwerejweja, tanaya latiji kummëy wowore aposo*.
kamishë-lë   werejwerejwe-ø=ja   tana-ø=ya   latiji   kummë=y   wowore
slowly-AUG   untie-3=SS   tie-3=REP   then   tree=LOC snake
a-poso
3SG.P-beard
'He very slowly untied himself, and tied the snake's whiskers (beard) to the tree.'
b. *Apiiw amalishtawti, kuratalë tuntaya libushajtiya*.
a-pii=w   amala-ishta-ø=w=ti   kurata-lë   tunta=ya
3SG.P-older.brother=PL   come-FUT-3=PL=DS   fast-AUG   tie=SS.IRR
li-busha-jti-ø=ya
DEL-lay-HAB-3=REP
'When his older brothers were about to arrive, she quickly wrapped him and put him back.'

In combination with spatially used demonstrative adverbs, the suffix -*lë* indicates a location near the place the demonstrative refers to:

(6) a. *Lanalëmashi apumë na wororilë atchi*.
l-ana-lë-mashi   a-pummë   na   wororilë   ati=chi
REF-this-AUG-HDG IPFV-sing.PROG DEM   great.tinamou.(bird) DEM-DIR
'Close by, a tinamou bird was singing there.'
b. *Latijsha lanalëchi atattajsha kuniriya latiji*.
latijsha   l-ana-lë=chi   a-tatta=jsha   ku-niri-ø=ya   latiji
after.that REF-DEM-AUG=DIR   3SG.P-back=ABL 3SG.VC-speak-3=REP then
'Then, very close to her, from behind, she spoke to her.'

In combination with temporal vocabulary, this suffix indicates proximity in time to the moment expressed in the adverb:

(7) a. *numannumali*
numannuma-lë=y
dawn-AUG=LOC
'in the early morning' (around dawn)
b. *shëli*
shëy-lë=y
yesterday-AUG=LOC
'the other day' (not too long before yesterday)

The marker also appears on verbs (in dependent clauses only), where it indicates that the action was just completed when another event started. This seems to relate directly to the proximity in time found as a function of *lë* on temporal adverbs:

(8)   *La dujnë kokkolëja, kumalaya abashti*.
         la   dujnë   kokko-lë-ø=ja   ku-mala-ø=ya   a-bashti
         then   meat   throw.away.PL-AUG-3=SS   3SG.VC-go.SG-3=REP   3SG.P-wife
         'Immediately after he threw away the meat, he followed his wife.'

The element *-lë* occurs on a number of modifiers as a (semi-)lexicalised element, for instance on *ñuñujulë* 'small', *shudyulë* 'beautiful', *tishilë* 'now' and *willë* 'far'.

   The common denominator of all these different uses of *-lë* seems to be that it marks proximity to some standard. This proximity can be interpreted spatially, temporally or qualitatively, depending on the nature of the root it applies to and the construction it appears in. The default interpretation for the use of the suffix with quality-denoting roots is to increment the value expressed in the root. Nevertheless, in combination with the diminutive *-nñu*, either on the same element (9a) or on another element (9b), the interpretation of *-lë* can be guided towards smallness:

(9)   a.   *Anajalimanñu kapuchuya!*
               ana-kka-lë-ima-nñu   ka-puchu-ø=ya
               this-MEA-AUG-COLL-DIM   3SG.COLL-escape-3=REP
               'Only [a piece] this tiny survived, was overlooked (escaped).'
         b.   *Anajalimaya lacha na aturumanñu*.
               ana-kka-lë-ima-ø=ya   lacha   na   a-turuma-nñu
               DEM-MEA-AUG-COLL-3=REP   too   DEM   3SG.P-arrow.type-DIM
               'She also had a small arrow, only this size.'

   A seemingly related suffix *-ilë* is marginally used on verbs to derive a person for whom the event expressed in the root applies excessively:

(10)   *tiyaylë*
         tiya-ilë
         eat-CHAR
         'glutton'

2.3 Hedging *-mash(i)*

The suffix *-mashi* appears on different kinds of predicates with the meaning 'hedged', referring to the limited extent to which the quality or event expressed in the root applies:

(11)   a. *Kusuti lipuwamashiw latiji*.
             kusuti   li-puwa-mashi-ø=w   latiji
             maybe   DEL-drunk-HDG-3=PL   then
             'Maybe they became a little drunk then.'
         b. *Kamalamashijti ush na shoja*.
             ka-mala-mashi-jti   ushta   na   shoja
             3SG-go.SG-HDG-HAB   before DEM   daughter
             ' She carried (was pregnant) only a little, this woman.' (that is: it wasn't too visible)
         c. *Lëmmuy tidala bintamashi*.
             lëmmuy   ti-dala binta-mashi-ø

only   1SG-head   hurt-HDG-3
'My head just hurts a little.'

In combination with verbs of cognition, such as knowing, realising, forgetting, etc., *-mashi* indicates that the cognitive access is somewhat blurred:

(12)   a.   *Tëpshë malatumba? Ati nish lëdojo tëylemashi.*
              tëtë-bëshë   ma-la-tumba-ø   ati   nish   lëdojo   të-yle-mashi
              what-ENT   3SG-MAL-drop-3   DEM   NEG   much   1SG-be.known-HDG
              'What was it that he dropped on them? I don't know too much about this.
        b.   *Wëshëtëmashi latiji.*
              wëshë-ta-mashi   latiji
              feel-MID-HDG   then
              'Then it started to dawn on him.' (lit.: 'He realised it somewhat then.')

The suffix *-mash* is found as an alternative to *-mashi*, often (but not necessarily; see (14b)) forming adverbs rather than verbs:

(13)   *Nachimash malaya timbushucham.*
        nachi-mash   mala=ya   ti-n-bushu-cha-m
        there-HDG   go.SG=SS.IRR   1SG-BEN-lie.down.SG-JUS-2SG.S
        'Move a little further and wait for me lying down.'

The same variant of the marker is found in imperatives:

(14)   a.   *Tintelemashma!*
              ti-n-itele-mash-ma
              1SG-BEN-let.go-HDG-IMP.SG
              'Give me some slack.' (let me go a little)
        b.   *Malamashma nakkamashi!*
              mala-mash-ma   na-kka-mashi
              go.SG-HDG-IMP.SG   DEM-MEA-HDG
              'Move over a little more that way.'

Combinations with *-nñu* are possible, though they do not seem to be common. The precise effect of the combination is unclear:

(15)   *Wuriwurishinñumashi.*
        wuriwurishi-nñu-mashi
        black-DIM-HDG
        'It is somewhat black.'

Combinations with *-lë* occur more often. In these, *-mashi* hedges the effect of *-lë* (see also (6a) above):

(16)   *Pipikka, kusu dyindyilmashibëla.*
        Pipi-kka-ø   kusu   dyindyi-lë-mashi-ø=bëla
        Pipi-MEA-3   maybe   small-AUG-HDG-3=CNT
        'He was the size of Pipi, or maybe a still bit smaller.'

2.4 Intensifying reduplication

The final morphological expression of evaluation marks intensity, and is formally very different from the ones discussed above. Firstly, intensity is expressed by (partial) reduplication rather than by an affix, and secondly, the reduplicated form attaches to the left edge of the root rather than the right edge.

The basic reduplicative process for forming intensity prefixes is to copy the first two moras of the stem, except the final coda (if present in the original), which is replaced by /h/, spelled *j*:

(17)   a. *meyeye* 'disobedient' >> *meyej~meyeye* 'very, really disobedient'
       b. *binta* 'strong' >> *bij~binta* 'very strong'

Historical processes seem to have led to a number of exceptions to this general pattern of reduplication. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the deviations (for more information, see Van Gijn, forthcoming). Suffice it to say that intensity reduplication always involves final [h], at least one syllable and at most two, and strong stress (in the case of disyllabic reduplication always on the rightmost syllable).

In terms of semantics, the effects of the intensity reduplication are diverse, according to the semantics of the root it applies to. In the most straightforward case, when it applies to a root that expresses a quality *X*, it simply indicates that the quality applies to a high degree ('very *X*'), as can be seen in (17), including the superlative interpretation:

(18)   *Atijti mapi shujshunñe.*
       ati-jti   ma-pi   shuj~shunñe
       DEM-HAB   3PL-older.brother.of.man   INTS~big
       'That was their biggest (oldest) brother.'

Words expressing processes or achievements are interpreted as being very close to their point of culmination when they carry the intensity prefix:

(19)   a. *Shamajshamishtuychi.*
           shamaj~shama-ishta-ø=w=ya=chi
           INTS~die.PL-FUT-3=PL=REP=FRUST
           'They really would have died.'
       b. *shëwëjshëwishtati*
           shëwëj~shëw-ishta-ø=ti
           INTS~become.dark-FUT-3=DS
           'when it was really getting dark'
       c. *Malajmalawitaya.*
           malaj~ma-la-wita-ø=ya
           INTS~3PL-MAL-arrive.SG-3=REP
           'They really had the urge [to urinate].' (lit.: '[The urine] really arrived with them.')

Intensity reduplication is less commonly found on action words (in fact I have found it only on movement verbs), where its effect is that the action is performed to a great extent:

(20)   *Majmala.*
      maj~mala-ø
      INST~go.SG-3
      'He went really far.'

The intensity prefix takes on a more interactional meaning when applied to question words. In these circumstances it seems to express a strong curiosity to know the precise answer to the question, often in combination with the frustrative marker =*chi*:

(21)   *Ajami shetachi?*
      aj~ama=y   sheta-ø=chi
      INTS~WH=LOC   lost-3=FRUST
      'Where exactly did he get lost?'

It is marginally possible to apply the intensity reduplication to nouns, as long as they can be interpreted as something gradable:

(22)   *majmapa*
      maj~ma-pa
      INTS~3PL-younger.brother.of.man
      'their youngest brother'

Combinations with other evaluative markers are rare. I have found no combination of the intensity marker with the limited degree marker -*mashi*. The only instance I have found of a combination of the intensity marker with augmentative -*lë* is in the lexicalised expression *idojolë*, which has *idojo* as its basic root, meaning 'surpass'. With the augmentative, it indicates 'much, many'; with the intensity reduplication, this basic meaning is exaggerated:

(23)   *latijsha idojidojolë majmatataja*
      latijsha   idoj~idojo-lë   maj~matata-ø=ja
      after.that   INTS~surpass-AUG   INTS~big-3=SS
      'then, when he was really, really big'

A combination of the intensity marker and the diminutive -*nñu* is possible in instances such as the one in (24), which also contains a lexicalised instance of -*lë*, but this combination is very rare. In this case, it is difficult to say which of the markers has scope over the other:

(24)   *ñuj~ñuñujulë-nñu*
      INTS~small-DIM
      'very small'

3 Conclusion

The field of evaluative morphology in Yurakaré consists of four markers that do not form a natural morphological system: the reduplicated intensity marker attaches to the left edge of the stem, and the three evaluative suffixes occupy different positions in the morphological template, corresponding to their scope.
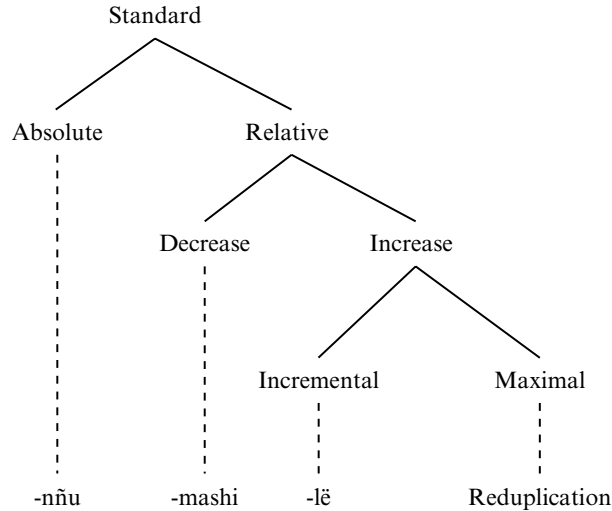
Figure 20.6.1 System of evaluative morphology in Yurakaré

(25)   ROOT -*lë* -*nñu* -*mashi*

Moreover, they do not attach to the same kind of roots in equal measures. The diminutive -*nñu* has a preponderance with nouns, although it can also be found on adjectives and verbs; the other markers have a preference for verbs and adjectives.

In terms of function, the markers sometimes overlap, but their different functions can be schematically represented as in Figure 20.6.1, which makes the differences between the markers clear.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Examples are glossed in four lines in order to provide the Yurakaré data in both its standard Roman orthography (line 1) and a morphemic analysis (line 2), along with morpheme glosses (line 3) and an idiomatic English translation (line 4).
2. Comparative constructions do not seem to be highly grammaticalised in Yurakaré, as there is quite some variation. One of the points of variation is the presence of the augmentative marker on the predicate, which can be left out if it is sufficiently clear that a comparison is made. Alternatively, the intensifying prefix can be used, or no evaluative modification at all.