

GRAMMAR IN THE SCRIPT: NOUNS and STATIVES

By Hutch Kinsman

In the sixth essay on verbal analysis in the script, **statives**, another type of intransitive verb construction, will be discussed, along with several types of nouns used in statives. Statives, or verbless predicates for the purpose of this essay¹, are constructed from nouns and adjectives and take the form such as found in the single word, *winiken*, “I am a man”, taken from the root noun *winik*, “man”. Possessed nouns in the Mayan languages are a complex issue and will not be discussed here except in the simple cases of possession by an ergative pronoun.

First the basics of the formation of statives will be discussed using information from the current Mayan languages, followed by a more detailed discussion of derived nouns found in the hieroglyphic script.

Since the categories of nouns and adjectives have not been discussed heretofore, a short review would be helpful. Houston, Robertson, and Stuart (hereafter referred to as HRS) cover the basic definitions in “Quality and Quantity in Glyphic nouns and Adjectives” (2001:2): “We define a “noun” in Mayan as the grammatical category that can (a) potentially be possessed, or (b) function as the argument of a proposition, that is, the subject of a sentence (“**he** scatters incense”) an object in a sentence (“he scatters **incense**”) or the object of a preposition (“with the **snake**”). In contrast, adjectives, whose function is to reference qualities of nouns, cannot be possessed, nor can they serve as arguments of a proposition. People possess *houses*, *horses*, and *dogs*, but not *white*, *large*, and *wide*. Similarly, “*houses* are lived in, “*horses* eat oats,” and “*dogs* are carnivores.” In Mayan, adjectives like *white* and *large* and *wide* cannot function in this way...”

Interestingly enough, in the stative both the noun and adjective take the same affixes and are translated the same way. These stative sentences found in the Mayan languages and script are composed of simply a noun or adjective plus the absolutive suffix that indicates (“cross-references”) the person and number. The English translation requires the use of the verb “to be”. Laughlin, for Tzotzil (1988:86) explains: “Stative sentences assert that the subject is a certain sort of thing (represented by a nominal predicate, for example), or that it exhibits a certain property (denoted by an adjective, perhaps), or that it occupies some position, or location. (...) Stative predicates do not require explicit marking for tense or aspect, but record, instead, an ongoing continuous state.”

A few examples from the Maya Dictionary of Hocabá (Bricker, Po'ot Yah, and Dzul de Po'ot, 1998:406) will demonstrate the use of the absolutive suffixes in forming these

¹ Wald goes to great lengths discussing Statives and Transitive Resultative Aspect, and that the two can overlap. Quoting from Nedjalkon and Jaxontov (1988), “The difference between the stative and the resultative is as follows: the stative expresses a state of a thing without any implication of its origin, while the resultative expresses both a state and the preceding action it has resulted from. Therefore the stative may denote natural, primary states which do not result from any previous event (2007:320).

simple verbless predicate sentences from both nouns and adjectives. The suffixes indicate how the stative sentence is translated. The absolutive pronomial affix endings are: *-en*, 1st Person Singular “I”; *-ech* 2nd Person Singular “you”; *-ø* (“null”) 3rd Person Singular “he/she/it”; *ó'on* 1st Person Plural “we”; *é'esh* 2nd Person Plural “you-all”; *ó'ob'* 3rd Person Plural “they”.

Wiinik, (noun), man [with absolutive pronoun].

<i>wíinik-en</i>	I am a man.
<i>wíinik-ech</i>	you are a man.
<i>wíinik-ø</i>	He is a man.
<i>wíinik-ó'on</i>	We are men.
<i>wíinik-é'esh</i>	You-all are men.
<i>wíinik-ó'ob'</i>	They are men.

'uk'ah, (adjective), thirsty [with absolutive pronoun].

<i>'uk'ah-en</i>	I am thirsty.
<i>'uk'ah-ech</i>	You are thirsty.
<i>'uk'ah-ø</i>	He/she/it is thirsty.
<i>'uk'ah-ó'on</i>	We are thirsty.
<i>'uk'ah-é'esh</i>	You-all are thirsty.
<i>'uk'ah-ó'ob'</i>	They are thirsty.

It can be seen that the absolutive pronoun is used with the noun or adjective just as it is with the verb, as the subject of the sentence in an intransitive construction. The absolutive pronoun also cross-references, that is agrees with, the person and number in all of these constructions. In contrast, when the ergative pronoun is used as a prefix to a noun, the noun becomes possessed. As stated above, an adjective cannot be possessed. Therefore when a noun *sukú'un*, “older brother” is possessed by the ergative pronomial affix, it becomes (ibid:405) as follows:

sukú'-un, (noun), older brother [with possessive ergative pronoun]

<i>in sukú'un</i>	my older brother
-------------------	------------------

<i>a sukú'un</i>	your older brother
<i>u sukú'un</i>	his/her older brother
<i>k sukú'un</i>	our older brother
<i>a sukú'un-é'esh</i>	you-all's older brother
<i>u sukú'un-ó'ob'</i>	their older brother

Both an ergative pronoun and an absolutive pronoun may be used with a noun in a construction such as *awiniken*, “I am your servant [man].” In fact, just such a construction is found in the hieroglyphic script on Piedras Negras Lintel 3 (noted by David Stuart, n.d.):



'a -wi- na
ke na

Example 6.1. 'a-wi-na-ke-na, a- winak -en

2nd Person Singular
Ergative Pronoun Set A
Possessive
“you”

“man” 1st Person Singular
Absolutive Pronoun Set B
Subject
“I”

There is somewhat of a parallel between the uses of the ergative and absolutive pronouns, 1) with verbs and 2), with nouns and adjectives. Absolutive pronouns in both situations act as subjects of intransitive sentences, and ergative pronouns act as the subject (agent) in the case of transitive verbs and possessors in the case of nouns.

This parallel does have some limitations, however. For instance, although the absolutive (Set B) pronouns are usually the same when being used as a subject of an intransitive construction, be it a noun, adjective, or verb, and as the object of the predicate in a transitive construction, the Set A ergative pronouns may vary when used as an agent versus being used as a possessor².

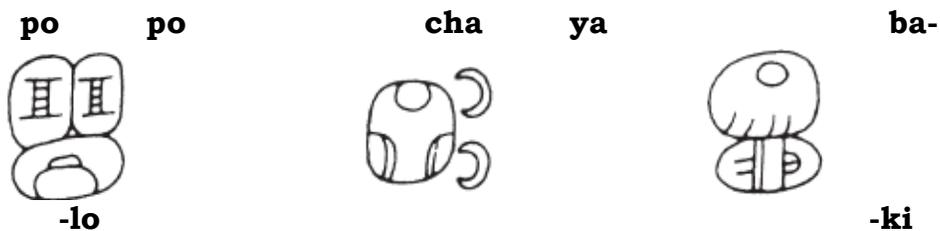
² In Ch'ort'i for instance the first person singular preconsonantal possessor of nouns is *ni-*, prevocalic *w-*, whereas the agent pronoun of transitive statements is *in-*, preconsonantal and *inw-* prevocalic. In fact, it is not certain whether the 1st

TYPES OF NOUNS FOUND IN THE SCRIPT

The nouns discussed so far have been **root** nouns, or nouns that can stand alone without any affixes. Other types of nouns that occur in the script are (taken from Houston, Robertson, and Stuart [2001:6] as adapted from Knowles) 2) **qualitative** nouns (abstract nouns that describe qualities like patience, kindness, goodness) -- nouns derived from root nouns and adjectives with a *-Vl* suffix in the script, 3) **instrumental** nouns – nouns derived from a verb by a suffix such as *ib'*, which is an instrument by which the verb is accomplished, 4) **agentives** -- nouns with a morpheme affixed (either a prefix or suffix) such as *aj-*, *'a*, *-om*, or *-aj*, that indicates a link between a person, place, object, or other class of person, and 5) **compound** nouns -- two nouns placed side by side where one noun modifies the other and verbal nouns where a noun is followed by a verb. Other types of compound nouns exist but are not attested yet in the script.

Root Nouns (continued)

At Yaxchilan on Hierglyphic Stairway 3 there is a carving of a captive; written in a vertical column on the captive's loincloth are 3 hieroglyphic blocks (example used in Houston, Robertson, and Stuart [2001:5]):



po-po-lo	cha-ya	ba-ki
<i>popol</i>	<i>chay</i>	<i>Bak</i>
	<i>-ø.</i>	<i>-ø.</i>
“roasted/mat-like	“fish”	3 rd Person Singular Set B Absolutive Pronoun (Subject)
		“prisoner” (“bone”) 3 rd Person Singular Set B Absolutive Pronoun (Subject)

Person Singular ergative pronomial preconsonantal affix in the hieroglyphic script is *in-* or *ni-*. Boot's dictionary (2009:mesoweb.com) gives *in-* from Landa, *ma in k'at ti*, “I don't want to”. But the “Rabbit Vase”, K1398 (Kerr,famsi.org), has a statement that uses *ni-* as a first person singular ergative subject pronoun (example used by Hull, Carrasco, and Wald,2009:37)

“He is a roasted fish. He is a prisoner.” is the stative translation since the three glyph blocks are only composed of an adjective and two nouns.

The *u-b'ah-ø* statement is a popular inscription found on monuments and lintels. The gopher head *b'ah*, a noun³ translated “image”, or “self”, is usually preceded by the the 3rd person singular ergative pronoun *u*, indicating possession of that image by the name of the person following *b'ah*. Accompanying this statement is normally a relief of that person referred to in the inscription.

Piedras Negras Lintel 12 (Drawing by J. Montgomery), replete with visual and hieroglyphic literary devices (pointed out to the author by Mark Pitts from the Philadelphia PCS) provides a very good example of the common *b'ah* expression in a stative construction. There are two scenes, each with a caption. The left scene has three figures and three *ub'ah* statements and the right scene has one figure with only the three accompanying glyphs blocks:



Example 6.3.

u B'AH

? AJAW

KALOOMTE

u

b'ah

-ø

?

Ajaw

Kaloomte

3rd Person
Singular Ergative
Set A Pronoun
(Possession)
“his”

“image”

3rd Person
Singular Absolutive
Set B Pronoun
(Subject)
“it”

“TITLES”

Expecting the verb to come first, and recognizing the second two collocations as titles, the syntactics point to a possessed noun to be converted to a verbal expression, in this case a verbless predicate using the English verb “to be”. Therefore the translation of this phrase would be the stative “His image, ?Ajaw Kaloomte,” or, “It is the image of the ?Ajaw Kaloomte.”

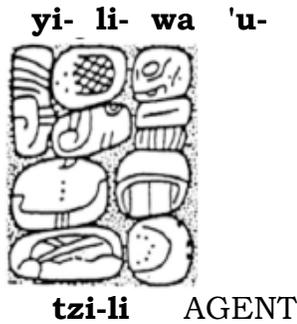
Qualitative Nouns

Qualitative nouns in the script are usually formed by the addition of a *-Vl* suffix to either a noun or adjective, where *V* could be any vowel. These newly formed abstract nouns require the reader to imagine something related to the concrete noun or adjective from which this new abstract noun came from (HRS,2001:8).

3 Historically *bah* was initially thought to be a verb, but after intensive study, is now accepted as a noun.

Two qualitative nouns attested in the script are *ajawlel* (or *ajawlitl*), “rulership” from the title noun *ajaw*, “lord”, and *'utzil*, “goodness”, from the adjective *utz*, “good”.

'Utzil is syntactically attested as a noun in the following statement as the object of a transitive verb *'il*, “to see, witness” on Chichen Itza Monjas lintel 5 (example from Wald[2007:236]):



Example 6.4. **yi-li-wa 'u-tzi-li AGENT.** *Y-'ilaw-ø 'utzil.* “He witnessed the goodness.”

Instrumental Nouns

There are several instrumental nouns attested in the script⁴ with the suffix *'ib'*, such as *ajal'ib'*, “awakening instrument”; *chumib'*, “seat”; *wayib'*, “sleeping place”; *we'ib'*, “food dish”, and *'ukib'*, “drinking vessel”. The possessed instrumental noun *yuk'ib'* occurs often on ceramic vessels. The word comes from the verb *uk'*, meaning “to drink”. The instrumental suffix *'ib'* is added to derive a noun, *'uk'ib'*, “drinking vessel”, and then the possessive ergative pronoun, the prevocalic prefix *yu* is added to show that the noun is possessed, “his drinking vessel (the drinking vessel of...)”. Used in a stative context, the translation would be, “It is/was the drinking vessel of...”. One such vessel, K511 from the Kerr files (Famsi.org), begins with a set of glyph blocks starting with *yuk'ib'*:



	yu-	k'i-	-b'i	'u- HEAD ...	
	<i>y-</i>	<i>'uk'</i>		<i>-ib'</i>	<i>-ø</i>
3 rd Person Singular		“to drink”		Instrumental	3 rd Person Singular
Ergative Set A		verb		Suffix	Absolutive Set B
Pronoun					Pronoun

⁴ As noted from a search of Erik Boot's online Maya dictionary (Mesoweb.org)

Example 6.5. “It is the drinking cup of ...

There seem to be only a few examples in the script (Boot,2009:50,52) of instrumental suffixes other than *ib'*: that of *-ab'* in *chikab*, “rattle-holder”, from *chik*, “bazucar” [to shake, to jolt], (Vásquez et al,1980:97) [Diccionario Maya Cordemex] and possibly the word *cheb*⁵, “brush pen, quill pen ('writing implement')”, possibly from the word *che'*, “to say, to tell” (Boot,2009:49), i.e., the brush/pen is an instrument for “making” words. As an alternative, Boot (ibid:50) adds that *cheb/chep* is recorded as “bamboo” in, for instance, Ch'ol.

Agentives

“The term 'agentive' is used for nouns that indicate agency, usually referring to a person who has the ability, duty, or task of performing a certain action. These agentives can also refer to non-human beings or even non-animate forms although such usage is much less likely. In English comparable suffixes would be “-er” or “-or” as in “singer” or “advisor.” In Spanish, the usual suffix is “-or” as “regidor.” (Wald,2007:440). As indicated above, there are several morphemes in the script that will derive an agentive noun from a root noun: *aj-*, *'a*, *-om*, and *-aj*. From Palenque, tablet of temple XIV, D8(example from HRS [2001:6])(Drawing by L. Schele):



Example 6.6. **K'AHK'-a,** *k'ahk'a*, “fire person”.

Kerry Hull's Ch'orti' Dictionary (famsi.org., p. 2) lists *ajk'ay* as an agentive for “singer”, “cantante”, while there is an example in the script from a shell (Pearlman [collection?])(Drawing by L. Schele), *k'ayom*, “singer” (Wald's example [2007:441]):

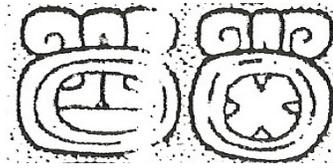


Example 6.7. **k'a- yo- -ma**

An example from Pusilha Stela D, B8B9 (Prager,2002:216) uses the *-om* agentive to derive a noun from the transitive verb *tzutz*, “to finish”. Although there are other possible *-Vm* endings, in Wald's opinion the *-om* suffix is most common when

5 Boot (2009:50) list *che'bul* as the primary word, however all three examples seem to have an unattested [l] in each of these.

presented with a **-ma** syllabic suffix (Personal communication,2010):



Example 6.8. **NAH- TZUTZ-ma** **PADDLER GODS**
nah- *tzutz-* *-om* *-ø* **PADDLER GODS**
 “first” “to finish,end” agentive 3rd Person Singular
 adjective verb (tr) suffix Ergative Set A Pronoun

*nah tzutzom*⁶ PADDLER GODS. “They are the first finishers, Paddler Gods.”

Compound Nouns

Two types of compound nouns are attested in the script. In one type two nouns occur together, where the first noun modifies the second noun. One example used by HRS(2001:figure 1) *ahk' nichte'/nikte'*, “turtle flower” occurs on the ceramic vessel K4669 (Kerr, famsi.org):



Example 6.9. 'a- -ku **NICH/NIK- TE'**

Noun-modifying-noun compounds are different than couplets composed of two nouns such as *tok'pakal*, “flint-shield = army”, or *chanch'en*, “sky-cave = settlement, city”, where the two nouns together may have a third meaning different from the two actual written words⁷.

Another type of compound noun, the verbal noun, is found often in the script in the form of a noun added to a verb root. An oft-occurring example is the *chokch'aj* phrase, sometimes prefixed by the 3rd person singular ergative pronoun as in *uchokch'aj*. When there are no verbal suffixes found with the verb, such as the transitive marker **-wa**. the phrase is translated “drop-throwing”, or “his drop-throwing”. That this form is found following a preposition such as *ti* is further

⁶ The spelling would *k'ayo'm* if one accepts Lacadena and Wichmann's spelling rules (2004).

⁷ See previous Codex article (Kinsman:2009:38,39) for more in-depth explanation, also David Stuart, On the Paired Variants of TZ'AK.

syntactic proof that this form is a noun. In addition, the deictic enclitic marker **-ya** is also found attached to these compound nouns, just as it is with k'ins, winiks, and tuns in distance number counts.

The first example, taken directly from Wald (2007:426), compares 3 examples of the compound noun *chokch'aj* with its transitive verb counterpart, differentiated by the transitive *-ow* suffix:

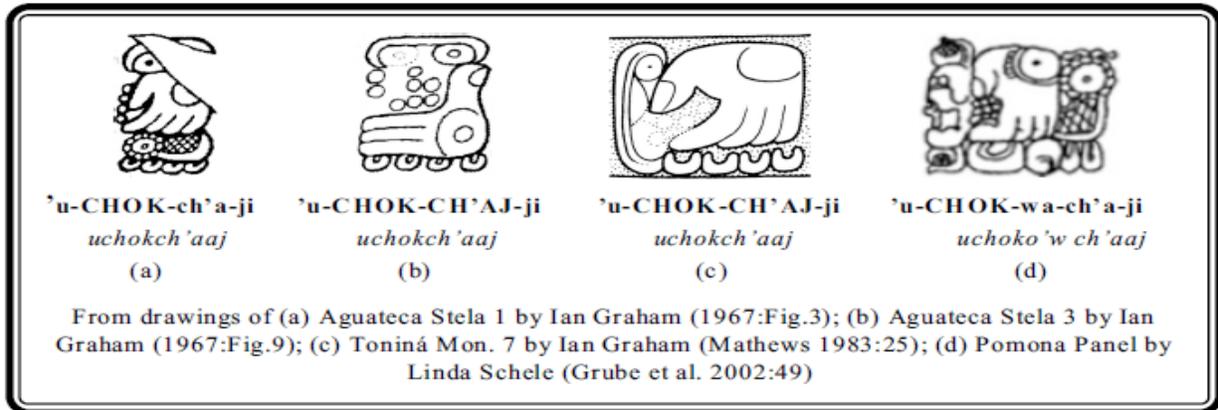


Figure 177. Three compound nouns compared to same two roots as transitive verb and its object

Example 6.10. Comparing Compound Noun to Transitive examples of *chokch'aj*.

Each of these first three examples would be translated, “It is/was the drop-throwing of ...”, whereas the fourth example would be a plain transitive statement, “He throws/threw the drops.”

On Copan Stela J (Drawing by L. Schele), the phrase occurs:



Example 6.11. 7 AJAW CHOK-CH'AJ-ji 3 KUMK'U ...

7 Ajaw chokch'aj 3 Kumk'u..., “(On) 7 Ajaw, It is/was a drop-throwing, 3 Kumk'u...”

Wald (2007:428,429) states in reference to this example: “It is however, quite significant for the argument that these forms of the *chok* verb are not inflected for the resultative aspect. The **ch'a** syllable is positioned to the left of the **CHOK** hand. Its lower end is clearly in the position where the drops would be if any had been carved. At the bottom of the **CHOK** and to the right of the **ch'a** syllable is the syllable **ji**. Together they write the word *chokch'aj*. It is important to note that there is no ergative pronoun. Its absence clearly rules out its being a transitive resultative. In its original context on Copán Stela J, there is no possessor at hand

and it occurs simply within a date context. Thus it is meant to form a verbless sentence on its own along with the date. In this context, *chokch'aaj* could be translated instead as “[On this date] [there was/it was] a throw[ing]-drops” without explicitly identifying who performed the ceremony.”⁸

Other verb-noun compound nouns that occur in the script include *chumtun*, “stone-seating”, *k'altun*, “stone-wrapping”, *ochbi(h)*, “enter-road = die”, *ochk'in*, “entering-sun = west”, *ochch'en*, and “enter-cave = “capturing event?” With only the **OCH** logogram and no derivational or inflectional affixes present, these *'ochNOUN* compounds are read in the majority of cases as the compound noun, though as always the context should be examined for the possibility of an intransitive verb. In some of these cases, especially *'ochbi(h)* and *'ochk'ahk'*, *'och* could be spelled with a **-chi** suffix, either **'o-chi** or **'OCH-chi**: again, the context should determine whether these are read as the *'ochNOUN* compound or an intransitive. Read as an intransitive, the *-i* should follow *'och*, as in *'ochi*. A), b) and c) are examples of how a compound noun could be written and examples d) and e) are examples of intransitives (following Wald [ibid:Fig.106,107]).



a) **'OCH-b'i**
'ochb'i(h)



b) **'OCH-K'IN**
'ochk'in



c) **'OCH-CH'EN**
'ochch'en



d) **'OCH-K'AK'**
'och'ijk'ahk'



d) **'OCH-chi-K'AK'**
'ochik'ahk'

Example 6.12. a) Palenque Sarcophagus (Drawing by L. Schele), b) Tikal Marcador (Drawing by L. Schele), c) Dzibanche Captive Steps, Monument 3, (Drawing by unknown), d) Randal Stela (Drawing by J. Montgomery), e) Yaxchilan Lintel 31 (Drawing by L. Schele).

Other Statives

Other statives arise from two or more nouns strung together where an English translation of a phrase such as this requires the insertion of the verb “to be”. For instance many lunar series contain the three glyph sequence, Glyph X, 'uk'ab'a,

⁸ See note 1 for further discussion on Transitive-Resultatives.

Numeral 29/30. The following example is taken from Palenque Tablet of the Cross (Drawing by L. Schele?).



Example 6.13.⁹ **GLYPH X3** **'u-K'AB'A** **K'AL-BOLON**

 GLYPH X3 *'uk'ab'a* *k'al bolon*

 “Glyph X3 is the name of the twenty-nine.”

Statements such as these appear not only in the supplemental series but in regular texts as well.

SUMMARY

The goal of this essay was to guide the reader in recognizing and translating various stative constructions that occur in the hieroglyphic script. These verbless predicates are another of the many types of intransitive construction that the Maya scribes frequently employed. A synopsis of the different types of nouns found in the script was presented with examples, although all were not present in stative constructions. The scope of this essay did not allow for an extensive discussion of possessed nouns, a subject more complex than in the English and Spanish languages. For this the reader is referred to Quality and Quantity in Glyphic Nouns and Adjectives (Houston, Robertson, and Stuart,2001:1-56) and On the Morphology of Intimate Possession in Mayan Languages and Classic Mayan Glyphic Nouns (Zender,2004:195-209).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Barbara MacLeod and Bob Wald for inspiration, technical support, and long discussions about grammar and hieroglyphics.

REFERENCES CITED

Boot, Eric
2009 ***Updated Preliminary Classic Maya-English Classic Maya Vocabulary of Hieroglyphic Reading.*** [www.mesoweb.com/
resources/vocabulary](http://www.mesoweb.com/resources/vocabulary)

9 Reading and example taken from Texas Note 29 (Schele, Grube, Fahsen,1992:7,example 72).

- Bricker, Victoria, E. Po'ot Yah, and O. Dzul de Po'ot
1998 ***Dictionary of the Maya Language: As Spoken in Hocaba, Yucatan.*** Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Hull, Kerry
2009 OnLine Ch'orti' Dictionary. www.famsi.org/resources/dictionaries
- Hull, Kerry, Carrasco, Michael, and Wald, Robert.
2009 *The First Person Singular Independent Pronoun in Classic Cholan.* **Mexicon**, Journal of American Studies, Vol. XXXI, April, 2009. No.2
- Kerr, Justin
n.d. Online. Maya Vase Data Base. www.famsi.org/research/Kerr/index.html
- Laughlin, Robert M. with Haviland, John B.
1988 ***The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of Santo Domingo Zinacantan*** with Grammatical Analysis And Historical Commentary, Volume I Tzotzil-English. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Robertson, John, Stephen Houston, and David Stuart
2001 *Quality and Quantity in Glyphic Nouns and Adjectives.* Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing No. 47. Barnardsville, NC: Boundary End Archaeology Research Center.
- Vasquez, Alfredo Barrera, Director. Colaboradores: Refugio Vermont Salas, David Dzul Góngora, Domingo Dzul Poot.
1980 **DICCIONARIO MAYA CORDEMEX, Maya-Español, Español-Maya** Merida, Yucatan. Ediciones Cordemex.
- Wald, Robert
2007 *The Verbal Complex in Classic-Period Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions: Its implications for Language Identification and Change.* Dissertation In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Austin: University of Texas at Austin.
- Zender, Marc
2004 On the Morphology of Intimate Possession in Mayan Languages and Classic Mayan Glyphic Nouns. ***The Linguistics of Maya Writing*** (Wichmann, ed.). Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

