

Kueteero where are you? The Spanish Suffix –ero in Sierra Popoluca

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I. Introduction. Sierra Popoluca is a native Mexican language that belongs to the Mixe-Zoquean family. People speak this language in the southwestern part of the State of Veracruz, specifically in the area of Soteapan. At this point, Sierra Popoluca is still a robust language, with around 30,000 speakers. Nevertheless, all of them are bilingual in Spanish. We believe that contact with the Spanish language goes back less than a hundred years. As recently as 1970, Sierra Popoluca speakers were not able to speak Spanish very well. Modern speakers still remember that whenever they saw anyone that did not belong to the community, they used to close their doors in order to avoid speaking with foreigners. Nevertheless, little by little they started to learn Spanish. A major change took place around 1972 when electricity was introduced into some native communities and with it, popular means of communication such as the television and radio. In a town named Amamaloya, a person who owned a small grocery store was the first to get a black and white television. Every night many people used to congregate at his business in order to enjoy some of the TV programs. It is our belief that this factor helped the Sierra Popoluca speakers improve their Spanish very quickly, to the degree that at the current time, Sierra Popoluca is in an intense contact with Spanish.

It is now well known that in situations of intense and extended language contact, the subordinate language can undergo change on any linguistic level, i.e. in the vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Thomason and Kaufman 1988, Thomason 2002, 2003, and Heine and Kuteva 2003). The transfer of vocabulary and phonology has been widely described in many languages. There has been less discussion of the transfer of grammatical features, particularly morphological features. Such features are in fact generally considered to be highly resistant to borrowing. Here we will examine a situation that appears at first glance to be a case of the direct transfer of morphology. A closer look will show that the story is actually even more interesting. There is evidence that some modern derivational morphology in Sierra Popoluca is the result of two processes: first borrowing, then grammaticalization. The analyses presented here are based primarily on data from spontaneous conversations recorded among some of the bilingual speakers of Sierra Popoluca.

II. The suffix –ero. Spanish contains a very productive derivational suffix –ero, which forms nouns for persons engaged in particular occupations or professions.

(1) Some Spanish derived agentive nouns

<i>leche</i>	‘milk’	<i>lechero</i>	‘milkman’
<i>carne</i> ¹	‘meat’	<i>carnicero</i>	‘butcher’
<i>cocina</i>	‘kitchen’	<i>cocinero</i>	‘chef’
<i>tienda</i> ²	‘shop’	<i>tendero</i>	‘shopkeeper’

<i>ganado</i>	‘cattle’	<i>ganadero</i>	‘rancher’
<i>zapato</i>	‘shoes’	<i>zapatero</i>	‘cobbler’
<i>parto</i>	‘childbirth’	<i>partero</i>	‘midwife’
<i>café</i>	‘coffee’	<i>cafetero</i>	‘coffee grower’
<i>carta</i>	‘letter’	<i>cartero</i>	‘mailman’

Sierra Popoluca shows a strikingly similar formation.

(2) Sierra Popoluca derived agentive nouns

<i>nĩsteero</i>	‘armadillo hunter’	(<i>nĩs</i> ‘armadillo’)
<i>aateero</i>	‘rower, paddler’	(<i>aa</i> < <i>aaha</i> ‘canoe’)
<i>tĩ?ĩpteero</i>	‘fisherman’	(<i>tĩ?ĩp</i> < <i>tĩ?ĩpĩ</i> ‘fish’)
<i>nĩ?teero</i>	‘water carrier’	(<i>nĩ?</i> ‘water’)
<i>muutteero</i>	‘well driller’	(<i>muut</i> < <i>muutĩ</i> ‘well’)

The examples above suggest that Sierra Popoluca borrowed the Spanish suffix *-ero* directly. But was this actually the way by which *-teero* entered Sierra Popoluca? Was it incorporated with the same grammatical function? That is, was it treated just as a borrowed suffix or as another grammatical category?

Most documented cases of morphological borrowing have involved the transfer of large numbers of vocabulary items containing a particular affix. After a sufficient number of sets of derivationally related words have been borrowed into a language, speakers may come to recognize the contribution of the affix in question and extend it to native stems. Thomason and Kaufman describe such a situation in English.

Because of massive lexical borrowing, certain derivational affixes occurring in words of French origin have been abstracted and applied to relevant root and stems of any origin whatsoever (for example, **-able**, which first entered English through French suffix **-able**; this suffix does not become at all popular on English verbs until the late 14th century). (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988:308)

If this were the mechanism by which Sierra Popoluca borrowed the Spanish suffix, we would expect to find a substantial set of Spanish loans with and without the suffix. Interestingly, we could find only one early Spanish loan with the suffix: *kueteero*.

- (3) *Kueteero*³, *juuty mi’-ity*, *pĩma’ yĩ’im!*
fireworks expert where 3SG:ABS-be come here!
‘Fireworks expert, Where are you? Come here!’

A *kueteero* is a person who has the skill of setting off fireworks. This activity is important in traditional festivities among Sierra Popoluca speakers because fireworks are displayed throughout the duration of the celebration. However, an important fact is that not everyone can serve as a *kueteero* because the work requires a special skill that few

people have. In addition, even at the present time, this particular activity is restricted to men: in Sierra Popoluca women never serve as *kueteeros*. In spite of this restriction it is very obvious that the word *kueteero* has been borrowed from Spanish, and culturally it is a very important one. Therefore, we strongly believe that the Spanish derivational suffix was incorporated into the Sierra Popoluca grammatical structure through the Spanish word *cohetero* that was nativized as *kueteero*.

The stem on which this agentive noun was based was also borrowed into Sierra Popoluca, as *kuete*. (cohete in Spanish).

- (4) *Juty mi'-oy*,
 where 2SG:ABS-go-PERF
 'Where did you go?'

a'-oy *utya-tʃk-kʃ'ím*,
 1SG:ABS-go-PERF Oteapan-house-LOC
 'I went to Oteapan (name of town)'

oy *an-juy* *kuete*
 go:PERF 1SG:ERG-buy-PERF fireworks
 'I went to buy fireworks.'

- (5) *Ju'tsang-nam* *kuete* *tan-a-'ity*
 How many-still fireworks 1PL:INCL-1SG:ABS-have
 'How many fireworks do we still have?'

It is easy to imagine why these two words, *kuete* 'fireworks' and *kueteero* 'fireworks expert', were borrowed. Before contact, there were no people in the Sierra Popoluca area who made fireworks. We can thus infer that there was no native word either for *kuete* or for *kueteero* in Sierra Popoluca. Obviously, this cultural reason explains why speakers easily accepted both words.

But did speakers actually recognize the derivational suffix and extend it to native stems on the basis of this one set of loans? A closer look at the form of the marker suggests that it was transferred through a different mechanism. Though the Spanish suffix has the form *-ero*, it appears in Sierra Popoluca as *-teero*. We might wonder why speakers chose the form *-teero* instead of *-ero* as it is in Spanish. Their choice suggests that the story is actually more interesting than the simple transfer of a suffix. We strongly believe that Sierra Popoluca borrowed the form not as a suffix but as a noun, following the compounding strategy already present in the language, an easy process for speakers since this language is very rich in compounding. A common pattern of compounding in Sierra Popoluca is the combination of two nouns to form a new noun: N + N = N.

(6) Native noun compounding

<i>apitychiiji</i>	‘porcupine’	(<i>aapity</i> ‘thorn’ + <i>chiiji</i> ‘fox’)
<i>kawajnoono</i>	‘kind of mushroom’	(<i>kawaj</i> ‘horse’ + <i>noono</i> ‘mushroom’)
<i>kosochiima</i>	‘kneecap’	(<i>kooso</i> ‘knee’ + <i>chiima</i> ‘plate’)
<i>kuypaasung</i>	‘squash’	(<i>kuy</i> ‘tree’ + <i>paasung</i> ‘pumpkin’)
<i>mokyooya</i>	‘raccoon’	(<i>mok</i> ‘corn’ + <i>yooya</i> ‘pig’)

Most of the time, the second noun in the compound, which represents the head, has the phonological shape of 'CVV.CV(C). Interestingly, *-teero* does too. Speakers of Sierra Popoluca apparently interpreted the form *kueteero* ‘fireworks expert’ as a compound, recutting the form so that the second element showed the canonical form of a head noun: *teero*.

Sierra Popoluca also had a precedent for forming sets of compounds with the same head.

(7) Compounding with the same noun in the second position

<i>piyu’aapa</i>	‘old hen’	(<i>piyu</i> ‘hen’ + <i>aapa</i> ‘mother’)
<i>yoya’aapa</i>	‘old pig’	(<i>yooa</i> ‘pig’ + <i>aapa</i> ‘mother’)
<i>chimpa’aapa</i>	‘old dog’	(<i>chimpa</i> ‘dog’ + <i>aapa</i> ‘mother’)
<i>xixaapa</i>	‘old cow’	(<i>xix</i> ‘cow’ + <i>aapa</i> ‘mother’)
<i>koya’aapa</i>	‘old rabbit’	(<i>kooya</i> ‘rabbit’ + <i>aapa</i> ‘mother’)
<i>yoommaanik</i>	‘daughter’	(<i>yoomo</i> ‘girl’ + <i>maanik</i> ‘son’)
<i>jaymaanik</i>	‘son’	(<i>jaaya</i> ‘male’ + <i>maanik</i> ‘son’)
<i>okmaanik</i>	‘grandson’	(<i>ok</i> < <i>okmo</i> ‘after’ + <i>maanik</i> ‘son’)
<i>tsiñmaanik</i>	‘stepson’	(<i>tsiñ</i> ? + <i>maanik</i> ‘son’)
<i>aachtyiwi</i>	‘elder brother’	(<i>aach</i> < <i>aachi</i> ‘uncle’ + <i>tiwi</i> ‘brother’)
<i>tsiñtyiwi</i>	‘stepbrother’	(<i>tsiñ</i> ? + <i>tiwi</i> ‘brother’)
<i>yoomtiwi</i>	‘sister’	(<i>yoomo</i> ‘girl’ + <i>tiwi</i> ‘brother’)
<i>jaaytyiwi</i>	‘brother’	(<i>jaay</i> < <i>jaaya</i> ‘male’ + <i>tyiwi</i> < <i>tiwi</i> ‘brother’)

It appears that the borrowed word *kueteero* was analyzed by Sierra Popoluca speakers as a compound, parallel in formation to native compounds like those in (7) above on the basis of its phonological, grammatical, and semantic structure. We do not know exactly when native speakers began to extend the form *-teero* to native words. We do know that the process had begun by at least 1960. In his grammar of Sierra Popoluca, Elson provides the examples below.

(8) Sierra Popoluca *-teero* nouns found by Elson 1960

<i>yoom-teero</i> (<i>yoomo</i> ‘girl’)	‘somebody who has several women’
<i>yooya-teero</i> (<i>yooya</i> ‘pig’)	‘somebody who buys pigs’
<i>kawah-teero</i> (<i>kawah</i> ‘horse’)	‘somebody who buys horses’
<i>hiy-tyeero</i> (<i>hiy</i> ‘talk’)	‘somebody who talks a lot’
<i>miich-tyeero</i> (<i>miich</i> ‘to play’)	‘joker’
<i>ets-teero</i> (<i>ets</i> ‘to dance’)	‘dancer’

The Sierra Popoluca marker *-teero* matches the Spanish suffix *-ero* in forming agentive nominals. It is used to form nouns designating people but not objects, as it is in Spanish.

(9) Spanish words ending in *-ero* for objects.

<i>rop-ero</i>	‘closet’	(<i>ropa</i>	‘clothes’)
<i>moned-ero</i>	‘wallet’	(<i>moneda</i>	‘coin’)
<i>libr-ero</i>	‘bookcase’	(<i>libro</i>	‘book’)
<i>cenic-ero</i>	‘ashtray’	(<i>ceniza</i>	‘ash’)
<i>azucar-ero</i>	‘sugar bowl’	(<i>azucar</i>	‘sugar’)

There is no evidence of a similar process in Sierra Popoluca. Therefore, it is obvious that in this native language *-teero* was restricted to people ‘occupation’ as in the example below:

(10) Teero restricted to human ‘occupations’

- a. ...*n#k-pam* *i’-a’m-taa* *koowa-teero-yaj...*
go-IMPERF 3SG:ERG-see-PASS guitar-NOM-PL
‘(Somebody) goes to see the guitar players’

- b. *an-tĩwi tsaam uk-teero,*
 1SG:POSS-brother a lot drunk-NOM
 ‘My brother is very drunk;’

tum tum jaama iñ-ix-pa iga uk-pa i-xĩ
 one one day 2SG:ERG-see-IMPERF PART drink-IMPERF 3SG:ERG-be
 ‘every day you can see him drinking.’

- c. *am-maanik tsaam yooxa-teero;*
 1SG:POSS-son a lot work-NOM
 ‘My son is very hard worker;’

muuma jaama nik-pa ityii I-kaam-joom
 all day go-IMPERF be 3SG:POSS-cornfield-LOC
 He spends all the day in his cornfield.’

- d. *jem an-aachi tsam idyik miich-tyeero*
 DEF 1SG:POSS-uncle a lot PART play-NOM
 ‘My uncle used to be a real joker.’

In Spanish the suffix *-ero* is used only with nouns to derive other nouns, while in Sierra Popoluca, *-teero* is also added to verbs. So why was it extended so easily to verbs? It was easy because in Sierra Popoluca V + N = N is so productive pattern of noun compounding. Example:

(11) Verb + Noun compounding with *kuy* (‘tree’ or ‘wood’) in the second position ⁴

<i>tuj</i>	‘to shoot’	<i>tuj-kuy</i>	‘guns’
<i>kooñ</i>	‘to sit’	<i>kooñ-koy</i>	‘chair’
<i>pet</i>	‘to sweep’	<i>pet-kuy</i>	‘broom’
<i>ix</i>	‘to see’	<i>ix-kuy</i>	‘eye’
<i>mong</i>	‘to sleep’	<i>mong-koy</i>	‘blanket’

The noun *kuy* ‘tree or wood’ is always added after the verb root. *-teero* follows this pattern when it is combined with verbs. Therefore, there is no doubt that rather than considering *-teero* as a suffix coming from the Spanish *-ero*, it should be treated in Sierra Popoluca as a noun form with no lexical meaning since it is a borrowing form.

It is of course possible that the borrowing might serve as a source for further processes of grammaticalization leading to the development of a suffix. The form *-teero* is never used as a free noun in isolation, but only added to other roots to form new nouns. A precedent for such a development already exists in the language in the native noun *kuy* ‘tree, wood’, which is coming to be used as a more abstract instrumental nominalizer.

III. Conclusion. Morphological features have generally been considered to be highly resistant to borrowing. It has been hypothesized that specific affixes are never borrowed directly, but are rather transferred into a language through the borrowing of large sets of derivationally related lexical items, pairs of words with and without them. Sierra Popoluca appears to present an exception to this principle with the borrowing of a derivational suffix *-ero* from Spanish without the large set of contrasting vocabulary pairs. A closer look indicates, however, that the marker was not borrowed directly as a suffix. Instead, a borrowed noun *kueteero* ‘fireworkers expert’ (Spanish *cohetero*) was recut and reanalyzed as a compound *kue-teero* (from Spanish *cohet-ero*) on the pattern of compounding already pervasive in the language. There are two kinds of evidence that support this claim:

- a) *-Teero* has the phonological shape of native disyllabic noun forms.
- b) It behaves much like any other native noun in compounding.

Notes

¹ From Latin ‘carnis’

² From Latin ‘tenta’

³ The noun form is ‘cohete’

⁴ Elson treats this form as a derivational suffix. Nevertheless, it seems pretty obvious that it came from the noun form ‘tree or board’.

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