Focus, recent past or anteriority particle in Mixe?

In Mixe languages, the particle *tëë* is often glossed as 'ya' in Spanish or 'already' in English (Ruiz 1980; Hoogshagen & Hoogshagen 1993, *inter alia*), as exemplified in (1) for Coatlán Mixe. However, it has also been described as recent past (Díaz 2014; Santiago 2015) or as perfect (Suslak 2005; Guzmán 2012).

1. **Tëë** ëëtsy n-anukx-ë'ë-y
   tëë 1 1S-tired-DER-dep
   'Ya me cansé.' / 'I'm already tired.' (Adapted from Hoogshagen & Hoogshagen 1993: 24)

In this paper, I argue that even though the translations of *tëë* may be compatible with Spanish *ya* 'already', it is not a focus particle like *already* (Krifka 2000). I will also argue that it is neither a past nor a perfect particle, although it has a temporal meaning. Using a neo-Reichenbachean analysis (Reichenbach 1947; Klein 1994; *inter alia*), I propose that *tëë* in Coatlán Mixe (CoMi) indicates anteriority with respect to the runtime of the event.

CoMi and other Mixe languages are spoken in southern Mexico and belong to the Mixezoque linguistic family. Wichmann (1995, 2012) divides them into five Mixe languages, but Romero (2021) has argued that they form a dialectal chain. It has been suggested that Mixe languages do not have tense, at least historically, although Ayutla Mixe has developed a perfective-past tense particle (Romero 2008, 2021).

As mentioned above, there are many of cases where *tëë* can be translated as *ya* 'already' in Spanish, and vice versa. However, there are also cases where *tëë* is not translated into Spanish, or where the use of *ya* or *already* would sound odd:

2. Ko **tëë** n-nax-y=ëtsy ma m-tëjk, n-mëkapx-y…
   when tëë 1S-pass\A-DEP=1 where 2POSS-house 1S-call-DEP
   'Cuando (#ya) pasé por tu casa, llamé…' / 'When I (#already) walked past your house, I called.' (Adapted from Hoogshagen & Hoogshagen 1993: 25)

Conversely, there are situations where *ya*/*already* are possible in Spanish or English, but *tëë* would be inappropriate in CoMi, as in (3)

3. [Context: Someone says that my brother is a new dad, but he has two older daughters. Then I reply:]
   #Tëë n-'utsy y-mëët-ëy-n mets y-nëëx.
   tëë 1POS-younger.sibiling 3S-have-DER-PERF two 3POSS- daughters
   Intended: 'My brother has already two daughters.'

The mismatch between CoMi and Spanish/English arises because *tëë* does not have the semantic properties of *already*. First, unlike *already* and similar adverbs in other languages (Krifka 2000, *inter alia*), *tëë* does not preserve the truth conditions of a sentence without.

In addition, *tëë* in CoMi does not trigger the 'earliness' implicature observed in *schon* in German, *already* in English or *ya* in Spanish (Michaelis 1992, 1996; van der Auwera 1993; Mittwoch 1993; *inter alia*). As discussed in the paper, there are other grammatical devices to convey 'earliness', such as miratives or the specialized prefix *ni-* in (4). This sentence would be grammatically and semantically adequate without the prefix *ni-* but it would not have the 'before it was expected' meaning.

4. Tëë n-muku'uk=ëtsy y-**ni**-nëkx-**n**.
   tëë 1POSS-friend=1 3S-**ni**-go-PERF;DEP
   'My friend left already [before it was expected].'

Even though the adverb *je'en* in CoMi can be translated as *still*, I argue that the dual analysis proposed for *schon* 'already' and *noch* 'still' in German and other languages (Löbner 1989, 1999; *inter alia*) does not apply to Mixe. In other words, *tëë* does not form a dual pair with *je'en*. Vander Klok & Matthewson (2015) argue that 'already' adverbials have an inchoative interpretation with stative predicates. Adding *tëë* to (5) would be odd in this context and it would mean 'My cat slept', and not 'My cat was already sleeping'. So, *tëë* changes the truth conditions of the proposition.

5. [Context: It is known that my cat sleeps a lot, and someone asks me what my cat was up to when I left home a couple of hours ago. I could answer:]
   Maa-p yë n-tsyiit.
   sleep\B-NEU;IND DEM 1POSS-cat
   'My cat was sleeping'

Both for Ayutla and Coatlán Mixe, two different Mixe languages, speakers say that *tëë* indicates a recent past. In fact, Díaz (2014) and Santiago (2015) gloss *tëë* as recent past for Tlahuitoltepec and Tamazulapam Mixe, respectively. While this particle is indeed used for recent past, as in (1), I argue that this arises from a pragmatic contrast with the perfective marker, which is then interpreted as a remote past. As shown in (6), *tëë* could be used in a sentence with future time reference, contradicting the recent past analysis:

6. Tëë=tsy najty yaa n-petë'ëk-y ko m-wimpit-ipy.
   tëë=1 IMPF here 1S-sweep\A-DEP when 2S-return\A-IRR;DEP
   'I will have swept [the floor] when you return.'

Finally, Romero (2008, 2011) claims that the perfect in Mixe languages is expressed by the suffix *-n(ë)*, shown in (4). In fact, according to this analysis *-n(ë)* introduces a Perfect Time Span (Iatridou *et al.* 2001; Rothstein 2008; *inter alia*) that can have both perfect and progressive interpretations. Thus, *tëë* is not a perfect marker either.

I will show that *tëë* seems to pass some of the diagnostics proposed by Vander Klok & Matthewson (2015) for 'already' or for a perfect. However, I will argue that *tëë* means that the (initial boundary of the) runtime of the event is prior to the reference time. This explains why it can have both a past (and usually perfective) interpretation or a future (perfect) interpretation, but not a present interpretation. It is impossible, for instance, to say somthing like *I'm already working* using *tëë*. Strictly speaking, in a neo-Reichenbachean analysis, the proposed semantics of *tëë* would be compatible with a present tense interpretation (since the event time is not involved in tense), but such uses are pragmatically excluded. Even though most of the data come from CoMi, I believe that this analysis applies to other Mixe languages as well.

The data for this paper comes from Dahl's (1985) questionnaire, targeted elicitations, and narratives, all collected by the author. Examples from other sources are used primarily for contrastive purposes. The elicitation was conducted in Spanish.

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