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Usila Chinantec
2-93

Skinner (19) argues for the following segment inventory of Usila Chinantec (hereafter Usila).

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p    t    tʸ   k                          i        u
b    d    dʸ   g                            e    o
f    s                                        a
m    n    ñ    ng
     l
     r

?,h
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Skinner argues that only /?/ and /g/ may close syllables in Usila, and furthermore, that /g/ occurs only after /a,e/. Coda /g/ is phonetically the velar spirant [τ]:

/a⁴lág³⁴/   [a⁴láτ³⁴]   it was fixed
/a⁴lég³⁴/   [a⁴leτ³⁴]   it is finished

Note that no other dialect of Chinantec has been claimed to possess coda /g/.

Skinner claims that the following segments may be preglottalized or preaspirated in onset position: /m,n,ñ,ng,l,dʸ/. Usila is thus claimed to contrast with most other dialects, in that it allows the prelaryngealization of a non-velar obstruent ([?dʸ, hdʸ]). He additionally argues that Usila does not possess the glides /y,w/, thus differing again from most other dialects.

In what follows, I will reanalyze those aspects of Skinner's presentation that result in irregularities both within the Usila system itself, and across the Chinantec system in general. This reanalysis will regularize the Usila system in accordance with cross-dialectal generalizations.

First, if the obstruent /dʸ/ is instead analyzed as the palatal glide /y/, Usila may begin to pattern more regularly. There are several arguments in favor of this analysis of [dʸ].

First, as already noted, positing an underlying /y/ results in a segment inventory more typical of Chinantec, and further, results in the more regular patterning of prelaryngealization attested elsewhere: sonorants (and sometimes the velar stop) may be prelaryngealized, while obstruents may not.

Second, Skinner reports that the aspirated portion of preaspirates is actualized "as the voiceless counterpart of the following phoneme, except before dʸ, where it is actualized as [I] [voiceless [i] --d.s.]"(p.252).

/ha?⁴/   [Aa?⁴]   creature

/he^1/ [Ee^1] field
/hie^4/   [Ii^E?^{4}]   it is coming
/o^{1}huá^3/   [o^{1}U^{u}á^3]   ashes
/hma?^{3}/   [Mma^3]   only
/o^{1}hd^{y}í^3]   [o^{1}Id^{y}í^3]   fire

If phonetic [d^y] is analyzed as phonological /y/, then the patterning of preaspiration is fully symmetrical across the system, in that it is always realized as the voiceless counterpart of the following segment.

    Skinner additionally reports some seemingly peculiar properties of complex nuclei. In vowel clusters /ia,io,ua/, the second vocoid is reportedly the syllable peak: [^{i}a,^{i}o,^{u}a].

/kia^{34}/   [k^{i}æ^{34}]   ten (inanimate)
/cio^{3}héu^{31} [tSo^{3}Eéu^3] Ladino, mestizo
/kua^1/   [k^{u}a^1]   corner

However, in /ie,ue/, it is the *first* vocoid that is reportedly syllabic: [i^E,u$^\theta$].

/kie^4/   [ki^E^{4}]   twenty (inanimate)
/kue^3/   [ku$^\theta$^{3}]   long (inanimate)

    Thus in a high – non-high vowel sequence, the high vocoid is considered the syllabic peak when the mid vowel /e/ follows, but is considered an onglide when the mid vowel /o/ follows. This rather strange state of affairs may be partially explained if the so-called complex nuclei /íe,úe/ (where the peak element is stressed), are re-analyzed as possessing post-vocalic aspiration, and are thus underlyingly of the form /ih,uh/[2].
    This hypothesis earns support when recalling that so-called coda /g/ occurs solely after /a,e/ nuclei, phonetically implemented as a velar spirant. If we re-analyze these forms as possessing post-vocalic aspiration as well, the system acquires complete symmetry, and further, becomes more in line with other dialects:[3]

Skinner's analysis: present analysis:

coda /g/	complex nuclei	post-vocalic aspiration
/ag/ [aɼ]	unreported	/ah/

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[1]Skinner writes "/...hEu^3/". I assume the epsilon is a typo.

[2]This hypothesis gains credibility when considering that Skinner himself entertains, though dismisses, this possibility. It is thus quite possible that the segment in question is so weakly articulated that it is not voiced, i.e., [sg].

[3]Skinner makes no mention of ballistic syllables in his analysis. I am inclined to think that were he to incorporate ballisticity into his analysis, exactly those syllables I am reanalyzing as possessing post-vocalic aspiration would be considered ballistic.

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  /eg/ [eɾ]      unreported                 /eh/
*/ig/          /ie/ [iᴱ]                    /ih/
*/og/            ??                         /oh/(?)⁴
*/ug/          /ue/ [uᵉ]                    /uh/
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     Under the present analysis, several irregularities present in Skinner's system are explained away. The patterning of the velar stop, an irregularity both within- and across systems, is no longer problematic, as these segments are considered to be post-vocalic aspiration. further, the asymmetrical patterning of high - non high nuclei does not arise, as such sequences are also considered to possess post-vocalic aspiration. The gaps in both irregular systems are accounted for when positing the presence of post-vocalic aspiration.

     Finally, we may observe that onglides /i,u/ occurring in so-called complex nuclei are the missing glides /y,w/: /u/ may serve as a onset ([w]), and thus, as other sonorant onsets, may be preaspirated (/o¹huá³/) or, presumably, preglottalized. It may also serve as a syllable nucleus (/ku?⁴/ - cold (inanimate)). /i/ may also serve as onset, where it is phonetically implemented as [dʸ]. As other sonorants, it may pre preaspirated and preglottalized in this position. /i/ may additionally serve as syllable peak, where it is phonetically [i].

     In the following table, Column (1) contains Skinner's hypothesized lexical representations, while Column (2) contains lexical representations following the current reanalysis. Forms are glossed in Column (3).

(1) Skinner's UR	(2) reanalyzed UR	(3) gloss
/dʸíe⁴/	/yih⁴/	(day after tomorrow)
/?dʸa³/	/?ya³/	(he beats, mixes)
/o¹hdʸi³/	/o¹Yi³/	(fire)
/hie?⁴/	/hi?h⁴/	(it is coming)

     Usila thus falls in line with most other dialects of Chinantec.

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   p    t       k                   i       u
_____
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⁴Skinner reports no diphthongs with /o/ as the first member. I assume this is either an accidental gap or that such forms simply eluded Skinner in his investigation

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        b       d               g                                   e       o
        f       s                                                    a
        m       n               ng
                l
                r
                        y       w

        ?,h
```

As in other dialects, all sonorant consonants may be preaspirated or preglottalized, while none of its obstruents may. Furthermore, the only allowable codas are /?/ and /h/.