Contributions

The First-Person Singular Independent Pronoun in Classic Ch’olan

Kerry Hull, Michael D. Carrasco and Robert Wald

Most Maya hieroglyphic texts present narratives in the third person, which infuses narratives with factual authority as they imply a witness to the events described. In the last decade, however, the recognition of various discourse genres using first- and second-person pronouns in the inscriptions has profoundly altered our understanding of the narrative function of Maya hieroglyphic writing (Grube 1998; Stuart et al. 1999). With the recent decipherments of the first- and second-person singular pronouns, the third-person plural pronoun, and the first-person plural pronouns, we have begun to appreciate multiple discourse genres within Maya hieroglyphic writing. In addition, independent pronouns have also been identified in the script such as the second-person singular (ha-a-ta), the third-person singular (ha-i), and the third-person plural (ha-o-ba). A new independent pronoun can now be added to this paradigm. We present here evidence for the decipherment of the first-person singular independent pronoun “I/me” as hiin (hi-na) (Fig. 1). While our reading and interpretation of it has been formally presented and has made it into certain publications (Stuart 2005:52; 2006:43), as of yet the arguments for its decipherment have not been described in print.In addition to adding to our growing knowledge of the Classic Ch’olan pronominal and verbal system, this paper also examines the grammatical patterns that the use of independent pronouns evidence. In particular a better understanding of the syntactic function of independent pronouns clarifies certain kinds of “passive” constructions, suggesting instead that these are better understood as actor focus (hereafter AF) constructions. The decipherments of each of these independent pronouns not only force us to question the different focus presented by first- and second-person narratives, but also to analyze in greater detail the grammatical constructions that seem to arise with their use.

Process of Decipherment

Until recently, a perplexing issue in the study of Classic Ch’olan pronouns has been the apparent lack of independent pronouns in the script. Independent pronouns are attested in all modern Mayan languages and should, in all likelihood, be present in the language of the inscriptions. The first independent pronoun to be deciphered by a number of different scholars in the 1990s was Washa-i, meaning either “he/she/it,” or “this one/that one” as a demonstrative pronoun (see Stuart and Houston 1994; Lacadena 2000:167). At the time, another compound, hi-na (Fig. 1), was also generally interpreted as either the demonstrative pronoun “this” (cf. Boot 2002:34) or as an alternate spelling of the demonstrative ha-i (realized ha’i or haa’), “he/she/it here; this one over here.” Thus, the distinction between hi-in and ha-na was thought to represent a minor variation in the recorded language, despite the occurrence of the hi-na version in more limited contexts, primarily in Late Classic ceramic texts.

The decipherment of the hi-na collocation as the first-person singular independent pronoun was first made by Kerry Hull and Michael Carrasco in 2001 while analyzing the text of K1440. Near the end the text on the “Vessel of the Eighty-eight Glyphs” (K1440), both ha-i and hi-na appear in close proximity, which for Hull and Carrasco called into question their interpretation as mere dialectal variants. A search of the linguistic resources produced several intriguing possibilities for hi-in as the first-person independent pronoun “I/me”.

Crucially, the lengthy text on K1440 contains the hi-na compound followed by the quotative particle cheheen, spelled che-he- na at D1’, commonly interpreted as “he/she/it said” (David Stuart 1997 [personal communication from David Stuart to Alfonso Lacadena 1997]; Grube 1998; 2004) (Fig. 2). The quotative discourse indicated by this particle is an ideal context for the use of a first-person pronoun. Thus, Hull and Carrasco began to entertain the possibility that hi-in could be the independent pronoun “I/me” in this quotative context. A check of other cases where hi-in also appears soon confirmed this supposition. Based on these initial observations, together with insights and contributions of Robert Wald, we believe there is considerable evidence pointing to hi-in as the first-person singular independent pronoun.

The Historical Development of hi-in

Independent pronouns in Proto-Mayan were likely built upon the base *ha’- or *haa’- with the addition of absolutive pronouns. According to Kaufman (1989), the first-person singular independent pronoun in Proto-Mayan was *ha’-i-n. In Proto-Mayan, *-i:n was the first-person singular absolutive marker, corresponding to the Proto-Ch’olan *-een. John Robertson has suggested seeing the hieroglyphic hi-in as a fossilized form retaining the Proto-Mayan *-i:n ending (i.e., *ha’-i:n > hi-in) as a and the glottal stop elided, leaving only h- and -in behind, even when other Ch’olan pronominal forms were simultaneously adopting the *-een suffix (John Robertson, personal communication 12/2/2006). While in general agreement with Robertson, we instead interpret hi-in as a fossilization of a Pre-Greater Tzeltalan form *ha’-iin. Therefore, in the language of the hieroglyphic inscriptions in the Late-Classic period, the -ii of the independent pronoun hi-in likely reflects a fossilization harkening back to an earlier form.
Evidence for *hiin* as the First-Person Independent Pronoun

Turning our attention again to K1440, the text from B4'-F2' reads:

```
hi-na ?-ya-si tz'i?-na u-? che-he-na
hiin ?-yaas tz'iin u ? cheheen
1SI ‘name’ ‘name’ say ISA
‘It is I, [name] Tz’iin’, I said’
```

```
u-TZ’IB? li ?-ya-si tz’i?-na u-?-na sa?-ja-la
u-tz’ihbil ?-yaas tz’iin u-?-n saj-al
3SE-writing-POSS ‘name’? ‘name’? 3SE-‘vassal lord’
It is the writing of the ‘Scribe of the Eighty-eight Glyphs’,
the of the ‘vassal lord’
The independent pronoun *hiin* here functions as the subject in this statement. Thereafter, a sign likely referring to a scribal title follows, suggesting the scribe who painted this vase left his “signature” at the end of the text. It is important to note that we interpret the *cheheen* glyph not as a third-person quotative (as first published by Grube in 1998), but rather as the first-person quotative expression “I said,” composed of the root *che* ‘and the first-person singular absolutive pronoun-een’.9 If this interpretation is correct, it further strengthens the first-person context of this portion of the text.

A cylindrical vase from the Naranjo area (K1 398), known as the “Regal Rabbit Vase,” contains three crucial instances of the *hi-na* compound and is without a doubt the most important extant inscription for understanding the function of *hiin* as the first-person singular independent pronoun (Fig. 3). Several scholars have noted the presence of first-person pronouns in the text of K1398 (Butting and Johnson 1993:178, 182; Stuart 1993:170-171; Stuart et al. 1999:11-21). Indeed, many scholars have noted the interplay between text and image on this exceptional vessel, the mythical narrative of which falls into the category of narrative trickster tale (Nielson and Wichmann 2000; Hull 2003a, 2003b; Beliaev 2003; Wald and Carrasco 2004). On K1 398, the leftmost caption to the Sun God and the two vertical columns of text contain three instances of the *hiin* glyph (Fig. 4). The text begins with the date 13 Ok 18 Uo, followed by a deer head variant of the *k’in* sign. The verbal expression begins with *niche* ‘amaw nimuwaan, “I grasped my hawk(?)” and then mentions the god who was present during this action (Bolon Okte’ K’uh) and the location where the event occurred.10 The *hiin* is followed by an undeciphered sign, perhaps another sign for *k’in*, and a phonetic spelling of *ojjluju/, meaning “pierce.” The meaning of the remaining text is unfortunately opaque; however, since the context of this vertical column is clearly first-person in the first clause, this would thus be an ideal environment for the use of the independent pronoun “I.”

The second vertical text to the rear of the rabbit contains a more intelligible occurrence of *hi-na* for interpreting its function and meaning. The text begins with the Calendar Round date of 7 Ak’bal followed by a sun-god K’IN logogram, a locative, and martial statement (Fig. 5):

```
UH-ti-ya K’IN-ni u-WITZ-li pi-a CHAN-na-CH’EN-na
uht-0-iiyk’in u-witz-ilpi[?]-[h]a’ chan ch’een
happen-3A-ADV .ENCL day 3SE-mountain-POSS ‘name’
sky-cave
It happened [on this] day, [at the] mountain of the Pip Ha’ locale
```

The grammatical elements presented in this important sentence, let us first turn our attention to the semantics of the verbal root *pat-*, which was first deciphered by David Stuart (cf. 1998:381-384) with the meaning of “to make” or “form.” Due to the productive reading of *PAT*-as “make” or “form” in other contexts, many have considered this instance to likewise be a reference to the ‘making’ of a jaguar throne. In 2003, Robert Wald and Michael Carrasco, on the other hand, presented an
alternative reading of this passage based on another meaning of the root *pat* in Tzotzil, namely ‘to overturn’: Santo Domingo Tzotzil pata “sitting bowed over, lying face down” (Laughlin 1975:268-269)

pata “sit bowed over, lie face down, bow low” (Laughlin 1975:268-269)

ptlub “falling face down suddenly” (Laughlin 1975:268-269) patk’un

tyel “push face down”

San Lorenzo Tzotzil pata “acostado boca abajo (lying face down)” (Vda.deDelgaty Ruiz Sanchez 1978:97)

tapatan “lo pone boca abajo (put it face down)” (Vda. deDelgaty Ruiz Sanchez 1978:97)

These entries shine a different light on the events described on the Regal Rabbit Vase. Rather than describing the ‘forming’ of a throne, this action seems to be one of ‘turning over’ the throne in a martial context.11 Thus, Wald and Carrasco interpreted this sentence to read, “It is I who overturned the ‘jaguar throne’.” Furthermore, the next two glyph blocks in this passage, *te ‘baah andtsook’haab*, “images of wood, images of flint,” strengthen the militaristic interpretation as a metaphor for making war, reflecting the weapons used in Maya warfare, that is, those made of wood and flint (cf. Roys 1931; Barthel 1955; ScheleAndGrube 1997:83). Of particular importance is the subject of a transitive verb being extracted from the Verbal Phrase (hereafter VP) into a focus preverbal position. The object Noun Phrase (hereafter NP) may be demoted to an oblique clause or be retained as a direct argument. The verb usually undergoes some change in morphology to traditional antipassive verbal forms.14 Important is that the verb in AF constructions only cross-references one of the two NPs morphologically. The choice between the two is usually accomplished by deferring to an animacy hierarchy; however, a number of other factors can also be responsible (Tonhouser 2003:5-6; Hedberg 1988:2). On K1398, we believe the clause *hiin patbuniy* ‘throne’ represents just such an AF cleft construction. The subject, *bim,* “I,” has been extracted from the VP and realized as an independent pronoun in a preverbal focus position. In addition, the derived transitive *verbpatbu* also receives the –n suffix, which, appropriately, is regularly added to derived transitive roots in AF constructions in a large number of Mayan languages (see below).15 As an AF cleft formation, the analysis and translation of this sentence would be:

\[ \text{hi-\text{na} PAT'-\text{ta-ni-\text{na}} \quad \text{“jaguar-throne” } - \text{na}} \]

\[ \text{hiinpat-bu-n-\text{-i-iy} “jaguar-throne”} \]

1SI face.down-CAUS-AF-3SA-ADV.ENCL throne

It is I who overturned the ‘jaguar throne’! It is important to state that in this type of AF cleft expression the verb cross-references on the third-person singular absolutive pronoun –O that appears on the verb as *pat-bu-n-\text{-i-iy}*. There are other examples of AF cleft constructions in Classic Ch’olan. For instance, the following text from Pomona Panel 4 uses the third person independent pronoun *ha i/haa* and the verb shows the –n suffix in a similar grammatical construction to the sentence in question on K1398:

\[ \text{ha-i ILA-ni-ya} \]

\[ \text{ha i/haa ila-n-\text{-i-iy}} \]

3 SI see-AF-3SA-ADV.ENCL

It is he who witnessed it

As in the example from K1398, the transitive *verbha* receives the –n suffix, and the expected ergative pronoun drops since the agent is fronted with the third person independent pronoun *ha i/haa*. Another clear example of this construction is found in the text of Copan Stela A:
Akateko (Schüle’s original analysis retained):

example, Schüle (2000:170) provides the following sentence from
with an absolutive pronoun in these clefted AF constructions. For
languages, where the verb can cross-reference on the object NP

168) writes: “When the subject of a transitive verb is clefted, it
is put into the preverbal cleft position accompanied by the cleft
expression.

It is they who opened the portal and closed the portal
In this example, the verb cross-references on absolutive pronouns
following the noun “portal” and not on agents (“they”) of the
expression.

Thus, in these examples we are presented syntactically and
morphologically with all the markings of AF cleft constructions
that are, as we shall see below, fully consistent with patterns
known from modern Mayan languages. As an AF cleft formation,
the translation of this the sentence from Kl 398 would be: “It is I
who overturned the ‘jaguar throne’.” It is important to state that in
this type of cleft AF expression the absolutive pronoun on the verb
references not the agent but rather the patient; thus, it is the ‘jaguar
throne’ and not “I” to which the-0 (null) absolutive pronoun in the
verbal construction/bu-n-0-iyy refers.

A similar marking system is found in a number of Mayan
languages, where the verb can cross-reference on the object NP
with an absolutive pronoun in these clefted AF constructions. For
example, Schüle (2000:170) provides the following sentence from
Akateko (Schule’s original analysis retained):

jein acb-ma ’on an
PRO1sB2-hit-SUFC1ls
It is I who hit you

Note that the verb does not cross-reference on the first-person
pronoun/ein (if so, an –in affix would be expected between ac/2 and
ma) but rather only on the second-person absolutive pronoun
(labeled “B2” by Schüle), acb- in the Object NP.

Ixil (Blunk-Fernandez, n.d.: 6,10) also shows precisely the same
AF construction (Blunk-Fernandez’s original analysis retained):
a. In kat=tzok-on=theta u si’ei’
Islnd. compt=CUt-af=3Abs. def. FIREWOOD-enc.
It is I who cut the wood
b. In ni=b’an-on=theta
Islnd. imp=DO-af=3Abs. Is it
I who is doing it

As Blunk-Fernandez points out, in both a and b, the verb is marked
with the third-person singular absolutive pronoun (-theta) and cross-
references on the original patient rather than the fronted agent (i.e.,
“T”).

Kaqchikel has a similar cleft structure in which the actor
is extracted from the VP, but the verb cross-references on the object
NP, but not always relating to animacy hierarchy (Hedberg
1988:18). Hedberg notes that if either the subject NP or object NP is
not a third person, as in the case with the subject NP on Kl 398, then
an AF construction is possible, and either the Actor or the Object
is cross-referenced on the verb (Hedberg 1988:20-21). In Akateko,
we can see a similar case in AF cleft constructions. Schüle (2000:167-
168) writes: “When the subject of a transitive verb is clefted, it
is put into the preverbal cleft position accompanied by the cleft
particle/s’. The transitive verb obtains the suffix -on and marks only
the direct object with a set B prefix.” Schüle then provides the
following sentence to illustrate this point (Schule’s original
analysis retained):

[morphemes from Schüle’s analysis]

The third-person absolutive pronoun -theta (marked as “B3 in Schüle’s
analysis) in “x-0-ma’-on” cross-references on the
objectNP—exactley what we see on Kl 398 in the AF
cleft construction where
the-Ombiinpat-bu-n-0-iyy
‘throne’ similarly cross-
references on the object
NP, ‘the throne’, but not
based on an animacy hi-
erarchy (since the subject
NP ranks higher than the
object NP). Therefore,
Kl 398 demonstrates a
clear affinity with these
examples drawn from
modern Mayan languages
in clefted AF construc-
tions. Furthermore, the
particular parameters of this
structure in this passage
indeed require interpreting
this sentence as either a
Focus Antipassive or AF
construction; we opt for the
latter. Thus, reading biin as
“T” in this clefted AF context
is eminently appropriate.

The third case of biin on the Regal Rabbit Vase
(K1398) appears in the spoken text caption of the Sun God. Below
the Sun God, God L is pleading his case against the rabbit, who has
taken some of his personal items (Fig. 6). The caption reads:

AJAW-wa ?-ch’al-a T’UL u-CH’AM-wa ni-? ni-bu-ku ni-

pa-ta

Lord, -ch’al(a) Rabbit took my (?), my clothes, and my back
rack.

The seated Sun God then responds to the complaint of the
Rabbit (Fig. 7):

ma-cha-ja ?-ch’a(?) -la T’UL tu-hi-na ni-MAM

lord ‘name’ rabbit 3SE-grasp-TRANS-3SA 1SE-? 1SE-
clothes 1SE-back.rack

The biin in this case is used as the first-person object, “me,” of
the preposition ta, “with.” Once again, the first-person context
(“my grandfather”) is in full concordance with the interpretation of
biin as a first-person independent pronoun. Moreover, it is this
reading that best fits the iconography of the scene, where the rabbit
is hiding behind the Sun God. The humor of the scene would not
be complete without this statement from the Sun God.
A final example of the independent pronoun *biin* appears on K0793 (kindly pointed out to us by Luis Lopes). In 2003, the reading was discussed with other epigraphers (Nikolai Grube, Barbara MacLeod, and Robert Wald). The decipherment was first presented by Robert Wald and Michael Carrasco in a public forum in March of 2004 at the Texas Maya Meetings in a paper focusing on the Regal Rabbit Vase, K1398. Wald and Carrasco further suggested that in general the forms *hiin, ha’at, ha’a’a’a*, and *ha’a*o*’b* were best analyzed as independent pronouns as opposed to their more common interpretation as demonstrative pronouns (Carrasco 2004).

*Alfonso Lacadena (2000:176) suggested that *hi-na* was related to the *hi-in* form in Ch’ol, meaning “el, ella, esa, este, esta” (“he, she, this, that one”) (Aulie and Aulie 1978:65). This interpretation saw the *hi-na* spelling as a variant form of *ha-i*, which was rightly identified as the third-person independent pronoun. The small, incised caption text of Lintel 3 from Piedras Negras may be the sole known occurrence in non-ceramic texts of the first-person singular independent pronoun; however, it appears there written in an abbreviated fashion as *hi* and not as *hi-na*. Additionally, there are few instances where the likely equivalent of *hiin* also appears simply as *hi* on ceramic vessels (cf. K1092, K7727). Sometimes referred to as a result of “underspelling,” this process may rather reflect the phonetic spelling of actual, perhaps localized and/or contextually-motivated speech patterns.*

*Mocho also has *hi-in as the first-person singular-independent pronoun (Schumann 1969). Most Mayan languages have cognates of *hiin* but show varying degrees of phonetic change. David Mora-Marin has also kindly pointed out to us dialectal forms in Chontal of *kdiin “I/me,” a-jin “you,” and u-jin “he,” where -jin is the base upon which the ergative/possessive pronouns are added in forming independent pronouns (Keller and Luciano 1997:16, 57, 269, 271) (cf. Mora-Marin 2004:57). In addition, Poqomam and Poqomchi’ both have the form *hin*, albeit with a short vowel (Kaufman 1976; Mayers 1966).*

*Marc Zender (see Stuart 2005:52) has proposed that the original form was *haa*- in Proto-Mayan, and the vowel was shortened near the end of the Late Classic period with the appearance of a few *ha-a* spellings.*

*Grammatical abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 1, 2, 3 first, second, third person, 0 third-person singular absolutive pronoun, A absolutive pronoun, ADV advverb, AF agent focus, AVP agent verb patient, CAUS causative, CL clitic, CFT cleft, COM complete, DEF definite article, E ergative pronoun, ENCL enclitic, I independent pronoun, IMP imperfective, NCL noun classifier, NEG negative, NP noun phrase, P plural, PART particle, PEFt perfective, POS possessive, PREP preposition, PRO pronoun, RESUL resultative, S singular, SUFFIX suffix, SVO subject verb object, TRANS transitive, VOS verb object subject, VP verbal phrase, and VPA verb patient agent. In 2004, based on a suggestion from Michael Carrasco, we have come to see the *cheeken* form as strictly a first-person quotative, “I said.”*
Marc Zender has also come to a similar conclusion as to its interpretation and circulated his ideas in an email to other epigraphers in 2004 (Marc Zender, personal communication 2005). There is not room for a full discussion into the complexities for this argument here.

David Stuart interprets this glyph as referring to the Muwan-bird hat (or “feathery sombrero”) often worn by God L (Stuart 2006:99; cf. Coe 1973:91).

This idea is supported further by the iconography of Naranjo Stela 21, a monument dedicated to the conquest of K’a’kh’ Tiliw Chan Chakh, the ruler who is also mentioned as the owner of the Regal Rabbit Vase. Stela 21 depicts a jaguar throne actually positioned upside down (Julia Guernsey, personal communication to Michael D. Carrasco 2004) in an image that is nearly identical to the scene of God L before the Sun God on the vase.

Antipassive constructions in Mayan languages were described in considerable detail early on by John Robertson (1976:133-164). Robertson noted that in many Mayan languages the patient of the transitive verb is attenuated, resulting in a transitive verb left with only a single argument Noun Phrase that takes absolutive case markings. Robertson noted that in many Mayan languages the patient of the transitive verb is attenuated, resulting in a transitive verb left with only a single argument Noun Phrase that takes absolutive case markings.

13. Duncan has noted similar instances in Tz’utujil where detransitivization does not necessarily occur in AF constructions (2003:174).

In some Mayan languages, however, Tonhouser argues that the verb may not show any special morphological change in focus constructions that “realize an event participant with the discourse status ‘unpredictable’” (2003:14).

The -n “agentive voice suffix” ultimately derives from a Proto-Mayan *(V)n (Smith-Stark 1978). In the modern Mayan languages, the suffix used on derived transitive and non-CVC verbs is -n or a cognate form of it (see Yasugi 2005:80).

One final occurrence of hiin is known. At Kohunlich, a short hieroglyphic inscription with a hi-na compound was recently found by Enrique Nalda and Sandra Balanzario in a funeral chamber above Edificio E-8 Sub of 27 Escalones. (We thank Erik Boot for bringing this example to our attention.) Erik Velásquez Garcia has published a drawing and reading of the glyphs (2002:16). He interprets the sequence as hi-na ka-AJAW, hiin ka-ajaw, “este es nuestro Senor” (“this is our Lord”).” We would instead see the hiin as “I” in this context (note the explicit first-person reference with ka-, “our”). Furthermore, we disagree with reading the main sign as ajaw since Mayan phonological rules do not normally allow two successive vowels without an epenthetic ligature (usually “w” or “y” in the hieroglyphic inscriptions), especially in the case of ergative pronominal proclitics. More important, however, is that the ka- prefix leaves open the possibility of a first-person plural (“our”) reference - an ideal place for a first-person independent pronoun.

In 2004, Marc Zender also independently concluded the che-ke-na spellings must represent a first-person reference (personal communication 2005).

The verbal form chekta means “to appear” in Ch’orti’ (Hull 2005:15), chechant means “declararse, saber, manifestarse” (“to declare oneself, to know, to manifest oneself”) in Chontal (Keller and Luciano 1997:82), and checut means “hallcar” (“to find”) in Ch’orti’ (Boot 2004:26).

Most notably, David Mora-Marin (2003; n.d.) has made an alternative argument that hi-na and the unique hi-ni example (on K4113) represent Pre-Proto-Ch’olan and Proto-Western Ch’olan variants of the third-person singular independent pronoun, respectively.

### Bibliography

Aissen, Judith L.

Barthel, Thomas S.

Beliaev, Dmitri

Beliaev, Dmitri, and Albert Davletshin

Blunk-Fernandez, Will
n.d. Untitled and unpublished manuscript in possession of the authors.

Boot, Erik


Carrasco, Michael D.
2004 Ko’ox Xokik Uuchben U Tz’iibil Maya’ T’aan: An Introduction to Epigraphic Mayan. Notebook for the Workshop on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing for the Summer Intensive Course in Yucatec Mayan. The Consortium in Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, conducted at the Universidad Autonoma de Yucatan, Merida.

Coe, Michael D.

Craig, Collete

Duncan, Lachlan

Ditting, Dieter, and Richard E. Johnson

Grube, Nikolai

Hedberg, Nancy

Hull, Kerry
2003a The Shape of CVC Transitive Imperatives in Maya Hieroglyphic Writing. Unpublished manuscript.
2003b Verbal Art and Performance in Ch’ortí’ and May a Hieroglyphic Writing. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, The University of Texas at Austin

Kaufman, Terrence

Keller, Kathryn C., and Placido Luciano G.

Lacadena, Alfonso
2000 Antipassive Constructions in the Maya Glyphic Texts. Written Language and Literacy 3(1), pp. 155-180

Laughlin, Robert M.

Lopes, Luis

MacLeod, Barbara

Mayers, Marvin

Mora-Marín, David

Wald, Robert, and Michael D. Carrasco

Yasugi, Yoshiho

Zender, Marc