Problem 3 solution
Winter 2010 601 final exam

The data you’re asked to look at are the following:

1. zu bi ‘dry earth’
2. udibi ciciza? ‘I am dry’
3. ibi ciciza? ‘I am thirsty’
4. rulabaza? ‘I count’
5. rulabala ciciza? ‘I think, wonder’
6. skalaciza? ‘I want’
7. slaciza? ‘I am mad’
8. edala ciciza? ‘I remember’
9. ekala ciciza? ‘I am well’
10. edakala ciciza? ‘I am content’

What you have to determine is the identity of some suffix that’s present in all of these examples except 1, 2 and 4. The absence of the suffix from these data is your first (and best) clue to the form and meaning of the suffix you’re asked to specify.

The fact that the suffix is missing from three forms means that you have a convenient point of reference in your analysis: if you can compare one of these three with another example that’s very close in form to it, but which belongs to the group containing the suffix in question, then you can do the elementary ‘subtraction’ that I originally talked about in the morphology handouts with little trouble. The difference between the form that doesn’t contain the suffix and the form that does will be the suffix itself, or very close to it. Do we have such a basis for comparison in the data?

We do, and the problem is set up in such a way that it’s hard not to notice it: the difference between 2. and 3. is minimal, but we know that the first does not contain the suffix in question and the second does. Take a closer look at the two:

(1) udibi ciciza? ‘I am dry’
ibiciza? ‘I am thirsty’

We know that -za? is the first person suffix. Removing it (and its associated translation) gives us

(2) udibi ciciza- ‘(be) dry’
ibiciza- ‘(be) thirsty’

We also know, from the very first example in the set, that biczi must be the form meaning ‘dry’. Clearly zu is not that form, because it only shows up in 1., whereas biczi shows up in both 1. and 2., where the property of dryness is mentioned in both cases. The form zu, on the other hand, shows up exactly once, just as the notion ‘earth’ shows up exactly once, and only in that same first example. So it’s clear that biczi is what is carrying the meaning of dryness, and the fact that a substring of the word has exactly this phonetic form, and that the translation alludes to ‘thirst’, clearly connected semantically to dryness (lack of moisture in both cases) makes it as clear as it can be that biczi in 3. is the same as the biczi in 1. and 2. So let’s subtract biczi as well, and see what we wind up with. In order to do this, though, we need to figure out what it means to subtract the meaning ‘dry’ from the meaning ‘thirsty’. Clearly, dryness is a physical condition; ‘thirsty’, on the other hand, denotes a sensation, something that can only be experienced by an entity has some form of consciousness (leaving aside metaphorical uses). Since we know what we’re looking for is a suffix—something which comes at the end—we can ignore the difference between what’s at the beginning of the words in (2); putting these in parentheses for the time being, we wind up with

(3) (udi) ‘(be) …’
(i)iaci- ‘(be) sensation-of …’
So just looking at 1.–3. give us a very plausible point of departure: the suffix is -laci, and it identifies a sensation or possibly some other manifestation of consciousness. What happens when we take this preliminary result to the other examples?

Comparison of 4. and 5. provides a nice test of this hypothesis.

(4)   rulabaza? ‘I count’  
      rulabalaciza? ‘I think, wonder’

Here, everything is the same except for the presence of laci in 5.. Subtracting -za? from both examples yields a form rulaba that appears to mean ‘count’, whereas, as 5. shows, rulaba-laci, means ‘think/wonder’. This contrast fits perfectly with what we’ve found so far: counting itself, though it may be associated with mental activity, isn’t dependent on consciousness—it’s something that a machine can do, and strictly speaking identifies an action, rather than a state of mind. Thinking, wondering, speculating, on the other hand, are all mental states, inner cognitive sensations, which do not involve actions, but rather changes in a purely subjective, mental reality. The data in 4. vs. 5. therefore accords perfectly with what we’ve already hypothesized about laci on the basis of 1.–3.

In the remaining data, we don’t have enough information to identify the meaning of the various roots. But we don’t need to—all that our hypothesis requires of us is that all these forms, where we know -laci is present, refer to some kind of internal cognitive state or sensation. And it’s clear from the meanings involved that that’s the case: ‘want, be mad, remember’ and so on all identify such internal states of being or mental activity or sensation. Thus, the original identification of the suffix in question as -laci, and the meaning deduced for it as such an internal cognitive state, seems to be the one that the data provided support.