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Comparative Study of Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MEZQUITAL OTOMI AND MEXICAN SPANISH

GRAMMAR AND PHONOLOGY

by

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B.A., Wesleyan University, 2004

A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

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This thesis entitled:
Comparative Study of Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish
written by Sarah Stefanie Vollmann
has been approved for the Department of Linguistics

J. Andrew Cowell

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Date _____

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
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Vollmann, Sarah Stefanie (M.A., Linguistics)

Comparative Study of Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish Grammar and Phonology

Thesis directed by Professor J. Andrew Cowell

My degree will specialize in teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Comparative studies of different languages are very useful for language teachers. The idea for this thesis grew from a video I made which presents the Mezquital Otomi language to Spanish speakers of Otomi ancestry. Mezquital Otomi is spoken in central Mexico, so it has had much contact with Mexican Spanish ever since Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. There used to be many dialects of a single Otomi language, including the Mezquital dialect, spoken by the Mezquital Otomi people. However, nowadays those dialects have become mutually unintelligible languages.

My speakers for this endeavor were two sisters who spoke Mezquital Otomi with their mother in Mexico until about ages eight and nine, when they began learning Spanish. They never went to school in their native country, instead working in the fields. Their experience seems typical of Otomi people, who were conquered by the Aztecs shortly before the Spanish arrived. For hundreds of years, they have been poor; Mezquital Otomi is a low-status language. Mezquital Otomi is one of the more widely spoken Otomian languages. Nonetheless, many Otomi parents want their children to learn Spanish in order to ascend the social ladder. My speakers are now about 50 and 51 years old. They have lived in Boulder, Colorado for about six years, and speak Spanish at native level.

There are many similarities and differences between the two languages. For example, Mezquital Otomi contains three phonemic tones, while Spanish has none. Otomi tones may resemble differences in pitch, vowel length, or stress to Spanish speakers. Phonemes in Mezquital Otomi but not Mexican Spanish include /ε/, /ʊ/, /φ/, and /ʃ/. Grammatically, both languages are nominative-accusative and fusional. The basic word order in Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish is AVP. However, the former sometimes uses verbs for things that would be expressed by adjectives in Spanish. For example, “to be cold” is a verb. Furthermore, Otomi does not mark gender, while Spanish genders everything, even inanimate objects. Knowledge of Spanish would help learners of Otomi in some ways, but also present them with challenges.

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Introduction

I have worked with speakers of Mezquital Otomi during almost the entire time I have been a graduate student at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I chose this school because it had a two-year master's program in Linguistics for TESOL Professionals. My career goal is to teach English as a second/foreign language at the university level. I grew up learning about different cultures, and saw TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) as a way to further a social justice goal.

How TESOL and Mezquital Otomi Further Social Justice

As a university ESL/EFL professor, I will be able to increase the number of educated professionals in countries that have emerging economies. In many places, people must know English in order to secure a powerful job. A teacher never reaches only one student or class; they will in turn affect the other people in their native countries. Nations such as China and South Korea are rapidly developing, in part because of English teachers.

Some English teachers worry that they are causing their students to lose their native languages and cultures. But my mother is bilingual in French and English, so I knew that people could be fluent in more than one language. Furthermore, knowledge of English can actually foment intercultural understanding. English is today's international lingua franca, so people who know it as a second language can communicate their people's perspective to a wider audience. As a writing and speaking teacher, I will give my students the power to represent their native countries and cultures.

I am fluent in Spanish, and have often wished that I could find a job teaching in Latin America. Since the age of 15, I have participated in various service projects that help people in

that region. I have seen grinding poverty, resulting in minimal education and a lack of basic healthcare. At the same time, I have been amazed by friendly, hardworking people from a diversity of indigenous cultures. When I came to graduate school, I hoped that I would be able to complete some sort of educational service project during my time here.

I had hardly begun school when I heard that Finn Thye, a Ph.D. student in my department, was recruiting people to document indigenous languages of the Americas. She had already found speakers among the Latino immigrant community in Denver and Boulder, Colorado. When I suggested that I document a language as a thesis, she helped me contact her advisor, J. Andrew Cowell. We decided that I would work with two speakers of Mezquital Otomi.

When I first met with Andy, he had another idea for me in addition to a thesis. I spent part of 2011 working for him as a research assistant, creating a video that presents the Mezquital Otomi language for heritage speakers to learn. We defined heritage speakers as grown children of Otomi immigrants who speak Spanish and perhaps English, but want to learn Mezquital Otomi. The video is titled, “El otomi mezquital para los hispanohablantes,” or “Mezquital Otomi for Spanish Speakers.” My career goal is to increase the leadership classes of other countries by teaching English to college students. In a sense, I thought, the adult children of Otomi immigrants are the leadership class of their people. Having grown up in the United States, they have had many more opportunities for education than have Otomi people in Mexico. If they learn Mezquital Otomi, they should be able to elevate their people’s status.

Background and Design of This Project

Mezquital Otomi is one of the languages spoken by the Otomi people, who are from the Central Highlands region of Mexico. The Otomian family of languages is a subset of the Otomanguean one (http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=1865-16, 2011). My speakers grew up speaking Otomi with their mother in Mexico until they started learning Spanish around ages eight and nine. They are now about 50 and 51 years old, and came to the United States about six years ago. I began working with them in March, 2011.

First, I elicited some basic vocabulary for topics in the video. These words included Otomi words for places in Mexico, animals, numbers, etc. I met with my speakers for about an hour or two at a time, mostly individually, at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Twice, the younger sister generously made tamales at her home in Boulder. I went there with a camera and filmed that event. The video features her explanation of how to make tamales in both Spanish and Otomi, with key words highlighted for learners. I finished the video in August.

Some of the data for the phonemes and phonology sections of this paper is from the video, since any words contain the sounds of a language. With the start of the fall 2011 semester, I began elicitation sessions on campus for my thesis. For about two hours at a time, I asked the younger sister to translate sentences from Spanish to Mezquital Otomi. The data that I analyzed in the grammar section is from these sessions. They took place from August to November, 2011. Otomi has no writing system of its own; all utterances in that language have been transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet here.

This paper will focus on comparing Mezquital Otomi with Mexican Spanish for teaching purposes. Language learners' strengths and weaknesses in the target language are often the result of grammar and pronunciation similarities and differences between it and their native

language. For example, the alveolar trill in Spanish is notoriously hard for English speakers to produce. But the same phoneme exists in Gulf Arabic, so if a Gulf Arabic speaker started learning Spanish, that knowledge would help him or her.

The sisters I worked with are from a rural area in the state of Hidalgo. They never had a chance to go to school in Mexico, but instead spent their childhood working in the fields. As I got to know them, it seemed clear to me that they are barely literate in Spanish, though they speak that language at native level. At every elicitation session, I brought a written list of sentences in Spanish for my speaker to translate into Mezquital Otomi. When Francisca asked me to repeat a sentence, she would always say she had forgotten her glasses. This happened several times. I think she was embarrassed that she could not read the words on the page. She did take one-word notes at various times, such as if she had to think or ask Bernarda for a word in Otomi. Even then, sometimes I had to help her with spelling. Bernarda's reading comprehension is very low; she had trouble with a simple page of directions to the university.

Nonetheless, both of my speakers are exceedingly smart and resourceful. Their energy and enthusiasm, as well as their knowledge of Otomi, are apparent in my video. Neither this paper nor the video would have been possible without them.

My thesis will focus on the grammatical and phonological differences between Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish. There have been many contrastive studies between English and other languages (David Rood, personal communication, March 21, 2012). This study is different because it focuses on two languages that have had much contact with each other. My thesis could even be used as background for the purpose of teaching Mezquital Otomi to Spanish speakers.

Finn Thye and another student had already begun working with the speakers that Andy selected for me. Her research partner, Alexander Ferguson, had completed a B.A. in linguistics from our university; he was working on a second bachelor's degree, in anthropology. Ideas from Finn and Alexander's elicitation sessions are therefore scattered throughout my paper.

Information About Otomi

My source for this section is Hekking and Bakker, 2007.

Otomi is the fifth most commonly spoken indigenous language in Mexico. It has had contact with Nahuatl since the beginning of the tenth century, when the Aztecs came into Otomi territory, and Nahuatl became the privileged language when the twelfth century started. Otomi has been influenced by Spanish since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and is now spoken by about 330,000 bilinguals in the states of Mexico, Hidalgo, Queretaro, Puebla, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, and Michoacan.

Spanish missionaries such as Fray Pedro Carceres and Fray Alonso Urbano documented Otomi in the sixteenth century. They used Spanish orthography, which lacked many of the sounds in Otomi. The twentieth century saw a policy of bilingual education in Mexican indigenous communities, but most Otomi people are still illiterate in their own language and many do not speak standard Spanish well. Otomi is only spoken informally, among family and friends. Thus my speakers' experience is fairly typical of Otomi people.

Some aspects of Otomi grammar and phonology transfer into the Spanish of Otomi people in Mexico; their Spanish is thus imperfect. Since Otomi is a stigmatized language, many Otomi people do not want to teach it to their children. Also, the younger that Otomi people learn

Spanish, the more they insert loanwords into their Otomi, and the closer their Spanish is to the standard Mexican version.

More Acknowledgements

I received valuable help on my thesis from Professor David Rood in the Linguistics Department at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is the person who first taught me how to analyze grammar in documentation. Professor Esther Brown, in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, also provided me with reading recommendations on Spanish phonology. These books gave me information that I needed to compare patterns in the sounds of Spanish to those of Mezquital Otomi. I am immensely grateful for the support of these two professors.

Phonemes of Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish

The phonemes of Mezquital Otomi are as follows:

| | Bilabial | Dental | Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|------------------------|----------|--------|----------|---------|-------|---------|
| Ejective Stop | | tʰ | tsʰ | tʃʰ | kʰ | |
| Unaspirated Stop | p | t | ts | tʃ | k | ʔ |
| Voiced Fricative | | | | | | |
| Voiceless Fricative | ɸ | θ | s | ʃ | x | h |
| Nasal | m | n | | ɲ | | |
| Tap or Flap | | | r | | | |
| Lateral | | | l | | | |
| Semivowel | w | | | j | | |

| | Front | Central | Back |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Oral Nasal | Oral Nasal | Oral Nasal |

| | | | |
|-----------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Close | i ï | I | u u ù |
| Close-mid | e | | o õ |
| Near-open | ε ẽ | | |
| Open | | a ã | |

The consonants of Mexican Spanish follow:

| | Labial | Alveolar | Post-Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Labio-velar | Glottal |
|-------------|---------|-----------|---------------|---------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Plosive | /p/ /b/ | /t/ /d/ | | /ð/ | /k/ /g/ | /k ^w / | |
| Affricate | /β/ | /tʃ/ /ts/ | /tʃ/ /dʒ/ | | | | |
| Fricative | /f/ /v/ | /s/ /z/ | /ʃ/ /ʒ/ | | /x/ /χ/ | /x ^w / /χ ^w / | /χ/ |
| Nasal | /m/ | /n/ | | /ɲ/ | /ŋ/ | | |
| Approximant | | /l/ | | /j/ /ɻ/ | | /w/ | |
| Trill | | /r/ /r̄/ | | | | | |

From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_Spanish, 2011.

Spanish has just five vowels: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/.

Mezquital Otomi includes many phonemes that do not exist in Spanish. Otomi vowels include /ʊ/, as in /ʊni/, the word for “chicken.” Another vowel found in Otomi but not Spanish is /ɛ/. Learners of Otomi would have to work hard in order to hear the difference between /e/ and /ɛ/, /o/ and /ʊ/, and say them correctly. They might substitute /e/ for /ɛ/ and /o/ for /ʊ/ otherwise. Also, Otomi often uses nasalized vowels, which do not occur in Spanish. Thus heritage learners of Otomi would have to learn how to consistently produce those, too.

Otomi also has many ejective consonants. Some examples are /tʰ/, /tsʰ/, /tʃʰ/, and /kʰ/. /t/ and /k/ exist in Spanish, but not even with aspiration, so heritage learners of Otomi would benefit from instruction on how to produce ejectives.

There is a bilabial voiceless fricative in Otomi, which Spanish speakers might substitute with /p/ or /f/ from their native language. There is also /ʃ/ in Otomi, which Spanish speakers might substitute with /tʃ/. All of these sounds would be challenging and require much practice for native Spanish speakers.

In Mezquital Otomi, /o/ and /u/ are not phonemic. For example, “You’re going to eat” could be said either /magi njone/ or /magi njune/; they seem to be in free variation. Since /o/ and /u/ are contrastive in Spanish, students of Otomi would have to be told that /o/ and /u/ are the same sound in that language. Practice listening for this aspect of Otomi should help them.

Like in Spanish, /g/ can be substituted by /ɣ/ intervocally in fast speech. For instance,

3. mavi tsiθe¹

AUX-2S.FUT drink

“You’re going to drink.”

Here, /mavi/ is the same auxiliary verb as /magi/.

Alternation can occur between /a/ and /ε/, too. For example,

6. ʃan^hũ: ma n^ho

hurt-3PS me my head

“I have a headache.”

Here, /ʃan^hũ/ is the same particle as /ʃεn^ho/ in:

8. ʃεn^ho me gu

hurt-3PS me my ear

“My ear hurts.”

Students of Otomi should be taught to hear differences between /a/ and /ε/, the new vowel for them, so they will understand Otomi properly.

Otomi and Spanish also share many phonemes. Spanish of Central Mexico includes the phoneme /x/, which is especially salient intervocalically—for example, in the word “Mexico” /mexiko/ (Lipski, 1994). In some other parts of the Spanish-speaking world, this phoneme

¹ Like in Spanish (and English, which some heritage speakers are likely to know), there is one verb in Otomi that can mean either “eat” or “drink.” The verb root tsi- is the Otomi equivalent of the Spanish tom- from the infinitive “tomar.”

becomes more of an /h/ (Lipski, 1994). In Mezquital Otomi, the two phonemes seem to alternate. One of my speakers translated the Spanish version of “You’re going to drink that water there” as /noʔe magi tsinona dehe bixa:ni/, using the distal demonstrative, but /noʔe magi tsinona dehe bihanijabu/ was “You’re going to drink that water over there,” using the very distal demonstrative. She said both sentences at the same speed, so these consonants seem to be in free variation.

Otomi also has a flap, like Spanish. However, the Otomi flap seems to only occur intervocalically, while the Spanish one can happen anywhere. An example of the flap in Otomi is the determiner /no ora/.

Mezquital Otomi has both voiced and voiceless interdental sounds. For example, “my dad” in Otomi is /ma ɖaɖa/, and “red” is /θɛni/. Students would have to be taught, and subsequently reminded, to place their tongues between their teeth—not substitute /d̪/ for /ð/ or /s/ for /θ/, for example. The letter “d” is sometimes pronounced as /ð/ in Spanish (e.g., Eddington, 2004), other times as /d̪/, so heritage speakers would have to learn to view them as different phonemes and pronounce them in the appropriate words in Otomi.

Glottal stops are often used in Otomi, but not in Spanish. If heritage learners of Otomi live in the United States and know English, they will be at an advantage for knowing this phoneme as well as interdental ones. If not, they will have to be taught how to make a glottal stop. Pointing to the glottis on a diagram should help. Speakers of English might not notice they make glottal stops, however, since they are often substituted for /t/ in informal speech. Consequently, they might not hear glottal stops in Otomi.

Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish still have many phonemes in common. Like many languages around the world, they share the voiceless oral stops /p/, /t/, and /k/. Both languages also have the voiced oral stops /b/, /d/, and /g/, as well as the fricatives /s/, /x/ and /z/. Although there is no /h/ on the chart, that phoneme is sometimes substituted for /x/ in Mexican Spanish, so heritage speakers might know how to produce /h/. Otherwise, they would have to be taught how to make this voiceless glottal fricative.

Mexican Spanish contains many other phonemes also found in Mezquital Otomi. These include nasals /m/, /n/, /ɲ/ as well as the rhotics /r/ and /ɾ/. The liquid /l/ is also in both languages, as are the semivowels /w/ and /j/. All of these factors would give Spanish speakers some foundation for learning Otomi.

Tones of Mezquital Otomi

The tones of Otomi would be a challenge for heritage speakers because Spanish is not a tonal language. Otomi has three tonemes: high, low, and rising (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). For example, /jà/ is “the” plural, /já/ is the 3PS possessive plural, and /jǎ/ means “liver” (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). I have updated the transcription and grammar explanation from Sinclair and Pike’s 1948 analysis. Additionally, /rà/ means “the” singular, while /rá/ is the 3PS possessive singular (Sinclair and Pike, 1948).

Sinclair and Pike count 33 consonants and clusters of glottal stop plus consonant, and claim that all of them appear before the high toneme in the same syllable (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). All of them but /ʔr/, /tʃ/, and /l/ occur before the low tone in their research (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). Every one except /tʃ/, /kʔ/, /ʔm/, and /tʔ/ occurs before the rising toneme (Sinclair

and Pike, 1948). All consonants but /tʃ/ occur after the high toneme, and all but /k/, /kʔ/, /ʔw/, and /x/ occur after the rising one (Sinclair and Pike, 1948).

Sinclair and Pike also find that all types of tones can occur in neighboring syllables; they are not conditioned by different environments (1948). All three tonemes can occur in monosyllabic words, though monosyllabic nouns are all rising or high in their research. Verbs can be high, rising, or low (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). The first syllable of dissyllabic words can have any of the three tonemes (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). The second syllable can also have any of the three, though the rising tone is less common (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). The rising tone is rare on the final syllable of trisyllabic words, which tend to have two morphemes (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). In some words with high tones on both syllables, the tone on the second syllable can be either high or low (Sinclair and Pike, 1948).

Otomi utterances tend to have high intonation at the end, so Sinclair and Pike only found high and rising tonemes there. Nevertheless, high tonemes in that position have occurred in a medium high tone, and a rising glide has been heard as a descending glide (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). When people talk in an animated way, their overall pitch rises, sometimes changing the tones (Sinclair and Pike, 1948).

Sinclair and Pike list some borrowed words that demonstrate Otomi tonal interpretations of Spanish stress. “Newspaper” is /peri ‘odiko/ in Spanish, but /ʔnà rà pèriódíkó/ in Otomi (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). “Wednesday” is /mierkoles/ in Spanish, but /miérkólé/ in Otomi (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). “School” is /la eskwela/ in Spanish, /rà skwěla/ in Otomi (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). “Book” is /libro/ in Spanish, /rà líbró/ in Otomi (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). In these examples, adjacent high tonemes can represent stressed and unstressed syllables in Spanish

(Sinclair and Pike, 1948). Nouns are also higher in pitch relative to their articles in both Spanish and Otomi (Sinclair and Pike, 1948).

Sinclair and Pike note several difficulties that Spanish-speaking researchers have had in hearing tone in Otomi. First, the high tone sounds like pitch-stress to Spanish speakers (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). Many dissyllabic words with low and then high pitch have been transcribed as having accent on the last syllable (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). The rising tone also sounds to Spanish speakers like vowel length difference, because it is longer than the other tonemes (Sinclair and Pike, 1948). These challenges would be the same for Spanish-speaking learners of Otomi.

Spanish loanwords in Otomi provide insight into how Spanish phonotactics adjust according to Otomi tones (Wichman, 2006). ‘C(C)V(C)CV becomes C(C)V^{MH}(C)CV, for example the Spanish “pato” becomes /ba^{MH}do/ (“duck”) (Wichman, 2006). (C)V’CVC(C)V becomes (C)VH’CVHC(C)V, for example the Spanish “chaqueta” becomes /tʃa^Hke^Hta/ (“jacket”) (Wichman, 2006). (C)V’CVC becomes (C)V^HCV, for example the Spanish “color” becomes /ko^Hlo/ (“color”) (Wichman, 2006). Final consonants in words stressed on the last syllable in Spanish are deleted because Otomi prefers open syllables (Wichman, 2006). In Wichman’s notation, ^{MH} marks the rising tone and ^H, the high tone (Wichman, 2006).

I did not transcribe tone, since it seems to have no grammatical function. Very little research has been done by other linguists on Mezquital Otomi, so more information about how Otomi tone corresponds to Spanish stress appears to not be known.

Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish Phonology

Comparison of Conditioning Environments

The phoneme /g/ is an allophone of /ɣ/ in Mezquital Otomi. /g/ appears in many more conditioning environments than /ɣ/; the latter phoneme only occurred in the environments a_I, o_u, and u_u in my data. (/g/ occurred in a_I, as well.) The situation in Spanish is very similar, as /ɣ/ is an allophone of /g/. /ɣ/ is used when the phoneme is not word-initial or after a nasal, in which case /g/ is correct (Schwegler et al., 2010). In Mezquital Otomi, /d͡/ and /ð/ occur in many of the same conditioning environments, with /d͡/ more common. In my data, the only times /ð/ and not /d͡/ was used were word-initially before /a/ and between /e/ and /o/. In Spanish, /d͡/ is correct after a nasal, pause, or /l/. The same grapheme is pronounced as the fricative /ð/ in all other cases (Schwegler et al., 2010). Heritage learners of Otomi would have to become accustomed to these different conditioning environments over time.

In my data, the ending /-n/ was added to /noʔera/ and /ra/ before /tʃutsi/, the word for “girl,” and /metsi/, the word for “boy.” The same thing happened on the prefix /ja-/, to make singular /tʃutsi/ plural. It is possible that these two nouns are in their own noun class—or that it is more efficient to epenthesize an /n/ in this language, which has many nasalized vowels. My dataset for this project was not large enough to be conclusive.

Several vowels are interchangeable in Otomi, but contrastive in Spanish. For example, my speaker told me “they make” could be said /nujʊ hoki/ or /nujʊ hoka/. Similarly, “they are going to make” is either /nujʊ magahjoka/ or /nujʊ magahoki/. This concept would be a task for heritage speakers to remember as they work on their listening skills in Otomi.

As in Spanish, /b/ and /v/ are interchangeable in Otomi. Intervocally, they can also become /β/ in fast speech. For example, my speaker translated “right now” both as /nuvia/ and

/nuβia/ in different sentences. /k/ can also be pronounced as the fricative /h/ intervocalically in fast speech. My speaker translated “we make” as /ðihoke/ and /ðihohe/, saying each one was correct.

The underlying form of the negative particle for most negative Otomi sentences, /hin/, can be pronounced many different ways. In the sentence

| | | |
|---------|--------------|-----------|
| 122. in | gatsi | jaṭeḍi |
| NEG | eat-2PS.PAST | tamale-PL |

“Didn’t you eat tamales?”

/hin/ is said without the word-initial /h/, and the /n/ harmonizes with /g/’s velar place of articulation.

Some conditioning environments are different cross-linguistically for phonemes that appear in both languages. For example, /f/ and /ϕ/ are only intervocalic in my Otomi data, yet in Spanish, there are consonant clusters such as /fr/ in words like “fresco” (/fresko/, “fresh”). Similarly, /p/ is always either word-initial (preceding a vowel) or intervocalic in my Otomi data, but can occur in such Spanish words as “imprimir” (/imprimiɾ/, “to print”) and “playa” (/plaija/, “beach”). The flap /ɾ/ is also word-initial preceding a vowel or intervocalic, in contrast to common Spanish words like /fresko/ and /imprimiɾ/. People tend to disprefer consonant clusters, so these phonemes would be easier for Spanish speakers to say in Otomi. An ideal syllable is CV, or consonant, vowel (class notes, Phonology with Prof. Rebecca Scarborough, University of Colorado, Boulder, March 15, 2011).

The phoneme /l/ only occurs in Spanish loanwords according to my Otomi data, and then only when the Spanish feminine definite article (/la/) is part of an Otomi word. It is always intervocalic. Indeed, consonant clusters are rare in Mezquital Otomi, and the more common

clusters include /n/, /ŋ/, or /ʔ/. /n/ and /ŋ/ are always the first consonant in a cluster; the exception is that my data showed /n/ after /r/ in words borrowed from Spanish. /ʔ/ is always the second consonant in a cluster.

Glides, especially /j/, are also common beside vowels, avoiding hiatus. The Spanish vowels /i/ and /u/ convert to semivowels /j/ and /w/ in cases of hiatus (Schwegler et al., 2010). Two adjacent vowels can also be diphthongs in Spanish (Schwegler et al., 2010) as in Otomi.

Some vowels in Otomi are oral, others nasal. The i-vowel and e-vowel in Mezquital Otomi are almost always oral (Wichman, 2006). The u-vowel is nasal almost all the time (Wichman, 2006). There is contrast between /a/ and /ã/, however (Wichman, 2006). This contrast might be difficult for heritage speakers to learn because there are just two conditioning environments in which vowels are nasalized in Spanish (Schwegler et al., 2010). Any vowel is nasalized between two nasal consonants, or word-initially before a nasal consonant (Schwegler et al., 2010). Students of Otomi would have to be told the difference between an oral and nasalized vowel, and know when they are producing which one, in order to pronounce Otomi properly.

Mezquital Otomi, unlike Spanish, is a tonal language. For example, the word for “one,” /na/, has a tone that falls, then rises. It is not the same word if the tone is incorrect, so Spanish speakers would have to learn this new concept. However, tone seems to have no grammatical function in Otomi, as evidenced by H. Harwood Hess’ 1968 study of the language. Therefore, I did not transcribe it in this paper.

Comparing Loanwords

Mezquital Otomi has had centuries of contact with Spanish, and loanwords reveal a great deal about Otomi phonology compared to Spanish. My speaker translated the Spanish word for “store,” “tienda,” into Otomi as /denda/. Thus the diphthong disappears, supporting a claim that Hekking and Bakker made with more data (ed. Matras and Sakel, 2007). Heritage speakers of Otomi would have to try not to use diphthongs when speaking their new language.

According to my speaker, “mesa” (“table” in Spanish) is /meʃa/, so the /s/ becomes postalveolar. The same phenomenon seems to occur with “queso” (the Spanish word for “cheese”), which is /geʃo/ in Otomi. This finding agrees with Hekking and Bakker’s (ed. Matras and Sakel, 2007). They found the same initial consonant that I did for the name “Juan” (ed. Matras and Sakel, 2007), which my speaker translated as /ʃuva/. Spanish speakers would have to beware of using intervocalic /s/ when they speak Otomi.

The voicing of /k/ in the borrowed word /geʃo/ supports another of Hekking and Bakker’s findings. They write that voiceless stops from Spanish tend to become voiced in Otomi. This rule might be a good one to tell Otomi learners as they recognize borrowed words from Spanish.

Describing Mezquital Otomi and Spanish Grammar

Introduction

Like Spanish, Mezquital Otomi is a fusional language. The basic word order is AVP. The basic word order in a noun phrase is determiner, adjective, head noun. Thus, noun phrases are head-final. Otomi is a nominative-accusative language, like Spanish, and has proximal, distal, and very distal demonstratives. Mezquital Otomi has some adjectives and a copula, but some verbs can also express things that would be adjectives or adverbs in Spanish or English. Otomi does not mark gender, even on pronouns—very different from Spanish, in which everything has a gender, even inanimate objects. Otomi also has a plural prefix, while Spanish has a plural suffix. Syntax for possession follows:

name of possessor, determiner, possessive adjective, noun (P).

A system of prefixes and suffixes marks tense, aspect, and mode in Otomi. The negative Otomi particle is /hin/ most of the time, but /o/ in imperative sentences. Question words come first in Otomi open-ended questions, and yes-no questions have the same word order and morphemes as statements. These formulas are approximately the same as in Spanish grammar. Relative clause markers are optional in Otomi as in Spanish. Imperatives in Otomi are just the simple form of the verb, but they can become stronger if the speaker adds a particle. After centuries of contact with Spanish, Otomi contains many borrowed words, including some prepositions and adverbs of time. Mezquital Otomi and Mexican Spanish grammar have much in common, but learners of Otomi would also have many new grammar concepts to learn.

Abbreviation Guide

| | |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| 1PS | First person singular |
| 1PP | First person plural |
| 2PS | Second person singular |
| 2PP | Second person plural |
| 3SF | Third person singular |
| 3PP | Third person plural |
| A | The most agent-like argument |
| ADJ | Adjective |
| AUX | Auxiliary |
| CAUS | Causative |
| DAT | Dative |
| DET | Determiner |
| DET.ACC | Accusative Determiner |
| DET.NOM | Nominative Determiner |
| DIST | Distal |
| FUT | Future |
| IMP | Imperative |
| IMPF | Imperfect |
| NEG | Negative |
| OBLG | Obligatory |
| P | The most patient-like argument |
| PAST | Past tense |

| | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| PL | Plural marker |
| PRES | Present tense |
| PROG | Progressive aspect |
| PROX | Proximal |
| REL | Relative clause marker |
| SG | Singular |
| V | Verb |
| VERY DIST | Very distal |

Word Order

The basic word order in Mezquital Otomi is AVP, the same as Spanish. In the following example, “he” is the agent, “three big snakes” is the patient, and “killed” is the verb.

| | | | | |
|----------|--------------|-------|----------|-------|
| 29. nonĩ | vijo | nju | jak'enja | doŋgi |
| he | kill-3S.PAST | three | snake-PL | big |

“He killed three big snakes.”

Word order can vary, though, to become PVA in some situations. This phenomenon might be more generally true for non-agentive subjects, though the only examples in my data were for body parts. To say a part of the body hurts, there is a phrase that means “hurts” and then the part of the body follows. For instance:

| | | |
|-----------|----|------|
| 7. ʃan'u | ma | wa |
| hurt.PRES | my | feet |

“My feet hurt.”

This system seems close to the Spanish one, in which a reflexive verb (“me duele”) is used, followed by a definite article and the part of the body. However, Otomi does not appear to distinguish between singular and plural things that hurt, while Spanish does. Also, the verb in Otomi does not point out who the body part hurts. Instead, the possessive (/ma/ for “my,” /di/ for “your”) on the body part signals who hurts. Learners of Otomi should be made aware of these differences.

Like in Spanish, agent pronouns can be omitted in Otomi, since they are expressed by the verb. They are both pro-drop languages. The auxiliary verb /magi/ (also pronounced /magI/ or /mavi/) seems to show future tense in 2PS. For example,

1. magi niune
 AUX.2PS.FUT eat
 “You’re going to eat.”

This explanation works with many other sentences, such as

3. mavIn tsiθe
 AUX.2PS.FUT drink
 “You’re going to drink.”

The auxiliary /maga/ also exists for first person plural future tense.

19. maga tsihu da ?aro
 AUX.3PP.FUT eat some rice
 “We’re going to eat rice.”

This similarity between Spanish and Otomi grammar would help heritage speakers learn Otomi.

Noun Phrase Word Order

The usual order of elements in a Mezquital Otomi noun phrase follows:

number, head noun, possessor, relative clause.

Pronouns also come before determiners, which precede the head noun, but adjectives can precede or follow it. (The only pronouns that accompany other elements in noun phrases in my data are third person singular.) For example,

| | | | | | |
|-----|------|---------------|-------|----------|--------|
| 29. | noni | vijo | nju | jak'enja | doŋgi |
| | 3PS | kill-3PS.PAST | three | snake-PL | big-PL |

“He killed three big snakes.”

The previous sentence demonstrates that numerals (e.g., “three”) go before the described noun (“snakes”), while adjectives (“big”) come after it.

A longer example displays more elements in a noun phrase:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|----------|---------|--------|---------------|------|-------|-------|
| 134. | noni | ra | ʃuɣua | vihio | nojɔ | nju | |
| | 3PS | DET.NOM | Juan | kill-3PS.PAST | ? | three | |
| | jak'enja | de | mige | me | bui | haran | hwāhi |
| | snake-PL | of | Miguel | ? | ? | the | field |

“Juan killed Miguel’s three snakes, which were in the field.”

In the first noun phrase, the 3PS pronoun and nominative determiner precede the head noun. In the second noun phrase, the number precedes the head noun, but the possessor and relative clause follow it.

Head Marking

Noun phrases are head-final in Mezquital Otomi. “Your snake” is

ri k’enja

your snake.

A longer noun phrase is structured the same way. “Miguel’s snake” in Otomi is

paφi no ora k’enja

Miguel DET snake

The snake, the head, comes at the end of each noun phrase.

Mezquital Otomi is verb-medial in verb phrases. In the example

95. era ðame tihi du:nti

DET man run-3PS.PRES a lot

“The man runs a lot.”

the verb /tihi/, “runs,” is the head of the verb phrase and at the beginning of it.

Grammatical Relationships: S, A, P

Mezquital Otomi is a nominative/accusative language. The verb agrees with the S and A arguments in the nominative case. There appear to be no affixes to mark the A or the P, which are instead shown through syntax.

Sometimes, it seems that the system of determiners in Mezquital Otomi serves as a case-marking mechanism. /noʔora/, /no ran/, /nu ran/, and /noʔara/ are all A markers, while /ran/, /ra/, and /era/ are the P markers. For instance,

43. no ran tʃutsi bijandi era metsi

DET.NOM girl see-3PS.PAST DET.ACC boy

“The girl saw the boy.”

Here, /no_ran/ is the A determiner; /e_ra/ is the one for the P. Further evidence is in the next sentence:

| | | | | |
|------------------------|-------|--------------|---------|--------|
| 44. no _r an | metsi | bijandi | era | tʃutsi |
| DET.NOM | boy | see-3PS.PAST | DET.ACC | girl |

“The boy saw the girl.”

The determiners do not vary with gender, but with case. /no_ran/ is the nominative case marker, /e_ra/ the accusative one. H. Harwood Hess claims that /nú ra/ means “that the” or “the one referred to” (1968). /nú ra/ appears often in his data, before nouns, so it seems that my speakers simply pronounced this expression differently. However, the first mention of the girl is not an anaphoric reference in my data, so Hess’ theory of the meaning of /nú ra/ does not work for /no_ran/ here.

There are other times when this theory does not work. For example,

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------|---------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| 36. no _o re | ʃuvua | vihio | paϕi | no _o ra | k’enja |
| DET.NOM | Juan | kill-3PS.PAST | Miguel | DET.ACC | snake |

“Juan killed Miguel’s snake.”

Here, both the A and the P receive the supposed A marker. Perhaps a study with more data would be more conclusive about case-marking in Otomi.

In Spanish, like English, determiners do not vary according to case, so this concept would be a new one for heritage learners of Otomi. Also, Spanish is a gendered language, and most feminine words (including the feminine article, /la/) end in /a/. Spanish speakers might be tempted to put /e_ra/ before a feminine noun, even in the nominative case.

| | | | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------|------|-----------|
| 77. noni | biunβaβi | jaṭeḍi | nojɔ | jantʃutsi |
| 3PS | give-3PS.PAST | tamale-PL | to | girl-PL |

“She gave tamales to the girls.”

There are no determiners in this sentence, yet it is clear that “she” is the A and “the girls” are the P.

Demonstratives

In Otomi, as in Spanish, there are proximal, distal, and very distal demonstratives. For example, the simple form of one sentence (with no demonstratives) is:

| | | | |
|-------------|-------|------|-------|
| 20. maga | tsihu | da | dahe |
| AUX.3PP.FUT | drink | some | water |

“We’re going to drink water.”

A similar sentence, but with a proximal demonstrative, follows:

| | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------|-------|-------|
| 22. noʔe | magi | tsinona | dehe | novua |
| 2PS | AUX.2PS.FUT | drink | water | PROX |

“You’re going to drink this water right here.”

The Otomi demonstrative /novua/ would easily translate into Spanish as “este.” Yet Otomi differs from Spanish in the order of P and demonstrative. In Spanish, demonstratives come before their nouns, while demonstratives go after them in Otomi.

23. The same is true with distal demonstratives:

| | | | | |
|------|-------------|---------|-------|---------|
| noʔe | magi | tsinona | dehe | bixa:ni |
| 2PS | AUX.2PS.FUT | drink | water | DIST |

“You’re going to drink that water there.”

The Otomi distal demonstrative /bixa:ni/ corresponds to the Spanish one “ese,” except that the word order is opposite.

The pattern continues with very distal demonstratives, the equivalent of “aquel” in Spanish:

| | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------|-------|------------|
| 24. noʔe | magi | tsinona | dehe | bihanijabu |
| 2PS | AUX.2PS.FUT | drink | water | VERY DIST |

“You’re going to drink that water over there.”

Here, -jabu seems to be a suffix that increases the intensity of distalness.

Otomi also has some determiners that might seem redundant to someone proficient in Spanish when Otomi borrows words from that language. In the example

| | | |
|----------|----------|-------------------|
| 25. none | la rana | ʃəngami |
| DET | the frog | be-green-3PS.PRES |

“The frog is green.”

In Spanish, the article “la” is already a determiner for “frog.” The article is borrowed lexically as part of the word. However, in Otomi, the determiner /none/ must be added. Heritage learners of Otomi might omit either /none/ or /la/.

Adjectives

The basic rule in Spanish is that adjectives come after the nouns they describe, but some (including, notably, quantifiers) precede these nouns. I could not gather enough data in my thesis to determine the entire pattern for that in Otomi. However, quantifiers do consistently precede their nouns in my data, and other adjectives can come before or after their nouns. For instance,

| | | | | |
|----------|------|----|-------|--------|
| 30. noni | vijo | na | doŋga | k’enja |
|----------|------|----|-------|--------|

3PS kill.3PS.PAST one big.SING snake

“He killed one big snake.”

In this sentence, the adjective “big” (/doŋga/), as well as the quantifier “one” (/na/), precede the noun “snake” (/kʰenja/) that they describe. But consider the following sentence, which also uses a quantifier and the adjective “big”:

29. noni vijo nju jakʰenja doŋgi
3PS kill.3PS.PAST three snake.NC big.PL

“He killed three big snakes.”

Like in the first example, the quantifier goes before the noun it describes. The adjective root for “big,” doŋg-, takes the singular suffix –a or the plural one –i. Nonetheless, my speakers did not always follow this rule. There is also a plural prefix for the noun, ja-. But the same adjective, “big,” comes after the noun, even though it was before the noun in the first example.

Some verbs contain words that are adjectives in Spanish and English. For instance,

47. no ma ḏaḏa ʃidanoho
DET.NOM my dad be-fat-3PS.PRES

My dad is very fat.

The third person singular form of the copula would be /ra/, but that word is not above. Instead, one word says “is very fat.”

Some adverbs that modify adjectives are contained in verbs. For example, there is one copula verb, “to be,” as well as another for “to be very.”

71. ra dehe ʃʌŋgʰami
DET water be green-3PS.PRES

The water is green.

This sentence uses an adjectival verb, /ʃirʌŋg²ami/.

72. ra dehe ʃirʌŋg²ami
DET water be very-3PS.PRES green

The water is very green.

The verb in the previous sentence is not in this one. Instead, there is a different verb, /ʃirʌŋg²ami/, for the sentence that translates as “The water is very green.”

H. Harwood Hess claims that Mezquital Otomi has a copula (1968), which is rare in languages that use verbs instead of adjectives (J. Andrew Cowell, personal communication, December 13, 2011). My data agrees with Hess’ claim:

45. nuraŋ hwa ra doŋgi
DET.NOM fish be-3PS.PRES big-SG

The fish is big.

Hess lists /ra/ as the 3PS present form of the copula (1968). Hess also finds that /d̥aŋga/ is the word for “big,” an adjective (1968). He elaborates that there is a –ɕ suffix which marks the quality verb type, with such meanings as “to be cold” (Hess, 1968). The adjective “cold” would thus be contained in this verb, though Mezquital Otomi also has a copula.

Gender/Person/Number Marking

The prefix ja- is the plural prefix that my speaker consistently used to translate plural nouns from Spanish to Otomi. This information agrees with that found by Hess (1968). For example, /jaɬeɖi/ is how my speaker pronounced “tamales” translated from Spanish. Heritage

speakers would be used to suffixes as plural markers, so they would have to learn to put this affix at the beginning of the noun.

My speaker could not recall a difference in Otomi between “he” and “she.” Thus /noni/ or /none/ must be the universal third person singular subject pronoun. This idea could pose difficulties for heritage speakers as they practice listening skills in Otomi. In Spanish, they can distinguish the gender of a person from the pronoun used, but in Otomi, the same pronoun can correspond to a male or female person as well as an inanimate noun. They might have to ask the gender of a person if they need to know it.

In Otomi, unlike in Spanish, pronouns and determiners come before proper nouns. In

| | | | | | | | |
|------|------|---------|-------|---------------|-------|-------|----------|
| 134. | noni | ra | ʃuxua | vihio | nojɔ | nju | jak'enja |
| | 3PS | DET.NOM | Juan | kill-3PS.PAST | ? | three | snake-PL |
| | de | mige | me | bui | haran | hwāhi | |
| | of | Miguel | ? | ? | the | field | |

“Juan killed Miguel’s three snakes, which were in the field.”

/noni ra/ might seem like extraneous information to learners of Otomi, who do not put determiners before proper nouns.

A quantifier seems obligatory before nouns such as “rice” and “water.” My speaker translated “We’re going to eat rice” (with no determiner in English or Spanish) as

| | | | | |
|-----|-------------|-------|------|------|
| 19. | maga | tsihu | da | ʔaro |
| | AUX-1PP.FUT | eat | some | rice |

“We’re going to eat rice.”

Similarly, “We’re going to drink water” became

| | | | |
|-------------|-------|------|-------|
| 20. maga | tsihu | da | dahe |
| AUX-3PP.FUT | drink | some | water |

“We’re going to drink water.”

/da/ is absent in sentences that use possessives, definite articles, or demonstratives. The one exception in my data is:

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------|----------|---------|
| 22. maga | tsihu | natuki | da dehe |
| AUX-1PP.FUT | eat/drink | a little | water |

“We’re going to drink a little water.”

/natuki da/ means “a little,” but more research would be necessary to determine other meanings of /natuki/ and /da/. Suffice to say that in my data, every noun must be preceded by a determiner.

Possession

Some possessive adjectives exist in Otomi. For example,

| | | | |
|----------|---------------|----|--------|
| 32. noni | vijo | ma | k’enja |
| 3PS | kill-3PS.PAST | my | snake |

“He killed my snake.”

Here, “ma” is “my.” /ri/ is “your” (second person singular), and /ra/ is the third person singular possessive. These possessive adjectives come before what is possessed, just like in Spanish.

Word order varies with how possession is expressed. When there is a possessive adjective, the determiner on the P comes before the possessive adjective, which is followed by the noun:

| | | | | |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|------|---------|
| 35. noni | vihio | no ^ʔ o | ri | k'en'ja |
| 3PS | kill-3PS.PAST | DET.ACC | your | snake |

“He killed your snake.”

When a sentence mentions the name of the person to whom the P belongs, the name is followed by the determiner, then the noun:

| | | | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------|--------|---------|--------|
| 36. no ore | ʃuvua | vihio | paφi | no ora | k'enja |
| DET.NOM | Juan | kill-3PS.PAST | Miguel | DET.ACC | snake |

“Juan killed Miguel’s snake.”

Syntax for possession can thus be characterized as: name of possessor (if applicable), determiner, possessive adjective (if applicable), noun (P). This pattern is the same as the one Hess describes (1968).

Tense/Aspect/Mode

Present

| | |
|-----|------------|
| 1PS | ði- or da- |
| 1PP | -e |
| 2PS | -ika |
| 3PS | -i |
| 3PP | -a |

An example follows:

11. nuga ðin^juni
 1SG eat-1SG.PRES
 “I eat.”

Here, the prefix ði- marks first person singular present tense. The next example shows the other prefix that marks the same person and tense:

59. noga dahoka jaṭeḍi mande
 1PS make-1PS.PAST tamale-PL yesterday
 I made tamales yesterday.

Past

- 1PS dai- or di-
 1PP ða- and -e
 2PS gai- or gra- (hoki)
 3PS bi-
 3PP vi- and –i

An example follows:

111. ðahohe jaṭeḍi mande
 make-1PP.PAST tamale-PL yesterday
 We made tamales yesterday.

The verb root for “make” is /hok/, which becomes /hoh/ here because /k/ is intervocalic. Both the prefix ða- and the suffix –e are added to mark first person plural past tense.

Future

| | |
|-----|--------------|
| 1PS | hamaga- |
| 1PP | maga- |
| 2PS | magi- |
| 3PS | mađa- and -i |
| 3PP | maga- and –a |

An example follows:

| | | | | |
|------|------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| 103. | noni | mađahoki | jaṭeḍi | ḥudi |
| | 3PS | make-3PS.FUT | tamale-PL | tomorrow |

She is going to make tamales tomorrow.

A prefix, mađa-, and suffix, -i, are both necessary to mark third person singular future tense.

Progressive Aspect

| | |
|-----|------------|
| 1PS | -i |
| 1PP | ḍi- and -e |
| 2PS | gi- |
| 3PS | bi- and -i |
| 3PP | vi- and –i |

An example follows:

| | | | | |
|-----|------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 57. | noga | dijoki | jaṭeḍi | nuvia |
| | 1PS | make-1PS.PRES-PROG | tamale-PL | right now |

I am making tamales right now.

Here, *di-* is the first person singular present tense prefix. The verb root for “make,” /*hok/*, is /*jok/* intervocalically. *-i* is the first person singular progressive suffix.

Negation

In general, the negative particle for Mezquital Otomi is /*hin/*. It comes before the verb, after the subject if one is specified, i.e. by a pronoun. For instance,

119. *nuga hin dahoka jaṭeḍi*
1PS NEG make-1PS.PAST tamale-PL

“I didn’t make tamales.”

This account agrees with Hess’ (1968). Please see the Phonology section for further discussion of how this negative particle can be pronounced.

The particle /*o/* negates imperative sentences. For example,

53. *o gi niune*
NEG 2PS eat-2PS

“Don’t eat!”

This discovery agrees with that found by Hess (1968).

There might be other ways to negate other types of sentences, however. For example,

48. *no^ʔo ma ḍaḍa inʃanoho*
DET my dad not-be-fat-3PS.PRES

“My dad is not fat.”

Here, the verb negates the sentence. /*in/* is not the negative particle here because the 3PS present form of the verb “be fat” is /*ʃidanoho/*. I did not gather enough data to determine whether this claim is true for any adjectival verb, and Hess does not list any way other than /*hin/* (1968) to

signal negation—even for adjectival verbs. It is possible that /ʃidanoho/ in rapid speech sounds like /ʃanoho/. Without more data, I could not determine whether there was a negative particle and then an adjectival verb, or a different adjectival verb that marks negation.

Questions

Question words in Otomi follow:

| | |
|-------|-------|
| when | ham ã |
| who | toʔo |
| where | hawo |
| what | te |
| why | haŋka |
| how | haŋka |

Each question word comes first in the sentence. For example,

| | | |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| 86. ham ã | magihoki | jaṭeḍi |
| when | make-2PS.FUT | tamale-PL |

“When are you going to make tamales?”

This rule applies to all sentences with question words, regardless of which question word is used.

The same rule exists in Spanish.

Yes-no questions in Otomi use the same word order and morphemes as statements. For example, the statement

| | | | |
|----------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| 64. noʔe | mai hoka | jaṭeḍi | ʃodi |
| 2PS | make-2PS.FUT | tamale-PL | tomorrow |

“You are going to make tamales tomorrow.”

is the same in that regard as the question

124. magihoka jaṭeḍi
make-2PS.FUT tamale-PL

“Are you going to make tamales?”

Hess contends that /ha/ is the question particle, coming at the beginning of each sentence (1968).

However, my speaker did not include any such particles when she translated yes-no questions.

Negative questions are formed with the negative particle first, then the verb, and then the object. For instance,

121. hin gahoka jaṭeḍi
NEG make-2PS.PAST tamale-PL

“Didn’t you make tamales?”

Rising intonation at the end of an utterance signals a question.

Relative Clauses

Like Spanish and English, relative clause markers are optional. In Spanish, “The woman who ate the chicken is sleeping” would translate thus:

la muher ke komio el pojo
ART-DEF woman REL eat-3PS.PAST ART-DEF chicken

esta durmiendo

sleep-3PS.PRES-PROG

“The woman who ate the chicken is sleeping.”

Although the words here are different from English, the grammar is the same. In Otomi, one of my speakers translated the same sentence as:

38. noʔara ben² ʔa bizira oni ja bin¹oho
 DET woman eat-3PS.PAST chicken sleep-3PS.PRES-PROG

“The woman who ate the chicken is sleeping.”

There is no relativizer such as “who,” like in English, or /ke/, like in Spanish. However, the same speaker translated the following sentences thus:

96. none era ɔame ʃi dihi du:nti ra doŋgi
 3PS the man REL run-3PS.PRES a lot be-3PS.PRES big

“The man who runs a lot is big.”

Here, /ʃi/ is the relativizer. In each type of relative clause, the relative clause follows its head.

Causatives

In Spanish, there are two basic types of indirect causatives and one direct causative.

These are the only types of sentences that I asked my speaker to translate.

Indirect causatives:

Weakest-

50. ma nana bihokagi ga nione
 my mom let-3PS.PAST me eat

“My mom let me eat.”

Strongest-

51. ma nana bimaʃkagi ga nione
 my mom help-3PS.PAST me eat

“My mom helped me eat.”

In English, “My mom had me eat” would be the strongest. There is no exact equivalent of that in Spanish, though, so I only asked my speaker about these two.

Direct causative:

| | | | | | | |
|-----|----|------|---------------|----|-------|---------|
| 52. | ma | nana | bijēna | ge | pɛtsi | ganione |
| | my | mom | make-3PS.PAST | me | OBLG | eat |

“My mom made me eat.”

As my speaker explained, when the particle /pɛtsi/ is used, it means something is almost obligatory.

Imperatives

One way to say an imperative sentence in Otomi is to use just the simple form of the verb. The translation for “eat!” follows:

| | |
|-----|---------|
| 54. | niune |
| | eat-2PS |
| | “Eat!” |

There is a stronger version, with the particle /pɛtsi/, which my speaker said makes a command almost obligatory:

| | | | |
|-----|--------------------|-----|-------|
| 55. | pɛtsi | gi | nione |
| | OBLG | 2PS | eat |
| | “You have to eat!” | | |

As described in the Negation section, /o/ negates an imperative sentence.

Borrowed Words from Spanish in Otomi

Native speakers of Spanish will recognize some borrowed grammatical words in Otomi. For example, the Otomi word for the verb “cook” is /pa.raginione/. “Eat” is /ginione/, and “para” means “for” in Spanish. Hence “cook” is “for eat.” Also, Spanish speakers often use “para” to mean “to,” as in “Voy para allí” for “I’m going there.” “Home” as an adverb is /pa.rangu/ in Otomi, with /ngu/ meaning “house.” This preposition must have been borrowed from Spanish into Otomi, and pointing out that relationship would help Spanish speakers remember that aspect of their new language.

Conclusion

Mezquital Otomi is a unique language that has also had much contact with Spanish. Its grammar and phonology thus have much in common with those in Spanish, yet heritage speakers would have many new concepts to learn. I hope that this paper, and the accompanying DVD, bring more pride to the Otomi people. They were oppressed for centuries by the Spanish, and before that, the Aztecs (Hekking and Bakker, 2007). When the Spanish arrived, they asked the Aztecs for an account of the Otomi, and thus concluded that the Otomi were coarse and unskillful (ed. Matras and Sakel, 2007). Today, in Mexico, the Otomi are poor, and live off the land. One of my speakers told me she never went to school growing up—in any language, which would make it very difficult for her to document Mezquital Otomi or elevate the status of the culture.

Children of immigrants who were able to come to the United States have a much higher quality of life than their forebears. My speaker seemed sad and dismissive when she described life in Mexico, but lit up when she made tamales. She said cooking them makes her like Otomi. I hope that heritage learners of Otomi feel that way about the video I made. Additionally, perhaps an academic portrayal of an Otomian language would be a more accurate representation of the Otomi than the pejorative ones from the past. It seems that any interest they have in their ancestors' language can only be good for their people. I made my video and wrote this paper with a social justice motivation.

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Appendix A: Gloss

1. magi njune
AUX-2S.FUT eat
“You’re going to eat.”
2. magi nione
AUX-2S.FUT eat
“You’re going to eat.”
3. mavIn tsiθe
AUX-2S.FUT eat/drink
“You’re going to drink.”
4. magI ōhō
AUX-2S.FUT go to bed
“You’re going to go to bed.”
5. magi nangi
AUX-2S.FUT get up
“You’re going to get up.”
6. ʃan^hũ: ma n^ho
hurt.PRES my head
“I have a headache.”
7. ʃen^ho ma wa
hurt.PRES my feet
“My feet hurt.”
8. ʃen^ho me gu

hurt.PRES my ear

“My ear hurts.”

9. ʃan^ĩõ di ʃin^ĩo

hurt.PRES your nose

“Your nose hurts.”

10. te magi pefi

what AUX-2S.FUT do

“What are you going to do?”

11. nuga ðin^ĩuni

1SG eat-1SG

“I eat.”

12. nuga hamagan^ĩuni

1PS eat-1PS.FUT

“I’m going to eat.”

13. nuga dain^ĩo:ni

1PS eat-1PS.PAST

“I ate.”

14. nu^ʔi gain^ĩuni

2SG eat-2SG.PAST

“You ate.”

15. nũnĩ bin^ĩũnĩ

3PS eat-3PS.PAST

“He ate.”

16. ja gain^loni
 already eat-2PS.PAST
 “Did she eat?”
17. nuni ja bIn^loni
 3PS already eat-3PS.PAST
 “She ate.”
18. nōnē bin^lūnī
 3PS eat-3PS.PAST
 “Did he eat?”
19. maga tsihu da ʔaro
 AUX-1PP.FUT eat some rice
 “We’re going to eat rice.”
20. maga tsihu da dahe
 AUX-1PP.FUT eat/drink some water
 “We’re going to drink water.”
21. maga tsihu natuki da dehe
 AUX-1PP.FUT eat/drink a little water
 “We’re going to drink a little water.”
22. noʔe magi tsinona dehe novua
 2PS AUX-2PS.FUT drink water PROX
 “You’re going to drink this water right here.”
23. noʔe magi tsinona dehe bixa:ni
 2PS AUX-2PS.FUT eat/drink water DIST

“You’re going to drink that water there.”

24. noʔe magi tsinona dehe bihanijabu
2PS AUX-2PS.FUT drink water VERY DIST

“You’re going to drink that water over there.”

25. none la rana ʃəngami
3PS the frog be-green-3PS.PRES

“The frog is green.”

26. nuga dra n'on'ò
1PS be-1PS.PRES Otomi

“I am Otomi.”

27. noni bin'u kagiga n'on'ò
3PS ? ? Otomi

She taught me Otomi.

28. noga θaʔontwaʔida n'on'ò
1PS ? ? ? Otomi

I taught her to speak Otomi.

29. noni vijo nju jak'enja dongi
3PS kill-3PS.PAST three snake-PL big-PL

He killed three big snakes.

30. noni vijo na donga k'enja
3PS kill-3PS.PAST one big-SG snake

He killed one big snake.

31. noni vijo ra k'enja

3PS kill-3PS.PAST his snake

He killed his snake.

32. noni vijo ma k'enja

3PS kill-3PS.PAST my snake

He killed my snake.

33. noʔora ben^ʔia jabinⁱoho

DET.NOM woman sleep-3PS.PRES.PROG

The woman is sleeping.

34. noʔora ben^ʔia obizi ra uni

DET.NOM woman eat-3PS.PAST DET.ACC chicken

The woman ate the chicken.

35. noni vihio no^ʔo ri k'en'ja

3PS kill-3PS.PAST DET.ACC your-SG snake

He killed your snake.

36. no ore ʃuvua vihio paʔi no ora k'enja

DET.NOM Juan kill-3PS.PAST Miguel DET.ACC snake

Juan killed Miguel's snake.

37. no ora ʃuvua vihio kagihu mazi k'enjahu

DET.NOM Juan kill-3PS.PAST ? ? ?

Juan killed our snake.

38. noʔara ben^ʔia bizira uni ja binⁱoho

DET.NOM woman eat-3PS.PAST chicken now sleep-3PS.PRES.PROG

The woman who ate the chicken is sleeping.

39. noni viho nou jaṭeḍi vihioki noni

3PS like-3PS.PAST REL tamale-PL make-3PS.PAST 3PS

He liked the tamales that she made.

40. noni vivi jatedi vihioke noni

3PS eat-3PS.PAST tamale-PL make-3PS.PAST 3PS

He ate the tamales that she made.

41. gi tihi du:nti

2PS run-2PS.PRES a lot.

You run a lot.

42. no ran tʃutsi vinio tsi jaṭeḍi pa rangu

DET.NOM girl ? ? tamale-PL home

The girl took the tamales home.

43. no ran tʃutsi bijandi era metsi

DET.NOM girl see-3PS.PAST DET.ACC boy

The girl saw the boy.

44. no ran metsi bijandi era tʃutsi

DET.NOM boy see-3PS.PAST DET.ACC girl

The boy saw the girl.

45. nu raŋ hwa ra doŋgi

DET.NOM fish is big-SG

The fish is big.

46. nu raŋ hwa ra ōki

DET.NOM fish is small-SG

The fish is small.

47. no ma ḏaḏa ʃidanoho
DET.NOM my dad be-fat-3PS.PRES

My dad is very fat.

48. no^ʔo ma ḏaḏa inʃanoho
DET.NOM my dad not-be-fat-3PS.PRES

My dad is not fat.

49. no^ʔo ra wã iŋ ra doŋgi
DET.NOM be-3PS.PRES fish NEG be-3PS.PRES big-SG

The fish is not big.

50. ma nana bihokagi ga nione
my mom let-3PS.PAST me eat

My mom let me eat.

51. ma nana bimaʃkagi ga nione
my mom help-3PS.PAST me eat

My mom helped me eat.

52. ma nana bijēna ge pɛtsi ganione
my mom ? me make-3PS.PAST eat

My mom made me eat.

53. o gi niune
NEG 2PS eat-2PS

Don't eat!

54. niune

eat-2PS

Eat!

55. pɛtsi gi nione

OBLG 2PS eat

You have to eat!

56. noga ðihoka jaɽɛɽi hjasto

1PS make-1PS.PRES tamale-PL daily

I make tamales every day.

57. noga dijoki jaɽɛɽi nuvia

1PS make-1PS.PRES-PROG tamale-PL right now

I am making tamales right now.

58. noga mavahoki jaɽɛɽi ʃudi

1PS make-1PS.FUT tamale-PL tomorrow

I'm going to make tamales tomorrow.

59. noga dahoka jaɽɛɽi mande

1PS make-1PS.PAST tamale-PL yesterday

I made tamales yesterday.

60. noga ndihoga jaɽɛɽi nujujaheja biθogi

1PS make-1PS.IMPF tamale-PL in past years

I used to make tamales in past years.

61. seria gaθo no^ʔũ jaheja ʃan^lepu magahoki jaɽɛɽi

? ? 1PS years ? make-1PS-PRES.PROG tamale-PL

In years, I will make (be making) tamales every once in a while.

62. noʔe hokika jaṭeḍi hjasto
 2PS make-2PS.PRES tamale-PL every day
 You make tamales every day.
63. noʔe gihoki jaṭeḍi nuvia
 2PS make-2PS.PRES-PROG tamale-PL right now
 You are making tamales right now.
64. noʔe maihoka jaṭeḍi ʃodi
 2PS make-2PS.PRES-PROG tamale-PL tomorrow
 You are going to make tamales tomorrow.
65. noʔe grahoki jaṭeḍi mande
 2PS make-2PS.PAST tamale-PL yesterday
 You made tamales yesterday.
66. noʔi magisige ihoki bihoka jaṭeḍi nandio
 2PS make-2PS.PAST-PROG tamale-PL in past years
 You used to make tamales in past years.
67. nuga dahoka jaṭeḍi fono a ra huni dega deθã
 1PS make-1PS.PAST tamale-PL ? ?? ? ? ?
 I made tamales with corn flour.
68. noga ga onbabi jaṭeḍi noũ no ma haʔi
 1PS ? give-1PS.PRES tamale-PL to ? my people
 I give tamales to my people.
69. noni larana ʃirʌngʔami

3PS frog be very-3PS.PRES green

The frog is green.

70. ra dehe ʃatse

DET.NOM water be cold-3PS.PRES cold

The water is cold.

71. ra dehe ʃʌng²ami

DET.NOM water be green-3PS.PRES

The water is green.

72. ra dehe ʃirʌng²ami

DET.NOM water be very-3PS.PRES green

The water is very green.

73. ʃirʌtse ra dehe

be very cold-3PS.PRES DET.NOM water

The water is very cold.

74. nuga ðahoki ku ra n¹i nera ðentʃi

1PS cook-1PS.PAST with DET.ACC chiles and onions

I cooked with chiles and onions.

75. noni vihio na ra k'enja ko n²a ra za

3PS kill-3PS.PAST one DET.ACC snake with one DET stick

He killed the snake with a stick.

76. ðahoki noju jaṭeḍi ko ra ge:ʃo

make-1PS.PAST 3PP tamale-PL with DET.ACC cheese

I made tamales with cheese.

77. noni biunβaβi jaṭeḍi nojo jantʃutsi
 3PS give-3PS.PAST tamale-PL to girl-PL
 She gave tamales to the girls.
78. nuni birakagi du:nti jaṭeḍi
 3PS give-3PS.PAST me many tamale-PL
 He gave me many tamales.
79. noga di[?]onbaβi joho jaṭeḍi noni hjasto
 1PS give-3PS.PAST her ? tamale-PL 3PS every day
 I give her tamales every day.
80. noga di[?]onbaβi joho jaṭeḍi hjasto noni
 1PS give-1PS.PRES her ? tamale-PL every day 3PS
 I give her tamales every day.
81. noga ḍahots'i du:nti jaṭeḍi para ma ngu
 1PS take-1PS.PAST many tamale-PL to my house
 I took the tamales home.
82. noga ḍatsi ra dehe miha hara meʃa
 1PS drink-1PS.PAST DET.ACC water be-3PS.PAST on table
 I drank the water that was on the table.
83. ma ngu ra doṅgi
 my house be-3PS.PRES big
 My house is big.
84. ran hwa ra doṅgi
 DET fish be-3PS.PRES big

The fish is big.

85. nojʊ jangu ja doŋgi

? house-PL be-3PP.PRES big

The houses are big.

86. hamõ magihoki jaṭeḍi

when make-2PS.FUT tamale-PL

When are you going to make tamales?

87. hamõ none maḍahjoki jaṭeḍi

when 3PS make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL

When is she going to make tamales?

88. toʔo maḍahjoki jaṭeḍi

who make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL

Who is going to make tamales?

89. toʔo maḍahjoka jaṭeḍi

who make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL

Who is going to make tamales?

90. toʔo vihi oʔa k'enja

who kill-3PS.PAST DET.ACC snake

Who killed the snake?

91. hawʊ magihjoki jaṭeḍi

where make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL

Where are you going to make tamales?

92. hawʊ magihjoka jaṭeḍi

where make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL

Where are you going to make tamales?

93. te magihoki bia paraginione

what make-2PS.FUT ? cook

What are you going to cook?

94. te maðahjoki bia paraginione

what make-3PS.FUT ? cook

What is she going to cook?

95. era ðame tihi du:nti

DET man run-3PS.PRES a lot

The man runs a lot.

96. none era ðame fi dihi du:nti era dongi

3PS the man REL run-3PS.PRES a lot be-3PS.PRES big

The man who runs a lot is big.

97. none era ðame fi dihi du:nti ra dongi

3PS the man REL run-3PS.PRES a lot be-3PS.PRES big

The man who runs a lot is big.

98. no[?]ora fuvua vinjo ku ra nana

DET.NOM Juan talk-3PS.PAST with his mom

Juan talked with his mom.

99. jantfutsi jani ku jaku

girl-PL play-3PP.PRES with sibling-PL

The girls play with their sisters.

100. jantʃutsi njeni ku noju jaku
 girl-PL play-3PP.PRES with 3PP sibling-PL
 The girls play with their sisters.
101. noni hoki jaṭeḍi hjasto
 3PS make-3PS.PRES tamale-PL every day
 She makes tamales every day.
102. none bihoki jaṭeḍi nuvia
 3PS make-3PS.PRES.PROG tamale-PL right now
 She is making tamales now.
103. noni maḍahoki jaṭeḍi ʃudi
 3PS make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL tomorrow
 She is going to make tamales tomorrow.
104. noni vihioki jaṭeḍi mande
 3PS make-3PS.PAST tamale-PL yesterday
 She made tamales yesterday.
105. noni mihoki jaṭeḍi mameḍo
 3PS make-3PS.PAST.IMPF tamale-PL in the past
 She used to make tamales in the past.
106. noni maḍahjoki jaṭeḍi nojo jaheja ʃenjepu
 3PS make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL ? ? ?
 She will make tamales in coming years.
107. noni ra ben'ia biunbi nujo jaṭeḍi
 3PS DET.NOM woman give-3PS.PAST to tamale-PL 3PS

noni era dame bihio na ra k'enja

3PS DET.ACC man kill-3PS.PAST one DET.ACC snake

The woman gave the tamales to the man who killed the snake.

108. ðihoke jaṭeḍi hjasto

make-1PP.PRES tamale-PL every day

We make tamales every day.

109. ðihohe jaṭeḍi nuβia

make-1PP.PRES.PROG tamale-PL right now

We are making tamales right now.

110. magahohe jaṭeḍi ſuḍi

make-1PP.FUT tamale-PL tomorrow

We are going to make tamales tomorrow.

111. ðahohe jaṭeḍi mande

make-1PP.PAST tamale-PL yesterday

We made tamales yesterday.

112. ḍihohe jaṭeḍi nuʔujahejabiθogi

make-1PP.PAST.IMPF tamale-PL in past years

We used to make tamales in past years.

113. nujo hoka jaṭeḍi hjasto

3PP make-3PP.PRES tamale-PL every day

They make tamales every day.

114. nujo vihoki jaṭeḍi nuvia

3PP make-3PP.PRES.PROG tamale-PL right now

They are making tamales right now.

115. nuʝo magahjoka jaṭeḍi ʃoḍi
3PP make-3PP.FUT tamale-PL tomorrow
They are going to make tamales tomorrow.

116. vihjoki jaṭeḍi mande
make-3PP.PAST tamale-PL yesterday
They made tamales yesterday.

117. mihoka jaṭeḍi nuʔujahejabiθgi
make-3PP.PAST.IMPF tamale-PL in past years
They used to make tamales in past years.

118. maḍahjo nju jak'enja
kill-3PS.PRES.PROG three snake-PL
He is killing three snakes.

119. nuga hin dahoka jaṭeḍi
1PS NEG make-1PS.PAST tamale-PL
I didn't make tamales.

120. nunka ḍihoki jaṭeḍi
never make-1PS.PRES tamale-PL
I never make tamales.

121. hin ga hoka jaṭeḍi
NEG you make-2PS.PRES tamale-PL
Didn't you make tamales?

122. iŋ gatsi jaṭeḍi

- NEG ? tamale-PL
 Didn't you eat tamales?
123. magi hoki tegitsi
 AUX-2PS.FUT make-2PS food for yourself
 Are you going to make food for yourself?
124. magi hoka jaṭeḍi
 AUX-2PS.FUT make-2PS tamale-PL
 Are you going to make tamales?
125. nuni maḍa hjoki jaṭeḍi
 3PS AUX-3PS.FUT make-3PS.FUT tamale-PL
 Is she going to make tamales?
126. nune viʔoho
 3PS sleep-3PS.PRES.PROG
 He/she is sleeping.
127. haṅka magi hoki jaṭeḍi
 how AUX-2PS.FUT make-2PS tamale-PL
 How are you going to make tamales?
128. haṅka magi hoki jaṭeḍi
 why AUX-2PS.FUT make-2PS tamale-PL
 Why are you going to make tamales?
129. nora dehe miha har meʃa
 DET.NOM water be-3PS.PAST on table
 The water was on the table.

130. *nora dehe xa hara meʃa*
 DET.NOM water be-3PS.PRES on table
 The water is on the table.
131. *gaho ora dehe*
 like-3PS.PAST DET.ACC water
 He/she liked the water.
132. *gaho jaṭeḍi*
 like-3PS.PAST tamale-PL
 He liked the tamales.
133. *biho noʔora dehe miha hara meʃa*
 like-3PS.PAST DET.ACC water be-3PS.PAST on table
 He liked the water that was on the table.
134. *noni ra ʃuxua vihio nojʊ nju jak'enja de mige*
 3PS DET.NOM Juan kill-3PS.PAST ? three snake-PL of Miguel
me bui haran hw ãhi
 ? ? in the field
 Juan killed Miguel's three big snakes, which were in the field.
135. *te gihogi hoki*
 what ? do
 What do you like to do?
136. *te ra ve ʔa gihoki*
 what ? ? ? do-2PS.PRES.PROG
 What are you doing?

Appendix B: Lexicon

Adjectives

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| n ¹ on ¹ o | Otomi |
| doŋg- | big |
| ok- | small |
| k'a ² mi | green |
| tse | cold |

Adverbs

| | |
|--------|-------|
| du:nti | a lot |
|--------|-------|

Affixes

| | |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| ja- | plural prefix |
| -a | singular suffix on adjectives |
| -i | plural suffix on adjectives |

Determiners

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| no [?] ora | nominative |
| no [?] an | nominative |
| nuraŋ | nominative |
| no, no [?] o | nominative |
| ran | accusative |

ra accusative

era accusative

Demonstratives

tsinona prenominal demonstrative

noyua proximal (postnominal)

bixa:ni distal (postnominal)

bihanijabu very distal (postnominal)

Nouns

Mexico monda

Actopan ma²n¹ut'e

Pachuca n¹onte

city nēine

tamales tedi

mother/mom nana

father/dad ðaða

water dehe

rice aro

frog rana

snake k'enja

dog sad'jo

cat mi,fi

| | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| mouse | doŋgu |
| sheep | ɖe:ti |
| goat | jo |
| coyote | mi [?] n ^j o |
| calf | terne ro |
| horse | ɸani |
| rabbit | anɣua |
| snake | k'en ^j a |
| rooster | menɣa |
| chicken/hen | ɔni |
| pig | ts'ɣɖi |
| donkey | buro |
| frog | rana |
| corn | dεɣa |
| bean | hɣ |
| seed | semija |
| animals | bon'e |
| fly | gin'ue |
| bird | ts'ɪnts'ɣ |
| skirt | gɣ ɖe |
| sandal | z εsti |
| blankets | tɛu ʃos |

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| blanket | tɛu ʃo |
| shirt | pani |
| shirts | pani |
| stones | do |
| bank (of a river) | tunĩ |
| tortillas | mɛ |
| bread | tuo mɛ |
| pulque/maguey | hoadá |
| water | dehe |
| head | n'amĩõ |
| mouth | nɛ |
| throat | juga |
| fingers | saha |
| feet | vua |
| ear | gu |
| hand | ʃɛ |
| earrings | ts'ɪngu |
| nose | ʃin'õ |
| eye | ɖa |
| hair | stõ |
| chile | n'i |
| red chile | tangan'e |

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| napkins | maʒume |
| night | ntʃue |
| store | denda |
| table | meʃa |
| cheese | geʃo |
| Juan | ʃuɣua |
| Miguel | paɸi |
| boy | metsi |
| girl | tʃutsi |
| fish | hwa |
| people | haʔi |
| stick | za |
| house | ngu |
| sibling | ku |
| alcohol | refino |
| grandmother | ʒuʒu |
| grandfather | ʃiṭa |
| bicycle | bisikleta |

Possessives

| | |
|------|----|
| my | ma |
| your | ri |

| | |
|-------|----------|
| his | ra |
| our | mametiho |
| their | no ri |

Prepositions

| | |
|------|------|
| with | ku |
| to | nujo |
| on | har |

Pronouns

| | |
|--------|------|
| I | nuga |
| you | no?e |
| he/she | noni |
| we | noje |
| they | nujo |

Quantifiers

| | |
|----------|--------|
| one | na |
| three | nju |
| some | da |
| a little | natuki |

Question Words

| | |
|-------|-------|
| what | te |
| when | ham õ |
| who | to?o |
| where | hawu |
| how | haŋka |
| why | haŋka |

Time Adverbs

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| every day | hjasto |
| right now | nuvia |
| tomorrow | ʃudi |
| yesterday | mande |
| in past years | nujujaheja biθogi |
| every once in a while ? | |

Verb Roots

| | |
|--------|---------------------|
| eat | -n ⁱ uni |
| drink | tsi- |
| kill | vihio, vijo |
| get up | nangi |
| make | -hok- |

Verb Affixes

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| hamaga- | 1PS future prefix |
| da- | 1PS past prefix |
| ǫi-, ǫi- | 1PS present prefix |
| magi-, mavi- | 2PS future auxiliary |
| da-, dai- (#13) | 1PS past prefix |
| ga-, gai- (#14) | 2PS past prefix |
| bi- | 3PS past prefix |
| mada- | 3PS future auxiliary |
| -i | progressive suffix |
| -a | suffix for simple aspect |

Greetings

| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| good morning | ke atʃa ual |
| good afternoon | ki ve |
| good night | tʃue |