

# Article-Proper Name compatibility throughout Mesoamerica: an areal-typological account

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The talk investigates the patterns that arise when we compare the presence/absence as well as the distribution of (so-called) articles in combination with common nouns and proper names in forty-two indigenous languages of Mexico covered by the *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México*. Table 1 reveals that of four logically possible combinations only three are represented in my sample. The grey shaded cell is of special interest for the talk.

Table 1: Attested combinations			proper name	
			article	
			no	yes
common noun	article	yes	Nahuátl (2)	<b>Tepehua (3)</b>
		no	Trique (1)	not attested

The empirical gap creates a situation in which the unidirectional implication seems to hold that proper names take an article only if the same applies to common nouns whereas the latter may boast a definite article independently of the presence/absence of a proprial article in the same language. I illustrate the patterns identified in Table 1 with the sample sentences #184 (= (a)-sentence translating Spanish *El niño se durmió* ‘The child fell asleep’) and #148 (= (b)-sentence translating Spanish *María es mujer* ‘María is a woman’) of the *Archivo*.

(1) Trique [Oto-Manguan, Oaxaca]

(a) common noun without article (Hollenbach/Hollenbach 1975: 91)

*Gotoh*<sup>34</sup> Ø *žini*<sup>3</sup> *âh*  
fall\_asleep Ø child DECL

(b) proper name without article (Hollenbach/Hollenbach 1975: 86)

*Ža*<sup>3</sup>*nq*<sup>5</sup> *mę*<sup>3</sup> Ø *maryq*<sup>32</sup> *âh*  
woman COP Ø María DECL

(2) Nahuatl [Uto-Aztecan, Hidalgo]

(a) common noun with article (Lastra de Suárez 1980: 71)

*In* *kone-λ* *o-koč*  
DEF child-ABS PST-sleep.PF

(b) proper name without article (Lastra de Suárez 1980: 65)

Ø *María* *siwa:-λ*  
Ø María woman-ABS

(3) Tepehua [Tepehuan, Veracruz]

(a) common noun with article (Mackay/Trechsel 2010: 175)

*An* *jas*<sup>?</sup>*á*<sup>?</sup>*da* *lhtátalh*  
DEF child sleep:PFV

(b) proper name with article (Mackay/Trechsel 2010: 165)

*An* *Malía* *dakú*<sup>?</sup>  
DEF María woman

The supposed dependence of the proprial article on the common article does not mean that all sample languages that allow for the co-occurrence of proper names and a determiner that the latter is identical to the definite article employed for common nouns as in (3a-b). As transpires from (4), the common article and the proprial article can have different forms.

(4) Huasteco [Mayan, Veracruz]

(a) common noun with article (Meléndez Guadarrama 2017: 102)

*ʔan* *ʔakam* *wajitʔ*  
DEF child sleep:CMPL

(b) proper name with article (Meléndez Guadarrama 2017: 96)

*Na* *María* *ʔi* *ʔuʃum*  
PROP María INDEF woman

The talk surveys the distribution of these patterns across the sample languages by way of determining what factors favour the overuse of the common article with proper names as in (3) as opposed to the co-existence of distinct determiners for common nouns and proper names. The question is raised whether the determiners that accompany proper names fall under the rubric of articles or are onymic markers. To this end the data are analysed synchronically in accordance with the principles of functional typology. The results are compared to selected cases from outside Mexico.

### **Abbreviations**

ABS = absolutive, CMPL = completive, COP = copula, DECL = declarative, INDEF = indefinite, PF = perfect, PFV = perfective, PROP = proprial article, PST = past

### **References**

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