

Nouns and demonstratives of Otomi

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This presentation derives from a larger project that consisted of the documentation of local geography and life memories in Otomi (ISO 639-3 ott), a native Mexican language. The goal of this research is to encourage the study of language through documentation of community knowledge and the creation of written material. The anecdotes took place in the early 70's and were collected during the Winter 2022 in the municipality of Temoaya, State of Mexico. The methods used to collect the data were (1) interviews, to get to know more about the speakers' everyday life. (2) Field walks (Cruz, E., 2017) in places that are important for the community members such as mountains, spring water, wells, and corn plantations. (3) Description of different areas through pictures and recordings of non-easy access locations. This was a very effective technique to collect data from old or sick speakers who cannot move easily but whose memories are vivid.

The anecdotes contain elders' wisdom related to geography, such as Otomi toponyms and the stories behind them. The narratives were recorded from 14 adult Temoaya Otomi speakers, then transcribed, and analyzed in Otomi. Finally, they were translated to English and Spanish resulting in a digital collection (See Image 1), accessible to anyone interested in the language and culture.



Image 1. Digital collection of Living memories

The material collected contains meaningful data that allows a detailed analysis of the noun system. So, in this talk I will discuss some of the properties identified at the NP level that are shared by proper nouns such as demonstratives, diminutives, honorifics and bare forms.

In Otomi, there are simple and complex demonstratives. In Table 1 we can see that simple demonstratives precede proper nouns as in (1a) & (1b), and common nouns as in (2a) & (2b). These demonstratives mark for proximity, number and definiteness.

Table 1 Definite demonstratives

	+PROX		+DIST
SG	nu		ka
(1a)	(A) To xiphi <u>nu</u> Xua to ʃiphi nɾ ʃua 1SG.PST say DEM.SG.PROX John <i>I told John</i>	(1b)	To kǎjti ka Xua mande to-kǎhti ka ʃua mande 1SG.PST-see DEM.SG.DIST John ADV <i>I saw John yesterday</i>
PL	yu		ku
(2a)	Bi tsi <u>yu</u> bahtsi ra mihkwa bi tsi yɾ bahtsi ra-mih-kwa 1SG.PST say DEM.PL.PROX children 3PL.PRS-sit-LOC <i>The children that are sitting here ate</i>	(2b)	Bi maphi <u>ku</u> wene bi-maphi kɾ wene 1SG.PST-scream DEM.PL.DIST baby <i>The babies screamed</i>

In table 1, *nu*, the singular proximal demonstrative, implies that the listener not only knows *Xua* (1a) but is somehow looking at him. In case *Xua* was not present, the demonstrative used would be the distant singular demonstrative *ka* as in (1b). The same applies whether the entity is a proper, common, mass, or countable noun. In both cases, whether the speaker uses *nu* or *ka*, it is implied that the listener knows the entity being mentioned. If the speaker was talking about a random *Xua*, out of many *Xuas* that exist in the world of the speaker, the demonstrative used would be the indefinite singular form *na* ‘one’.

Complex demonstratives are formed by two simple demonstratives such as in example (3) and (4).

(3)

nu-ku tsi khani bi-ntiji bi-ma
nɾ-kɾ tsi kʰāni bi-ntihi bi-ma
DEM.SG-PL. HONOR. people 3PL.PST-hurry up 3PL.PST-go
and the dear people hurry up to leave

(4)

nu-guegue bi-doi
nɾ-gege bi-doi
DEM.SG-3SG 3SG.PST.buy
he bought it

These complex demonstratives can precede proper nouns, with an emphatic function.

Finally, Otomi nouns are preceded by a demonstrative, including proper nouns, and few can be bare. Documented proper nouns include personal people’s name, toponyms and demonyms.

REFERENCES

Cruz, E. (2017) *Documenting Landscape Knowledge in Eastern Chatino: Narratives of Fieldwork in San Juan Quiahije*. *Anthropological Linguistics*, Volume 59, Number 2, Summer 2017, pp. 205-231. University of Nebraska Press.