

## **Verb morphology of Ixtenco Otomí**

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Ixtenco is a small town in Tlaxcala where Otomí has been preserved in spite of the pressure from Nahuatl speaker who displaced Otomís from other towns such as Huamantla and in spite of the pressure of Spanish. The disappearance of Ixtenco Otomí will no doubt occur, however, because only older persons speak it and for some time it has not been transmitted to the younger generations. People 40 or younger may only have a passive knowledge of the language.

The present paper is based on field work carried out intermittently in one-day trips undertaken in September 1990 and resumed in February 1991. The informants have been two men and three women, but the main informant has been David Alonso, 85 who immensely enjoys teaching his language making it a pleasure to try to understand its structure.

Here we will deal with the main features of verbal morphology and compare some of the characteristics of the Ixtenco system with Classical Otomí and with the present-day varieties of Toluca and Hidalgo highlands. In the rest of this paper I will refer to the latter one as Hidalgo Otomí.

In contrast to these varieties of Otomí, the Ixtenco dialect has lost the dual; the suffixes that signal the dual in the other varieties are used for plural here. The suffixes for plural in the other varieties are still recognized as a sort of plural of abundance, but they are no longer used.

There are 10 tense aspects not counting the imperative. There are: present, preterit, imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, future, subjunctive, irrealis, present continuative and imperfect continuative. The pluperfect, however is very hard to elicit and does not seem to occur with every verb. Tense-aspects is signaled by prefixes, one for each of the three persons; the number of the first and second persons, is marked by prefixes. Distinction is made between exclusive and inclusive. We will exemplify all this with the paradigm for the preterite of the verb meaning ‘to call’.

<b>dΛ-matΛ-gá</b>	<b>dΛ-matΛ-gá-mé</b> (excl.)
	<b>dΛ-matΛ-wí</b> (incl.)
<b>gΛ-matí</b>	<b>gΛ-matΛ-wí</b>
<b>bi-matí</b>	<b>bi-matí-ø</b>

You may have noticed that there is also a suffix -gá in the first person singular and in the plural exclusive, but not in the inclusive. This is not optional. In other Otomí dialects there is a set of emphatic suffixes, one for each person as in Hidalgo Otomí: -gɔ first person, -ge second person, -ʔa third person singular and ʔi third person plural. But in Ixtenco there are no emphatic suffixes for the second and third persons, and gá (or its allomorph -ká) is really a required feature of the first person. As a matter of fact, the first person singular prefix is sometimes omitted but the suffix never is. The form -ká is added to stems where the second consonant of the base form (the stem as it appears in the second person or in the imperative) is a fricative, or a voiced stop or else where the vowel i occurs. -gá occurs elsewhere, that is to say with voiceless stops, nasal or a nasal plus a voiced stop. It also occurs after one syllable stems. If -ká occurs the second syllable of the base is dropped and -káis added. If -gá occurs it is simply added the one syllable base. If the base has two syllables, the last vowel drops. Examples:

<b>di-ʔǒ-ká</b> ‘I bury’	:	<b>gi ʔo-gí</b> ‘you bury’
<b>di-nũ-ká</b> ‘I awake’	:	<b>gi-nũhu</b> ‘you awake’
<b>di-mǒ-ká</b> ‘I stand’	:	<b>gi-moi</b> ‘you stand’
<b>di-yǎkΛ-gá</b> ‘I chat’	:	<b>gi-yaki</b> ‘you chat’

**di-hǎndΛ-gá** ‘I see’ : **gi-hǎndí** ‘you see’  
**di-yo?-gá** ‘I walk’ : **gi-yo?** ‘you walk’

You may have also noticed that the final vowel of the stem which would be **í** in the base changes to a **Λ** when a suffix is added. This is a morphophonemic rule that pervades this dialect.

Toluca Otomí has the same number of tense-aspects and Hidalgo Otomí is similar, but has other moods besides the indicative, subjunctive, and imperative. The classical had present, imperfect, future, future perfect, and two subjunctives.

The most frequently used prefixes for each of tense-aspects, except the imperfect continuative which does not occur with this verb, are illustrated in the paradigm of the verb ‘to say’:

Present	singular	plural
	<b>(di-)mǎ-n-gá</b>	<b>di- mǎ-n-gá-mé</b> (excl.) <b>di-mǎ-mí</b> (incl.)
	<b>gi-mǎ</b>	<b>gi-mǎ-mí</b>
	<b>bi-/ø-mǎ</b>	<b>(go)-ø-mǎ-ø</b>
Preterit	<b>dΛ-mǎ-n-gá</b>	<b>(go-)dΛ-mǎ-n-gá-mé</b> (excl.) <b>dΛ-mǎ-mí</b> (incl.)
	<b>gΛ-mǎ</b>	<b>gΛ-mǎ-mí</b>
	<b>(go-)bi-mǎ</b>	<b>bi-mǎ-ø</b>
Imperfect	<b>di-mi-mǎ-n-gá</b>	<b>di-mi-mǎ-n-gá-mé</b> (excl.) <b>di-mi-mǎ-mí</b> (incl.)
	<b>gi-mi-mǎ</b>	<b>gi-mi-mǎ-mí</b>
	<b>(go-)mi-mǎ</b>	<b>ø-mi-mǎ-ø</b>
Perfect	<b>štΛ-mǎ-n-gá</b>	<b>štΛ-mǎ-n-gá-mé</b> (excl.) <b>štΛ-mǎ-mí</b> (incl.)
	<b>škΛ-mǎ</b>	<b>škΛ-mǎ-mí</b>
	<b>šΛ-mǎ</b>	<b>šΛ-mǎ-ø</b>
Pluperfect	<b>štΛ-dΛ-mǎ-n-gá</b>	<b>štΛ-dΛ-mǎ-n-gá-mé</b> (excl.) <b>štΛ-dΛ-mǎ-mí</b> (incl.)

	<b>šk</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ <b>ski</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ	<b>šk</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>ski</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- $\emptyset$
Future	<b>(g</b> $\Lambda$ -) <b>m</b> - <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎǎ  <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ	<b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ- <b>mé</b> (excl.) <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> (incl.) <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- $\emptyset$
Subjunctive	<b>go</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ  <b>go</b> - <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ <b>go</b> - <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ	<b>go</b> - <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ- <b>mé</b> (excl.) <b>go</b> - <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> (incl.) <b>go</b> - <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- $\emptyset$
Subjunctive B (irrealis)	<b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ <b>g</b> ǎ  <b>go</b> - <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ <b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ	<b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>g</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>mé</b> <b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>wí</b> <b>go</b> - <b>gi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>wí</b> <b>go</b> - <b>go</b> - <b>d</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>m</b> ǎ <b>m</b> ǎ
Present continuative	Does not occur in this verb	
Imperfect continuative	<b>di</b> - <b>mbi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ  <b>gi</b> - <b>bi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ	<b>di</b> - <b>mbi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>n</b> - <b>g</b> ǎ- <b>mé</b> <b>di</b> - <b>mbi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>gi</b> - <b>bi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>k</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>bi</b> - <b>m</b> ǎ
Imperative	<b>m</b> ǎ	<b>m</b> ǎ- <b>mi</b>

The present continuative can be illustrated with the verb ‘to give’

Present continuative	<b>dr</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎn- <b>g</b> ǎ  <b>gr</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎni <b>r</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎni	<b>dr</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎn- <b>g</b> ǎ- <b>mé</b> <b>dr</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎ- <b>mí</b> <b>gr</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> u- <b>mí</b> <b>r</b> $\Lambda$ - <b>ʔ</b> ǎni- $\emptyset$
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The plural exclusive suffix is always **-mé**, but the one added to the inclusive and the second person can be **-mí**, **-wí**, or **bí**. Verbs with **-bi** include **m**ǎi ‘be’, **mí** ‘sit’, **yó**i ‘to lie’. Those with **-wí** are the same as those that take **-g**ǎ in the first person singular and exclusive, but there are exceptions: **p**ǎší ‘to sweep’ takes **-g**ǎ, but **-wí** while the following verbs take **-g**ǎ and **-mí**: **m**ǎ ‘say’, **ʔ**ǎni ‘give’, **né** ‘want’, **p**ěni ‘wash’, **nyé**ni ‘play’. All of these have nasals, but the generalization that verbs with a nasal take **-mí** cannot be made because **tú**ni

‘to fight’ is **didit-tŭnΛ-wí** in the first person plural inclusive. After more data are collected, perhaps a clear rule will emerge.

Ixtenco Otomí differs from others in the shapes of tense-aspect prefixes. The differences with the classical are the most noticeable ones, the forms in the classical being much longer. But the differences are not just those of shape, but also of the importance which transitivity vs intransitivity had. This difference seems best preserved in Hidalgo, but does not seem to be too important in Toluca or Ixtenco.

As for the meaning of each of these tense-aspects, I will try to describe each one and give an example. The present is used for habitual action and also for events that are occurring as one speaks, much as we use the continuative in English or Spanish: ‘I am dancing’, meaning ‘I am dancing now’ would be **di-ně**. The present continuative here differs with English usage, because **drΛ-ně** means ‘I am dancing elsewhere’. For instance if I am at a party and a friend calls me out, I say ‘I am dancing’ meaning inside a few moments ago I was dancing and the moment I go back in I will continue to dance. If I am in the process of sowing corn I come home at night and say **drΛ-tŭdi-thá-gá** ‘I am sowing corn’ but of course not at the very moment of speaking. In this example the two languages do not differ.

The preterite refers to a completed action:

**šimana bithōgi dΛmΛgá šinúši** ‘last week I went to Huamantla’

The perfect is usually translated with Spanish ‘ya’:

**nge ña mi mǎdí binwǎi gwadí škiyotʔi yΛ thŭhu** ‘when it started to rain the cornfield was already dry’

Notice that in this sentence a past action which occurs before another past action, is nevertheless expressed with the perfect and not with the pluperfect as one would expect. But the next sentence illustrates the use of the pluperfect:

**nge mbeʔehe rΛ senador gwadí štΛyǎgΛmé** ‘when the senator came we had already spoken’

The imperfect is used much as in Spanish or in English ‘I used to work’ or ‘I was working’. For instance:

**nge rΛ šúa mi něi nge nya ma hǎndΛgá** ‘John was dancing when I saw him’

The future is used for events that have not yet taken place, such as **nugagá nišudi gΛhongá** ‘I’ll look for it tomorrow’ but also in subordinate clauses such as in **nuʔá gobišphí dΛmá šunúši** ‘he ordered him to go to Huamantla’.

Example of subjunctives are:

**masΛ đanakwí r déhé gogáʔłtΛgá** ‘if they give us the water, I would do it’  
**núʔa gogo dišèmahma** ‘he would have dug’.

Ixtenco Otomí verbs can be classified according to the prefixes which they take. The most frequently used ones have already been illustrated above, but there is a set of verbs which adds a **di-** in the present, and another set which takes different prefixes in the future. An example of the present tense with an extra **di-** is that of **pěphí** ‘work’:

<b>di-di-pěká</b>	<b>di-di-pěkΛ-mé</b> (excl.)
	<b>di-di-pě-mí</b>
<b>gi-di-pěphí</b>	<b>gi-di-pě-mí</b>
<b>di-pěphí</b>	<b>di-pěphí</b>

This same verb also belongs to the class with different future prefixes:

<b>gΛ-pěká</b>	<b>gΛ-pěká-mé</b>
	<b>gΛ-pě-mí</b>
<b>di-pěphí</b>	<b>di-pě-mí</b>
<b>di-pěphí</b>	<b>di-pěphí</b>

But the verb with **di-di-** do not necessarily take **di-** in the second person of the future, ‘burn’ for instance, takes **gi-**: **gi-cłdi** ‘he will burn’.

These same verbs take the prefix **bi-** in imperative meaning ‘to go and do something’: **bi-phěphí** ‘go and work’ while most verbs take **bΛ**:

**bΛ-hõni** ‘go and look for it’                      **bΛ-tói** ‘go and buy it’

Verbs can also be classified according to morphophonemic changes in the roots. These are morphologically conditioned. The changes take place in the third person of the preterit, perfect, pluperfect, future and subjunctives, but sometimes also in the third persons. The change is usually voicing as in

‘to reach’ :    **bi-cłdí** ‘he reaches’                      **dΛ-ždí** ‘he will reach’  
‘to find’ :     **mi-tíni** ‘he used to find’                **dΛ-díni** ‘he will find’

but it can also be the addition of an initial /y/ as in ‘to ask for’

**mi ʔǒgí** ‘he used to ask for something’      **šΛ-yǒgí** ‘he has already asked for something’. There are other possible changes and in addition there are some verbs that add an /n/ in the perfect as in the verb ‘to answer’

**mi-thǎdí** ‘he used to answer’                      **sa-ndǎdí** ‘he has already answered’

Two more characteristics of Ixtenco Otomí will be only briefly mentioned, before concluding: the object prefixes which are very similar to those of other dialects and the passive. The object prefixes are illustrated with the verb ‘to leave’:

<b>bi zǒgΛ-gá</b>	‘he left me’
<b>bi-zǒ-kʔi</b>	‘he left you’
<b>bi-zǒ-gi-ø</b>	‘he left him’

There is an impersonal passive where the agent is not indicated. This is indicated by changes in the root, such as in:

**má hongá** ‘I am going to look for it’      **thongΛgámé** ‘they are looking for me’

This is also very similar to the other two present-day dailects.

## References

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