

**A Comparison of Person Markers
in Sayula and Oluta Popoluca**

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Abstract

In the two Mixean languages described in this study, person is marked in the verb primarily by sets of prefixes that vary according to whether the clause is intransitive or transitive and whether it occurs in a syntactically independent or dependent construction. Features of interest in transitive verbs include a distinction between third and fourth person in both languages and the presence in Oluta of two different inverse suffixes, which mark the prefix person as the object rather than the subject. The similarity in person marking between these two languages suggests a fairly close linguistic relationship between them.

Introduction

Two neighboring languages that have been spoken in southern Veracruz for several centuries are Sayula Popoluca (SYL) and Oluta Popoluca (OL).¹ Even though these two languages are members of the larger Mixean group located primarily in Oaxaca state, Mexico, they are quite divergent from Oaxaca Mixe and somewhat divergent from each other in their lexicon.

SYL and OL show striking similarities, however, in their person-marking systems. This article seeks to compare these systems and draw some tentative conclusions about the position of SYL and OL within Mixean. There is evidence that SYL/OL form a separate branch of Mixean parallel to Oaxaca Mixe and that they did not branch off from within Oaxaca Mixe.

SYL/OL verbal formations are independent or dependent, hereafter abbreviated INDEP and DEP.² In both languages the simplest form of a verbal formation consists of a person-marking prefix, a verb root, and a tense-aspect suffix. The following examples contain the cognate root [SYL: *kay*, OL: *kay*] ‘to eat’.³

SYL:	<i>tɛkayp</i>	<i>tɛ-kay-p</i>
OL:	<i>tɛkaypa</i>	<i>tɛ-kay-pa</i>
	‘I eat.’	

In both SYL and OL there are various sets of person prefixes, which correlate with different verb types, and there are also different sets of tense-aspect (TA) suffixes for INDEP and DEP verb formations. The interrelation of person and TA is described as follows for each verb formation.

¹ The Sayula language is still spoken vigorously in Sayula, Veracruz, by several thousand people of the father and grandfather generation. The language is moribund, however, because younger residents of the town now use Spanish. The Oluta language is in an even more precarious position. When I first visited Oluta in 1955, there were still some 200 Oluta speakers. Linguist Roberto Zavala reported to me recently that only 14 Oluta speakers remain (personal communication).

² In order to maintain the focus on person markers, there are a number of areas of verb morphology that are not treated in this article; these include commands, negation, and plural forms (including a distinction between first-person inclusive and exclusive in Sayula).

³ The SYL/OL orthography in this paper uses a popular alphabet: *ɛ* is a high central vowel, *x* is a retroflexed alveopalatal sibilant, *ʔ* is a glottal stop, *j* is similar to English [h], and double vowels indicate vowel length. When paired morphemes from the two languages are cited, they are enclosed in brackets when they are cognate with each other.

1. INDEP Verbal Formations

The SYL/OL INDEP verb occurs as the main predicate of an indicative clause. In INDEP verb formations Set 1 TA suffixes occur; they are presented briefly here and discussed in greater detail in 1.6.

SYL	OL	
<i>-p</i>	<i>-pa, -pe, -p</i>	Continuative 1
<i>-aj ~ -am ~ -amp</i>	<i>-am, -anḥp</i>	Future 1
<i>-# ~ -u ~ -wu</i>	<i>-u</i>	Past 1

1.1 INDEP Intransitive Verbs

SYL and OL person sets that occur in INDEP intransitive formations are identical in form and function, which strongly indicates a close linguistic relationship between SYL and OL. Here and elsewhere, the pound sign (#) indicates an unmarked affix.

SYL	OL	
<i>tḥ-</i>	<i>tḥ-</i>	1 st subject
<i>mi-</i>	<i>mi-</i>	2 nd subject
<i>#-</i>	<i>#-</i>	3 rd subject

With an INDEP intransitive formation, the OL Continuative 1 suffix has the form *-pa*: [SYL: *-p*, OL: *-pa*]. Examples:

SYL: *mikayp* *mi-kay-p*
 OL: *mikaypa* *mi-kay-pa*
 ‘You eat.’

1.2 INDEP Transitive Verbs with Third- or Fourth-Person Object

SYL and OL person sets that occur in INDEP transitive formations in which the object is third person are nearly identical in form and meaning. Note that the person-marking prefixes combine subject and object in one unanalyzable form.

SYL	OL	
<i>tḥn-</i>	<i>tḥn-</i>	1 st subject, 3 rd object
<i>ḥin-</i>	<i>min-</i>	2 nd subject, 3 rd object
<i>ḥi-</i>	<i>ḥi-</i>	3 rd subject, 4 th object

Both SYL and OL distinguish between third and fourth person; a participant that is marked with a fourth-person prefix receives less focus in the discourse than one who is marked with a third-person prefix. In all three forms above, therefore, the object is of lower rank than the subject. In the following verbal formations the OL Continuative 1 suffix has the form *-pe*: [SYL: *-p*, OL: *-pe*].

Examples:

SYL: <i>tɛ̃nkayp</i>	OL: <i>tɛ̃nkaype</i>	‘I eat it.’
SYL: <i>?inkayp</i>	OL: <i>minkaype</i>	‘You eat it.’
SYL: <i>?ikayp</i>	OL: <i>?ikaype</i>	‘He eats it.’

1.3 INDEP Transitive Verbs with First-Second Person Interaction

SYL and OL person markers that indicate first-second person are different from each other. In SYL, the person prefixes are as follows:

<i>tɛ̃-</i>	1 st subject, 2 nd object
<i>?ix-</i>	2 nd subject, 1 st object

The following examples are based on the cognate verb [SYL: *tsuk*, OL: *tsuk*] ‘to cut’.

<i>tɛ̃tsukp</i>	<i>tɛ̃-tsuk-p</i>	‘I cut you.’
<i>?ixtsukp</i>	<i>?ix-tsuk-p</i>	‘You cut me.’

In OL, however, the person prefix *tɛ̃x-* is used for first-second person interaction in either direction. When the subject is first person, the *tɛ̃x-* prefix occurs with the root and the TA suffix. When the subject is second person, the formation is considered inverse, because the subject is of lower rank than the first-person object.⁴ In this case, a special inverse suffix *-?k* follows the TA suffix, as illustrated in the following table:

<i>tɛ̃x-</i>	1 st subject, 2 nd object
<i>tɛ̃x- ... -?k</i>	2 nd subject, 1 st object

In this set of verbs, the OL TA Continuative 1 suffix is *-pa*. Examples:

<i>tɛ̃x-tsukpa</i>	<i>tɛ̃x-tsuk-pa</i>	‘I cut you.’
<i>tɛ̃x-tsukpa?k</i>	<i>tɛ̃x-tsuk-pa-?k</i>	‘You cut me.’

1.4 INDEP Inverse Transitive Verbs With Third- or Fourth-Person Subject

In other cases where the object is a person of higher rank than the subject, SYL has a set of prefixes that combine subject and object in one unanalyzable form, and OL has an inverse formation.

⁴ Shirley Lyon refers to this inverse feature as goal oriented in her 1967 article, “Tlahuitoltepec Mixe Clause Structure,” *IJAL* 33:25–33. She writes: “A clause may be oriented toward its actor, its goal or its subject. The first two orientations occur with transitive verbs, the last with intransitive verbs.”

The SYL prefixes are:

<i>tɛx-</i>	3 rd subject, 1 st object
<i>?ix-</i>	3 rd subject, 2 nd object
<i>?igi-</i>	4 th subject, 3 rd object

Examples:

<i>tɛxtsukp</i>	<i>tɛx-tsuk-p</i>	‘He cuts me.’
<i>?ixtsukp</i>	<i>?ix-tsuk-p</i>	‘He cuts you.’
<i>?igitsukp</i>	<i>?igi-tsuk-p</i>	‘He cuts him.’

The SYL form *?igi-* ‘fourth-person subject, third-person object’ is unlike any other Mixean person prefix. This prefix may be a case of borrowing from the neighboring Nahuat dialect of Mecayapan, where prefix *ki-* marks fourth person.⁵ If so, the native SYL prefix *?i-* ‘third-person subject, fourth-person object’ (see 1.2) plus *-ki* became *?iki*, which is weakened to *?igi* by intervocalic voicing.

In OL, this kind of inverse action is expressed by using the same person prefixes that are used to mark subject in INDEP intransitive verbs together with an inverse suffix *-ɛ*, which occurs between the stem and the TA suffix. The person prefixes in this formation refer to the object, rather than to the lower-ranked subject, which is unexpressed.

<i>tɛ- ... -ɛ</i>	3 rd subject, 1 st object
<i>mi- ... -ɛ</i>	3 rd subject, 2 nd object
<i>#- ... -ɛ</i>	4 th subject, 3 rd object

(Note that the inverse suffix here is different in both form and position from the one described in 1.3.)

The form of the TA Continuative 1 suffix following the inverse suffix *-ɛ* is *-p*. Examples:

<i>tɛtsukɛp</i>	<i>tɛ-tsuk-ɛ-p</i>	‘He cuts me.’
<i>mitsukɛp</i>	<i>mi-tsuk-ɛ-p</i>	‘He cuts you.’
<i>tsukɛp</i>	<i>#-tsuk-ɛ-p</i>	‘He cuts him.’

1.5 INDEP Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive verbs are formed by a stem change combined with a suffix, and SYL/OL have cognate affixes for both of these. Transitive verb roots take prefix *ni-* ‘reflexive’, and the resulting stem is intransitive. A suffix that marks ‘self-referent’ comes between this stem and the TA suffix. In SYL, this suffix is *-jɛ*, and in OL it is *-ɛ*, which also serves as an inverse marker (see 1.4). In formula, the reflexive verb can be expressed as: [SYL: *ni-* ... *-jɛ*, OL: *ni-* ... *-ɛ*]. Reflexive verbs take the same

⁵ This idea was first suggested to me by Norman Nordell, based on data from Carl Wolgemuth, who investigated this Nahuat dialect. Wolgemuth writes: “The third person object prefix is *ki-* when the subject is third person. Pajapam (Nahuat) variety has *gi-*.” (Personal communication.)

person prefixes that occur in the INDEP intransitive verb (*tɛ̃-*, *mi-*, *#-*). The following examples are based on the cognate verbs [SYL: *tsuk*, OL: *tsuk*] ‘to cut’ and [SYL: *tsum*, OL: *tsum*] ‘to tie’.

SYL: *tɛ̃nitsujkɛ̃p* *tɛ̃-ni-tsuk-jɛ̃-p*⁶

OL: *tɛ̃nitsukɛ̃p* *tɛ̃-ni-tsuk-ɛ̃-p*

‘I cut myself.’

SYL: *nitsujmɛ̃p* *#-ni-tsum-jɛ̃-p*

OL: *nitsumɛ̃p* *#-ni-tsum-ɛ̃-p*

‘It ties itself (i.e., it gets entangled).’

1.6 Set 1 TA Suffixes

As noted above, two sets of TA suffixes co-occur with the person-marking sets. Set 1 occurs with INDEP verbal formations, and Set 2 with most DEP verbal formations. Set 1 TA suffixes are discussed here.

1.6.1 SYL/OL Continuative 1 TA Suffixes

Continuative 1 indicates present action or continual action in the recent past or the immediate future. The forms that this suffix takes are: [SYL: *-p*, OL: *-pa*, *-pe*, *-p*].

There is only a single form in SYL, but in Oluta there are three forms, each of which is grammatically defined (indicated above by comma). The form *-pa* occurs with the INDEP intransitive verb and with the INDEP transitive verb forms showing first-second person interaction, the form *-pe* occurs with the INDEP transitive verb forms with third-person object, and the form *-p* follows the inverse or self-referent suffix *-ɛ̃*. Examples have been given in 1.1 through 1.5 above.

1.6.2 SYL/OL Future 1 TA Suffixes

Future 1 indicates action in future time. The forms that this suffix takes are: [SYL: *-aj* ~ *-am* ~ *-amp*, OL: *-am*, *-anɛ̃p*].

In SYL, the three forms of the Future 1 suffix are phonologically conditioned: *-aj* occurs word final, *-am* precedes a consonant-initial suffix such as *-naj* ‘still’, and *-amp* precedes a vowel-initial suffix such as *-ey* ‘also’. Examples:

tɛ̃kayaj *tɛ̃-kay-aj* ‘I will eat.’

tɛ̃kayamnaj *tɛ̃-kay-am-naj* ‘I will still eat.’

tɛ̃kayampey *tɛ̃-kay-amp-ey* ‘I will eat also.’

In OL, the basic form of the Future 1 is *-am*. In transitive verbs that have a third-person subject (inverse forms, see 1.4) a fused form *-anɛ̃p* combines the Future 1 TA suffix and the inverse suffix.

⁶ This SYL form illustrates a morphophonemic rule of /j/ metathesis, but for the purposes of this article I have chosen not to describe any of the numerous morphophonemic processes found in both SYL and OL. The morpheme breaks are simply given following the surface form.

Examples:

<i>t̥ntsukam</i>	<i>t̥n-tsuk-am</i>	‘I will cut him.’
<i>t̥tsukan̥p</i>	<i>t̥-tsuk-an̥p</i>	‘He will cut me.’

The following set of examples shows each of the five SYL INDEP verb formations with Future 1 TA suffixes.

Intransitive:	<i>mikayaj</i>	<i>mi-kay-aj</i>	‘You will eat.’
Transitive:	<i>ʔinkayaj</i>	<i>ʔin-kay-aj</i>	‘You will eat it.’
1st-2nd Interaction:	<i>t̥tsugaj</i>	<i>t̥-tsuk-aj</i>	‘I’ll cut you.’
	<i>ʔixtsugaj</i>	<i>ʔix-tsuk-aj</i>	‘You’ll cut me.’
Inverse:	<i>t̥xtsugaj</i>	<i>t̥x-tsuk-aj</i>	‘He’ll cut me.’
Reflexive:	<i>minitsujk̥̥j</i>	<i>mi-ni-tsuk-j̥-aj</i>	‘You’ll cut yourself.’

The following set of examples shows each of the five OL INDEP verb formations with Future 1 TA suffixes.

Intransitive:	<i>mikayam</i>	<i>mi-kay-am</i>	‘You will eat.’
Transitive:	<i>minkayam</i>	<i>min-kay-am</i>	‘You will eat it.’
1st-2nd Interaction:	<i>t̥xtsukam</i>	<i>t̥x-tsuk-am</i>	‘I’ll cut you.’
	<i>t̥xtsukamaʔk</i>	<i>t̥x-tsuk-am-ʔk</i>	‘You’ll cut me.’
Inverse:	<i>t̥tsukan̥p</i>	<i>t̥-tsuk-an̥p</i>	‘He’ll cut me.’
Reflexive:	<i>minitsukan̥p</i>	<i>mi-ni-tsuk-an̥p</i>	‘You’ll cut yourself.’

1.6.3 SYL/OL Past 1 TA Suffixes

Past 1 indicate action in the past. The forms that this suffix takes are: [SYL: -# ~ -u, OL: -u].

In SYL the TA suffix is unmarked following a consonant and occurs as -u following a vowel. Examples are shown here with the verbs *kay* ‘to eat’ and *maa* ‘to sleep’.

<i>t̥kay</i>	<i>t̥-kay-#</i>	‘I ate.’
<i>t̥maau</i>	<i>t̥-maa-u</i>	‘I slept.’

Unlike the continuative and future, the OL Past 1 suffix -u has only a single form. Examples:

<i>t̥ntsuku</i>	<i>t̥n-tsuk-u</i>	‘I did cut him.’
<i>t̥xtsuku</i>	<i>t̥x-tsuk-u</i>	‘I did cut you.’
<i>t̥tsuk̥u</i>	<i>t̥-tsuk-̥-u</i>	‘He did cut me.’

The following set of examples shows each of the five SYL INDEP verb formations with Past 1 TA suffixes.

Intransitive:	<i>mikay</i>	<i>mi-kay-#</i>	‘You ate.’
Transitive:	<i>?inkay</i>	<i>?in-kay-#</i>	‘You ate it.’
1st-2nd Interaction:	<i>tɨtsuk</i>	<i>tɨ-tsuk-#</i>	‘I did cut you.’
	<i>?ixtsuk</i>	<i>?ix-tsuk-#</i>	‘You did cut me.’
Inverse:	<i>tɨxtsuk</i>	<i>tɨx-tsuk-#</i>	‘He did cut me.’
Reflexive:	<i>minitsukɨu</i>	<i>mi-ni-tsuk-jɨ-u</i>	‘You did cut yourself.’

The following set of examples shows each of the five OL INDEP verb formations with Past 1 TA suffixes.

Intransitive:	<i>mikayu</i>	<i>mi-kay-u</i>	‘You ate.’
Transitive:	<i>minkayu</i>	<i>min-kay-u</i>	‘You ate it.’
1st-2nd Interaction:	<i>tɨxtsuku</i>	<i>tɨx-tsuk-u</i>	‘I did cut you.’
	<i>tɨxtsuku?k</i>	<i>tɨx-tsuk-u-?k</i>	‘You did cut me.’
Inverse:	<i>mitsukɨu</i>	<i>mi-tsuk-ɨ-u</i>	‘He did cut you.’
Reflexive:	<i>minitsukɨu</i>	<i>mi-ni-tsuk-ɨ-u</i>	‘You did cut yourself.’

2. DEP Verbal Formations

The SYL/OL DEP verb occurs as the main predicate of a dependent clause. There are three kinds of dependent clauses. The most common kind of DEP clause has an initial adverbial of time, location, or manner that triggers this change in affixation. Some of these adverbials are cognates in the two variants:

SYL: <i>tɨ?jy</i>	OL: <i>tɨ?ɨy</i>	‘yesterday’
SYL: <i>jobom</i>	OL: <i>japoom</i>	‘tomorrow’
SYL: <i>yam</i>	OL: <i>yam</i>	‘here’
SYL: <i>?axam</i>	OL: <i>?ixi</i>	‘as, in like manner’

Others, including the following interrogative adverbs, are not cognate with each other:

SYL: <i>jɨm</i>	OL: <i>mɨ</i>	‘where?’
SYL: <i>nat</i>	OL: <i>jumej</i>	‘how?’
SYL: <i>jutim</i>	OL: <i>na?kxej</i>	‘when?’
SYL: <i>pɨjɨn</i>	OL: <i>jupa?</i>	‘how much?’

A second kind of DEP clause consists of traditional subordinate clauses, which modify an INDEP clause. In Popoluca, there is usually no subordinating conjunction expressed, but the status of the clause is expressed by DEP verbal formations, and the specific relation is inferred from the context.

The third kind of DEP clause occurs as the complement of a few auxiliary verbs of motion or ability, such as:

SYL: <i>ʔoya</i>	OL: <i>jat</i>	‘to be able’
SYL: <i>ʔoy</i>	OL: <i>ʔoy</i>	‘to go and return’
SYL: <i>nɛx</i>	OL: <i>nɛkx</i>	‘to go’
SYL: <i>min/miʔn</i>	OL: <i>min/miʔn</i>	‘to come’

Auxiliary verbs are intransitive. They occur without person markers and only with Set 1 TA suffixes, and they are followed by a DEP verb in the complement.

In most DEP clauses, person marking is correlated with Set 2 TA suffixes, which are presented briefly here and discussed in greater detail in 2.6.

TA suffixes for Set 2:

SYL	OL	
-#	-i ~ -e, -ij ~ -ej	Continuative 2
-waʔn	-aʔn, -aʔnej	Future 2
-j	-i, -ii	Past 2

2.1 DEP Intransitive Verbs

The SYL/OL person-marking sets that occur in DEP intransitive formations are:

SYL	OL	
<i>tɛ-</i>	<i>tɛn-</i>	1 st subject
<i>ʔin-</i>	<i>min-</i>	2 nd subject
<i>ʔi-</i>	<i>ʔi-</i>	3 rd subject

In the following example with SYL/OL location adverbial *yam* ‘here’ in initial position, the verb *kay* ‘to eat’ occurs with Continuative 2 TA suffixes.

SYL: <i>yam ʔinkay</i>	<i>yam ʔin-kay-#</i>
OL: <i>yam minkaye</i>	<i>yam min-kay-e</i>

‘Here you eat.’

When the adverbial follows the verb, however, the INDEP verb occurs since the adverbial is no longer in focus position (see 1.1). Example:

SYL: <i>mikayp yam</i>	<i>mi-kay-p yam</i>
OL: <i>mikaypa yam</i>	<i>mi-kay-pa yam</i>

‘You eat here.’

The example below illustrates the time adverbial *tɛ ʔjy* ‘yesterday’ with the cognate verb [SYL: *ʔoy*, OL: *ʔoy*] ‘to go and return’, which occurs with Past 2 TA suffixes.

SYL: *tɛ̃ ʔjy ʔinʔojy* *tɛ̃ ʔjy ʔin-ʔoy-j*
 OL: *tɛ̃ ʔɛ̃y minʔoyi* *tɛ̃ ʔɛ̃y min-ʔoy-i*
 ‘Yesterday you went (and returned).’

The following example of a DEP time clause occurs with the cognate verb [SYL: *nɛ̃x*, OL: *nɛ̃kx*] ‘to go’ and *jem* ‘there’ in the DEP clause, and the cognate verb [SYL: *juy*, OL: *juy*] ‘to buy’, in the INDEP clause.

SYL: *ʔinɛ̃xwaʔn jem, ʔijuyaj* *ʔi-nɛ̃x-waʔn jem, ʔi-juy-aj*
 OL: *ʔinɛ̃kxaʔn jem, ʔijuyam* *ʔi-nɛ̃kx-aʔn jem, ʔi-juy-am*
 ‘When he goes there, he’ll buy it.’

The following example shows a DEP verb form of *kay* ‘to eat’ plus *jem* ‘there’ in the complement of the auxiliary verb SYL: *ʔoya*, OL: *jat* ‘to be able’. This auxiliary verb always occurs with Continuative 2 TA suffixes in the complement.

SYL: *ʔoyap ʔinkay jem* *ʔoya-p ʔin-kay-# jem*
 OL: *jatpa minkaye jem* *jat-pa min-kay-e jem*
 ‘You can eat there.’
 (*Lit.*: Is able, you eating it, there).

2.2 DEP Transitive Verbs with Third- or Fourth-Person Object

The SYL/OL person-marking sets that occur in DEP transitive formations are:

SYL	OL	
<i>tɛ̃x-</i>	<i>tɛ̃x-</i>	1 st subject, 3 rd object
<i>ʔix-</i>	<i>mix-</i>	2 nd subject, 3 rd object
<i>ʔigi-</i>	[^] <i>tɛ̃-</i> ⁷	3 rd subject, 4 th object

The following example shows a DEP transitive verb with Past 2 TA suffixes following the location adverbial *yam* ‘here’.

SYL: *yam tɛ̃xkajy* *yam tɛ̃x-kay-j*
 OL: *yam tɛ̃xkayi* *yam tɛ̃x-kay-i*
 ‘Here I ate it.’

The following example shows a DEP transitive verb with Future 2 TA suffixes following the time adverbial [SYL: *jobom*, OL: *japoom*] ‘tomorrow’. The cognate verb is [SYL: *paat/paʔt*, OL: *paat*] ‘to find’.

SYL: *jobom tɛ̃xpaʔtwaʔn* *jobom tɛ̃x-paʔt-waʔn*
 OL: *japoom tɛ̃xpaataʔn* *japoom tɛ̃x-paat-aʔn*
 ‘Tomorrow I’ll find it.’

⁷ This person marker is written as [^]*tɛ̃-* to differentiate it from *tɛ̃-*, which indicates 1st subject. These prefixes are not allomorphs of each other.

In the following example the DEP transitive verb occurs in the complement of the auxiliary verb *ʔoy* ‘went’. The SYL/OL verbs are noncognates: SYL: *cheʔn*, OL: *kep* ‘to look for’, as are the nouns that express the object of this verb: SYL: *jaʔx*, OL: *kɨpi* ‘firewood’. Although the nouns and verbs are noncognates, the structure is the same in both SYL and OL. The DEP verb in the complement occurs only with Continuative 2 TA suffixes, and person is marked only in the complement.

SYL: *jaʔx ʔoy tɨxcheʔn jaʔx ʔoy tɨx-cheʔn-#*
 OL: *kɨpi ʔoy tɨxkepe kɨpi ʔoy tɨx-kep-e*
 ‘I went to look for firewood.’
 (*Lit.*: Firewood, went, I seeking it.)

Consider the following example in which [SYL: *nɨx*, OL: *nɨkx*] ‘to go’ occur as auxiliaries.

SYL: *nɨxaj tɨxcheʔn jaʔx nɨx-aj tɨx-cheʔn-# jaʔx*
 OL: *nɨkxam tɨxkepe kɨpi nɨkx-am tɨx-kep-e kɨpi*
 ‘I will go to look for firewood.’
 (*Lit.*: Will-go, I seeking it, firewood)

2.3 DEP Transitive Verbs With First-Second Person Interaction

DEP verbs with first-second interaction occur with the same person prefixes that mark the INDEP verb. In SYL, prefix *tɨ-* occurs with Set 2 TA suffixes, but prefix *ʔix-* occurs with Set 1 TA suffixes.

<i>tɨ-</i>	1 st subject, 2 nd object	TA Set 2
<i>ʔix-</i>	2 nd subject, 1 st object	TA Set 1

Note that there is no formal difference between DEP and INDEP in the SYL inverse form. The following examples have continuative TA suffixes:

yam tɨtsuk yam tɨ-tsuk-# ‘Here I cut you.’
yam ʔixtsukp yam ʔix-tsuk-p ‘Here you cut me.’

In OL, person prefix *tɨx-* occurs with Set 2 TA suffixes in both forms, and suffix *-ʔk* ‘inverse’ follows the TA suffix when the subject is second person. The following examples have continuative 2 TA suffixes:

yam tɨxtsuki yam tɨx-tsuk-i ‘Here I cut you.’
yam tɨxtsukiʔk yam tɨx-tsuk-i-ʔk ‘Here you cut me.’

2.4 DEP Inverse Transitive Verbs With Third- or Fourth-Person Subject

In other cases where the object is of higher rank than the subject, DEP inverse forms are used. In SYL, the same person set is used in this DEP inverse formation as in the corresponding INDEP inverse formation (see 1.4), and they occur with Set 1 TA suffixes in both. As mentioned in 2.3, there is no formal difference between DEP and INDEP in the inverse verbal formations.

SYL inverse transitive person markers (INDEP/DEP):

<i>tɛx-</i>	3 rd subject, 1 st object
<i>ʔix-</i>	3 rd subject, 2 nd object
<i>ʔigi-</i>	4 th subject, 3 rd object

SYL TA suffixes for Set 1:

<i>-p</i>	continuative 1
<i>-aj ~ -am ~ -amp</i>	future 1
<i>-# ~ -u ~ -wu</i>	past 1

Consider these examples with the cognate verb [SYL: *moy/moʔ*, OL: *moy/moʔ*] ‘to give to’. (In this verb, the object marking refers to the recipient or indirect object.) In SYL, the following TA suffixes illustrate continuative 1, future 1, and past 1 in a DEP inverse formation.

<i>yam ʔigimoyp</i>	<i>yam ʔigi-moy-p</i>	‘Here he gives it to him.’
<i>jobom tɛxmoʔaj</i>	<i>jobom tɛx-moʔ-aj</i>	‘Tomorrow he will give it to me.’
<i>tɛ ʔjy ʔixmoy</i>	<i>tɛ ʔjy ʔixmoy-#</i>	‘Yesterday he gave it to you.’

In OL, the DEP inverse verb occurs with the same person prefix set that marks the DEP intransitive verb (see 2.1). As in the corresponding INDEP inverse verb, the inverse suffix *-ɛ* occurs, but in DEP forms it fuses with Set 2 TA suffixes to give *-ij ~ -ej* (continuative 2), *-aʔnej* (future 2), and *-ii* (past 2).

OL inverse transitive person markers:

<i>tɛn-</i>	3 rd subject, 1 st object
<i>min-</i>	3 rd subject, 2 nd object
<i>ʔi-</i>	4 th subject, 3 rd object

OL TA suffixes for Set 2 (fused with inverse):

<i>-ij ~ -ej</i>	continuative 2
<i>-aʔnej</i>	future 2
<i>-ii</i>	past 2

Examples:

<i>yam tɛnmoyej</i>	<i>yam tɛn-moy-ej</i>	‘Here he gives it to me.’
<i>yam ʔimoʔaʔnej</i>	<i>yam ʔi-moʔ-aʔnej</i>	‘Here he will give it to him.’
<i>yam minmoyii</i>	<i>yam min-moy-ii</i>	‘Here he gave it to you.’

2.5 DEP Reflexive Verbs

In SYL, the DEP reflexive verb occurs with the same prefix *ni-* ‘reflexive’ and suffix *-jɛ* ‘self-referent’ that occur in INDEP verbs, but with DEP person markers and Set 2 TA suffixes. The

following examples are based on SYL: *ʔeʔp* ‘to see’, and are contrasted with the INDEP reflexive verb.

INDEP Transitive

tɛ̃nʔeʔp

tɛ̃n-ʔeʔp-p

‘I see it.’

INDEP Reflexive (Intransitive)

tɛ̃niʔeʔjpɛ̃p

tɛ̃-ni-ʔeʔp-jɛ̃-p

‘I see myself (as in a mirror).’

DEP Transitive

jobom tɛ̃xʔeʔpwaʔn

jobom tɛ̃x-ʔeʔp-waʔn

‘Tomorrow I’ll see it.’

DEP Reflexive (Intransitive)

jobom tɛ̃niʔeʔjpɛ̃waʔn

jobom tɛ̃-ni-ʔeʔp-jɛ̃-waʔn

‘Tomorrow I’ll see myself.’

In OL, the DEP reflexive verb occurs with prefix *ni-* ‘reflexive’, but the obligatory self-referent suffix follows the pattern of the DEP inverse object suffix, i.e., this suffix is fused with Set 2 TA suffixes which results in *-ij ~ -ej* (Continuative 2), *-aʔnej* (Future 2), and *-ii* (Past 2), as shown above in 2.4. The following examples are based on OL: *tsuk* ‘to cut’, and are contrasted with the INDEP reflexive verb (1.5).

INDEP transitive

tɛ̃ntsukpe

tɛ̃n-tsuk-pe

‘I cut it.’

INDEP reflexive (Intransitive)

tɛ̃nitsukɛ̃p

tɛ̃-ni-tsuk-ɛ̃-p

‘I cut myself.’

DEP transitive

yam tɛ̃xtsuki

yam tɛ̃x-tsuk-i

‘Here I cut it.’

DEP reflexive (Intransitive)

yam tɛ̃nitsukij

yam tɛ̃-ni-tsuk-ij

‘Here I cut myself.’

2.6 Set 2 TA Suffixes

TA suffixes of Set 2 occur with most dependent verbal formations. In SYL Set 2 TA suffixes show no allomorphic alternation, but OL suffixes do.

2.6.1 SYL/OL Continuative 2 TA Suffixes

Like Continuative 1, Continuative 2 indicates present action or continual action in the recent past or the immediate future. The forms that this suffix takes are: SYL: *-#*, OL: *-i ~ -e*, *-ij ~ -ej*.

In SYL, Continuative 2 is unmarked in DEP verb formations. Examples:

yam tɛ̃kay

yam tɛ̃-kay-#

‘Here I eat.’

yam tɛ̃xkay

yam tɛ̃x-kay-#

‘Here I eat it.’

In OL, the first pair of allomorphs (*-i ~ -e*) occur in DEP verbal formations that are not inverse. The allomorphs are conditioned by the vowel quality of the preceding syllable: *-i* follows a syllable

with a high vowel (*i, ɛ, u*), and *-e* follows a syllable with a low vowel (*e, a, o*). The following examples occur with an OL DEP time phrase.

<i>tɛntiji</i>	<i>tɛn-tij-i</i>	‘When I stay ...’
<i>ʔipete</i>	<i>ʔi-pet-e</i>	‘When he goes up ...’

In the second pair of allomorphs (*-ij ~ -ej*), the TA suffix is fused with the inverse suffix (see 2.4). This pair follows the same pattern of vowel alternation as in the first pair of allomorphs. Examples:

<i>tɛnxiipij</i>	<i>tɛn-xiip-ij</i>	‘When it makes me itch ...’
<i>tɛnkevej</i>	<i>tɛn-kev-ej</i>	‘When it scratches me ...’

2.6.2 SYL/OL Future 2 TA Suffixes

Like Future 1, Future 2 indicates action in future time. The forms that this suffix takes are: SYL: *-waʔn*, OL: *-aʔn, -aʔnej*.

In SYL the Future 2 suffix is *-waʔn* in DEP verb formations. Examples:

<i>jobom tɛkaywaʔn</i>	<i>jobom tɛ-kay-waʔn</i>	‘Tomorrow I’ll eat.’
<i>jobom tɛxkaywaʔn</i>	<i>jobom tɛx-kay-waʔn</i>	‘Tomorrow I’ll eat it.’

In OL, the basic Future 2 suffix is *-aʔn*; it occurs with the DEP intransitive and transitive verb. This suffix is illustrated in 2.2 above, and in the following example:

<i>japoom mixtsukaʔn</i>	<i>japoom mix-tsuk-aʔn</i>	‘Tomorrow you will cut him.’
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The OL allomorph *-aʔnej* is a fusion of *-aʔn* with the inverse suffix, and it occurs with DEP inverse formations, as in the following example:

<i>yam mintsukaʔnej</i>	<i>yam min-tsuk-aʔnej</i>	‘Here he will cut you.’
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2.6.3 SYL/OL Past 2 TA Suffixes

Like Past 1, Past 2 indicates action in the past. The forms that this suffix takes are: SYL: *-j*, OL: *-i, -ii*.

In SYL, the past 2 suffix is *-j* in DEP formations. Examples:

<i>tɛʔjy tɛkajy</i>	<i>tɛʔjy tɛ-kay-j</i>	‘Yesterday I ate.’
<i>tɛʔjy tɛxkajy</i>	<i>tɛʔjy tɛx-kay-j</i>	‘Yesterday I ate it.’

In OL, the basic Past 2 suffix is *-i*; it occurs with the DEP intransitive and transitive verb, as in the following examples:

<i>yam minʔoyi</i>	<i>yam min-ʔoy-i</i>	‘Here you went.’
<i>yam mixkayi</i>	<i>yam mix-kay-i</i>	‘Here you ate it.’

The allomorph *-ii* is a fusion of *-i* with the inverse suffix, and it occurs with DEP inverse formations, as in the following examples:

<i>t̥ʔ̥y mintsukii</i>	<i>t̥ʔ̥y min-tsuk-ii</i>	‘Yesterday he did cut you.’
<i>yam minmoyii</i>	<i>yam min-moy-ii</i>	‘Here he gave it to you.’

2.6.4 OL Intransitive Inverse Correlation

OL INDEP intransitive person prefixes (*t̥ʔ̥*, *mi-*, *#-*) also occur with INDEP transitive inverse formations, as noted in 1.4. Likewise, the OL DEP intransitive person prefixes (*t̥ʔ̥n-*, *min-*, *ʔi-*) also occur with DEP transitive inverse formations, as noted in 2.4. In both cases the presence of an inverse suffix *-i* differentiates the inverse forms from the corresponding intransitive forms. This inverse suffix sometimes fuses with the TA suffix.

The two INDEP sets, which take the person prefixes (*t̥ʔ̥*, *mi-*, *#-*), show the following suffixation:

Intransitive	Transitive Inverse	
<i>-pa</i>	<i>-i + -p</i>	continuative 1
<i>-am</i>	<i>-anip</i>	future 1
<i>-u</i>	<i>-i + -u</i>	past 1

Example of INDEP intransitive:

<i>t̥ʔ̥tsukpa</i>	<i>t̥ʔ̥-tsuk-pa</i>	‘I am cutting.’
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Example of INDEP transitive inverse:

<i>t̥ʔ̥tsukip</i>	<i>t̥ʔ̥-tsuk-i-p</i>	‘He cuts me.’
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The two DEP sets, which take the person prefixes (*t̥ʔ̥n-*, *min-*, *ʔi-*), show the following suffixation:

Intransitive	Transitive Inverse	
<i>-i ~ -e</i>	<i>-ij ~ -ej</i>	continuative 1
<i>-aʔn</i>	<i>-aʔnej</i>	future 1
<i>-i</i>	<i>-ii</i>	past 1

Example of DEP intransitive:

<i>yam t̥ʔ̥ntsukaʔn</i>	<i>yam t̥ʔ̥n-tsuk-aʔn</i>	‘Here I will cut.’
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Example of DEP transitive inverse:

<i>yam t̥ʔ̥ntsukaʔnej</i>	<i>yam t̥ʔ̥n-tsuk-aʔnej</i>	‘Here he will cut me.’
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3. SYL/OL within Mixe-Zoquean

Languages in the Mixe-Zoquean stock are spread over four states in southern Mexico. Wichmann⁸ subdivides Zoquean into the Chiapas Zoque, the Chimalapa Zoque of Oaxaca, and Gulf Zoquean. The latter includes the Sierra and Texistepec Popoluca in Veracruz and the Ayapa Zoque in Tabasco. He subdivides Mixean into four branches: the Oaxaca Mixe, Tapachultec in Chiapas (extinct), Sayula Popoluca, and Oluta Popoluca in Veracruz. While I agree with Wichmann on his broader classification of the Mixe-Zoquean groups, I group SYL and OL together as a branch of Mixean distinct from Oaxaca Mixe, rather than treating them as two separate branches.

Two Oaxaca Mixe groups, Totontepec (TM) and Coatlan (CM) have person-marking systems somewhat similar to SYL and OL. Totontepec is located on the northern edge of the Mixe region and Coatlan is far to the south. Yet TM and CM have person-marking prefixes identical to each other in intransitive formations, although these prefixes are either unmarked or a single consonant. They also have INDEP and DEP formations which correlate with sets of TA suffixes. The following⁹ table of intransitive formations presents the contrast between SYL/OL and TM/CM person prefixes.

	SYL		OL		TM		CM	
	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep
1st subject	<i>tɛ̃-</i>	<i>tɛ̃-</i>	<i>tɛ̃-</i>	<i>tɛ̃n-</i>	#-	<i>n-</i>	#-	<i>n-</i>
2nd subject	<i>mi-</i>	<i>ʔin-</i>	<i>mi-</i>	<i>min-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>m-</i>
3rd subject	#-	<i>ʔi-</i>	#-	<i>ʔi-</i>	#-	<i>y-</i>	#-	<i>y-</i>

SYL/OL transitive formations are similar in function to TM/CM as shown in the following table. The INDEP transitive verb has the same person-marking sets as the DEP intransitive, but SYL/OL has fuller person prefixes than TM/CM. (The notation 1 > 3, 2 > 3, 3 > 4 refers to first-person subject combined with third-person object, etc.)

	SYL		OL		TM		CM	
	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep	Indep	Dep
1 > 3	<i>tɛ̃n-</i>	<i>tɛ̃x-</i>	<i>tɛ̃n-</i>	<i>tɛ̃x-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>
2 > 3	<i>ʔin-</i>	<i>ʔix-</i>	<i>min-</i>	<i>mix-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>x-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>xy-</i>
3 > 4	<i>ʔi-</i>	<i>ʔigi-</i>	<i>ʔi-</i>	[^] <i>tɛ̃-</i>	<i>y-</i>	<i>tɛ̃-</i>	<i>y-</i>	#

Note that OL: [^]*tɛ̃-* is cognate with TM: *tɛ̃-* for third person dependent, but not with SYL: *ʔigi-* (see discussion in 1.4). Otherwise, SYL and OL are similar in form and function, while the TM and CM dependent sets are dissimilar.

⁸ Wichmann, Soeren. 1994. "Mixe-Zoquean Linguistics: A Status Report." Pp. 193–267 in: Doris Bartholomew, Yolanda Lastra, Leonardo Manrique, eds., *Panorama de los Estudios de las Lenguas Indígenas de México*, Tomo I. Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala.

⁹ Sources for data from these two variants are: Schoenhals, Alvin. 1962. "A grammatical classification of Totontepec Mixe verbs." Master's thesis, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Searle Hoogshagen and Hilda Halloran de Hoogshagen. 1993. *Diccionario Mixe de Coatlán, Oaxaca*. Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, A.C., México, D.F.

TM/CM and other Oaxaca Mixe groups have a considerably less elaborated person-marking system than SYL/OL, and so Oaxaca Mixe depends on free personal pronouns or pronouns attached as an enclitic to the verb to resolve ambiguity.¹⁰ In that SYL/OL has fuller person-marking sets, they rarely depend on such pronouns to clarify meaning. There is one case of ambiguity: SYL: *?ix-* may mean either second-person subject, first-person object, or third-person subject, second-person object. In this one case, the speaker will use a clarifying pronoun if the context does not make the referents clear.

4. Conclusion

The similarities in the SYL/OL person-marking system suggest that these two languages do form a distinct branch of Mixean. Intransitive and transitive noninverse sets have cognate forms in both SYL and OL, and these SYL/OL forms have the same basic semantic value. The INDEP reflexive verb has cognate forms in both SYL and OL. The difference in the two systems lies mainly in the way in which they handle inverse forms.

The towns of Sayula and Oluta are located some 90 miles from the Oaxaca Mixe but less than 10 miles from each other. Foster posits that “Popoluca-speaking people once occupied the entire northern part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, but the arrival in pre-conquest times of Aztec-speaking groups forced the present-day Popoluca onto less desirable land in the Tuxtla Sierra and disrupted their contact with the Mixe and Zoque groups.”¹¹ If that was the case for the Mixean branch we now call Sayula and Oluta Popoluca, their logical migration route might have taken them eastward through friendly Mixe towns down to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, where they traveled northward to their present locations near the trans-isthmus highway in southern Veracruz.

I posit that SYL/OL developed their own language apart from the Oaxaca Mixe as a separate branch of Mixean. It seems likely that, after a period of separation when they were still located in Oaxaca, SYL and OL came into close proximity after their move to Veracruz, where they acquired some new shared vocabulary items. These SYL/OL verbs and nouns do not appear in Oaxaca Mixe, or in Chiapas Zoque or Gulf Zoquean.¹²

¹⁰ The CM first-person pronoun *ɛɛch* has an enclitic form *ɛch*, as with the verb *pejt* ‘to go up’, e.g., *pejtpɛch* ‘I go up’, *pejtp* ‘He goes up’.

¹¹ Foster, George M. 1943. “The geographical, linguistic and cultural position of the Popoluca of Veracruz,” *American Anthropologist* 45:531–546. Foster did extensive anthropological and language research among the Sierra Popoluca in the mid-nineteen forties.

¹² In an unpublished article, prepared in 2001, entitled “Cognate Sets in Six Zoque-Mixe-Popoluca Languages,” I compared 100 nouns and 100 verbs in SYL, OL, TM, CM, Francisco Leon Zoque (FLZ), and Sierra Popoluca (SP). I noted that SYL and OL have 71 percent shared cognates versus 45 percent shared cognates with the Zoque groups (FLZ and SP). However, SYL/OL have 70 percent shared cognates with TM, and 64 percent with CM. SYL/OL shared lexical innovations include at least eight verbs and ten nouns, including the following cognate sets: [SYL: *tsook*, OL: *tsook*] versus [TM: *mujoy*, CM: *cojuy*] and [FLZ: *coyoj*, SP: *yoyj*] ‘to pay’; [SYL: *nɛɛn*, OL: *nɛɛnɛ*] versus [TM: *caacy*, CM: *caagy*] and [FLZ: *ane*, SP: *aanyi*] ‘tortilla’.

More important than lexical sets, however, are shared grammatical features, which are less susceptible to borrowing. The most striking shared feature between SYL and OL is the person-marking system, which offers enough evidence to consider these two languages a distinct branch of Mixean. The similarities are too deep to have arisen through borrowing during a recent period of proximity. Since it is unlikely that SYL/OL originated in what is now Veracruz State, a more appropriate name for this branch would be North Isthmus Mixean.