



## Language and Culture Archives

### Bartholomew Collection of Unpublished Materials

### SIL International - Mexico Branch

© SIL International

#### NOTICE

This document is part of the archive of **unpublished** language data created by members of the Mexico Branch of SIL International. While it does not meet SIL standards for publication, it is shared “as is” under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) to make the content available to the language community and to researchers.



SIL International claims copyright to the analysis and presentation of the data contained in this document, but not to the authorship of the original vernacular language content.

#### AVISO

*Este documento forma parte del archivo de datos lingüísticos **inéditos** creados por miembros de la filial de SIL International en México. Aunque no cumple con las normas de publicación de SIL, se presenta aquí tal cual de acuerdo con la licencia "Creative Commons Atribución-NoComercial-CompartirIgual" (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) para que esté accesible a la comunidad y a los investigadores.*

*Los derechos reservados por SIL International abarcan el análisis y la presentación de los datos incluidos en este documento, pero no abarcan los derechos de autor del contenido original en la lengua indígena.*

submitted to Les langues du monde

PROPERTY OF S.I.L. MEXICO LIBRARY

## The Tarascan Language

by Alan C. Vares  
Summer Institute of Linguistics

### I. EXTERNAL INFORMATION

1.1 The Tarascan language community. The Tarascan language is spoken by some 60,000 inhabitants of the northwest corner of the state of Michoacán, Mexico. The area is more precisely described by West as "extend[ing] eastward from the Zamora-Los Reyes railroad to the east shore of Lake Pátzcuaro, and southward from the Mexico-Guadalajara highway to a line drawn between Pátzcuaro and the peak of Tancitaro" (1948:1). This is located some 350 to 450 kms. west of Mexico City, in the transverse volcanic zone that extends across the country from the Pacific Ocean almost to the Gulf of Mexico.

Stanislavski (1947:46-47) refers to this same area as "the culture nucleus of the ambitious, aggressive Tarascans" and goes on to say that "It was then [i.e., prior to the Conquest], as it is now, a region in which Tarascan unity was maintained, and the boundaries of this nucleus have altered but slightly in subsequent centuries."

Before the coming of the Spaniards, Tarascan social and political influence extended beyond this nucleus throughout practically the entire area of the present state of Michoacán. Place names of Tarascan origin are found close to the eastern border of the state (e.g., Zitácuaro, Anganguaco), and to the north in the state of Guanajuato (e.g., Acámbaro, Yuriria, Cuitzeo). The state names of Guanajuato and Querétaro are both of Tarascan origin.

The majority of Tarascans are farmers, many of them working small communal farm lands. Other occupations in the highlands are: shoemakers,

TARASCAN UNCLASSIFIED

hatmakers, charcoal burners, carpenters, masons, beekeepers, tailors, butchers, traders, schoolteachers (cf. Beals 1946:61). In the region of Lake Pátzcuaro many are fishermen, and some are potters, storekeepers, weavers of nets, weavers of reed mats, and engaged in other occupations (cf. Foster 1948:54-55). A few have had higher education and have become doctors, engineers, and educators.

**1.2 The name of the language.** The Tarascans call themselves *pho'ropeča*, and their language *pho'ro*. The former name is sometimes written as *purépecha*, but the language is generally called *tarasce* in Spanish. This word comes from *ta'yaskwa* "son-in-law", which was applied by the Indians to the Spanish conquerors who married native women, but through a misunderstanding the Spaniards used it to refer to the Indians themselves.

**1.3 History of the language.** The Tarascan language is unrelated to the Utoaztecan or the Otomanguean languages that are its closest neighbours in Mexico. To date, no conclusive evidence has been adduced to demonstrate a relationship to any other North American language.

After the Conquest, Tarascan was used as the vehicle of education in schools founded by don Vasco de Quiroga and it was studied by some of the Spanish friars who settled in that region, notably by Father Maturino Gilberti, who compiled a dictionary of Tarascan. The initial interest in promoting the use of the language was followed by three centuries of suppression in the public schools until after the first Inter-American Indian Congress in Pátzcuaro in 1940, when Indian languages were once again given a place of dignity along with Spanish in the educational program of rural Mexico (I. Wares 1965:55-56). The Council of Indigenous Languages, a semi-official body composed chiefly of linguists, proposed an orthography which was used in text-books published by the Ministry of Education for the teach-

ing of reading in the Tarascan Literacy Campaign during the 1940s.

**1.4 Tarascan dialects.** Although there are numerous regional variations in Tarascan speech (Paul Friedrich of the University of Chicago enumerates fourteen), they are mutually intelligible. Only minor changes in phonology are observed in going from one dialect to another. The velar nasal, which is phonemic in the highland dialects, is subphonemic in the lake dialects. The high central vowel that is characteristic of much of Tarascan speech is lacking in the eastern highlands, where it has merged with the high front vowel. Although all dialects have at least five vowels, in certain phonological environments the low front and back vowels *e* and *o* (see Sect. 2.2) of the eastern dialects correspond to *i* and *u* in the same words in some of the highland dialects.

Likewise there are dialectal variations in the sibilants, with the retroflexed *ɣ* allophone of /*s*/ appearing before *t*, *k*, and *p* in the highland dialects, but only before *k* in others. The non-retroflexed sibilant *s* is frequent before *t* in the highlands, but *h* appears more frequently in corresponding words in other dialects (Friedrich: unpublished MS).

The most distinctive difference of all, according to M. D. Lathrop, is the presence of a retroflexed lateral in the dialect of San Lorenzo and of Angahuan, corresponding to a retroflexed flap in other dialects. He also cites as characteristic of the dialect of Panatácuaro the use of aspirated stops in common words such as 't<sup>h</sup>a:ti "father" and 'ɛ<sup>h</sup>a "you (pl.)", where the stop is unaspirated in other dialects (1971: personal communication).

Dialectal variations are observed also on the morphological level. The suffix of reciprocal action, for example, is *-hpera* in the highlands, and *-pera* in the lake area. Particularly noticeable are the many varieties of the past tense habitual aspect suffix: *-sɛ,ran*, *-sɛ,ren*, *-sa,an*, *-sɛ,an*, etc. The suffix indicating future action is *-a* in the lake dialects and

→ in some areas of the highlands.

Lexical differences among dialects are perhaps the most noticeable phenomena of this kind. These sometimes reflect the difference in environment between the highlands and the lake, for example, where words pertaining to the construction of a troje (a steep-roofed wooden building) are known in the highlands, where such structures are common (Beals, Garmasco, and McGorkle: 1944), but not at the lake, where house construction is of adobe. At the lake, on the other hand, words for canoes and different kinds of fishing gear are in common use, but are virtually unknown in the highlands.

Towns on the periphery of the Tarascan area tend to retain vocabulary that is archaic in other areas. Perhaps the most confusing of lexical differences is to be found in Cuanaajo, an almost monolingual village several kilometres east of the town of Pátzcuaro, where the first and second plural personal pronouns mean the reverse of what they do elsewhere: 'ēa is "we" in Cuanaajo, but "you (pl.)" elsewhere, and ku'ēa is "you (pl.)" there, but "we" everywhere else.

## II. PHONIC MATERIAL

**2.1 Syllable types.** A characteristic feature of Tarascan speech is that in isolation every word ends in a vowel which, when unstressed, is generally voiceless; in context it is often elided. Although closed syllables occur initially and medially, open syllables are of much more frequent occurrence. Syllable patterns are illustrated by the following examples, in which hyphens indicate syllable boundaries within words:

VC	'in-epi-ni	"to sell"
CVC	'pan-pi-ri	"companion"
V	'i	"here; take it"
CV	'no	"who?"
CVV	i-'kia-ni	"to be angry"
CCV	'ēpi-ri	"fire"
CCGV	wa-'šan-ekwa	"chair, seat"

**2.2 Phonemes.** The phonological description of a language is a generalization of the phonemic systems of all native speakers of the language. Owing to dialect differences within the language, and to the degree to which an individual's speech has been affected by a second language, these phonemic systems are not all alike. Hence the linguist must choose from among these the system that is most nearly representative of the language as a whole.

With regard to the present analysis, it is assumed that the six-vowel dialects are characteristic of Tarascan, as are those in which the velar nasal is phonemic. A further assumption is that the majority of Tarascan speakers are bilingual to some extent and that loanwords must be taken into consideration in any phonemic analysis of the language.

There are six vowels in Tarascan, three high and three low (or, more precisely, non-high), articulated at front, central, and back positions:

	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɨ	u
Low	e	a	o

In closed syllables, e and o tend to be open, but in general the vowels show little range of allophonic variation.

The consonant phonemes of Tarascan are:

		labial	dental	alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
Stops	aspirated	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	s <sup>h</sup>	ç <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	
	unaspirated	p	t	s	ç	k	
	vd.	b	d			g	
Spirants		f		s	ç		h
Nasals		m	n			ŋ	
Lateral			l				
Flaps			r	ɾ			

ŋ should be read  
as ɲ throughout

There are three series of stops in Tarascan, two of which show limited distribution. The voiceless unaspirated stops occur word initially and word medially; the aspirated stops occur word initially only, where they contrast with the unaspirated stops, e.g., 'tamu "separate, apart", 't<sup>h</sup>amu "four"; 'kani "when?", 'k<sup>h</sup>ani "young corn plant".

The voiced stops occur only following nasals in native Tarascan words (e.g., 'tenta "[his] wife", 'nandi "[my/your] mother", hig'goni "with"), but in words borrowed from Spanish, such as 'baka "cow", dok'tori "doctor", and go'bienu "government", the initial voiced stop contrasts with the voiceless unaspirated stop in the same environment in native Tarascan words (e.g., pa'karani "to remain", tu'kuru "owl", 'keki "toad"). There are no phonemic voiced affricated stops; where these sounds occur they are allophones of the voiceless unaspirated phonemes: [in'zani] /'incani/ "to give [many]"; [in'ʃani] /in'cani/ "to enter".

Of the four spirant phonemes, the first occurs only in borrowed words (e.g., 'fawika "factory"). The alveolar spirant /s/ has a retroflexed allophone [ʂ] before k, p, and t, and a voiced allophone [z] before a voiced consonant (in borrowed words); elsewhere it is [s]. This phoneme contrasts with the palatal spirant in such word pairs as 'cani "a little" and 'ʃani "so much".

As mentioned earlier (Sect. 1.4), the velar nasal is phonemic only in the highland dialects; in the lake area it is an allophone of /n/. It contrasts with /n/ in syllable-initial position (it never occurs word initially) in such pairs of words as a'napu "belonging to, related to" and a'ɟatapu "tree" (this latter word is a'natapu in the dialects that lack the n/ɟ contrast).

The lateral phoneme occurs only in borrowed words, e.g., 'lapisi "pencil". The dental flap occurs in word initial position in borrowed words

only (e.g., re'bista "newspaper, magazine"), but word medially it contrasts with the retroflexed flap: 'uri "performer, actor, deer" and 'uri "nose".

Tarascan has two semi-vowels /y/ and /w/, which have the same articulation as the high front and back vowels but are non-syllabic. In the practical orthography proposed by the Council of Indigenous Languages and accepted by the Ministry of Education, the letters i and u have been used for these non-syllabic semi-vowels as well as for their syllabic counterparts.

**2.3 Phonotactics.** The semi-vowels do not occur preceding homorganic vowels (i.e., \*[yi], \*[wu] and \*[wo] are not found) nor preceding *ɛ*, but they do occur before other vowels, as the following examples illustrate: 'yast "now, today", 'yetani "to mix", 'yoni "long time", 'yumu "five"; wa'piti "woman, wife", 'wenani "to begin", 'wiču "dog".

Sequences of two vowels occur in such words as e'šeati "he/she will see", i'kiani "to be angry", ha'poatani "to help", 'čua:ni "to chase [more than one]".

Word initial consonant clusters in Tarascan consist of a stop or a spirant as the first member, followed by a stop as the second, e.g., 'tɔkwa "valley", 'tɔpu "mosquito", 'ɔpiri "fire", 'škari "firewood", 'stumba "eyebrow". These clusters, which are found in the lake dialects, evidently resulted from the loss of an intervening vowel which still appears in some of these words in the highland dialects, e.g., či'kari "firewood", ču'piri "fire".

Consonant clusters in word medial position may consist of stop plus stop (a'tapka "[that] he had hit", 'eekuni "to light a fire", yu'yickiri "young woman", 'hečka "yes, of course"), spirant plus stop ('əpu "head", i'mahtu "he also", 'kəhəkwə "hat", 'yohča "crane", 'həhki "hand", 'aspiti "tasty, delicious", 'istu "also", 'eskwa "eye"), and stop plus spirant (e'rokət "griddle", e'šəkəksə "we have seen"). Sequences of nasal plus



stop are common (an'be "what?", an'di "why?", in'ōa "enter"), and also nasal plus stop plus spirant ('kwegkaē "bluejay").

**2.4 Stress.** Stress is phonemic in Tarascan, as can be seen on the lexical level by such word pairs as 'karani "to fly" and ka'rani "to write"; 'werani "to go out" and we'rani "to cry". Primary stress falls on the first or second syllable of the root (see Sect. 3.3) and remains on the same syllable irrespective of the number of suffixes added. Certain enclitics also carry their own stress, as -'ta "emphasis".

Verbs in the present durative have two primary stresses, one on the root and the other on the final syllable of the suffix, e.g., wan'daša'ti "he is speaking". Certain other forms of the verb have secondary stress on the inflectional ending as well as primary stress on the root, e.g., wan'daš,raŋti "he used to speak", wan'daššapti "he was speaking", wan'da,šananti "he was about to speak", wan'da,šanti "he is about to speak".

**2.5 Vowel length.** Long vowels occur in many Tarascan words, but on the lexical level they are rarely the only differentiating feature between words. Two minimal pairs that come to mind are 'hašā "class, kind, type", and 'ha:šā "bread bean"; 'hiškani "to hide" and 'hi:škani "it is I". Some frequently occurring words that have long vowels are: a'ēa:ti "man, husband", hu'ēi:ti "my, mine", i'me:ri "his, her".

On the grammatical level, whenever a stem is followed by a suffix beginning with the same vowel as that of the final (open) syllable of the stem, the latter is lengthened, e.g., a'ta- "strike" + -a "future" + -ti "3rd person indicative" > a'ta:ti "he will strike". Only front and central vowels are lengthened.

**2.6 Relationship between speech and writing.** The phonemic orthography proposed by the Council of Indigenous Languages (cf. Sect 1.3) has been modified

to conform more closely with Spanish orthography. The affricated stops, formerly symbolized by *č* and *č̣*, have for many years been written *ts* and *ch*; *š* and *ṣ̌* have been retained, however, as well as *x* (the retroflexed flap) and *ʌ* (the high mid vowel). Aspirated stops are designated by an apostrophe following the letter (*p'*, *t'*, *ts'*, *ch'*, *k'*), and aspiration as a phoneme is written *j*, since it corresponds somewhat to the Spanish velar fricative.

Although stress is phonemic, it has been found unnecessary to indicate it for native speakers of the language except on words that differ minimally only by stress (see Sect. 2.4). In recent years vowel length, which was formerly disregarded, has been written as a dieresis over the long vowel. Generally speaking, there is a close relationship between Tarascan speech and the writing system in use during the past three decades.

### III. STRUCTURE OF UTTERANCES

**3.1 Obligatory constituents.** Except for utterances that consist of simple particles (*kani* "when?", 'he "yes"), the obligatory constituent of a Tarascan sentence is the predicate. This may consist of a verb root alone (the singular imperative), or a root or stem (see Sect. 3.2 for the distinction between "root" and "stem") followed by verbal suffixes.

In an imperative clause, the only obligatory element is the verb root: 'ni "go: (sg.)". The plural imperative is formed with the word 'he (the pl. imperative of *ha'gani* "to be") following the verb root: *ha'no* 'he "come in: (pl.)". The imperative expression can be expanded by adding a modifier (e.g., *wi'ria* 'kokani "run (sg.) quickly!"), or an object (*e'še* *hu'či:ti* 'wičuni "see (sg.) my dog!"), or the negative particle 'aṣi (e.g., 'aṣi 'p<sup>h</sup>ari "don't touch! (sg.)"). Further expansion of the modifier or of the object will be discussed in the next section.

A stative clause may consist simply of a root with verbal suffixes attached, e.g., 'šumuesti "it is fog" (< 'šumu "fog"), a'paḡisti "it (the weather) is hot" (a'paḡini "to be hot").

Similarly, an interrogative sentence may consist of an interrogative particle alone (an'di "why?", na'ni "where?"), or with verbal suffixes attached ('noski "who is it?", an'beski "what is it?").

**3.2 Organization of phrases within the sentence.** The noun phrase may consist of a particle (demonstrative or possessive pronoun, or numeral) and a noun, e.g., na 'hwata "a mountain", in'de 'wiču "that dog". This may be expanded by a modifier, e.g., na 'hwata 'k<sup>h</sup>eri "a huge mountain", in'de 'wiču tu'ḡipiti "that black dog". In the former case, the modifier may precede the particle ('k<sup>h</sup>eri na 'hwata) to give added emphasis to the modifier ("an immense mountain").

The modifier in the noun phrase, instead of being a single word, may consist of a clause introduced by the relative pronoun 'eḡga, e.g., in'de a'čā:ti eḡga i'šū 'hapka wi'ciadiḡwa "the man who was here yesterday".

The verb phrase, as indicated above, consists essentially of a root or stem with verbal suffixes attached. The distinction between root and stem is that the latter may consist of a root plus derivational suffixes; the root is an element devoid of all suffixes. For example, 'ni "go! (sg.)" is the root of the verb ni'rani "to go"; ni'ra-/ni'wa- is the stem of the same verb, to which inflectional suffixes are attached, e.g., i'na ni'rasti "he has gone", pa'wani ni'wakakst "tomorrow we will go".

Certain forms of the verb are complex in that they consist of an infinitive followed by a finite form of the verb ha'ḡani "to be", e.g., i'nast ni'rani 'hamanti "he (is the one who) was about to go", a'čā:ti <sup>eḡga</sup> ni'rani ha'ka "the man who is going".

Another form of the verb phrase consists of a finite verb followed by an infinitive, e.g., i'ma tan'tiaristi ni'rani "he has considered going". The idea of "wanting to do" something, which might be expressed in this way (e.g., i'ma 'wetastendi ni'rani "he wants to go") is more commonly expressed by a desiderative derivational suffix (-nča) in the verb, as in i'ma ni'nenčastadi "he wants to go".

The verb phrase can be expanded by various kinds of modifiers: (a) temporal: i'ma ni'wati pa'wani (or pa'wani ni'wati) "he will go tomorrow"; (b) locative: hi'ma ni'rasti "he has gone there"; (c) manner: ni'raspti 'kokani "he went immediately". It may also be expanded by having as object of the verb a complete clause: i'marini e'yagusti eska pa'wani ni'pirigga i'wini 'hwataru "he told me that tomorrow he would go to cut firewood on the mountain".

Expressions that are prepositional phrases in English are sometimes rendered in Tarascan by one word with case suffixes, as in Latin, e.g., a'čartiri "of the man; the man's", i'xetaru "in the village". Often they are postpositional phrases in Tarascan, with the postpositions him'bo "by means of, on, in" or hig'goni "with, accompanied by", or with participles postponed to the words with which they form a unit, e.g., 'sabado him'bo "on Saturday", 'lapisi him'bo "with a pencil", 'hindini hig'goni "with me", hi'ma 'weratini "from there", io'paku ha'mukutini "by the river", ha'poda wi'ripatani "around the lake".

**3.3 Morphology.** Suffixation is the predominant feature of Tarascan morphology; prefixation is no longer a productive feature, but vestiges of prefixes may be found in certain expressions. The basic elements of Tarascan syntax are particles, roots, suffixes, and enclitics. The first of these categories includes conjunctions (ka "and", 'nabkima "although", 'peru "but", 'ekm "when, if", 'eska "that"), interrogatives ('kani "when?", 'ne "who?",

na'ni "where?", 'na "how?", 'naki "which?", an'be "what?", na'muni "how many?", negatives ('ani "don't", 'no "no, not").

Roots are either monosyllabic or bisyllabic, and in the latter case may take the primary stress of the word on one syllable or the other (see Sect. 2.4). They cannot be further classified as noun roots or verb roots, because the same root may, with different suffixes, form either a noun or a verb, e.g., a'ja- "upright", a'jatapu "tree", a'jašayini "to stand up".

Suffixes may be derivational or inflectional. The former modify the meaning of the root, and the latter show the syntactic relationship between the word to which it is affixed and other words in the sentence. A large group of derivational suffixes are locational, serving to focus the attention to the place to which the action of the verb has reference (some of these suffixes refer to parts of the body as well as to locations in the environment). For example, the suffix -jaji refers to the face or to any vertical surface; with the root 'ni- "know, remember" it gives 'nigajikani "to recognize a face"; with šo're- "put a flexible object somewhere", it gives šo're-jajitani "to hang a rag on a wall" (each of these words includes another suffix in addition to the locative). Similarly, -nu refers to the edge of something or to the lips: p<sup>h</sup>i'kumuni (< p<sup>h</sup>i'ku- "take off, remove") means "to take off at the edge"; p<sup>h</sup>a'memuni (< p<sup>h</sup>a'me- "be sore, have a pain") means "to have sore lips".

Other derivational suffixes refer to public action (-hpi), action for the benefit of a third person (-ku), action performed by means of an instrument (-tara), solitary action (-mari), and so on. These suffixes occur in definite positions in relation to each other; their order of occurrence has been determined (by Maxwell and Elisabeth Lathrop, of the Summer Institute of Linguistics) by comparison of hundreds of words containing two or more of each of these suffixes.

As intimated above, inflectional suffixes are used to indicate the case of Tarascan nouns. The noun itself, with no inflectional suffix, is in the subjective, or nominative, case. The plural suffix *-eēn*, when it occurs, normally precedes the case ending, which is one of three suffixes: possessive *-eri*, objective *-ni*, or locative *-yu*. In some dialects the postpositions *hin'be* and *hiŋ'goni* have lost their stress and their initial syllable, and have been analyzed as instrumental and comitative case suffixes, but evidence from other dialects and from historical documents (such as Basalenque's Arte de la lengua tarasca) indicate that these are not suffixes in the Tarascan language as a whole.

Verbal inflectional suffixes inflect the verb for aspect, tense, and mode (see Table 1, which lists the combinations of these), as well as forming the infinitive (*-ni*) and participles, present durative (or concurrent) (*-rini*), present perfect (*-tini*), and past (*-kata*). The suffixes which identify the modes are those occurring in the third person form of the verb in final position (or before the first enclitic). They are: *-ti* Indicative; *-hi*, *-i*, or zero Interrogative; and *-ka* Subjunctive.

Past tense is indicated by *-p* (which is assimilated to a preceding *n* before *-ti* or *-ka*), the future by *-a*. Present tense is unmarked.

The perfective aspect, which refers to the action of the verb in its entirety, is indicated by *-s*, as in *i'na 'nitisti* "he knows". Some verbs in the present perfective are commonly rendered in English as a simple past, as *i'na a'ŋisti* "he said"; but *i'na a'ŋishti* "he said" (past perfective) refers to the action of saying as having been already complete at some time in the past. In some respects the perfective aspect is analogous to the present perfect and the pluperfect tenses in English in that the results of the action persist to some specified time, either in the present or the past.

The habitual aspect suffixes are *goin* (present tense) and *-sā,ran* (past tense), with considerable dialectal variation in the latter, as mentioned

A. Past tense

## M O D E

A S P E C T	Indicative		Interrogative		Subjunctive	
	Strong	Weak/Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
Perfective	-epti	-pti	-epi	-pi	-epka	-pka
Habitual	-st,ranti	-anti	-st,ranhi	-nhi	-st,ranka	-anka
Durative	-,šapti	-ni 'hapti	-,šapi	-ni 'hapi	-,šapka	-ni 'hapka
Inceptive	-,šananti	-ni 'hananti	-,šanahi	-ni 'hanahi	-,šanaka	-ni 'hanaka

B. Present tense

## M O D E

A S P E C T	Indicative		Interrogative		Subjunctive	
	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
Perfective	-sti	-ti	-shi	-hi	-ska	-ka
Habitual	-sindi	-hti	-sini	-hi	-siŋga	-hka
Durative	-ša'ti	-ni ha'ti	-ša'hi	-ni ha'hi	-ša'ka	-ni ha'ka
Inceptive	-,šanti	-ni 'hanti	-,šahi	-ni 'hanahi	-,šanka	-ni 'hanka

C. Potential action

## M O D E

A S P E C T	Indicative		Interrogative		Subjunctive	
	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
Future	-ati		-a		-aka	
Conditional	-pirindi		-pirini		-piriŋga	

Table 1. Inflectional suffixes of the Tarascan verb.

earlier (Sect. 1.4). The durative aspect suffix is -ša, with primary stress on the following syllable in the present tense, and secondary stress on the aspectual suffix in the past, e.g., hu'paša'ti "he is coming", hu'pa.šapti "he was coming". The present inceptive suffix is -,šan, and the past inceptive

is -,*kanan*. These four aspects focus the attention on the action of the verb itself (irrespective of tense) with regard to its completion, its repetition, its continuation, and its beginning.

Both future and conditional seem to pattern as aspects of unrealized or potential action. The future suffix is -*a*, as mentioned above, and the conditional -*pirin*.

Each of the three nodes has two forms which, for want of a more descriptive term, are here designated as "strong" and "weak". The verb may stand alone in the strong form of the indicative and interrogative nodes, but follows the conjunctions *hin'hoka* "because" or '*aka* "that" in the strong form of the subjunctive node. The weak forms of the verb always follow a previously occurring morpheme: in the indicative this is the definitive suffix -*af* which, when affixed to the subject, lends added emphasis, e.g., *i'mast 'mititi* "he is the one who knows". In the interrogative the word *e'nahki*, which implies doubt or uncertainty, is followed by the weak form of the verb, e.g., *e'nahki i'ma 'mitihiti* "he seems to know". In the subjunctive, the weak form follows the conjunctions '*aka* "when, if" or '*ajga* "who, which", e.g., '*aka i'ma 'niple* "when he went"; *i'ma 'ajga un'dani ha'ka* "he who is speaking".

Table 1 lists the morpheme sequences that may be suffixed to any Tarascan verb stem to give the third person singular form of the verb in the aspect, tense, and node indicated. The reason for choosing the final suffix of the third person form of the verb as diagnostic of the nodes is that for the first and second persons the verb forms of indicative and subjunctive are identical. Except for this change of form in the indicative, the inflected form of the verb (apart from pronominal enclitics which can optionally follow the inflectional suffixes) is invariable for all persons, singular and plural, for any given tense and aspect. This is illustrated by the paradigms in Table 2.



	Indicative (I [have] struck, etc.)	Interrogative (have I struck?, etc.)	Subjunctive (because I [have] struck, etc.)
1	'hi a'taska(ni)	'hi a'taski	him'bokani 'hi a'taska
sg. 2	't <sup>h</sup> uri a'taska	't <sup>h</sup> uri a'taski	him'bokari 't <sup>h</sup> u a'taska
3	i'ma a'tasti	i'ma a'taski	him'boka i'ma a'taska
1	hu'čakst a'taska	hu'čakst a'taski	him'bokakst hu'ča a'taska
pl. 2	'čahčt a'taska	'čahčt a'taski	him'bokahčt 'ča a'taska
3	c <sup>h</sup> t'makst a'tasti	c <sup>h</sup> t'makst a'taski	him'bokakst c <sup>h</sup> t'ma a'taska

Table 2. Present tense paradigms of a'tani "to strike".

The fourth of the basic elements of Tamascan syntax are the enclitics, which have also been called "movable suffixes" because they are not obligatorily attached to any one class of words. Person and number of verbs are indicated by enclitics (as well as by personal pronouns), but the enclitics are frequently attached to a word preceding the verb, whether conjunction or pronoun. For example, -ri is the indicator of the 2nd person singular subject; it may be attached to the verb itself (ni'wari "will you go?"), or to a preceding pronoun ('t<sup>h</sup>uri ni'waka "you will go"), or conjunction ('ekari ni'waka pa'wani... "if you go tomorrow..."). Other subject enclitics are: -ni "1st person sg.", -či "1st person pl." (in some dialects), -hoč "2nd person pl.", -hst "1st/3rd person pl." (in dialects that do not use -či for 1st person pl.).

There is likewise a series of object pronoun enclitics: -rini "1st sg.", -hini "2nd sg.", -hočni "1st pl.", -kani "2nd pl.". Examples of their use: i'warini wan'dasti "he spoke to me", 'nohočni 'inokwa 'sesikwa ni'xani "won't you give us permission to go?".

Other enclitics have different functions, as -taru "in addition" ('mataru "another" < 'ma "one"; 'notaru "no more"), -čka "emphasis" ('nička "go!"), -ntu "also" ('hihtuni ni'waka "I also will go"), 'ga "quotation" ('i'maga ha'tiristi 70 'wešurini "they say he is 70 years old").

Morphophonemic changes may be observed in Table 1, where in certain cases the nasal is assimilated to the point of articulation of the following consonant, which in turn becomes voiced, e.g., a'ta- "strike" - -sán "habitual aspect" - -p "present tense" - -ka "subjunctive mode" > a'tastigga "he strikes".

**3.4 Complex sentences.** Clauses can be joined together by the conjunction ka "and" to form a compound sentence, e.g., hi 'paska Eli'sitani ka A'delani 'parakst e'šeni dok'torini ka in'cínastikst re'media, ka 'sanderu 'sesi ha'pástikst 'ga "I took Elisita and Adela to see the doctor and they were given some medicine and are better now". Another coordinate conjunction is 'peru "but" (< Spanish pero): i'ma p<sup>hi</sup>in'destranti 'pani i'me:ri an'takiti 'burruni, 'peru no ha'tapastranti "he was accustomed to take his good donkey, but he didn't mount it".

Of more frequent occurrence are constructions with subordinate clauses introduced by a variety of words such as 'ejga "that, who" (e.g., 'hi hin'deska na eskwe'lanti 'ejgani no 'sesi 'hamanka "I am a schoolboy who didn't behave himself"), him'boka "because" (e.g., ka 'tenta i'kiaku,šapti him'boka 'šani 'yonda,šapta "and his wife would get angry because he delayed so long"), 'eska "that" (e.g., 'hi 'nitiska 'eska 'ča hug'gwaka 'biernisi him'bo "I know that you will come Friday"), 'eka "when" (e.g., 'sani 'yondakwagespti 'eka i'ma ni'rani 'hamanka ta'reni "he delayed a little when he was about to go to plow").

**3.5 Synonymous expressions.** Ideas can often be expressed in more than one way in Tarascan. A glance over some personal letters written by native Tarascan speakers reveals differences in structure of greetings, for example: (1) 'kanikwa 'cipiŕa'ka wan'dahpagkoŕni "I am very happy to greet you"; (2) 'kanikwa 'cipikwa hiŕ'goni wan'dahpaŕa'hakini "with much happiness I am greeting you". In the first case, the idea of pleasure, or happiness, is expressed by a verbal form of 'cipi-, the root meaning "happy", whereas in the second it is by a nominal form in an adverbial phrase.

In narrative context, a common type of syncayay is to use an infinitive in place of a finite form of the verb. This can be done when a finite form has already been used and the subject of the infinitive is the same as that of the finite form of the verb, e.g., ka pa'wandinakwa 'nintaspti i'retaŕu, ka e'yaguntani i'ne:ŕi 'tombani, ka a'ŕini... "and the next day he returned to the village and told [the news to] his wife, and said...". Here e'yaguntani "to notify, to tell" and a'ŕini "to say" are both infinitives, used instead of the finite forms e'yaguntaspti and a'ŕispti, which could just as well have been used here.

In some cases, the passive form of the verb can be used as synonymous with the active, as for example, ca'kapu a'tasti 'hwanuni "the stone struck John" and 'hwann a'tagasti ca'kapu hin'bo "John has been struck by the stone". When the agent is personal (e.g., "Bill struck John"), it is unlikely that the passive form of the verb (indicated by the suffix -ga) would be used.

#### IV. CLASSES OF WORDS AND GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES

**4.1 Word classes.** Nouns and verbs are the two inflected parts of speech in Tarascan. Although many of both classes of words are derived from the same roots, they can be distinguished in that the noun pluralizing suffix and the

endings for possessive, objective, and locative cases may be affixed to nouns only, e.g., i'xetaru "in the village", aa'hapweča "stones".

Pronouns may be considered a subclass of nouns, since certain nominal inflectional suffixes are used with personal pronouns. This is illustrated particularly by the third person pronouns, which take nominal suffixes -ri and -ni for possessive and objective cases respectively (see Table 3). As intimated earlier (Sect. 1.4), there is a certain amount of dialectal variation in pronouns. Those given in Table 3 are the personal pronouns common in literary usage.

		1st person		2nd person		3rd person	
SINGULAR	Subj.	'hi	"I"	'th <sub>u</sub>	"you"	i'na	"he"
	Poss.	hu'či:ti	"my"	'či:ti	"your"	i'me:ri	"his"
	Obj.	'hinini	"me"	't <sup>h</sup> uɟi:ai	"you"	i'nani	"him"
PLURAL	Subj.	hu'ča	"we"	'ča	"you"	c <sup>h</sup> i'na	"they"
	Poss.	hu'ča:ri	"our"	'ča:ri	"your"	c <sup>h</sup> i'ne:ri	"their"
	Obj.	hu'čancini	"us"	'čaykəni	"you"	c <sup>h</sup> i'nani	"them"

Table 3. Personal pronouns.

As mentioned earlier (Sect. 3.3), verb stems can be affixed for aspect, tense, and mode. This is not diagnostic for verbs, however, because nouns may also take certain verbal suffixes, e.g., a'xanietē "it is a rabbit" (a'xani "rabbit" + -s "perfective aspect" + -ti "indicative mode [3rd person]"). Participial suffixes can be attached to the verb stem, however, to form the durative participle (e.g., c'šerini "seeing" < c'šə- "see" + -rini "durative/concurrent participle"), the perfect participle (e.g., a'tatini

"having struck" < a'ta- "strike" + -tini "perfect participle"), or the past participle (e.g., 'ukata "having been made" < 'u- "make" + -kata "past participle"). These suffixes are not attached to noun stems, and may be considered as identifying verbs.

4.2 Grammatical categories. Other word classes may be described according to their relationship with one another within the utterance. The adjective occurs adjacent to the noun (generally following it) and, like the noun, may become a verbal phrase by the addition of verbal suffixes, e.g., a'gatapu šu'gapiti "green tree"; šu'gapitisti "it is green".

The adverb, likewise, occurs next to the verb it modifies, either preceding or following the verb, e.g., 'sesi 'warasti "it turned out well" (< 'sesi "well", 'warasti "to leave, go out"), 'ni 'kokani "go quickly!".

The only prepositions used in Tarascan are those borrowed from Spanish, chiefly per "by" and para "for". The preposition is followed by the noun or pronoun in the subjective, rather than the objective, case, e.g., para 'hi "for me (literally 'for I)". Instead of prepositions, Tarascan uses postpositions, which come at the end of the modifying phrase. Two of the most frequently used postpositions are him'bo "by means of, in, on" and hig'goni "with, accompanying", e.g., šu'daxi him'bo 'hondukani 'buxuni "with a rope he tied the donkey"; ni'raspti i'moxi 'buxuni hig'goni "he went with his donkey" (cf. also Sect. 3.2).

Another common postposition is a'napu "related to, belonging to", e.g., Uruapan a'napu "belonging to/coming from Uruapan". Nominal and verbal suffixes often occur with this word, giving it the appearance of a noun or verb, but these suffixes must be regarded as affixed to the postpositional phrase as a whole, rather than to the final element only, e.g., na'ni a'napweaki "where are you from?", México a'napweča "Mexicans".

Certain perfect participles are frequently used as postpositions, such as ha'mukutini "on the edge of" (< ha'gani "to be" + -mu "on the edge"), pa'gikutini "on the other side" (< pa'gikuni "to cross to the other side"), 'piritini "beside, nearby" (< 'pirini "to be close"), 'weratini "away from" (< 'werani "to leave"). Their use is illustrated in the following examples: ha'ponde ha'mukutini "on the edge of the lake", hi'na 'piritini "there nearby, near there", ta'nimu ki'lometru i'reta 'weratini "three kilometres from the village".

Conjunctions and interrogative and negative particles have already been mentioned (Sect. 3.3). Numerals might also be included in the category of particles. These are: 'na "one", oi'mani "two", ta'nimu "three", 't<sup>h</sup>anu "four", 'yumu "five", 'kwimu "six", yunci'mani "seven", yunta'nimu "eight", yun't<sup>h</sup>anu "nine", and 'tenhini "ten". Beyond ten, Spanish numbers are commonly used. Na "one" is also used as an indefinite article.

Demonstratives include in'de "that one", 'i "this one", e<sup>h</sup>'mi "these", and e<sup>h</sup>'t<sup>h</sup>ma "those".

**4.3 Grammatical constructions.** The adjective is compared by preceding it with 'sanderu "more", e.g., 'sanderu ya'wani "farther", 'sanderu an'bakitisti "it is better". When two items are being compared, the one being compared precedes the comparative construction of the adjective, which is followed by ka eska (literally "and that") and the item to which the first is being compared, e.g., in'de 'wiču 'sanderu 'k<sup>h</sup>eristi ka eska na hi'wach "that dog is bigger than a coyote".

Numeral classifiers -eča "long", -ara "round", -iču "flat" are used with numerals to indicate the shape of the objects referred to (Friedrich 1970). These are not necessarily used when the numeral precedes the noun to which it refers (e.g., 't<sup>h</sup>anu i'čusanta "four tortillas"), but when the

numeral occurs alone, as in response to a question, the classifier is used, followed by the nominalizing suffix -kwa, e.g., 't<sup>h</sup>aničukwa "four (flat objects)".

#### V. LEXICAL MATERIAL

The statement has been made (Sect. 3.3) that roots are either monosyllabic or bisyllabic. Lexical items are formed from such roots by the addition of the appropriate suffixes. The most productive nominal suffix is this nature is -kwa, e.g., č<sup>h</sup>a'na- "play" + -kwa > č<sup>h</sup>a'nakwa "game"; hen'če- "tremble, quake (referring to the ground)" + -kwa > hen'čekwa "earthquake". Some common endings, which may have been nominal suffixes at one time but are no longer used productively, are: -mu, -pu, -čə, -mba, -ta.

For verbs as lexical items, the only infinitive suffix is -ni; there is only one verb conjugation in Tarascan.

Lexical sequences include the plural of the interrogative particles 'ne "who?" and an'be "what?". The plural of these is a kind of reduplication, 'ne ka 'ne "who and who?" (literally) and an'be ka an'be "what and what?". An'be is also used as a noun, with the meaning "affair, matter, thing", e.g., 'hikeini e'yanigwaka ma an'be "I shall tell you (pl.) something". In this sense, the regular plural suffix is used, e.g., i'ne:ri an'be:ča "his affairs, his belongings".

The negatives of these words are likewise fixed lexical sequences: no 'ne or no ne 'na "nobody" and no ma an'be (or nom'be) "nothing". Such sequences are not very common in the language.

## TEXT AND ANALYSIS

(The following text is transcribed as written in the practical orthography popularized by the Tarascan Literacy Campaign; the phonemic orthography is used in the analysis. The text is from a personal letter dated July 1954.)

siempreni miantašapka parakini karachini, isa jimbo insakini menderu  
karachiska išu ch'erani ueratini jimbokani noteru Morelia jaraska,  
k'anakuristia eskuela noteru segiriatl jimboka tsimani maestrocha  
uentaska ka noteru ukastiksa segirini estudiarini, isa jimbo noteru  
uskaksa segirini estudiarini, ka mejora nintastiksa lamindu tatakicha.  
ji sani sentirini koxokasaŷga jimbokani ne neni ušaka estudiarini, ka  
perikani noteru segiriakia estudiarini.

'siempreni: Sp. siempre "always" + -ni "1st person sg. subject" (enclitic).

'miantašapka "I was remembering": 'miani "to remember" + -nta "repetitive"  
+ -ša "durative aspect" + -p "past tense" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st  
person".

'parakini: Sp. para "for" + -kini "2nd person sg. object" (enclitic).

ka'račini "to write to you": < ka'rani "to write" + -či "1st/2nd person  
benefactive" + -ni "infinitive".

'isē hin'bo "for this reason": 'isē "thus", hin'bo "by means of"; this is a  
common lexical sequence.

'yasikini "now-you": 'yasē "now, today" + -kini "2nd person sg. object".

'menderu "again": neni "once" (cf. na "one") + -teru "in addition".

ka'račiska "I have written to you": see above; -s is "perfective aspect".

i'šu "here".

č'h'e'rani 'weratini "from Cherán": 'weratini is the perfect participle (< 'werani  
"to leave"), used here as a postposition (see Sect. 4.2).



hin'bokani "because-I": hin'boka "because" + -ni "1st person sg. subject" (cf. above).

'noteru "no longer": no "negative" + -teru "in addition" (cf. above).

Morelia ha'paska "I am in Morelia": ha'paska < ha'pami "to be" + -s "perfective aspect" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st person" (cf. above).

k<sup>h</sup>a'makuristia es'kwela "school is finished": k<sup>h</sup>a'makuni "to finish" + -kuri "reflexive" + -s "perfective aspect" (cf. above) + -ti (indicative mode, 3rd person) + -ia "already" (Sp. ya); eskwela is a Sp. borrowing: escuela "school".

se'giriati "it will continue": Sp. seguir "to continue" + -a "future" + -ti "indicative mode, 3rd person".

'askakst "we are able": 'uni "to do, to be able" + -s "perfective aspect" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st person" + -kst "1st/3rd plural subject".

se'girini "to continue": Sp. seguir "to continue" + -ni "infinitive".

estudiarini "to study": Sp. estudiar "to study" + -ni "infinitive".

'nintastikst "they have gone home": ni'rani "to go" + -uts "repetitive action" + -s "perfective aspect" + -ti "indicative mode" + -kst "1st/3rd person pl. subject".

'yamindu ta'takiča "all the boys": 'yamindu "all", ta'taka "boy" + -ča "noun pl." (ta'takiča is a dialectal variation of ta'takeča).

'hi 'sani sen'tirini ko'pokasigga "I feel a little sorry": 'hi "I", 'sani "a little", sen'tirini "to feel" (< Sp. sentir "to feel" + -ni "infinitive"), ko'pokasigga "I feel" (< ko'pokani "to feel" + -sin "habitual aspect" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st person"); this is an idiomatic expression, based on the Spanish usage of sentir as "to be sorry".

hin'bokani "because-I": see above.

no 'meni 'uša'ka "I am not able": no "negative", 'meni "once", 'uni "to be able" (cf. above) + -ša "durative aspect" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st person".

ka 'perikani "and probably": ka "and", 'perika "probably" + -ni "1st person subject".

se'giriak'ya "I will continue": Sp. seguir "to continue" + -a "future" + -ka "indicative mode, 1st person" + -ya "already" (Sp.).

## FREE TRANSLATION

I was still thinking of writing to you, so now I am writing you again from Cherán because I am no longer in Morelia. School has finished. It will not continue because two teachers left and don't want to continue teaching any longer. For that reason we can't continue to study any longer, and it is better that all the boys have returned home. I feel rather sorry because I am not able to study, and probably I will not continue to go to school.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baselenguas, Diego  
1886 Arte de la lengua tarascan. Mexico, Secretaría de Fomento. 86 p.  
[first published 1714]
- Beals, Ralph L.  
1946 Cherán: a sierra Tarascan village. Smithsonian Institution. Institute of Social Anthropology. Publication No. 2. Washington, Government Printing Office. x, 225 p. and 8 plates.
- Beals, Ralph and Carrasco, Pedro  
1944 "Names of the mountain Tarascans." American Anthropologist 46:516-522
- Beals, Ralph L.; Carrasco, Pedro; and McCorkle, Thomas  
1944 Houses and house use of the sierra Tarascans. Smithsonian Institution. Institute of Social Anthropology. Publication No. 1. Washington, Government Printing Office. x, 37 p. and 8 plates.
- Brand, Donald D.  
1944 "An historical sketch of geography and anthropology in the Tarascan region: Part I." New Mexico Anthropologist, vol. 6/7, pp. 37-108
- Poster, George M.  
1948 Empire's children: the people of Tzintzuntzan. Smithsonian Institution. Institute of Social Anthropology. Publication No. 6. Washington, Government Printing Office. v, 297 p. and 16 plates.
- Poster, Mary LeGron  
1968 "Componential analysis of grammar: the Tarascan verb." International Journal of American Linguistics 34:259-268  
1969 The Tarascan Language. [University of California Publications:

Linguistics 56] Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press. xli, 200 p.

Friedrich, Paul

1969 On the meaning of the Tarascan suffixes of space. [Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics: Memoir 23 of the International Journal of American Linguistics] Bloomington, Indiana University. 48 p.

1970a "Shape in grammar." Language 46:379-407

1970b "Dialectal variation in Tarascan." Unpublished MS.

Gilberti, Maturino

1962 Diccionario de la lengua tarasca o de Michoacán. Colección Siglo XVI, No. 9. Mexico [first printed Mexico 1559; subsequent edition Mexico 1901]

Grasserie, Raoul de la and Nicolas Leen

1896 Langue tarasque. Paris.

Lagunas, Juan Bautista de

1896 Arte y diccionario, con otras obras en lengua michuocana. Mexico.

Lathrop, Maxwell D.

1937 "Report on a partial study of the Tarascan dialect." Investigaciones Lingüísticas 4:111-129

Pabín de la Borbolla, Daniel

1940 The Tarasca project: a cooperative enterprise of the National Polytechnic Institute, Mexican Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the University of California. American Anthropologist 42:708-712

Stanislowski, Dan

1947 "Tarascan political geography." American Anthropologist 49:46-55

Swadesh, Mauricio

1969 Elementos del tarasco antiguo. Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas. 190 p.

Wares, Alma G.

1946 Suffixation in Tarascan. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Indiana University. 30 p.

Wares, Iris M.

1965 Linguistic and related problems in Mexican Indian literacy. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Texas. vi, 194 p.

West, Robert G.

1948 Cultural geography of the modern Tarascan area. Smithsonian Institution. Institute of Social Anthropology. Publication No. 7. Washington, Government Printing Office. vi, 77 p. and 14 plates.