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## Morphological Analysis of a Mixteco Song

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The text was taken by the author in 1954 from Rodriguez Hernandes Lopez, a middle aged, bilingual man. He resides in San Agustin, Tlacotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico, where the dialect differs slightly from other surrounding villages.

The "Song of the Cat-God" is sung by the Mixtecos of this village and of one or two nearby villages at special celebrations such as a wedding, birthday, or a dance. Usually it is sung to the accompaniment of one or several violins and guitars and to the rhythm of a drum.

The "cat-god" represents a man who is trying to find a wife. He supposedly has gone up to heaven where, unknown to the girl, he watches her as she goes about her work.

Text as dictated:<sup>I</sup>

'<sup>1</sup>zaā <sup>2</sup>?i?<sup>3</sup>zā <sup>4</sup>n'dibilú.

1. <sup>1</sup>zaā 'song'. Noun subject.<sup>X</sup>

2. <sup>2</sup>?i?<sup>3</sup>zā 'god, deity'. Noun, subordinate to the main noun.

3. <sup>4</sup>n'dibilú 'cat'. <sup>4</sup>n'di - prefix frequently used with names of animals.  
bilu 'cat'.

(Song of the Cat-god)

'<sup>1</sup>nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kū <sup>2</sup>?i?<sup>3</sup>zā <sup>4</sup>n'dibilú 4. naha 'why'. na 'what'. Question

<sup>2</sup>?i?<sup>3</sup>zā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>7</sup>n'dabā <sup>8</sup>zā <sup>9</sup>w'a?an <sup>10</sup>za indicator. ha 'thing'. A noun.

<sup>10</sup>n'mu? "sukún <sup>12</sup>o<sup>n</sup>dé <sup>13</sup>be?e. 5. ní - past tense indicator of the verb it precedes.

6. kuu - Here past tense of the verb 'to be'.

7. <sup>n</sup>daba 'to jump'. Past tense.  
8. za 'He'. Pronoun form of ?i?za<sup>2</sup>.  
9. k<sup>W</sup>a?an 'went'. One of the few verbs  
in Mixteco not preceded by ni<sup>7</sup> to  
indicate past tense.  
10. mu?u 'face, toward, place to'. Noun.  
11. suk?n'tall, high'. An adjective.  
12. ?o<sup>n</sup>d? 'over to, up until'. Noun.  
13. be?e 'house'. Here means 'heaven'.

(What was the cat-god for, the god who jumped,  
went up on high to his house in heaven?)

- <sup>4</sup>nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>7</sup>zeke <sup>15</sup>sini <sup>2</sup>?i?za      14. zeke 'bone'. Noun.  
<sup>3</sup><sup>8</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu <sup>9</sup>nu masu <sup>10</sup>tinteró <sup>11</sup>skribanú <sup>12</sup>13. siní 'head'. Noun.  
<sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>7</sup>zeke <sup>15</sup>sini <sup>2</sup>?i?za <sup>3</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu.      16. nú 'if'.  
17. masu 'not'. mā is the negative  
preceding verbs in the potential  
aspect. suu is an affirmative reply.  
<sup>18</sup><sup>19</sup>tinterú 'inkwell'. s<sup>W</sup>ribanú  
'writer'. Spanish loans.<sup>17</sup>

(What was the cat-god's skull for  
if it wasn't an inkwell for the writer?)

- <sup>4</sup>nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>9</sup>só?o <sup>2</sup>?i?za <sup>3</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu      19. só?o 'ear'. Noun.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>17</sup>masu <sup>20</sup>kučárá <sup>21</sup>kosinerá      20, 21 kučárá 'spoon'. kosinerá  
<sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>9</sup>só?o <sup>2</sup>?i?za <sup>3</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu.      'cook'. Spanish loans.

(What was the cat-god's ear for  
if it wasn't the cook's spoon?)

- <sup>4</sup>nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>22</sup>isi <sup>23</sup>n<sup>W</sup>uci <sup>2</sup>?i?za <sup>3</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu      22. isi 'hair'. Noun.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>17</sup>masu <sup>18</sup>zeke <sup>24</sup>tikú <sup>25</sup>kosturerá      23. n<sup>W</sup>uci 'eye'. Noun possessor.  
<sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>22</sup>isi <sup>23</sup>n<sup>W</sup>uci <sup>2</sup>?i?za <sup>3</sup>n<sup>W</sup>ibilu.      24. tikú 'stitch'. Adjective.  
25. Kosturerá 'seamstress'.  
Spanish loan.

(What was the cat-god's eye-lash for  
if it wasn't the seamstress' needle?)

- "nahā <sup>5</sup> nī <sup>6</sup> kuu <sup>23</sup> <sup>22</sup> duči <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū 26. antichó 'eye-glasses'.  
"nú <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>26</sup> anteohó <sup>19</sup> skribanú Spanish loan.  
ni <sup>5</sup> kuu <sup>23</sup> <sup>22</sup> duči <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū.
- (What were the cat-god's eyes for  
if they were not glasses for the writer?)
- "nahā <sup>5</sup> nī <sup>6</sup> kuu sitnī <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū 27. ſitnī 'nose'. Noun.  
"nú <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> fii tači <sup>24</sup> eřerú 28. fii 'skin, leather'. Noun.  
ni <sup>5</sup> kuu sitnī <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū. 29. tači 'wind, air'. Noun.  
30. eřerú 'forger, smith'. Spanish.
- (What was the cat-god's nose for  
if it wasn't bellows for the smith?)
- "nahā <sup>5</sup> nī <sup>6</sup> kuu iši <sup>22</sup> zu?u <sup>21</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū 31. žu?u 'mouth'. Noun.  
"nú <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>25</sup> žeke tíkú sastřerú 32. sastřerú 'tailor'. Spanish.  
ni <sup>5</sup> kuu iši <sup>22</sup> žu?u <sup>21</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū.
- (What was the cat-god's mustache  
for it it wasn't the tailor's needle?)
- "nahā <sup>5</sup> nī <sup>6</sup> kuu nū?un žosō <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū 33. nū?un 'tooth'. Noun.  
"nú <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>25</sup> sieřa karpinterú 34. žosō 'grinder'. Noun.  
ni <sup>5</sup> kuu nū?un <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū. 35,36. sieřá 'saw'. kařpinterú  
'carpenter'. Spanish.
- (What were the cat-god's molars for if  
they were not a saw for the carpinter?)
- "nahā <sup>5</sup> nī <sup>6</sup> kuu nū?un ze?e <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū 37. ze?e 'door'. Noun.  
"nú <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>23</sup> ahó kosinera 38. ahó 'garlic'. Spanish loan.  
ni <sup>5</sup> kuu nū?un ze?e <sup>2</sup> ?i?žā <sup>3</sup> ndibilū.
- (What was the cat-god's front teeth for  
if they were not garlic for the cook?)

nahā <sup>5</sup> <sub>6</sub> <sup>39</sup> kuu žáa ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū  
nú masū <sup>19</sup> limá <sup>20</sup> ererú  
<sup>4</sup> ni <sup>5</sup> <sub>6</sub> <sup>37</sup> kuu žáa ?i?žá <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū.

39. žáa 'tongue'. Noun.

40. limá 'file'. Spanish loan.

(What was the cat-god's tongue for  
if it wasn't a file for the smith?)

- nahā <sup>5</sup> <sub>6</sub> <sup>41</sup> <sub>42</sub> <sup>43</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup> kuu kutū žoo ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 41. kutū 'nostril'  
nú <sup>19</sup> masū <sup>43</sup> <sub>44</sub> kañú <sup>45</sup> <sub>18</sub> <sup>46</sup> há?a <sup>n</sup>dute <sup>47</sup> bе?e <sup>48</sup> rey 42. žoo 'tube'  
<sup>5</sup> ni <sup>6</sup> <sub>41</sub> <sup>42</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup> kuu kutū žoo ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilu. 43. kañú 'hollow shaft'. Spanish.  
44. há?a 'pass by'. Present tense  
verb.  
45. <sup>n</sup>dute 'water'. Noun.  
46. rey 'king'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's Adam Apple for  
if it wasn't a canal for water to flow  
through for the king's house?)

- nahā <sup>5</sup> <sub>6</sub> <sup>49</sup> kuu zeke čižo ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 47. čižo 'shoulder'. Noun.  
nú <sup>19</sup> masū <sup>50</sup> palá pamaderú 48. palá 'shovel'. Spanish.  
<sup>5</sup> ni <sup>6</sup> <sub>49</sub> <sup>50</sup> kuu zeke čižo ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilu. 49. panaderú 'baker'. Spanish.

("hat was the cat-god's shoulder blade for  
if it wasn't a peel for the baker?)

- nahā <sup>5</sup> <sub>6</sub> <sup>49</sup> kuu zeke <sup>50</sup> nda?a <sup>51</sup> kʷá?á <sup>52</sup> ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilu 50. <sup>n</sup>da?a 'hand, arm'. Noun.  
nú <sup>19</sup> masū <sup>52</sup> bastóon presidente 51. kʷá?á 'right-handed'.  
<sup>5</sup> ni <sup>6</sup> <sub>49</sub> <sup>50</sup> kuu zeke <sup>51</sup> nda?a <sup>52</sup> kʷá?á <sup>53</sup> ?i?žá <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilu. An adjective.  
52,53. bastóon 'walking-stick'. presidente 'president'. Spanish loans.

(What was the cat-god's right arm for  
if it wasn't a cane for the president?)

- <sup>1</sup>'nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>14</sup>žeke <sup>5o</sup>ndá?a <sup>5u</sup>sá?ndé <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>54.</sup>sá?ndé 'left-handed'.  
<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>ndibilū <sup>16</sup>nú masū <sup>17</sup>bastóon <sup>52</sup>alkaldé <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu Ajective.  
<sup>4</sup>'žeke <sup>5o</sup>ndá?a <sup>64</sup>sá?ndé <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3</sup>ndibilū. <sup>55.</sup>alkaldé 'mayor'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's left arm for  
if it wasn't a cane for the mayor?)

- <sup>4</sup>'nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>5b</sup>tnií <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilū <sup>56.</sup>tnií 'fingernail'. Noun.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>11</sup>masū <sup>51</sup>tenasá <sup>3p</sup>ererú <sup>57.</sup>tenasá 'tongs'. Spanish.  
<sup>5</sup>ni <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>5b</sup>tnií <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilū.

(What were the cat-god's claws for  
if they were not tongs for the smith?)

- <sup>4</sup>'nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>14</sup>žeke <sup>53</sup>sukún <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu <sup>58.</sup>sukún 'neck'. Noun.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>11</sup>masū <sup>59</sup>martižú <sup>39</sup>ererú <sup>59.</sup>martižú 'hammer'. Spanish.  
<sup>5</sup>ni <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>14</sup>žeke <sup>59</sup>sukún <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu.

(What was the cat-god's neckbone for  
if it wasn't a hammer for the smith?)

- <sup>4</sup>'nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>60</sup>sítā <sup>61</sup>ná?má <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu <sup>60.</sup>šítā 'tortilla'. Noun.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>11</sup>masū <sup>62</sup>sponhá <sup>63</sup>ndú <sup>64</sup>doo <sup>19</sup>mesá <sup>19</sup>skribanú <sup>61.</sup>ná?má 'spongy'. Adjective.  
<sup>5</sup>ni <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>60</sup>sítā <sup>61</sup>ná?má <sup>7</sup>i?žā <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu. <sup>62.</sup>sponhá 'sponge', Spanish.  
<sup>63.</sup>ndú <sup>60</sup>doo 'become clean'.  
<sup>64.</sup>duu 'to become, turn into'.  
A verb. <sup>65.</sup>doo 'clean'. Adjective.  
<sup>64.</sup>mesá 'table'. Spanish.

("hat were the cat-god's lungs for  
if they were not a sponge to clean  
the writer's table with?)

- <sup>4</sup>'nahā <sup>5</sup>ní <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>64</sup>sítā <sup>55</sup>há?á <sup>7</sup>i?žá <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu <sup>65.</sup>há?á 'soaked, swollen'. Adj.  
<sup>16</sup>nú <sup>17</sup>masū <sup>66</sup>librú <sup>47</sup>kantóor <sup>66,67.</sup>librú 'book'; kantóor  
<sup>5</sup>ni <sup>6</sup>kuu <sup>66</sup>sítā <sup>65</sup>há?á <sup>7</sup>i?žá <sup>3n</sup>ndibilu. 'singer'. Spanish loans.

(What was the cat-god's liver for  
if it was not a book for the singer?)

⁴ nahā ⁵ n̄i kuu ⁶ ⁷ añú ?i?zā ³ n̄dibilū

68. añú 'heart'. Spanish loan.

¹⁶ n̄u masū ūuu ¹⁰ hasí ūá?

69. ūuu 'stone'. Noun.

⁵ n̄i kuu añú ?i?zā ² ³ n̄dibilū.

70. hasí 'to crush'. Present Tense verb.

71. ūá?á 'chile'. Noun object.

("What was the cat-god's heart for

if it wasn't a stone to grind chile with?)

⁴ nahā ⁵ n̄i kuu hiti ká?nu ?i?zā ³ n̄dibilu 72. hiti 'intestine'. Noun.

¹⁶ n̄u masū bodegá ¹³ ⁴ ⁶ rey 73. ká?nu 'large'. Adjective.

⁵ n̄i kuu hiti ká?nú ?i?zā ³ n̄dibilu. 74. bodegá 'storage room'. Spanish.

75.

(What was the cat-god's large intestine for

if it wasn't a storage room for the king?)

⁴ nahā ⁵ n̄i kuu ūi?wi ² ³ n̄dibilū 75. ūi?wi 'excreta'. Noun.

¹⁶ n̄u masū pes bioliín 76. pez 'pitch, rosin'. Spanish.

⁵ n̄i kuu ūi?wi ² ³ n̄dibilu. 77. bioliín 'violin'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's excreta for

if it wasn't rosin for the violin?)

⁴ nahā ⁵ n̄i kuu hiti kʷáci ² ³ n̄dibilū 78. kʷáci 'small'. Adjective

¹⁶ n̄u masū tūci haraná 79. tūci 'vein, nerve'. Noun.

⁵ n̄i kuu hiti kʷáci ² ³ n̄dibilu. 80. haraná 'banjo'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's small intestine for

if it wasn't string for the banjo?)

⁴ nahā ⁵ n̄i kuu ūeke ūiká ² ³ n̄dibilū 81. ūiká, 'side, chest'. Noun.

¹⁶ n̄u masū ūarana máá señoōr sa 82. máá 'itself'. Noun.

⁵ n̄i kuu ūeke ūiká ² ³ n̄dibilu. 83. señoōr 'lord, Mr.'. Spanish.

84. sa 'my, me, I'. Pronoun.

(What were the cat-god's ribs for

if they were not a banjo for my lord?)

- ⁷ nahā <sup>5</sup> ni kuu zeke <sup>17</sup> žatá <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 85. žatá 'back, behind'. Noun.  
⁸ nū masū <sup>17</sup> arkó <sup>86</sup> bioliín 86. arkó 'bow'. Spanish.  
⁹ ni <sup>6</sup> kuu zeke <sup>14</sup> žatá <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū. 87. bioliín 'violin'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's spine for

if it was not a boy for the fiddle?)

- ⁷ nahā <sup>5</sup> ni kuu suū <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 88. suū 'buttocks, bottom of'. Noun.  
⁸ nū <sup>11</sup> masū <sup>89</sup> seke <sup>19</sup> so?o <sup>90</sup> señorá 89. seké 'adornment'. Noun.  
⁹ ni <sup>6</sup> suū <sup>88</sup> <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū. 90. señorá 'lady'. Spanish.

(What were the cat-god's buttocks for

if they were not ear rings for the lady?)

- ⁷ nahā <sup>5</sup> ni kuu ūii <sup>91</sup> <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 91. ūii 'skin'. Noun.  
⁸ nū <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>92</sup> kapoté <sup>93</sup> teñienté 92. kapoté 'raincoat'. Spanish.  
⁹ ni <sup>6</sup> ūii <sup>91</sup> <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū. 93. teñienté 'officer'. Spanish.

(What was the cat-god's skin for

if it was not a raincoat for the officer?)

- ⁷ nahā <sup>5</sup> ni kuu su?mā <sup>14</sup> <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū 94. su?mā 'tail'. Noun.  
⁸ nū <sup>17</sup> masū <sup>95</sup> kompáā <sup>96</sup> kantóōr 95. kompáās 'baton'. Spanish.  
⁹ ni <sup>6</sup> su?mā <sup>94</sup> <sup>2</sup> ?i?zā <sup>3</sup> n̄dibilū. 96. kantóōr 'singer'. Spanish.

Footnotes:

I. The phonemes of Mixteco are: Voiceless unaspirated stops /p, t, c, k, k<sup>w</sup>, ?/; prenasalized voiced stops /<sup>m</sup>b, <sup>n</sup>d, <sup>ny</sup>j, <sup>n</sup>g, <sup>n</sup>g<sup>w</sup>/, voiced nasals /m, n, ñ/ (postsyllabic nasal is used to represent nasalization of the preceding syllabics); voiceless fricatives /s, ʃ, h/; voiced fricatives /b, ð, ʒ/; the liquid /l/; the trill /r/ (fricative trill except enclitic initial); oral vowels /i, e, a, o, u/; nasalized vowels /in, en, an, on, un/.

Mixteco is a tonal language having three phonemic pitch levels in the dialect of San Miguel el Grande, Oaxaca, and four in the dialect of San Esteban Atatlahuca. (See Kenneth L. Pike, Tone Languages, pp. 77-95; and Cora Mak...IJAL ??) The tonal system has not been analyzed in the dialect of San Agustin Tlacotepec, but it is very apparent that there are at least three levels, which are marked: high tone //, low tone /~, mid tone (unmarked).

III The informant explained the use of Spanish loans in the song as being necessary to keep the rhythm. A long Mixteco phrase in place of a Spanish word would not be sung as easily to fit into the rhythm.

II See Kenneth L. Pike, "Analysis of a Mixteco Text," International Journal of American Linguistics, X (October, 1944).