

**SIL-Mexico Electronic Working Papers #022:
Discourse analysis and information structure studies of
Otomanguan languages: An annotated bibliography**

Stephen A. Marlett

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1. Introduction

It has long been recognized that good communication requires a clear packaging of information drawing on principles that are quite different from those that are typically taught in classes of grammar.¹ These principles are shaped and used in language-specific ways, however, and so they are just as important to understand and describe at the language-specific level as are the rules of syntax. As significant as those principles are, for many reasons it is relatively difficult to find detailed discussion of them in many languages.

This paper presents and (minimally) annotates a bibliography of works that are relevant to anyone working on an Otomanguean language (the most diverse language family of Mexico, sometimes compared to the Indo-European family in time depth; see Longacre 1967:119, Campbell & Poser 2008 and also the discussion in Campbell 1997:157-159). While a good start has been taken on various topics, it is obvious that much remains to be studied and written about such themes in this extensive language family.

Various labels are used for the organization of information, and reference is made to Dooley & Levinsohn (2001), a work that summarizes some of the literature (see the references in it). The topics chosen in this paper are varied; no particular outline or organization is used. (A future version may organize the topics differently.) In some cases the topic is included because of its importance in Dooley & Levinsohn (2001) even though nothing specific may appear in the studies cited; but this is purposeful—to draw attention to the gaps. For example, none of the works consulted have directly addressed the topic of “foreground vs. Background” (section 2.7). Works are listed under each topic first in alphabetical order by language family at the genus level (e.g. Mixtecan) and then in chronological order.

Particular works are identified by language family at the genus level (Amuzgoan, Chinantecan, Mixtecan, Otopamean, Popolocan, Tlapanecan, Zapotecan)² and then, when appropriate, with mention of a particular variety with its ISO 639-3 code (e.g., Isthmus Zapotec is [zai]).

¹I thank Beth Merrill for her help in locating many of the works cited in this paper; Heather Beal for her help by writing summaries of many items that lacked them, by verifying references and by checking an earlier draft; and Rick Barnes and Andy Black for their helpful suggestions.

²See http://mexico.sil.org/language_culture/mexican-families-stocks.

Some of the annotations are minor adaptations of summaries available via the links to the items. It is worth noting that many of the works are available on-line and freely downloadable, thanks especially to SIL International's electronic repository (Language and Culture Archives, see <https://www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives>) and the work of colleagues in the Mexico Branch who have overseen the scanning (when necessary) and preparation of those materials for such use.

This bibliography may be updated periodically. Recommendations for works to be included may be sent to the compiler by sending an email to [linguistics_mexico AT sil.org](mailto:linguistics_mexico@sil.org) (substituting AT with @).

2. Topics

The topics of the following subsections are ones that might be addressed in a particular language. Not all of them have been addressed in Otomanguean languages, to the best of my knowledge.

2.1 Cohesion

In chapter 6 of Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:27), it is stated that the speaker plants

linguistic signals in the text as clues to assist the hearers in coming up with an adequate mental representation. [...] Signals of cohesion indicate how the part of the text with which they occur links up conceptually with some other part.

The inventory of possible cohesive ties given in Dooley & Levinsohn (2001) is actually quite broad and many of the works listed in this bibliography (and even various grammatical studies that are not listed here) address this topic without overt reference to the concept.

The topic is touched on a bit in Williams (2008a) for one variety of Mixtec.

2.2 Thematic groupings

In chapter 7 of Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:35), it is stated that just as in oral narratives there are cues about how the structure of the discourse is set up,

in written narrative we commonly find other kinds of boundary phenomena, such as paragraph indentation and chapters. In plays, we find scenes and acts. By such means the speaker, consciously or not, is grouping sentences into units of text, which we refer to as thematic groupings.

The following work addresses this topic in some way:

1. Popolcan (specifically Tlacoyalco Popoloca, [pls]), Stark (1980): A description of paragraph structure in narrative discourse. The discussion focuses on paragraph boundary markers.

2.3 Prominence

The notion of "prominence" is not clearly defined in Dooley & Levinsohn (2001) since it is taken to be a pretheoretical notion. The following works discuss prominence issues in some way:

1. Mixtecan (specifically Coatzacoapan Mixtec, [miz]), Small (1979): This article is a survey of various aspects of narrative discourse structure. The author examines prominence in both participant reference and event structure, thematic participants and the means of indicating dominance.
2. Mixtecan (specifically Silacayoapan Mixtec, [mks]), North (1987): A description of participant tracking. (The author uses the phrase "participant tracing".) Topics covered include particles and grammatical devices in order to track participants and indicate their prominence throughout a discourse.

3. Mixtec languages generally, Hollenbach (1995): Focus devices described include simple fronting to the preverbal position and various embellishments of fronted elements, such as heightening the separation of the preverbal constituent, marking the constituent for prominence, or using a cleft construction.
4. Zapotecan (specifically Cajonos Zapotec, [zad]), Larry Jones & D. Nellis (1979): This paper investigates the various functions and grammatical context of *na'a* in monologue and dialogue narrative discourses and in complex sentence constructions. (In a monologue narrative discourse, it can indicate thematic agent, mark a prop, underscore pivotal events, and signify important junctures in the chronology, depending on the grammatical construction in which it appears. The authors also investigate its functions in dialogues where, in addition to the types of functions already listed, it indicates a resolution of situations of tension. Finally in complex sentence constructions, it serves to indicate prominence.)
5. Zapotecan (specifically Zoogocho Zapotec, [zpq]), Long (1985): A presentation of two possible analyses of prominence markers in Zoogocho Zapotec narrative discourse. Examples of such markers include verbal aspect, use of certain discourse particles and a number of different rhetorical devices.
6. Zapotecan (specifically Yalálag Zapotec, [zpu]), Newberg (1987): An analysis (using Talmy Givón's method of measuring participant accessibility) of various syntactic devices used to mark participants in a folk story. The author claims that the participant with the greatest prominence tends to be marked as more accessible.

2.4 Points of departure

In section 11.4.1 of Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:68) it is said that

the term POINT OF DEPARTURE [...] designates an initial element, often fronted or left-dislocated, which cohesively anchors the subsequent clause to something which is already in the context (i.e., to something accessible in the hearer's mental representation). It "sets a spatial, temporal, or individual domain within which the main predication holds" (Chafe 1976:50). It is backward-looking, in the sense of locating the anchoring place within the existing mental representation, but is forward-looking in that it is the subsequent part of the sentence which is anchored in that place.

There is no work to cite here about this topic in Otomanguen languages.

2.5 Highlighting

Highlighting has to do with the marking of a unit in some way to signal its importance (section 12.5 of Dooley & Levinsohn 2001:84). The following work discusses highlighting in some way:

1. Zapotecan (specifically Chichicapam Zapotec, [zpv]), Benton (1997): A description of how certain changes of verbal aspect are used to highlight parts of narrative discourse as a means of maintaining listener interest.

2.6 Topic, focus and activation states

Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:63) state that

in sentences with TOPIC-COMMENT articulation, topic is the entity that the utterance is primarily about (Dik 1978:130), while part or all of the comment is the focus, depending on the context.

They also state (2001:62) that

the focus of an utterance is that part which indicates what the speaker intends as the most important or salient change to be made in the hearer's mental representation.

And they discuss, in chapter 10, the topic of activation status and activation states, citing authors such as Chafe and Lambrecht. These concepts have to do with the accessibility of information in the text.

The following works discuss topic, focus or activation states in some way:

1. Mixtec languages generally, Hollenbach (1995): Focus devices described include simple fronting to the preverbal position and various embellishments of fronted elements, such as heightening the separation of the preverbal constituent, marking the constituent for prominence, or using a cleft construction.
2. Mixtec (specifically Tezoatlán Mixtec, [mxb]), Williams (2008a): The author argues that fronting in this variant is used to mark focus, change of topic, setting and in a few cases cohesion.
3. Popolocan (specifically San Jerónimo Mazatec, [maa]), M. Agee (1993): A discussion of fronted noun phrases. The author argues that there are two distinct constructions involved, one which establishes a topic and another which marks narrow focus.
4. Zapotecan (specifically Zoogocho Zapotec, [zpq]), Long (1985): A description of topicalization in expository discourse, including its grammatical form, its discourse function, and a comparison to other similar discourse devices. The author defines topicalization as an element grammatically preposed in a topic-comment relationship to the main clause and where this is the primary relationship of the topic to the paragraph.
5. Zapotecan (specifically Quioquitani Zapotec, [ztq]), Ward (1987): A preliminary analysis of the use of the word *lēē*. The author challenges the use of the label “focus word” for this morpheme.
6. Zapotecan, Riggs & Marlett (2010): This paper discusses structural aspects of focus phrases that begin with the word *le'e* or its cognate.

2.7 Foreground and background

Chapter 12 of Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:79) deals with the topic of foreground and background:

The terms FOREGROUND and BACKGROUND describe parts of a text which, respectively, do or do not extend the basic framework of the mental representation. If only the foreground were available, the resulting representation might be complete in its general outline, but would be sketchy. Background aids in internal and external contextualization ...

There is no work to cite here from Otomanguean languages that directly addresses this topic.

2.8 Participant reference

Dooley & Levinsohn (2001) devotes chapters 16-18 to the topic of PARTICIPANT REFERENCE.

The following works on Otomanguean languages discuss participant reference issues in some way:

1. Mixtec (specifically Coatzacoapan Mixtec, [miz]), Small (1979): This article is a survey of various aspects of narrative discourse structure. The author examines prominence in both participant reference and event structure, thematic participants and the means of indicating dominance.
2. Mixtec (specifically Silacayoapan Mixtec, [mks]), North (1987): A description of participant tracking. (The author uses the phrase "participant tracing".) Topics covered include particles and grammatical devices in order to track participants and indicate their prominence throughout a discourse.
3. Mixtec (specifically Tezoatlán Mixtec, [mxb]), Williams (2008b): A description of grammatical devices used to encode participant reference in Tezoatlán Mixtec narrative discourse. The author argues that participant reference can be charted along a cognitive referential status hierarchy.
4. Popolocan (specifically Jalapa de Díaz Mazatec, [maj]), T. Schram (1979a): This paper describes various patterns of participant reference and analyzes their functions in narrative discourse. Importantly, they introduce subject-chaining rules to identify the underlying grammatical subject of clauses that have no overt subject. The author also investigates fronting, doublets, and participant staging in narratives.
5. Zapotecan (specifically Choapan Zapotec, [zpc]), R. Lyman (1977): This paper describes some of the more important criteria relevant to participant identification in both fiction and non-fiction texts. It considers primary, secondary and minor participants. (Once introduced, either by name or with a noun phrase, the primary participant is not referred to with a noun phrase again until the conclusion of the text.)

6. Zapotecan (specifically Western Ixtlán Zapotec, [zac]), Thiessen (1987): The author claims that the enclitic *-ha* serves two basic functions: as a deictic and to indicate a participant referent. The focus of the paper is on the latter function.
7. Zapotecan (specifically Quiatoni Zapotec, [zpf]), Martínez (1995): A description of third person participant tracking in narrative discourse. Topics discussed include introduction of participants and devices for tracking participants, contrasting those who are in focus from those who are not.
8. Zapotecan (specifically Isthmus Zapotec, [zai]), Marlett & Pickett (2002/1996). This paper concerns a silent pronoun that is always coreferential (anaphoric) with a preceding noun in either the same sentence (which may be subject or some other grammatical relation) or in the discourse, but which cannot be coreferential with another audible pronoun. The paper presents the rules of grammar and discourse that control the use and interpretation of the silent pronoun, with abundant examples. [Note: this does not seem to be a general feature of Zapotecan, but comparative studies are lacking. However, the discussion in R. Lyman (1977) is very relevant.]
9. Zapotecan (specifically San Francisco Ozolotepec Zapotec, [ztg]), Heise (2003): The study analyzes the encoding devices that refer to and track participants throughout third person narrative texts. The author uses Givón's quantitative method and Dooley and Levinsohn's charting method to analyze participant reference.

2.9 Discourse markers and connectives

Dooley & Levinsohn (2001) do not refer to discourse markers as such, but discusses various ways in which words are used to indicate the development of a text—the DEVELOPMENT MARKERS (2001:93). They also discuss connectives (2001:91):

The most obvious kind of clue constraining the interpretation of a semantic relation over against another is morphemic. This is often a connective, such as a CONJUNCTION.

The following works discuss discourse markers or connectives in some way:

1. Popolocan (specifically Northern Popoloca, [pls]), Machin (1977): The author discusses the use of two discourse markers in the three types of discourse identified in Popoloca (narrative, procedural and behavioral), noting that the marker *are* only occurs in narratives and that the marker *na* is falling into disuse. These markers indicate three discourse functions: episode divisions, pivotal events or themes, and important participants or props.
2. Zapotecan (specifically Cajonos Zapotec, [zad]), Larry Jones & D. Nellis (1979): This paper investigates the various functions and grammatical context of *na'a* in monologue and dialogue narrative discourses and in complex sentence constructions. (In a monologue narrative discourse, it can indicate thematic agent, mark a prop, underscore pivotal events, and signify important junctures in the chronology, depending on the grammatical construction in which it appears. The authors also investigate its functions in dialogues where, in addition to the types of functions already listed, it indicates a resolution of situations of tension. Finally in complex sentence constructions, it serves to indicate prominence.)

2.10 Devices for marking narrative development

On the topic of how narrative development is marked, see the following works:

1. Mixtecan (specifically Silacayoapan Mixtec, [mks]), Shields (1997b): This paper compares and analyzes the narrative devices found in two short narratives. It investigates verb usage in the story line, background and climax of the narratives
2. Zapotecan (specifically Amatlán Zapotec, [zpo]), Riggs (1987): The paper identifies the characteristics of a well-formed narrative discourse through paragraph analysis. It investigates the components of an episode, the boundaries of paragraphs and the peak. It also briefly discusses procedural discourses.

Some of the works presented in section 2.13 may also be of relevance.

2.11 Idea units and information flow

Some works that treat the topics of idea units and information flow include:

1. Mixtecan (specifically Alacatzalzala Mixtec, [mim]), Anderson (1993): It is claimed that repetition is used to control information flow, among other things. (The topic of repetition also figures in L. Harris (1995), described in section 2.13.)
2. Mixtecan (specifically Silacayoapan Mixtec, [mks]) Shields (1997a): The author examines a short text, explaining how new information is introduced and subsequently referenced in the narrative.

2.12 Evidentiality

The following work takes up the topic of evidentiality:

1. Mixtecan (specifically Southeastern Nochixtlán Mixtec, [mxy]), McKendry (2001:91-92): Brief discussion of morphemes that indicate epistemic modality.

Olive (1995) also touches on this topic at least briefly. See the discussion of that work in section 2.13.

2.13 General and other

The following works address various topics of discourse analysis of the languages that are either other than those of the previous sections or more than one of them.

1. **General analysis** (Popolocan, specifically Huautla Mazatec, [mau]), Gudschinsky (1959): Gudschinsky uses techniques elaborated by Zellig Harris (1952a, 1952b) to analyze a Mazatec text. She explores and illustrates the benefits of discourse analysis.
2. **General** (Zapotecan, specifically Sierra de Juárez Zapotec, [zaa]), Gibbs (1977).
3. **Themes** (Popolocan, specifically Jalapa de Díaz Mazatec, [maj]), J. Schram & Linda Jones (1979): This discussion of themes is supported by an examination of grammatical features that appear at the significant junctures in the theme-development.
4. **Tense and thematic level** (Popolocan, specifically Jalapa de Díaz Mazatec, [maj]), T. Schram (1979b): An innovative approach to the study of tense in relation to discourse. Changes of tense and consequent tense embedding or end of embedding is correlated with change of thematic level in discourse allowing for both flexibility and variety of expression.
5. **Plot structure** (Zapotecan, specifically Lachixío Zapotec, [zpl]), D. Persons (1979): This paper analyses plot structure, revealing three distinctive levels (background, backbone and peak) that are revealed by choices of verbal aspect used. Peak is also indicated by the use of unusually long sentences.
6. **Style** (Otopamean, specifically Estado de México Otomí, [ots]), Bartholomew (1984): A discussion about some differences between oral and written text.
7. **Reconstruction of discourse features in Proto-Otomanguean**, Longacre (1986): This paper compares certain discourse features of Sierra Juárez Zapotec and Northern Popolocan to see what can be inferred regarding a feature of discourse structure (the word **na*) in Proto-Otomanguean.
8. **Word order** (Zapotecan, specifically Chichicapam Zapotec, [zpv]), Benton (1989): A description of clause and sentence-constituent word order in oral narrative discourse. The focus is on left-shifting in word order to mark thematic elements.
9. **Repetition** (Mixtecan, specifically Alacatzalzala Mixtec, [mim]), Anderson (1993): A discussion of repetition in Alacatzalzala Mixtec narrative discourse. This construction appears frequently in both oral and written narratives, although it is more common in oral, and takes the form of various kinds of paraphrase. It is used to control information flow, for semantic effect and as a rhetorical device. [Note: this may be a common feature of Mixtecan languages, but comparative studies are lacking. The topic discussed in Nieves (2012) may be related.]
10. **Doublets** (Otopamean, specifically Estado de México Otomí, [ots]), Bartholomew (1995): An analysis of the types and functions of doublets in narrative discourse.

11. **Narrative discourse** (Mixtecan, specifically Southwestern Tlaxiaco Mixtec, [meh]), L. Harris (1995): A description of various features of narrative discourse in this variety of Mixtec. Topics covered include verbal aspect, participant reference, fronting, repetition, and peak features.
12. **Narrative peak** (Zapotecan, specifically Xanaguía Zapotec, [ztg]), Hopkins (1995): A description of narrative peak marking. Topics discussed include changes in verb aspect and various markings of augmented sequence and immediacy.
13. **Word order** (Mixtecan, specifically Chicahuaxtla Trique, [trs]), Longacre (1995): Looks at left-shifts in VSO languages.
14. **Quotation formulas** (Zapotecan, specifically Xanaguía Zapotec, [ztg]), Olive (1995): A discussion of speech verbs used in quotation formulas in narrative discourse. The author argues that the choice of speech verb conveys information about the type of quotation (direct or indirect), the existence or absence of a first person addressee, and the speaker's willingness to vouch for what is said.
15. **Cohesion, peak marking, participant tracking** (Zapotecan, specifically Xanica Zapotec, [zpr]), Piper (1995): An initial analysis of the discourse functions of *lëë*. Functions include discourse cohesion, peak marking and participant tracking. The author also compares functions of a similar word that occurs in several other varieties of Zapotec.
16. **Hortatory text** (Mixtecan, specifically Southeastern Nochixtlán Mixtec, [mxy]), Huggins (1998): The strongly hortatory text of a Mixtec woman is analyzed. It is shown that overt command forms never occur. Instead of issuing commands, the speaker conveys what the hearers are to do by skillfully employing rhetorical devices. An in-depth examination of such a text can yield valuable insights into how exhortation strategies function in this language.
17. **Hortatory texts** (Mixtecan, specifically Southeastern Nochixtlán Mixtec, [mxy]), McKendry (2011): Some features of hortatory texts are described.
18. **Hortatory discourse** (Zapotecan, specifically Amatlán Zapotec, [zpo]), Riggs (2011): An analysis of discourse features in Amatlán Zapotec based on two hortatory texts. Topics discussed include the use of inclusion and doublets to mark salient parts of the text, the features that mark the peak of the discourse, and features that mark either mitigation or aggravation with regard to the force of the exhortation.
19. **Genre** (Mixtecan, specifically Mixtepec Mixtec, [mix]), Nieves (2012): The Ceremonial Speech is a discourse uttered by an old man who acts as an ambassador or representative in certain civic and religious activities like weddings, baptisms, and the changing-over of the municipal authorities of the village, among others. The special speech genre used in this type of discourse is part of Mixtec rhetoric. In addition to figures of speech, it is characterized by some poetic devices like parallelisms and words pairs in parallel lines.
20. **Style** (Mixtecan, specifically Diuxi-Tilantongo Mixtec, [xtd]), Kuiper (2015): A description of the grammatical structure and the uses of verbal parallelisms and doublets in Diuxi-Tilantongo Mixtec. Most are used to make discourse more formal and elegant.

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