Indefiniteness in Temoaya Otomi

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Introduction

Otomi is an Otomanguean language with 22 linguistic varieties native to Mexico (Palancar 2017:3). In this paper, I focus on Temoaya Otomi (*ISO 639-3 ott*), a variety that belongs to the Western Otomi group.

Temoaya is the municipality with the highest number of Otomi speakers in the State of Mexico (INEGI 2009: 70). They refer to themselves as *dri ñatho* ('I still speak') and call Spanish monolinguals *i ñanfo* ('they speak [Spanish]'). Otomi is transmitted by oral tradition, and it is commonly used to communicate with elders or close neighbors. Receptive bilinguals are common and children do not seem to use the language in their everyday life and know only a couple of words.

Some previous Otomanguean languages that have been described at their definiteness level are Cuevas Mixtec (Cisneros 2019), Matlazinca (Gomez 2015), Mazahua (Mora-Bustos & Mora-Muñoz 2017) and Otomi del Valle del Mezquital (Acosta 2020). Due to the nature of the research, this paper does not aim to compare different varieties or family related languages. The objective is to present relevant data that provides insight into the indefiniteness system of Temoaya Otomi variety.

1 Indefiniteness

Indefinites are often used to introduce new entities to the discourse. For example, a story's central character could be initially introduced with an indefinite, and later refered to with a definite particle as the character becomes familiar to the listener (Schwarz 2019:22). Languages express indefiniteness in different ways. Some languages have determiners or articles to express that indefiniteness or arbitrariness. For instance, Lyons (1999:13) points out that in English, one of the uses of *a* is when the entity referred to is

not associated with what can be called a context. In the sentence 'a beautiful horse lives down the street,' the article *a* is used to introduce *horse*. In that case the referent is taken to be unfamiliar to the hearer because it has not been mentioned before, hence considered indefinite.

I collected data to investigate the features of indefiniteness in Temoaya Otomi. In the following sections, I present the methodology and the results to contribute to our understanding of this variety.

2 Methodology

The examples used in this paper were obtained virtually from two bilingual Temoaya Otomi-Spanish speakers, one female and one male, both in their 60s. They were recorded using *Zencastr*.[2] The techniques used were elicitation and grammaticality judgements.

I refer to examples from an anecdote titled *The pig story* to illustrate the usage of indefiniteness marking in naturalistic speech. This anecdote was provided by the male speaker, as a memory of an event that happened to him during his youth, while planting corn in the fields. The anecdote was recorded, transcribed, translated and analyzed to identify sentences containing indefinite references.

The data was collected in Spanish and Temoaya Otomi. In the case of the elicitated sentences, the context was provided orally in Spanish. As for grammaticality judgement, speakers were isolated one from another and were asked whether the sentences were natural and likely to be produced by a native Temoaya Otomi speaker and if so, the context in which they would produce them.

3 Indefiniteness in Temoaya Otomi

Indefinites refer to an unfamiliar entity in the set denoted by the noun phrase. They are often used to refer to arbitrariness of the noun phrase and used to introduce entities (Lyons 1999:89). In Temoaya Otomi the two main indefinite articles are *na* and *yo*, such as in the following examples:

(1) *to   tsi   na   mi*
    1SG.PST   eat   IND.SG   tortilla
    'I ate a tortilla'

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(2)   *konke*   *to*   *toi*   *yo*   *mi*
     CONJ   1SG.PST   buy   IND.PL   tortilla
     'but I bought tortillas'

In (1) and (2) the indefinite article indicates the number of the noun. If we were to exchange *yo* for *na* in (1) and (2), the interpretation would switch from singular to plural and vice versa. However, these articles cannot be considered just a plural marker since they contain indefinite information. For instance, sentence (1) could be produced to introduce the indefinite *tortilla* for the first time in a conversation. The article in sentence (2) not only marks plural but introduces unspecified entities. In both cases, the speaker does not intend, nor does he or she expect the listener to have in mind a specific (definite) *tortilla* but any *tortilla(s)* that have the feature of being round, thin and made of corn.

       Bare nouns are not common in Temoaya Otomi. Countable, mass, common and proper nouns are usually preceded by an article. Proper nouns are preceded by a definitive demonstrative such as in (3) when familiar to the listener. Later in (8), I illustrate how an indefinite proper noun is used to introduce to the discourse.

(3)   *to*   *ʃifi*   *nu*   *ʃua*
     1SG.PST   tell   DEM.SG   John
     'I told John'

In (3) we can see that the proper name *ʃua* is preceded by *nu*. It indicates that the listener knows and is able to see *ʃua* at the moment of the utterance. A bare proper noun is not acceptable for the speakers as shown in (4).

(4)   **to*   *ʃifi*   *ʃua*
     1SG.PST   tell   John
     'I told John'

Sentence (4) is ambiguous because the listener doesn't know what *ʃua* the speaker is referring to. However, bare common nouns can occur in predicate position in certain circumstances, such as when referring to a plural indefinite, as in (5), or a list of common nouns as in (6).

(5)   *di*   *petzi*   *eni*   *ha*   *ma*   *ngu*
       1$_{SG.PRS}$ have   chicken $_{LOC}$ 1$_{POSS.SG}$ house
       'I have chickens at home'

       Context A: a person that describes all the products she sells in the market.

(6)   *di*   *po*   *dahtu,*   *ixi*   *kani...*
       1$_{SG.PRS}$ sell   cloth   fruit   leaf.vegetables…
       'I sell cloths, fruits, leaf vegetables…'

Nouns in (5) and (6) are considered indefinite. They do not have to be preceded by an indefinite plural such as occurs with the list of general nouns contained in sentence (6), but they can with no semantic difference as in (7).

       Context B: a person that lists the animals she raises at home.

(7)   *di*   *ɲihko*   *yo*   *eni,*   *yo*   *ndani*   *ha*   *ma*   *ngu*
       1$_{SG.PRS}$ have $_{IND.PL}$ chicken $_{IND.PL}$ cow $_{LOC}$ 1$_{POSS.\ SG}$ house
       'I have chickens, cows at home'

In (6) and (7) the speaker does not have specific nouns in mind but refers to several possible entities that share semantic features. Hence, bare common nouns can be used to refer to indefinite plural entities.

       Another example of a bare noun is sentence (8). In this case we can see that the indefinite singular *na* occurs when the first time *nzoia* is mentioned. When the second time *nzoia* appears, it is preceded by the demonstrative *ka* and implies definiteness since the listener knows what *nzoia* the speaker alludes to. The proper noun *Pedro* appears later in that sentence for the first time. *Pedro* is not preceded by a definite article as it occurs with *ʃua* in (3).

(8)   *na*   *nzoia*   *mi-imbi*   *bi-foʃki-gi,*   *pero*   *ka*   *nzoia*   *mbro*   *Pedro*   *(ka)*
     $_{IND.SG}$ man   3$_{SG.PST}$-   3$_{SG.PST}$-   but $_{DEM.}$ man   3$_{SG.PST}$ Pedro $_{(DEM.}$
                 say   help-1$_{SG}$ $_{SG}$ .be $_{SG)}$
     'a man who we can say that helped me (but) the man was Pedro that…' (*The pig story,* line 7, 8)

(8) shows that whenever the conjunction verb *mbro* occurs the noun in the predicate position will be bare, whether it is a proper or a common noun. The suffix attached to *Pedro*

cannot be that missing prefix since it is optional and could not precede the proper noun as shown in (9).

(9)   *pero   ka   nzoia   mbro   ka   Pedro
       but   DEM.SG   man   3SG.PST.be DEM.SG   Pedro
       '(but) the man was Pedro that…'   (*The pig story,* line 8)

The indefinite singular *na* wouldn't be acceptable as a prefix of *Pedro* either since it would mean the speaker refers to one of several *Pedros*.

      Bare nouns have probably gone through a process of historical change due to Temoaya Otomi contact with Spanish. Ibañez et al. (2017:150) say that the absence of articles and the omission of the differential object marker *a* are common to Spanish-Otomi and Spanish-Mazahua speakers, both Otomanguean languages.

      Bare common nouns can also occur after the expression *te-ngu* (how much) *tega ngu* (how much does it cost) as in (10) and (11).

(10)   *te-*   *ngu*[3]   *tzone*   *ko*   *toni.a?*[4]
       Q-   much   avocado   2SG.PST   buy.PART?
       'how many avocados did you buy?' Lit. how much avocado did you buy, eh?'

(11)   *te-*   *ngu*   *mi*   *ko*   *tzi-a?*
       Q-   much   tortilla   2SG.PST   eat.PART?
       'how many tortillas did you buy?' Lit. how much tortilla did you buy, eh?'

Sentences (10) and (11) show unmarked nouns, which because of the *te-ngu* are interpreted as plural. The speaker thinks the person ate more than one *tortilla* or bought more than one *avocado* or *pounds of avocadoes* but in none of the cases does the speaker have a particular entity in mind. The same would happen with a mass nouns, such as *dehe* (water). In that case the person being asked is free to include in his or her reply a measurement or a container such as *na ʃihtó ro dehe* (a bottle of water) or just *dahta ngu ro dehe* (much water).

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[3] I consider this expression to be the short version of *te-ra ngu* (Q-DEF. SG. a lot) and different from *te-ngu-tʰo* (some-only 'just a few').

[4] This seems to be a compound of the verb *toi-* (buy) and *nuia* (now) that works as an emphatic.

The same structure can be used with demonstratives such as in (12).

(12) *te- ngu   (ka)   domi   i-   nkuhti ki-a?*
      Q-   much   (DEM.SG)   money   PST.IMPERSONAL   pay   1SG-PART?

'how much money are you paid?' Lit. 'how much the money you are paid?'

Example (12) contains the definite demonstrative *ka* since the speaker is referring to the money that constitutes part of the listener's salary. In this case the speaker asks the listener to create a mental representation of that entity. These cases of plural bare nouns may not be truly bare NPs and the *te-ngu* could be occupying the D position in a partitive structure.

Some genuine examples of indefinite articles are cardinality terms such as *na* (one) and *te-ngu* (some). In sentence (13) the speaker does not intend the listener to create a mental representation of a unique or familiar onion but any entity with onion features.

(13) *bo   ha   na   dentʃi   nu   ha   nu⁵   denda*
      1SG.PST.go   bring   one   onion   DEM.SG   where   DEM.SG   store

'go to the store to buy some onions' Lit. 'go buy one onion in the store'

Sentence (13) is not translated as *one onion* because *na* is used in entities that are usually acquired in larger quantities such as onions, tomatoes, lemons or sugar, and is considered an inclusive number. In this case the listener will ask for quantity confirmation (14).

(14) *te   -ngu   go   kuhu?*
      Q   much   1SG. FUT   bring

'how much am I going to bring?'

The speaker would have to reinforce if he wants *natʰo* (only one), *na kilo* (one kilo), *ioho* (two), *ñú* (three), etc. So, we can consider *na* (one) as an inclusive number and it will depend on the context when *na* means *one*.

In (15) the entity *reza* is introduced for the first time, preceded by the indefinite singular *na.*

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⁵ Some varieties accept *nu ha ro denda,* instead of the double single demonstrative.

(15) *do-penti*   *na*   *reza,*   *ingi-gi*

1SG.PST-grab   IND.SG   bag   tell-1SG

'I grabbed a bag, he told me' (*The pig story,* line 26)

Na in (15) is not inclusive since it introduces a singular indefinite *reza* being grabbed. Another example where we can see the numeral *na* introducing an entity is (16).

(16) *do-tuʃ*   *ka-ro,*   *na-*   *pi.na*   *tegi*   *pada*   *wa-fotz*   *a.hoi*   *ku*

1SG.PST   DEM.SG-   IND.SG-   an.IND.SG   metal   to   1SG.PST   PREP   DEM.PL

-take   SG   plough   floor

'I took another metal tool to plough the floor' (*The pig story,* line 13)

Sentence (16) uses *na* twice, once pronominally and one as a suffix to the radical *pi*. We can conclude that *na* (one) is the indefinite article par excellence. In the case of partitives, they can be introduced by the Spanish preposition *de* (from) as in (17).

(17) *de*   *kuta*   *nzoia,*   *go*   *nkʰãnti*   *kʰũte*

from   five   men   four   3PL.PST drink   bitter-water

'out of every 5 men, 4 drink beer'

In (17) the entity is preceded by a non inclusive numeral. Another example where an entity is introduced for the first time is (18). *Tzi* (pulque) is introduced without an indefinite marker. The first time that *tzi* is introduced in the story, the speaker uses a definite demonstrative and a possessive. So far, the listener has no previous background of *tzi* apart from the general knowledge of it being an alcoholic drink. Possessives are definite so in this case the speaker may be appealing to the familiarity of the listener with the drink.

(18)   *hi-mi-ne-bi*   *di-bé*   *ka-ro-tzi,*   *zai*   *mi-ne*   *bi-zi*   *tzi*

NEG-3SG.PST-   3SG.PST.miss   DEM.SG-3POSS-   always   3SG.PST-   3SG.PST-   pulque

want-3SG   pulque   want   drink

'he didn't want to miss his pulque, he always wanted to drink pulque' (*The pig story,* line 9)

The second time *tzi* appears in (18) it is a bare noun. It could be a characteristic of the verb *zi*,[6] which allows to introduce entities, either mass or countable, with no demonstrative and the fact that *tzi* in this case has a plural connotation. The listener understands that the person referred to was some sort of a drunkard that drinks large amounts of *tzi*.

In sentence (19) and (20) two entities are introduced for the first time, *zakhua* and *detʰa*. They take the definite demonstrative *ku* (19) and the complex demonstrative *nu-ku-yu (20).*

(19)   *ku*   *zakhua*   *mi-penti,*   *mi- muʃta*   *hoi,*   *mi-ʎete…*

         DEM.PL   pig   3PL.PST-grab   3PL.PST- dig   land   3PL.PST-destroy…

     'pigs would grab, dug the land, destroyed …' (*The pig story,* line 15)

(20)   *nu*   *ku-yu*   *detʰa*   *ha.nta*   *di-te,*   *di-imbi…*

         DEM.SG   DEM.PL-PL   corn   yes.SUF   3SG.IPFV-grow up   3PL.IPFV-say…

     'so that corn would grow up, we say...' (*The pig story,* line 14)

In the case of *zakhua* (19) and *detʰa* (20), the speaker takes for granted that the listener is familiarized with the context and tries to make it more familiar. The speaker intends the listener to think about that specific corn that was planted and how these random pigs came and destroyed everything. Hence the speaker uses demonstratives that have been observed with definite meaning in other examples such as (8).

Finally, we can conclude that indefiniteness is marked by the non-existence of articles (bare nouns) most likely in the case of plural nouns and the use of numerals, of which the numeral *na* 'one' is perhaps the most common one. The use of definite demonstratives occurs when the speaker intends the listener to create a mental representation of the entity to make the event sound more familiar. In addition, pragmatics and extra-linguistic information such as body language and the listener's background play an important role in the use of indefinite markers.

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[6] The verb *zi* ('*eat/drink*') can be *tzi* in some environments.

Conclusions

In this paper I have presented some examples of indefinite nouns and their usage in Temoaya Otomi. Analyzed data comes from two Temoaya Otomi-Spanish speakers. No comparison has been done with other varieties. The examples are the result of elicitation, grammaticality judgment and narrative.

We have seen that pragmatics plays an important role and that there might be nonlinguistic resources, at discourse level, that provide listeners crucial semantic information.

After the analysis, I conclude that Temoaya Otomi indefiniteness is marked with indefinite articles, numerals or bare nouns. Bare nouns are normally used to introduce a set of plural entities, plurals or when the entity is preceded by a conjunction verb such as *mbro.* Mass, common nouns and proper nouns behave in a similar way at a syntactic level.

Once the entity is familiar to the listener, a demonstrative will be attached to it. This could be one of the reasons why the list of demonstratives is dense in comparison to the indefinite articles which are limited to mainly two: *na* and *yo*. These two articles are prefixes attached to the nouns and contain number information (plural and singular).

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Zencastr, Inc. (May, 2021). Zencastr. Retreived from www.zencastr.com

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Coyote Papers Volume 24 (2022)