

**Direction and landscape in language and rituals:  
Location conjugation in Acazulco Otomí**

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If a language marks direction or associated motion in its verbal morphology, its speakers can be expected to monitor locational aspects of events routinely for communication purposes. Such grammaticalized reference to place is known from e.g. Cavineña (Bolivia, Guillaume 2000), Arrernte (Australia, Wilkins 2006) and the Otopamean family (Mexico, Hernández-Green *et al.*). In Acazulco Otomí, spoken in the mountains west of Mexico City, verbal proclitics indicate translocative (1) and cislocative (2) motion, while other proclitics indicate vertical level for 3<sup>rd</sup>-person subjects:

(1) *d=ár= 'jǒ=ga= 'mbé*  
1=IPFV.TRL=walk=1=PL.EXCL  
'We walk (in another direction).'

(2) *'a xǒntho ba=pǒxa ba= 'jǒ*  
LOC mountain IPFV.CSL=ascend IPFV.CSL=walk  
'They ascend the mountain (toward us), they walk (toward us).'

The relationship between verb conjugation, lexicon and Frames of Reference (FoR) was investigated through space games (Man & Tree, Levinson *et al.* 1992) and narratives of pilgrimages and processions. For the director-matcher tasks, speakers relied on a geocentric FoR, employing two crossing axes: *'a rígwani- 'a ríthót'i* (uphill-downhill) and *'a xǒntho- 'a mbatǔdi* ('at mountain'- 'where pines stand'). Using the environment as anchor also for microscale location predications could thus reinforce the awareness of position in landscape needed for verbal conjugation. Moreover, these distinctions play a structuring role in the lexicon, which offers several pairs of verbs differing only in direction toward/away from speakers or uphill/downhill, e.g.: *ndo'ts'e* ('look uphill'), *hé't'i* ('look downhill'), *tsoni* ('arrive uphill'), *tsot'i* ('arrive downhill'). This ubiquitous linguistic pointing to position and movement may be motivated and sustained by the community's collective ritual practices. All year round, the inhabitants walk together in processions and multiday pilgrimages through landscapes with large altitudes differences (1700-3400 m.a.s.l.) and distinct climates. A host of shared activities (praying, eating, sleeping, bathing etc.) thus have travelling as recurring backdrop, supporting the relevance of reference to place and direction in Acazulco Otomí.

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