

A Reciprocal Morpheme in Ancient Nahuatl?

Basándose en formas dialectales del náhuatl hablado, que constituyen "errores" desde el punto de vista de la gramática tenochca, el autor intenta una comparación interna que pueda explicar al mismo tiempo lo dialectal y lo tenochca. Además de los datos tenochcas - que de acuerdo con su teoría tetradialectológica es una forma palaciega del náhuatl central - y de los datos dialectales procedentes de la Sierra Madre Oriental y sus llanos costeros adyacentes, el autor se vio precisado a retro proyectarse a un momento no definido de la historia del idioma, en que habría funcionado un prefijo "reciproco". El autor agrega que, una vez terminado su análisis y reconstrucción, encontró que un sistema pronominal idéntico existe actualmente en el popoluca (idioma tozoque), lo que podría aportar un cierto criterio de validez al resultado meramente hipotético aquí expuesto.

If we make a table of Nahuatl personal prefixes, grouping together the greatest number of morphological similarities, certain anomalies attract our attention, especially those of the double appearance of *ti-* and the third-person forms. The first table below consists of an inventory of these morphemes. The second table shows how they combine:

	2nd plur.	1rst sing.	1rst plur.	2nd sing.	3d sing.	3d plur.
subject	am#-*	ni-	ti-	ti-	#-	#-
possessive	amo-	no-	to-	mo-	i-	in-
accusative-dative	aměc-	neč-	teč-	mič-	ki-	kin-

'I him'	niki-	amki	'you him' (1)
'thou him'	tiki-	tiki-	'we him'
'thou me'	tineč-	tineč-	'we thee'

In the first four columns of the first table, we find, in the second line, the possessive marker -o- added to the personal markers.

In the following line, we find -eč-, -ič- added.

By analogy with the first column, we might have expected, in the first line of the fourth column, the form *mi- and in the third line the form *meč- (2).

In the first line of the first column we might have expected *ami- with the same final breve i vowel as in the other three columns.

In the first column as well as in the last two, we find # ("zero") instead of i. What rôle does that omitted vowel play? Like other Nahua vocalic elements, it acts only as an epenthesis. Such an epenthesis is unnecessary in the first column, where the consonant depends on the support of the preceding vowel. And the epenthesis is equally unnecessary with the last two columns, since they lack any consonantal marker of person. We can say, then, that the personal markers are: am-, n-, t-, t-, #-, #-.

I shall try to explain the double appearance of the marker t- (or ti-), by reconstructing a hypothetical system, whose existence I do not presume to have demonstrated here (3). I shall work with the previously mentioned form *mi- and with two dialectal phenomena, which, as far as I can tell, have never been commented on.

In the Pipil of the Gulf - south of Veracruz -, there is evidence of an ancient usage of two different forms for "first person plural". Lacking any precise data, I cannot be certain about the difference between them. But we will not go astray if we ascribe a minus semantic feature to one of them, and a plus to the other. Like this ni...h (-), ti...h (+).

My first impulse was to attribute to minus, the value of exclusive ('we are going, but you are not') and to plus that of inclusive ('we are going, and you are too'). Possibly, they did function that like recently. But seen in a broad-

er perspective, such a hypothesis conflicts with the second dialectal phenomenon: In several villages timič- ('I ... thee' [whose ti- coexists with ni- 'I', for example in ninemi 'I walk']) is used. Once again, we find two different forms of what in English would be one and the same person. This fact does not make less valid the postulation of two opposed semantic features. But we have to reject the idea that minus was originally exclusive and plus inclusive.

Although it may seem complicated, we might do better to conceive the positive term as imbued with the concept of "relation with the speaker", "social reciprocity". This could be symbolized by a two-headed arrow \leftrightarrow . Relations, for example, such as lending something to speaker or asking him a question, are potentially and immediately invertible terms, although not necessarily with the same verb: lending and asking, would correspond to returning and answering. The Nahuatl morphemes for this reciprocity are: ti- \leftrightarrow mič- 'I ... thee', ti- \leftrightarrow mič...h 'we ... thee', and therefore ti- \leftrightarrow neč- 'thou ... me', ti- \leftrightarrow neč...h 'you ... me'.

This \leftrightarrow (i.e. reciprocity) with the speaker does not exist, if we tell him something about a third person (nik- 'I ... him', *mik- 'thou ... him') or if we refer to an intransitive action (ninemi 'I am walking', *minemi 'thou art walking'). Thus, let us rewrite our symbols, using \leftrightarrow instead of +:



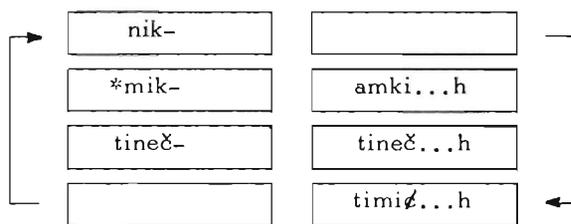
Through the time that the speech community conserved the semantic opposition of the — and \leftrightarrow features, the marker system - illustrated by the following table - remained stable:

nik- *mik-	nik...h amki...h	(-)
tineč- timič-	tineč...h timič...h	(\leftrightarrow)

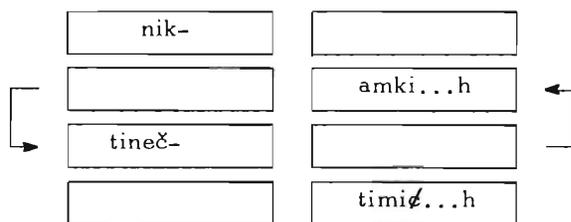
- in which we see that the marker ti- is used as a reciprocal term when there is an interaction or conversational exchange. In "Acerca de las formas de salutación en el pipil del Golfo" (Archivos Náhuas, 1958) I presented an analogous system of reciprocity, which had led to the interchange of some kinship terms. In a similar way, the pronominal reciprocity led to the signifiante acquiring a new signifié, when the system became unbalanced and took on its present form.

Since many of the forms shown in the last table have disappeared totally or regionally, we have to recognize that at some time the — vs ↔ opposition became inoperative, triggering off a degenerative process of the remaining forms. The process was by no mean uniform in all of the villages; this fact is borne out wherever timiŋ- is conserved and by the Pipil evidence. On the other hand, in the Nahua spoken near Tenochtitlan, which scholars usually take as a norm, both of these phenomena are unknown. Successive phases of loss account for the absences. Every time a slot in the table became vacant, its function was taken over by another (which I indicate by an arrow).

As a first step, I should like to consider the loss of a "first person" in each column of the table we have just considered. The functions of the first and last lines would be fused (singular nik- absorbs the timiŋ- slot, yet transformed in nimiŋ-, and plural timiŋ...h absorbs the nik...h slot, yet transformed in tik...h):



At a second step, the "second person" would have become fused. The plural tineč...h [whose final aspiration is rarely heard in the language] shifts to avoid confusions with the singular tineč-. The plural tineč...h is then substituted by amneč...h; *mik- shifts because of its resemblance to nik-.



With this we have arrived exactly at the present situation (obviously without considering the above-mentioned regional exceptions which gave the key to this study). This latter table, omitting the empty slots and adding tik- or tiki-, is identical to the contents of the second table in this paper.

The third-person markers seem to be unrelated to the markers we have studied so far. It is striking that their elements (first table, last two columns) reveal

a phonic aspect that make them distinct from the system we have been considering.

Above all, the third person is distinguished by the absence of an agent marker. It is the non-person, the one who does not act within the system of ↔ relations of 'I' and its speakers.

For possession, we have in this other system an i̇-, different from the above mentioned epenthetic i̇-, and evident again in k+i̇-, which denotes the object or beneficiary of a transitive action. And for the plural we have -n.

The non-person markers do not match up with the other pronominal affixes, nor with the rest of the affix system of Nahua. And so, we seemed to observe an unquestionable difference between these persons within the speaker's ambit and the third person. (4)

NOTES

- * The # has been used just to attract the attention to the place where in the other morphemes a vowel always occurs.
- (1) The forms nĭkĭ-, tĭkĭ- are Tlaxcaltec. All of the other regions omit the second i̇ and many may omit the first, as well. In this paper, I shall write nĭk-, tĭk-, although strictly speaking, in a morphemic study, we could omit the epenthetic vowel: nk-, tk-. In the same way amki- differs from one region to another, anki- being the most common.
 - (2) miġ- was derived from *mi+i̇č-: the affricate and i̇ became fronted owing to the attraction exerted by i̇. (On the other hand, there was an influx of the low vowel a in: *ta+i̇č- > teč-, *am+i̇č- > ameč- and in *an+i̇č- > *aneč- > neč-.) In the Nahua of Pochutla, the steps were: *mi+i̇č- > *miġ- > moġ-.
 - (3) After writing the lines, I was surprised and satisfied to find "my" system in the chapter "Inflexión" of Benjamin Elson's "Gramática del Popoluca de la Sierra" (Jalapa, 1960). Interestingly enough, the correlations are semantic as well as phonetic (t- = t-; *mi- = mi-; #- = #-; i- = i-). Actually, the Totozoque languages have a good deal to contribute toward a deeper historical study of Nahua. For instance, it would convince us that the mazacoate (Boa constrictor) is not a deer snake but rather a sacred serpent.
 - (4) It is in the light of other languages, like the Totozoque or those of California, that certain Nahua morphemes, such as ĭk, and those of origin-destination ("andativos" or "verbos de ir y venir") and some others, may be better understood.

