The TAM morphology in Tilapa Otomi verb conjugations

Tilapa Otomi is an undescribed Mesoamerican (Otopamean, Otomanguean) language on the verge of extinction which is spoken by under a hundred old speakers in the village of Santiago Tilapa, Mexico State, Mexico. This language is a linguistic island with respect to other Otomi languages because it both shows idiosyncratic phonological developments and its conservative morphology preserves a substantial number of the complex paradigms registered by Cárceres (1907/1580) for Old Otomi. Such paradigms have been largely reduced and reanalyzed since in other languages of the family.

Tilapa Otomi verbs are organized in three conjugations and may inflect for more than 17 tenses. The different TAM categories are encoded by means of paradigms combining certain verbal clitics together with a number of inflectional prefixes. Besides carrying TAM information, the clitics also cross-reference subject, as shown in (1) with the 1st conjugation verb *mi* 'sit'. These clitics have a series of allomorphs and always precede the verb: they are commonly proclitics, as in (1a), but may appear enclitized to other functional words, as in (1b).

The examples in (1) illustrate the paradigm for the past realis of the 1st and the 3rd conjugations. The past tense of the 2nd conjugation includes an inflectional prefix in the 1st and 2nd persons, as shown in (2), with the verb *hande* 'yawn'. However, for the present continuous of the realis mood, the paradigm for the 1st and the 2nd conjugation lack a prefix, while the one for the 3rd conjugation receives one in all persons, as shown in (3), with the middle verb *nta^hki* 'scratch'. The paradigms can get more complex: they may employ more than one prefix, as in the past irrealis of the 1st person for 2nd conjugation verbs, shown in (4).

As shown in the examples, the inflectional prefixes vary in form, but they are all based on a structure *TV-* and *gV-*. They also display an apparent puzzling distribution. For instance, in (2), *TV-* and *gV-* appear associated with 1st and 2nd person, respectively, but in (3), *TV-* occurs with all persons, and in (4), both are found with 1st person. Morphological-ly, these prefixes also constitute a problematic category as they share a number of properties with clitics, but have other which associate them typically with affixes. Like clitics, they are able to host a labial infix (i.e. *T<w>V-*) which is a marker available in certain tenses to indicate that the action is performed elsewhere, away from the space at the speech act. Similarly, unlike other derivational prefixes, these inflectional ones impose a strong phonological barrier before the verb's stem, which may be seen in a number of phonological processes affecting word-initial consonants. Nevertheless, as affixes they tend to undergo vowel harmony triggered either by a neighboring clitic or by the verb's root; they are prosodically and distributionally associated with the verbal stem and have a derivational function in other contexts.

In this paper, I first present all TAM paradigms and then discuss relevant ones in detail in order to study the distribution of the prefixes while attempting a reconstruction to minimize their current variation. The function of the prefixes is largely inflectional within TAM paradigms, but a reflex of the prefix *TV-* is also used elsewhere derivationally to produce inchoative verbs. In the attempt to shed light onto their distribution within the paradigms across the three conjugations, in the paper, I also study each conjugation in detail, and I propose that while the 1st conjugation serves as a default, a functional and semantic profile can be sketched for the verbs pertaining to the 2nd and the 3rd.

Examples:

	Clitic hosted at stem	Clitic hosted at functional word

(1) a. **tṹ**=mi
     1.PST.R=sit
     'I sat down.'

     b. hin=**dṵ**   mi
     NEG=1.PST.R sit
     'I didn't sit down.'

     gṹ=mi
     2.PST.R=sit
     'You sat down.'

     hin=**gṵ**   mi
     NEG=2.PST.R sit
     'You didn't sit down.'

     bi=mi
     3.PST.R=sit
     'He/she/they sat down.'

     him=**bi**   mi
     NEG=3.PST.R sit
     'He/she/they didn't sit down.'

(2) a. tṹ=**dṵ**-hande
     1.PST.R=Pf-yawn
     'I yawned.'

     b. xṵn=dṹ   **dṵ**-hande
     also=1.PST.R   Pf-yawn
     'I also yawned.'

     gṹ=**gṵ**-hande
     2.PST.R=Pf-yawn
     'You yawned.'

     xṵn=gṹ   **gṵ**-hande
     also=2.PST.R   Pf-yawn
     'You also yawned.'

     bi=hande
     3.PST.R=yawn
     'He yawned.'

     xṵn=bi   hande
     also=3.PST.R   yawn
     'He also yawned.'

(3) a. txá=**ti**-n-taʰki
     1.PRES.CONT.R=Pf-MED-scratch
     'I'm scratching.'

     b. xṵn=r̃á   **ti**-n-taʰki
     also=1.PRES.CONT.R Pf-MED-scratch
     'I'm also scratching.'

     grá=**ti**-n-taʰki
     2.PRES.CONT.R=Pf-MED-scratch
     'You're scratching.'

     xṵn=grá   **ti**-n-taʰki
     also=2.PRES.CONT.R Pf-MED-scratch
     'You're also scratching.'

     rá=**ti**-n-taʰki
     3.PRES.CONT.R=Pf-MED-scratch
     'He's scratching.'

     xṵn=á   **ti**-n-taʰki
     also=3.PRES.CONT.R Pf-MED-scratch
     'He's also scratching.'

(4) a. gṵ=**gṵ-tṵ**-hande
     1.PRES.IRR=Pf-Pf-yawn
     'I'm going to yawn.'

     b. hin=gṵ   **gṵ-tṵ**-hande
     NEG=1.PRES.IRR Pf-Pf-yawn
     'I'm not going to yawn.'

References:
Cárceres, Fray Pedro de. 1907/1580. Arte de la lengua otomí, in Nicolás León (ed.), *Boletín del Instituto Bibliográfico Mexicano*. Mexico D.F.: Instituto Bibliográfico Mexicano.