

# The reference-tracking system of Tlapanec

## Between obviation and switch-reference\*

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This paper presents data on the Azoyú Tlapanec reference tracking system. The system is analyzed according to a procedure where default rules for how the system works are formulated and deviations are interpreted as being licensed by different levels of grammar organization along the lines of the local-global parameter proposed by Comrie (1989). The system is compared to its closest common typological congeners, obviation and switch-reference. Although it bears more resemblances to obviation, the system is neither clearly one of switch-reference, nor, indeed, of obviation.

### o. Introduction

This paper reports on the reference-tracking system of the Tlapanec language as spoken in Azoyú, Guerrero, Mexico.<sup>1</sup> It is an unusual type of system which shares characteristics with both obviation and switch-reference, but is different from both. My goal is to characterize the system typologically in terms of its similarities and differences with respect to obviation and switch-reference. Moreover I shall argue for the relevance of a local-global parameter in the description of how reference-tracking works in Tlapanec. My use of such a parameter is based on Comrie (1989), who makes a distinction between 'local' vs. 'global' reference-tracking systems. I deviate from Comrie, however, in that I use the parameter as a way of describing different functions of the system rather than as a way of fitting the system as a whole into a typological classification.

The system distinguishes between 'new' and 'given' third person (singular or plural) animate arguments. This distinction is expressed on the predicate, either by tonal or segmental suffixation. The status of 'new' vs. 'given' relates to whether the referent has been introduced prior to the predicate marking the

distinction or whether it is introduced as an argument of the predicate. Since Tlapanec is a verb-initial language, the predicate is usually expressed before its core arguments. If the referent has been introduced in some prior clause, or, less commonly, in fronted focus position within the same clause as the predicate, ‘given’ marking occurs. If the referent is introduced by an overt noun phrase after the predicate but within the same clause, ‘new’ marking occurs. Examples (1a–c) give some simple illustrations of how the distinction works.<sup>2</sup> As seen, the predicates  $i^2\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$  (1a–b) and  $i^3\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$  (1c) differ in their tonal inflection,<sup>3</sup> which expresses the ‘given’ vs. ‘new’ distinction. The examples (1a) and (1b) only differ in that in (1a) the animate argument is referred to anaphorically, whereas in (1b) it is introduced overtly in the preverbal focus position.

- (1) a.  $i^2\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$   $\eta gwa^{23}$   $gu^{23}wa^2$   
 ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.G where house  
 ‘S/he is sitting in the house.’
- b.  $\text{ša}^2bu^3$   $ra^2$   $i^2\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$   $\eta gwa^{23}$   $gu^{23}wa^2$   
 man FOC ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.G where house  
 ‘The man, he is sitting in the house.’
- c.  $i^3\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$   $\text{ša}^2bu^3$   $\eta gwa^{23}$   $gu^{23}wa^2$   
 ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.N man where house  
 ‘The man is sitting in the house.’
- d.  $i^3\text{-}\text{?gi}^2$   $ba^3w\text{-}i^2$   $\text{ša}^2bu^3$   $\eta gwa^{23}$   $gu^{23}wa^2$   
 ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.N one-ABS.3SG.N man where house  
 ‘A man is sitting in the house.’

(1c–d) demonstrate that the distinction cannot be equated with definite vs. indefinite. As seen, both definites and indefinites may be treated as ‘new’. What triggers the ‘new’ marking in (1c) is strictly and only presence of the overt argument following the verb. In a natural context for an example such as (1c),  $\text{ša}^2bu^3$  ‘man’ could represent an overt mentioning of a referent which had already been introduced earlier in the discourse. In such a situation where a discourse participant is mentioned overtly in some sentence prior to the verb carrying the ‘new’/‘given’ distinction and is then reintroduced, the overriding factor determining ‘new’ marking is the overt presence of the argument following the verb. Even if the referent is not new in the sense of not having been mentioned before, it will be formally treated as ‘new’.

(1d) also shows that numerals are sensitive to the category. In examples (2a–c) it is furthermore shown that possessed nouns and pronouns similarly express the category. In accordance with the consistent head-marking nature of Tlapanec the possessor is marked directly on the possessum. The contrast

between  $go^{23}o^{12}$  and  $go^{23}o^1$  in (2a,c) vs. (2b), then, signals the status of the possessor as ‘new’ vs. ‘given’ (in the current stretch of discourse). The possessum is inert with respect to the distinction.

- (2) a.  $i^{-3}{}^2g-i^{22}$                        $\eta gwa^{23}$   $go^{23}-o^{12}$                        $i^2k-a^3$                        $hwan^1$   
 ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.N where house-DAT.3SG.N PRON-ABS.3SG.N Juan  
 ‘Juan<sub>i</sub> sits in his<sub>i</sub> house.’
- b.  $i^2k-a^1$                        $i^{-2}{}^2g-i^{21}$                        $\eta gwa^{23}$   $go^{23}-o^1$   
 PRON-ABS.3SG.G ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.G where house-DAT.3SG.G  
 ‘S/he<sub>i</sub> sits in his/her<sub>i</sub> house.’
- c.  $i^2k-a^1$                        $i^{-2}{}^2g-i^{21}$                        $\eta gwa^{23}$   $go^{23}-o^{12}$   
 PRON-ABS.3SG.G ASP-sit-ABS.3SG.G where house-DAT.3SG.N  
 ‘S/he<sub>i</sub> sits in his/her<sub>j</sub> house.’

All predicates are sensitive to the category. It is not surprising that numerals, possessed nouns and pronouns are sensitive to the category since they formally behave like predicates, more precisely stative predicates (predicates that do not take aspectual distinctions). The numeral  $ba^3w-i^2$  of (1d) is inflected for third person singular animate and subcategorizes for the absolutive case like most other stative predicates. In (1d) it functions syntactically as a dependent of  $\acute{s}a^2bu^3$  ‘man’ and may be translated as the numeral ‘one’ or the indefinite pronoun ‘a’. In other context, however, it may be translated as ‘s/he is alone’ (higher ‘numerals’ similarly work as predicates, fundamentally meaning ‘we/you/they are two/three/etc.’). Possessed nouns take dative case markers and, in this respect behave just like several intransitives predicates, including forms meaning ‘to be cold’, ‘to be sad’, ‘to be a nice person’, etc. Thus a literal translation of  $go^{23}o^1$ , glossed above as ‘his house’, would be something like ‘he houses’. Personal pronouns subcategorize for the absolutive case like the numerals and most stative predicates. The form  $i^2ka^1$ , treated above as a third person pronoun, contains the base  $i^2k$  (glossed above as PRON for ‘pronominal base’), which recurs in the demonstrative  $i^3ki^2$  ‘there’ (discussed in Wichmann 1993). Thus, formally it behaves as a predicate, and could literally be translated ‘s/he is there’. We shall not enter into further discussion of part-of-speech issues in Tlapanec. For the present purposes it is sufficient to note that numerals, possessed nouns and pronouns are sensitive to the category that we are dealing with.

Only one argument per predicate can be cross-referenced for the ‘given’ vs. ‘new’ distinction. I label this argument the ‘pivot’, a useful notion introduced by Heath (1975) and Dixon (1979), which has gained wide currency through the work of Foley and Van Valin (1985). The following is a general definition of this term: “A *pivot* is any NP type to which a particular grammatical process is

sensitive, either as a controller or as target” (Foley and Van Valin 1985:305). A ‘pivot’, then, is a notion which is specific to a given language. In the context of the present analysis the use of the term is to be understood specifically as ‘the argument which is susceptible to being encoded by the Tlapanec ‘given’/‘new’ distinction.’ The term is simply a way of denoting the member of the set of arguments which is relevant for the category that I am discussing. Pivot status is assigned in the following way. For transitive predicates involving a third person animate argument and an inanimate one, the animate argument is necessarily the agent (sentences like ‘the hammer killed the man’ are impossible) and will also be pivot. For transitives involving a non-third person animate agent and a third person animate argument, the third person argument is the pivot regardless of its semantic function. For transitives involving two animate third person arguments the agent is the pivot. For ditransitives involving a non-third person agent, a third person animate theme, and a third person animate recipient, the recipient is the pivot. In this respect Tlapanec patterns as a ‘primary object language’ (cf. Dryer 1986).

In the discussion of the uses of the Tlapanec reference-tracking system in different syntactic domains along the local-global cline in Section 2 below, we shall see that within the local domain the system is involved in marking restrictive relative clauses and is used for distinguishing between coreferent vs. non-coreferent arguments in subordinate and possessive constructions. Such functions, which relate to certain strictly defined syntactic contexts, make the system reminiscent of switch-reference. Unlike switch-reference, however, the use of the system goes beyond such narrow contexts. The basic function of the system is the tracking of ‘new’ vs. ‘given’ topics in the current stretch of discourse. Finally, the descriptive relevance of a more global discourse level is revealed by instances where ‘given’ marking is used even though the referent of the current pivot is not identical to the pivot referent most recently introduced by an overt noun phrase. Such behavior is motivated by the overriding importance of a certain discourse entity, a global topic. In natural conversation the ‘local’ rules for referent-tracking are often violated and a use of the system reminiscent of obviation occurs. Nevertheless, ‘new’ vs. ‘given’ is not used systematically to distinguish between more and less topical discourse entities. It is only occasionally that ‘given’ marking may identify a more topical entity.

The paper sets out with a brief description of the morphosyntactic mechanics and morphology of the system (Section 1), continues with a description of the employment of the system in different syntactic and discourse domains of the local-global scale (Section 2); finally, a summary of the characteristics of

the system in comparison to obviation and switch-reference is provided (Section 3), as well as a general conclusion (Section 4).

## 1. Morphosyntax and morphology of the category

### 1.1 The topic accessibility hierarchy

For the purpose of discussing the ‘given’/‘new’ category in Tlapanec we need a term by which to refer to the pivot involved in this category in its capacity as an element of discourse. For this, I choose the term ‘topic’. This term has been used in a great many different ways in the literature. Given that its meaning is already quite vague, there is no harm in applying the term ‘topic’ in yet another new way, as long as we remember that the meaning of the term in the present context is a very special, language-specific one, just as the meaning of ‘pivot’. As another matter of terminology it should be mentioned that I avoid the terms ‘subject’ and ‘object’ since there are no constructions (such as a passive or other) that motivate positing such grammatical relations for Tlapanec. Instead, the relations among participants are discussed in terms of the semantic roles agent, theme, and recipient. These are used in broadest possible sense. Thus, ‘agent’ refers to any participant in a mono-personal predication (an intransitive or transitive predication involving just one animate participant) whether or not this participant functions semantically as a true agent.

In a clause involving one or more animate participants one — and only one — participant is assigned the status of topic. Furthermore, a topic must be an animate third person (singular or plural) argument. When more than one animate participant is involved the topic is selected according to the hierarchy shown in (3).

- (3) The Tlapanec Topic Accessibility Hierarchy  
agent > recipient > theme

The hierarchy is to be interpreted as follows. If there is an animate agent involved in the nuclear predication, this will be selected for topic status, and will thus be marked (on the predicate) as either ‘given’ or ‘new’. If there is no animate third person agent, then an animate third person recipient gets the topic status. If there are no third person agents or recipients, then the third person animate theme is topic. If none of these conditions are satisfied, topic is not relevant to the predication. That is, inanimate and non-third person arguments are never eligible for topic marking. The schematic representation in (4) makes

the previous statements more explicit. Here all possible combinations of agent, theme, and recipient, qualified by the relevant features of animacy and person, are listed. Inanimate transitive agents and recipients are excluded since they rarely, if ever, occur, and since inanimates are not eligible for topic status anyhow. The argument which receives topic status is marked in bold. When no argument is marked in bold there is no topic.

(4) Articulation of the Tlapanec Topic Accessibility Hierarchy

Intransitive	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>		
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>		
	Agent <sub>[+3P, -ANIM]</sub>		
Transitive	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[+3P, -ANIM]</sub>	
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- <b>Theme</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-3P]</sub>	
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[+3P, -ANIM]</sub>	
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- <b>Theme</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-3P]</sub>	
Ditransitive	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-ANIM]</sub>	- <b>Recipient</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[-3P]</sub>
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- <b>Recipient</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- <b>Theme</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[-3P]</sub>
	Agent <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- <b>Recipient</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[-3P]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[-3P]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>
	<b>Agent</b> <sub>[+3P, +ANIM]</sub>	- Theme <sub>[-3P]</sub>	- Recipient <sub>[-3P]</sub>

The sentences in (5) illustrate some crucial aspects of the workings of the Topic Accessibility Hierarchy. The vital clues to the interpretation of (5a) are the following: the verb is marked for the presence in the predication of an animate theme by means of the suffix *-i*; the participant 'Juan' is introduced overtly in the syntactic slot of 'new' participants; and the verb carries 'new' topic marking. Since the verb is ditransitive and since recipient ranks higher than theme on the Topic Accessibility Hierarchy we know that a 'new' recipient must be involved. The 'new' recipient must be Juan given the overt expression of the noun phrase *hwan*<sup>1</sup>. In (5b) the topic is marked as given. The topic must be the recipient because of the Topic Accessibility Hierarchy. Since Juan is treated

syntactically as a ‘new’ participant he cannot be the recipient, but must be interpreted as the theme.

- (5) a. *ma-šn-i-<sup>2</sup>u<sup>3</sup>* *hwan<sup>1</sup>*  
 FUT-give-TH-PEG.1SG>3SG.N Juan  
 ‘I will give him/her to Juan.’  
 b. *ma-šn-i-<sup>2</sup>u<sup>32</sup>* *hwan<sup>1</sup>*  
 FUT-give-TH-PEG.1SG>3SG.G Juan  
 ‘I will give Juan to him/her.’

When two third person core participants are expressed overtly in a ditransitive construction, as in (6), it is impossible to know which of the two is the recipient being cross-referenced by means of the ‘new’ topic marking.

- (6) *ma-šn-i-<sup>2</sup>u<sup>3</sup>* *hwan<sup>1</sup> ča<sup>23</sup>gu<sup>2</sup>*  
 FUT-give-TH-PEG.1SG>3.N Juan girl  
 ‘I will give Juan to the girl’ or ‘I will give the girl to Juan.’

The sentence in (6) may, however, be disambiguated by rendering ‘girl’ indefinite, changing *ča<sup>23</sup>gu<sup>2</sup>* to *ba<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>2</sup> ča<sup>23</sup>gu<sup>2</sup>* ‘a [literally ‘one’] girl’. Since indefiniteness signals the status of the participant as ‘new’ we are led to interpret ‘girl’ as the recipient and to translate the sentence ‘I will give John to a girl’.

For the sake of completeness, it should perhaps be mentioned that a ditransitive marked for given recipient, as *ma-šn-i-<sup>2</sup>u<sup>32</sup>* in (5b), obviously cannot be followed by two overt animate arguments. In such a sentence one of the two arguments would have to be interpreted as the recipient (they cannot both be themes), and the overt mentioning of the recipient would be in conflict with the grammatical treatment of this argument as given.

In actual speech, examples such as (6) are rare. When two core participants are expressed overtly, one of them will normally be topicalized, a status which is marked by fronting the constituent and supplying a following topicalizing particle *ra<sup>2</sup>*, cf. (7).

- (7) *ča<sup>23</sup>gu<sup>2</sup> ra<sup>2</sup> ma-šn-i-<sup>2</sup>u<sup>3</sup>* *hwan<sup>1</sup>*  
 girl TOP FUT-give-TH-PEG.1SG>3.N Juan  
 ‘The girl, I will give her to Juan.’

## 1.2 Morphological expression of the category

The simplest way to begin to explain how the category of ‘given’/‘new’ is expressed and to situate it in the context of other morphological categories is by

showing an example of a Tlapanec verb paradigm. In (8) I provide the example of the verb ‘to pass, cross’.

(8) Inflectional paradigm for the verb ‘to pass, cross’ (intr)

1SG	<i>na-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-o<sup>23</sup></i> ‘I am crossing’
2SG	<i>na-ta-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-a<sup>223</sup></i> ‘you etc...’
3SG, Given	<i>na-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-o<sup>1</sup></i>
3SG, New	<i>na-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-o<sup>23</sup></i>
1PL, Incl	<i>n-u-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-a<sup>23</sup>=lu<sup>22</sup></i>
1PL, Excl	<i>n-u-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-a<sup>23</sup>=lo<sup>23</sup></i>
2PL	<i>n-u-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-a<sup>23</sup>=la<sup>23</sup></i>
3PL, Given	<i>n-u-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-un<sup>21</sup></i>
3PL, New	<i>n-u-no<sup>2</sup>hɲg-un<sup>32</sup></i>

As far as phonology goes it should be mentioned that there are seven tones in Tlapanec: high (<sup>1</sup>), mid (<sup>2</sup>), low (<sup>3</sup>), mid-high (<sup>21</sup>), high-mid (<sup>12</sup>), mid-low (<sup>23</sup>), and low-mid (<sup>32</sup>). The contour tones trigger a phonetic lengthening of the syllables with which they associate, providing a very salient cue for the presence of the contour. Wichmann (2006) cites sets of lexemes that demonstrate the tonal contrasts and discusses some of the complex word-internal sandhi-processes involving tones. Another non-segmental contrast is nasalization. This only occurs before word boundaries or enclitics. In the plural forms in (8) the final *n* is a practical orthographic device for indicating nasalization. We now move on to briefly mentioning the major verbal categories. Aspect is marked by means of prefixes. In (8) the prefix is *na-* ‘imperfective’. For agentive verbs a special second person prefix *ta-* (or allomorphs thereof) and a special plural prefix *u-* intervene between the aspect marker and the root. The presence of *u-* causes the aspectual prefix to be reduced (here to *n-*). The category of agentivity is discussed in Wichmann (1996b). The suffixes *-o<sup>23</sup>*, *-a<sup>223</sup>*, etc. are portmanteau morphemes that combine case and person marking in ways somewhat similar to, say, corresponding verbal affixes in languages like Choctaw (Davies 1986) or Caddo (Melnar 2004). The case system is described in Wichmann (2005). Tlapanec verb roots always end in a vowel, and when the case-person suffixes are added to the root, morphophonological processes ensue. Because of this fusion of root and suffix vowels it is somewhat misleading to place a hyphen before the case-person suffix in the analyses. Such a hyphen is nevertheless used throughout this paper in order to ease the processing of the grammatical glosses. The enclitics *=lu<sup>22</sup>*, *=lo<sup>23</sup>*, and *=la<sup>23</sup>* serve to add person distinctions to the non-third plural stem.

If we extract the tonal person marker paradigm for third persons from the example in (8) we get the following result:

(9) Tonal marker paradigm for the verb 'to pass, cross' (intr)

3SG, New	ML	3PL, New	LM
3SG, Given	H	3PL, Given	MH

The main interest of the paradigm in (9) is the relationship among the 'new' and 'given' markers for the third person. It is not clear from an isolated case such as the paradigm in (9) whether 'given' is derived from 'new', 'new' from 'given' or whether the two forms are simply members of equal status of the total paradigm. A clue to the relationship between them comes from verbs subcategorizing for the ergative, where a suffix *-i* is added to the third person singular given form, showing this to be marked. Moreover, there is a special suffix *-e*<sup>2</sup> which only occurs in the paradigm of certain dipersonal verbs to signal a relationship among third person singular or plural given acting on first person singular — again some evidence that 'given' is marked and 'new' unmarked. Finally, the relationship among the tones of the third person 'given' and 'new' forms are such that the 'given' is more naturally derived from the 'new' than the other way around. When the entire range of paradigms is inspected it turns out that the given (singular or plural) form is consistently derived from the 'new' (singular or plural) form by a high tone or a raising of the tone or tone pattern of the latter. The most commonly occurring relationships between the tones of 'new' and 'given' forms are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The most common tonal derivational relationships between given and new third person

new	L	L	LM	LM	M	MH	HM	H
given	LM	H	MH	H	H	H	H	H

As can be seen, it is impossible to derive the 'given' form automatically from the 'new' one. Corresponding to a 'new' form having a low tone there are two different 'given' forms, one having a low-mid contour and one having a high tone; furthermore, corresponding to a 'new' form with a low-mid contour we find both a mid-high and a high tone in the 'given' form. If the 'given' form were to be derived automatically from the 'new' one by a single, consistent tone-changing rule we would not find more than one tonal pattern in the 'given' form corresponding to one and the same pattern in the 'new' form. But even if different paradigms must be set up in an arbitrary fashion to account for all the forms found, there is at least the regularity that the tone of the 'given' form is

higher or rising and the ‘new’ form, correspondingly lower or level. The case of neutralization where both ‘given’ and ‘new’ is marked with a high tone (cf. the far right end of Table 1) supports my view that ‘given’ is derived from ‘new’ by a tone raising. If the opposite was the case, i.e., if ‘new’ were derived from ‘given’ by a lowering of the tone, there could not be a neutralization where both ‘given’ and ‘new’ are expressed by high tones. But this can happen if the ‘new’ form already has a high tone and if ‘given’ is normally expressed by a raising of the tone. In such a situation the observed neutralization is what we would expect since a high tone cannot rise further (there is no extra-high level available in the tonal system). Thus, the tonal evidence points in the same direction as the above-mentioned segmental evidence, indicating that ‘new’ is unmarked and ‘given’ marked.

It is important to establish the markedness relationship within the ‘given’/‘new’ opposition because this is an issue of typological relevance. Comrie (1999) has proposed that cross-linguistically the forms indicating coreference within the local domain of the predicate and its arguments — a domain where coreference is typically not expected — tend to be marked, whereas the forms indicating coreference in extended domains (across clause boundaries) tend to be unmarked, since here coreference is typically expected. The remainder of this paper will look at the employment of the Tlapanec reference-tracking mechanism, arguing that it is used both in local and more extended domains. Given that the category is functionally both a local and a global one, it is not possible to test Comrie’s prediction. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that morphologically it follows the pattern of local reference-tracking mechanisms in other languages.

It is important to emphasize that the markedness relationship within the ‘given’/‘new’ category in Tlapanec is a strictly morphological one. The fact that ‘new’ is morphologically unmarked does not mean that this type of marking is somehow default. As I hope to demonstrate in this paper, ‘new’ marking is always motivated in some way, as is ‘given’ marking.

The above treatment of Tlapanec inflection has been very cursory, but should provide enough of a morphological characterization of the ‘given’/‘new’ category for the present purposes. I have argued that given is marked with respect to ‘new’ and, indeed, is directly derived from it. Whereas ‘new’ third person is a true member of the total paradigm of person markers, ‘given’ third person is an outgrowth on the third person ‘new’, and thus not truly a member of the total paradigm of person markers.

## 2. Tlapanec reference-tracking in light of the local-global parameter

In this section I shall show how the Tlapanec reference-tracking system is employed at different levels. After showing an example of what I take to be the basic use of the system, I shall move from a treatment of the level of manipulating reference in clause combining situations, over the level of tracking reference from one main clause to the other, to the level where true reference is suspended or where the discourse context at large must be taken into account in order to understand the behavior of ‘given’ vs. ‘new’ marking. All the various special instances at the more local or the more global levels are identifiable as deviating from the following rules:

- ‘New’ topic marking requires the cross-referenced argument to be expressed overtly following the predicate;
- conversely, ‘given’ topic marking requires the cross-referenced argument to have been expressed overtly prior to the predicate carrying the distinction;
- if the reference of the pivot shifts, ‘new’ topic marking should occur.

The function of the category is essentially to distinguish the ‘given’ vs. ‘new’ status of the pivot, and the three rules fall out naturally from this function. Nevertheless, it is necessary to state these relatively detailed rules explicitly. We might instead set up a single, general rule such as ‘mark new topics as ‘new’ and given topics as ‘given’ or we might try to reduce the operations of the reference-tracking system to general pragmatic principles, for instance following the neo-Gricean proposals of Levinson (1987) which have been further developed in several publications by Yan Huang, including Huang (1994, 2000). A single, general rule, however, would not lead to the kind of strict analytical procedure that I am proposing. For instance, if a topic previously introduced is reintroduced into the discourse, then the general rule would not make any clear predictions since the reintroduced topic could conceivably be considered both relatively ‘new’ and relatively ‘given.’ The rules as stated above, however, do not require the analyst to make judgments of what is ‘given’ and ‘new.’ In the case of the reintroduced topic, for instance, the third rule predicts that ‘new’ topic marking should occur because the reference has shifted, and the first rule predicts that an NP overtly identifying the reintroduced topic should then occur. Now, it may well be that a reintroduced topic is in fact cross-referenced by given topic marking and is not expressed overtly (examples of this nature will be given in Section 2.7 below). Then the explicit and detailed rules serve to tell the analyst that a special situation is at work and that an explanation should be

sought out among various possible ones. In this particular case the analyst will decide that there is a global topic at work. Other types of deviations will require other kinds of explanations. In other words, the rules are simply an analytical tool. Violations are to be taken as signs not that the rules are inadequate but as evidence that different levels of syntactic or discourse organization are in play. Thus, by studying deviations from the default use of the system, evidence is produced to support the notion that levels of discourse organization are important for the characterization of reference-tracking systems (e.g., Woodbury 1983, Comrie 1989, Stirling 1994, Nariyama 2002). In the following sections examples will be given first of segments of discourse that conform to the predictions of the rules and then of segments of discourse that evince various types of deviations, which are then given principled explanations.

## 2.1 Default use of the reference-tracking mechanism in declarative main clauses

In this section I give an extract from the beginning of a taped conversation demonstrating the normal use of the topic marking category similar to the elicited examples in (1–2). The subsequent conversation contains various deviations which we shall deal with in Section 2.7 below. The beginning, however, follows the normal rules. The partners in the conversation, A and B, are two brothers.

- (10) A: 1 *bwe<sup>3</sup>na<sup>2</sup> šī<sup>2</sup>a<sup>1</sup> šī<sup>2</sup> mya<sup>2</sup>*  
 good very now PART  
 ‘It is very good now, you see,
- 2 *no<sup>2</sup>mo<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>-ʔt-u<sup>2</sup> aleha<sup>3</sup>ndru<sup>2</sup>*  
 because PFV-tell-3SG.N>DAT.1SG Alejandro  
 because Alejandro (new topic) told me
- 3 *di<sup>2</sup> i<sup>2</sup>k-a<sup>1</sup> ba<sup>2</sup>w-i<sup>1</sup>*  
 that.INAN PRON-3SG.G alone-ABS.3SG.G  
*ma-ri<sup>2</sup>-i<sup>1</sup>=li<sup>2</sup> ša<sup>2</sup>štu<sup>2</sup>*  
 FUT-clean-3SG.G>INAN-ITER cornfield  
 that he (given topic) alone will weed the cornfield
- 4 *ma<sup>1</sup> i<sup>2</sup>k-a<sup>1</sup> ma-<sup>2</sup>ʔg-e<sup>32</sup> e<sup>2</sup>-ʔt-e<sup>1</sup>*  
 PART PRON-3SG.G FUT-go-3SG.G AOR-say-ERG.3SG.G>INAN  
 he (given topic) would go just like that, he (given topic) said’
- B: 5 *na<sup>1</sup> wa-<sup>3</sup>h-a<sup>1</sup>*  
 Q RES-grow up-ABS.3SG.G  
 ‘(is) he (given topic) (a) grown(-up)?’

- A: 6 *wa*<sup>3</sup>*h*-*a*<sup>1</sup>                      *mya*<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>  
RES-grow up.ABS.3SG.G PART  
‘sure, he (given topic) is (a) grown(-up)’
- 7 *da*<sup>2</sup>*ma*<sup>3</sup><sup>2</sup>    *i*<sup>2</sup>*k*-*a*<sup>1</sup>              *na*-*ri*<sup>2</sup>-*i*<sup>1</sup>=*li*<sup>2</sup>                      *tan*<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>  
by.himself PRON-3SG.G IPFV.clean-3SG.G>INAN-ITER QUOT  
he (given topic) weeds by himself, they say’
- B: 8 *a*<sup>2</sup><sup>2</sup>*dy*-*o*<sup>1</sup><sup>2</sup>              *ti*<sup>3</sup>*nu*<sup>2</sup> [Question-intonation]  
SON-DAT.3SG.N Celestino  
‘(is he) the son of Celestino (new possessor)?’

The topic of the conversation, ‘Alejandro’, is introduced as an overt noun phrase following the first predicate of which he is an argument. In the ensuing clauses given topic marking is used in association with the maintained reference to ‘Alejandro.’ This includes sentence 4, where the other speaker begins to contribute to the exchange. No new topic-worthy (i.e. third person animate) participant is introduced until sentence 8 where ‘Celestino’ is introduced as a new possessor in the context of B’s efforts to identify which ‘Alejandro’ A had in mind. The little excerpt serves to illustrate that in real discourse topic maintenance is a matter of negotiation. It so happens that B accepts and maintains ‘Alejandro’ as the topic and consequently uses given topic marking. But as we shall see in 2.7 matters get more complicated when new animate entities are introduced into the discourse or when speakers disagree about who is the topic of the conversation.

## 2.2 Relative clauses

From within relative clauses the pivot is obligatorily cross-referenced by ‘new’ marking on the predicate. (11) gives a straightforward example of a relative clause.

- (11) *i*<sup>2</sup>*k*-*a*<sup>3</sup>                      *ci*<sup>2</sup>              *ni*<sup>2</sup>-*hk*-*a*<sup>3</sup>                      *rama*<sup>2</sup>*h*-*an*<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>  
PRON-ABS.3SG.N REL.AN PFV-COME-3SG.N evil-ABS.3SG.G  
‘He who came is evil.’

This violates the rule that a predicate occurring after the overt introduction of the pivot (in this case *i*<sup>2</sup>*ka*<sup>3</sup>) should carry ‘given’ marking. My interpretation of the rule violation is that ‘new’ marking relates to the fact that the relative clause is restrictive. It has so far not been possible to determine how a non-restrictive relative clause might be formed. Indeed, non-restrictive relative clauses may be absent from the language. The obligatoriness of ‘new’ marking in relative

clauses thus seems to go hand in hand with the absence of non-restrictive relative clauses.

### 2.3 Indirect speech

New topic marking may be used as a means of disambiguation across the boundary of an indirect speech complement. The sentence in (12) illustrates this.

- (12)  $ni^{-3}\text{?}t\text{-}un^1$                        $di^2$   $na^{-2}nd\text{-}o^3$                        $ya^2h\text{-}un^{\text{?}3}$   
 PFV-tell-PEG.3SG>3SG.G that PFV-want-DAT.3SG.N work-ERG.3SG.N  
 ‘He<sub>i</sub> told him<sub>j</sub> that he<sub>k</sub> wanted to work.’

New topic marking on the verb  $na^2ndo^3$  serves to signal that the person wanting to work is different from the person doing the telling (the referent signalled by the “j”-index is different from “k” for pragmatic reasons: one does not tell someone else what this other person wants). A noun phrase referring to the person wanting to work is not introduced overtly following the new topic-marked verb  $na^2ndo^3$ . Again we see a violation of the default rules for topic marking and here the explanation is that the system is employed for manipulating reference at the local level of clausal complementation.<sup>4</sup>

In discourse where a person is reporting a story about third person participants which s/he has heard from somebody else, new topic marking may occur in order to disambiguate between the person who originally transmitted the story and the third person protagonist even in clauses that do not directly complement speech act verb. In my experience, however, speakers will shift to a topic management internal to the narrative after just a couple of sentences. That is, ‘false’ new topic marking is not maintained as a signal of reported speech but remains a device for reference manipulation at the local clause level. Reported speech is instead marked off by the particle  $tan^{\text{?}1}$  ‘it is said’.

The following fragment of a narrative shows that when new topic marking occurs in complements similar to the one in (12) the rule that a shifted reference requires new topic marking may be violated.

- (13)  $na^2ka^1$   $ni^{-2}\text{?}j\text{-}un^3$                        $hwan^1$   $del^2$   $ka^2rmin^1$   
 when PFV-hear-ERG.3SG.N Juan del Carmen  
 ‘When Juan del Carmen (new topic) heard  
 $di^2$   $ci^{-3}\text{?}k\text{-}a^2$                        $\check{c}e^3nte^2$   $ra^2$   
 that NEG.IPFV-come.3SG.N Vicente FOC  
 that Vicente (new topic) didn’t come

*še<sup>1</sup>hko<sup>ʔ3</sup> ne<sup>2</sup>-hk-e<sup>1</sup> pa<sup>2</sup> ka<sup>ʔ1</sup>un<sup>3</sup>*  
 like that PFV-go.3SG.G to there  
 he (given topic = Juan del Carmen) went away.’

Since ‘Vicente’ is introduced as a new topic, the subsequent shift of the reference back to ‘Juan del Carmen’ would normally require new topic marking. The violation of this rule may be due to the occurrence of ‘Vicente’ in a complement clause where local rules for reference-manipulation apply. Another possible interpretation is that ‘Juan del Carmen’ is treated as a discourse topic. Under this interpretation the explanation is due to the global level of discourse rather than the local level of clause combining. Both explanations, however, follow the logic of seeing variations of the default rules for topic management as being due to the presence of different levels of grammatical organization.

## 2.4 Other types of subordinate clauses

The following is another example of the use of topic marking for the disambiguation of reference in clause combining.

- (14) *ne<sup>2</sup>-hke<sup>1</sup> ga<sup>2</sup>-ʔy-un<sup>1</sup> bis<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>3</sup>rtiŋ<sup>1</sup>*  
 PFV-go.3SG.G SUB-do-PEG.3SG.G>3SG visit Martín  
 ‘S/he (Some previously introduced participant) went to visit Martín ...  
*ma<sup>1</sup>ski<sup>2</sup> na-ya<sup>2</sup>h-un<sup>ʔ3</sup>*  
 although PRG-work-ERG.3SG.N  
 ... although he (new topic, thus: Martín) was working.’

Again new topic marking occurs in the absence of an overtly expressed argument following the predicate, and again the violation of the default pattern is licensed by the locality of the construction.

## 2.5 Impersonal constructions

The rule that ‘given’ topic marking requires the cross-referenced argument to have been expressed overtly prior to the predicate carrying the distinction is violated in the special case of impersonal constructions. The inflection of verbs for third person plural given topic is conventionally used for expressing what in some other languages would be rendered by, say, a passive. An example is given in (15). As seen, both the impersonal agent of the taking event and the argument of the verb ‘to return’ are rendered as given topics. This violates the default rules for topic management in the following way. The ‘given’ marking

on ‘they took him’ would normally require the agent to have been expressed previously. Under the impersonal interpretation, however, there cannot be an over expression of the agent. Nevertheless, by convention, ‘given’ marking is used.

- (15) *yu<sup>23</sup>un<sup>2</sup> ni-htu<sup>2</sup>w-in<sup>3</sup>*                      *mi<sup>2</sup> na-ka-hta<sup>2</sup>ng-a<sup>1</sup>-li<sup>2</sup>*  
 there PFV-grap-3PL.G>ABS.3SG and IPFV-NEG-return-3SG.G-ITER  
 ‘There he was taken (lit.: they took him) and he no longer returned.’

## 2.6 Exophoric reference

Other cases where two subsequently occurring predicates are both marked for given topic even though the reference shifts are those where reference is made to an entity who does not belong to the discourse proper but rather is contextually given. In the excerpt from a conversation in (16) the two speakers discuss a third speaker, abbreviated here by his initials A. R. This discourse entity is introduced in topicalized position, before the first predicate which refers to him. This and subsequent predicates carry given topic marking in agreement with the normal rules for topic management. Intervening into the discourse concerning A. R. occurs the sentence ‘he likes it’, where the referent, who is identical to the present writer, is treated as a given topic even though the entity had not previously been introduced into the discourse. Moreover, A.R. is not reintroduced as a new topic but is simply being maintained as a given topic after the occurrence of the sentence ‘he likes it’ which refers to me (I had left the tape-recorder running and gone off while the two speakers carried on the conversation). This type of violation of the default rules for topic tracking is licensed by the presence of the contextual level, clearly a global aspect of the discourse.

- (16) A: *mi<sup>2</sup> cu<sup>23</sup>un<sup>2</sup> kan<sup>3</sup> ša<sup>2</sup>ba<sup>2</sup>ha<sup>32</sup> A.R. kan<sup>3</sup>*  
 and that ehh old man A.R. HES  
*mbanu<sup>1</sup>tu<sup>2</sup> na-<sup>2</sup>?ni<sup>2</sup> ja<sup>2</sup>hkun<sup>1</sup> i<sup>2</sup>k-a<sup>1</sup> mya<sup>21</sup>*  
 differently PRG-do speak.3SG.G PRON-3G.G PART  
 ‘And that old A. R. — ehh, he (given topic) speaks differently, right?’  
 B: *mbanu<sup>1</sup>tu<sup>2</sup>*  
 ‘Differently.’  
 A: *ma<sup>1</sup> di<sup>2</sup> i<sup>2</sup>k-a<sup>1</sup> na-ne<sup>2</sup>g-o<sup>21</sup>*  
 just that PRON-3SG.G IPFV-like-DAT.3SG>INAN<sup>5</sup>

*mo*<sup>3</sup>     *wa*<sup>2</sup>*wa*<sup>1</sup> *na*<sup>2</sup>-ʔ*t-e*<sup>1</sup>

because slowly IPFV-speak-3SG.G

‘But he (given topic = S. Wichmann) likes it, because he (given topic = A. R.) speaks slowly.’

## 2.7 Global topic

Now we shall turn to a common case of violation of the default rules for reference-tracking which is licensed by the global level of discourse. It concerns instances where an entity is treated as a given topic even if some other topic has been introduced into the immediately preceding discourse. The examples are drawn from the same conversation whose beginning was cited as (10) above. In order to save space and to focus on the immediately relevant information a full analysis is not given, only the text and a free translation. I have bold-faced the names or pronouns in the English translation which renders those entities in the Tlapanec text that are cross-referenced on predicates or possessed nouns for the status as new or given. It should be remembered that in Tlapanec only pronominal noun phrases themselves carry the distinction, which is otherwise marked by means of cross-referencing on the verbs or on possessed nouns.

(17)

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| A: | 1 <i>bwe</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>na</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ši</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>a</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ši</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup> <i>mya</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup>  | It is very good now, you see,  |
|    | 2 <i>no</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>mo</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>ni</i> <sup>ʔ3</sup> <i>tu</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>aleha</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>ndru</i> <sup>2</sup>   | because <b>Alejandro</b> <sub>NEW</sub> told me                                  |
|    | 3 <i>di</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>i</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ka</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ba</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>wi</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>mari</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup> <i>li</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ša</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>štu</i> <sup>2</sup>   | that <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> alone would weed the cornfield.                  |
|    | 4 <i>ma</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>i</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ka</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ma</i> <sup>ʔ2</sup> <i>gee</i> <sup>32</sup> <i>e</i> <sup>ʔ2</sup> <i>te</i> <sup>1</sup>  | Just <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> would go, <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> said.       |
| B: | 5 <i>na</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>wa</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>ha</i> <sup>1</sup>  | (Is) <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> (a) grown(up)?                                   |
| A: | 6 <i>wa</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>ha</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>mya</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup>  | Sure <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> is (a) grown(up).                                |
|    | 7 <i>da</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ma</i> <sup>32</sup> <i>i</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ka</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>nari</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup> <i>li</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>tan</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup>   | In and of himself <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> weeds, they say.                    |
| B: | 8 <i>a</i> <sup>ʔ2</sup> <i>dyo</i> <sup>12</sup> <i>ti</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>nu</i> <sup>2</sup>   | (Is he) the son of <b>Celestino</b> <sub>NEW POSSESSOR</sub> ?                   |
| A: | 9 <i>hmyu</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>a</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ngyon</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>a</i> <sup>ʔ2</sup> <i>dyo</i> <sup>12</sup> <i>ti</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>nu</i> <sup>2</sup>  | He and his brothers are the sons of<br><b>Celestino</b> <sub>NEW POSSESSOR</sub> |
| B: | 10 <i>aaa</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>bwe</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>na</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>manda</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>hwe</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>šu</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup> <i>ki</i> <sup>3</sup><br><i>mya</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup>  | O good, then, so <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> will weed it!                        |
|    | 11 <i>ti</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ya</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>di</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ti</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>nu</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>hma</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>le</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>n</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>çu</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ta</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>çu</i> <sup>2</sup> | Don't you see that Celestino with Prudencio and Anastasio ... [3 brothers]       |
| A: | 12 <i>i</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ka</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>wa</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>mbo</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ne</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>hke</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>ga</i> <sup>ʔ2</sup> <i>di</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>di</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ši</i> <sup>ʔ3</sup>                     | <b>He</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> finished going sowing yesterday.                      |
|    | 13 <i>ma</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>hko</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>ki</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>na</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>o</i> <sup>1</sup>   | It was still night, you know,  |
|    | 14 <i>mi</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>cikanu</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>li</i> <sup>2</sup>   | and <b>he</b> <sub>GIVEN</sub> had not returned.                                 |
|    | 15 <i>gwen</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>namyahwa</i> <sup>ʔ1</sup> <i>lo</i> <sup>ʔ3</sup>   | We were extremely worried.   |

- B: 16 *še<sup>1</sup>hko<sup>23</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>šna<sup>2</sup> o<sup>3</sup>ra<sup>2</sup>*  
*i<sup>2</sup>ʔta<sup>2</sup> hwan<sup>1</sup> mya<sup>ʔ1</sup>*
- A: 17 *namyahw<sup>2</sup>in<sup>2</sup> sala<sup>2</sup>sti<sup>2</sup> ru<sup>22</sup>da<sup>23</sup>lu<sup>22</sup>*  
18 *na<sup>2</sup>ʔte<sup>1</sup> ŋgwa<sup>23</sup> di<sup>2</sup> o<sup>3</sup>ra<sup>2</sup>*  
19 *i<sup>2</sup>kun<sup>232</sup> ko<sup>1</sup>mo<sup>3</sup>*  
*di<sup>2</sup> nikanu<sup>1</sup> ʔma<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>2</sup> go<sup>23</sup>o<sup>1</sup>*
- 20 *mo<sup>3</sup> di<sup>2</sup> e<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>3</sup> šta<sup>1</sup>*  
21 *mi<sup>2</sup> da<sup>22</sup>ka<sup>32</sup> mya<sup>ʔ1</sup>*  
22 *tan<sup>21</sup> di<sup>2</sup> ni<sup>22</sup>ni<sup>2</sup> mi<sup>22</sup>yun<sup>12</sup> ce<sup>21</sup>yo<sup>3</sup>*
- B: 23 *wa<sup>3</sup>ki<sup>ʔ2</sup> ni<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>1</sup>li<sup>2</sup> mya<sup>ʔ1</sup>*
- A: 24 *wa<sup>3</sup>ki<sup>ʔ2</sup> mya<sup>ʔ1</sup>*
- B: 25 *i<sup>2</sup>tan<sup>3</sup> ri<sup>2</sup>gu<sup>12</sup> cu<sup>2</sup> naški<sup>2</sup>ju<sup>1</sup>*
- A: 26 *a<sup>2</sup>hŋgu<sup>1</sup> da<sup>23</sup>ka<sup>2</sup> ne<sup>3</sup>wen<sup>2</sup> na<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>2</sup>*  
*kun<sup>23</sup>*
- 27 *da<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>2</sup> ca<sup>2</sup>hkun<sup>1</sup>*  
28 *da<sup>23</sup>ka<sup>32</sup> baw<sup>2</sup>ti<sup>2</sup>sa<sup>3</sup>u<sup>2</sup>*
- B: 29 *iii<sup>1</sup>ho<sup>3</sup> ka<sup>2</sup>hŋgu<sup>1</sup> i<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>3</sup> du<sup>ʔ1</sup>ki<sup>3</sup>*  
*ya<sup>2</sup>hun<sup>23</sup>*
- A: 30 *tan<sup>21</sup> di<sup>2</sup> ba<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>2</sup>*  
*na<sup>22</sup>ni<sup>2</sup> mi<sup>22</sup>yun<sup>12</sup> šku<sup>22</sup> o<sup>1</sup>*
- B: 31 *ga<sup>22</sup>mi<sup>12</sup> mamba<sup>1</sup>li<sup>2</sup>*
- A: 32 *ga<sup>22</sup>mi<sup>12</sup> mamba<sup>1</sup>li<sup>2</sup>*
- B: 33 *mo<sup>3</sup> di<sup>2</sup> te<sup>2</sup>go<sup>21</sup> di<sup>2</sup> mica<sup>22</sup>kun<sup>12</sup> e<sup>2</sup>jo<sup>1</sup>*
- A: 34 *te<sup>2</sup>go<sup>21</sup> mya<sup>ʔ1</sup>*
- B: 35 *bwe<sup>3</sup>na<sup>2</sup> da<sup>2</sup>tan<sup>1</sup> i<sup>2</sup>kan<sup>232</sup>*  
36 *miju<sup>22</sup>hča<sup>21</sup> ŋgwa<sup>23</sup> i<sup>23</sup>gi<sup>22</sup> ja<sup>2</sup>hkun<sup>3</sup>*
- Thus the hour has come, says **Juan**<sub>NEW</sub> [a private proverbial quote of one Juan who once returned at 10 pm from the field]
- Our **mother**<sub>NEW</sub> was very worried. **She**<sub>GIVEN</sub> said: “what time is it?” I thought that **he**<sub>GIVEN</sub> had already arrived at **his**<sub>GIVEN</sub> house [1st violation of the default rules: the global topic Alejandro overrides the given topic of 18]
- Because he lives by the road And he hadn’t, you see They say that the **chaneca**<sub>NEW</sub> [she-devil] had him scared. **He**<sub>GIVEN</sub> came back late, you know’ [2nd violation: Alejandro overrides the topic introduced in 22]
- Late, indeed. Even more so if **he**<sub>GIVEN</sub> was hungry [B implicitly makes fun of A, who always thinks of eating]
- I say, it’s because **he**<sub>GIVEN</sub> probably didn’t bathe [= isn’t baptized — belief has it that non-catholics are not protected from supernatural forces.] **He**<sub>GIVEN</sub> hasn’t got a godfather. He isn’t baptized. My God, that’s why it is like this!
- They say that **animals**<sub>NEW</sub> always frightened him, you know. There is danger that **he**<sub>GIVEN</sub> may die [3rd violation: Alejandro overrides the topic of 30]
- There is danger that **he**<sub>GIVEN</sub> may die. Because **his**<sub>GIVEN</sub> head hasn’t been blessed. Right, that’s missing! You’d better tell him. You will take him to the **priest**<sub>NEW</sub>

37 *maʃta<sup>2</sup>mu<sup>2</sup> tan<sup>1</sup> i<sup>3</sup>ya<sup>2</sup> ca<sup>2</sup>hkun<sup>3</sup>  
e<sup>2</sup>jo<sup>1</sup>*

He<sub>GIVEN</sub> will throw a little holy water onto his<sub>GIVEN</sub> head. [On a sentence-level interpretation this sentence would mean: 'he (the priest) will throw a little blessed water onto his (own) head', this is the 4th violation involving the global topic 'Alejandro.']

A: 38 *na<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>2</sup>ndo<sup>3</sup> ru<sup>2</sup>du<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>2</sup>šo<sup>1</sup>*

What, would his<sub>GIVEN</sub> mother<sub>NEW</sub> want that! — she<sub>GIVEN</sub> wouldn't want it!

B: 39 *cu<sup>2</sup> na<sup>2</sup>ndo<sup>1</sup> cu<sup>2</sup> da<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>32</sup>  
adaci<sup>2</sup>yan<sup>2</sup> mya<sup>2</sup>*

If she<sub>GIVEN</sub> wants to..., if not leave it be, then.

A: 40 *i<sup>2</sup>ka<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>2</sup>ndo<sup>1</sup> mya<sup>2</sup>*

He<sub>GIVEN</sub> will want it, you know [5th violation: the sentence is highly ambiguous to the outsider since it would make just as much sense if 'his mother' was topic]

41 *ma<sup>2</sup>tun<sup>1</sup> di<sup>2</sup>  
ma<sup>2</sup>ni<sup>2</sup> ca<sup>1</sup>hkun<sup>1</sup> i<sup>2</sup>kan<sup>2</sup>*

he<sub>GIVEN</sub> will tell her that you'll be his<sub>GIVEN</sub> godfather

B: 42 *da<sup>2</sup>tan<sup>1</sup> mya<sup>2</sup> a<sup>2</sup>da<sup>2</sup>tan<sup>1</sup>*

Tell him, you hear, tell him!

43 *muri<sup>2</sup>ya<sup>2</sup> lu<sup>2</sup> ba<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>2</sup> al<sup>2</sup>ma<sup>2</sup>  
a<sup>3</sup>un<sup>12</sup> a<sup>2</sup>gu<sup>2</sup>*

Let's save a soul from the fire!

As can be seen, the rule that a shift in reference requires new topic marking is time and again (5 times in all) violated. I interpret this as evidence of a clash between the default rules for reference-tracking at the local, inter-sentential level and a rule pertaining to the global level of the discourse as a whole according to which a global topic is consistently treated as given and need not be reintroduced once it seems agreed-upon by the speakers that this entity is indeed the global topic of the conversation.

### 3. Tlapanec reference-tracking: Between obviation and switch-reference

In this section I shall characterize the Tlapanec referent tracking system typologically by comparing it to its two closest congeners: obviation and switch-reference. First I very briefly introduce each of these two types of referent-tracking systems and then I compare their characteristics to those of the Tlapanec system.

### 3.1 General characteristics of obviation

By ‘obviation’ I refer to its canonical manifestation in Algonquian languages, where it is an inflectional verbal category. For instance, I do not take into account cases such as Tzotzil and Chamorro argued by Aissen (1997) to have obviation characteristics even though obviation is not overtly marked in these languages.

In Algonquian languages third person participants are marked either as proximate or obviative. Bloomfield (1962:38), referring to Menomini, says that “the proximate third person represents the topic of discourse, the person nearest to the speaker’s point of view, or the person earlier spoken of and already known.” Example (18) gives an Ojibwa example of a simple sentence where the notional object is marked with a suffix indicating its obviative status and the notional subject is unmarked, indicating its proximate status.

- (18) OJIBWA (Rhodes 1975: 202 as cited by Dryer 1992: 121)  
*aw mini wgi:-wa:bma:n niw kew:wan*  
 that man 3,PAST-see (TA,3-3’) that,obv woman,obv  
 ‘The man [prox] saw the woman [obv].’

When the notional object is proximate an inverse form of the verb is required. The system may have ‘local’ uses, such as to disambiguate the referents in constructions where there is both a third person subject and a third person possessor. However, it is primarily a system for distinguishing between more and less topical entities, that is, a system operating at the discourse level. Under certain conditions it is possible to have two obviatives in a single sentence. The occurrence of multiple proximates within a sentence seems to be much rarer, but the phenomenon has been documented (Dahlstrom 1991: 114–119).

### 3.2 General characteristics of switch-reference

As regards switch-reference I again refer to canonical cases. One such case is the Papuan language Usan from which the example in (19) is drawn.

- (19) USAN (from Reesink 1983: 17–18; also cited by Haiman and Munro 1983: xi)  
 a. *ye nam su-âb isomei*  
 I tree cut-SS I.went.down  
 ‘I cut the tree and went down.’

- b. *ye nam su-ine isorei*  
 I tree cut-1s.DS it.went.down  
 'I cut the tree down'

The salient characteristics of canonical switch-reference systems are the following (for a good typological survey see Stirling 1993: 1–57). Switch-reference serves to signal whether or not two noun phrases share the same pivot across two clauses. The marked clause normally precedes and is syntactically and semantically dependent on the controlling clause. The two NPs that enter into the switch-reference relation may be either first, second or third person and are generally, though not always (Huang 2000: 287–288), grammatical subjects. Switch-reference is marked by suffixation on the verb of the dependent clause. At least in so far as the languages of North America are concerned either switch or retention of reference is usually associated with some other category such as aspect or various categories signalling interclausal relations (see Jacobsen 1983: Table 1). In general, the languages in North America that have switch-reference also have SOV order.<sup>6</sup> (This is not necessarily true of other parts of the world, for instance not of Australia, according to Peter Austin, in personal communication. An example would be Garawa, which has switch-reference in relative-type subordinate clauses according to Austin 1981: 327 but VOS word order according to Dryer 2005, who cites Furby and Furby 1977).

### 3.3 Summary of the characteristics of the system in comparison to obviation and switch-reference

With these brief remarks on obviation and switch-reference we may go on to make some preliminary comparisons of these two types of reference-tracking systems with the Tlapanec system. The results are shown in Table 2.

The comparisons show several similarities to both obviation and switch-reference, as well as differences. Typologically the Tlapanec system may then perhaps be characterized as a kind of intermediate type. A system rather similar to it is the Eskimo so-called 'third' vs. 'fourth' person (Woodbury 1983, Fortescue 1991). West Greenlandic has switch-reference formally marked for third person entities. The traditional designations third and fourth (or 'reflexive') person roughly correspond to third person different subject and third person same subject, respectively. As in Tlapanec, both possessed nouns and predicates are sensitive to the distinction. Consider the following examples, which may be compared to (2b–c) above:

**Table 2.** Comparison among salient characteristics of switch reference, obviation, and the Tlapanec reference-tracking system

	Switch reference	Obviation	Tlapanec reference
SIMILARITIES TO OBVIATION			
Used to manipulate reference between subject and possessor	no	yes	yes
Restricted to third person animates	no	yes	yes
Operates on the level of adjacent clauses only	yes (with some violations)	no	no
Marking normally combines with one or more other categories	yes	no	no
Only subjects, no other core arguments are tracked	no	yes	yes
Generally restricted to verb-final languages (areally)	yes	no	no
SIMILARITIES TO SWITCH REFERENCE			
Possibility for two animates to be marked in the same way within a sentence	no	yes	no
Coexists with a direct-inverse distinction	no	yes	no
SIMILARITIES WITH BOTH SWITCH REFERENCE AND OBVIATION			
Crucially sensitive to switch of reference	yes	yes	yes
Used to track reference between main and subordinate clauses	yes	yes	yes

(20) WEST GREENLANDIC (Fortescue 1991: 53):

- a. *nuliani takuaa*  
 wife.4SG see.3SG>3SG  
 'He<sub>i</sub> saw his<sub>i</sub> wife.'
- b. *nulia takuaa*  
 wife.3SG see.3SG>3SG.IND  
 'He<sub>i</sub> saw his<sub>j</sub> wife.'

The various types of deviations from the regular use of switch-reference marking (Fortescue 1991: 56) are often similar to what has been described above for Tlapanec. In particular, the phenomenon described above where the violations of default topic marking are due to the overriding presence of a global topic has a clear parallel in West Greenlandic usage. Example (21) is the free translation of a quote from a letter provided by Fortescue (1991: 70)

- (21) ‘Last week Nanoq caught the flu (Same Subject) and since he can’t be left alone (Same Subject) I am ending my letter here.’

The first-person subject is anticipated as being coreferential with the sick child Nanoq, a deviation from the expected pattern which is licensed by the status of Nanoq as a global topic.

#### 4. Conclusion

My aim in this paper was twofold.

First, I wished to apply an analytical technique which may be of use in dealing with reference-tracking systems in general. This technique consists in formulating some rules for the default ways that the reference system functions and then to look systematically at the deviations from the rules, arguing from the existence of such deviant patterns for the existence of different levels of syntactic and discourse organization. No attempt was made to distinguish between the different levels in a very rigorous way, but we may at least clearly identify the levels shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Levels of syntactic and discourse organization licensing deviations from the default rules of Tlapanec topic management

Levels		Evidence from the employment of the Tlapanec reference-tracking system
LOCAL	the intraclausal level	agent-possessor disambiguation
	the level of clause pairs	formation of restrictive relative clauses reference management in indirect speech complements
GLOBAL	the global discourse level	management of global topics occurrence of exophoric topics

Whereas there is a default use of the system where new topics are introduced overtly in postverbal position when the reference shifts and where otherwise given topics are maintained by verbal pronominal cross-referencing, evidence for a strictly local level and a more global one is provided by deviations from the default use of the reference-tracking system. As noted earlier in reference to Comrie (1999), while the system functions at various levels from the most local one to various extended levels, it patterns morphologically with systems that operate at the local level in so far as the marked member of the opposition indicates coreference and the unmarked member non-coreference.

Secondly, I wished to describe the peculiar reference-tracking system of the Azoyú variety of Tlapanec and to compare this system typologically to the better-known systems to which it bears most resemblances, namely obviation and switch-reference. The results of these comparisons are not such that I am willing to squarely identify the system with any of them. Rather I would see it as a kind of intermediate type, and I have demonstrated some ways in which it is similar to another type of reference-tracking system also generally considered to be an intermediate one, namely that of Eskimo languages. More work is clearly needed on the typology of reference-tracking systems; future studies will likely uncover more overlaps among systems involving ‘switch-reference’, ‘fourth-person’, and ‘obviation’, revealing the necessity for a more fine-grained typological classification based on the formal characteristics of these various systems. If the Tlapanec system qualifies as a distinct system perhaps a distinct designation for it, such as ‘switch topic’, might be warranted. In the future, however, it may turn out to be appropriate to replace not only such a term but also the traditional ones for other types of systems with a completely new terminology that might bring out crucial differences and resemblances more tellingly.

## Notes

\* This paper grew out of my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Wichmann 1996a) and versions of it have been presented at 6th International Conference on Functional Grammar, York, 1994, and at Syntax of the World’s Languages, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, 2004. The data come from my fieldwork carried out during several trips in 1991–94 and 2003–4 that have together lasted close to a year. I have worked extensively with more than a dozen different speakers. Examples that are not said overtly to come from narratives or conversations were elicited directly.

1. This variety of Tlapanec is today spoken by just a few hundred speakers (682 according to the 1990 census). Among the language’s immediate linguistic relatives is Malinaltepec Tlapanec, described in Suárez (1983). I shall refer to Azoyú Tlapanec as simply Tlapanec, for short. The autodesignation, *me<sup>22</sup>pa<sup>1</sup>*, has yet to penetrate into the literature.

2. The non-self explanatory grammatical abbreviations used in this paper are: ABS = ‘absolute’, DAT = ‘dative’, ERG = ‘ergative’, G = ‘given’; N = ‘new’, PEG = ‘pegative’ (neologism introduced in Wichmann 2005 to designate a special case category), TH = third person animate Theme in ditransitives. Tone marking: <sup>1</sup> = high tone; <sup>2</sup> = mid tone; <sup>3</sup> = low tone.

3. Because tones are involved some readers might consider the distinction “subtle” and deserving of exemplification by lots of minimal pairs, as did one referee. I have given four contrastive pairs in (1a) vs. (1b), (2a,c) vs. (2b), (5a) vs. (5b), and in (8). Any number of such

pairs could be added, but to do justice to the complex nature of Tlapanec verbal inflection it would be necessary to involve full paradigms for all the various inflectional classes, of which there are several score, in addition to a number of suppletive and irregular paradigms. This clearly exceeds the limits of this paper. In Wichmann (forthcoming) I provide more discussion of Tlapanec tonal inflection and give examples both of tonal contrasts in general and within verbal paradigms. The paper may be downloaded from the author's home page ([http://email.eva.mpg.de/~wichmann/wichmann\\_publ.html](http://email.eva.mpg.de/~wichmann/wichmann_publ.html)). A full description of the language is in preparation, but will take another few years to finish.

4. As a referee suggested, a sentence like 'he asked him whether he wanted to work' might provide a clearer example than (12), since this does not introduce the complication of three different referents simultaneously in play. The improved example would work the same way, though. That is, in 'he<sub>i</sub> asked him whether he<sub>j</sub> wanted to work' the verb 'to work' would be marked for new topic such as to indicate the non-coreference of he<sub>i</sub> and he<sub>j</sub>. I hesitate to construct the actual example since I am presently unable to consult with a speaker, but, based on my general familiarity with Tlapanec, I do not hesitate to affirm that such an example could be constructed.

5. This is one of a minority of verbs that do not encode a distinction between given and new topic because both are marked by a high tone, cf. Table 1 above.

6. O'odham is an exception, in so far as word order in this language has been shown to be flexible (Payne 1987). Data concerning word order were taken from Matthew Dryer's contributions to Haspelmath et al. (eds.) (2005) as contained in the accompanying electronic files.

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