

The Flea

MELODY TYPES AND PERTURBATIONS IN A MIXTEC SONG¹

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SPOKEN Mixtec has three phonemic registers, high, mid, low. In attempting to record this song, it appeared that three sung registers could record it also, allowing for tonal perturbations similar to the non-phonemic variety in speech. Significant perturbations also occurred, caused by the melody.

Finals: Melody pattern, sustained middle to sustained low: This is of stanza final. Phrase final tends to vary from it. (In all sample numbers of lines given below, italicization implies that the perturbation of the speech tone is very apparent. In other instances, either the words are not parallel in the spoken story, and hence do not show clearly, or else one cannot be too sure whether or not melody has caused change.) Examples of this—

Stanza Final: 5d, 6d, 7d. In 1a, the interjection is outside the pattern; 2d, is rather like phrase final than stanza final; 3d, the high start on final mora is due to the text tone; 4d, the final melody must be on last morpheme, hence here on a single mora which receives both glide and sustained element.

Phrase Final, preceding pause; mid to sustained low: 2a, 2b, 3a, 3c, 4b, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 7c.

Phrase Final, without full pause following it, either like that preceding pause, 2c, 4a, or with penultimate mora on the same pitch as the final sustained one. 4c, 6c. 1a and 1b final single mora morpheme sustained. 1c, the pattern high to mid in speech equals that of low low, hence fits the pattern here; 5a unsustained, reason: 5c text interference.

Phrase Introductions: Melody always steps up in pitch within the first few syllables of the phrase, usually on the second or third mora, but once on the fourth 4a, and once the fifth 6a, apparently without relation to the speech tones, over which the melody consistently triumphs, e.g. 1c, 4d, 5a.

¹ Abstract of data presented to a meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, July 27, 1939.

Phrase Centers: Tendency to be on a high pitch monotone. This, plus initial rising melody, and final fall, gives the basic melody, as seen in 2a, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5d, 6a, 6b, 7a. This often involves changing of text tone, as seen in phrases italicized. In 1a the center is as stated, but final has text tone interference. There is a sub-pattern where the next to last morpheme steps down to mid mid, as in 4d, 7b, 7c.

Weaknesses in Phrase Centers: A pivot point seems often to cut the phrase in two, where between the two sections there is a step down actualized by one or more syllables which seem to serve as falling final of first section and preparation for step up of second section. That these are not due to the speech tones may be seen in 1b and 1c, as well as others italicized here. 3b an artificial pause due to catch in throat, after which melody begins anew; 1a and 3a have first section again subdivided on a similar plan; 4c not clear, but possible speech tone compromise (it would be considered the latter were it not that speech tone so often is changed by pivot melody, that here we judge it just a coincidence); 5b, rise expected on [nama] counterbalanced by closeness to falling melody; 5c, pivot melody in between sections, with text interference in middle of section two; 6c, not clear evidence; 7d; 2c, perhaps speech tone here, but a difficult place to transcribe from the phonograph record, since if glides are present, they are reduced to very short ones.

Occasionally the pivot point is actualized by a step up, only, to high, when the first section or its latter part were mid. (Probably these could not occur when the first section was high, else it would bring in an impermissible fourth register.) 2b, 3b and 3d; 3c, 6d. Sub-pattern with next to last morpheme mid mid, 2d, 6a.

Changes of Melody by Speech Tones: Three times by Spanish loans, 1c, 2c, 3d (final mora starts high before glide).

Only one clear instance of interference of speech tones. In 5c, [siko]; compare 3c, the same word, where it does not influence the melody but on the contrary is perturbed by it.

A number of times there is possible text interference, at pivot points, as mentioned above, but these are probably mere coincidences, since no clear cases are present where a contrasting text tone remains, but many where, on the contrary, they are perturbed. See paragraph above on weaknesses in phrase centers.

Length of Phrases: Very uneven; 7 to 15 moras; average 10.25.

Conclusion: The melody of the song is: a rise, high level, then falling sustained tones. The melody has various sub-patterns which are inherent in itself, not caused by text tone interference. Strangely enough, Spanish loans are more apt to affect the melody than are the native words.

Symbols:

['] high tone

[-] or zero, mid tone

[√] low tone

[:] sustained

[||] pause

[:] phrase transition without pause

[.....] indication of spoken words differing from song and preventing demonstration of tone parallel

Song form in first line of each group; speech form in second line.

1a

vài-rì kátà-rì nú ámigó-rì:	√' ' ' '√':
vài-rì kata-rì nù ámigó-rì	√ - - √'√

I come to sing to my friend

1b

Δn tá ⁿ dò ^o ni tá ⁿ an-rì:	- √' - - √':
ΔΔn tà ⁿ dó ^o ni ta ⁿ àn-rì	- √' - - √'

a misfortune I met

1c

ìni ΔΔn korrédor yà ⁿ a:	√' '' -'√'√':
inì ΔΔn korredòr yá ⁿ a	√ - - -'√'√'

in a corridor here

1d

ΔΔn táyo ^o ni túú ru:ù:	ái:	-- √' - - '' -':	√':
ΔΔn tayò ^o ní tuu ruù		-- √' ' - - √'	

a flea stabbed me, oh!

2a

ni ⁿ dá ⁿ ñúú ní kájinì:	- '' '' ' '√':
ni(i) kà jinì tàká ñúù

every town knew

4c

te ni ku šíní u míl va²u: || - - - " - / - - : ||
 te ni kú šíní uù míl vá²ù - \ / ' - \ / \ /
 and supped two thousand coyotes

4d

tè nì ke ⁿdóó-gá ní jásí ini-ta\ || \ \ - ' ' ' / " - - : ||
 te nì ke ⁿdòò nì jasi inì-tà - \ \ - \ \ - - - \ \
 and left over animals breakfast

5a

tè šá²an tíyó²ó yá²a || \ " ' ' / - ||
 *te šà²an tíyò²ó yá²a - \ - \ \ / / -
 and lard (of) flea this

5b

ni ka sá²a || namà: || - - / - || - \ : ||
 nì ki²in-de nì sá²a-de namà \ - \
 they made soap

5c

te ni kí²in nì kàján šikó: || - - " \ \ / \ : ||
 te nì kajà šikó-de - \ \ - \ \ / \ : ||
 and sold

5d

nu yá²ú rínko:ò:n || - " / - \ : ||
 nu yá²u rínkò:n - / - / \
 market Rincon

6a

tè ñíí tíyó²ó yá²a: || \ " ' ' / - : ||
 te ñíí tíyò²ó yá²a - - \ \ / -
 and hide (of) flea this

6b

ni ka kí ní ká číⁿdajì: || - - / / / / \ - : ||
 nì ki²in-de nì ka číⁿdajì-de \ - - \ - - -
 took soaked

6c

te ni ka tavá uu míl kóyuⁿda: || - - - / - - " / - - : ||
 tè nì kana uù míl kóyuⁿdá \ \ - \ \ / \ : ||
 and took out two thousand yoke-straps

* In story verse five precedes verse four.

6d

tè nì keⁿdoo **Á**án ní kúú píá:à:l || \ \ --- ' ' ' ' -: ||
 te nì ⁿdòò ní kuu **Á**n pyáàl - \ \ - - - \ - - - \
and left over was a pole-strap

7a

tè ⁿdúčí tíyó^o yá^a: || \ ' ' ' ' -: ||
 tè ⁿduči tíyò^o yá^a-ni \ - - ' ' ' ' -: ||
and eyes (of) flea this very one

7b

ni kí^oin ní ká iin (?) si íčí: || - ' ' ' ' - - -: ||
 ni(i) ná íčí - - - - - - - - -: ||
took hung up to dry

7c

tè ni ké ⁿdoo lúí: || \ - ' - - -: ||
 te nì ke ⁿdòò lúí - \ - \ - ' ' ||
and remained small

7d

ja ná tó^oon yóó já ni ná čí:tò: - ' ' - ' ' - ' -: ||
 k^wentá yoò já ní na čítú - \ ' ' ' ' - ' ||
which like moon which has become full.

Note: j is phonetically [h] plus slight velar friction; Á is a high back unrounded vowel. Bold face type is due to typographic necessity and has no deeper meaning.