

The meaning of the *potential* and the *future* prefixes in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec

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In this talk we discuss the distribution of the future (FUT) (1) and the potential (POT) (2) prefixes in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec (TdVZ). The distribution of these prefixes has been claimed to have purely syntactic motivations (cf. table below from Gutierrez, et al. (2022)). However, we argue that their distribution is best explained in semantic and pragmatic terms. We propose that FUT marks events bound in the present, while POT indicates free possibilities not predictable at the utterance time.

(1) *xhí* *zu-yāʔ* *Jwány* *læʔn=xkwily*
tomorrow **FUT**-dance Juan R.N.stomach=school
'Juan will dance tomorrow in the school.'

(2) *xhí* *guʔ-yāʔ* *Jwány* *læʔn=xkwily*
tomorrow **POT**-dance Juan R.N.stomach=school
'Juan will dance tomorrow in the school.'

Construction	Future	Potential
Polar questions	√	X
WH-questions	X	√
Non-reduced complement clauses	√	X
Reduced complement clauses	X	√
Negation	X	√

Although the proposal by Gutierrez et al. predicts most occurrences of these prefixes, it does not explain the distribution in other settings including simple clauses like (1) and (2); a minimal pair. For Central Zapotec, Munro (2006) states that the use of FUT corresponds to a higher level of certainty about the occurrence of an event. This does not apply for TdVZ since, e.g., negative sentences, which require POT, don't correspond to less certainty.

For Northern Zapotec, Toosarvandani (2023) accounts for the use of the prefixes in terms of commitment spaces. POT is modeled as a Verum operator employed by a speaker whose knowledge exceeds the knowledge of the hearer. TdVZ does not make this distinction.

Therefore, we argue that speakers' perspectives on how the future may develop depend on their knowledge about the present state of affairs and on their world knowledge; events that can be expected to happen based on these are marked with FUT. All the other alternatives not grounded in the present must be marked with POT. Hence, (1) is appropriate in a situation when the common ground of speech participants already includes information about Juan's disposition to participate. Sentence (2) can be felicitously uttered in the context when Juan's participation does not align completely with speakers' knowledge about the future, as in (3), where this is indicated by a main clause.

(3) *z-égyâ* *bāɪ* *guʔ-yāʔ* *Jwány* *læʔn* *xkwily*
FUT-go:see:1SG if **POT**-dance Juan R.N.stomach school
'I will go and/to watch if Juan (will) dance(s) in the school.'

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