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Mixtec classifiers before typology: Rereading *Arte en lengua mixteca* by Antonio de los Reyes (1593)

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Abstract. In this paper we examine the description of noun classifiers in the Teposcolula variety of Mixtec (Otomanguean; Mexico) in *Arte en lengua mixteca* by Antonio de los Reyes (d.1603). His 1593 grammar is a valuable source of information about 16th-century Mixtec, which showed little influence from Spanish. Among its innovative features, de los Reyes described the semantic, functional, and diachronic properties of noun classifiers with a detail and accuracy that strikingly anticipates modern typological accounts.

Keywords. Mixtec; noun classifiers; Antonio de los Reyes; missionary grammars

1. Introduction. Noun classifiers, a type of classifier that occurs in noun phrases independently of numerals or demonstratives (Aikhenvald 2000: 90; Grinevald 2000: 64), have only been recognized as a distinct typological category since the 1970s. This paper examines the description of noun classifiers in the Teposcolula variety of Mixtec (Otomanguean; Mexico) in *Arte en lengua mixteca* by Antonio de los Reyes (d.1603), focusing on the semantic, functional, and diachronic properties of the classifier system. We argue that his account, written four centuries before the emergence of modern typologies of classifiers, anticipates such a typological understanding with a detail and accuracy that is remarkable for a scholar working within the Latin model.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides background context on Otomanguean and Mixtec, the sixteenth-century missionary grammatical tradition, and de los Reyes and his *Arte*. In §3 we situate noun classifiers within modern typological frameworks and describe their place within the Otomanguean family. Section 4, the core of the paper, analyses de los Reyes's description of the morphological expression, semantic properties, functions, diachrony, and dialectal variation of Mixtec classifiers. In §5 we consider the reception of the *Arte* and its significance for the history of linguistics. Finally, in §6 we offer some conclusions.

2. Mixtec and its sixteenth-century documentation

2.1. OTOMANGUEAN LANGUAGES. Otomanguean is a large, internally diverse language family comprising 179 languages (Eberhard et al. 2025) or 181 languoids (Hammarström et al. 2025), historically spoken across a broad area, from central Mexico to Nicaragua and Costa Rica (see Figure 1). It has been described as "the most diverse and … perhaps the least understood of the major Mesoamerican language families" (Campbell 2017: 1) and "the most underexplored

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frontier in Mesoamerican historical linguistics" (Kaufman & Justeson 2009: 227).[1] Among the main branches of Otomanguean, Mixtec comprises 52 languages (Eberhard et al. 2025) or 53 languoids (Hammarström et al. 2025) spoken primarily in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero by approximately 530,000 speakers over 3 years old (INEGI 2020) (see Figure 2). The branch is characterized by an exceptional degree of internal fragmentation and multilingualism. Around 100 mutually unintelligible varieties are spoken in Oaxaca alone, a state roughly the size of Portugal (Suárez 1983: 16). Following Josserand (1983), Lillehaugen (2020: 355) distinguishes within the branch "at least 18 mutually-unintelligible dialect clusters".

Figure 1. Pre-contact distribution of Otomanguean languages in Mexico and Central America[2]

Mixtec languages share a number of typological features common to the Otomanguean family as a whole, including tones and tone morphology, and rich pronominal systems, as well as traits characteristic of the Mesoamerican linguistic area more broadly (cf. Campbell et al. 1986), among them relational nouns, base-20 number systems, and inalienable possession of body part and kinship terms (Macaulay 1996: 12–15).

[1] Okura (2015) discusses the conflicting criteria adopted in the classifications of Otomanguean languages, in particular the Mixtec and Zapotec varieties.

[2] Image from Wikipedia, based on Map 10 in Asher & Moseley (2007: 56); source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Precontact_Otomanguean.svg#/media/File:Precontact_Otomanguean.svg, accessed 20 March 2026.

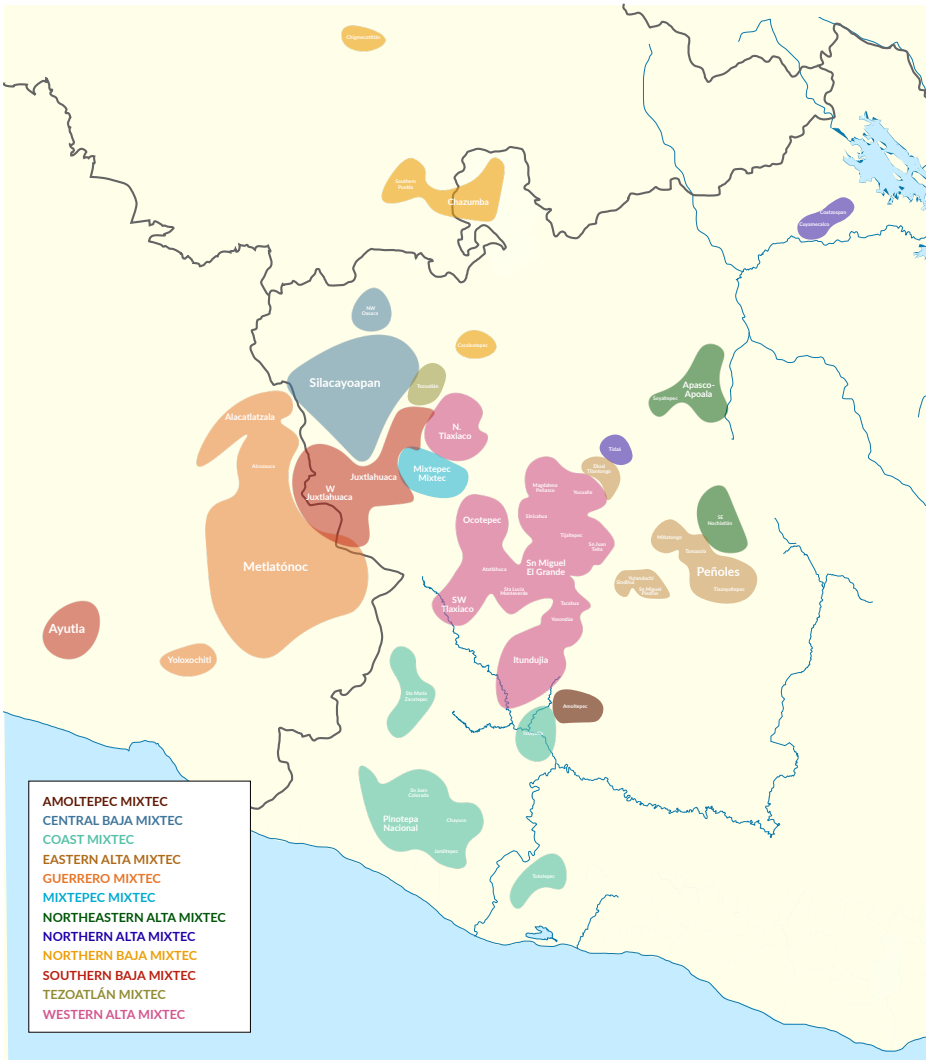

Figure 2. Mixtec varieties, including Eastern Alta Mixtec[3]

2.2. 16TH-CENTURY MISSIONARY DESCRIPTIONS OF MIXTEC. The sixteenth century saw a remarkable flourishing of missionary linguistic scholarship in New Spain, driven by the practical demands of evangelization. Three works document Mixtec from this period (Dürr 2025, forthcoming): *Arte en lengua mixteca* by Antonio de los Reyes (1593), the anonymous *Arte de la lengua misteca*, probably dating from the second half of the 16th century (Dürr 2025: 14), and *Vocabulario en lengua misteca* by Francisco de Alvarado (1593).[4]

Antonio de los Reyes was born around 1538 in Toro, Spain, to a Spanish mother and a German father, and studied in Salamanca before arriving in New Spain in 1555 (Dürr 2025: 16). He served as a Dominican vicar in Teposcolula, Tamazulapan, and Tlaxiaco in Oaxaca. His signature is illustrated in Figure 3.

[3] Image from Wikipedia (https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=86117145), accessed 20 March 2026.

[4] The two grammars are available in Dürr (2025), with commentaries in Zwartjes (2018a, b) in the *Corpus de textes linguistiques fondamentaux* and Dürr (forthcoming). Alvarado's *Vocabulario* is available in Jansen & Pérez Jiménez (2009); for the original facsimile see Alvarado (1962 [1593]). Digital facsimiles of Alvarado's and Reyes's works are available at *Primeros Libros de las Américas* (https://primeroslibros.org).

Figure 3. Signature of Antonio de los Reyes (Swanton 2017)[5]

In 1587 de los Reyes was commissioned to complete a grammar and dictionary of Mixtec. The result, a grammar based on the Eastern Alta Mixtec variety of Teposcolula and published in Mexico City in 1593, is the primary focus of this paper. While following the Latin grammatical tradition in its organization and metalanguage, the *Arte* makes every effort to describe Mixtec accurately and on its own terms (cf. Dürr forthcoming). The grammar includes a preface which discusses dialectal variation, a preamble on orthography and pronunciation, twenty-four chapters dealing with the parts of speech, and four chapters containing word lists covering honorifics, body part and kinship terms, and toponyms. As shown in Figure 4, below, the title page of the grammar is decorated with an engraving of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus, and the preface closes with an engraving of interlaced lines covering more than half the page.

3. Noun classifiers. Among the several types of classifiers distinguished in the literature, noun classifiers occur in noun phrases independently of another modifier, such as a numeral or demonstrative (Aikhenvald 2000: 90; Grinevald 2000: 64; Kilarski & Allassonnière-Tang 2021: §3.2). Noun classifiers classify referents according to a range of semantic categories including sex, humanness, animacy, kinship, respect and social status for animates, and material and function for inanimates. Despite having been attested in Southeast Asia, Australia, and Mesoamerica, noun classifiers were only recognized as a distinct category from the 1970s onwards, beginning with work on Popti' (or Jacaltec), a Mayan language of Guatemala (Craig 1977, 1986). Colette Grinevald Craig identified them as "a generally ignored type" (Grinevald 2000: 65). Indeed, the identification of noun classifiers as a type distinct from the better-known numeral classifiers was described as "practically the main point" of her typology of classifiers (Grinevald 2004: 1021). Where both types co-occur in a single language, they can be distinguished by their differing discourse behavior: noun classifiers are more likely to be omitted and are more frequently used anaphorically (Aikhenvald 2000: 90).

[5] Photograph by Michael Swanton. Biblioteca Fray Francisco de Burgoa, Oaxaca (BFFB-000819). Reproduced with permission.

Figure 4. Title page and last page of the preface of the *Arte en lengua mixteca*[6]

Within Otomanguean, noun classifiers are the most common classifier type, alongside numeral, possessive, and verbal classifiers, though they are "completely fossilized" in most languages of the family (Suárez 1983: 89). The most common semantic values attested are animate, human, animal, liquid, and plant. Noun classifiers are found across several branches of Otomanguean, including Mixtecan and Popolocan (Veerman-Leichsenring 2004), as well as in the now-extinct Chiapanec, a Manguean language from which noun classifiers were borrowed into several neighboring Mayan languages including Chuj, Q'anjob'al (or Kanjobal), Akateko (or Acatec), Popti', and Mam (Hopkins 2012), pointing to the areal significance of this classifier type in Mesoamerica more broadly.

Within Mixtec specifically, the classifier system had received little attention in modern linguistics before León Pasquel's cross-dialectal survey, which she described as filling a "heretofore undocumented" gap (León Pasquel 1987: 337; see also León Pasquel 1988). The present paper complements this modern perspective by examining the earliest systematic description of the system, in de los Reyes's *Arte* of 1593.

The Mixtec classifier system comprises three types of forms: prefixed class terms, address proclitics and enclitics (Dürr 2026) (see Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3). The classifiers encode distinctions relating to the sex of the speaker and referent, age, social status, and respect, together with the referent's membership in one of several semantic classes (animals, trees, and liquids).

[6] Joaquin García Icazbalceta Manuscript Collection, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin (GZZ IC103). Reproduced with permission.

Form	Meaning
a-	‘toponyms’
ñu-	‘toponyms’
ña-	‘gender-neutral (or female person)’
te-	‘animals, round objects’
tnu-	‘trees’

Table 1. Prefixed class terms in Mixtec (Dürr 2026)

Speaker	Form	Meaning
Female	*dzu=*	‘male respectful (older than speaker)’
	dzuq	‘male (younger)’
	yco	‘female respectful (older or of equal age)’
Male	*ndacu*	‘male’
	ndo=	‘female (regardless of age)’
	ye=	‘male respectful (older)’
All	*dzi=*	‘relatives (lit. uncle or aunt)’
	ñu=	‘deceased’

Table 2. Proclitic address classifiers in Mixtec (Dürr 2026)

Speaker	Form	Meaning
Female	*=ña*	‘gender-neutral’
	=co	‘female (older or of equal age)’
Male	*=ta*	‘male’
	=ña	‘female’
All	*=si*	‘non-specific (babies, deceased, inanimate objects)’
	=to	‘respectful (lower nobility)’
	=ya	‘honorific (royal nobility and divine beings)’
	=te	‘animals’
	=tnu	‘trees’
	=ta	‘liquids’

Table 3. Enclitic classifiers in Mixtec (Dürr 2026)

As can be seen, the three types of classifiers differ in their morphological position and grammatical function, with several forms such as *ña-*, *te-*, and *tnu-* appearing across more than one category.

4. De los Reyes’s description. The description of noun classifiers is distributed across two chapters of the *Arte*: Chapter III, “De los Pronombres”, and Chapter IV, “De las Particulas o sillabicas adjeciones relatiuas”. At the beginning of Chapter IV, de los Reyes defines noun classifiers as “particulas o | sillabicas adjeciones que siruen como de ar|ticulos o relatiuos que se ponen en lugar | de pronombres” [particles or syllabic adjections which serve as articles or relative pronouns and which are used in place of pronouns] (fol. 14r).[7] The definition is noteworthy in two respects: it correctly identifies the classifiers as a distinct category from pronouns proper,

[7] All quotations from the *Arte* come from the edition in Dürr (2025); the translations from the *Arte* and from Humboldt (2009) are provided by the authors.

while at the same time capturing their pronominal function in the reference system, a point to which we return in §4.3.

4.1. MORPHOLOGICAL EXPRESSION. De los Reyes distinguishes and illustrates different types of deictic and classificatory elements depending on their placement and complexity, comparing them with full forms — both nouns and pronouns. The classifiers are clearly distinguished from pronouns, as also indicated in the following description given in Chapter III: "Sin estos que propriamente son pronom-|bres ay enesta lengua otras particulas o silla-|bicas, adjectiones relatiuas, que son como ar|ticulos que se antepone[n] o posponen a los nom|bres y verbos en lugar de pronombres" [Apart from those which are properly pronouns, this language has other particles or syllabic relative adjections, which are like articles that are preposed or postposed to nouns and verbs in place of pronouns] (fol. 10r).

While de los Reyes does not explicitly distinguish between the three types given above, his description provides examples of all of them, including prefixed class terms, which he does not address as a separate category (Dürr 2026). The animal classifier, for instance, related to *quete* 'animal', is found both as a class term *te-* in nominal compounds (cf. Swanton 2021: 63–64; Dürr 2026), as in (1a), and as an enclitic *=te* in verbal and adjectival constructions, as in (1b) and (1c).

(1) a. *tecachi* 'ram', *teñoo* 'hen' (fol. XIIr)
b. *ña huahate* 'it is not good (an animal)' (fol. 15v)
c. *yyo dzanate* 'it is very wild (an animal)' (fol. 15v–16r)

De los Reyes thus illustrates the classifier in both its prefixed realization in nouns and its enclitic realization in verbal and adjectival constructions, in each case relating it back to the full generic noun *quete* 'animal'.

4.2. SEMANTIC PROPERTIES. De los Reyes also recognizes and describes different semantic properties of noun classifiers found in the 16th-century Teposcolula Mixtec. He provides a detailed description of the use of classifiers based on the sex of the speaker and referent, relative age, respect and social status, and other categories (the deceased; animals, trees and wooden objects, and liquids). He also points out asymmetries in 3rd person reference, e.g., between male speakers (*ta* for male referents vs. *ña* for female referents) and female speakers (*ña* for all referents). He illustrates this asymmetry with the following example:

> Quando la muger haze relacion de tercera | persona, avnque sea hombre no vsa del *ta*, sino | de *ña*, que sirue para las mugeres. Preguntan-|do a la muger, donde fue tu marido? *ma ndaa | quaha yeendo?* Responde, *yahui quahaña*, fue | al tianguez, *ñundevui quacadza* [*n*]*dahuita*, fue | a mercaderear a la costa, sin hazer en estas re-|laciones differencia de hombres a mugeres. (fol. 15r) (Dürr 2025: 146)
>
> [When a woman makes third-person reference, even if it is to a man, she does not use *ta*, but *ña*, which serves for women. Asking a woman, 'Where did your husband go?', *ma ndaa quaha yeendo?,* she answers *yahui quahaña* 'he went to the market'; *ñundevui quacadza* [*n*]*dahuita* 'he went to trade at the coast',[8] without making, in these references, any difference between men and women.]

De los Reyes also acknowledges semantic extensions within the 16th-century Mixtec noun classification system. For instance, he describes the use of the classifier *si* for children, the deceased, inanimate objects, and demons, and the honorific use of *ya* for sacred beings and angels:

[8] Dürr (2025: 146) notes that the pronominal enclitic at the end of the phrase should be *=ña* (cf. fol. 29r).

Para niños pequeños vsan deste. *si. yonda*|*yusi*, llora *yosadzisi*, mama, *yoquidzisi*, duerme.

Tambien vsan deste *si*, para defuntos, por | que la relacion de, *ñu*, antepuesta, sirue se-|ñalando la persona defunta, y no la señalan-|do sino hablando en comun de defunto o de|funta, dizen este. *si*. el qual. Tambien sirue para | cosas inanimadas como piedra hierro y cosas | de este jaez que no tienen particulas re-|laciones.

Hablando de los angeles es mejor vsar del, | *ya*, como de grandes señores, pues lo son, y | de los demonios del *si*, por su baxeza, como | esta dicho en otras relaciones y es ympro-|prio nombralos por el, *te*, que es para los ani-|males irracionales.

[For small children they use this *si*: *yondayusi* 'he/she cries'; *yosadzisi* 'he/she suckles'; *yoquidzisi* 'he/she sleeps'.

They also use this *si* for the deceased, because the reference form *ñu*, when preposed, serves to point out the deceased person; and when they do not point out the person but speak in general of a dead man or dead woman, they use this *si*. It also serves for inanimate objects such as stone, iron, and things of that kind that do not have referential particles.

When speaking of angels it is better to use *ya*, as for great lords, since they are so; and of demons, *si*, because of their baseness, as has been said in other references, and it is improper to refer to them with *te*, which is for irrational animals.] (fol. 15v) (Dürr 2025: 146).

This description captures several characteristic properties of noun classifier systems, including their categorizing function and their role in the reference system, a point which we discuss in the following section (cf. León Pasquel 1988: 123).

4.3. FUNCTIONS. De los Reyes is thus clearly aware of the functions of noun classifiers in discourse, where classifiers are used anaphorically or deictically to identify a referent (for a typology of functions of nominal classification see Contini-Morava & Kilarski 2013). As shown in §3, the three types of classifiers differ in function: prefixed class terms are derivational, proclitics are used in forms of address, and enclitics are used as third-person pronouns (Dürr 2026). This is indicated in his definition of classifiers in the opening paragraph of Chapter IV, quoted above in §4: "particulas o | sillabicas adjeciones que siruen como de ar|ticulos o relatiuos que se ponen en lugar | de pronombres" [particles or syllabic adjections which serve as articles or relative pronouns and which are used in place of pronouns] (fol. 14r) (Dürr 2025: 145).

The deictic and anaphoric functions of classifiers are illustrated in de los Reyes's description of *dacu* (also *ndacu*; see Table 2), used when addressing boys by other males older or equal in age:

Quando los hombres hazen relacion de | muchachos, y los mesmos muchachos vnos | de otros de su edad, vsan deste termino, *dacu*, | l. *dacu, quachi*, como, *dacu yuqua nicani ñaha* | aquel muchacho me dio, entiendese señalan-|dole, y si es ausente, dizen, *dacu quachi niqui*-|*dza*, vn muchacho lo hizo. (fol. 14v) (Dürr 2025: 146).

[When men refer to boys, and boys themselves to others of their own age, they use this term *dacu*, e.g. *dacu quachi*; as in *dacu yuqua nicani ñaha* 'that boy gave it to me' (it is understood that they indicate him); and if he is absent, they say *dacu quachi niquidza* 'a boy did it'.]

The parenthetical remark ("it is understood that they indicate him") shows de los Reyes's awareness of the deictic function of the classifier, while the contrast with the absent referent illustrates its anaphoric use.

Pronominal uses of classifiers are also exemplified in the context of the reverential function, as illustrated in the following quotation and the glossed example in (2).

> En la tercera persona tambien ay muchas | differencias quando hazen relacion delos se-|ñores. Que como ya esta dicho, el, *ta*. sirue | para hombres communes, y el *ña*. para mu-|geres. Pero con los señores, ni del vno, ni | del orro vsan, sino deste. *ya*, que sirue para se|ñores, y señoras. como enestas oraciones, | *nicoo naaya*. desmayose. *nindetuvui iniya*, | boluio en si. *nisiñe casaya*, cayo, *nindoyo* | *cuiñeya*, leuantose. *nisasi dzitaya*, comio. | *yya*. quiere dezir señor. (fol. 11v–12r) (Dürr 2025: 143).
>
> [In third person reference there are also many differences when referring to lords. As has already been said, *ta* serves for common men and *ña* for women. But with the lords, neither one nor the other is used, but rather this *ya*, which serves for lords and ladies, as in these sentences: *nicoo naaya* 'he fainted'; *nindetuvui iniya* 'he came to'; *nisiñe casaya* 'he fell'; *nindoyo cuiñeya* 'he rose'; *nisasi dzitaya* 'he ate'. *yya* means 'lord'.][9]

(2) Noun classifier *ya* used in reverential function (Dürr 2025: 98, glosses modified)

nindoyo	*cuiñeya*
ni-ndoyo	cuiñe=ya
PFV-rise	stand.IRR=3HON

'He rose.' (a lord)

The functional properties of the classifier system described here are thus consistent with those identified in modern typological accounts (Contini-Morava & Kilarski 2013).

4.4. DIACHRONY. As well as describing the uses of classifiers, de los Reyes also provides evidence of their nominal origin, either implicitly, by noting correspondences with full forms, or explicitly by noting the ways in which speakers modified the nouns.

Among human classifiers, he comments on the possible origin of the classifiers *ye* and *ñu*:

> Las mas de las relaciones aqui puestas no | tienen dependencia de vocablos, ni corres-|pondencia a cosa que les parezca, como pare-|ce el *ye*, al *tai yee*: y el, *ñu* al *ñuhu*. (fol. 15r.) (Dürr 2025: 145).
>
> [Most of the referential forms set out here do not depend on other words, nor do they correspond to anything that might seem appropriate, though *ye* appears to correspond to *tay yee*, and *ñu* to *ñuhu*.]

The origin of the two classifiers, i.e., *ye*, used by males with reference to other males, and *ñu*, used with reference to the deceased, is in fact clarified in the preceding sentences, where de los Reyes relates them to *tai yee* 'man' and *ñuhu* 'earth, soil':

> Los hombres tambien hazen relacion de | otros hombres con esta particula, *ye*, que sale | del nombre. *tai yee*, por hombre …

[9] Dürr (2025: 146) notes that in the third sentence, the form *orro* should be *otro*.

Para los defunctos tambien tienen differen|te relacion que es, *ñu*, como, *ñuAndres*, *ñun|Domingo*. El difunto Andres, el defunto Do-|mingo, y este *ñu*, viene de *ñuhu*, q[ue] quiere dezir | tierra (fol. 14v–15r) (Dürr 2025: 145).

[Men also refer to other men with this particle *ye*, which comes from the noun *tai yee* 'man'…

For the deceased they also have a different referential form, which is *ñu*, as in *ñuAndres*, *ñunDomingo*: 'the late Andrés', 'the late Domingo'. And this *ñu* comes from *ñuhu*, which means 'earth']

In contrast, the origin of non-human classifiers is clearly attributed to changes in generic nouns, indicating that they derive from phonologically reduced nouns. Thus, de los Reyes recognizes the origin of the classifier *te* used to refer to animals in the noun *quete* 'animal', the origin of the classifier *tnu* for trees and wooden objects in the noun *yutnu* 'tree, wood', and the origin of the classifier *ta* for liquids in the noun *duta* 'water' (see Table 4).

Classifier	Meaning	Noun	Meaning
te	animals	*quete*	animal
tnu	trees, wooden objects	*yutnu*	tree, wood
ta	liquids	*duta*	water

Table 4. Non-human classifiers in Teposcolula Mixtec (after de los Reyes 1593; cf. León Pasquel 1988: 129; Dürr 2025: 71–72)

The origin of the animal classifier *te* is explained as follows:

Las vezes que se haze relacion de algun ani|mal vsan de este termino. *Te*. quitandole el | nombre entero qne es, *quete*, por qualquier | animal, que es nombre generico, ansi dizen, | *quahate*. fuesse. *nisihite* muriose, *ña huahate*: | no es bueno, *huaha yosicate*, anda: *yyo dzana*-|*te*, es muy bellaco. (fol. 15v–16r) (Dürr 2025: 146).

[Whenever reference is made to some animal they use this term *te*, removing the full word, which is *quete* 'any animal', a generic name; thus they say *quahate* 'it went away', *nisihite* 'it died', *ña huahate* 'it is not good', *huaha yosicate* 'it goes [well]', *yyo dzanate* 'it is very wild'.]

Among these examples, *ña huahate* 'it is not good' is glossed in (3):

(3) Reference to animals (fol. 15v) (Dürr 2025: 75, glosses modified)
ña huahate
ña=huaha=te
NEG.REALIS=good=3SG.CLF.ANIMAL
'It is not good.' (an animal)

In turn, the origin of the classifiers *tnu* and *ta* is explained as follows:

Por madero tenemos, *yutnu*. y haziendo | mension de el se dize sola mente el. *tnu*, que es | la diction con que acaba, como, *candatnu*, cor-|tale, *ninacuiyotnu*, torciose, *nitniño cuiñetnu* | *nisañutnu*, abriose. |

Duta quiere dezir agua, y todas las vezes | que se haze relacion de ella es por este. *ta*. con | que acaba, como, *yninota yuta*, esta en el Rio, | *yocatneta*, suena,

yosiñe siquita, haze olas, *cate*|*ta*, derramala, *cohota* beuela*, dzacuidzita*, | calientala. (fol. 16r) (Dürr 2025: 146).

[For wood we have *yutnu*, and when mention is made of it one says only *tnu*, which is the ending with which it finishes, as in *candatnu* 'cut it'; *ninacuiyotnu* 'it twisted'; *nitniño cuiñetnu nisañutnu* 'it opened'.

Duta means 'water', and every time reference is made to it, it is by this *ta* with which it ends, as in *yninota yuta* 'it is in the river', *yocatneta* 'it sounds', *yosiñe siquita* 'it makes waves', *cateta* 'spill it', *cohota* 'drink it', *dzacuidzita* 'heat it'.]

These observations are consistent with modern accounts of the nominal origin of non-human classifiers in Mixtec (León Pasquel 1987: 341–342; Dürr 2025: 71–72).

4.5. VARIATION. As mentioned above, the work by de los Reyes is based on the Teposcolula variety, which he characterizes as spoken at the time by "los viejos que tienen mas noticia de | la lengua" [the elders who know the language best]. He further notes that the variety is "mas vniuersal, y | clara, y que mejor se entiende en toda la | Mixteca" [more universal, and … better understood throughout the Mixteca] (fol. VIIIr) (Dürr 2025: 129).

De los Reyes also explicitly aims to document the ancient usage of Teposcolula Mixtec, describing it as having preserved "la | entereza de la lengua" [the integrity of the language] with less Spanish influence than other varieties (fol. VIIv) (Dürr 2025: 129). He notes that certain neologisms introduced through the printed doctrine of Fray Benito Hernández had caused "confusion" in the language, and sets out to restore "los vocablos y modo de hablar al | vso antiguo de Tepuzculula" [the vocabulary and manner of speaking to the ancient usage of Teposcolula] (fol. VIIIr) (Dürr 2025: 129).

For example, de los Reyes compares the Teposcolula and Yanhuitlán varieties – the latter also described in the anonymous *Arte de la lengua misteca* – with respect to their use of the animal classifier *te*:

En la lengua de Yanguitlan no vsan del, *te*. so-|lo. sino que en qualquier relacion que se haze | de animal le nombra entero, con el acento en | la vltima. como. *tasi queté*. echale, *quaca que*-|*te*, tomale, *quandaca queté*, lleuale, y ansi de | los de mas. (fol. 16r) (Dürr 2025: 146).

[In the language of Yanhuitlán they do not use *te* alone, but whenever reference is made to an animal they name it in full, with the stress on the last syllable, e.g. *tasi queté* 'throw it', *quaca queté* 'take it', *quandaca queté* 'carry it', and likewise with the rest.]

This observation is consistent with León Pasquel's (1987, 1988) finding that productive classifier use varies considerably across Mixtec varieties. In view of such insights, de los Reyes's systematic comparison of the Teposcolula and Yanhuitlán varieties has been described as the first dialectological study of a Mesoamerican language (Swanton 2021: 45–46; Dürr forthcoming).

5. Reception and significance. The *Arte en lengua mixteca* has had a limited impact on the history of linguistics, in part due to its restricted accessibility. Only four copies remain in existence, and the work has appeared in two editions and two reprints (Dürr forthcoming). Where it has been noticed, assessments have been mixed. On the one hand, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) was critical of the copious examples that were provided at the expense of explanation:

> De los Reyes Grammatik, das einzige Hülfsmittel, das wir zur Kenntniß dieser Sprache besitzen, ist <äußerst> dunkel und mangelhaft. Der Verfasser führt in den meisten Fällen, statt <der> Regeln, nur Beispiele an, diese giebt er in ganzen Redensarten, und erklärt dieselben oft gar nicht weiter, oft nur einzelne Wörter daraus. Einige Stellen zeigen auch deutlich, daß er selbst nicht hinlänglich in die Technik der Sprache eingedrungen war, um sie <wieder> mit Klarheit dar<zu>stellen.
>
> [De los Reyes's grammar, the only aid we possess for understanding this language, is extremely obscure and deficient. In most cases, instead of the rules, the author only cites examples; these he gives in entire phrases and often does not explain them further at all, often only individual words from them. Some passages also clearly show that he himself had not penetrated sufficiently into the structure of the language to present it with clarity.] (Humboldt 2009: 19)

In contrast, Dürr (forthcoming) concludes that the two 16th-century grammars are "… outstanding intellectual achievements of their time, demonstrating an exceptional ability to describe linguistic phenomena and anticipating ideas and methods of modern descriptive linguistics." Further, writing specifically about the description of classifiers, León Pasquel (1988: 123) suggested that the grammars "… seem to provide … a more suggestive analysis of classifiers than present day grammars, in spite of the fact that Latin grammar was used as their analytical framework". The description of noun classifiers in the *Arte* bears out these more positive assessments, and confirms an observation made by Zygmunt Frajzyngier (p.c., 2025) that "… scholars, no matter what their profession was, were keen observers of languages several hundreds years ago. Our own advancements are relatively minor."

6. Conclusions. In this paper we have examined the description of noun classifiers in the Teposcolula variety of Mixtec in *Arte en lengua mixteca* by Antonio de los Reyes (1593). While working within the Latin grammatical tradition, de los Reyes provides a remarkably detailed account of the Mixtec classifier system, covering its morphological expression, semantic properties, functions, diachronic origins, and dialectal variation, thus offering a valuable insight into the history of Mixtec. His description anticipates modern typological descriptions in several respects and contributes to our knowledge of classifiers on a par with modern grammars, especially regarding their expression and role in the Mixtec reference system.

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