

Twenty-Third International Linguistics Olympiad

Bucharest (Romania), 26 July – 2 August 2026

Team Contest Problem

The Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec language belongs to the Western Tlacolula Valley dialect chain in the Oto-Manguean family. It is spoken by approx. 5000 people in the Oaxaca Valley of Mexico. In Teotitlán del Valle, there is a legend about **Kresěnsy** ‘Crescencio’, known respectfully as **dāKrésěnsy** ‘Don Crescencio’, a man from the Sierra Norte, the mountain range just north of Teotitlán del Valle. He could turn into anything whose spirit he conquered, from an eagle to the wind itself, and would steal from the rich to give to the poor.

In Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec, a vowel’s tone distinguishes meaning (low: unmarked; mid: $\bar{}$; high: $\acute{}$; rising: $\check{}$; falling: $\hat{}$). For example, **bēll** ‘snake, fish’ has a low tone, **bēll** ‘if’ has a mid tone, and **bēll** ‘how many, how much money’ has a high tone. Vowels are also distinguished by airflow (normal: unmarked; partially blocked: $\text{◌}̚$; fully blocked: $\text{◌}̚$). A vowel’s tone and airflow can change for various reasons, such as the surrounding sounds or certain processes. For example, it is difficult to maintain a high tone with restricted airflow, so the tone becomes falling. Another example can be seen by comparing the names **Kresěnsy** and **dāKrésěnsy**.

△ **r** = *tt* in American English *butter*. **rr** is a trilled *r*. **x** = *ss* in *mission*. **xh** = *s* in *vision*. **tx** = *tch* in *match*. **dx** = *j* in *jam*. **y** = *y* in *you*. **a** ≈ *a* in *father*. **e** ≈ *ai* in *bait*. **ε** ≈ *e* in *bet*. **i** ≈ *ee* in *beet*. **o** ≈ *oa* in *boat*. **u** ≈ *oo* in *boot*.



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Part I.

This section features a retelling of the story of Don Crescencio by Mrs. Guillermina Bautista Lorenzo, recorded and transcribed by Hiroto Uchihara and Ambrocio Gutiérrez Lorenzo. In the translation, underlined words or phrases mark emphasis. For sentences that contain direct speech, the speaker is indicated in parentheses (in the translation only). In Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec, commas mark long pauses in speech, and spaces mark short pauses in speech.

The story is given in random order on **Page 3**, and its translation is given in chronological order on **Page 4**. The story is divided into two parts. The first half of the story corresponds to translations 1–17, or sentences A–Q. The second half of the story corresponds to translations 18–41, or sentences AA–RR; however, six of the translations in the second half of the story are missing their corresponding sentences in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec.

The Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec sentences contain several loanwords, which are indicated in italicised subscript after the translation of each loanword. For example, “rich_{rico}” means that the Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec word corresponding to “rich” is borrowed from *rico*.

The following loanwords are from Spanish:

- ‘burro, donkey’ < *burro*;
- ‘servant’ < *mozo*;
- ‘rich, wealthy’ < *rico*;
- ‘even, until’ < *hasta*;
- ‘poor’ < *pobre*;
- ‘week’ < *semana*;
- ‘hour, time’ < *hora*;
- ‘reason, purpose’ < *razón*;
- ‘store, shop’ < *tienda*.

⚠ $\left. \begin{array}{l} rr \text{ in the word } \textit{burro} \\ r \text{ in the words } \textit{razón}, \textit{rico} \end{array} \right\}$ is a trilled *r*. *r* in the words *hora*, *pobre* = *tt* in American English *butter*. *c* = *k* in *baking*. *z* = *s* in *sing*. *h* is silent.

The following loanword is from Nahuatl: ‘mezcal’ < *mexcalli*.

⚠ *x* = *ss* in *mission*. *c* = *k* in *baking*.

Mezcal is an alcoholic beverage made from the agave plant, also known as maguey.
Oaxaca City is the capital of Oaxaca state, Mexico.

- (a) Match the translations 1–17 with their corresponding sentences A–Q.
- (b) Match the translations 18–41 with their corresponding sentences AA–RR. Write “N/A” if the corresponding sentence is missing.
- (c) For the six translations that are missing their corresponding sentences, write the corresponding sentences in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec. You may write the translations in any order, but you must indicate the number 18–41 that you are translating.

△ Sentences A–Q correspond to translations 1–17.

- A. Gāxhbálūyān lādān xáridyε maskály.
- B. Gāxhgúnñi dāKrésěnsy, xhí txítô'n, xhí txítô'n maskálykán Llŵá'.
- C. Gāxhzé dāKrésěnsy nez Llŵá' zétā'wān máskálykī, zénēn dxmúsān txírúdxpúrrān.
- D. Gazūb xsilytε retyug dāKrésěnsy dūb térugwāyān.
- E. Gūlgúgwā dbúrr maskálykán. Gūlgúgwā lādúm maskálykán.
- F. Gullikā yúbyú, zilytε maskály rayápún, xhí txítô'nēn Llŵá'.
- G. Komnā'tē rizākān rūnyān zūynkī tūzyān, gūdīlyān tāt mūs gáknē lān.
- H. Kresěnsy bidyélān.
- I. Lē'n dāyn gáxyga logedxrē' gūbānyān.
- J. Lē'n teges rô'wtε rugwāyānén.
- K. Maskály batā'wān gáxhtxī'nga, txī'nga gūpān mědy.
- L. Nā dūdxbā.
- M. Rrīkwte guk dāKrésěnsy kommaskály gulēn.
- N. Txianā tyóp xmán kánēn lādān, zilytε maskály ákábēdān.
- O. Txikytε gunñdān gūbāyn tébēnny nírak ryak bi.
- P. Zēky rūnyān gáxhribēn máskály.
- Q. Zittε mědy gūpān, zittε mědy gūpān.

△ Sentences AA–RR, plus six sentences that are missing, correspond to translations 18–41.

- AA. Bāgály nāin?
- BB. Gāxhgúrkī byāk dāKrésěnsy tebidun rô'wtε.
- CC. Gāxhwénēn dxmúsān tédyēnd rô'wtε tésīdān xígyēnēdān.
- DD. Gūltū', gūltū'. Tiptε nā bídunkán.
- EE. Maskály bānyān tēretā'wānén Llŵá'.
- FF. Nā'tē gū dūxpúrrun, nā'tē gū dūxpúrrun.
- GG. Rēky bákātsān txī'n xmēdyān.
- HH. Targū'ntū gūltū', targū'ntū gūltū'.
 - II. Txibazūyndān lē'n dyēnd rô'wtēkī, gāxhgúnñi dāKrésěnsy, gūlkā' rátε nirikāztū txírúgūlgúgwāin dūxpúrrun.
 - JJ. TxigūkdāKrésěnsy bēngúl, lē'n dā:yn gūbānyān.
- KK. Txirútxiáruguyn kixhān gáxhryākān bídun, tékēdtúrúđēddi xsón xúr ridyēñ lē'n dyēndkī.
- LL. Txī'n niribān dāKrésěnsykī rūtā'wān Llŵá'.
- MM. Xtxī'nīn rīgīzyān rīkā' dxmúsān.
- NN. Xtxī'nīn rúđēdān dbēnny prúb nirādxāgān txiázyén.
- OO. Zēky gūk xkālānyān.
- PP. Zēky rūnyān tékēdrīgīxhdyān rátε nirizyēn, komaxt nākāytε rak txiryākān bídun.
- QQ. Zittε mědy rāpā', zittε mědy rāpā', zyēntε bēnny zāk gáknē.
- RR. Zyēntε xīndēky yū' rē, gūlkā', gūlkā' rátε nitxíka dūxpúrrun, gūlkā'.

△ Translations 1–17 correspond to sentences A–Q.

(1) Long ago, they said there lived a person who would be able to turn into the wind. (2) He lived on the hill close to this village. (3) He was named Crescencio. (4) Don Crescencio became very rich_{rico} because he produced mezcal_{mexcalli}. (5) He sold mezcal_{mexcalli}, then little by little, little by little he had money. (6) He had a lot of money. He had a lot of money. (7) There were very early mornings Don Crescencio would go and cut maguey to boil. (8) He would boil it in a very big pot. (9) He would do thus, then he would produce mezcal_{mexcalli}. (10) Because he would feel like doing that (aforementioned) work alone was very heavy, he looked for four servants_{mozo} who could help him. (11) Then he taught them how to produce mezcal_{mexcalli}. (12) After two weeks_{semana} of bringing them along, they were already producing a lot of mezcal_{mexcalli}. (13) Then Don Crescencio said, “Tomorrow we can go and sell. Tomorrow we can go and sell that (close) mezcal_{mexcalli} in Oaxaca City.” (14) (Servant) “You’re right. We have a lot of mezcal_{mexcalli}. Tomorrow we can go and sell it in Oaxaca City.” (15) (Don Crescencio) “Load the donkeys_{burro} with that (close) mezcal_{mexcalli}. Load them with that (close) mezcal_{mexcalli}.” (16) Then Don Crescencio was going to Oaxaca City, he was going and selling that (aforementioned) mezcal_{mexcalli}, he was going and bringing his servants_{mozo} and his donkeys_{burro} along. (17) Well, [that] is the story.

△ Translations 18–41 correspond to sentences AA–RR, plus six sentences that are missing.

(18) When he arrived in Oaxaca City, then he sold that (aforementioned) mezcal_{mexcalli}. (19) Then he brought his servants_{mozo} to a very big store_{tienda} so that they could buy what they could bring back. (20) When they arrived inside that (aforementioned) very big store_{tienda}, then Don Crescencio said, “Take everything that you want, and load it onto our donkeys_{burro}.” (21) (Servants) “There is a lot of stuff here. Take. Take everything that our donkeys_{burro} can hold onto. Take.” (22) (Servants) “Our donkeys_{burro} can carry very heavy. Our donkeys_{burro} can carry very heavy.” (23) (Don Crescencio) “How much is it?” (24) Then, in that (aforementioned) moment_{hora}, Don Crescencio turned into a very big whirlwind. (25) He turned into a very big whirlwind in that (aforementioned) store_{tienda}. (26) He would do thus so that he would not pay for everything that he would buy because it would even_{hasta} become very dark when he would turn into the whirlwind. (27) (Don Crescencio) “Quickly, let’s go. Quickly, let’s go.” (28) (Servants) “Let’s go. Let’s go. That (close) whirlwind is very strong.” (29) A little bit of what that (aforementioned) Don Crescencio would steal, he would sell in Oaxaca City. (30) He would distribute a little more, [which] his servants_{mozo} would take. (31) He would give a little more to the poor_{pobre} people that he would meet when he was already going back. (32) Thus was his life. (33) Thus was Don Crescencio’s life. (34) He made mezcal_{mexcalli} so that he would go and sell it in Oaxaca City. (35) He would go there and take stuff that he could bring back. (36) And when he was about to pay, then he would turn into the whirlwind so that nobody would notice (lit. give mind_{razón}) at what time_{hora} he would leave that (aforementioned) store_{tienda}. (37) (Don Crescencio) “I have a lot of money. I have a lot of money. I will be able to help a lot of people.” (38) (Servant) “Don Crescencio has a lot of money.” (39) When Don Crescencio became an old man, he lived on the hill. (40) He hid some of his money there. (41) They would say he hid a little more in this village.

Part II.

This section features a retelling of the story of Don Crescencio by Ms. Ana González Gutiérrez, recorded by Angela Hou (author) and Gabriel Swai. The two of them were foreigners, therefore the word “our” excludes the listeners. The story is however slightly more informal, because they were already familiar with Ana at the time of recording.

The story is given in chronological order, but the translations are scrambled. Some of the translations are missing. Moreover, the underlines that represent emphasis are missing from the translations.

The following loanwords are from Spanish: ‘centavo, penny, money’ < *centavo*; ‘way, manner’ < *modo*; ‘but’ < *pero*. A centavo is a money coin with little value, similar to a penny.

- (d) Match the sentences 1–11 with their corresponding translations A–F. Write “N/A” if the corresponding translation is missing.
- (e) Identify the word or phrase that should be underlined in translations A–F. If there is no emphasised word or phrase in the translation, write “N/A”.
- (f) Translate the five remaining sentences. If a word or phrase is emphasised, underline it. You may write the translations in any order, but you must indicate the number 1–11 that you are translating.

(1) Binnyetrê', nā, rinnīdān lān Krésěnsy. (2) Lān nán tébinnyet, rāknēn bėnny prub. (3) Txíázêdān yû' rē rikīnān sėntāb. (4) Pēr lān kėdráxhyēldyán tēmudx kanáknēn dúsô'n. (5) Lān ná txyākān bí, dyēkān bísyê. (6) Āx zėky ná nírīnnyān lódūsô'n nírīxhî' sėntāb. (7) Āx zėky ná nībēllryākān bí. (8) Āx tērākān sėntābkī lōdān tērudēdānén dúsá' prübūn. (9) Dūsô'n nírākīn tėsėntāb kannāb bēllrákxhūdān bēll. (10) Lān gyēbā, gyēn ráknēn dúsá' prübūn. (11) Āx zėky ná tédīdx xtē binnyetrê' nigūknē dúgālbāyn xtē dūsô'n nírīkīn dūnún.

- A. And thus was the one that would say to our community that the money_{centavo} would be obtained (lit. squeezed out).
- B. But_{pero} he would not find a means_{modo} by which to help our community.
- C. Regardless of how much money our community that would make but a penny_{centavo} was asking for, if they would be ill...
- D. There is this someone... they would say he's named Crescencio.
- E. When he was already coming to stay here, money_{centavo} would be needed.
- F. ... and so that he would make that (aforementioned) money_{centavo} for them so that he would give it to our poor_{pobre} community.

Part III.

This section features a partial picture of Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec verbal morphology. A series of verbs are given in three forms: a base form which lacks a subject, and two additional forms that have first and third person singular subjects. For your convenience, in the base form, prefixes have been separated from the verb root with hyphens (-). Some forms place a high tone on the hyphen (ˉ) to indicate that a preceding prefix causes the following vowel to gain a high tone. A null marker (Ø) is used to indicate that meaning is added without any additional sounds. The meanings of the first-person singular forms are given in random order. The abbreviation *x* stands for something, someone, or somewhere.

Base Form	1st person sg.	3rd person sg.	First Sg. Meaning
1. b-a-dxāg	badxāgá	badxāgān	A. I bought <i>x</i> (completely)
2. b-a-txa	batxâ	bātxān	B. I can/could/may be hungry
3. bi-dxiby	bidxībya	bidxībyān	C. I can/could/may fill <i>x</i>
4. bi-dyε	bidyê	bidyēn	D. I can/could/may jump
5. g-a'-dxāg	gadxâgá	gadxâgān	E. I can/could/may leave <i>x</i>
6. g-u'-sɛd	gusêda	gusêdān	F. I can/could/may meet <i>x</i>
7. g-u'-txa	gutxâ	gutxān	G. I can/could/may study <i>x</i>
8. gu-bix	gubixa	gubixān	H. I filled <i>x</i> (completely)
9. gu-gizh	gugîzha	gugîzhān	I. I fill <i>x</i> (often/habitually)
10. gu-llyān	gūllyāná	gūllyānān	J. I get scared (often/habitually)
11. gu-tyes	gutyēsá	gutyēsān	K. I got scared (completely)
12. gu-zī	guzyě	gūzyēn	L. I jumped (completely)
13. r-a-dxāg	radxāgá	radxāgān	M. I left <i>x</i> (completely)
14. r-u-sɛd	rusêda	rusêdān	N. I live (often/habitually)
15. r-u-txa	rutxâ	rūtxān	O. I meet <i>x</i> (often/habitually)
16. ri-bāyn	rībānyá	rībānyān	P. I met <i>x</i> (completely)
17. ri-dxiby	ridxībya	ridxībyān	Q. I paid for <i>x</i> (completely)
18. Ø'-dyε	dyê	dyēn	R. I study <i>x</i> (often/habitually)
19. Ø'-llyān	llyāná	llyānān	S. I was (completely) hungry
20. Ø'-tyes	tyésá	tyēsān	T. I was (completely) turned around

(g) Match the sets of verb forms 1–20 with their corresponding first sg. meanings A–T.

Below are two sets of verb forms whose first sg. meanings are ‘I wait (often/habitually)’ and ‘I am in a situation (often/habitually)’, in arbitrary order. As demonstrated above, certain verbs undergo additional changes with a first person singular subject, depending on the meaning of the verb, including exactly one of the verbs below.

Base Form	1st person sg.	3rd person sg.
ri-bēz	ribēzá	ribēzán
ri-bēz	ribēzá	ribēzán

(h) Determine which set corresponds to which meaning. Explain how the first person forms were derived and why they differ from each other.

(i) Write the Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec verb forms with translations 21–30.

21. He can/could/may get scared
22. He can/could/may live
23. He jumps (often/habitually)
24. He studied x (completely)
25. I am hungry (often/habitually)
26. I can/could/may be turned around
27. I can/could/may get scared
28. I can/could/may live
29. I jump (often/habitually)
30. I studied x (completely)

(j) Write the Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec sentences with translations 31–35. If there is more than one way to translate a word or phrase, use the more formal version from **Part I**.

31. Long ago, I lived in the north, then I arrived in this village.
32. After I met the eagles and snakes close to that (aforementioned) village, I could turn into them.
33. But when I would do thus, I would want everything that they would want.
34. When the sun would rise, I would steal the rich people’s money in the west.
35. And when the sun would set, I would hide it in the east so that my community could live.

—Angela Hou, Nina Stadermann

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Good luck!

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Answer sheet: Team _____

(a)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	

(b)

18.	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.	25.
26.	27.	28.	29.	30.	31.	32.	33.
34.	35.	36.	37.	38.	39.	40.	41.

(c) You may write the translations in any order, but you must indicate the number 18–41 that you are translating.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

(d)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
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(e)

A.	B.	C.
D.	E.	F.

Answer sheet: **Team** _____

- (f) You may write the translations in any order, but you must indicate the number 1–11 that you are translating.

_____. _____

_____. _____

_____. _____

_____. _____

_____. _____

- (g)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.

- (h) Determine which set corresponds to which meaning. Explain how the first person forms were derived and why they differ from each other.

- (i)

21.	22.	23.	24.	25.
26.	27.	28.	29.	30.

- (j) 31. _____
32. _____
33. _____
34. _____
35. _____

⚠ No additional explanation besides the answers is required, nor will be marked.