

# Otisil

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Language . . . . .	3
1.2	Document . . . . .	4
1.2.1	Phonetic notation . . . . .	4
1.2.2	Glossing . . . . .	4
1.2.3	Special characters . . . . .	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Phonology</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Consonants . . . . .	5
2.1.1	Consonantal allophony . . . . .	5
2.2	Vowels . . . . .	7
2.2.1	Vocalic allophony . . . . .	7
2.2.2	Tone . . . . .	8
2.3	Syllable structure . . . . .	9
2.3.1	Restrictions . . . . .	9
2.3.2	Word-initial vowels . . . . .	9
2.4	Orthography . . . . .	10
<b>3</b>	<b>Nouns</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1	Number . . . . .	11
3.2	Case . . . . .	12
3.2.1	Patientive case . . . . .	12
3.2.2	Agentive case . . . . .	13
3.2.3	Genitive case . . . . .	14
3.2.4	Dative case . . . . .	14
3.2.5	Ablative case . . . . .	15
3.2.6	Locative case . . . . .	15
3.2.7	Viative case . . . . .	16
3.3	Deixis . . . . .	17

<b>4</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1	Adverbials . . . . .	18
4.2	Valency . . . . .	19
4.2.1	Causative . . . . .	19
4.2.2	Reflexive . . . . .	19
4.2.3	Reciprocal . . . . .	20
4.3	Deixis . . . . .	21
4.4	Tense . . . . .	22
4.4.1	Non-Past . . . . .	22
4.4.2	Aorist . . . . .	22
4.4.3	Imperfect . . . . .	22
4.5	Verb forms . . . . .	24
4.5.1	Infinitive . . . . .	24
4.5.2	Attributive . . . . .	25
4.5.3	Converb . . . . .	25
<b>5</b>	<b>Syntax</b>	<b>27</b>
5.1	Modifiers . . . . .	28
5.2	Adverbial arguments . . . . .	29
5.3	Infinitive clauses . . . . .	30
5.4	Copula dropping . . . . .	31
5.5	Converb placement . . . . .	32
5.6	Multiphrasal sentences . . . . .	33
5.6.1	Clefting . . . . .	33
5.6.2	Alternative questions . . . . .	34
<b>6</b>	<b>Semantics</b>	<b>35</b>
6.1	Volition . . . . .	35
6.2	Topicality . . . . .	36
6.3	Focus . . . . .	37
6.4	Passives . . . . .	38
6.5	Experience . . . . .	39
6.6	Mirativity . . . . .	40
6.7	Copula . . . . .	41
<b>7</b>	<b>Derivation</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>43</b>
8.1	Glossing abbreviations . . . . .	43
8.1.1	Nouns . . . . .	43
8.1.2	Verbs . . . . .	43
8.1.3	Persons . . . . .	43
8.1.4	Miscellaneous . . . . .	44

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Language

Otisil is an a priori constructed language, created in February 2023. It was designed to feel somewhat naturalistic but it is not confined by this, ultimately being a personal, artistic language.

The name of the language, *otísil*, is a nominal compound from the verb *otíxa* ‘come together, convene’ and the noun *sil* ‘mouth’.

The language is designed around an agrarian culture, with its in-world speakers mainly residing in the fertile valleys of a mountainous archipelago known as *daixwí* ‘the black-place’, referring to the dark colour of many of the mountains.

## 1.2 Document

### 1.2.1 Phonetic notation

This document uses IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) as phonetic notation. Outside of phonology tables, this will usually be written between forward slashes, e.g /ai pi ei/, or between square brackets, e.g [ai pi ei]. The difference between these two is meaningful: forward slashes indicate phonemic notation and square brackets indicate phonetic notation.

- (1) ígidá gáki kixxoi ba  
/ʔígidá gáki kisʔoi ba/  
[ʔígidá ɣáki kɪsʔoi wa]  
‘This is my example.’

Angular brackets, e.g <i>, may be used to indicate graphemes. Anything between these brackets relates to Otisil as it is written in the Latin alphabet rather than the underlying sounds.

### 1.2.2 Glossing

For illustrative language examples this document uses a Leipzig glossing style. Within this, abbreviations are used to represent meaningful parts of Otisil’s grammar. A reference list of abbreviations used in the document can be found in the Appendix (§8.1).

- (2) *ígi -dá gá -ki kixxoi -∅ ba-∅*  
this-DAT.TOP 1SG-GEN example-PAT be-NPST  
‘This is my example.’

### 1.2.3 Special characters

Throughout the document, especially in glosses and tables, the special null character ∅ may be used. This indicates something unmarked, meaning it is not apparent in the word itself, but is still meaningful. For example, the word *ka* ‘buy’ may be glossed as *ka-∅*, where the null suffix indicates the non-past tense which is unmarked.

## 2 Phonology

### 2.1 Consonants

Otisil has a moderate consonant inventory of 18 phonemic consonants. One of the primary distinctions present in the inventory is between plain and labialised consonants.

		Labial	Coronal		Dorsal		Glottal	
			Plain	Lab.	Plain	Lab.	Plain	Lab.
Nasal		m	d	n <sup>w</sup>	g	g <sup>w</sup>	ʔ	ʔ <sup>w</sup>
Plosive	Voiced	b	d	d <sup>w</sup>				
	Voiced		t	t <sup>w</sup>	k	k <sup>w</sup>		
Fricative	Voiced		z	z <sup>w</sup>	h			
	Voiced		s	s <sup>w</sup>				
Approximant			r	l				

Table 1: Otisil consonants

#### 2.1.1 Consonantal allophony

There is a wide range of phonetic variance in Otisil's consonants, mainly allophonic variations in consonant pronunciation depending on the environment of a word or utterance. It must be noted, however, that there are also many dialectal or idiolectal variances which are too numerous to list here. Otisil is rich in dialectal variance throughout its language area.

- /d/ and /g/ have nasal allophones [n] and [ŋ] which appear in word-initial position. An example of such a word is *doí*, a sentence-final contrastive particle pronounced [noí].
- /b/ has an approximant allophone [w] in word-initial position. An example of such a word is *bá*, a sentence-final question particle pronounced [wá].
- /h/ has a velar allophone [x] before another consonant. An example of such a word is *gíhmi* 'women', pronounced [ŋíxmi].
- /t/ and /s/ have post-alveolar allophones [tʃ] and [ʃ] when they appear before the vowel /i/. An example of such a word is *sil* 'mouth', pronounced [ʃiw].

- /l/ has an approximant allophone [w] in coda position. An example of such a word is *zel* 'tree', pronounced [zɛw].
- /r/ has an approximant allophone [ɹ] in coda position. An example of such a word is *dwar* 'peach', pronounced [d<sup>w</sup>œɹ].

One notable dialectal difference to mention is the variance of coda /r/. Whilst given here as [ɹ] in coda position, there are some dialects of Otisil that instead lengthen the vowel and drop the /r/ altogether. When this occurs, the syllable still counts as closed allophonically, meaning the lengthened vowel is the relevant closed syllable allophone. For example, *dwar* 'peach' may be pronounced [d<sup>w</sup>œ:] in such a dialect.

## 2.2 Vowels

Otisil has a small vowel inventory of 4 vowels, which can combine into an additional 3 diphthongs.

	Front	Back
High	i	o oi
Mid	e ei	
Low	a ai	

Table 2: Otisil vowels

### 2.2.1 Vocalic allophony

Similar to the consonants, Otisil's vowels exhibit phonetic variance through regular allophony.

	Allophone	Environment
/i/	[ɥ]	Closed syllable, after labialised consonant
	[y]	Open syllable, after labialised consonant
	[ɪ]	Closed syllable
	[i]	Open syllable
/e/, /ei/	[o], [oy]	After labialised consonant
	[ɛ], [ɛɪ]	Closed syllable
	[e], [ei]	High tone, open syllable
	[ə], [əi]	Low tone, open syllable
/a/, /ai/	[œ], [œɣ]	Closed syllable, after labialised consonant
	[ɑ], [øɣ]	Open syllable, after labialised consonant
	[æ], [ai]	Closed syllable
	[a], [ai]	Open syllable
/o/, /oi/	[ʊ], [ʊɪ]	Closed syllable, after labialised consonant
	[u], [ui]	Open syllable, after labialised consonant
	[o], [oi]	Elsewhere

Table 3: Vowel allophones in Otisil

### 2.2.2 Tone

Otisil has two tones: low and high. The high tone is denoted by an acute accent, whilst the low tone is unmarked. Diphthongs can exhibit two distinct tones on each constituent vowel, resulting in two contour tones: rising and falling.

	Flat		Contour	
	Low	High	Rising	Falling
Monophthong	a	á		
Diphthong	ai	ái	aí	ái

Table 4: Otisil tones



## 2.3 Syllable structure

Syllables in Otisil are made up of an obligatory onset consonant, an obligatory vowel and an optional coda consonant. The only consonants allowed in coda are /l/, /r/, /s/, /h/ and /ʔ/.

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
C	V	(l/r/s/h/ʔ)

Table 5: Syllable structure in Otisil

### 2.3.1 Restrictions

When a syllable with a coda is followed by a syllable with an onset, this results in a consonant cluster. There are a few rules these clusters must follow in order for a word to be legal.

- Clusters of two identical consonants are not permitted. As an example \*/sih.ha/ is illegal. This restriction also applies if the second consonant in a cluster is the labialised version of the first. As an example, \*/kaʔ.ʔ<sup>w</sup>a/ is illegal.
- Clusters of /lr/ or /rl/ are not permitted.
- There are restrictions on consonants that may follow an /s/ in coda - these are /t/, /t<sup>w</sup>/, /k/, /k<sup>w</sup>/, /ʔ/ and /ʔ<sup>w</sup>/. Any other consonant after /s/ would be illegal. As an example, /kis.ʔa/ is legal but \*/kis.ra/ is illegal.

### 2.3.2 Word-initial vowels

As all syllables must have an onset, there are no cases when a word would begin with a vowel. However, words that begin with a glottal stop /ʔ/ drop this in writing and it is instead implied. As an example, the word *ei* 'you' is phonemically /ʔei/.

This stop is explicitly written again if, for example, it becomes non-initial such as by compounding. This can be seen in the word *maixida* 'lover', a compound of *maí-* 'love' and *ida* 'person'. The glottal stop in *ida* is only written once it's no longer word-initial.

## 2.4 Orthography

Otisil is written phonemically with the Latin alphabet.

		Labial	Coronal		Dorsal		Glottal	
			Plain	Lab.	Plain	Lab.	Plain	Lab.
Nasal		m						
Plosive	Voiced	b	d	nw dw	g			
	Voiceless		t	tw	k	kw	x	xw
Fricative	Voiced		z	zw	h			
	Voiceless		s	sw				
Approximant			r l					

Table 6: Romanisation of Otisil consonants

	Front	Back
High	i	o oi
Mid	e ei	
Low	a	ai

Table 7: Romanisation of Otisil vowels

Changes in phonetic realisation due to allophony are not reflected in the romanisation. For example, the /i/ in *xwí* ‘place’ and *síl* ‘mouth’ are both written <i> despite having different realisations: [i] and [ɪ] respectively, not accounting for tone.

### 3 Nouns

Nouns in Otisil are marked for number, case and topicality.

#### 3.1 Number

There are three numbers in Otisil: singular, dual and plural. These refer to one, two and three or more referents respectively. Nouns mark for these via a suffix, which is placed at the end of a noun before the case marker.

There are special forms of the dual and plural markers when attaching to a word that ends in coda /s/ due to cluster rules (see §2.3.1).

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Regular	-∅	-se	-mi
After /s/		-te	-twi

Table 8: Grammatical number endings in Otisil

- (3) *gʰ -se -dá dos -twi-kwi kái-mí*  
woman-DU-DAT.TOP man-PL -ABL see-AOR  
'Two women saw some men.'

## 3.2 Case

There are 7 noun cases in Otisil, marked via a suffix attached to the noun after the number suffix.

Each case has two main forms depending on the topicality of the noun. The semantic implication of topicality is discussed later (see §6.2).

There are also special forms of some cases which are used when attaching to words ending in coda /r/ or /l/, /s/ or /x/ due to cluster rules (see §2.3.1).

		Non-Topic	Topic
Patientive	Regular	-∅	-xé
	After /ʔ/		-é
Genitive		-ki	-kí
Agentive		-ti	-tí
Dative	Regular	-da	-dá
	After /s/	-ta	-tá
Ablative		kwi	kwí
Locative	Regular	-ri	-rí
	After /r/ or /l/	-si	-sí
Viative	Regular	-goi	-goí
	After /s/	-koi	-koí

Table 9: Grammatical case endings in Otisil

### 3.2.1 Patientive case

The patientive (PAT) case in Otisil is used for the main recipient of a particular action or state.

- (4) *gá -ti lixa-∅ kói-∅*  
 1SG-AGE fish-PAT eat-NPST  
 ‘I am eating fish.’

Whilst this is comparable to the role of an object in many European grammars, its use is wider. The patientive can act as the sole argument of an intransitive verb if the action is not undertaken with agency.

This is best shown with verbs such as *kwóixa* ‘fall’ which describe actions

that may be unintentional, making the patientive a suitable case for this argument in such a context.

The semantics of volition in Otisil and how it relates to the noun cases is discussed at length later (see §6.1).

- (5) *gá* -∅ *kwói-mí*  
1SG-PAT fall -AOR  
'I fell down [and I didn't intend to].'

The final use of the patientive case is in equative expressions, where one thing is being equated to another. In such cases, the first item is given in the dative case and the second, often the more salient in the expression, is in the patientive case. The semantics of such a construction is discussed further later (see §6.7).

- (6) *ei* -*dá* *twolxida*-∅ *bá*  
2SG-DAT doctor -PAT Q  
'Are you a doctor?'

### 3.2.2 Agentive case

The agentive case is used for the agent of a particular action or state.

- (7) *twolxida-tí* *gwilxida* -∅ *twol-mí*  
doctor -AGE.TOP sick\_person-PAT heal-AOR  
'The doctor healed a sick person.'

With intransitive verbs, the agentive implies a more volitional sole argument than the patientive.

- (8) *gíh* -*tí* *kwói-mí*  
woman-AGE.TOP fall -AOR  
'The woman fell [intentionally].'

### 3.2.3 Genitive case

The genitive case is used to refer to possessors and often precedes a possession.

- (9) *gĩh -ki maíxida-tí sói -Ø*  
woman-GEN lover -AGE.TOP cook-NPST  
'The woman's lover is cooking.'

A genitive noun phrase can also act as a quantifier when it modifies a following noun phrase. In such expressions, the noun in the genitive is usually a quantifier noun such as *nwái* 'much' or *nwaí* 'some', or a measure noun such as 'cup' or 'handful'.

- (10) *go -tí gá -da toh-ki hoí -Ø ro -mí*  
3SG.F-AGE.TOP 1SG-DAT cup-GEN water-PAT give-AOR  
'She gave me a cup of water'

### 3.2.4 Dative case

The dative case is used for recipients, goals or benefactors of a specific action. It's comparable to arguments in English that require prepositions such as 'to' and 'for'.

- (11) *ei -tí il -da twídi-Ø ro -mí bá*  
2SG-AGE.TOP 3SG.M-DAT gift -PAT give-AOR Q  
'Did you give him a gift?'

The dative is also used to identify the experiencer of a sensation, emotion or thought. In this sense the experience is implied to be non-intentional. This type of construction is explored more in depth later (see §6.5).

- (12) *gá -dá ei -kwi kaxwí -ri kái -mí*  
1SG-DAT.TOP 2SG-ABL market-LOC buy-AOR  
'I saw you at the market.'

Finally, the dative may be used to indicate one argument in an equative expression. More information on the semantics of such constructions can be found later (see §6.7).

- (13) *íre dos -tá molxida-∅ ba-∅*  
 DIST man-DAT.TOP farmer -PAT be-NPST  
 ‘That man is a farmer.’

### 3.2.5 Ablative case

The ablative case is used to denote movement away from something.

- (14) *go -tí moíx-kwi gwa -mí*  
 3SG.F-AGE.TOP town-ABL walk-AOR  
 ‘She walked away from the town.’

The ablative may also denote a source, origin or reason.

- (15) *il -ki darsai-kwí ríroxi -∅ nwe -hi*  
 3SG.M-GEN belief-ABL.TOP offering-PAT burn-IMPF  
 ‘He was burning the offering due to his faith.’

Finally, the ablative may indicate the stimulus of a sensory experience. This type of construction is explored more in depth later (see §6.5).

- (16) *gá -dá swáswa-kwi gáí -∅*  
 1SG-DAT.TOP rain -ABL hear-NPST  
 ‘I can hear rain.’

### 3.2.6 Locative case

The locative case indicates the location of a particular verb.

- (17) *kaxwí -rí swi-ti otí -∅ líx*  
 market-LOC.TOP 1PL-AGE come\_together-NPST EMPH  
 ‘At the market we all come together.’

### 3.2.7 Viative case

The viative case indicates motion through or across something.

- (18) *go -tí mol -goi gwa -hi*  
3SG.F-AGE.TOP field-VIA walk-IMP  
'She was walking through the field.'

The viative case can also indicate an instrument or tool used to perform an action.

- (19) *gá -ti sil -goí gira -Ø*  
1SG-AGE mouth-VIA.TOP speak-NPST  
'I speak using my mouth.'



### 3.3 Deixis

There are two determiners that may precede a noun phrase in Otisil. These are the proximal and the distal determiners, with the meaning of ‘this’ and ‘that’ respectively.

Proximal	Distal
áre	íre

Table 10: Deictic determiners in Otisil

- (20) *ei -tí áre mol -goi gwa -∅ bá íre mol -goi bá*  
2SG-AGE.TOP PROX field-VIA walk-NPST Q DIST field-VIA Q  
‘Are you walking through this field or that field?’

## 4 Verbs

Verbs in Otisil are highly agglutinative, meaning there are a number of grammatical differences that can be shown on a verb through a range of different prefixes and suffixes.

Prefixes	Root	Suffixes			
Adverbial		Valency	Deixis	Tense	Form

Table 11: Makeup of an Otisil verb

### 4.1 Adverbials

The adverbial prefix on Otisil verbs can indicate polarity (positive or negative) and additionality (additional or non-additional).

	Positive	Negative
Non-Additional	∅-	si-
Additional	bi-	séi-

Table 12: Adverbial verb prefixes in Otisil

The additional prefix indicates that the verb's action or state is undertaken in addition to some other action or state, whether that's something that has already been said before by the speaker or something else in the context of the discourse.

- (21) *gá -∅ bi- gwil -∅*  
 1SG-PAT ADD-be\_sick-NPST  
 'I'm also ill.'

The negative prefix indicates that the proposition otherwise given by the verb is being denied, similar to how the English adverb 'not' works.

- (22) *gá -tí ei -∅ si- gaí -hi*  
 1SG-AGE.TOP 2SG-PAT NEG-hear-IMPF  
 'I wasn't listening to you.'

## 4.2 Valency

There are a few optional suffixes in Otisil that can slightly alter the meaning of a verb, accompanied by a shift in valency.

	Suffix
<b>Causative</b>	-le
<b>Reflexive</b>	-bai
<b>Reciprocal</b>	-bei

Table 13: Valency verb suffixes in Otisil

### 4.2.1 Causative

The causative suffix shifts the meaning of the verb to imply causation, comparable to the expression ‘make’ or ‘cause’ in English.

When a causative verb is used, the argument that is being caused to carry out the verb is usually in the dative case whilst the argument that is causing another argument to carry out the verb is usually in the agentive case.

- (23) *gá -tí il -da lixa-∅ kói-le -mí*  
 1SG-AGE.TOP 3SG.M-DAT fish-PAT eat-CAUS-AOR  
 ‘I made him eat fish.’

### 4.2.2 Reflexive

The reflexive suffix implies that a verb’s action is carried out by and upon the same argument. This is comparable to English expressions using ‘self’ or ‘oneself’.

In example 24 we see that the verb’s agent and patient are different entities: one being some unspecified man and another being some clothes.

- (24) *il -tí reí -ri mes -∅ hoídi-∅*  
 3SG.M-AGE.TOP river-LOC cloth-PAT wash-NPST  
 ‘He is washing clothes in the river.’

By applying the reflexive suffix, the act of washing oneself can be expressed with a single agentive argument, as seen in example 25.

- (25) *il -tí reí -ri hoídi -bai -Ø*  
 3SG.M-AGE.TOP river-LOC wash-REFL-NPST  
 ‘He washes himself in the river.’

An alternative use of the reflexive is the expression of passivity, implying that some action was carried out on a patient without specifying an agent. This is achieved by using a reflexive verb with a patientive argument. This type of construction is explored more at length later on (see §6.4).

- (26) *reí -ri il -xé hoídi -bai -Ø*  
 river-LOC 3SG.M-PAT.TOP wash-REFL-NPST  
 ‘He was washed in the river.’

### 4.2.3 Reciprocal

The reciprocal suffix is similar to the reflexive as it reduces the number of required arguments. However, its key difference is that it requires the agent to be many in number, whether that’s by being a dual or plural noun or some other singular noun that implies a group (such as ‘family’ or ‘nation’), and implies that the verb is carried out by each agent upon the others.

This is comparable to expressions in English with terms such as ‘each other’ or ‘one another’.

- (27) *swi -tí reí -ri hoídi -bei -Ø*  
 1PL-AGE.TOP river-LOC wash-RECP-NPST  
 ‘We wash each other in the river.’

### 4.3 Deixis

Deictic suffixes on Otisil verbs are an optional indicator regarding the location of the verb. The suffix varies by whether it implies a static location (locative), a movement towards a direction (lative) or a movement away from a direction (ablative).

The particular location or direction specified is either proximal ('here') or distal ('there').

	Proximal	Distal
Locative	-gá	-gí
Lative	-gixá	gixí
Ablative	-gorá	-gorí

Table 14: Deictic verb suffixes in Otisil

- (28) *go -dá ei -kwi kái-gí -mí*  
 3SG.F-DAT.TOP 2SG-ABL see-LOC.DIST-AOR  
 'She saw you there.'

Because of this ability to encode locational or directional information in the verb itself, Otisil verbs using these suffixes are often translated into English with different verbs altogether such as 'come' or 'go'.

- (29) *go -tí gwa -gixá -∅*  
 3SG.F-AGE.TOP walk-LAT.PROX-NPST  
 'She's coming here.' (literally: 'She's walking here')

## 4.4 Tense

Otisil verbs conjugate for three tenses, one of which (non-past) is unmarked. Though they are commonly referred to as tenses for simplicity, the two past tenses are technically differentiated by aspect, making it a tense-aspect system.

<b>Non-Past</b>	-∅
<b>Aorist</b>	-mí
<b>Imperfect</b>	-hi

Table 15: Verb tense suffixes in Otisil

### 4.4.1 Non-Past

The non-past tense is used to refer to any action that takes place in the present or future.

- (30) *gá -tí      dwar -∅      kói-∅*  
1SG-AGE.TOP peach-PAT eat-NPST  
'I'm eating a peach.'

### 4.4.2 Aorist

The aorist tense is one of two past tenses in Otisil. It is used to refer to actions or states in the past that are finished and complete.

- (31) *íre dos -tí      dwar -se -∅      ka -mí*  
DIST man-AGE.TOP peach-DU-PAT buy-AOR  
'That man bought two peaches.'

### 4.4.3 Imperfect

The imperfect tense, in contrast to the aorist tense, refers to actions or states in the past which have internal structure, such as those that are continuous, ongoing or habitual.

- (32) *gʰ* -*tí*      *swáɣwi* -∅    *kái* -*hi*  
woman-AGE.TOP rainbow-PAT look-IMPF  
'The woman was looking at the rainbow.'

## 4.5 Verb forms

The final suffix that may be appended to a verb is one of various verb forms. These are non-finite verb forms, meaning they can not be used on their own as a verb. Instead they are used in special ways with other verbs or constructions.

	<b>Infinitive</b>	-xa (-xaí)
	<b>Attributive</b>	-do
<b>Converb</b>	<b>Imperfective</b>	-xi
	<b>Perfective</b>	-xó
	<b>Causal</b>	-lei
	<b>Hypothetical</b>	-xíka

Table 16: Verb form suffixes in Otisil

### 4.5.1 Infinitive

The infinitive form of the verb acts like a noun, representing the action or state of the verb as a concept. This can then be used as an argument in another verb phrase to talk about the verb.

This is most often translatable into English with ‘to’ (as in ‘to eat’) or ‘-ing’ (as in ‘eating’). Note that the ending *-xa* has a special form for the topical patientive case: *-xaí*.

- (33) *kói-xaí*            *hei*    -∅  
 eat-INF.PAT.TOP    be\_good-NPST  
 ‘Eating is good.’

An infinitive verb can have arguments of its own, in effect turning the verb phrase as a whole into a dependent clause. The syntax associated with this is explored in more detail later (see §5.3).

- (34) *lixa-∅*    *kói-xa* -∅    *hei*    -∅  
 fish-PAT    eat-INF-PAT    be\_good-NPST  
 ‘Eating fish is good.’

The infinitive is also the dictionary form of a verb, used for talking about particular verbs in a more general or linguistic sense.



- (35) a. *síl -da kóikoi-∅ dí -xi dasil -∅ meí?*  
 mouth-DAT food -PAT put-CNV.IMPV word-PAT what  
 ‘What’s the word for when you put food in your mouth?’
- b. *kói-xa*  
 eat-INF  
 ‘Eating.’

#### 4.5.2 Attributive

The attributive form of a verb acts like a modifier and can be placed before a noun or noun phrase to modify it with the meaning of the verb. It can also have arguments of its own, being one way of making a relative clause in Otisil.

- (36) *íre kaxwí -da gwa -mí -do gfh -tí gá -da*  
 DIST market-DAT walk-AOR-ATTR woman-AGE.TOP 1SG-DAT  
*dwi -do lixa-∅ karo-mí*  
 be\_bad-ATTR fish-PAT sell -AOR  
 ‘That woman who went to the market sold me bad fish.’

The attributive form is also the main way to translate the English language concept of adjectives modifying nouns into Otisil, as Otisil’s adjectives are verbs.

- (37) *gweí -do kis -∅ ba-∅*  
 be\_new-ATTR rule-PAT be-NPST  
 ‘It’s a new rule.’

#### 4.5.3 Converb

Otisil has four converb forms, all of which make the verb act as a subordinate clause along with any arguments of its own.

The imperfective converb has a meaning comparable to the English conjunction ‘while’ or ‘during’.

- (38) *il -tí kói-xi gira -mí líx*  
 3SG.M-AGE.TOP eat-CNV.IMPV speak-AOR EMPH  
 ‘He spoke whilst eating!’

The perfective converb has a meaning comparable to the English conjunction ‘after’.

- (39) *gá -tí lixa-∅ kóí-xó sil -∅ hoídi-∅*  
1SG-AGE.TOP fish-PAT eat-CNV.PFV mouth-PAT wash-NPST  
‘I’m washing my mouth after eating fish.’

The causal converb has a meaning comparable to the English conjunction ‘because’, denoting a reason or cause.

- (40) *gá -tí reí -kwi bei -mí -lei gwil -∅ líx*  
1SG-AGE.TOP river-ABL drink-AOR-CNV.CAUS be\_sick-NPST EMPH  
‘Because I drank from the river, I feel sick!’

The hypothetical converb has a meaning comparable to the English conjunction ‘if’, denoting a hypothetical situation or conjecture.

- (41) *ei -ti gá -∅ báli -xíka gá -xé oki-∅*  
2SG-AGE 1SG-PAT hurt-CNV.HYP 1SG-PAT.TOP cry-NPST  
‘If you hurt me, I’ll cry.’

## 5 Syntax

Otisil syntax is mostly verb-final and head-final, with arguments tending to follow a specific order.

Agentive	Dative	Adverbial arguments			Ablative	Patientive
		Time	Manner	Place		

Table 17: Ordering of arguments in Otisil sentences

With the exception of sentence-final particles, finite verbs are usually the final constituent in a sentence. All the verb's arguments are placed before it.

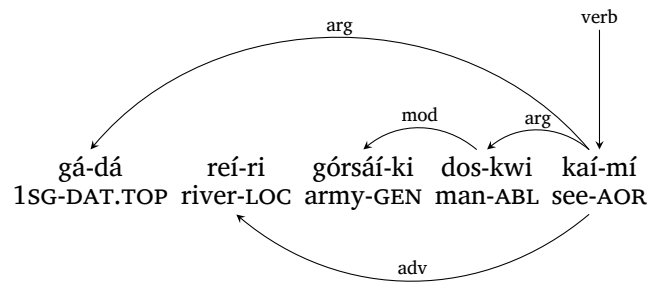


Figure 1: 'I saw an army of men at the river.'

## 5.1 Modifiers

Noun phrases that include a modifier are head-final, meaning the noun is the right-most part of the phrase, with its modifiers preceding it.

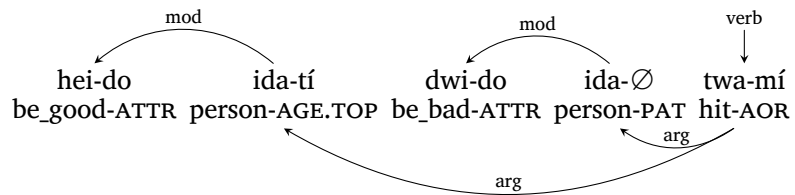


Figure 2: 'The good person hit the bad person.'

## 5.2 Adverbial arguments

Adverbial arguments are the arguments of the verb that provide additional context rather than being core arguments of the verb. This is usually comparable to the role of adverbs or prepositional phrases in English.

When multiple adverbial arguments are in a sentence they generally follow the order of time, then manner, then location.

- (42) *gʰ -tí            nwil -si    zwar            -goi reí            -ri    hoídi -bai -Ø*  
 woman-AGE.TOP dawn -LOC hand            -VIA river            -LOC wash-REFL-NPST  
                                       (TIME)            (MANNER)            (PLACE)

'The woman washes herself by hand in the river in the morning.'

### 5.3 Infinitive clauses

When a verb is put into the infinitive it takes on the syntactic role of a noun and is therefore usually declined as a noun. If this verb has arguments, these form an infinitive clause with the nominalised verb as its head.

To avoid ambiguities that may arise, the infinitive clause is often fronted.

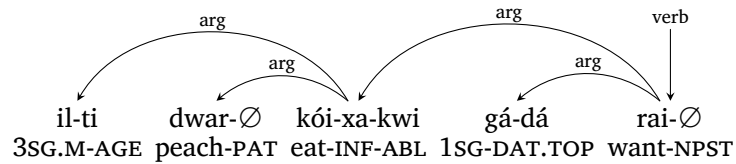


Figure 3: ‘I want him to eat a peach.’

It’s worth noting that there is a colloquial construction whereby an infinitive or infinitive clause is placed with a copula or an implied copula (see §5.4) and question word. This is often used for suggestions or desires.

- (43) *swi -tí*      *kaxwí -da*   *gwa -xa*   *bá*  
 1PL-AGE.TOP   market-DAT   walk-INF   Q  
 ‘Shall we go to the market?’

## 5.4 Copula dropping

When an unmarked (positive, non-past) form of the copula (*ba* ‘it is’) appears before a question particle, usually *bá*, the copula may be dropped.

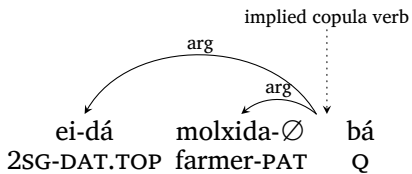


Figure 4: ‘Are you a farmer?’

This can also occur with a negative non-past copula (*siba* ‘it is not’) with the consequence that the question particle must be *swá* ‘right? is it not?’.

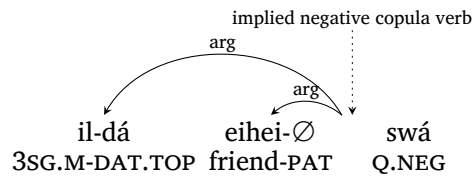


Figure 5: ‘Isn’t he a friend?’

As this particle is also used to form tag questions, the sentence could be interpreted as either ‘is he not a friend?’ (where the implied copula verb is negative) or ‘he’s a friend, right?’ (where the implied copula verb is positive) depending on the context.

## 5.5 Converb placement

Converbs and converb phrases are typically placed before a finite verb and all its arguments. In this sense, the converb phrase (the converb and its arguments) can be thought of as a fronted modifier of the verb.

It's common for arguments to be dropped from the verb where these are clear from context. In the case of sentences with a converb, often the finite verb will drop arguments that would otherwise be anaphoric references to the same argument in the converb phrase.

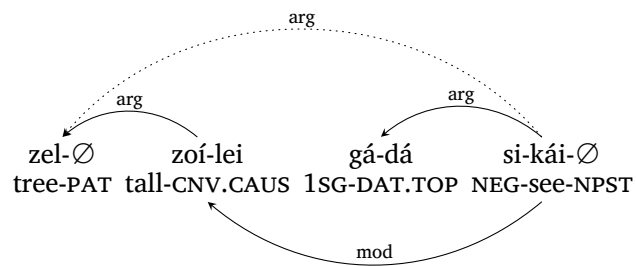


Figure 6: 'Because the tree is tall, I cannot see it.'



## 5.6 Multiphrasal sentences

There are some situations in Otisil in which a sentence can feasibly have multiple independent verb clauses joined without any specific conjunction. Note that this is different to converbs, as they are non-finite and therefore constitute a dependent clause.

### 5.6.1 Clefting

One type of multiphrasal sentence in Otisil is due to clefting. Clefting in Otisil is a syntactic phenomenon in which an argument is moved into its own verb clause, often with the verb *ba* ‘be’, and fronted in the sentence.

This sets up a contrastive focus on the clefted argument. Taking the non-clefted example of Figure 7, we see that the arguments of the utterance all belong to the single root verb *zi* ‘is green’.

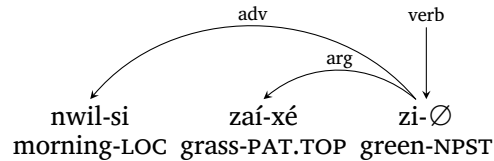


Figure 7: ‘Grass is green in the morning.’

We can, however, cleft the adverbial argument to apply contrastive focus. As seen in Figure 8, one argument now belongs to a lone clefted clause with the verb *ba* ‘is’ and the remainder of the verb phrase follows. The semantics of this kind of expression is explored more in detail later (see §6.3).

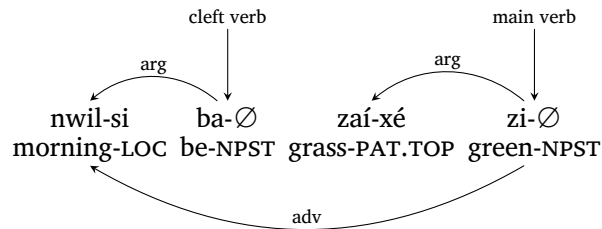


Figure 8: ‘It’s in the morning that the grass is green.’

### 5.6.2 Alternative questions

Another example of multiphrasal sentences occurs in the positing of alternative questions, such as ‘is the sky green or blue?’.

Otisil translates such expressions by splitting them into separate questions: ‘is the sky green?’ and ‘is the sky blue?’ and fusing them in a single sentence, usually with the overlapping arguments (in this case: ‘sky’) dropped on all but one of the clauses.

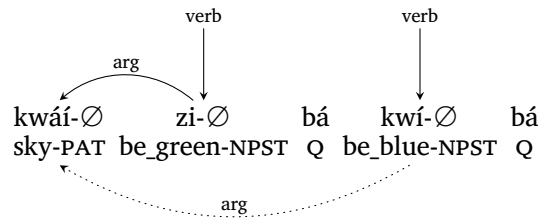


Figure 9: ‘Is the sky green or blue?’

In cases where the element being questioned is an argument rather than a verb, the verb becomes an overlapping part of the split sentences: ‘do you walk through the field?’ and ‘do you walk through the river?’. In this case, all but one instances of the verb can be dropped.

This leads the clauses with a dropped verb to resemble copular questions (i.e. ‘is it through the river?’), as the question particle *bá* often accompanies a preceding dropped copula (see §5.4).

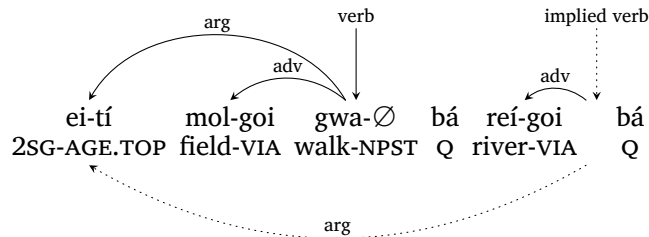


Figure 10: ‘Do you walk through the field or through the river?’

## **6 Semantics**

### **6.1 Volition**

## 6.2 Topicality

### **6.3 Focus**

## 6.4 Passives

## 6.5 Experience

## 6.6 Mirativity



## 6.7 Copula

## 7 Derivation

## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Glossing abbreviations

#### 8.1.1 Nouns

- AGE – agentive case
- PAT – patientive case
- GEN – genitive case
- DAT – dative case
- ABL – ablative case
- LOC – locative case
- VIA – viative case
- TOP – topic
- SG – singular number
- DU – dual number
- PL – plural number

#### 8.1.2 Verbs

- NPST – non-past tense
- AOR – aorist tense
- IMPF – imperfect tense
- NEG – negative
- ADD – additional
- CNV – converb
- IMPFV – imperfective
- PFV – perfective
- CAUS – causative
- HYP – hypothetical
- ATTR – attributive
- REFL – reflexive
- RECP – reciprocal
- PROX – proximal
- DIST – distal
- LOC – locative
- LAT – lative
- ABL – ablative
- INF – infinitive

#### 8.1.3 Persons

- 1SG – 1st person singular
- 2SG – 2nd person singular
- 3SG – 3rd person singular
- 1DU – 1st person dual
- 2DU – 2nd person dual
- 3DU – 3rd person dual
- 1PL – 1st person plural
- 2PL – 2nd person plural
- 3PL – 3rd person plural
- M – masculine

- F – feminine

- INAN – inanimate

#### **8.1.4 Miscellaneous**

- Q – question particle

- EMPH – emphatic