

Chapter 1: Introduction

San Miguel Chimalapa is a town of about 5,000 people in southwestern Oaxaca, Mexico. Most of the residents of the town are Zoques, although there are also Zapotecs and non-indigenous Mexicans living there. Outlying communities that belong to the San Miguel municipio are more likely to be non-Zoque the farther down the mountain they lie. Going up the mountain, there are tiny hamlets of Zoques speaking the San Miguel dialect (hereafter, MIG Zoque), until one passes Cofradía, after which one enters the Santa María Chimalapa (MAR Zoque) municipio. These two dialects are mutually intelligible, though quite different in many ways (Kaufman, 1996).

Estimates of numbers of speakers are rough, and tend to conflate the two Chimalapan communities. There were around 2,000 speakers of MIG Zoque in 1990 (Grimes, 1992) and another 3-4,000 speakers of MAR Zoque. There are no active speakers of MIG Zoque under the age of 40, although there are many between the ages of 20 and 40 who understand the language. There are now two generations of Zoques in San Miguel who have not acquired the Zoque language as their first. Everyone in this community speaks Spanish.

The Chimalapas are a high wilderness area on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. A large tract of this region is officially Zoque territory (Rojas, 1994), although recent years have seen incursions by Tzeltals and Tzotzils from Chiapas. The area was accessible only on foot until the early 1960's, when roads were built to the two municipios, and schools, clinics, electricity, and outsiders

arrived. The principal market city of the region is Juchitán, a Zapotec city, and the lowlands around the southern rim of the Chimalapas are dominated by Zapotecs. Hence, many Zoques also speak some Zapotec, since they are most likely to find work in Juchitán.

1.1. The Mixe-Zoque language family

Oaxacan Zoque is a member of the Mixe-Zoque (MZ) language family, shown in figure 1.1 (adapted from Kaufman & Justeson, 1993). MZ languages are spoken in southern Mexico, in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz.

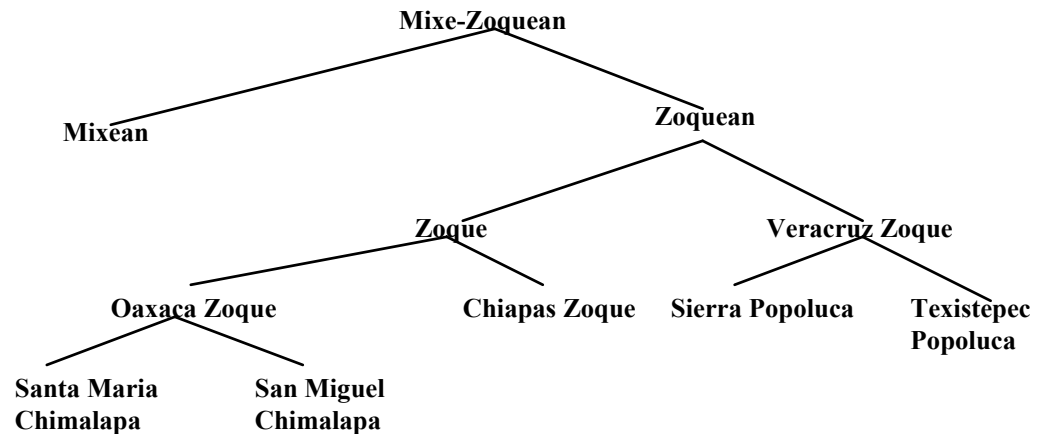


Figure 1.1: The Mixe-Zoque language family

None of the languages in the MZ family is well-documented, although that situation is being rectified by participants in the MesoAmerican Languages Documentation Project (MALDP), led by Terrence Kaufman and John Justeson.

This project began in 1993, with the initial goal of gathering lexical data for the MZ languages to aid in the decipherment of Epi-Olmec (a Zoquean language) inscriptions (Kaufman & Justeson, 1993). The current work is an outgrowth of that project, in which I participated in the summers of 1994 and 1995. Other work produced by project participants includes a thesis on Sierra Popoluca verbs (Himes, 1997) and a dissertation on Oluta Popoluca, a Mixean language (Zavala, forthcoming).

Dictionaries of MZ languages (and several Zapotecan languages) are being published by the project on-line at <http://www.albany.edu/anthro/maludp/>. There are currently two: the San Miguel Chimalapa Zoque Lexicon (Johnson and Kaufman, 1997), and the Oluta Popoluca Lexicon (Zavala, 1997). A third, the Santa María Chimalapa Zoque Lexicon, by Terrence Kaufman, will be placed on-line this year. These are searchable databases, originally developed as Shoebox databases (Davis & Wimbish, 1993). The plan is to publish analyzed texts as well as lexicons over the course of the next five years. Information on the structure of the MIG Zoque lexicon is provided in Appendix A.

Wichman (1993) is an excellent survey of both the demographic situation in Mixe and Zoque communities and of the literature on all Mixe-Zoquean languages. He mentions the following as containing some MIG Zoque data: Spear, 1872; Cerda Silva, 1941; Cordry & Cordry, 1941; Cruz Lorenzo, 1987. Cruz Lorenzo is a Zoque from San Miguel Chimalapa who has also written a primer for schoolchildren that contains some vocabulary and a few short texts (Cruz Lorenzo, 1981). He is revising his grammar of the language for publication in the near future. In my analysis of MIG Zoque verbal morphology, I made use

of Wonderley's analysis of the verbal morphology of Copainalá Chiapas Zoque (Wonderley, 1951-2). For the most part, however, my principal resource on MZ languages in general and Oaxacan Zoque in particular has been the vast knowledge of Terrence Kaufman, which I refer to somewhat inadequately as (Kaufman, 1996), indicating the collection of notes and handouts and other materials distributed to the MALDP participants.

1.2. The data

The data used in the present study was collected in the field in the summers of 1994 and 1995, under the auspices of MALDP, and during the 1995-1996 academic year, during which time I resided in Oaxaca with aid of grants from the Fulbright Commission and the National Science Foundation. I made one follow-up visit of two weeks during the summer of 1998.

My principal consultant throughout this time has been Germán Sánchez Morales, a native speaker of Zoque from San Miguel. He is in his mid-fifties, and although he does not read or write, is a gifted narrator and language teacher. He spent many years of his youth on a *ranchería* (a very tiny hamlet) with his grandmother, and thus speaks a more conservative variety of MIG Zoque than many of his peers. He began to learn Spanish at the age of twelve, when he moved back to San Miguel. All of the data used in this work, even that which originated with other consultants, was reviewed with Sr. Sánchez. Most of the translations into Spanish of text and lexical items are also his.

The lexicon is based initially on tapes containing about 2000 lexical items that were made in San Miguel in 1994 by two assistants of Terrence Kaufman, Benigno Robles Reyes and Ester Martinez Sánchez, and two Zoque consultants, Gelasio Sánchez Morales and Camilo Miguel Sánchez. These tapes were transcribed by Kaufman. I extended the lexicon during the summers of 1994 and 1995 with Sr. Sánchez. The lexicon was reviewed in its entirety by Kaufman and Sr. Sánchez during the summer of 1995, and partially reviewed again by those two the following summer. It now consists of around 4,000 entries, with translations in both Spanish and English. Lexical entries contain as much information as we could produce for each item: morphological analysis, historical attributes of underlying forms, usage and grammatical codes, examples, principal derived forms, and much cross-referencing with root forms and derived expressions.

During my year in the field, I taped some 15 hours of narrative texts with ten different speakers, both men and women. These texts were transcribed by me, usually with Sr. Sánchez, but occasionally with the narrator, and then translated into Spanish by Sr. Sánchez. English translations were produced by me from the Zoque texts. They are all entered into Shoebox databases and most have been analyzed using Shoebox's interlinearization tools. In addition to these natural texts, there are several small databases of elicited sentences, which I constructed and then tested with Sr. Sánchez and Sr. Camilo Miguel Sánchez. The texts, the elicited examples, and the lexicon, all comprise the data on which this grammar is based, and are collectively referred to henceforward as the corpus.

1.3. Methodology

The foundation of this grammar are the natural texts in the corpus. The dictionary work, supplemented by discussions with Kaufman and others on the project and intensive training by Sr. Sánchez, gave me an initial grasp of the MIG Zoque language. During the months of taping, transcribing, translating, and interlinearizing texts, the principal grammatical patterns of the language emerged. Since the texts tended to be quite similar in style, usage, and lexical range, I began constructing sentences based on those found in the texts that would test the full range of syntactic and morphological possibilities. As the work began to organize itself into categories (noun phrases, agreement, etc.), I occasionally translated example sentences from other grammars into Zoque (Foley & Van Valin, 1984; Dixon, 1977; Craig, 1977; Aissen, 1987) to test the grammatical possibilities discussed in those works. I tested my constructions with both Sr. Sánchez and Sr. Miguel, correcting them as directed and noting variations in grammaticality judgements. Corrections included pragmatic errors as well as grammatical ones¹. Their judgements were generally consistent, with minor differences such as Sr. Sánchez's preference for a middle ("it happened") translation for passives as opposed to Sr. Miguel's preference for an impersonal ("they did it") reading. Their judgements were always very clear, ranging from praise for my astonishing cleverness to complete lack of comprehension. My hand is visible in these sentences in that I tend to put the verb first (since it

¹ Sr. Sánchez rejects examples in which things behave inappropriately. So, for example, tables can't walk and trees can't cut people.

required the most work to figure out) and I use the definite article vastly more often than any Zoque speaker. The consultants invariably volunteered numerous related sentences during these elicitation sessions, which I included in the elicitation data set.

Wherever possible, I have tried to draw examples from the natural texts. These are certain to be correct Zoque, and usually include enough context to give a solid picture of the usage of the construction in question. When paradigmatic data is relevant, these are nearly always drawn from the elicited set. Finally, for examples of the various uses of some morpheme, such as a particular prefix, I relied on the lexicon for complete sets of representative samples.

1.4. Presentation of data

Most of the supporting data in this book is presented in four lines, as shown in the example below.

- (1.1)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------|----------|-----|----------|--------------|
| dey | ʔən | campa | tum | ʔistorya | |
| de.y | ʔən+ | cam-pa | tum | ʔistorya | |
| DCT2.TMP | 1E+ | chat-INC | one | history | |
| 'Now I'm going to tell you a story.' | | | | | (ZOH1R6 001) |

The first line is a direct phonemic transcription of the expression that shows any elisions or contractions that were pronounced. The second line is a morphemic representation of the first, in which underlying forms are given for each morpheme. The third line provides glosses for each morpheme. (A

complete list of morpheme glosses is given on page iv.) The fourth line is a free translation of the expression. Exceptions occur when the example consists of a single morpheme, in which case the breakdown line would be superfluous.

Most of the examples were drawn from texts, not elicited specifically to illustrate grammatical points. The part of the example that corresponds to the topic under discussion will be written in bold-face type as an aid to the reader. So, if example (1.1) were part of the discussion of time deictics, the first word, *dey* 'now', would have been bold-faced.

The following symbols are used to separate morphemes. When a bound morpheme is mentioned in the text, it is preceded or followed by the appropriate symbol. Verb roots are conventionally indicated with a following hyphen, although they can take affixes on either side; for example, *nək-* 'to walk.'

- inflectional affix
- . derivational affix
- = compound root
- + clitic (on the side of the element to which it belongs syntactically)

If an example was elicited, the word 'elicited' appears in parentheses to the right of the translation. If the example comes from a text, the identifier of the source text and the line number are given in parentheses at the right of the translation line. Texts are labelled by the resource identifiers used in the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA: www.ailla.org); all texts referenced here are available in the archive. If not otherwise specified, the example comes from the lexicon.

1.5. Organization of the book

An overview of MIG Zoque grammar and a sketch of the theoretical perspective adopted in this work are presented in chapter 2. A sketch of the phonology is given in chapter 3. The word classes of MIG Zoque, including the sub-classification of verbs, are defined and discussed in chapter 4. This section includes the complete descriptions of pronouns and deictics. Discussion of morphology is divided into two chapters: verbal inflectional morphology is presented in chapter 5, and all derivational morphology in chapter 7. (Only verbs have any inflectional morphology.) Chapter 6 contains a description of the basic clause, which means single, declarative clauses. This chapter includes discussion of verbal arguments, agreement, word order, predicate and existential clauses. The valency-changing suffixes and their effects on argument structure are also discussed here. Dependent verb constructions, including verb stem compounding, are described in chapter 8. The structure of a noun phrase is presented in chapter 9; this includes discussion of quantifiers and definiteness. Noun incorporation is described in chapter 10. Multi-clause expressions, including relative clauses, coordination, and subordinated clauses, are discussed in chapter 11. Questions and the modal operators that pertain solely to questions are discussed in chapter 12. A deeper discussion of aspect (beyond the simple facts of inflection) appears in chapter 13. Finally, an analysis of MIG Zoque narrative text conventions and discourse markers appears in chapter 14. This will also involve further discussion of word order, as it relates to issues of topic and recency. There are six

appendices. Appendix A describes the on-line lexicon. Appendices B-D list complete tables of deictics, time, and space adverbials. Appendix E gives a larger set of number words than the brief discussion in section 4.4.1, and Appendix F provides a set of examples of permissible permutations of word orders in sentences with varying numbers of core arguments.

I have tried to make this grammar as complete as possible, but much has necessarily been left out. It is in many cases impossible to determine conclusively if some sub-construction is an error, albeit a commonly-made one, or an alternative means of expression. For example, there are several instances in the corpus of an auxiliary verb construction (chapter 8) in which the pronominal agreement argument is duplicated at the left edge of the phrase. I do not know if this happened because the speaker changed his or her mind in mid-sentence, or if it is a grammatical alternate. I was not able to elicit examples of this kind, and so chose not to include it in the description of auxiliary verb phrases. People have an untidy habit of speaking without regard for the difficulties of the poor grammarian, who wants her data neatly sorted into perfectly discrete compartments; unfortunately, this means that we preserve only the bits that fit into the compartments, leaving much of the natural, unruly, fully expressive, language behind.