

Transcription conventions

Stephen A. Marlett

The Zapotec Grammar Files

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1 Introduction

This document explains the conventions used for transcribing Zapotec in [The Zapotec Grammar Files](#). The data are usually given in two forms, both of which require explanation since each is unique. See also appendix A. These transcriptions are not substitutes for careful phonetic transcriptions or specific phonological analyses.

2 Generalized Zapotec practical transcription

The first line of data in examples, presented in blue color, is a kind of practical transcription that is an attempt to present complicated data in a straightforward way. It does not follow the specific orthographic conventions of any particular variety of Zapotec and is not intended to be a pan-Zapotec practical orthography. It is referred to here as the generalized Zapotec practical transcription. This line does not indicate tone even though the source of the data may have indicated it in some way. This transcription does not represent all phonetic detail and should not be taken as the equivalent of a phonetic transcription.

Clitics are generally written with a space after or before them, regardless of the conventions used in the original source.

When Zapotec words appear in a paragraph and are not surrounded by diagonals or square brackets, they are given in this generalized Zapotec practical transcription.

3 Technical transcription

The second line of data in examples, presented in red color, is a technical transcription that is essentially “broad phonetic” — neither phonemic nor detailed phonetic — using the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association. Some details are given in the following sections.

3.1 Obstruents

The traditional distinction between fortis and lenis obstruents in Zapotec languages is generally represented here by symbols for voiceless and voiced consonants although in some cases a more detailed phonetic representation is given. Details of the pronunciation of these phonemes must be found in phonological descriptions of particular varieties.

3.2 Sonorant consonants

The symbols /j/ and /w/ represent non-syllabic central approximants. The analysis of an approximant after a consonant is not always clear, and the presentation of data may not be consistent. In some it is secondary palatalization or secondary labialization (see §3.3). In other cases it is a high vowel before another vowel. In yet other cases (especially simple syllable onsets), it is a simple approximant /j/ or /w/.

The distinction between fortis and lenis sonorants in Zapotec is represented here with a length symbol [ː] following the fortis consonant when length is the primary phonetic characteristic. If the fortis lateral approximant is phonetically post-occlusive, as in Tilquiapan [zts], it is transcribed as /ɽ̥/. If the phonetic realization of the fortis sonorant is distinctive in some other way, the phonetic form is also presented.

The phoneme /j/ varies widely in its pronunciation across Zapotec varieties. It may be a straightforward voiced approximant [j], a voiced postalveolar fricative [ʒ], a voiceless alveolopalatal fricative [ç], or an approximant with a velar stop onset (more like [gʲ]); this variation may be indicated here only with an occasional footnote.

3.3 Secondary palatalization and labialization

Consonants with secondary palatalization or secondary labialization are written with the appropriate superscript symbols. If the secondary palatalization has changed the point of articulation of the consonant (as in the case of nasals, where /nʲ/ may be [ɲ]), this is not indicated.

3.4 Vowels

Vowels may come in one, two, or three phonation types in addition to the modal (viz., plain) vowels. Modal vowels are represented with a simple vowel letter. In many varieties these are all phonemic and unrelated to tonal contrasts.

Checked vowels are represented with a vowel letter followed by a glottal stop (e.g. /aʔ/).

Laryngealized vowels (which may have various phonetic realizations) are represented with a vowel letter followed by a superscript glottal stop (e.g. /aʔ̚/). In some varieties the difference between checked vowels and laryngealized vowels is linked to tonal differences and is not phonemic. The data from those varieties may or may not explicitly represent the phonetic phonation differences.

Breathy vowels are represented with a vowel letter followed by a superscript *h* (e.g. /a^h/).

In a few cases, nasalized vowels are written. Some nasalized vowels are analyzed as phonetic realizations of a vowel followed by a tautosyllabic nasal, and they are transcribed here by that analysis.

3.5 Tones

If included, tone information is represented with diacritics: acute accent for high tone, grave accent for low tone, inverted circumflex [ˇ] for rising tone, etc.

Appendix A: Technical transcription and generalized Zapotec practical transcription correspondences

Note: Not all phonemes occur in all varieties of Zapotec. Not all analyses of Zapotec agree with this presentation of the phonological system. Loanwords may contain sounds which are not described here. They are written as transparently as possible. Vowel phonations are not shown here; see §3.4 above.

Phoneme	Technical transcription	Generalized Zapotec practical transcription
/p/	p	p
/b/	b	b
/t/	t	t
/d/	d	d
/k/	k	k
/g/	g	g
/tʃ/	tʃ	ch
/tʃx/	tʃx	dx
/θ/	θ	th
/ð/	ð	dh
/s/	s	s
/z/	z	z
/ʃ/	ʃ	x
/ʒ/	ʒ	zh
/ʃr/	ʃr	xr
/zr/	zr	zhr
/χ/	χ	q
/m/	m	m
/n/	n	n

Phoneme	Technical transcription	Generalized Zapotec practical transcription
/ɲ/ ¹	ɲ	ñ
/l/	l	l
/r/	r	r
/w/	w	w
/j/	j	y
Fortis sonorant	C ²	CC
Consonant with secondary palatalization	C ^j	Cy
Consonant with secondary labialization	C ^w	Cw
/a/	a	a
/e/	e	e
/i/	i	i
/y/	y	ü
/o/	o	o
/u/	u	u
/æ/ or /ɛ/	æ	ë
/ɨ/ ³	ɨ	ɨ
Checked vowel	V [?]	V'
Laryngealized vowel	V ^ʔ	V'V
Breathy vowel	V ^h	Vh

¹See the discussion in §3.2.

²Except the case of post-occlusive lateral, which is represented /ɫd/, as mentioned §3.2.

³This may be phonetically a schwa.