

Lealao Chinantec Syntax

Studies in Chinantec Languages 2

**Summer Institute of Linguistics and
The University of Texas at Arlington
Publications in Linguistics**

Publication 88

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by

James E. Rupp

**A Publication of
The Summer Institute of Linguistics
and
The University of Texas at Arlington
1989**

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Library of Congress Catalog No: 89-061775

ISBN: 0-88312-103-4

ISSN: 1040-0850

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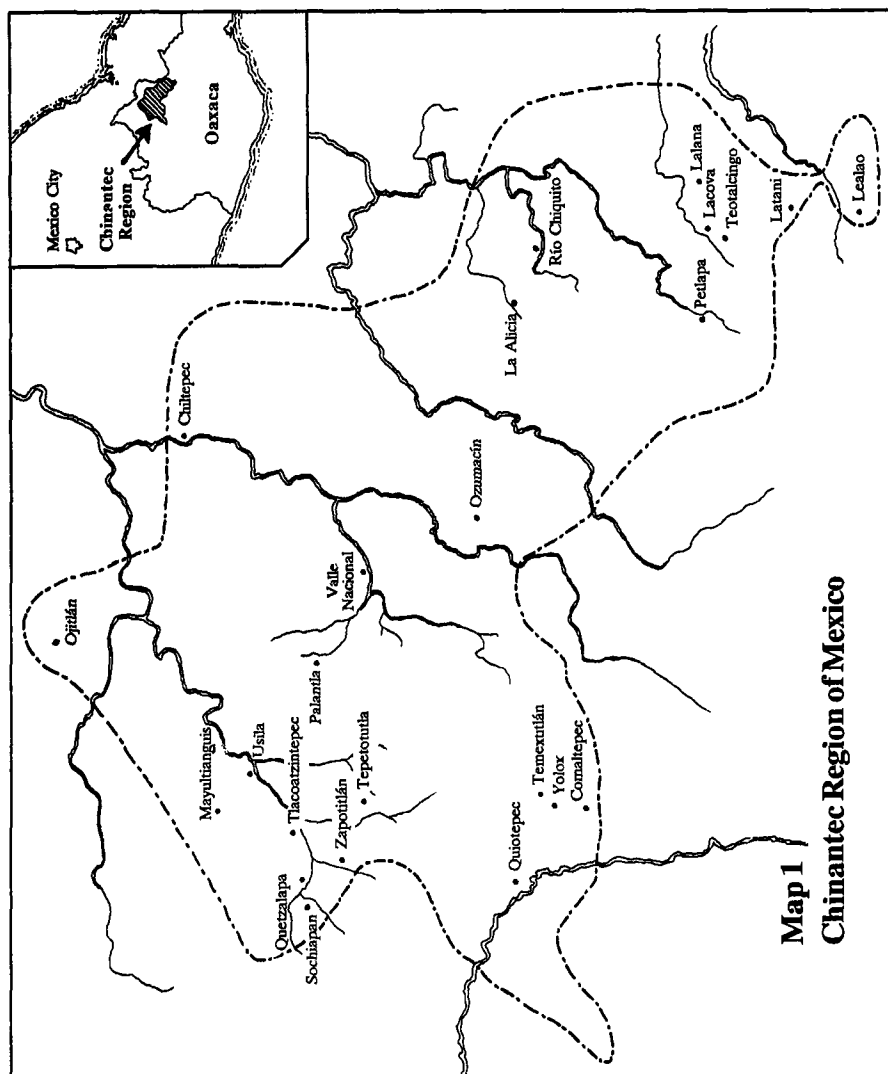
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Preface

Lealao Chinantec is so named for the principal town where this language is spoken—San Juan Lealao, situated in the northeast quadrant of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, in the ex-District of Choapan, within fifteen miles of the Veracruz State line. A few Lealao speakers reside in two other nearby towns, Santa María Yahúivé and Latani, but the majority of the 1200 speakers live in the town of Lealao itself. Another small settlement between Lealao and Santa María will soon gain official status as a town. It is composed of Lealao families who have chosen to settle on their farms rather than make the daily trek from Lealao.

Lealao is situated in rugged, mountainous cloud forest at an altitude of 3500 feet above sea level, receiving approximately 70 inches of annual rainfall. The Chinantec people of the area are subsistence maize farmers, using a slash-and-burn technology, who also raise varying amounts of coffee and sugar cane for both personal use and sale. They also benefit from a variety of tropical fruits and vegetables which grow in their region. Crafts are limited to making utility items needed at home or work such as baskets, gourd bowls, and net or rope articles made from natural fibers.

Lealao Chinantec is a member of the Chinantec family of the Otomanguan stock and is located at the southeastern fringe of the Chinantla, a kidney-bean-shaped area inhabited by the twelve Chinantec language groups. All the villages in the immediate vicinity of Lealao speak either Zapotec or Mixe, effectively isolating it geographically from the rest of the Chinantla. The Lalana Chinantec people are the nearest Chinantec-speaking group, located to the north of Lealao at a distance of at least one day's travel by foot.

Data for this paper were collected between 1968 and 1981, during which time I resided in Lealao, with my wife and two daughters, for a total period of about five years. Much of the remaining time during this period was also spent in language research carried out at study centers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Mexico. Some of the data were electromagnetically recorded; the rest were written out for me by one of several native speakers of Lealao Chinantec. Five individual men have provided the bulk of the material represented here, either independently or in assisting me in the review of earlier materials. Of these men, Maximo Alonso Marcial was the outstanding contributor, as author, typist, and proofreader. This study is one of five, on five related Chinantec languages, which were drafted during the months of February through April, 1988, at a workshop designed for that purpose in Catalina, Arizona, near Tucson, under the direction of Dr. William R. Merrifield.