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TZOTZIL GRAMMAR

by

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The present monograph, Tzotzil Grammar, is the second volume in this series which treats Mayan languages, re: Mayan Studies I, #5. In contrast to #5 which offered a collection of studies on various Mayan languages, i.e., Cakchiquel, Ixil, Jacaltec, etc., Tzotzil Grammar deals only with speech form currently in use by some 65,000 speakers in the area around Huixtan, Chiapas, Mexico. Miss Marion Cowan has had ten years experience among the Huixtecos; her fluency in the idiom as well as her linguistic field work, translation, and literacy efforts in the area, has given her materials that authentic ring of mature judgment. William E. Merrifield has taken the results of Miss Cowan's studies and cast them in a linguistic model which depends upon Pike's hierarchical structures and, as well, upon the stratificational model of Lamb. The linguistic strata represented in this volume reflect the model presented at S.I.L. courses, the University of Washington, Seattle, by Mr. Merrifield and others of his collegues.

Dow F. Robinson
Tlalpan, Mexico
June, 1968

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FOREWORD

Miss Cowan is a member of the Mexico Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Inc. The purposes of SIL are well known, but in general they are directed toward those languages of the world not yet reduced to writing. These languages are studied, speaking ability is acquired, alphabets are established, literacy materials are prepared, and so forth. In the course of such study, which presupposes linguistic training, information is acquired concerning the structure of these languages which is of general scientific interest.

In view of the vast numbers of languages which fall within the domain of SIL concern, the difficulty of training sufficient numbers of linguistic field workers can well be appreciated. The appearance of this study of Tzotzil would seem to give testimony to a degree of success in this regard, inasmuch as Miss Cowan may be considered a typical product of the SIL training program.

This training program consists of two summers of linguistic training at one or another of its Summer Institutes. The linguistic training is supplemented by a course to prepare the field worker for primitive (rural or jungle) living conditions. Such courses are held regularly in Mexico, West Africa, and New Guinea. The training then continues in the field through an organized consultant program and system of workshops.

Miss Cowan, a Registered Nurse, began her fieldwork in Mexico after receiving her SIL linguistic training. She has since served as a staff member in the Mexico jungle camp program as well as supporting staff in one of the Summer Institutes. Before settling among the Tzotzil of Huixtán, she did literacy work among the Chol, Tzeltal, and San Andres Tzotzil. In addition to her Huixteco assignment, she is presently a literacy consultant to her colleagues working in Mayan languages.

This study is based on her initial SIL linguistic training, her speaking ability of Tzotzil, and three SIL linguistic workshops. The first of these workshops was a part of the 1961 Linguistic Institute held on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Viola Waterhouse was her consultant at that time. The other two workshops were held in 1966 and 1967 at the SIL Centro Lingüístico Manuel Gamio in Ixmiquilpan, Mexico, where it was my privilege to direct her study.

Her grammar is framed in terms of a theory which recognizes language (and languages) as having three modes or components—as well as a means of relating the components to one another. Each component is constituted

of units which combine in restricted and hierarchical fashion. A description of one such component must inevitably include a classification of its units and a description of their patterned arrangements.

The components are conceived of as ordered in relation to one another, the syntactic component being intermediate to the other two. Two relations are thus required: that between the phonological and syntactic components, and one between the syntactic and semantic components.

The relation between units of adjacent components has been accounted for in two steps. Statements such as "A pronoun occupies Position One of the verb phrase nucleus if..." (6.1) serve to place units of one component (in this case the semantic component) 'in position' in the adjacent component; that is, they state the conditions under which such units are related to those of the adjacent component in particular positions within the set of patterned arrangements (or constructions) of the latter. A second set of statements such as "SUBJN is realized morphophonemically as the null element when..." (2.3) provide 'the spellings' for a unit of one component (in this case the syntactic component) in terms of the adjacent component.

Although framed in terms of a theory with formal and generative implications, this study of Tzotzil grammar is presented in straightforward prose (as indicated in the preceding paragraph) with a minimum of formal rules of the type so common in current studies. Miss Cowan has tried to write a grammar which someone might wish to sit down and read, a lamentably uncommon exercise even for linguists these days. An earlier and more formal statement of a portion of Tzotzil grammar using the same theoretical framework can be found in Cowan and Merrifield, 1968; and further discussion of the framework itself may be found in Merrifield, 1967.

For the most part, this study is limited to a description of the syntactic component of Tzotzil. In a few instances, however, reference is made to the semantic component and a few statements are made relating it to the syntactic component. A partial statement of the relation between the syntactic component and the phonological component is also attempted (11).

William R. Merrifield
Coordinator of Linguistic
Research in Mexico

Centro Lingüístico Manuel Gamio
May 8, 1968