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The University of Texas at Arlington  
Publications in Linguistics**

Publication 95

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# **Syllables, Tone, and Verb Paradigms**

**Studies in Chinantec Languages 4**

**William R. Merrifield and Calvin R. Rensch**

**Editors**

**A Publication of  
The Summer Institute of Linguistics  
and  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
1990**

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Library of Congress Catalog No: 90-71408

ISBN: 0-88312-105-0

ISSN: 1040-0850

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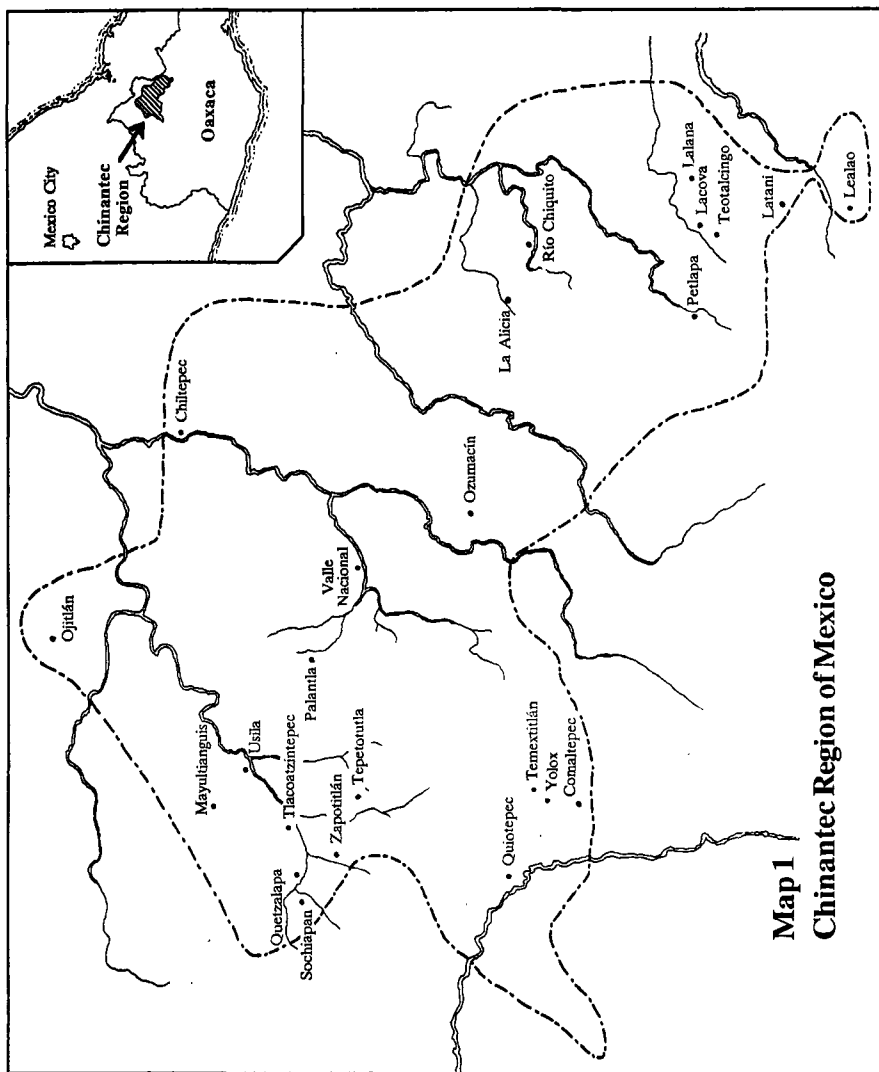
Cover design and sketch by Ruth Hara

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**Map 1**  
**Chinantec Region of Mexico**

## Editors' Apology

For as long as it has taken to get this collection of Chinantec papers in print, it could have been a festschrift. Rensch began to put the volume together in late 1971 or early 1972, but before their form could be finalized or their number completed he was whisked away one dark, moonless night to an administrative gulag from which pardon may never be granted. After some years of carefully protecting the growing collection of autographs, word was filtered through to him that extradition papers had been signed and that he was to be transferred from his current location somewhere in North Texas to administrative duties which would take him back and forth across Asia in a [futile] attempt to break his academic spirit.

With this knowledge, he began to look for an opportunity to smuggle the manuscripts into safe hands. His chance came at Christmas in 1981 or 1982. He was granted a holiday furlough for a few days and, as it was their custom, the Rensch family shared Christmas dinner with the Merrifield family. This was a long-standing tradition for these two families, begun in the late 1950s, and so aroused no suspicions at the time among the watchful guardians of administrative duty, although it proved to be the last time in recent years that the privilege was granted them.

After the main course had been served and dessert was being readied, Rensch took advantage of an unguarded moment, during which the ever-watchful guardians of administrative duty were arguing over the wishbone, and passed the precious manuscripts under the table to Merrifield. It looked, for a moment, as though long-sought-after and sacrificially collected knowledge of the Chinantec languages would soon be revealed to the academic (free) world.

But Merrifield, alas, was already under administrative house arrest. In spite of repeated starts on putting the manuscripts into shape for

publication during late and early hours, he was forced time and time again to return them to hiding, away from the prying eyes of the administrative hierarchy. But then, these powers made their fatal mistake. They permitted Merrifield to be transferred to the academic publications gulag where, right under their noses, he has finally been able to edit the precious Chinantec autographs for publication.

Long live the Chinantec languages! May their virtues be entoned throughout the land!

William R. Merrifield  
Dallas, Texas  
October, 1989

## Introduction

As indicated in the editors' apology, these studies were all written during the 1970s and would have been usefully published long ago. They were projected to be the first volume in this publication subseries focusing upon Chinantec languages. As it turns out, by the time it became possible to give priority to this project, a workshop on Chinantec syntax was scheduled by the Mexico Branch of SIL at their Catalina, Arizona, center. Five monographs began to take shape during a three-month period which are in various stages of preparation for publication at this time. Two of them have actually appeared in this series, prior to these papers which were written much earlier. The other three monographs are projected to appear during this year and next.

The fact that these papers have been delayed has created some problems, since continuing research has inevitably led to new insights into the structure of Chinantec languages. This is particularly true of Comaltepec and Lealao which have been described in volumes 2 and 3 of this subseries.

This volume contains two contributions relating to Comaltepec Chinantec. The first is a major description of the tone system of that language produced by Anderson, Martínez, and Pace. Since the time of that research, Pace wrote a Master's thesis on Comaltepec verb inflection—the second Comaltepec paper in this volume—but then moved on to work in languages of the Sudan, in East Africa, leaving Anderson to continue Chinantec research. While Anderson has gained new insights into Chinantec phonology since the earlier paper was drafted, systematic work on tone of the sort that brought the original draft together has not been attempted. It has, thus, seemed best to present the original study intact, without forfeiting its integrity as a characterization of the tone patterns of the chief language associate of that period, Isaac Martínez.



Pace's thesis has been revised only slightly for publication here. It is partially repetitious of the later material presented in Anderson's monograph, but Pace's responsibilities in the Sudan have made it difficult to undertake a more vigorous paring back of the material. This partial duplication should not create difficulties for the reader, but will, rather, provide additional factual support of claims made about Chinantec through the examples presented in the two contributions.

There are also two articles relating to Lealao Chinantec, the subject of volume 2 of this subseries, both predating the latter in writing. Rensch's manuscript, placing Lealao data within the context of his comparative work on Proto-Chinantec phonology, was originally drafted in close association with the syllable paper that appears here with it. The syllable paper, however, has received two revisions since that time as a result of Rupp's continuing research in the language. This has required rephrasing of Rensch's paper on two separate occasions as well.

A tone paper on Quiotepec Chinantec, a close cousin to Comaltepec Chinantec, is a third attempt at accounting for this complex phonological system. In two earlier papers, much less was known about Chinantec phonology in general than is now known through extensive research in a dozen languages of the family. The chief point of interest, however, apart from learning more about Quiotepec phonology, may be in the different results obtained by analysis of phonology without reference to grammar—the approach taken in the earlier work by Robbins—from that obtained by a Pikean 'grammatical prerequisites' approach—as was taken in this paper.

The final paper, on Tepetotutla Chinantec, describes Chinantec verbs of motion in a tradition started with similar studies on Mixtec and Zapotec a decade ago. These earlier papers engendered some discussion in the literature of the time, but this one must of necessity be presented as originally drafted, without reference to this discussion if it is to appear at all. In the case of this earlier study of Tepetotutla Chinantec, the monograph being prepared to accompany it will appear subsequent to it, in the near future.