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ZAPOTECO SIBLING TERMS

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[This article describes the use
of sibling terms in Zapoteco
and gives examples of their
usage.]

INTRODUCTION

Zapoteco consists of a group of at least six mutually unintelligible dialects spoken in an area of Southern Oaxaca extending from over seventy five miles northeast of the capital to beyond the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The dialect under consideration is that spoken in the districts of Villa Alta and Choapan in the extreme northeast of the Zapoteco region. We know of twenty five villages in which it is spoken and there are probably more which are in the same dialect. The number of speakers of the dialect is not under twenty thousand. Work on the feature whose description follows was done with informants of Yat-zachi El Bajo of the district of Villa Alta.

We have used five informants in this study. Fidel Lopez, a man in his forties with elementary school education part of which was received in the Spanish speaking city of Oaxaca; Gregorio Lopez, a man in his thirties with elementary school education part of which was received in Mexico City; Marcelina Lopez, a woman in her thirties with elementary school education part of which was received in Mexico City;

Patricio Gonzales, a man in his thirties with enough education to read; and Rosa Llaguno, a girl of seventeen who has completed four years of elementary school.

All are bilingual and all except Patricio Gonzalez are natives of Yatzachi El Bajo. ^{Patricio Gonzalez} He is a native of Tavehua in which he grew to young manhood; ^{since then he has lived} living since in Yatzachi. Tavehua is three quarters of an hour's walk from Yatzachi, but there is little communication between the two towns.

CHART OF SEGMENTAL PHONEMES

Consonants

		Labial	Post-dental	Alveo-palatal	Velar	Backvelar	Glottal
Fortis-Lenis Distinction							
Fortis Stops		p	t	č	k ^w k		
Lenis Fricatives		b	d	ɟ	g (g)	(g ^w g)	
Fortis Sibilants			s	š ʃ (ʃ)			
Lenis Sibilants			z	ʒ ʒ (ʒ)			
Fortis Liquids		m	n	l			
Lenis Liquids			ɳ	ɭ			
No Fortis-Lenis Distinction							
		w f	ɣ	r ɾ	jw j		ʔ

Green ink indicates phonemes found only in loan words.

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		o
Mid	e	ɨ	
Low		a	

Footnote if not noted has explained 1

Sibling (i.e. brother or sister) terms are inalienable; i.e., they cannot appear without a possessor.

The term used depends upon the possessor's sex; e.g.,

<u>bil</u>	'sister of female'
<u>bišɿʔ</u>	'brother of male'
<u>zan</u>	'sibling of opposite sex'.

In the case of sibling of plural persons of mixed sex, most informants used zan exclusively. One informant, however, used the form for male possessor throughout. Another informant could not give forms except where possessors were predominantly of one sex ^{in which case} when he used the form for the predominating sex. His usage would be as follows: A man speaking to his sister about their brother could not say 'our brother', but must use 'my brother' or 'your brother' using bišaʔa (aʔ 1st sing poss suff) or zanoʔ (oʔ 2nd sing poss suff). ^{if plural} A man speaking to his brother and sister about their brother could say 'our brother' using bišɿʔiʔo (ʔo 1st plu poss suff).

Sibling terms are generally compounded with the

word beNĩ? 'adult' or bi 'child', e.g.

beNĩ?bile?

'her adult sister' (e? 3rd sing
resp poss suff)

bibile?

'her child sister'

The dependence of sibling terms ⁱⁿ Zapoteco upon the sex of the possessor is the more remarkable in that sex gender is very unimportant in most speech. Li se? is either 'his avocado' or 'her avocado'. ɣase? means either 'he is sleeping' or 'she is sleeping'. Whole conversations about people take place in which the sex of the subjects talked about is never expressed except indirectly by mention of the names of the people talked about.

In Zapoteco^V terms for siblings are not reciprocal; the word for "brother", for example is different according to whether the possessor is a male or female.

Note how their usage differs according to the sex of the possessor:

bila? "my sister" (female speaker)
zana? "my sister" (~~female~~ male speaker)
zane? "his sister"
bile? "her sister"

One of the terms means sibling of opposite sex:

zana? "my brother" (female speaking)
zana? "my sister" (male speaking)
zane? "his sister" (male or female speaking)
zane? "her brother" (male or female speaking).

Two different terms occur when the sex of possessor and possessed sibling are the same:

bila? "my sister" (female speaker)
bisha? "my brother" (male speaker)

When the possessor is constituted of more than one person and those are of differing sex, most informants use the stem zan- regardless of the sex of the possessed sibling:

zancho 'our brother' or 'our sister' (male and female speakers)

One informant, however, used the stem forms throughout which would have been used of a single male possessor. Another informant refused to volunteer forms except for situations outlined in which possessors were predominantly of one sex; in these cases he used exclusively the form for

the predominating sex. His usage was then as follows:
 only
 For a man speaking to his sister about their only brother
 he would not say "our brother" but used 'my
 brother' or 'your brother' with bisha?a (a? 1st sing. poss.
 suff.) or zano? (o? 2nd sing. poss. suff.); for a man speaking
 to his brother and sister about their brother he used

the form bishi?icho 'our brother' (cho 1st plu poss suff).

The sibling terms mentioned are most commonly found
 in compounds with the words beni? "adult" or bi "child". E.g.

beni?ibile? "her adult sister" (e? 3rd sing.
 resp. poss. suff.)

bibile? "her child sister"

The dependence of sibling terms of Zapoteco upon the
 sex of the possessor is the more interesting in that
 sex gender does not exist as a formal category in the
 language; for example, lixé? is either "his avocado" or
 "her avocado". chtase? means either "he is sleeping"
 or "she is sleeping". In fact, an entire conversation
 may occur with no grammatical indication of the sex of
 the speakers; the sex is made known only by mention of the
 names of the people talked about; male and female names
 differ, so that ambiguity seldom occurs.

Sibling terms are inalienable, i.e. they cannot
 appear without a possessor. For example, one may say
zana? "my brother", but there is no form *zan "brother"

~~66~~

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 mutually unintelligible dialects spoken in an area of
 Southern Oaxaca, Mexico, extending from over seventy five

miles northeast of the capital to beyond the Isthmus of
Tehuantepec.

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