

**THE  
JACALTEC  
LANGUAGE**

RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE LANGUAGE SCIENCES  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

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## CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	2
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	3
1. PHONOLOGY . . . . .	9
1.1 Phonemes and Orthography . . . . .	9
1.2 Allophonics of Segmental Phonemes . . . . .	10
1.3 Allophonics of Suprasegmental Phonemes . . . . .	12
1.4 Distribution of Segmental Phonemes . . . . .	14
1.5 Canonical Forms of Roots . . . . .	15
1.6 Morphophonemics . . . . .	16
1.7 Distribution of Suprasegmental Phonemes . . . . .	20
2. MORPHOLOGY . . . . .	25
2.1 Roots and Stems . . . . .	25
2.2 Stem Formative Suffixes . . . . .	28
2.3 Inflectional Affixes . . . . .	29
2.4 Derivational Affixes . . . . .	41
2.5 Clitics . . . . .	51
2.6 Numeral Formation . . . . .	57
2.7 Numeral Classifiers . . . . .	59
2.8 Some Irregular Verbs and Statives . . . . .	61
3. SYNTAX . . . . .	63
3.1 Simple Sentence . . . . .	64
3.2 Noun Phrase . . . . .	64
3.3 Verb Phrase . . . . .	75
3.4 Adverb Phrase . . . . .	81
3.5 Dependent Clause . . . . .	84
3.6 Statal Clause . . . . .	86
3.7 Complex Sentence . . . . .	89
3.8 Conjoined Sentences . . . . .	92

3.9 Indefinite Pronoun . . . . .	93
3.10 Indefinite Demonstrative . . . . .	94
3.11 Modifier Verb . . . . .	96
3.12 xín “then” . . . . .	96
3.13 Compound Noun . . . . .	97
3.14 Peripheral Sentence Constituents . . . . .	103

## APPENDIXES

1. Text . . . . .	105
2. Noun Classifiers, Kin Terms, and Vocative Particles . . . . .	125
3. Glossary . . . . .	129

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Adj	Adjective	PMA	Class A person marker
Adv	Adverb	PMB	Class B person marker
AdvP	Adverb phrase	Pos	Positional
BndAdv	Bound adverbial	Prct	Proclitic
ComN	Compound noun	Pron	Indefinite pronoun
ComS	Complex sentence	QedS	Quoted sentence
Con	Conjunction	QingS	Quoting sentence
ConNP	Conjoined noun phrase	RC	Relative clause
ConS	Conjoined sentence	RefNP	Reflexive noun phrase
Dem	Demonstrative	S	Sentence
DepC	Dependent clause	SentCl	Sentence clitic
DisStP	Disjunct stative phrase	StC	Statal clause
Enct	Enclitic	SubC	Subordinate clause
IV	Intransitive verb	SubCon	Subordinating conjunction
ModV	Modifier verb	SV	Stative verb
N	Noun	TV	Transitive verb
NC1	Noun classifier	V	Verb
NP	Noun phrase	VocP	Vocative phrase
Num	Numeral	VocPt	Vocative particle
NumCl	Numeral classifier	VP	Verb phrase
Part	Particle	VStP	Verbal stative phrase
PM	Person marker		

## INTRODUCTION

### *Location and Population*

Jacalteco is a Mayan language spoken in a portion of the northwestern slope of the Cuchumatanes mountains in the *departamento* of Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and in a few nearby settlements in the Mexican state of Chiapas. The dialect described here is that of the town of Jacaltenango, Guatemala. The map on page 4 (fig. 1) shows the Jacalteco-speaking area of Guatemala.

Jacalteco is spoken in the following towns:<sup>1</sup> Jacaltenango, San Marcos Huista, San Andrés Huista (all in the municipio of Jacaltenango), Concepción, Petatán (both in the municipio of Concepción), San Antonio Huista (a few speakers only), and Santa Ana Huista (a few speakers only). In Chiapas Jacalteco is spoken, but it is reportedly dying out in Guadalupe Victoria and Paso Hondo. In each of these Guatemalan towns a somewhat different dialect of Jacalteco is spoken. These dialects are mutually intelligible with no difficulty, but they are easily distinguished by phonological, morphological, and lexical differences. The Mexican settlements speak a subdialect of the Jacaltenango dialect.

Each Jacalteco-speaking town has several dependent settlements, or *aldeas* (Jacalteco *waya'ñb'al*, literally "sleeping-place"). The people of the *aldeas* usually speak the dialect of the town and consider themselves members of the town society. Virtually all Jacalteco-

1. "Town" as used here is a Jacalteco designation, *co'ñob'*, and does not coincide with the governmental designation of *pueblo*. In the list which follows, only Jacaltenango, Concepción, San Antonio H., and Santa Ana H. are officially towns; they are seats of municipios (roughly, counties) of the same names. The other Guatemalan settlements are officially *aldeas* (roughly, "hamlets"), dependent on the town which is the seat of the municipio. I do not know the exact location or the official status of the Mexican settlements.

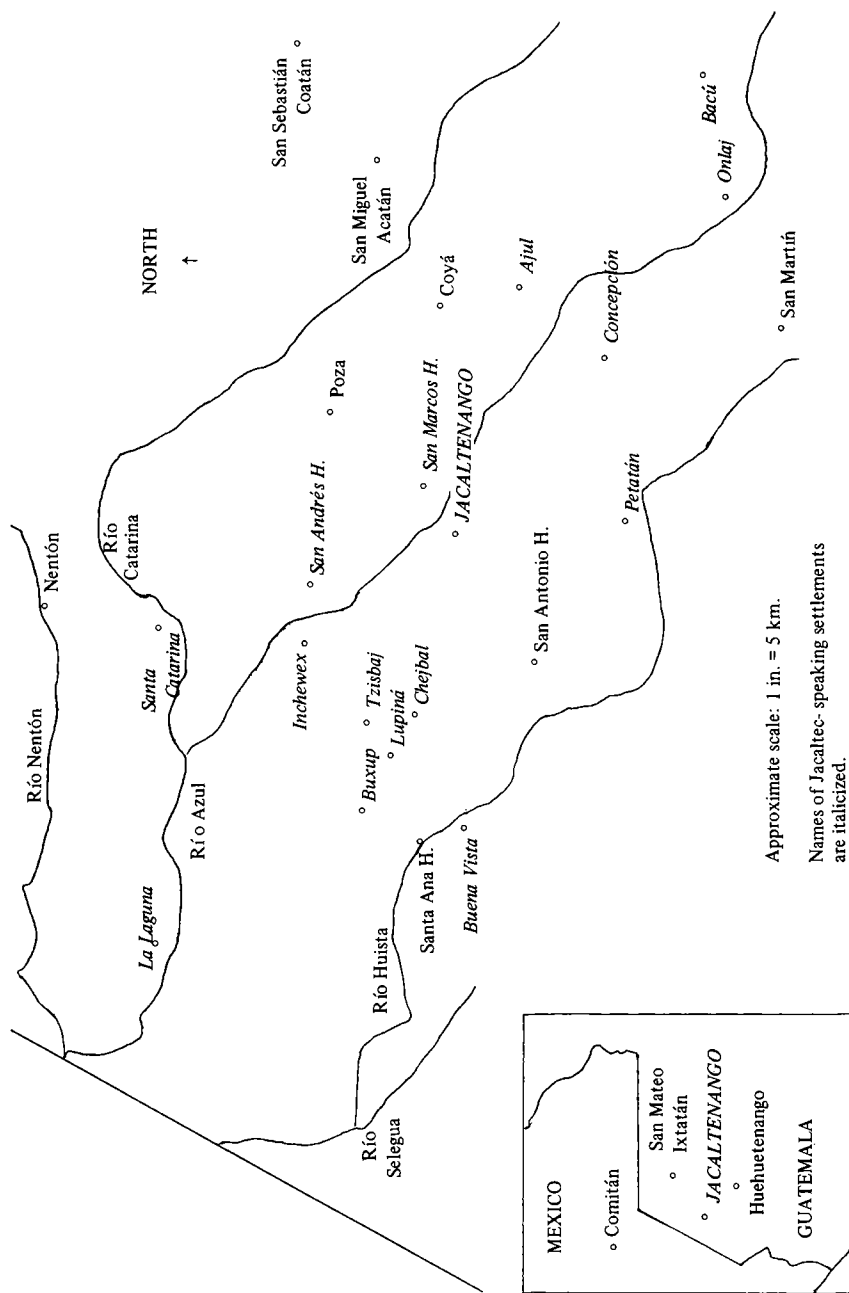


Fig. 1 The Jacaltecspeaking area

speaking dwellers in the aldeas of Jacaltenango have close family ties in the town and return to it now and then for Sunday markets, major town fiestas, and family fiestas of close town relatives. The principal aldeas of Jacaltenango are Buxup (B'uxub'), Chejbal (Chehb'al), La Laguna (Alagúna), Lupiná (Lupina'), Tzibaj (Tzib'aj), and Inchewex (Yiñ Ch'ewex).

Population figures from the 1964 national census for Jacaltenango and Concepción, the two predominately Jacalteco municipios, are:<sup>2</sup> habitually speak an indigenous language at home, 9,570 and 5,488; indigenous, 10,865 and 6,067; nonindigenous, 1,482 and 846; totals, 12,347 and 6,913. According to Jacaltecos, probably between 500 and 1,000 Jacalteco speakers live in other Guatemalan municipios, principally in Buena Vista, municipio of Santa Ana Huista. Probably fewer than 1,000 live in the Mexican settlements.

### *Neighboring Languages*

The Jacalteco area is bordered on the south by Mam (dialects of Todos Santos Cuchumatán and San Martín), and on the east and northeast by Kanjobal (dialects of San Juan Ixcay and San Miguel Acatán). The northern and western parts of the area are bordered by Spanish-speaking Ladino towns, coffee plantations, and ranches. The Jacalteco area includes many small settlements of Todos Santos Mam and San Miguel Kanjobal speakers, who rent or sharecrop Jacalteco land. The area is separated from Chuj, a fairly closely related language, only by a narrow band of Spanish- and Kanjobal-speaking settlements to the north and northeast.

Jacalteco is closely related to its eastern neighbor, Kanjobal. It is mutually intelligible with at least the San Miguel Acatán dialect. Other works can be consulted for the position of Jacalteco within the Mayan family as a whole. Jacalteco and Kanjobal, as a group, have recently been classified by different writers as most closely related to Chuj and to Motocintlec.<sup>3</sup>

2. Information obtained from the Dirección General de Estadística, Guatemala City.

3. Norman A. McQuown reviews older classifications and proposes his own in "The Classification of the Mayan Languages," *International Journal of American Linguistics*

*Data Sources*

The data for this grammar were obtained in Jacaltenango from October 1964 to September 1965 and from February to August 1968.<sup>4</sup> My collaborator-informant was Sr. Antonio Feliciano Méndez, a young Jacaltec man. He is fluent in Jacaltec and Spanish, and literate in both. Data from other informants were used occasionally for checking.

The corpus from which the grammar was written consists of (1) nine stories and ethnographic texts of various lengths, tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated by the informant; (2) a long recorded conversation between the informant and a friend, also transcribed and translated by the informant; (3) a slip-file Jacaltec-Spanish lexicon of some eight thousand items prepared by the informant; and (4) a slip-file of several thousand words, phrases, and sentences, mostly elicited, but many suggested by the informant. Many items from this corpus appear as examples here, and one of the recorded stories is given in Appendix 1.

Chapters 1 and 2 ("Phonology" and "Morphology" respectively) were written entirely using material analyzed to some extent in the field with the informant at hand. In Chapter 3 ("Syntax"), the following sections are based on material analyzed in the field with the informant: 3.1-3.2.1, 3.2.3, 3.3-3.5, 3.7, and 3.9. The remaining

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12:3:191-95 (1960). Two glottochronological treatments are: Morris Swadesh, "Interrelaciones de las lenguas mayenses," *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* 13:231-67 (1960); and Marvin K. Mayers, "Linguistic Comparisons," *Languages of Guatemala*, Marvin K. Mayers (ed.) (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966), pp. 272-302. See also Norman A. McQuown, "Los orígenes y la diferenciación de los mayas según se infiere del estudio comparativo de las lenguas mayanas," and Terrence S. Kaufman, "Materiales lingüísticos para el estudio de las relaciones internas y externas de la familia de idiomas mayanos," (both in) Evon V. Vogt and Alberto Ruz L. (eds.), *Desarrollo cultural de los mayas* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Seminario de Cultura Maya, 1964), pp.49-80, 81-136; Terrence Kaufman, "Some Recent Hypotheses on Mayan Diversification," ("Language-Behavior Research Laboratory," Working Paper No. 26a; Berkeley, 1969); and Terrence Kaufman, "Teco—A New Mayan Language," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 35:2:154-74 (1969).

4. The first field trip was supported in part by the American Council of Learned Societies. The second was supported by National Science Foundation Grant number GS-1941.

sections are based on material gleaned from the transcribed tape recordings after leaving the field, checked and amplified by the informant via correspondence.

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Shaw, Mary ed. *According to Our Ancestors: Folk Texts from Guatemala and Honduras*. Norman, Oklahoma: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1972.

Shaw, Mary, ed. *Según Nuestros Antepasados: Textos Folklóricos de Guatemala y Honduras*. Guatemala City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano en Centro America, 1972.