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# Five Oxlajuuj Keej Mayab' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA) Grammars

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### Notes/Citation Information

The following are reviewed:

Rukorb'aal Poqom Q'orb'al: Gramática Poqom (Poqomam). By Pala's José Francisco Santos Nicolás and Waykan José Gonzalo Benito Pérez. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1998. Pp. 480 (paper). Rukeemiik ja Tz'utujiil Chii': Gramática Tz'utujiil. By Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 481 (paper). Rukemik ri Kaqchikel Chi': Gramática Kaqchikel. By Lolmay Pedro García Matzar and Pakal B'alam José Obispo Rodríguez Guaján. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 485 (paper). Ttxoolil Qyool Mam: Gramática Mam. By B'aayil Eduardo Pérez and Ajb'ee Odilio Jiménez. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 414 + appendixes (paper). Gramática K'ichee'. By Saqijix Candelaria Dominga López Ixcoy. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 458 (paper).



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Rukorb'aal Poqom Q'orb'al: Gramática Poqom (Poqomam) by Pala's José Francisco Santos Nicolás; Waykan José Gonzalo Benito Pérez; Rukeemiik ja Tz'utuujil Chii': Gramática Tz'utuujil by Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá; Rukemik ri Kaqchikel Chi': Gramática Kaqchikel by Lolmay Pedro García Matzar; Pakal B'alam José Obispo Rodríguez Guaján; Ttxoolil Qyool Mam: Gramática Mam by B'aayil Eduardo Pérez; Ajb'ee Odilio Jimén ...

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## REVIEWS

- RUKORB'AAL POQOM Q'ORB'AL: GRAMÁTICA POQOM (POQOMAM). By Pala's José Francisco Santos Nicolás and Waykan José Gonzalo Benito Pérez. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1998. Pp. 480 (paper).
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- TTXOOLIL QYOOL MAM: GRAMÁTICA MAM. By B'aayil Eduardo Pérez and Ajb'ee Odilio Jiménez. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 414 + appendixes (paper).
- GRAMÁTICA K'ICHEE'. By Saqijix Candelaria Dominga López Ixcoy. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 1997. Pp. 458 (paper).

Oxlajuuj Keej Mayab' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA) is a research organization of native-speaker Maya linguists in Guatemala. Since its founding in 1990, the linguists of OKMA have conducted a wide range of research under the direction of Nora England. In terms of linguistic description, these OKMA grammars are the most detailed and extensive descriptions ever written for these languages. All of the languages belong to the Eastern branch of Maya and all except for Mam (which is Mamean) are in the K'ichean family.

The five grammars are all organized in the same way and cover the same aspects of grammar. In many cases, the text of different grammars is identical when describing similar structures in the different languages. Because of this, determining similarities and differences across the languages is quite straightforward, making the set of grammars particularly useful for the comparative study of Eastern Maya or K'ichean. The grammars all contain detailed chapters on phonology, morphology, and syntax, with appendixes containing sample texts. Given that the grammars are written as part of a program of language revitalization and standardization, these grammars are also important in understanding the social implications of descriptive grammar. In addition to providing comprehensive descriptions, the OKMA grammars challenge many assumptions concerning the enterprise of grammatical description.

The grammars open by noting that the structures depicted in descriptive grammars reflect the motives of their authors. The Euro-American tradition typically views language description as an objective, scientific project, treating the structure of a particular language as an inherently coherent and naturally bounded system. Some Maya have criticized this understanding of descriptive linguistics, arguing that language

description is inherently subjective and that all descriptive grammars reflect their authors' ideologies (Cojtí Cuxil 1990; 1991 and England 1996; 2003). Indeed, descriptive grammars can be read in many ways. In addition to description, grammars reflect particular ideologies that are rarely discussed openly. These ideologies are typically ignored as irrelevant to the pursuit of objective linguistic science. The OKMA grammars challenge the assumption that ideology is irrelevant to good linguistic description, arguing instead that ideology is an inherent part of every descriptive grammar.

Western linguists typically assume that descriptive linguistics and ethnography are entirely separate enterprises, with descriptive grammars providing objective, socially neutral information about language structure independent of and distinct from cultural depictions of the language's speakers. Cojtí Cuxil (1990; 1991) has argued that this assumption is false and that all descriptive grammars convey representations of the speakers themselves. Because a descriptive grammar is often the only information available for a particular community, the cultural representation reflected in the grammar is a major concern. The cultural representations within grammars are often unintentional but pervasive, emerging in the indexical meanings of linguistic examples. For example, the choice to demonstrate syntactic patterns with transitive verbs such as *kill* and *hit* instead of *help* or *hug* reinscribes racist stereotypes of speakers of indigenous languages (Cojtí Cuxil 1990 and England 1992).

In addition to producing depictions of the speakers of a given language, grammars typically reflect a particular view of language generally. For example, colonial descriptions often analyzed Native American languages in terms of their similarity to Latin. More contemporary grammars often assume universal syntactic theories that may lead to the analysis of Native American languages in terms of their similarity to English (cf. Van Valin 1987). Theories of language may also reflect cultural assumptions about the speakers of the language described. Grammars that emulate English or Latin reinscribe notions of European superiority. The fragmented and arbitrary character of many colonial grammars reflects the Spanish view that Mayan languages lacked coherent structure and that the Maya had trouble speaking their own languages (Sam Colop 1991). Cojtí Cuxil (1990) views the tendency to write distinct grammars for dialects of a single language (especially prevalent in work by the Summer Institute of Linguistics) as an obstacle to pan-Maya unity. A particular ideology of "language" (that dialects should be treated as distinct linguistic systems) may have serious social implications.

The OKMA grammars reject the view of linguistic description as a neutral endeavor. In taking a nonneutral stance in both describing and analyzing language structures, the members of OKMA raise questions about our understanding of many fundamental theoretical assumptions in linguistics. These grammars question prevailing views of basic distinctions such as language/dialect, diachronic/synchronic, written/spoken, and prescriptive/descriptive. The work of OKMA demonstrates that such distinctions are never socially and politically neutral.

As part of the Maya cultural revitalization movement, the OKMA grammars present a distinct view of Mayan grammar and Maya culture as distinct from and independent of Spanish influence. For example, although the majority of Maya use

Spanish names, the OKMA grammars use Mayan names (such as *Pakal* or *Kawooq*) in example sentences. Although the grammars include sections on borrowings from other languages (including borrowings from Mixe Zoque and Spanish), Spanish loanwords are almost never used in example sentences (although they occur in the appended texts from natural language data). Because the languages are undergoing standardization, the authors move freely between prescriptive and descriptive grammar. For example, in an effort to ensure that written norms present the fullest form of language structure in order to be easily understood by all speakers, several of the grammars present contracted forms that do not occur across all dialects as “incorrect” forms for written language. The Spanish spellings for place-names are also presented as incorrect for written Maya (e.g., B’aayil and Ajb’ee, p. 22).

In order to construct and promote a standard variety that will be acceptable to the majority of speakers, it is crucial to have an extensive and exact description of the range of grammatical forms available in the language. Typically, ideologies limit the range of description, resulting in grammars that are far from complete. In contrast, the ideology behind the OKMA grammars actually EXPANDS the range of grammatical description. For example, the question of word order in Eastern Mayan has become an important social and political question (cf. England 2003 and Maxwell 1996).

All of the languages described here have verb-initial basic orders. However, many speakers (particularly in Kaqchikel and Mam) have begun using SVO as the most frequent word order. The OKMA linguists view this change as the result of convergence toward Spanish and have been highly critical of other linguists for presenting descriptions in which SVO is given as the only possible word order. In an earlier grammar of Kaqchikel, for example, Pakal B’alam (1994) openly criticized the governmental bilingual education agency (Pronebi) for producing a grammar of Kaqchikel in which every sentence had SVO order. In their discussion of contact between Spanish and Mam, B’aayil and Ajb’ee compare “correct” (VSO) and “incorrect” (SVO) word orders. Elsewhere they describe the grammatical contexts in which SVO is acceptable (B’aayil and Ajb’ee, pp. 312ff.), producing a view of Mam grammar that minimizes Spanish influence. For the K’ichean languages, example sentences from the *Annals of the Kaqchikel* and the *Titulo de Yaax* (K’iche’) are used to demonstrate the full range of possible word orders in K’ichean languages. In his grammar of Tz’utujiil, Ajpub’ uses examples from sixteenth-century Kaqchikel translated into Tz’utujiil to demonstrate OVS and SOV word orders (pp. 363–67). The use of 400-year-old examples from a related language might seem odd to some, but given OKMA’s strategy of determining the broadest and most complete description of grammatical possibilities, the use of diachronic examples increases the range of possible orders and produces a distinct contrast to grammars that present a single possibility (particularly SVO) as the only order found in K’ichean.

The phonology chapters all contain phonemic inventories, phonetic descriptions of all allophones (and their phonological contexts), a description of stress patterns, an inventory of possible syllable types, descriptions of segmental phonological alternations, and a discussion of the use of additional phonemes in Spanish loanwords. All of the languages contain a contrasting series of glottalized and nonglottalized voiceless stops, glottal and nonglottal (alveolar and alveopalatal) affricates, a series of

voiceless (alveolar, alveopalatal, and uvular) fricatives, and the same set of sonorants (*m, n, l, r, w, and y*). Mam contains additional phonemes not found in the K'ichean languages, including phonemic palatal stops (*ky* and *ky'*), glottal and nonglottal retroflex voiceless affricates, and a retroflex voiceless fricative. All of the languages have ten vowels with five places of articulation (*i, e, a, o, u*) contrasting in terms of length or (in the case of Kaqchikel) tense/lax distinctions. Although the phonology sections are presented using the IPA, other transcriptions are presented in the Unified Mayan Alphabet (UMA). The phonemic representations in the UMA transcriptions are designed to highlight similarities between related languages. For example, Poqom has a glottalized sonorant [*w' ~ m'*] that corresponds to a bilabial implosive in other K'ichean languages. The UMA transcription uses <b'> to represent this phoneme so that K'ichean cognates will be spelled identically across languages.

The discussion of syllable structure is more detailed than in previous grammars, distinguishing between syllable types found in morphemic roots and those in fully inflected words. In Mam, for example, morphemes may have only two initial onset consonants, while fully inflected words may have word-initial sequences of up to four consonants. The segmental phonology includes many patterns that are omitted in previous works, including alternations involving vowel length and glottal stops. For example, few grammars of Mayan languages discuss the distinction between word-initial glottalized consonants and nonejective consonants followed by a glottal stop. In order to capture such distinctions, the transcriptions use hyphens to distinguish between C' and C<sup>2</sup> and (for Mam) between the affricate [tʃ] (UMA <tx>) and sequences of [t] followed by [ʃ] (UMA <t-x>). Rules for written forms of the languages are presented in a separate section of the phonology chapters. This makes it possible to examine the choices the authors have made for standard written varieties without producing confusion between norms for writing and the phonological descriptions themselves.

The morphology chapters begin with brief discussions of root classes, followed by more detailed discussion of fully inflected words in each class. In addition to covering nouns, adjectives, positional roots, verbs, adverbs, numbers, and particles, these grammars include discussions of root classes often neglected by Mayanists working on these languages, such as affective roots, terms of measure, and classifiers. The discussion of classifiers in Mam includes dialectal variation (not all Mam dialects use the same set of classifiers). Because K'ichean languages only use personal classifiers, many previous descriptions have ignored them completely. The grammars lay out the tense/aspect and inflectional system for verbs in a clear and straightforward manner with examples of each form. In particular, the discussions of tense/aspect are more detailed than in most previous grammars, providing careful descriptions of the use of each tense/aspect marker based on native-speaker intuition.

The morphology sections include lists of derivational morphemes and descriptions of morphophonological alternations. The authors lists possible syllable types for each class of morpheme with numerous examples, providing even more new information on Mayan phonology. Noun classes are described both in terms of possessed forms and in terms of composition (including the various types of compound nouns that occur in each language). The discussions of nouns also include Mayan proper names

and toponyms (in both Mayan and Spanish forms). The discussion of pronouns is the most thorough to date, including information on contexts in which independent pronouns are used, such as the use of pronouns for emphasis, with nonverbal predicates, and with relational nouns. The presentation of verbal morphology is quite extensive and includes a number of full paradigms. All of the languages have ergative/absolutive agreement markers in the verb complex, markers for tense/aspect, and modal agreement suffixes.

The discussions of adverbs, measure words, particles, and positional roots all contain much more information than has previously been available. For example, the discussion of adverbs provides separate discussion of a variety of root classes such as adverbs marking place, manner, affirmation, negation, quantity, intensifiers, and doubt. Particles are also broken into classes, including those with syntactic functions, those that introduce toponyms, several classes of subordinators, demonstratives and determiners, locative markers, diminutives, directional and epistemic clitics, and so on. The discussions of relational nouns and prepositions are presented together, based on their similar forms and usage. The authors include “correct” and “incorrect” forms for writing prepositions and relational nouns, arguing for writing the full form of CV prepositions for dialects where the vowel deletes in certain contexts. The morphology sections end with detailed discussions of verbal derivation and the various forms of numbers and measure words.

The syntax chapters are the most detailed sections of these grammars and are all broken into three parts, covering syntactic phrases, simple sentence structure, and complex sentence structure. The syntactic phrases cover noun phrases, verb phrases, and statives in great detail, with shorter discussions of adverb, adjective, and prepositional phrases. The discussions of noun phrases include discussions of determiners, possession, relative clauses, measure words, pronouns, and negation. The discussion of sentence structure includes lengthy discussion of word order and voice. Given the political implications associated with SVO order, the authors are very careful to describe other possible orders and their exact syntactic functions. They provide detailed information on the contexts for a particular order, including relevant pragmatic information and orders that are specific to particular verbal genres or historical documents. Although the inclusion of colonial evidence is tied to the goal of demonstrating that Mayan languages exploit a wide range of word orders, the authors are very careful in describing the exact contexts for each order. For example, examples from the *Annals of the Kaqchikel* are used to demonstrate SOV and VSO (Lolmay and Pakal B’alam, pp. 337–41), but the authors are quite clear about the (rare) use of these orders in contemporary Kaqchikel.

The sections on word order are followed by presentations of the evidence for ergativity in these languages and discussion of voice marking. All of the languages have multiple forms for passive voice and three forms classified as antipassives. The traditional distinction used by Mayanists between “focus antipassive” and “absolutive antipassives” is adopted and an additional category (“incorporation antipassive”) is included. The authors are all very explicit in their descriptions of each voice, including information on syntactic and discourse functions, changes in valency, and so on. Regardless of whether or not one accepts the label “antipassive” for all of these



voices, the authors present enough detail for syntacticians to categorize them according to any theoretical framework. In addition to these voices, the grammars of Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, and K'iche' include descriptions of the instrumental voice, and K'iche' (Saqijix, p. 375) also includes a referential voice that has the same form as the instrumental (*-b'ee*) but is used to promote some indirect objects (such as with verbs of speaking).

The discussion of syntax also includes details on topicalization, focus, emphatic constructions, negation, *wh*-questions, and *yes/no* questions. The discussion of complex sentences is one of the best (and most detailed) sections of the grammar, including extensive discussions of relative, complement, adjunct, and adverbial clauses. The data for relative clauses, for example, are presented in sets containing the corresponding independent clauses followed by the complex sentences formed by combining them. The descriptions include discussions of the interaction between various types of complex sentences and aspects of verbal morphology and detailed information concerning when and how particular complementizers are used and when subordinate clauses do not require complementizers. The syntax chapters close with discussions of coordination and conditional sentences, including both hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals.

All of the grammars contain one substantial example text with morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and free translations. The type of text included varies across the grammars, including a marriage ceremony (Mam), personal narratives (K'iche', Tz'utujil, Kaqchikel), and a conversation (Poqom). The texts are all taken from natural language data and occasionally include Spanish forms that are avoided elsewhere in the grammars. The grammars also include a bibliography of sources cited in the text (though not a general bibliography of research on a particular language).

The OKMA grammars move freely across the written/spoken, diachronic/synchronic, dialect/language, and prescriptive/descriptive boundaries that are central to Euro-American language ideology. The authors are quite explicit in outlining details of usage, however, so that the social and political goals of the grammar do not detract from the exceptionally high quality of the grammatical descriptions. It has become rather common to hear of traditionalists grumbling about the ideology of the Mayan language revitalization movement and its effect on Mayan linguistics. The idea that native-speaker Maya linguists must conform to colonial language ideologies only produces an additional obstacle that marginalized indigenous linguists must confront. The unique language ideology inherent in the OKMA grammars is certainly not naïve but is deeply rooted in careful and critical analysis of the large body of previous research by both Maya and non-Maya linguists. Through their linguistic research, the members of OKMA have produced rich grammatical descriptions that provide much more detail and nuance than the vast majority of research by non-Maya.

The OKMA linguists have succeeded in producing grammatical descriptions that not only provide a wealth of new insight into Mayan grammar but also force non-Maya to reconsider the important role of language ideology in their own research. The publication of these grammars is an important turning point in Mayan linguistics. The members of OKMA have demonstrated that the Maya are no longer simply providing

us with information on their languages but are teaching us to think critically about the very nature of linguistics as a field of academic endeavor.

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MODERN MOHEGAN: THE DIALECT OF JITS BODUNAXA. By Julian Granberry. *Languages of the World/Materials*, no. 430. Munich: Lincom, 2003. Pp. 68 (paper).

A LEXICON OF MODERN MOHEGAN: THE DIALECT OF JITS BODUNAXA. By Julian Granberry. *Languages of the World/Dictionaries*, no. 29. Munich: Lincom, 2003. Pp. 90 (paper).

Mohegan is a language of the Southern New England group of Algonquian, originally spoken in southeastern Connecticut. It is a dialect of the same language as Pequot, spoken to the immediate east of Mohegan, and Montauk, spoken on the east end of Long Island. Taken together, this language is often called Mohegan-Pequot.

Mohegan-Pequot has not been spoken natively for almost a hundred years. The last native speaker was the Mohegan elder Fidelia Fielding, who died in 1908.<sup>1</sup> Speck and

<sup>1</sup> Fielding's Mohegan name was, in her own spelling, *Jeets Boddernashah* or 'flying bird'. *Jits Bodunaxa* is Granberry's spelling of this name.