

= Mayan languages =

The Mayan languages form a language family spoken in Mesoamerica and northern Central America . Mayan languages are spoken by at least 6 million Maya peoples , primarily in Guatemala , Mexico , Belize and Honduras . In 1996 , Guatemala formally recognized 21 Mayan languages by name , and Mexico recognizes eight more within their territory .

The Mayan language family is one of the best @-@ documented and most studied in the Americas . Modern Mayan languages descend from the Proto @-@ Mayan language , thought to have been spoken at least 5 @, @ 000 years ago ; it has been partially reconstructed using the comparative method . The proto @-@ Mayan language diversified into at least 6 different branches , the Huastecan , Quichean , Yucatecan , Qanjobalan , Mamean and Ch 'olan @-@ Tzeltalan branches .

Mayan languages form part of the Mesoamerican language area , an area of linguistic convergence developed throughout millennia of interaction between the peoples of Mesoamerica . All Mayan languages display the basic diagnostic traits of this linguistic area . For example , all use relational nouns instead of prepositions to indicate spatial relationships . They also possess grammatical and typological features that set them apart from other languages of Mesoamerica , such as the use of ergativity in the grammatical treatment of verbs and their subjects and objects , specific inflectional categories on verbs , and a special word class of " positionals " which is typical of all Mayan languages .

During the pre @-@ Columbian era of Mesoamerican history , some Mayan languages were written in the logo @-@ syllabic Maya script . Its use was particularly widespread during the Classic period of Maya civilization (c . 250 ? 900) . The surviving corpus of over 10 @, @ 000 known individual Maya inscriptions on buildings , monuments , pottery and bark @-@ paper codices , combined with the rich postcolonial literature in Mayan languages written in the Latin script , provides a basis for the modern understanding of pre @-@ Columbian history unparalleled in the Americas .

= = History = =

= = = Proto @-@ Mayan = = =

Mayan languages are the descendants of a proto @-@ language called Proto @-@ Mayan or , in K 'iche ' Maya , Nab 'ee Maya ' Tzij (" the old Maya Language ") . The Proto @-@ Mayan language is believed to have been spoken in the Cuchumatanes highlands of central Guatemala in an area corresponding roughly to where Q 'anjobalan is spoken today . The earliest proposal was that of Sapper (1912) which identified the Chiapas @-@ Guatemalan highlands as the likely " cradle " of Mayan languages was published by the German antiquarian and scholar Karl Sapper . Terrence Kaufman and John Justeson have reconstructed more than 3000 lexical items for the proto @-@ Mayan language .

According to the prevailing classification scheme by Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman , the first division occurred around 2200 BCE , when Huastecan split away from Mayan proper after its speakers moved northwest along the Gulf Coast of Mexico . Proto @-@ Yucatecan and Proto @-@ Ch 'olan speakers subsequently split off from the main group and moved north into the Yucatán Peninsula . Speakers of the western branch moved south into the areas now inhabited by Mamean and Quichean people . When speakers of proto @-@ Tzeltalan later separated from the Ch 'olan group and moved south into the Chiapas highlands , they came into contact with speakers of Mixe ? Zoque languages . According to an alternative theory by Robertson and Houston , Huastecan stayed in the Guatemalan highlands with speakers of Ch 'olan @-@ Tzeltalan , separating from that branch at a much later date than proposed by Kaufman .

In the Archaic period (before 2000 BCE) , a number of loanwords from Mixe ? Zoquean languages seem to have entered the proto @-@ Mayan language . This has led to hypotheses that the early Maya were dominated by speakers of Mixe ? Zoquean languages , possibly the Olmec . In the case of the Xincan and Lencan languages , on the other hand , Mayan languages are more often the

source than the receiver of loanwords . Mayan language specialists such as Campbell believe this suggests a period of intense contact between Maya and the Lenca and Xinka people , possibly during the Classic period (250 ? 900) .

= = = Classic Period = = =

During the Classic period the major branches began diversifying into separate languages . The split between Proto @-@ Yucatecan (in the north , that is , the Yucatán Peninsula) and Proto @-@ Ch'olan (in the south , that is , the Chiapas highlands and Petén Basin) had already occurred by the Classic period , when most extant Maya inscriptions were written . Both variants are attested in hieroglyphic inscriptions at the Maya sites of the time , and both are commonly referred to as " Classic Maya language " . Although a single prestige language was by far the most frequently recorded on extant hieroglyphic texts , evidence for at least five different varieties of Mayan have been discovered within the hieroglyphic corpus : an Eastern Ch'olan variety found in texts written in the southern Maya area and the highlands , a Western Ch'olan variety diffused from the Usumacinta region from the mid @-@ 7th century on , a Yucatecan variety found in the texts from the Yucatán Peninsula , a Tzeltalan variety found in the Western Lowlands (i.e. Toniná , Pomona) , and possibly a highland Maya language belonging to K'ichean major within texts painted on Nebaj ceramics . The reason why only few linguistic varieties are found in the glyphic texts is probably that these served as prestige dialects throughout the Maya region ; hieroglyphic texts would have been composed in the language of the elite .

Stephen Houston , John Robertson and David Stuart have suggested that the specific variety of Ch'olan found in the majority of Southern Lowland glyphic texts was a language they dub " Classic Ch'olti'an " , the ancestor language of the modern Ch'orti ' and Ch'olti ' languages . They propose that it originated in western and south @-@ central Petén Basin , and that it was used in the inscriptions and perhaps also spoken by elites and priests . However , Mora @-@ Marín has argued that traits shared by Classic Lowland Maya and the Ch'olti'an languages are retentions rather than innovations , and that the diversification of Ch'olan in fact post @-@ dates the classic period . The language of the classical lowland inscriptions then would have been proto @-@ Ch'olan .

= = = Colonial period = = =

During the Spanish colonization of Central America , all indigenous languages were eclipsed by Spanish , which became the new prestige language . The use of Mayan languages in many important domains of society , including administration , religion and literature , came to an end . Yet the Maya area was more resistant to outside influence than others , and perhaps for this reason , many Maya communities still retain a high proportion of monolingual speakers . The Maya area is now dominated by the Spanish language . While a number of Mayan languages are moribund or are considered endangered , others remain quite viable , with speakers across all age groups and native language use in all domains of society .

= = = Modern period = = =

As Maya archaeology advanced during the 20th century and nationalist and ethnic @-@ pride @-@ based ideologies spread , the Mayan @-@ speaking peoples began to develop a shared ethnic identity as Maya , the heirs of the Maya civilization .

The word " Maya " was likely derived from the postclassical Yucatán city of Mayapan ; its more restricted meaning in pre @-@ colonial and colonial times points to an origin in a particular region of the Yucatán Peninsula . The broader meaning of " Maya " now current , while defined by linguistic relationships , is also used to refer to ethnic or cultural traits . Most Mayans identify first and foremost with a particular ethnic group , e.g. as " Yucatec " or " K'iche ' " ; but they also recognize a shared Maya kinship . Language has been fundamental in defining the boundaries of that kinship . Fabri writes : " The term Maya is problematic because Maya peoples do not constitute a

homogenous identity . Maya , rather , has become a strategy of self @-@ representation for the Maya movements and its followers . The Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) finds twenty @-@ one distinct Mayan languages . " This pride in unity has led to an insistence on the distinctions of different Mayan languages , some of which are so closely related that they could easily be referred to as dialects of a single language . But , given that the term " dialect " has been used by some with racist overtones in the past , as scholars made a spurious distinction between Amerindian " dialects " and European " languages " , the preferred usage in Mesoamerica in recent years has been to designate the linguistic varieties spoken by different ethnic group as separate languages .

In Guatemala , matters such as developing standardized orthographies for the Mayan languages are governed by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG ; Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages) , which was founded by Maya organisations in 1986 . Following the 1996 peace accords , it has been gaining a growing recognition as the regulatory authority on Mayan languages both among Mayan scholars and the Maya peoples .

= = Genealogy and classification = =

= = Relations with other families = =

The Mayan language family has no demonstrated genetic relationship to other language families . Similarities with some languages of Mesoamerica are understood to be due to diffusion of linguistic traits from neighboring languages into Mayan and not to common ancestry . Mesoamerica has been proven to be an area of substantial linguistic diffusion .

A wide range of proposals have tried to link the Mayan family to other language families or isolates , but none is generally supported by linguists . Examples include linking Mayan with the Uru ? Chipaya languages , Mapuche , the Lencan languages , Purépecha and Huave . Mayan has also been included in various Hokan and Penutian hypotheses . The linguist Joseph Greenberg included Mayan in his highly controversial Amerind hypothesis , which is rejected by most historical linguists as unsupported by available evidence .

Writing in 1997 Lyle Campbell , an expert in Mayan languages and historical linguistics , argued that the most promising proposal is the " Macro @-@ Mayan " hypothesis , which posits links between Mayan , the Mixe ? Zoque languages and the Totonacan languages , but more research is needed to support or disprove this hypothesis . In 2015 , Campbell noted that recent , yet unpublished , evidence uncovered by David Mora @-@ Marin strengthened the case for a relationship between Mayan and Mixe @-@ Zoquean languages , although he did not yet consider it conclusive .

= = Subdivisions = =

The Mayan family consists of thirty languages . Typically , these languages are grouped into 5 @-@ 6 major subgroups (Yucatean , Huastecan , Ch 'olan @-@ Tzeltalan , Q 'anjob 'alan , Mamean , and K 'ichean) . The Mayan language family is extremely well documented , and its internal genealogical classification scheme is widely accepted and established , except for some minor unresolved differences .

One point still at issue is the position of Ch 'olan and Q 'anjobalan ? Chujean . Some scholars think these form a separate Western branch (as in the diagram below) . Other linguists do not support the positing of an especially close relationship between Ch 'olan and Q 'anjobalan ? Chujean ; consequently they classify these as two distinct branches emanating directly from the proto @-@ language . An alternative proposed classification groups the Huastecan branch as springing from the Ch 'olan @-@ Tzeltalan node , rather than as an outlying branch springing directly from the proto @-@ Mayan node .

= = Distribution = =

Studies estimate that Mayan languages are spoken by more than 6 million people . Most of them the speakers live in Guatemala where depending on estimates 40 % -60 % of the population speaks a Mayan language . In Mexico the Mayan speaking population was estimated at 2 @, @ 5 million people in 2010 , whereas the Belizean speaker population figures around 30 @, @ 000 .

= = = Western branch = = =

The Ch 'olan languages were formerly widespread throughout the Maya area , but today the language with most speakers is Ch 'ol , spoken by 130 @, @ 000 in Chiapas . Its closest relative , the Chontal Maya language , is spoken by 55 @, @ 000 in the state of Tabasco . Another related language , now endangered , is Ch 'orti ' , which is spoken by 30 @, @ 000 in Guatemala . It was previously also spoken in extreme west of Honduras and El Salvador , but the Salvadorian variant is now extinct and the Honduran one is considered moribund . Ch 'olti ' , a sister language of Ch 'orti ' , is also extinct . Ch 'olan languages are believed to be the most conservative in vocabulary and phonology , and are closely related to the language of the Classic @-@ era inscriptions found in the Central Lowlands . They may have served as prestige languages , coexisting with other dialects in some areas . This assumption provides a plausible explanation for the geographical distance between the Ch 'orti ' zone and the areas where Ch 'ol and Chontal are spoken .

The closest relatives of the Ch 'olan languages are the languages of the Tzeltalan branch , Tzotzil and Tzeltal , both spoken in Chiapas by large and stable or growing populations (265 @, @ 000 for Tzotzil and 215 @, @ 000 for Tzeltal) . Tzeltal has tens of thousands of monolingual speakers .

Q 'anjob 'al is spoken by 77 @, @ 700 in Guatemala 's Huehuetenango department , with small populations elsewhere . The region of Q 'anjobalan speakers in Guatemala , due to genocidal policies during the Civil War and its close proximity to the Mexican border , was the source of a number of refugees . Thus there are now small Q 'anjob 'al , Jakaltek , and Awakatek populations in various locations in Mexico , the United States (such as Tuscarawas County , Ohio and Los Angeles , California) , and , through postwar resettlement , other parts of Guatemala . Jakaltek (also known as Popti ') is spoken by almost 100 @, @ 000 in several municipalities of Huehuetenango . Another member of this branch is Akatek , with over 50 @, @ 000 speakers in San Miguel Acatán and San Rafael La Independencia .

Chuj is spoken by 40 @, @ 000 people in Huehuetenango , and by 9 @, @ 500 people , primarily refugees , over the border in Mexico , in the municipality of La Trinitaria , Chiapas , and the villages of Tziscu and Cuauhtémoc . Tojolab 'al is spoken in eastern Chiapas by 36 @, @ 000 people .

= = = Eastern branch = = =

The Quichean ? Mamean languages and dialects , with two sub @-@ branches and three subfamilies , are spoken in the Guatemalan highlands .

Q 'eqchi ' (sometimes spelled Kekchi) , which constitutes its own sub @-@ branch within Quichean ? Mamean , is spoken by about 400 @, @ 000 people in the southern Petén , Izabal and Alta Verapaz departments of Guatemala , and also in Belize by 9 @, @ 000 speakers . In El Salvador it is spoken by 12 @, @ 000 as a result of recent migrations .

The Uspantek language , which also springs directly from the Quichean ? Mamean node , is native only to the Uspantán municipio in the department of El Quiché , and has 3 @, @ 000 speakers .

Within the Quichean sub @-@ branch K 'iche ' (Quiché) , the Mayan language with the largest number of speakers , is spoken by around 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 K 'iche ' Maya in the Guatemalan highlands , around the towns of Chichicastenango and Quetzaltenango and in the Cuchumatán mountains , as well as by urban emigrants in Guatemala City . The famous Maya mythological document , Popol Vuh , is written in an antiquated K 'iche ' often called Classical K 'iche ' (or Quiché) . The K 'iche ' culture was at its pinnacle at the time of the Spanish conquest . Q 'umarkaj , near the present @-@ day city of Santa Cruz del Quiché , was its economic and ceremonial center . Achi

is spoken by 85 @, @ 000 people in Cubulco and Rabinal , two municipios of Baja Verapaz . In some classifications , e.g. the one by Campbell , Achi is counted as a form of K 'iche ' . However , owing to a historical division between the two ethnic groups , the Achi Maya do not regard themselves as K 'iche ' . The Kaqchikel language is spoken by about 400 @, @ 000 people in an area stretching from Guatemala City westward to the northern shore of Lake Atitlán . Tz 'utujil has about 90 @, @ 000 speakers in the vicinity of Lake Atitlán . Other members of the K 'ichean branch are Sakapultek , spoken by about 15 @, @ 000 people mostly in El Quiché department , and Sipakapense , which is spoken by 8 @, @ 000 people in Sipacapa , San Marcos .

The largest language in the Mamean sub @-@ branch is Mam , spoken by 478 @, @ 000 people in the departments of San Marcos and Huehuetenango . Awakatek is the language of 20 @, @ 000 inhabitants of central Aguacatán , another municipality of Huehuetenango . Ixil (possibly three different languages) is spoken by 70 @, @ 000 in the " Ixil Triangle " region of the department of El Quiché . Tektitek (or Teko) is spoken by over 6 @, @ 000 people in the municipality of Tectitán , and 1 @, @ 000 refugees in Mexico . According to the Ethnologue the number of speakers of Tektitek is growing .

The Poqom languages are closely related to Core Quichean , with which they constitute a Poqom @-@ K 'ichean sub @-@ branch on the Quichean ? Mamean node . Poqomchi ' is spoken by 90 @, @ 000 people in Purulhá , Baja Verapaz , and in the following municipalities of Alta Verapaz : Santa Cruz Verapaz , San Cristóbal Verapaz , Tactic , Tamahú and Tukurú . Poqomam is spoken by around 49 @, @ 000 people in several small pockets in Guatemala .

= = = Yucatecan branch = = =

Yucatec Maya (known simply as " Maya " to its speakers) is the most commonly spoken Mayan language in Mexico . It is currently spoken by approximately 800 @, @ 000 people , the vast majority of whom are to be found on the Yucatán Peninsula . It remains common in Yucatán and in the adjacent states of Quintana Roo and Campeche .

The other three Yucatecan languages are Mopan , spoken by around 10 @, @ 000 speakers primarily in Belize ; Itza ' , an extinct or moribund language from Guatemala 's Petén Basin ; and Lacandón or Lakantum , also severely endangered with about 1 @, @ 000 speakers in a few villages on the outskirts of the Selva Lacandona , in Chiapas .

= = = Huastecan branch = = =

Wastek (also spelled Huastec and Huastec) is spoken in the Mexican states of Veracruz and San Luis Potosí by around 110 @, @ 000 people . It is the most divergent of modern Mayan languages . Chicomuceltec was a language related to Wastek and spoken in Chiapas that became extinct some time before 1982 .

= = Phonology = =

= = = Proto @-@ Mayan sound system = = =

Proto @-@ Mayan (the common ancestor of the Mayan languages as reconstructed using the comparative method) has a predominant CVC syllable structure , only allowing consonant clusters across syllable boundaries . Campbell & Kaufman (1985) Most Proto @-@ Mayan roots were monosyllabic except for a few disyllabic nominal roots . Due to subsequent vowel loss many Mayan languages now show complex consonant clusters at both ends of syllables . Following the reconstruction of Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman , the Proto @-@ Mayan language had the following sounds . It has been suggested that proto @-@ Mayan was a tonal language , based on the fact that four different contemporary Mayan languages have tone (Yucatec , Uspantek , San Bartolo Tzotzil and Mocho ') , but since these languages each can be shown to have innovated tone

in different ways , Campbell considers this unlikely .

=== Phonological evolution of Proto @-@ Mayan ===

The classification of Mayan languages is based on changes shared between groups of languages . For example , languages of the western group (such as Huastecan , Yucatecan and Ch 'olan) all changed the Proto @-@ Mayan phoneme * / r / into [j] , some languages of the eastern branch retained [r] (K 'ichean) , and others changed it into [tʔ] or , word @-@ finally , [t] (Mamean) . The shared innovations between Huastecan , Yucatecan and Ch 'olan show that they separated from the other Mayan languages before the changes found in other branches had taken place .

The palatalized plosives [tʔʔ] and [tʔ] are not found in any of the modern families . Instead they are reflected differently in different branches , allowing a reconstruction of these phonemes as palatalized plosives . In the eastern branch (Chujean @-@ Q 'anjobalan and Ch 'olan) they are reflected as [t] and [tʔ] . In Mamean they are reflected as [ts] and [tsʔ] and in Quichean as [tʔ] and [tʔʔ] . Yucatec stands out from other western languages in that its palatalized plosives are sometimes changed into [tʔ] and sometimes [t] .

The Proto @-@ Mayan velar nasal * [ʔ] is reflected as [x] in the eastern branches (Quichean ? Mamean) , [n] in Q 'anjobalan , Ch 'olan and Yucatecan , [h] in Huastecan , and only conserved as [ʔ] in Chuj and Jakalteek .

=== Diphthongs ===

Vowel quality is typically classified as having monophthongal vowels . In traditionally diphthongized contexts , Mayan languages will realize the V @-@ V sequence by inserting a hiatus @-@ breaking glottal stop or glide insertion between the vowels . Some K 'ichean @-@ branch languages have exhibited developed diphthongs from historical long vowels , by breaking / e : / and / o : / .

=== Grammar ===

The morphology of Mayan languages is simpler than that of other Mesoamerican languages , yet its morphology is still considered agglutinating and polysynthetic . Verbs are marked for aspect or tense , the person of the subject , the person of the object (in the case of transitive verbs) , and for plurality of person . Possessed nouns are marked for person of possessor . There are no cases or genders in Mayan languages .

=== Word order ===

Proto @-@ Mayan is thought to have had a basic verb ? object ? subject word order with possibilities of switching to VSO in certain circumstances , such as complex sentences , sentences where object and subject were of equal animacy and when the subject was definite . Today Yucatecan , Tzotzil and Tojolab 'al have a basic fixed VOS word order . Mamean , Q 'anjob 'al , Jakalteek and one dialect of Chuj have a fixed VSO one . Only Ch 'orti ' has a basic SVO word order . Other Mayan languages allow both VSO and VOS word orders .

=== Numeral classifiers ===

When counting it is , in many Mayan languages , necessary to use numeral classifiers which specify the class of items being counted ; the numeral cannot appear without an accompanying classifier . Some Mayan languages , such as Kaqchikel , do not use numeral classifiers . Class is usually assigned according to whether the object is animate or inanimate or according to an object 's general shape . Thus when counting " flat " objects , a different form of numeral classifier is used than when counting round things , oblong items or people . In some Mayan languages such as Chontal , classifiers take the form of affixes attached to the numeral ; in others such as Tzeltal , they

are free forms . Jakaltek has both numeral classifiers and noun classifiers , and the noun classifiers can also be used as pronouns .

The meaning denoted by a noun may be altered significantly by changing the accompanying classifier . In Chontal , for example , when the classifier -tek is used with names of plants it is understood that the objects being enumerated are whole trees . If in this expression a different classifier , -ts 'it (for counting long , slender objects) is substituted for -tek , this conveys the meaning that only sticks or branches of the tree are being counted :

= = = Possession = = =

The morphology of Mayan nouns is fairly simple : they inflect for number (plural or singular) , and , when possessed , for person and number of their possessor . Pronominal possession is expressed by a set of possessive prefixes attached to the noun , as in Kaqchikel ru @-@ kej " his / her horse " . Nouns may furthermore adopt a special form marking them as possessed . For nominal possessors , the possessed noun is inflected as possessed by a third @-@ person possessor , and followed by the possessor noun , e.g. Kaqchikel ru @-@ kej ri achin " the man 's horse " (literally " his horse the man ") . This type of formation is a main diagnostic trait of the Mesoamerican Linguistic Area and recurs throughout Mesoamerica .

Mayan languages often contrast alienable and inalienable possession by varying the way the noun is (or is not) marked as possessed . Jakaltek , for example , contrasts inalienably possessed wet?el " my photo (in which I am depicted) " with alienably possessed wet?ele " my photo (taken by me) " . The prefix we- marks the first person singular possessor in both , but the absence of the -e possessive suffix in the first form marks inalienable possession .

= = = Relational nouns = = =

Mayan languages which have prepositions at all normally have only one . To express location and other relations between entities , use is made of a special class of " relational nouns " . This pattern is also recurrent throughout Mesoamerica and is another diagnostic trait of the Mesoamerican Linguistic Area . In Mayan most relational nouns are metaphorically derived from body parts so that " on top of " , for example , is expressed by the word for head .

Relational nouns are possessed by the constituent that is the reference point of the relation , and the relational noun names the relation . Thus in Mayan one would say " the mountain 's head " (literally " its head the mountain ") to mean " on (top of) the mountain " . Thus in the Classical Quiché of the Popol Vuh we read u @-@ wach ulew " on the earth " (literally " its face the earth ") .

= = = Subjects and objects = = =

Mayan languages are ergative in their alignment . This means that the subject of an intransitive verb is treated similarly to the object of a transitive verb , but differently from the subject of a transitive verb .

Mayan languages have two sets of affixes that are attached to a verb to indicate the person of its arguments . One set (often referred to in Mayan grammars as set A) indicates the person of subjects of intransitive verbs , and of objects of transitive verbs . They can also be used with adjective or noun predicates to indicate the subject .

Another set (set B) is used to indicate the person of subjects of transitive verbs (and in some languages , such as Yucatec , also the subjects of intransitive verbs , but only in the incomplete aspects) , and also the possessors of nouns (including relational nouns) .

= = = Verbs = = =

In addition to subject and object (agent and patient) , the Mayan verb has affixes signalling aspect , tense , and mood as in the following example :

Tense systems in Mayan languages are generally simple . Jakaltek , for example , contrasts only past and non @-@ past , while Mam has only future and non @-@ future . Aspect systems are normally more prominent . Mood does not normally form a separate system in Mayan , but is instead intertwined with the tense / aspect system . Kaufman has reconstructed a tense / aspect / mood system for proto @-@ Mayan that includes seven aspects : incompletive , progressive , completive / punctual , imperative , potential / future , optative , and perfective .

Mayan languages tend to have a rich set of grammatical voices . Proto @-@ Mayan had at least one passive construction as well as an antipassive rule for downplaying the importance of the agent in relation to the patient . Modern K 'iche ' has two antipassives : one which ascribes focus to the object and another that emphasizes the verbal action . Other voice @-@ related constructions occurring in Mayan languages are the following : mediopassive , incorporational (incorporating a direct object into the verb) , instrumental (promoting the instrument to object position) and referential (a kind of applicative promoting an indirect argument such as a benefactive or recipient to the object position) .

= = = Statives and positionals = = =

In Mayan languages , words are usually viewed as belonging to one of four classes : verbs , statives , adjectives , and nouns .

Statives are a class of predicative words expressing a quality or state , whose syntactic properties fall in between those of verbs and adjectives in Indo @-@ European languages . Like verbs , statives can sometimes be inflected for person but normally lack inflections for tense , aspect and other purely verbal categories . Statives can be adjectives , positionals or numerals .

Positionals , a class of roots characteristic of , if not unique to , the Mayan languages , form stative adjectives and verbs (usually with the help of suffixes) with meanings related to the position or shape of an object or person . Mayan languages have between 250 and 500 distinct positional roots :

Telan ay jun naq winaq yul b 'e .

There is a man lying down fallen on the road .

Woqan hin k 'al ay max ek 'k'u .

I spent the entire day sitting down .

Yet ewi xoyan ay jun lob 'aj stina .

Yesterday there was a snake lying curled up in the entrance of the house .

In these three Q 'anjob 'al sentences , the positionals are telan (" something large or cylindrical lying down as if having fallen ") , woqan (" person sitting on a chairlike object ") , and xoyan (" curled up like a rope or snake ") .

= = = Word formation = = =

Compounding of noun roots to form new nouns is commonplace ; there are also many morphological processes to derive nouns from verbs . Verbs also admit highly productive derivational affixes of several kinds , most of which specify transitivity or voice .

Some Mayan languages allow incorporation of noun stems into verbs , either as direct objects or in other functions . However , there are few affixes with adverbial or modal meanings .

As in other Mesoamerican languages , there is widespread metaphorical use of roots denoting body parts , particularly to form locatives and relational nouns such as Tzeltal / Tzotzil ti ' na " door " (lit . " mouth of house ") , or Kaqchikel chi ru @-@ pam " inside " (lit . " mouth its @-@ stomach ") .

= = Mayan loanwords = =

A number of loanwords of Mayan or potentially Mayan origins are found in other languages , principally Spanish , English , and some neighboring Mesoamerican languages . In addition , there are words in Mayan languages that are known or suspected to ultimately derive from non @-@

Mayan languages , especially Spanish .

According to Mayan language scholars , the English word " shark " comes directly from the Yucatec Maya *xoc* for " fish " . The OED print edition describes the origin of shark as " uncertain " , noting that it " seems to have been introduced by the sailors of Captain (afterwards Sir John) Hawkins 's expedition , who brought home a specimen which was exhibited in London in 1569 " .

Another Mayan loanword is " cigar " . " Sic " is Mayan for " tobacco " and " sicar " means " to smoke tobacco leaves " . This is the most likely origin for cigar and thus cigarette .

The English word " hurricane " , which is a borrowing from the Spanish word *huracán* is considered to be related to the name of Maya storm deity Jun Raqan . However , it is probable that the word passed into European languages from a Cariban language or Taino .

= = Writing systems = =

The complex script used to write Mayan languages in pre @-@ Columbian times and known today from engravings at several Maya archaeological sites has been deciphered almost completely . The script is a mix between a logographic and a syllabic system .

In colonial times Mayan languages came to be written in a script derived from the Latin alphabet ; orthographies were developed mostly by missionary grammarians . Not all modern Mayan languages have standardized orthographies , but the Mayan languages of Guatemala use a standardized , Latin @-@ based phonemic spelling system developed by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) . Orthographies for the languages of Mexico are currently being developed by the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI) .

= = = Glyphic writing = = =

The pre @-@ Columbian Maya civilization developed and used an intricate and fully functional writing system , which is the only Mesoamerican script that can be said to be almost fully deciphered . Earlier @-@ established civilizations to the west and north of the Maya homelands that also had scripts recorded in surviving inscriptions include the Zapotec , Olmec , and the Zoque @-@ speaking peoples of the southern Veracruz and western Chiapas area ? but their scripts are as yet largely undeciphered . It is generally agreed that the Maya writing system was adapted from one or more of these earlier systems . A number of references identify the undeciphered Olmec script as its most likely precursor .

In the course of the deciphering of the Maya hieroglyphic script , scholars have come to understand that it was a fully functioning writing system in which it was possible to express unambiguously any sentence of the spoken language . The system is of a type best classified as logosyllabic , in which symbols (glyphs or graphemes) can be used as either logograms or syllables . The script has a complete syllabary (although not all possible syllables have yet been identified) , and a Maya scribe would have been able to write anything phonetically , syllable by syllable , using these symbols .

At least two major Mayan languages have been confidently identified in hieroglyphic texts , with at least one other language probably identified . An archaic language variety known as Classic Maya predominates in these texts , particularly in the Classic @-@ era inscriptions of the southern and central lowland areas . This language is most closely related to the Ch 'olan branch of the language family , modern descendants of which include Ch 'ol , Ch 'orti ' and Chontal . Inscriptions in an early Yucatecan language (the ancestor of the main surviving Yucatec language) have also been recognised or proposed , mainly in the Yucatán Peninsula region and from a later period . Three of the four extant Maya codices are based on Yucatec . It has also been surmised that some inscriptions found in the Chiapas highlands region may be in a Tzeltalan language whose modern descendants are Tzeltal and Tzotzil . Other regional varieties and dialects are also presumed to have been used , but have not yet been identified with certainty .

Use and knowledge of the Maya script continued until the 16th century Spanish conquest at least . Bishop Diego de Landa Calderón of the Catholic Archdiocese of Yucatán prohibited the use of the

written language , effectively ending the Mesoamerican tradition of literacy in the native script . He worked with the Spanish colonizers to destroy the bulk of Mayan texts as part of his efforts to convert the locals to Christianity and away from what he perceived as pagan idolatry . Later he described the use of hieroglyphic writing in the religious practices of Yucatecan Maya in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* .

== Colonial orthography ==

Colonial orthography is marked by the use of c for / k / (always hard , as in cic / kiik /) , k for / q / in Guatemala or for / k ? / in the Yucatán , h for / x / , and tz for / ts / ; the absence of glottal stop or vowel length (apart sometimes for a double vowel letter for a long glottalized vowel , as in uuc / u ? uk /) , the use of u for / w / , as in uac / wak / , and the variable use of z , ç , s for / s / . The greatest difference from modern orthography , however , is in the various attempts to transcribe the ejective consonants .

In ca . 1550 , Francisco de la Parra invented distinctive letters for ejectives in the Mayan languages of Guatemala , the *tresillo* and *cuatrillo* (and derivatives) . These were used in all subsequent Franciscan writing , and are occasionally seen even today . In 1605 , Alonso Urbano doubled consonants for ejectives in Otomi (pp , tt , ttz , cc / cqu) , and similar systems were adapted to Mayan . Another approach , in Yucatec , was to add a bar to the letter , or to double the stem .

* Only the stem of ? is doubled , but that is not supported by Unicode .

A ligature ? for tz is used alongside ? and ? . The Yucatec convention of dz for / ts? / is retained in Maya family names such as Dzib .

== Modern orthography ==

Since the colonial period , practically all Maya writing has used a Latin alphabet . Formerly these were based largely on the Spanish alphabet and varied between authors , and it is only recently that standardized alphabets have been established . The first widely accepted alphabet was created for Yucatec Maya by the authors and contributors of the *Diccionario Maya Cordemex* , a project directed by Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and first published in 1980 . Subsequently , the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (known by its Spanish acronym ALMG) , founded in 1986 , adapted these standards to 22 Mayan languages (primarily in Guatemala) . The script is largely phonemic , but abandoned the distinction between the apostrophe for ejective consonants and the glottal stop , so that ejective / t? / and the non @-@ ejective sequence / t? / (previously t ' and t7) are both written t ' . Other major Maya languages , primarily in the Mexican state of Chiapas , such as Tzotzil , Tzeltal , Ch 'ol , and Tojolab 'al , are not generally included in this reformation , and are sometimes written with the conventions standardized by the Chiapan " State Center for Indigenous Language , Art , and Literature " (CELALI) , which for instance writes " ts " rather than " tz " (thus Tseltal and Tsotsil) . In Mexico , names of archaeological sites and other items of historical record retain the colonial spellings , rather than the revised orthography .

One element of the revised orthographies that is not widely accepted , especially outside the Guatemalan context , is the conversion of proper nouns (such as names of archaeological sites , modern settlements , and cultures) . Thus , the Cordemex continues to use the term " Yucatán " (rather than " Yukatan ") in its preface , despite the fact that its orthography does not utilize a " c " , and most scholarly archaeological texts continue to print the original spellings for archaeological sites and cultures that have been canonized in the literature over the centuries .

== Literature ==

From the classic language to the present day , a body of literature has been written in Mayan languages . The earliest texts to have been preserved are largely monumental inscriptions documenting rulership , succession , and ascension , conquest and calendrical and astronomical events . It is likely that other kinds of literature were written in perishable media such as codices

made of bark , only four of which have survived the ravages of time and the campaign of destruction by Spanish missionaries .

Shortly after the Spanish conquest , the Mayan languages began to be written with Latin letters . Colonial @-@ era literature in Mayan languages include the famous Popol Vuh , a mythico @-@ historical narrative written in 17th century Classical Quiché but believed to be based on an earlier work written in the 1550s , now lost . The Título de Totonicapán and the 17th century theatrical work the Rabinal Achí are other notable early works in K 'iche ' , the latter in the Achí dialect . The Annals of the Cakchiquels from the late 16th century , which provides a historical narrative of the Kaqchikel , contains elements paralleling some of the accounts appearing in the Popol Vuh . The historical and prophetic accounts in the several variations known collectively as the books of Chilam Balam are primary sources of early Yucatec Maya traditions . The only surviving book of early lyric poetry , the Songs of Dzitbalche by Ah Bam , comes from this same period .

In addition to these singular works , many early grammars of indigenous languages , called " artes " , were written by priests and friars . Languages covered by these early grammars include Kaqchikel , Classical Quiché , Tzeltal , Tzotzil and Yucatec . Some of these came with indigenous @-@ language translations of the Catholic catechism .

While Mayan peoples continued to produce a rich oral literature in the postcolonial period (after 1821) which has been collected by linguists and ethnologists gathering oral literature , very little written literature was produced in this period .

Because indigenous languages were excluded from the education systems of Mexico and Guatemala after independence , Mayan peoples remained largely illiterate in their native languages , learning to read and write in Spanish , if at all . However , since the establishment of the Cordemex and the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (1986) , native language literacy has begun to spread and a number of indigenous writers have started a new tradition of writing in Mayan languages . Notable among this new generation is the K 'iche ' poet Humberto Ak 'ab 'al , whose works are often published in dual @-@ language Spanish / K 'iche ' editions , as well as K 'iche ' scholar Luis Enrique Sam Colop (1955 ? 2011) whose translations of the Popol Vuh into both Spanish and modern K 'iche ' achieved high acclaim .