Southern Tepehuan (Durango and Narayit, Mexico) - Language Snapshot

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Southern Tepehuan (Durango and Nayarit, Mexico) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Southern Tepehuan (alternative names: O'dam, Audam)
Language family:	Uto-Aztecan, Tepiman Branch
ISO 639-3 Code:	stp, tla
Glottolog Code:	sout2975
Population:	36,543
Location:	22.921014°, -104.609572°
Vitality:	EGIDs 6b

Summary

Southern Tepehuan consists of three varieties: Southeastern Tepehuan, Central Tepehuan (both called O'dam) and Southwestern Tepehuan (Audam). All three varieties are endangered. Southeastern Tepehuan is the most documented, with a limited reference grammar, while Audam has very little published grammatical descriptions, and Central Tepehuan lacks published documentation entirely. Children are currently growing up learning a Southern Tepehuan variety and the Southeastern variety is taught in rural schools, although increased movement to cities is putting significant pressure on the ongoing vitality of Southern Tepehuan.

Resumen

El tepehuano del sur consiste de tres variedades dialectales en peligro de extinción: tepehuano del sureste, tepehuano central (ambas denominadas o'dam) y tepehuano del suroeste (denominada audam). Las tres variedades se hablan en los estados mexicanos de Durango y Nayarit en la región de la Sierra Madre: el Gran Nayar. La variedad sureste es la más documentada, ya que cuenta con una gramática de referencia y varios trabajos publicados, mientras que el audam tiene pocas descripciones gramaticales publicadas y la variante central carece completamente de documentación publicada. Actualmente los niños crecen aprendiendo una variante de tepehuano del sur y la variedad sureste se enseña en escuelas rurales, aunque el aumento del movimiento a las ciudades ejerce presión significante sobre la vitalidad en curso del tepehuano del sur.

1. Overview

Southern Tepehuan belongs to the Tepiman sub-branch of Southern Uto-Aztecan, along with O'odham, Pima, Northern Tepehuan, and Tepecano (extict) (Miller 1984; Valiñas 1993). There are three varieties of Southern Tepehuan: (i) Southeastern Tepehuan (lowland variety), (ii) Central Tepehuan (central variety), and (iii) Southwestern Tepehuan (highland variety) (Ambriz 2000; INALI 2008; García Salido & Reyes 2017).[1] Speakers of Southeastern and Central Tepehuan call themselves O'dam, while those from the Southwestern variety call themselves Audam.[2] Northern and Southern Tepehuan are not mutually intelligible, and it is still an open question as to the level mutually intelligibility the Southern Tepehuan varieties have. Some Southeastern speakers report to us that Central is much easier for them to understand than Southwestern, but Central is still somewhat difficult to understand.

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[1] We use '(Southern) Tepehuan' to refer to speakers of all three varieties.

[2] There is some inconsistency in the spelling systems of both Southeastern Tepehuan and Southwestern Tepehuan. One anonymous reviewer noted that some speakers spell the ethnonym for Southwestern as <Au'dam>, while our consultants spell the ethnonym as <Audam>. We also note that speakers of the Southeastern variety differ in whether or not they write double vowels in some words.

1.1 Southern Tepehuan

Southern Tepehuan is spoken primarily in the Mexican states of Durango and Nayarit. Most Southern Tepehuans live in the Mezquital and Pueblo Nuevo municipalities of Durango, which are part of the region of the Sierra Madre Occidental known as the Gran Nayar. This region is occupied by three other Indigenous groups: Cora, Huichol, and Mexicanero, all of which are also Uto-Aztecan speaking peoples, with the last group speaking a variety of Nahuatl. In the Sierra Madre, Southern Tepehuans primarily live in towns consisting of Tepehuans and Mestizos,[3] although there are some towns where Tepehuans live with the aforementioned Indigenous groups. The geographic proximity between these groups leads them to share both grammatical and cultural characteristics.

Southern Tepehuan towns in the Sierra Madre, shown in Figure 1, are split into *patio mayores*, *cabeceras*, and *anexos*. The former are ceremonial and political centres, respectively, while the latter are smaller towns associated with a single *cabecera* and *patio mayor* (Reyes 2006a). Tepehuans in the Sierra Madre typically practice subsistence ranching and farming, or work for mining and lumber companies. Each Tepehuan town maintains a communal corn farm, or *gaa*, which is harvested once a year at the start of the rainy season in June. Each Tepehuan family uses the corn provided by the *gaa* year round. The Southeastern variety is spoken in Santa María de Ocotán (*Juktir*), Santiago Teneraca (*Chianarkam*), San Francisco de Ocotán (*Koxbilhim*), Xoconoxtle (*Nakaabtam*), and their associated *anexos*. The Central variety is spoken in Santa María Magdalena de Taxicaringa and its *anexos*. The Southwestern variety is spoken in San Bernardino Milpillas Chico, San Francisco de Lajas (*Aicham*) and San Andrés Milpillas Grande, and their *anexos*. Of the aforementioned towns, only San Andrés Milpillas Grande is located in Nayarit (García Salido & Reyes, 2017). In terms of religion, Tepehuans are generally divided among those who practice: (a) *costumbre*, the traditional Tepehuan religion; (b) a syncretic form of Catholicism which incorporates practices of *costumbre*; and (c) Protestantism, whose practitioners typically reject *costumbre* practices (see Reyes 2006b, 2016; Cramaussel 2019).

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[3] This term refers to majority ethnic group in Mexico, consisting of people who have mixed European and indigenous heritage, but, crucially here, people who are not recognized as Tepehuan or Indigenous.
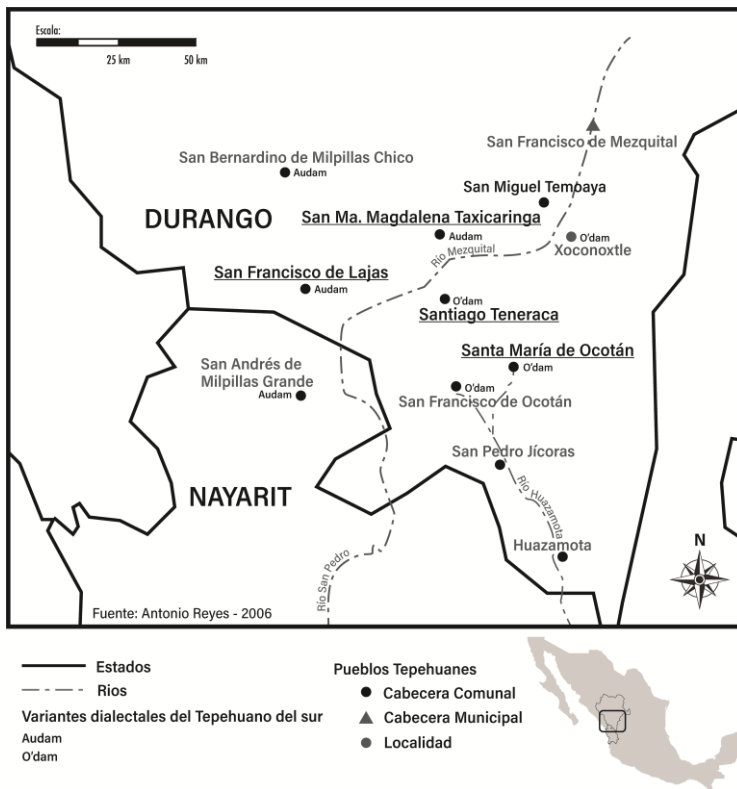
Figure 1: Map of Southern Tepehuan communities.
From Reyes (2007:10), modified to include scale

1.2 Previous research

Southern Tepehuan was first documented by Alden Mason, who worked in San José de Xoconostle (1952), although there is ethnographic research dating back to Lumholtz (1894-1897, 1902). Mason's documentation was never officially published, but his notes can be found in the archives of the American Philosophical Society (García Salido & Reyes 2015). Mason (1916) also described the now extinct Tepecano language, which may be a Southern Tepehuan language. Ethnographic studies have been ongoing since Lumholtz by Sánchez (1980), Escalante (1994), and Reyes (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Little is known about the Southern Tepehuan language during early colonial times; although colonial documents reference Tepehuan speakers, to our knowledge there are no colonial documents written in Southern Tepehuan.

Bascom (1965) was the first to establish the Tepiman subgroup of Uto-Aztecan, by connecting the Tepehuan, including Southern Tepehuan, and

Piman subgroups. Rinaldini (1743) was a grammar of the Tepehuan language before Northern and Southern Tepehuan split, although likely when they were in the process of splitting, after they were divided by the Spanish following the Tepehuan Revolt (Gradie 2000). Most publications on the Southern Tepehuan varieties have focused on the Southeastern variety, specifically as spoken in Santa María de Ocotán. Willett (1991) is a reference grammar of Southeastern Tepehuan, and Willett (1978, 1980, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007) is on morphology and syntax. Research on clause linkage and subordination includes García Salido (2014a, 2017b, 2018, 2020a,b), demonstratives and locative expressions (Moreno 2016; García Salido 2017a), verb classes and verbal morphology (García Salido 2012, 2014d; García Salido & Everdell 2019), evidentials (García Salido 2014b, Castillo 2017, 2020), and copula constructions (Martínez 2016). For O'dam phonology see E. Willett (1982, 1985), Moctezuma (2000), Guerrero (2001) and Reyes-Taboada (2014), with Optimality Theory analyses of Southeastern Tepehuan vowel deletion patterns by Kager (1997), and Gouskova (2003). For Southwestern Tepehuan there are only Moctezuma (1988, 1992), and Reyes-Taboada (2017) on phonology, and Reyes-Taboada (2019) on verbal morphology. There are no published descriptions of Central Tepehuan.

2. Vitality

INEGI (2015) estimates 36,543 speakers in total for the three varieties, increased from 26,453 in 2010 (INEGI 2010). To our knowledge there is no data on how the 36,543 speakers are distributed amongst the three varieties, but our experiences suggest that the Southeastern variety has by far the most speakers. There is no agreement about the vitality of any of the varieties. Eberhard et al. (2020) lists Southeastern Tepehuan as developing and Southwestern Tepehuan as vigorous, with no mention of Central (see also Valiñas 2019). INALI judges Southeastern and Southwestern Tepehuan as not immediately at risk of extinction, and Central Tepehuan at medium risk, because the younger generation has stopped speaking it in certain contexts, such as at school, local medical clinics, etc. While there are currently many speakers of Southern Tepehuan, in reality there are major changes in its use and transmission. Santa María Magdalena de Taxicaringa (Central Tepehuan) and San Francisco de Lajas (Southwestern Tepehuan) currently have nearby sawmills, which bring income and jobs for some members of the community, however, lumber companies are increasingly bringing in non-Tepehuan speaking mestizos for employment. As economic opportunities move out of the Sierra Madre and land disputes increase, Southern Tepehuans are increasingly migrating to nearby cities where Spanish has significant economic and social prestige, and where there are many fewer opportunities to speak Southern Tepehuan, thereby accelerating language shift to Spanish.

Torres (2018: 331) shows that Southeastern Tepehuan is employed in the home, parties and the church, while Southeastern Tepehuan and Spanish are used bilingually at meetings, school, work, local medical clinics, the market, and the city. There is currently no area where Spanish is used exclusively. This community demonstrates incipient bilingualism, since all the interviewees learned Southeastern Tepehuan as their first language.

Public schools and government agencies largely promote Spanish over Southern Tepehuan, and Tepehuans migrate to cities. Lack of employment, especially during the dry season, has added to economic pressure pushing Southern Tepehuans out of their communities in the Sierra Madre. More recently, they have begun seasonal migrations to the United States through the H-2A visa program that grants them six-month periods of agricultural work annually. Speakers report that people who move to the city significantly decrease their use of Tepehuan and, importantly, their children rarely learn it. To date there is no study of the actual effect of this movement and economic shifts on the vitality of Southern Tepehuan.

3. Current research

There is ongoing documentation and description of Southern Tepehuan varieties, fieldwork,[4] and training students and community members in linguistic and anthropological research methods, software, and technology for documenting and preserving the Southern Tepehuan varieties. There is a growing corpus of naturalistic speech for the three varieties (Southeastern, Central, and Southwestern). These texts have been gathered in Tobaatam, Santa María de Ocotán, Santiago Teneraca, Santa María Magdalena de Taxicaringa, San Francisco de Lajas, Koba'ram, Los Charcos, and La Guacamayita. This corpus is transcribed in the relevant Southern Tepehuan variety, following orthographic standards set forth by the Ministry of Public Education, and translated into Spanish using the software tool ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg 2008)[5] with the help of Tepehuan speakers.[6] Future documentation will focus on gathering a larger corpus of the Central variety.

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[4] This fieldwork has primarily taken place in a high-risk area due to drug trafficking.

[5] https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan (accessed 2020-11-23)

[6] Some texts are at revistas-filologicas.unam.mx/tlalocan/index.php/tl/article/view/240/ 239 (García Salido & Reyes 2015); revistas-filologicas.unam.mx/tlalocan/index.php/tl/ article/view/476 (García Salido 2018); and rlp.culturaspopulares.org/textos/35/ 01.arellanoygarcia.pdf (Arellano & García Salido 2018); García Salido et al. (in press) (all accessed 2020-10-06).

Aside from text collection and analysis there is ongoing comparative research into Southern Tepehuan dialectology (García Salido & Reyes 2017), the syntax and development of applicatives and valency augmentation in Southeastern and Southwestern varieties (García Salido & Everdell 2019), and the syntax of copulas (Martinez 2016; Martínez & García Salido, *in progress*). There is also ongoing examination of Southeastern variety constituency (Tallman et al. 2018; Everdell *in progress*) and the syntax and semantics of quantifiers and stativity (Everdell & Melchin *in progress*, Everdell & Denlinger *in progress*). Everdell was awarded a National Science Foundation grant in 2020 for his dissertation on argument realization and the adjunct-complement distinction in the Southeastern variety.

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