

Polysynthesis in Mixe-Zoquean languages

Roberto Zavala Maldonado
(CIESAS)

Mixe-Zoquean languages include 14 languages belonging to two different branches, the Zoquean branch and the Mixean branch. The languages are spoken in the south of Mexico. All of them include most of the traits of OV languages, although only few of them have a rigid AOV order. All of these languages are highly polysynthetic with a very complex verbal template which includes morphology conveying aspect, mood and modality, person, number, valence operators, directionals, auxiliaries, nominalizers and lexical affixes. Nominal and adverbial incorporation is highly productive, including rare types of nominal incorporation, like agent of transitive verbs. Some languages allow serial verb combinations of up to five verbal roots. All the languages are head-marking, hierarchical and ergative. Within the Zoquean branch, double marking is attested in some languages, and within Mixean branch, all the languages show inverse morphology. Mixe-Zoquean languages have been in contact with Mayan, Uto-Aztecan, Huave, Otomanguean and Totonacan for more than thirty centuries and with Spanish for last five centuries. Recent work has collected pieces of evidence that several of the polysynthetic features of Mixe-Zoquean have been borrowed by neighboring languages in the same way that morphosyntactic features of neighboring languages have been borrowed by Mixe-Zoque.