

Poqomchi' (Mayan) today and 400 years ago: Some remarks on diachronic development

Poqomchi' is a Mayan language spoken in Guatemala by around 100,000 people. Mayan family is traditionally considered one of the best documented in Latin America. However, Poqomchi' clearly remains understudied mostly due to its peripheral geographical location. At the same time, this makes Poqomchi' especially interesting from a perspective of areal contacts. Being genetically a Highland language, Poqomchi' shares several traits with neighboring Lowland Mayan languages (see Law 2014). Poqomchi' is also an intriguing object for diachronic research. The first documents written in Poqomchi' were produced by Dominican missionaries after the Spanish conquest, in the second half of the 16th century. The most important sources on the Poqomchi' language of that period include the Poqomchi'-Spanish-Latin dictionary written by Dionisio de Zúñiga around 1625, his "Arte" (grammatical description) of Poqomchi', and three extensive collections of sermons. These manuscripts are stored in libraries and archives in US, but some of them have been digitized.

In the talk, I will offer a brief overview of the current state of linguistic research on Poqomchi', followed by an introduction of the most important colonial manuscripts. After that, I will discuss some individual findings in the diachronic development of different grammatical domains. The phenomena observed in the corpus of colonial texts will be compared to their modern equivalents. Much information about Poqomchi' and its current dialectal variation was obtained during four fieldwork stays in Guatemala beginning in 2014.

For instance, I will argue that the preverbal clitic *na=* which denotes the future in the modern language, denoted the progressive aspect in colonial Poqomchi'. Compare (1) and (2):

- (1) *xrilov hinah chic angel, narupurinic pam yihal taxah*
 xrilow jenaj chik angel narupuriniik paam yejaal taxaaj
 x-r-il-ow jenaj chik angel **na=**ru-pur-in-iik paam
 PFV-3SG.ERG-see-TR INDEF more angel **PROG=**3SG.POSS-fly-INTR-NMLZ LOC
 yejaal taxaaj
 middle sky
 'He saw an angel flying in the middle of the sky.'
 ("Sermones en lengua Pokonchi", ~1600, folio 173 verso)

- (2) *xa re' chik i keem na'ab'anam rajlaal i q'ij*
 xa_re' chik i keem **na='a-b'an-am** r-ajlaal i q'ij
 only more DEF weave **FUT=**2POSS-do-NMLZ 3POSS-all DEF day
 'Now, you will only weave all the day.' (Modern Poqomchi'; Vinogradov 2016: 184)

In this context, sentence (1) would not make sense if *na=* has a future reading. Meanwhile, sentence (2) is unequivocally interpreted as a future prediction by the speakers of Poqomchi' nowadays.

Another example concerns negation. Modern Poqomchi' commonly uses a double negator which consists of the negative preverbal particle *ma'* and the enclitic *ta* or *taj* analyzed as an irrealis marker. In the corpus of colonial texts, there are no instances of such a double negation. Instead, the simple negative *ma'* is used. The enclitic spelled *tah* is attested, but its meaning seems to be close to the optative modality. This morpheme does not accompany the negator in early colonial texts.

I will also discuss the "recent past" marker *a-* which was probably borrowed from Lowland Cholan Mayan languages into colonial Poqomchi' and then disappeared; the loss of the ancient definite article *e'* which probably stems from a noun meaning 'thing'; the emergence of a new set of interrogative pronouns; and the conjunction *eh* 'and' borrowed from 16th century Spanish.

References

- Law, Danny. 2014. *Language contact, inherited similarity and social difference: the story of linguistic interaction in the Maya lowlands*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Vinogradov, Igor. 2016. El tesoro no recibido por miedo: dos cuentos mayas poqomchi'. *Tlalocan* 21: 167-215.