A Note on Extinct Languages of Northwest Mexico of Supposed Uto-Aztecan Affiliation

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NOTES AND REVIEWS

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A number of languages in northwest Mexico, for which we have little or no linguistic data, became extinct in the early colonial period. Most of the extant languages in this area are Uto-Aztecan, and thus it is often assumed that many or most of the extinct languages were also Uto-Aztecan: a reasonable assumption, but one which does not automatically make them Uto-Aztecan. The problem has received passing attention from a number of scholars, with a tendency for one scholar to utilize (with or without full citation) the results of an earlier one without careful checking.

I reviewed the situation recently, while preparing a paper on Uto-Aztecan (Miller, forthcoming *b*). It became clear that one of the few (perhaps the only one) to evaluate the original sources carefully was Sauer (1934). It would do no harm to reexamine the original materials, but this would require a look at archival material in a number of places, a task for which I have neither the means nor taste. But a careful reexamination of Sauer's article proved rewarding. This note is based principally on that work, along with an occasional look at other material.

The evidence for placing these lost languages is of four types, the first of which is direct linguistic evidence. This should be the best type, but unfortunately we have it for only a few languages, and in most cases it is very skimpy.

The second type consists of comments by early missionaries. The Jesuits in particular were careful to note language identities, similarities, and differences among neighboring groups.

The third kind of evidence comes from place-names. This is about the only weak spot in Sauer's otherwise very careful work, and probably reflects the fact that he was a geographer, not a linguist. Use of place-names is difficult, at best, since current names are not always from the language of the current inhabitants (witness the fact that some of the place-names Sauer cites have been taken over into current Spanish). Sauer's case is further weakened since he does not give an analysis of the names, so that there is no reason given for ascribing a particular set of place-names to a particular language.

The last type of evidence is cultural identity or similarity. This is the weakest, since cultural identity or difference does not always correlate with language identity or difference. But when used with other kinds of evidence, it is sometimes helpful in pointing in a given direction.

As a framework for discussion, I use my classification (Miller, forthcoming *a*), which places all of the (known) languages of northwest Mexico in a single branch, Sonoran. I considered all the extant languages of the area, plus Opata,

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Eudeve, and Tubar, languages that are probably extinct for which we have records adequate to allow classification. In the following listing, dialects are placed in parentheses:

1. Tepiman: Upper Piman (Papago, Pima, and Névome), Lower Piman, Northern Tepehuan, and Southern Tepehuan (Southern Tepehuan and Tepecano)
2. Taracahitian
   a. Tarahumaran: Tarahumara (with perhaps three distinct dialects or closely related languages), and Guarijío [Varohío] (with two divergent dialects or closely related languages)
   b. Opatan: Opata and Eudeve
   c. Cahita (Mayo and Yaqui)
3. Tubar
4. Corachol: Cora and Huichol

The three subgroups in Taracahitian display certain similarities that may reflect either a genetic unity or mutual influence through contact. If the latter, then Taracahitian would disappear as a genetic unit, and Sonoran would have six coordinate branches instead of four.

JOVA: Uto-Aztecan, probably Taracahitian. These people lived in rough canyon country surrounded by the culturally more advanced Opata. Sauer (1934:48–50) points out that earlier authors who placed them in the Opata subgroup were guided by geography, not linguistic considerations, there being little evidence that they show any special affinity to Opatan. Indeed, their geographic and cultural position makes them seem more like a remnant group that was in the process of being absorbed by the Opata, and this then gives no special evidence for grouping the two together. Linguistic data, which are scanty, have been pulled together by Pimentel (1874:369–71). They consist of an "Our Father" and a list of nine words. To me it appears that there is greater similarity to the Taracahitian languages than any other Sonoran languages, but the evidence is too meager to tell whether it fits with any of the three subgroups or makes a fourth group.

CONICARI, TEPAHUE, MACOYAHUI, and BACIROA: probably Cahitan. These people were located in and near the middle Mayo drainage (Sauer 1934:31–32). Sauer states that the first three "have been generally considered as Cahita" (1934:31) but gives no authority for this linkage. Today the area is inhabited by Mayos. Since early missionary comments quoted by Sauer (1934:32) make no mention of language differences, and since Sauer does not mention any replacement of Mayo, it may be these were simply names for local Mayo groups. When I was in this area, in May 1981, I was told there were a few Guarijío hamlets near the mestizo town of Mejiquillo and the old Jesuit mission of Macoyahui. This would place a Guarijío enclave to the south of the main Guarijío body. The Mayo between the two Guarijío groups, in the Macoyahui area, are known locally as the "Mayo Prieto," those to the south, in the old Baciroa area, as the "Mayo Líquido." While a lot has happened in this region in the past 400 years, it seems not impossible that these are continuations of the Macoyahui and Baciroa, and that the Guarijío and Mayo were interdigitated with each other, as they are today.

CHÍNIPA, GUASAPAR, and probably also TÉMORI: Tarahumaran, probably Guarijío. Early Jesuit travelers through the Chínipa, Guasapar, and Guarijío country in the headwaters of the Río Mayo and Río Chínipas made no mention of language change. Since they normally noted language differences, it is probable that they were very closely related, or only dialectally different (Sauer 1934:32–36). The Témori, just to the south of this region and just to the north of the Tubar, seem to be included in this discussion by Sauer.

HUITE: unclassified. This group occupied a small area in the mountains northwest of the Zoe and west of the Tubar. An early seventeenth-century missionary mentions that he was learning the language, that it was difficult, that it was different from all other languages around; and that is about all we know (Sauer 1934:37).

ZOE: unclassified. These people occupied a small area in the hill country near the present town of Choix, Sinaloa. Today, this is Mayo country. Sauer says they were probably affiliated with Comanito, but gives no evidence. The missionary Pérez de Ribas noted that they were bilingual in Yecorato (Comanito, hence Cahita) and another language (Zoe) which was totally distinct. Pérez de Ribas was silent on the affiliation of this second language.

COMANITO and MOCORITO: Cahitan, perhaps simply a dialect of Tahue or Mayo. These two groups lived in the hill and mountain country in and around the headwaters of the Río Sinaloa. In 1594, the missionary Martín Pérez noted that their speech was close to the Tahue (Sauer 1934:26). Sauer noted that "Tebaca-Bacapa-Pacaxe and Comanito are confusedly mingled in the records" (1934:37). This may be a clue that there was no real language boundary between Tebaca (an Acaxee subgroup) and Comanito, and that they were simply intergraded dialects.

NIO: unclassified; and OCORONI: Uto-Aztecan. The Nio were located along the Río Sinaloa, between the Guasave and Cahita, and the Ocoroni along the river of the same name, a short distance to the north of the Nio. Both were small groups, and early observers noted that they spoke languages different from their neighbors. An early missionary, returning from the Opata, noted a similarity between Opata and Ocoroni. Sauer suggests that this may mean a possible Opata affiliation; that may be, but perhaps it only means that the missionary noted the Uto-Aztecan affiliation of the two. For Nio, we do not have even enough evidence to say it was Uto-Aztecan, though culturally they were like their Cahitan neighbors.

ACAXEE: Cahitan; and XIXIME: unclassified. These peoples were located in the hill country between the Tepehuan of the mountains and the Tahue and Totorame of the lowlands, with the Acaxee to the northwest of the Xixime. Ralph Beals, cited as a personal communication by Sauer (1934:17), claimed to be able to partially etymologize Acaxee names, but not Xixime names. No evidence was presented, and in looking at the names I could find no Cahitan similarities for either Acaxee or Xixime names.[1] But Cahitan affiliation for

[1] Ray Freeze, who knows Cahita (Mayo) far better than I do, looked at these names also and agreed with my assessment.

Acaxee seems assured by the fact that Father Tapia, who knew Cahita, was able to compose a catechism and doctrine in Acaxee in twenty days. Moreover, he spent some time in his later days learning Tepehuan, indicating that he was not one of those rare, gifted polyglots who soaks up a new language in a matter of weeks. But for Xixime, we have no clues for its linguistic affiliation. Early observers noted that it was a distinct language. Being surrounded on four sides by Uto-Aztecan languages, it would be surprising if it were not also Uto-Aztecan, but that hardly proves it to be so.

TAHUE: Cahitan. This group lived on the floodplains of central Sinaloa, just below the Cahita. In the mid-sixteenth century, Casteñada noted that while Tahue differed somewhat from Cahita, their speakers were able to understand each other (Sauer and Brand 1932:58).

GUASAVE: unclassified. Early Jesuit accounts make it clear that the Guasave, COMOPORI, VACOREGUE, and AHOME all spoke the same language. They were hemmed in along the coast between the Cahita and Tahue. Sauer gives a list of some personal and place-names that he claims "indicates [a] relationship to the Cahita language" (Sauer 1934:30), but I fail to find any similarity from these names.[2] Beals (1943:1, 73–74) lists several Guasave place-names and claims that they are Cahita. Two of them clearly are: Bacahui (*ba-káwi* 'water-hill') and Matahoa (*mata-hóa* 'metate-place'; *hoa* is a very common second element in Cahita place-names). But the etymologies that Beals gives for the remaining names are doubtful at best. Two Cahita place-names in Guasave country do not make the area Cahita speaking, any more than Nevada is Spanish speaking because of place-names like Las Vegas. The Guasave were rude fisher folk, and nonagriculturists. This description also matches the Seri, who occupied a coastal enclave to the north. More on this later.

TOTORAME: Corachol, specifically Cora. This group was known earlier as PINOME. They inhabited the coastal plain between the Tahue and Cora-Huichol. In 1587, Father Ponce noted that they spoke the same language as the Cora.

TECUAL and GUACHICHIL: Corachol, most closely aligned with Huichol. The Tecual were located on the Tepic plateau of Nayarit, and an earlier observer noted that they spoke the same language as the Huichol (Sauer 1934:11). The Guachichil were found further to the east, beyond the Tepehuan. Sauer says information provided by Fray Alonso Ponce in 1587 shows a close connection with Tecual, but unfortunately Sauer does not repeat that information (1934:8).

NAARINUQUIA: unclassified. Also known as the THEMURETE, they lived along the coast of Nayarit; and like the coastal Guasave and Seri further north, they were a nonagricultural maritime people.

CAZAN. Sauer did not consider these people, but Pennington mentions them in passing, while defining the limits of the Tepehuan. He has nothing to say about them linguistically (1969:10). They were located to the south and east of the Tepehuan, and to the west of the Guachichil.

ZACATEC: Corachol, specifically Huichol (?). Zacatec or Zacateco is not considered by Sauer. I am not aware of any earlier material on the language or

[2] Again, Ray Freeze looked at these names and found little that looked like Cahita or Cahitan.

of early records that try to place them linguistically. But there is a short word list in Harvey (1972:300), taken in 1940 by Pedro Hendrichs. The list given in Harvey, which I repeat here in full, seems to be only part of the material collected by Hendrichs: 'name of the language' *z'apa*, 'body' *ku'āza*, 'nose' *ʔz'uri*, 'mouth' *t'ēni*, 'bone' *um'ɛ*, 'rabbit' *t'aču*, 'moon' *m'ɛɸə*, 'corn' *iʔk'uʔ*, 'metate' *maíaʔ*, 'tortilla' *paʔᵃp'a*.

Harvey notes correctly that this list aligns the language with Huichol. The words for 'mouth', 'bone', 'moon', and 'metate' establish the language as Uto-Aztecan; 'nose' and 'rabbit' show it to be Corachol; and 'bone' and 'moon' align it with Huichol rather than Cora. In fact, the words are so much like Huichol, I wonder if the language is not really Huichol rather than Zacatec. The speakers, traveling musicians from Peña Colorada, Zacatecas, claimed that it was a separate language and was not Huichol. But it seems odd that the language would surface after 400 years, with no reports in between, so far as I am aware.

LAGUNERO. Another group not considered by Sauer. Pennington (1969:11–12) uses this term to designate a group between the Zacateco and Toboso and suggests that it may have linguistic affiliations with Zacateco, since the first missionary to these people, Father Juan Agustin, spoke fluent Zacateco. If this is correct, and if Zacateco is aligned with Huichol, then Lagunero is also. Pennington also refers to another language, IRITILA, which seems to be another name for the Lagunero.

TOBOSO. Not considered by Sauer, but mentioned in passing by Pennington (1969:12). They were between the Zacateco and Concho, and in fact on Pennington's map they are included with the Concho. This group is also listed on the map of the *Southwestern* volume of the *Handbook* (Ortiz 1979).

CONCHO: perhaps Uto-Aztecan (branch unknown). These people were located in the plains of what is now eastern Chihuahua, to the east of the Opata and Tarahumara. Kroeber (1934:13) lists three words recorded in 1581: *sanate* 'corn', *bate* 'water', *yolly* 'the word for each other'. Kroeber goes on to say that these words are sufficient evidence to place the language in the Taracahitian group. This is a rather large leap, since there is not enough evidence to place Concho securely in Uto-Aztecan. The word for 'water' (Proto-Uto-Aztecan **paa*) looks good. An early Sonoran, perhaps the Proto-Sonoran, word for 'corn' was **sunu*. Since the vowels in Concho are different, and since agricultural terms are often diffused in the Sonoran languages, the Concho word does not provide very good evidence. The last word, *yolly*, Kroeber links with *yoli* and *yori*, which is the word for 'white man' that has diffused throughout most of the Sonoran languages—not at all convincing evidence. If Concho is Uto-Aztecan, then *-te* on the first two words is probably the absolutive suffix. Most commentators since Kroeber have assumed a Uto-Aztecan connection for Concho, but I do not think the evidence allows us to say more than maybe.

JUMANO and SUMA: affiliation unknown. Sauer (1934:65) has established that they spoke one language, and that it differed from their neighbors. It was spoken to the north of the Concho along the Rio Grande. Sauer suspects they might be Uto-Aztecan, and Kroeber (1934:15) is inclined to agree. But the evidence is skimpy. Only the words for 'water', 'beans', and 'copper' have been recorded. Only 'water', *abad*, looks plausible. Unlike Concho, we cannot even say that the evidence is suggestive.

I have tried to say what could be said based on the facts. I would like now to consider what may have been and what I believe to have been.

Sauer has discussed the maritime fishing people of this area: "The entirely nonagricultural Indians lived on the desert coast from the Culiacan River northward nearly to the mouth of the Altar, with an interruption at the mouths of the Yaqui and Mayo rivers. The southern group is designated by the collective term Guasave, the northern as Seri. In the coastal lagoons of Nayarit there also lived fishing people called Naarinuguia or Themurete, who apparently practiced no agriculture" (1934:77). I believe it is likely that the three were related to each other (and hence more distantly to Yuman), and that they represented coastal enclaves after the expansion of the Sonoran branch of Uto-Aztecan. Most Uto-Aztecan peoples were interior people who had learned to utilize the resources of desert and mountain. For the most part, those who had a coastal border did not utilize the resources of the sea to the same extent. An exception were a few Cahitan villages mentioned by Beals (1943:18). Otherwise, all of the Sonoran Uto-Aztecan groups were agriculturalists. It would take me too far afield to do so here, but I believe an examination of the linguistic evidence would show that agriculture arrived at the time of, or soon after, the breakup of Proto-Sonoran.

Except for the groups just discussed, all of the peoples of the coastal plains and all of the canyon and mountain people in northwest Mexico were probably speakers of Uto-Aztecan languages. The foothill and low canyon country between the Piman and Tepehuan contained a number of distinct languages, and it seems to have been an area of linguistic diversity. Unfortunately, we have information on only two of them, Guarijío and Tubar; the rest are lost. Guarijío along with the mountain-dwelling Tarahumara makes up the Tarahumaran branch. Tubar constitutes a branch all by itself. Two other foothill languages were Huite and Zoe. Nearby on the coastal plains were Nio and Ocoroni. There is little evidence that any of these four languages were grouped with any other languages. Negative evidence is not very good in a situation of this sort, but it seems quite possible that at least some of these four languages, like Tubar, constituted separate branches. We are on firmer footing in simply saying that this area was linguistically more diverse than any other Sonoran-speaking area. This may be at or near the homeland for the Proto-Sonorans. In any case, speakers of Sonoran languages must have been in this foothill area much longer than, say, in the mountain home of the present-day Tarahumara or the coastal plains of the Pima Alta.

The distribution of the Tepiman languages presents a problem. An examination of a map seems to indicate that they have been split into two groups by the intrusion of the Tarahumaran branch, and Sauer (1934:82) suggests just that. But this seems unlikely, since the Tepiman languages are so closely related to each other (indicating a shallow time depth), and the gap is part of the area of diversity just noted (indicating a deeper time depth). More likely the northern group moved south, or the southern group moved north, in either case moving around or through existing groups. A move from south to north receives some support. First, Fowler (1983) has found some evidence, though not decisive, from botanical terms. Second, much of the northern area is coastal plains, easier to move through rapidly than the mountainous Tepehuan area. Last, a southern homeland for Tepiman would put it closer to the foothill and low canyon

country, an area of linguistic diversity, which I suspect may have been the Sonoran homeland as well. Unfortunately, diversity gives us no clue, since the diversity within the Tepehuan area seems to be no greater than in the Piman area.

Most of the languages in the plateau and plains country to the east of the mountain-dwelling Uto-Aztecan were probably also Uto-Aztecan. It is not worth speculating on their prehistory, since we cannot even be sure which ones were in fact Uto-Aztecan, and even if we were sure, we could say almost nothing about classification and subgrouping.

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The core of the book under review is a version of a long therapeutic prayer in the Tzotzil of San Pablo Chalchiuitán. It was recorded by Ulrich Köhler during his field investigations in San Pablo in 1969–71.