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Documentation of Pisaflores Tepehua

Research Year: 2002

Culture: Totonac

Chronology: Classic to Contemporary

Location: Veracruz, México

Site: Pisaflores Tepehua

Table of Contents

[Abstract](#)

[Resumen](#)

[Final Report](#)

[Publications and grants resulting from FAMSI support](#)

Abstract

The goal of this project was to yield a sufficient corpus of linguistic material to support the description and analysis of Pisaflores Tepehua, an endangered and undocumented Totonacan language, spoken in Pisaflores, Veracruz in México. The main publication to result from this project will be a linguistic sketch of Pisaflores Tepehua, *El Tepehua de Pisaflores*, to appear in the series *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México* (Archive of the Indigenous Languages of México), published by the El Colegio de México in México City.

During June and July of 2002, the investigators conducted linguistic fieldwork in México, interviewing native speakers of the language and eliciting the data to be included in *El Tepehua de Pisaflores*. This material consists primarily of a lexicon, a list of roughly 1000 diagnostic phrases, and several narratives and conversations. All sessions with native speakers were recorded on paper and on analog and digital audio tape. Once the materials had been recorded, we asked several speakers to assist in the task of producing accurate and detailed phonetic transcriptions. We spent the academic year 2002-2003 reviewing and analyzing the Tepehua materials, checking for errors in transcription and/or translation, identifying the principal grammatical structures in the language, and converting the digital recordings into more usable and accessible CDs. We concentrated on isolating and identifying the relevant phonological and morphological units of the language and describing their distribution and patterns of co-

occurrence. At this point, the recordings have been transcribed in broad phonetic transcription, and we are analyzing the underlying forms which will be published with inter-linear glosses in both Spanish and English. One major objective is to ensure that all Tepehua materials which result from this project are translated into both English and Spanish.

Pisaflores Tepehua is the only Totonacan language about which virtually nothing is known. Through FAMSI's support, the documentation that results from this project will be of value to linguists, anthropologists and the community of Pisaflores itself.

Resumen

El objetivo de este proyecto es recopilar suficientes datos lingüísticos como para permitir la descripción y análisis del tepehua de Pisaflores, una lengua indígena que se habla en Pisaflores, Veracruz, México, que no ha sido documentada y que está en vías de extinción. La principal publicación de este proyecto será la descripción lingüística titulada *El tepehua de Pisaflores*, que formará parte de la serie *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México* publicada por El Colegio de México en Ciudad de México.

En junio y julio del año 2002, MacKay y Trechsel recopilaron datos lingüísticos en México entrevistando hablantes nativos del tepehua y recogiendo los datos que han de ser incluidos en el volumen *El tepehua de Pisaflores*. Este material consiste principalmente de un léxico, unas mil frases diagnósticas y varios relatos y conversaciones. Todas las sesiones con hablantes nativos se registraron a través de apuntes escritos y en grabaciones análogas y digitales. Una vez grabado el material, solicitamos a varios hablantes que nos asistieran en el proceso de transcribir fonéticamente los textos. Durante el año académico 2002-2003, se revisaron y analizaron los materiales tepehuas, se corrigieron errores de transcripción o de traducción, y se convirtieron las grabaciones digitales a CDs, para que resultaran más accesibles y fáciles de usar. Nos concentramos en identificar y aislar los elementos fonológicos y morfológicos del idioma y a describir sus distribuciones y patrones de coaparición. Al día de hoy, ya hemos transcrito las grabaciones y estamos analizando las formas subyacentes que serán publicadas con comentarios intercalados en español y en inglés. Uno de nuestros objetivos es asegurar que todos los materiales tepehuas sean traducidos a español y a inglés.

El tepehua de Pisaflores es el único idioma totonaco que se desconoce completamente. Es ésta una de las razones por las cuales la documentación producida por este proyecto (gracias al apoyo de FAMSI) será de gran interés y valor para lingüistas, antropólogos y para la comunidad de Pisaflores.

Submitted 04/04/2003 by:
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Final Report

The goal of this project was to yield a sufficient corpus of linguistic material to support the description and analysis of Písafleres Tepehua, an endangered and undocumented Totonacan language, spoken in the vicinity of Písafleres, Veracruz in México. Písafleres Tepehua is one of three languages that constitute the Tepehua branch of the Totonacan language family. The other two languages are Tlachichilco Tepehua, spoken in Tlachichilco, Veracruz, and Huehuetla Tepehua, spoken in Huehuetla, Hidalgo. Písafleres is a multilingual community in which Tepehua, Totonac, Otomí, and Spanish are all spoken. At the moment, Tepehua is the principal means of communication in Písafleres and is still being learned by children. However, the Tepehua language is rapidly being replaced by Spanish in the daily life of the community and there is every indication that this pattern of replacement is accelerating with increased contact with the national language and culture. This project represents an opportunity to collect a substantial corpus of linguistic material in Písafleres and to document patterns of language and language use in this community before they change substantially.

The project's aim is for both depth and breadth of coverage. During June and July of 2002, we conducted linguistic fieldwork in México, interviewing native speakers of the language and eliciting the data to be included in *El Tepehua de Písafleres*, a volume for the *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México* (El Colegio de México). This material consists primarily of a lexicon, a list of roughly 1000 diagnostic phrases, and several narratives and conversations. All sessions with native speakers were recorded on paper and on analog and digital audio tape. Once the materials had been recorded, we asked several speakers to assist in the task of producing accurate and detailed phonetic transcriptions. Native speakers are indispensable to this process since only they can repeat the texts slowly and accurately enough to permit representation of fine phonetic detail and only they can provide translation and other information needed to situate the texts in their proper socio-cultural context. Transcription and translation are slow and tedious processes which are absolutely essential to the goal of understanding the language and elucidating its structure. Together with the recordings, the transcriptions and translations will constitute the empirical database for the documentation and analysis of the language.

The principal products of the 2002 fieldwork include analyses and examples of major components of the grammar (phonology, morphology and syntax), a lexicon, and personal histories and narratives. These materials have been transcribed and presented in broad phonetic transcription. We are currently analyzing the underlying forms which will be published with inter-linear glosses in both Spanish and English. One of our primary objectives is to ensure that all Tepehua materials which result from this project are translated into both English and Spanish. This will not only enhance the value of these materials for scholars, but it will also make them accessible and useful to the native speakers themselves. We are confident that the materials produced in the course of this project will serve to assist native speakers as they struggle to preserve and maintain their language for future generations.

In our analysis of this data, we have focused on: (a) the segmental and suprasegmental phonology; (b) the inflectional morphology of nouns and verbs (including marking for tense, person, aspect, etc.); (c) the most productive derivational processes (word formation); (d) the principal syntactic structures, with special attention to variation in word-order; (e) the lexicon, with phonological and morphological analysis of Tepehua lexical items; and (f) the analysis of oral texts such as narratives, routinized speech acts (greetings, compliments, leave-takings, etc.).

The main publication to result from this project is a linguistic sketch of Pisaflores Tepehua, to appear in the series *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México* (Archive of the Indigenous Languages of México), published by El Colegio de México in México City. Each volume in this series consists of a brief grammatical sketch of the indigenous language, a lexicon, a diagnostic phrase list, and a selection of short texts. Most of the Tepehua recordings collected in June and July, 2002, serve as the empirical database for the Tepehua *Archivo* volume. The preliminary transcription of all sections of the *Archivo* volume have been completed. We are finalizing the description of the phonology of the language for publication, since this is an indispensable prerequisite for all further description and analysis.

The investigators spent the academic year 2002-2003 reviewing and analyzing the Tepehua materials, checking for errors in transcription and/or translation, identifying the principal grammatical structures in the language, and converting the recordings into more usable and accessible CDs. Pisaflores Tepehua is an agglutinating language with a very rich morphological system. The bulk of our time at this stage is spent trying to isolate and identify the morphological units and describe their distribution and patterns of co-occurrence. Based on the data collected in 2002, we are focusing on the inflectional morphology of Pisaflores Tepehua with the goal of describing it and comparing it with that of other Totonacan languages. We are incorporating Tepehua data into articles which focus on specific features of Totonacan languages, eg. "Reciprocal /laa-/ in Totonacan" (*International Journal of American Linguistics*) and "Symmetrical Object Constructions in Totonacan" (ms.).

While in México, we met with Crecencio García Ramos, an anthropologist and linguist of the *Instituto de Antropología* de la Universidad Veracruzana and Director of the *Academia de Lenguas Indígenas de Veracruz*, to discuss collaborating on data collection in Pisaflores and designing bilingual pedagogical materials for the community. Lic. García Ramos is a native speaker of Papantla Totonac and has organized language maintenance efforts in several Totonac speaking communities. He worked briefly in Pisaflores in the 1970s and is renewing his ties to the community. With his expertise, we hope to make the Pisaflores Tepehua materials accessible and useful to the community. Together, we began working not only to document the Tepehua of Pisaflores, but also to involve the community in the development of a practical orthography and in the production of pedagogical materials to introduce and support literacy in Tepehua. In October, 2002, MacKay returned to Xalapa to set up field sessions and training sessions in Pisaflores led by native speakers of Tepehua. With the help of bilingual (Spanish/Tepehua) teachers, community leaders, pedagogical materials and interest from the community itself, the efforts toward maintenance of an

endangered language are more likely to be successful. At this point, we are doing the groundwork to develop a network that will continue to maintain interest in the Tepehua of Pisaflores for generations to come.

Pisaflores Tepehua is the only Totonacan language about which virtually nothing is known. Through FAMSI's generous support, the documentation that results from this project will be of value to linguists, anthropologists, ethnohistorians, and other social scientists in several ways. First, it will provide the only grammatical description of this typologically interesting language. Second, it will provide data essential to the reconstruction of Proto-Totonacan, the ancestor language from which all the Totonacan languages are descended. Third, it will help linguists determine the precise historical relationship of Pisaflores Tepehua to other varieties of Tepehua and Totonac and to other languages in Mesoamerica. Fourth, it will yield a practical orthography of Pisaflores Tepehua, which we and members of the community will use in the creation of pedagogical materials. These materials will facilitate and encourage efforts to maintain Pisaflores Tepehua as a viable means of communication in the community.

Publications and grants resulting from FAMSI support:

National Science Foundation Grant #0132293 - 3 year grant for continuing research on Pisaflores Tepehua.

"Reciprocal /laa-/ in Totonacan" accepted for publication to *International Journal of American Linguistics* - February 2003.

El Tepehua de Pisaflores. (requested for publication in 2004). *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México* (Archive of the Indigenous Languages of México). México D.F.: El Colegio de México.

"Phonology of Pisaflores Tepehua" ms. in progress.

"Symmetrical Object Constructions in Totonacan" to be submitted to the *Language*.

"Three cases of language maintenance in México: Totonac, Tepehua and Veneto" Carolyn J. MacKay. to be submitted to *Anthropological Linguistics*.