

Producing a Timucua grammar from a corpus of colonial Spanish material

Timuca (iso:tjm) was a widely spoken Native language of Florida at the time of Spanish contact in 1565. After the introduction of literacy, native people wrote letters in the language and many religious texts were translated into Timucua. But while there are living descendants of Timucua people, there have been no speakers of this language for about two centuries. Producing a grammar and lexicon of the language is important for scholars (linguists, historians, and anthropologists) but is also important to descendants seeking to "re-awaken" the language.

However the most frequently used methods of grammatography (such as questionnaires and elicitation stimuli) are inapplicable to languages with no contemporary speakers. Instead, a Timucua grammar and lexicon require a set of methods which are slightly different. These include

Corpus creation with literal translation Eight fully or partially bilingual (Timucua-Spanish) religious books, a colonial Arte, and two secular letters have been transcribed, glossed and partially annotated for purposes of grammar development. In contrast to most contemporary bilingual corpora, one cannot assume that the Timucua present in the corpus corresponds exactly to the parallel Spanish text. Consider example (1) on the following page. In such examples, the linguist needs to carefully work to identify the morphology of the examples to produce literal translations.¹ The literal translations are a crucial initial step for grammar writing, since they help the linguist learn that that a sentence like (1) contains a clause-chaining structure for the last two verbs ('pray and extinguish'), used here to translate the purpose clause in Spanish and that the initial clause ('thunder came') is followed by a different subject switch-reference marker.

Confidence ranking for lexical and inflectional morphology Because the language is primarily attested in religious texts, the frequency of stems and inflectional morphology vary tremendously. Stems like 'pray' or 'face' appear thousands of times in the corpus, while 'thunder' (seen in 1) appears only twice. This is also true for inflectional affixes. Simple past tense marker *-bi* is extraordinarily frequent, but an apparently more remote past tense *-bilete* appears only about ten times in the corpus. Thus the grammar of simple past can be stated with some confidence, but there are numerous doubts and gaps in the treatment of the remote past. For this reason, the ongoing Timucua dictionary project (Broadwell 2021) includes both stems and affixes, along with a confidence ranking of each.

Genre and grammar The corpus of Timucua texts is internally diverse, and includes (at least) narration, explanation, interrogation, and instruction. Each of these distinct genres of text has a different set of frequent and infrequent morphemes and constructions. For example, only the parts of the corpus that discuss the garden of Eden include the remote past morpheme, and the second person plural pronoun is primarily found in instructional texts (e.g. 'you (pl) must confess'). Thus an adequate account of Timucua grammar must be sensitive to the grammatical properties of the genres of European religious texts selected for translation. We have the best understanding of the grammar of frequent genres such as interrogation and instruction. However narrative texts are less frequent, and a number of questions about sequence of tense, deixis, and topic shift in narration are consequently more difficult to answer.

Translated and original material Not all the material in the corpus is translated from Spanish; some is originally composed in Timucua. This is certainly true for the two surviving secular letters, but many other parts of the religious corpus appear to be original Timucua, and not translated from Spanish.² It is often possible to detect a wider range of grammatical usage in original material, which allows the grammar writer to detect certain fixed and grammatically restricted conventions for translations from Spanish. Thus an additional complication in the grammar of Timucua is the development of philological and statistical techniques to help distinguish translated from original material.

Linguists working on many other American indigenous languages must use similar colonial corpora of texts in grammar-writing. In this respect, this research connects to other projects based on missionary grammars and texts, such as Eloranta and Bartens (2020) on Mochica and Zwartjes (2002) on Tupinambá and Kiriri.

¹ See Dubcovsky and Broadwell (2017) for extended discussion of discrepancies between the Timucua and Spanish portions of the corpus.

² See Broadwell (2020) for a discussion of Timucua texts which discuss 'idolatry' (i.e. the religious practices of unconverted Timucua) and lack of any Spanish original for such texts.

Example:

- (1) Numa hebua-ma hime-ta-qe ituhu-ta ipo-si-bi-ch-o?
heaven speak-def come-tns-diff:subj pray-part extinguish-ben-pst-2:sg-q
Tronando, as soplado asta el Cielo para detener el nublado o agua con tus rezos malos?
[Thundering have you blown to the heavens to stop the cloud or water with your evil prayers?]
Lit. When thunder (heaven speak) came, did you pray (to/and) extinguish it? [Pareja 1613:150]

References:

- Broadwell, George Aaron (2020). The things they formerly worshipped: Timuca Christian texts on Native worship. in *Facing Florida: Essays in culture and religion in early Southeastern America*, ed. by Timothy Johnson and Jeffrey Burns. Oceanside, CA: Academy of American Franciscan History, pp. 51-62.
- Broadwell, George Aaron. (2021). A Timucua-English dictionary. <http://timucua.webonary.org>.
- Dubcovsky, Alejandra and George Aaron Broadwell. (2017) Writing Timucua, Recovering and Interrogating Indigenous Authorship. *Early American Studies* 15:409-441.
- Eloranta, R., & Bartens, A. (2020). New Mochica and the challenge of reviving an extinct language. *Variation and Evolution: Aspects of language contact and contrast across the Spanish-speaking world*, 29, 253.
- Pareja, Francisco. 1613. *Confessionario en lengua castellana y timuquana con unos consejos para animar al penitente*. Mexico City: Empronta de la viuda de Diego Lopez Daualos.
- Zwartjes, O. (2002). The description of the indigenous languages of Portuguese America by the jesuits during the colonial period: The impact of the latin grammar of Manuel Álvares. *Historiographia linguistica*, 29(1-2), 19-70.