

\*Do you want to  
learn Q'anjob'al?

# Cham ochej cha kuyu Q'anjob'al?

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# *Yuj wal Dios!*

Thanks to **Andrés Juan, Efrain Juan**, and other members of the Champaign-Urbana Q'anjob'al community for help with the grammar for 10+ years!

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# Introduction

# Q'anjob'al: A Mayan Language

- Q'anjob'al is spoken by 77,000 people (Ethnologue 2005); that's a little less than the population of Champaign, IL.
- There are many immigrant communities of Q'anjob'al speakers in the United States, including Champaign Co., IL; Omaha, NE; Los Angeles, CA; and Atlanta, GA.
- Q'anjob'al is spoken by the populations of several cities in the Department of Huehuetenango in Guatemala.
- Speakers may come from cities like: Santa Eulalia, Santa Cruz Barillas, San Miguel Acatán, San Juan Ixcoy, and Soloma.

# Santa Eulalia

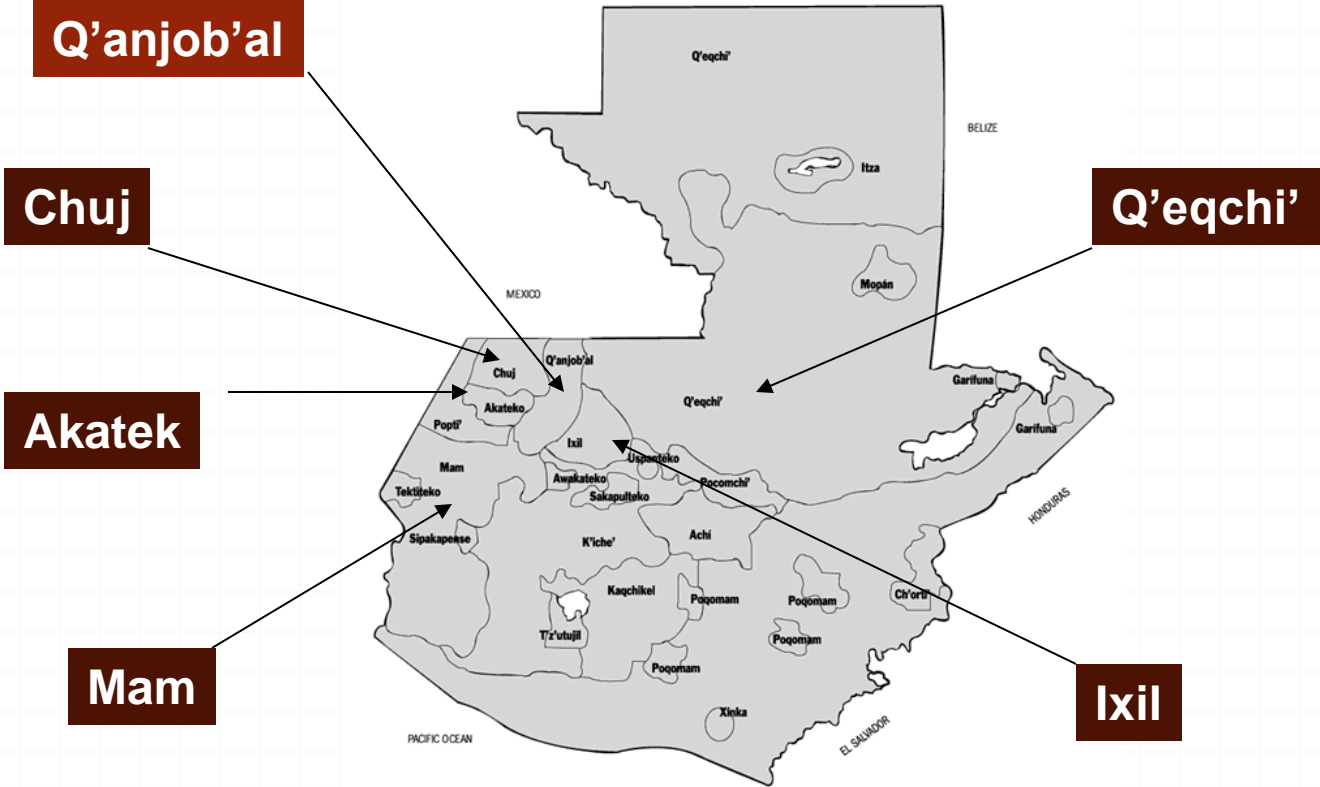
(photo ca. 2008)



# Guatemala in Central America



LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES OF GUATEMALA



SOURCE: BEST Project 520-0374, USAID - Guatemala



# Some easy questions

## ◦ **Is Q'anjob'al a written language?**

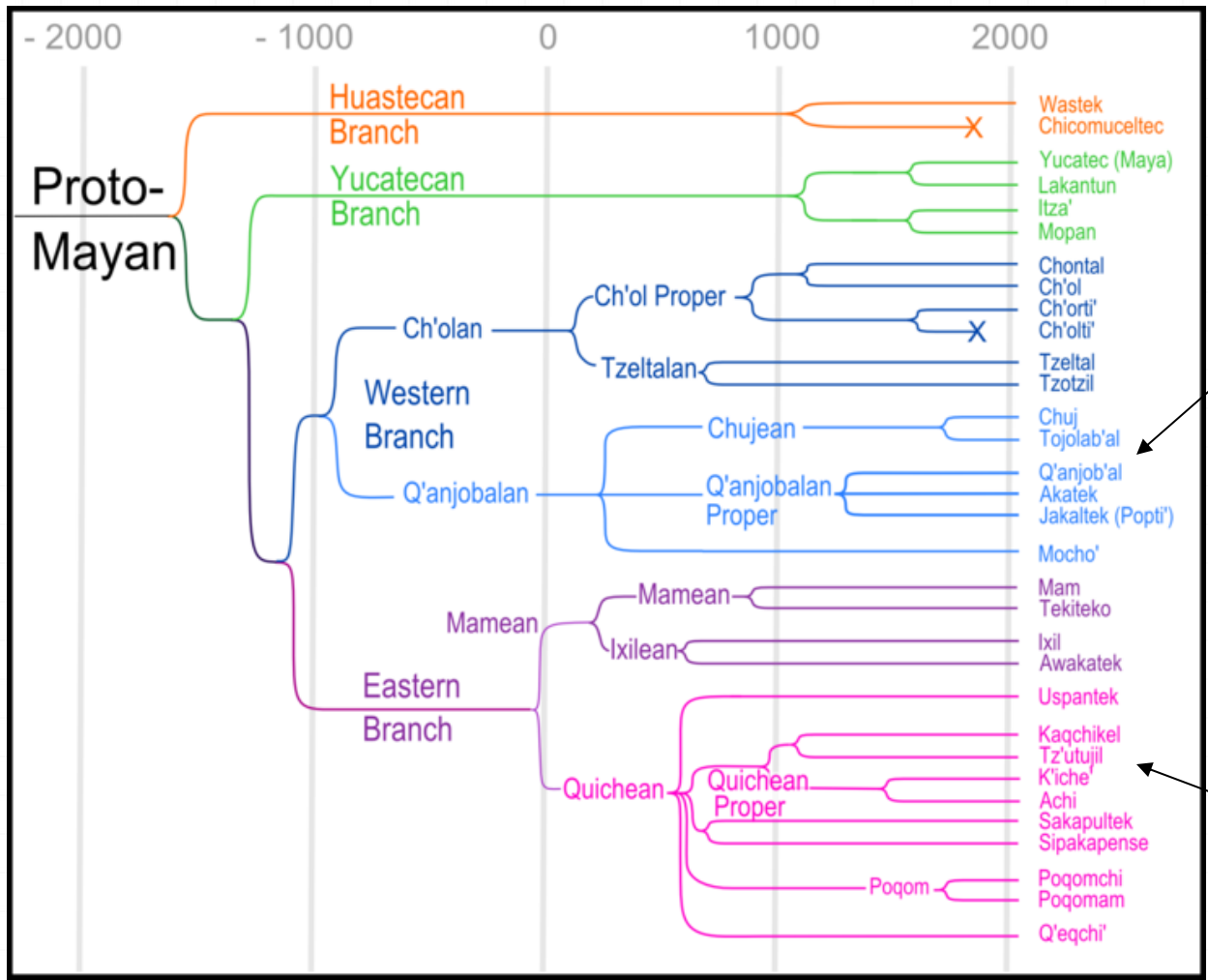
- Absolutely! Modern Mayan languages are written using the same (Roman) alphabet used in English, Spanish, and many other languages. They use some letters differently, however...

## ◦ **Is Q'anjob'al different from Spanish?**

- Very different. Mayan languages are not related to Spanish, English, or any other (Indo-)European language.

## ◦ **Can speakers of Mayan languages understand each other?**

- It depends on the languages..
- Q'anjob'al is most closely related to Akatek, then Chuj (cf. Spanish and Portuguese; English and Swedish)
- Languages like K'iche', Mam, and Ixil are more distantly related to Q'anjob'al (cf. English and German) but still in the same family.



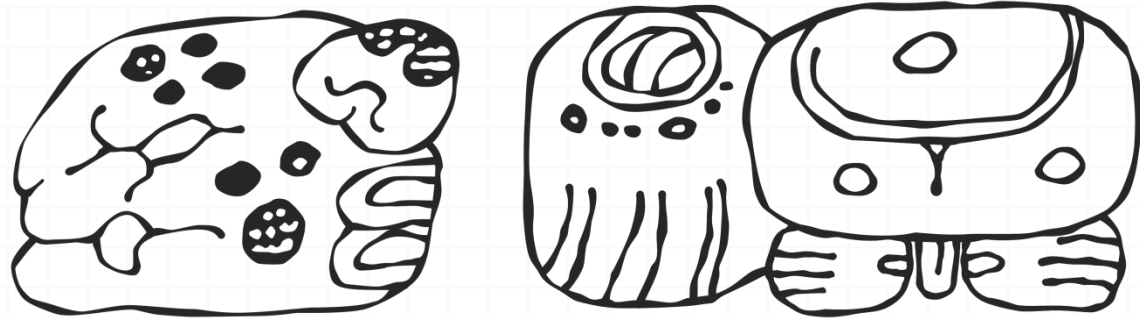
- Chuj
- Tojolab'al
- Q'anjob'al
- Akatek
- Jakalteq
- Mocho'

Kaqchikel

# Why should I learn a Mayan language?

- For a linguist, the answer is pretty much “Learn all the languages” – so go ahead!
- Maya immigration to the United States is currently strong; communicating with Maya friends and neighbors, especially in their own languages, will benefit the society we share.
- Non-indigenous Americans should understand the situation of *contemporary* indigenous Americans, including (but not limited to) the Maya.
- Studying modern Mayan languages can help us understand old texts, including those written in Classic Maya (Ch’olan) and Classical K’iche’.

# Classic Maya (Ch'olan) and Q'anjob'al are different, but related, languages



*The word b'alam 'jaguar', written logographically (l) and syllabically (r) in the Classic Maya script. B'alam is also a word of Q'anjob'al (written in the Roman alphabet).*

# Some aspects of the Q'anjob'al language

# Q'anjob'al has some uncommon speech sounds

- A large set of ejectives: [t' k' q' tz' ch' tx']
  - Ejectives occur in 18% of world's languages
- An implosive stop: [b']
  - Implosives occur in 10% of world's languages
  - Uncommon in the Americas
- Uvulars (contrasting with velars): [q q']
  - Q'anjob'al is among the subset of Mayan languages that retain uvulars from Proto-Mayan... they have merged with velars in other contemporary Mayan languages.
  - [q'] may be produced as a voiceless implosive (very uncommon).
- Three sibilant fricatives: [s xh x]
  - Fairly uncommon: cf. Mandarin, Polish, Sanskrit

# A few words

o txamej 'nose'

o chanej 'dress'

o q'axan 'hot'

o kixkab' 'earthquake'

o ix 'woman'

o yalixh 'little'

o b'alam 'jaguar'

o e'ej 'tooth'

o jolom 'head'

# Statements

- o Miman no' tx'i'.
- o The dog is big.





# Statements

- o Max man heb' xal ix te' china ewi.
- o The women bought oranges yesterday.



# Questions

o Maktxel maxach maq'oni?

o Who hit you?

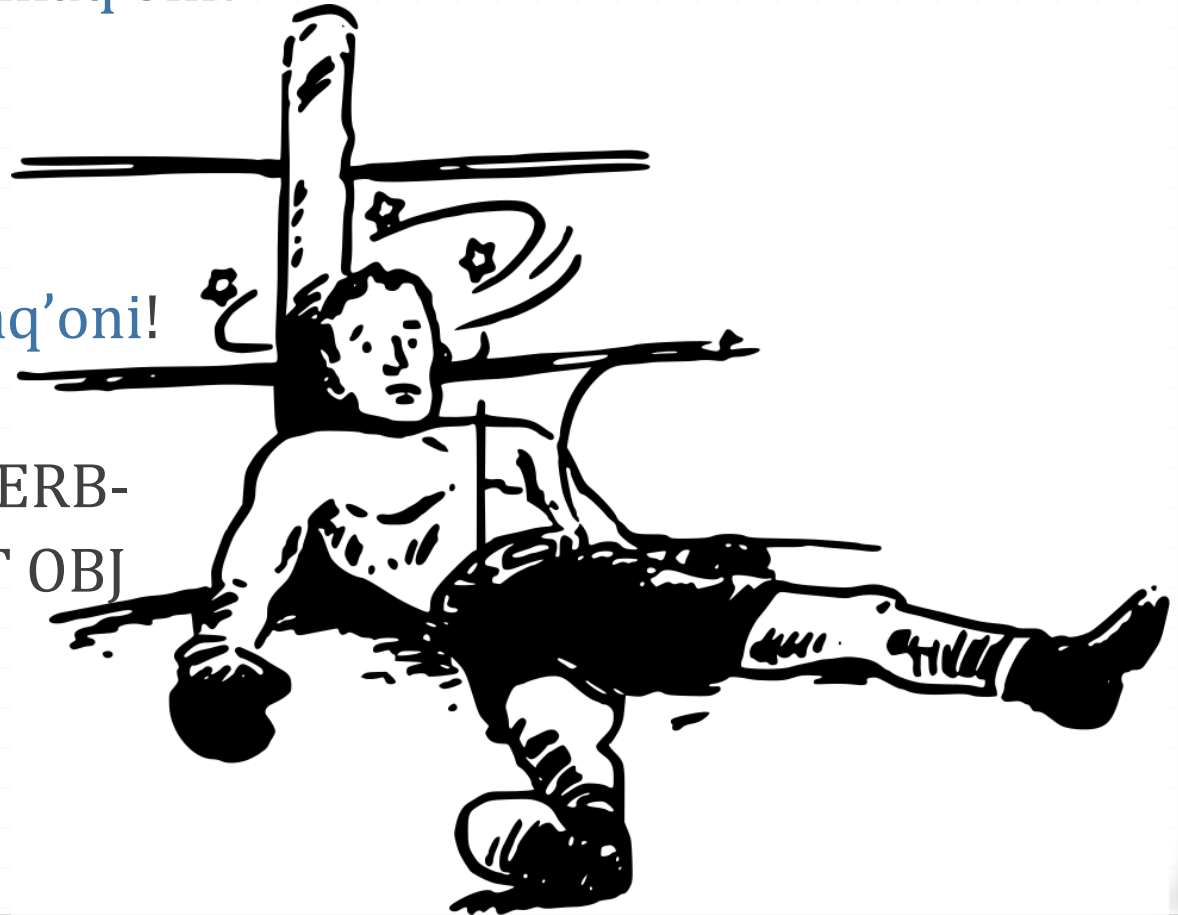
o He hit me!

o A naq' max in maq'oni!

o SUBJ PAST OBJ VERB-

o SUBJ VERB/PAST OBJ

o SUBJ OBJ VERB



# Numbers

01 – jun

02 – kab'

03 – oxeb'

04 – kaneb'

05 – oyeb'

06 – waqeb'

07 – uqeb'

08 – waxaqeb'

09 – b'aloneb'

010 – lajoneb'

# Q'anjob'al is an ergative-absolutive language

- Q'anjob'al marks the actors in a sentence differently than in English and Spanish.
- In English: **She** kissed **him**,
  - **him** is in the accusative case (not *she kissed he!*)
  - **she** is in the nominative case (not *her kissed him!*)
- Note that **she** is the subject of a transitive verb (one that takes an object), *kiss*.
- If **she** were the subject of an intransitive verb (one that doesn't take an object), like *sleep*, the pronoun would still be **she** (i.e. *her sleeps* is incorrect).

# The ergative case

o In languages like English we observe the following morphological (word-marking) pattern

o **S** = subject of an intransitive verb (*sleep*)

o **A** = subject of a transitive verb (*kiss*)

o **O** = object of a transitive verb (*kiss*)

*she*  
**S**

*she*  
**A**

**O**

*her*

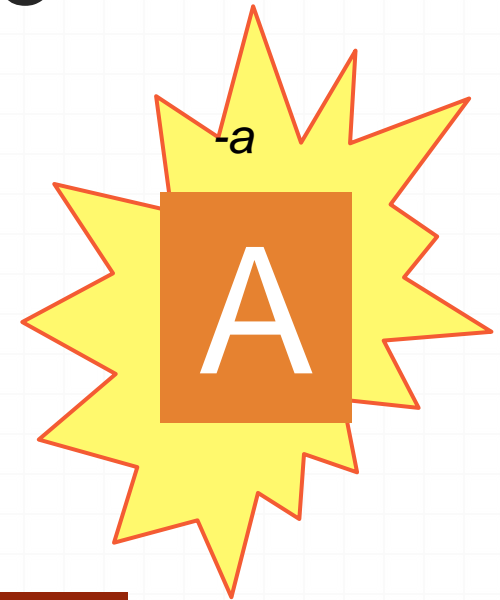
# The ergative case

- In languages like Q'anjob'al we observe a **different** morphological (word-marking) pattern
  - **S** = subject of an intransitive verb (*sleep*)
  - **O** = object of a transitive verb (*kiss*)
  - **A** = subject of a transitive verb (*kiss*)

-ach  
**S**

**O**

-ach



# The ergative case

- o English is a Nominative-Accusative language, where S and A <NOM> pattern against O <ACC>
- o Q'anjob'al is an Ergative-Absolutive language, where S and O <ABS> pattern against A <ERG>
  - o Max-**ach** wayi
    - o Compl- **Abs2Sg** sleep
    - o *You (sg) slept*; Intransitive verb (no object)
  - o Max-**a** lo te on
    - o Compl-**Erg2Sg** eat avocado
    - o *You (sg) ate avocado*; Transitive verb (with object)

# Subjects and objects

o Xin chi lay 'us 'A mosquito bit me <O>'

ABSOLUTIVE

o Xin chi 'us 'I <A> bit/ate a mosquito'

ERGATIVE

o Xin wayi 'I <S> slept'

ABSOLUTIVE

o Xach chi lay koj 'A wildcat bit you <O>'

ABSOLUTIVE

o Xa chi koj 'You <A> bit a wildcat'

ERGATIVE

o Xach wayi 'You <S> slept'

ABSOLUTIVE



# The upshot

- When talking about “you” in the past tense, the pronoun can take two different forms
  - Ergative *-a* if ‘you’ is an Agent (transitive verb subject)
  - Absolutive *-ach* if ‘you’ is a Subject (intransitive verb subject) or an Object
- Can you pick the right pronoun for ‘You ate an avocado’? NB: Not ‘An avocado ate you’!

*On x-a lo.*

# REVENGE OF THE ABSOLUTE

*On x-ach lo-on-i.*

OK, how do I learn this  
awesome language?

# A few phrases to start off...

- o The best way to learn Q'anjob'al is to speak it with a friend!
- o Ask how your friend is doing: "Tzet chi a k'ul?"
- o They might return the question and you might respond: "Watx'!" (Good!)
- o "Ryan yok in b'i." = My name's Ryan.
- o "Tzet yok a b'i ?" = What's your name?
- o "Tzet chi yon alon 'What's up?' yul Q'anjob'al?" = How do you say 'What's up?' in Q'anjob'al?
- o "Jila'!" = See you later!

# Language partners?

- Why not find a Maya friend who wants to get better at English and teach you a little Q'anjob'al, as well?
- If you want, we can come up with some exercises to learn what kinds of questions will best help you learn the sounds, vocabulary, and grammar of Q'anjob'al and how you might help your friend improve at speaking English, too.
- That's a lot to do... so let's get together another day to talk about it some more.

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