



Interpreting into Mayan languages

A guide to understand behind the scenes for
indigenous peoples in court proceedings

By: Elías P. Alonzo – Chuj interpreter

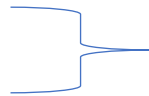
World ancient civilization

- The Mayans among the three most developed ancient civilizations
- The Mayan numbers and concept of zero:
- The Mayan sacred calendar

13 – Joints

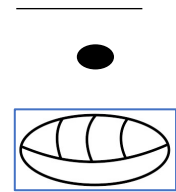
20 fingers

+ 5 Sacred Days

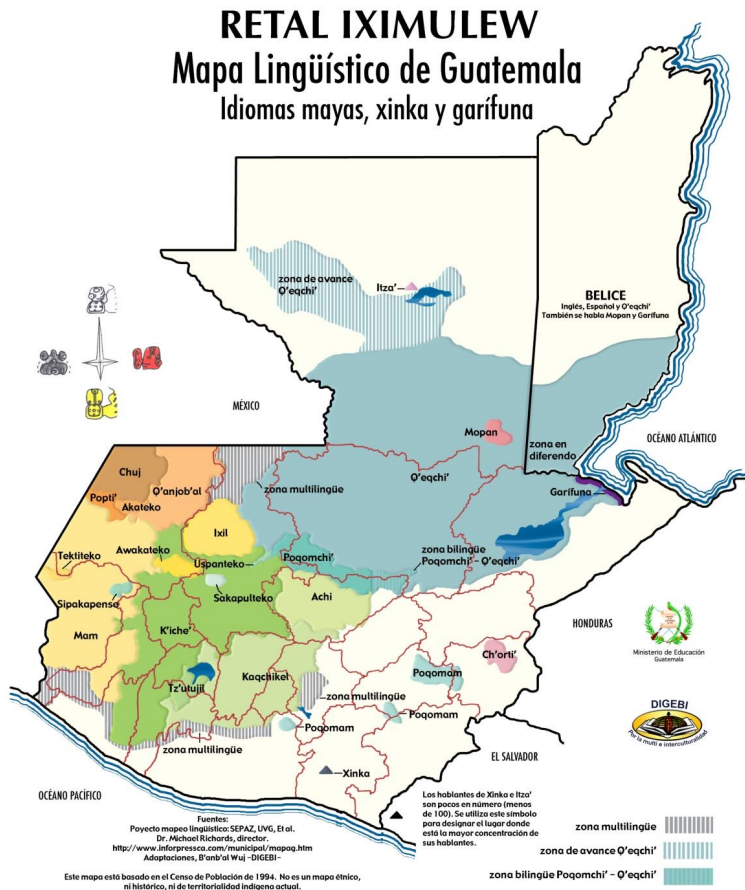


Jun

Winak



The Mayan world - Languages



- Guatemala has four people groups
 - Mayans – 5,000+ years
 - Xinka – 1,000+ years
 - Ladino – 500 years
 - Garífuna – 200 Years
- The Maya people are made up of 22 linguistic communities
- Since 2003 Guatemala has 25 official languages.
- Language Vs. Dialect

Interpreting — Structure & directness?

- Subject – Verb – Object.

• THE MAN BATTERED A WOMAN
VS.

- Verb - Subject – Object

• Smaq' cham winaq' jun xal ix. — Battered by the man a woman. } Q'anjob'al

- Verb – Object - Subject

• Smak' jun ix ix winh winak. - Battered a woman by the man } Chuj

What is justice? – A Comparison

Western Judicial Systems

- Punitive
- Centered on individual responsibilities
- Origins from Roman law

Mayan Justice System

- Reestablish the social imbalance
- Centered on the community
- No precedents

Western Judicial Systems

- Jury
- Payment of restitutions

Mayan Justice System

- Community elders
- Restitution through work

Mayan worldview in judicial process

- Imbalance happens because of a curse or not at peace with “Ajaw” or another person.
- The view of time is cyclical and not linear.
- Cultural, family, and community values are upheld above individual rights
- The elders come to a consensus to give a verdict.
- Shame plays a big role in being truthful.
- A person’s word is very important as opposed to documents.
- Children must honor parent’s, grandparents and elders of the community.

Working with indigenous people

- Familiarize yourself with their story.
- They might say they understand Spanish because they are ashamed of their background. In Guatemala for many years colonialism denigrated indigenous peoples.
- Take time to explain the judicial process in the U.S.
- Don't assume they are unintelligent.
- Many are illiterate in their native language.
- Many will use being indigenous to manipulate – be wise.
- Get a good interpreter and pay them well. 😊 - Avoid bilinguals.

Yujwalyos – Thank you – yujch’andios

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Consider supporting access to education for indigenous people in Guatemala at

www.ixtatan.org