



Kaqchikel Maya

Language Analysis Project

Sarah Eddy de Pappa

University of Central Florida

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis was to study the linguistic features of Kaqchikel, a Mayan language currently spoken in Guatemala and increasingly in the United States, in an effort to better prepare teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) to address the distinct needs of a frequently neglected and typically marginalized population of English language learners (ELLs). Raising awareness of a growing population of ELLs, the study provides historical, cultural, socio-political, and linguistic facts and perspectives and includes a personal interview with a native Kaqchikel speaker currently residing in the United States. Information about language origin, structure, development, evolution, and use informs ESL/EFL teachers of the importance of distinguishing speakers of Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages from other Hispanic ELLs. Suggesting a critical approach to English language instruction, the report details “the top five” challenge points for Kaqchikel speakers learning English and includes a list of resources that teachers can use both personally and in the classroom to gain insight into the Kaqchikel/Mayan language and culture and to foster and support literacy and language development. (Analysis contains one photo, two charts, and a numeric table.)

Introduction

Prior to 2000 B.C., a single indigenous language called Proto-Maya was spoken in the northwest corner of Guatemala. By 1000 B.C., the language diverged into Western (Cholan-Tzeltalan) and Eastern (Mamean) divisions which evolved into the Mayan languages spoken throughout Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America. (Coe, 1999, p.29) Despite destruction of Ancient Mayan texts during the Conquest, the introduction of Spanish as the dominant language, and a history of subjugation, oppression, discrimination, and genocide of indigenous people in the Mayan region, over thirty Mayan Languages continue to exist today. Classified into five subgroups or subfamilies: Ch'ol-Tzotzil, Huastecan, Yucatecan, Chujean-Kanjobal, and Quichean-Mamean, as well as by branch, Mayan languages are complete linguistic systems with distinct grammars, phonemes, and regional dialects. Languages within the same branch of a subgroup share similarities, yet are thought to be mutually unintelligible. A member of the K'ichee' branch of Mayan languages (Hedberg, 2009) of the K'ich'ean-Mamean subfamily, Kaqchikel most closely resembles two other languages in the same branch, Ki'chee' and Tzutujil. Kaqchikel is considered one of four primary Mayan languages, and unlike the extinction and endangerment of other Mayan languages, Kakchiquel is a living language attracting the attention and interest of linguists, scholars, and cultural activists.

Kaqchikel is one of twenty-one Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. Approximately 500,000 people across forty-four municipalities in the central highlands between Lake Atitlan and Guatemala City speak one of Kaqchikel's eleven regional dialects: Akatenango Southwestern, Central, Eastern, Northern, Santa Maria de Jesus, Santo Domingo Xenacoj, South Central, Southern, Western, Yepocapa Southwestern, Mixed Language (Ethnologue.com). Members belonging to each of these linguistic communities maintain strong cultural identities

that are reflected not only in the way they speak, but also in the way they dress: “In Guatemala, textiles and weavings serve to distinguish different ethnic and linguistic groups within communities. Each village proudly displays weavings and garments of unique and characteristic design.” (IDB, 1998-1999) Mayan women typically wear an intricately woven embroidered tunic called a *huipil* and a wrap of cloth as a skirt called a *corte*. Specific patterns, color schemes, and designs of *huipiles* indicate a woman’s natal village or status within her community. For example, many girls and women of Santa Maria de Jesús can be identified by a huipil embroidered with diamond-like geometric shapes in red and pink hues and multi-colored detailing on heavy blue cloth as seen on the girls in this photo from native planet.org:



A short drive from the capital lies a quaint tourist town called Antigua, the hub of Kaqchikel language preservation, reconstruction, and growth. A UNESCO World heritage site, Antigua attracts visitors, scholars, anthropologists, and linguists from around the world who collaborate with local experts and community members in an effort to increase awareness and understanding of Kaqchikel, the people, and the culture. Located near the ruins of Iximche, the seat of the ancient Kaqchikel kingdom, Antigua is a natural site for a Kaqchikel linguistic and cultural center and home to major institutions and programs involved in language revitalization efforts including the Proyecto Linguistico Francisco Marroquin (PLFM).

A non-profit organization founded in 1969 by linguists and Mayan community members, the PLFM organized to educate the public and promote the preservation, use, and understanding of Mayan languages. During Guatemala's 36 year internal conflict, the PLFM continued its efforts. Today, the PLFM and other institutions dedicated to the Pan-Maya revitalization movement, including The Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (AMLG) Kaqchikel Cholchi' branch, Oxlajuuj Keej Maya Ajtx'iib (OKMA), Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Meso-America (CIRMA), as well as Tulane University, the University of Arizona, the University of Kansas, and the University of Texas Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA), lead instructional programs in Kaqchikel language and culture that have contributed to the development of a basic written grammar and growing interest in Kaqchikel. In 1996, the end of the armed conflict brought about the Guatemalan Peace Accords which contains a section establishing indigenous *Cultural Rights* that place language "as a pillar of culture and 'a vehicle for the acquisition and transmission of world view.'" (McKenna Brown, 1998, p.169) At long last, speakers of Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages are gaining progress in realizing their ethnic rights:

Beginning in 2010, the Guatemalan government is requiring all schools at all grade levels throughout the nation to teach classes in the Mayan dialect spoken in each school's geographical department. In the department of Chimaltenango, where NPH is located, this dialect is Kaqchikel. (Daut, 2010)

An empowering move, implementation of Mayan language instruction in the school curriculum marks an important step in reclaiming the voice of a culture.

Writing System

Originally, the ancient Mayans used hieroglyphics to record language. During the Colonial period, a writing system based on the Latin alphabet called the Parra system that included twenty nine out of thirty-four phonemes was used extensively for religious, legal, and personal documents. Native speakers felt that this alphabet did not adequately reflect the true character of the language. As Spanish gained prominence, the Parra system fell out of use, and the practice of writing ceased among Mayan speakers. Supported by the Summer Institute in Linguistics (SIL), a faith-based organization representing Wycliffe Bible Translators, in 1948 the Guatemalan government attempted to adopt a unified written system based on the Spanish alphabet. However, individual communities began to adopt distinct writing systems until the first indigenous teacher Adrian I. Chávez (1904-1987), known as the “father of the Pan-Mayan movement,” (Fischer, 2001, p.97) and cofounder of the ALMG, focused his interest and attention on developing an accurate writing system based on the mother language Ki’che’ in order to render a correct and faithful translation of the sacred Mayan book, “The Popol Vuh.” (Chávez, 1969, p.33)

In order to complete the task, Chávez needed to develop an orthography that would correctly reflect indigenous phonemes and could be used as a basis for an authentic grammar. He felt that a single Mayan alphabet would serve to unify and empower the Mayan people. Finally, in 1988, the AMLG organized a council of 21 Mayan leaders consisting of linguists, scholars, and community members which designed and produced a uniform Mayan alphabet (Sheehan, 1998, p. 84) incorporating letters from the Latin alphabet and Mayan phonemic symbols based on the phonemic principle of spelling “one sound- one symbol, one symbol-one sound” (Blair, 1969, p. 17). The current alphabet consists of 34 graphemes that represent 34 distinctive sounds (phonemes),

comprised of 10 vowels and 24 consonants typically used in Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages. McKenna Brown, Maxwell, and Little (2006) identify 32 graphemes represented in the current Kaqchikel alphabet:

’, a, ā, b’, ch, ch’, e, ē, i, ī, j, k, k’, l, m, n, o, ö, p, q, q’, r, s, t, t’, t, tz’, u, ü, w, x, y. (p.6)

What Kaqchikel Looks and Sounds Like

Many of the phonemes found in Kaqchikel correspond to phonemes found in English. However, some sounds used in Kaqchikel do not correspond to English, and many English phonemes are not used at all in Kaqchikel. Sounds that do not occur in Kaqchikel include voiced and unvoiced dental fricatives [θ] and [ð] and voiced and unvoiced labiodental fricatives [v] (unless used in place of [w]) and [f]; voiced alveolar stop [d], or voiced fricative [z], voiced velar [g]; the voiced palatals [dʒ] and [ʒ] or unvoiced fricatives [ʃ], and voiced liquid [r], Nevertheless, consonant sounds [tʃ], [k], [l], [m], [n], [p], [s], [t], and voiced palatal glide [j] are very similar in Kaqchikel and English. Unvoiced palatal [ç] is written as <x> in Kaqchikel. Bilabials [b], [p], [m], and to an extent [w], are used in both languages, however in Kaqchikel [b] is always produced with a glottal stop, and [p] may be produced with or without a glottal stop. Interestingly, Kaqchikel speakers may pronounce voiced bilabial glide [w] as voiced bilabial stop [b] or voiced labio-dental fricative [v]. Additionally, Kaqchikel features the use of [tz] and [tz’] neither of which is used in English.

Kaqchikel and English speakers differ greatly in the articulation of consonant sounds, especially in regards to voiced consonants, and the use of the glottal stop in Kaqchikel. Blair (1969) notes that “the consonants l,y, w, r, have both voiced and unvoiced variants. (The unvoiced variants occur only in word-final position; the voiced variants never occur there).” (p.82) A prominent phonemic feature of Kaqchikel, glottalized consonants may be imploded (air

sucked into the mouth) or exploded (air forced out of the mouth)... B' and p' are generally imploded (p. 159). In Kaqchikel, [k], [q], are distinct sounds that can occur alone or with glottal stops. The articulation of the front [k] occurs toward the front of the soft palate, and the back [q] occurs with the back of the tongue against the back of the velum. The voiced liquid [r] in Kaqchikel resembles a Spanish trill, but is articulated more like an alveolar flap similar to the /tt/ in butter. Kaqchikel speakers also tend to voice the glottal glide /h/ which may be written as <j>.

All ten of the vocalic phonemes in Kaqchikel are produced in English. Kaqchikel distinguishes between two sets of vowels lax (represented by /··/) or tense vowels. Words may change from lax to tense vowels for grammatical purposes (to show possession in Class two nouns). Orthographic differences between vocalic graphemes and phonemes in English and Kaqchikel might cause English Language Learners (ELLs) some confusion with spelling. For example, the grapheme <e> in Kaqchikel and Spanish is similarly pronounced [e] as in IPA, but written in English as <a>.

The following chart (www.native-languages.org) includes two additional consonants: <ky>, <ky'> and shows the pronunciation, orthographic variety, and corresponding International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols:

☞ **Vowels**

<u>Character We Use:</u>	<u>Sometimes Also Used:</u>	<u>IPA symbol:</u>	<u>How To Pronounce It:</u>
a		a	Like the <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> .
ä	a, y, i, ä, a	ə ~ i	In some dialects it is pronounced like the <i>a</i> in <i>about</i> . In others, it is pronounced higher in the mouth like the "dark i" sound of Russian or Polish.

e		e	Like the Spanish <i>e</i> , similar to the <i>a</i> in English <i>gate</i> .
ë	e, ě, <u>e</u>	ɛ ~ ə ~ e	Like <i>e</i> in <i>get</i> . Most Kaqchikel dialects pronounce this sound the same as <i>ä</i> or <i>e</i> , and even Kaqchikel speakers who do pronounce this sound distinctly often spell it as "e."
i		i	Like the <i>i</i> in <i>police</i> .
ĩ	i, ĩ, <u>i</u>	I ~ i	Like the <i>i</i> in <i>hit</i> . In some dialects this sound is pronounced the same as the <i>i</i> sound.
o		o	Like the <i>o</i> in <i>note</i> .
ö	o, ö, <u>o</u>	ɔ ~ o	Like the <i>au</i> in <i>caught</i> . In some dialects this sound is pronounced the same as the <i>o</i> sound.
u		u	Like the <i>u</i> in <i>flute</i> .
ü	ũ, v, <u>u</u>	U	Like the <i>u</i> in <i>put</i> .

∞ **Diphthongs**

<u>Character We Use:</u>	<u>Sometimes Also Used:</u>	<u>IPA symbol:</u>	<u>How To Pronounce It:</u>
ay	ai	aj	Like English <i>eye</i> .
ey	ei	ej	Like <i>ey</i> in English <i>they</i> .
oy	oi	oj	Like <i>oy</i> in English <i>boy</i> .
uy	ui	uj	like the <i>uoy</i> in English <i>buoy</i> .

∞ **Consonants**

<u>Character We Use:</u>	<u>Sometimes Also Used:</u>	<u>IPA symbol:</u>	<u>How To Pronounce It:</u>
b'	b	ɓ	Like <i>b</i> in <i>boy</i> , only implosive. To English speakers, it sounds as if Maya speakers are 'swallowing' the <i>b</i> sound, similar to the way <i>b</i> is pronounced in Vietnamese. At the end of a word this sound often is not pronounced at all.
ch	c	tʃ	Like <i>ch</i> in <i>chair</i> .

ch'	chh, 'ch, c', 4h	tʃ̥	Like <i>ch</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
h	j	h ~ x	Like <i>h</i> in <i>hay</i> . Some speakers pronounce it more raspily, like the <i>j</i> in Spanish <i>jalapeño</i> .
k	c, qu	k	Like <i>k</i> in <i>key</i> .
k'	c', qu', q'u, k, k̥, 'c, 4	k̥	Like <i>k</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
ky	cy, k ^y	k ^j	Like <i>c</i> in <i>cute</i> .
ky'	cy', c'y, k ^{y'}	k ^{j'}	Like <i>ky</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
l	ll	l	Like <i>l</i> in <i>light</i> .
m		m	Like <i>m</i> in <i>moon</i> .
n	ŋ, nh	n ~ ŋ	Like <i>n</i> in <i>night</i> . At the end of a word, sometimes it is pronounced like the <i>ng</i> in <i>sing</i> .
p		p	Like the <i>p</i> in <i>pie</i> .
q	k	q	Like <i>k</i> only pronounced further back in the throat. This is the same sound as the <i>q</i> in Arabic.
q'	k', q̥, 'k, 3	q̥	Like <i>q</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
r		r̥	Like Spanish <i>r</i> , somewhat like the <i>tt</i> in English <i>butter</i> .
s	z, ç	s	Like the <i>s</i> in <i>sun</i> .
t		t	Like the <i>t</i> in <i>tell</i> .
t'	tt	t̥	Like <i>t</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
tz	ts, ç	ts	Like <i>ts</i> in <i>cats</i> .
tz'	ts', dz, t̥ç, ç', 'tz, 4,	t̥ç	Like <i>tz</i> , only glottalized (pronounced with a pop of air.)
w	b, v, vu, hu	w ~ b ~ β	Usually like <i>w</i> in <i>way</i> , but in some dialects it is pronounced like <i>b</i> in <i>boy</i> or the bilabial <i>v</i> in Spanish <i>navidad</i> instead.

X	š, sh, \$	ʃ	Like <i>sh</i> in <i>shell</i> .
y		j	Like <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i> .
'	ʔ	ʔ	A pause sound, like the one in the middle of the word "uh-oh."

Both Kaqchikel and English are considered stress languages. Speakers of Kaqchikel commonly place stress on the final syllable of a word. Words and morphemes in Kaqchikel often consist of one syllable made up of one to three grapheme/phonemes following vowel/consonant (VC) patterns: VC, CV, or CVC, or two syllable roots VCV, VCVC, or CVCVC. (Blair, 1969, p.22) Concurrent with the dominant language Spanish, Kaqchikel, and other Mayan languages are written from left to right, and read from left to right, top to bottom similar to English, not too different from the historical Maya texts which were “written from left to right, and from top to bottom in columns of two.” (Kettunen et al., 2008, p.15) Although current Mayan orthography was designed to represent sounds as they occur in speech, evident in the correlation between the 34 graphemes and 34 phonemes, orthography occasionally differs from pronunciation. (McKenna Brown et al., 2006, p.148) For example, the initial [n] of a verb is often pronounced as /ni/ (Blair, 1969, p. 49) Graphemes based on the Roman alphabet follow the same upper and lower case patterns. Symbols representing distinct Mayan phonemes that are not represented by a complementary Latin letter do not distinguish upper and lower case. Kaqchikel is commonly written in print form, however, because of the Latin features of most graphemes, Kaqchikel might also be written in cursive form. Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages follow standard Spanish punctuation including double question marks, as seen in the following sample:

Greeting Exchange between a young man, Kanek and a young woman, Ixq'anil (McKenna Brown et al, 2006, p.15)

	Kaqchikel	English
Kanek:	Xokoq'a k'a.	Good evening. (emphasis)
Ixq'anil:	Xokoq'a, matyöx.	Good evening, thanks.
Kanek:	¿ La üt ab'anon?	How are you?
Ixq'anil:	Janila üt, matyöx. ¿ La üt ab'anon rat?	Very well, thanks. How are you?
Kanek:	Jeb'ël üt, matyöx.	Very well, thanks.
Ixq'anil:	Matyöx k'ari'. Chwa'q chik.	Glad to hear it. Until tomorrow.
Kanek:	Ke ri' ka.	See you later.

Grammar (*Kemchi'*)

Collaborative efforts to study, preserve, and revitalize Kaqchikel have led to the assembly of a basic grammar. This grammar attempts to cover the major features of a standard form of Kaqchikel for the purposes of language instruction, analysis, and understanding. However, Kaqchikel's eleven distinct regional dialects vary in use, pronunciation, and form. Heavy influence of Spanish has greatly affected the Kaqchikel language. Younger people who speak the language in their communities have introduced borrowed Spanish terms, pronunciations, and syntax. For example, the Spanish conjunction *entonces*, or one of the clipped versions *tons* or *to*, is commonly used in spoken Kaqchikel. (McKenna Brown et al., 2000, p.198) Vocabulary varies according to the needs of speakers, and borrowing, compounding, and neologisms account for many new words and expressions to identify modern objects and concepts.

Word Order

Kaqchikel, like other Mayan languages, differs from English in many ways, notably in word order and syntactic structure. English, a nominative-accusative language follows a standard Subject Verb Object (SVO) word order. An Ergative-Absolutive language, Kaqchikel distinguishes morphologically between transitive and intransitive verbs, whereby intransitive verbs inflect for subjects and transitive verbs inflect for objects. Depending on the predicate form, thematic elements and verb transitivity or intransitivity, Kaqchikel word order is fairly flexible. According to Broadwell (2000), “Kaqchikel can show the possibility of two word orders; one in which the subject is initial and one in which the verb is initial” (p.1), and that “SVO is only obligatory for subjects of transitive clauses with third person objects” (p.2) Unlike English which necessitates the use of a verb in the predicate, Kaqchikel predicates may be verbal, nominal, adjectival, or positional, and inflect for subjects. “Pre-verbal position is generally “marked”, indicating special importance, be it sentence focus or topic. Elements may move around to satisfy stylistic precepts.” (McKenna Brown et al., 2006, p.196). The subject or object may follow an intransitive verb creating a VSO or VOS word order. Additionally, in certain circumstances nouns and adjectives may take the place of the verb and qualify as the predicate.

Affixes and Verbs

Affixes play an important role in Kaqchikel. A prefix or suffix can be added to almost every part of speech, except articles. Unlike English in which verbs are free lexical morphemes, verbs in Kaqchikel are bound lexical morphemes (roots) and are conjugated by the addition of a prefix to indicate tense, person, or number, but not gender. Commonly, “prefixes are added to

verb stems to form conjugations” (Blair, 1969, p.174) and root words mark possession, tense/aspect, and mood. Kaqchikel uses three tenses: present (incompletive- refers to ongoing actions) marked by a <y- >or <n-> prefix, future (a potential action) marked by <xk> or <xt> prefix, and past (completed actions) marked by <x- >prefix. Prefixes <n> and <xt> mark third person singular absolutive. (McKenna Brown et al., 2006, pp.167-170)

Suffixes may be added to verb roots to mark two states of action, perfective state or continuing condition. Kaqchikel speakers recognize two moods, indicative and subjunctive/hortative. The indicative expresses believability and the subjunctive/hortative expresses desires or wishes and is used to make demands and give orders. The prefix <k> attaches to pronouns (<t-> is used with third person singular absolutive) to mark the subjunctive/hortative mood.

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs and Corresponding Pronouns

Kaqchikel speakers use pronoun prefixes to distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs. One of two sets of possessive pronouns may attach as a prefix which indicates person and number. *Ergative* pronouns (set A) mark the subject of transitive verbs and *Absolutive* pronouns (set B) mark the subject of intransitive verbs. Transitive verbs occur most frequently with a third person singular object (McKenna Brown et al., 2006, p.85) and may be made intransitive or *antipassive*, “by suppressing the object” (p.174), just as intransitive verbs may be made transitive or *passive* “by suppressing” the subject or agent of the action. Intransitive verbs can form words pertaining to jobs and professions by adding the singular suffix <-el> or the plural suffix <ela’>; or they may be used to express some emotions.

Ergative pronouns serve as subjects of the transitive verb while Absolutive pronouns, “serve as subjects of non-verbal predicates.” (p.61). Unlike the Spanish pronouns *tú*, and *usted* “in Kakchiquel there is no social distinction between pronouns.” (Blair, 1969, p.29) Plurals, transitives, passives and antipassives, as well as the derivation of nouns from verbs may be formed by attaching a suffix.

McKenna Brown, Maxwell, and Little. (2006) indicate distinct types of pronouns:

1. Freestanding or independent personal pronoun. These pronouns serve one of three purposes: as subject, to add emphasis, to establish topic: (p.17)

rín (or yín)	I	rōj	we
rat	you (sing)	rīx	you (plural)
rijaʼ	he/she	rijeʼ	they

2. Possessive Pronouns (Set A) - Ergative pronoun prefix mark transitive verbs. Distinct prefixes are used before consonant-initial words and vowel-initial words.

A. Set A pronouns that attach to consonant-initial words (p.17):

nu-	my	qa-	our
a-	your (sing)	i-	your (pl)
ru-	her/his/its	ki-	their

B. Set A pronouns that attach to vowel-initial words (p.31):

w-	my	q-	our
aw-	your (sing)	iw	your (pl)
r-	her/his/its	k-	their

3. Possessive pronouns (Set B): Absolutive pronoun prefixes mark intransitive verbs.

A. Set B pronouns that attach to consonant-initial verbs (p.29):

yi-	I	yoj-	we
ya-	you (sing)	yix-	you (pl)
n-	s/he	ye-	they

B. Set B pronouns that attach to vowel-initial verbs (p.29):

yin-	I	yoj-	we
yat-	you (sing)	yix-	you (pl)
n-	s/he	ye'-	they

4. Object pronouns (p. 49)

A. Used with Transitive verbs: before consonant initial verb

Rin nin+ stem	roj nqa+ stem
Rat na+ stem	rix nitz+ stem
Rija' nu+ stem	rije' nki+ stem

B. Transitive verbs : before vowel initial verb

Rin ninw+	roj nq+
Rat naw+	rix niw+
Rija' nr+	rije' nk+

Transitive verbs may be made reflexive by adding the third person singular object pronoun followed by the relational noun <-i'>.

Example: The verb -tz'ët (to see)

Nintz' ët wi' I see myself	nqatz' ët qi' we see ourselves.
Natz' ët aw' you see yourself	nitz' ët iwi' you all see yourselves
Nutz' ët ri' s/he sees her/himself	nkitz' ët ki' they see themselves

5. Absolutive Subject pronouns (Set B) serve as subjects of non-verbal predicates and are used when a noun or an adjective is used as a predicate. (p.61, p.85)

Rin in	röj öj
Rat at	rix ix
Rija; (none)	rij' e

Nouns

Most nouns in Kaqchikel are free lexical morphemes or morpheme combinations that inflect to indicate or change under possession, and occasionally inflect for pluralization.

However de-verbal nouns derive from intransitive verb roots (bound lexical morphemes) with the addition of a suffix and common relational noun stems require a prefix. Nouns are divided in to three classes determined by interaction with possession, pluralization, and syntactic structure. (McKenna Brown et al., 2006, p. 144) The largest group, Class One nouns do not change upon possession. Class Two nouns change from a lax vowel in the unpossessed form to a tense vowel upon possession:

Lax vowels: ä, ë, ï, ö, ü

Tense vowels: a, e, i, o, u

Class Three nouns have a suffix when unpossessed which is lost upon possession. Nouns in this class rarely appear in unpossessed form. (p.146). Nouns may serve as arguments of verbs; they

may serve as predicates; they may be modified by adjectives; they may be counted by numbers; they may be designated by demonstrative frames. (p.142)

Classifiers are used to categorize nouns three ways:

1. Interaction with possessive pronouns.(6 classes)
 - a. Do not change when possessed
 - b. Lax vowel in unpossessed form and tense vowel in possessed form
 - c. Add a suffix when possessed
 - d. Change roots when possessed
 - e. Are always possessed
2. Pluralization- most nouns do not have a distinct plural form since plurality is understood through context (p. 47)
 - a. Plural suffix- used for naming people and some animals (exception includes: animal, coyote, bird, rabbit p. 94) suffix < i' > or < a' >; <taq> precedes some nouns to emphasize plurality,
 - b. No plural
3. Syntactic structure (p.155)
 - a. Count vs. mass nouns
 - b. Nouns that act like adjectives serve as attributive adjectives (truck driver)
 - c. Compounding
 - d. Polar generics
 - e. Relational nouns –link phrases and clauses in their possessed form (p.57):

<-oma> (because of, <-ik'in> (with) prefix marks person

Woma because of me

qoma because of us

Awoma because of you	iwoma because of you (plural)
Roma because of it/her/him	koma because of them
Wik'in with me	qik'in with us
Awik'in with you	iwik'in with you (plural)
Rik'in with it/him/her	kik'in with them
<-ichin>	
<-onojel> (indicates total, all my heart...), <-yon> (indicates alone-by oneself)	

Positionals

Distinctly, Kaqchikel has a class of words similar to adjectives or past participles called *positionals* that are used to name positions, conditions or states. Positionals may be used as nonverbal predicates. To form a nonverbal predicate positional, a suffix attaches to a positional root. Often, the suffix is formed by mimicking the vowel that appears in the root and changing from tense to lax, added to a final consonant <l>. Following a different pattern, root words ending in /l/ or /r/ simply add the suffix <-an>.

Example:

(Round)	set-	setël	(Circular)	sir-	siran
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Adjectives and Adverbs

In general, adjectives in Kaqchikel function much like they do in English. Similarly, they precede the nouns they modify. However, predicate adjectives may take the place of a verb. Predicate adjectives have both singular and plural forms that are marked by a suffix. The suffix

of the singular copies the first vowel and the first consonant of the root and adds the ending <ik>. The plural is formed the same way only with a different ending: <äq>.

Example: set- (round)

	Singular		Plural
set-	setesik	set-	setesäq

Most adjectives derive from positional roots and inflect with a suffix for pluralization. Uniquely, colors are formed with the addition of a suffix composed of first letter of the color plus <-oj> (light). (McKenna Brown, 2006, p.33) Adverbs are rare in Kaqchikel. Two adverbs (free lexical morphemes) *janila* (very) and *loman* (sort of, so-so) are most commonly used.

Questions

Kaqchikel speakers distinguish questions in two separate grammatical categories: *Yes/no* questions and *question-word* interrogatives. As in English, questions are marked by a rise and fall in intonation in *yes/no* questions, and a rise in intonation in *question-word* interrogatives. Unlike English, in Kaqchikel, *yes/no* questions may be introduced with the interrogative particle *la*, (McKenna Brown et al. p.139) and subject-verb inversion is not required. The expected response to a *yes/no* question is either the affirmative *ja'* or the negative *manäq*. The phrase *man..ta* surrounds a specific word for negation.

Example:

Questions:	Do you like the picture?	¿ La üt natz'ët ri achib'äl?
Affirmative Response:	Yes, I like it.	Ja' , üt nintz'ët.

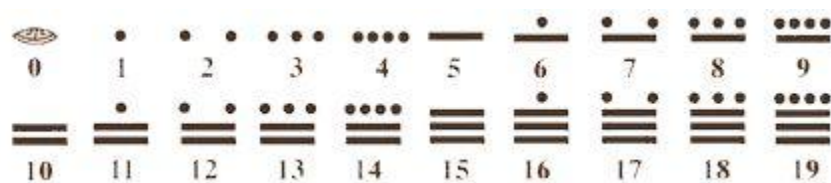
Negative Response: No, I don't like it. **Manäq, man ütztä nintz'ët**

In general, Kaqchikel uses *achike* for *who* and *what*, *akuchi* for *where*, *jaru (pe)* for *how much*, *jampe-jani pe* for *when*. (p.140). Additional question words are formed by adding the particle prefix *achoj-* or *achoj-* (*why* or *whose*) to the stem of relational nouns. *Axti* may also be used for *why*. The particle *wi* often occurs with *Akuchi'* (*where*) to indicate location or direction of movement (p.141).

Example: ¿ Akuchi' xb'e wi? Where did he go?

Numeric System

The Mayan base 20 number system remains in use. For example, Mayan women pass down traditional back strap-weaving techniques to their daughters and granddaughters using Kaqchikel numbers. Commonly, Kaqchikels learn the Spanish names for numbers however the Mayan movement has spurred instruction in Mayan numeration and counting in schools. In Kaqchikel, a glyph system of bars and dots represents numbers. The symbol for *one* is a dot; a bar represents *five*. A combination of bars and dots determine numbers *one* through *nineteen*. (McKenna Brown et al, p. 119)



<http://library.thinkquest.org/C004577/math2.php3>

Kaqchikel speakers distinguish two ways to say the number twenty: *winäq* (which also means person) is used to count people, days and units of time, and *juk'al* is used for objects. Cardinal numbers two through nine are formed by adding a vowel suffix [e], [i], [o], [u] and

glottal stop [‘] to a number stem. With numbers ten *lajuj* through nineteen *b’elejlajuj*, *lajuj* replaces the vowel [‘] suffix. To form ordinal numbers, Kaqchikel speakers replace the final vowel [‘] suffix with the third person singular possessive pronoun <ru-> or <r->. First *nab’ey*, second *ruka’n*, and fifth *to’* are exceptions to the rule. (p. 38) Ordinal numbers combine with the suffix <ik’> (month) to name the months of the year. Days of the week are formed by combining the first syllable of the Spanish day name (adapted to Kaqchikel sounds) with the suffix <q’ij> (day). (pp.38-39)

Similarities and Differences

Although Kaqchikel shares some similarities with English, the two languages differ greatly. Like English, but unlike Spanish, Kaqchikel does not distinguish grammatical gender for nouns, pronouns, adjectives, or verbs, and Kaqchikel recognizes two degrees of distance: close to the speaker *re...re’* (this) and far from the speaker *la...la’*. (McKenna Brown et al, 2006, p.161). Similar to English, Kaqchikel borrows many terms from other languages (frequently Spanish), and uses prefixes and suffixes to inflect and derive new words. Because of heavy Spanish influence, an invented term “Espanchikel” similar to the American term “Spanglish” might be used to describe the type of Kaqchikel that has evolved among young people.

Salient differences between Kaqchikel and English occur with phonemes, word order, and predicates. Distinct phonemes and manners of articulation create considerable confusion in listening and speaking for both Kaqchikel ELLs and English Kaqchikel language learners (KLLs). Flexible word order in Kaqchikel influences pragmatics, enabling speakers to express thoughts in a variety of ways. Grammatically impossible in English, nouns and verbs may act as predicates in Kaqchikel. Articles are used differently in Kaqchikel and English; use of an article

or deictic form (this/these or that/those) with a possessive pronoun and the noun it modifies occurs in Kaqchikel (and Italian), but not in English or Spanish. For example, Kaqchikel speakers might say: *I had this, my blouse made. He gave the his book to the teacher.* (p.143) Also, Kaqchikel speakers use *jun*, the number one, as an indefinite article and *ri* which is similar to the English definite article *the*, “but, as can be expected, its use differs in many ways from that of the. For example... it is used with proper names, except in directly addressing that person.” (Blair, 1969, p. 128) Interestingly, the practice of using a definite article with proper names, which never occurs in English, has transferred to Spanish speakers in Guatemala when referring to another person in conversation. (personal observation).

Teachers of ELLs with Kaqchikel backgrounds should be aware of specific trouble points occurring from differences in word order, word formation, and sentence construction. Also, Kaqchikel and English use of language reflect distinct interpretations of the world. For example, Kaqchikel does not claim possession like we do in English with the verb *to have*. Instead, Kaqchikel speakers use the possessive pronoun within an acknowledgement of existence. Example: K’o jun nutz’i “there is one my dog.” (McKenna Brown et al, 2006, p.155). Because Kaqchikel does not distinguish grammatical gender for nouns, pronouns, adjectives, or verbs, ELLs may have difficulty differentiating personal and possessive pronouns in English.

Reasons for Learning English

Kaqchikel speakers have different reasons for learning English. Jobs are scarce in Guatemala and poverty is prevalent. The ability to speak English is a highly marketable skill that supports other academic skills and degrees and affords students many opportunities by opening doors to a wide range of fields: tourism, hospitality, language education, broadcasting,

translator/interpreter, local and national government jobs, American-run corporations and publications, journalism, as well as to higher education. Families from Kaqchikel communities encourage their children to become educated and to learn English in order to find work and earn money to support the family. Schools throughout Guatemala commonly offer instruction in English as part of the curriculum. Many popular career options fall into the “bilingual” category-bilingual meaning the ability to communicate in Spanish and English. Students may earn certification in bilingual executive secretary, bilingual accounting, and bilingual education.

Despite increased restrictions on immigration in the United States, widespread poverty and the allure of a better life continue to drive many people from Guatemala north to the United States and Canada. Dispersed throughout the nation, speakers of Mayan languages including Kaqchikel and have even formed ethnic communities, such as the Q’anjob’al community in South Florida known as Indiantown. “Today there are few areas of the United States where Mayas are not found.” (Loukey et al., 2000, p.4) Many Mayas come to Florida to work in the tomato fields and citrus groves. In addition to needing English communication skills to survive in their new location, knowing English greatly helps to navigate the complex immigration process. According to Wellmeier (2000), “A non-literate agricultural population whose first language is not a major Western language finds it almost impossible to navigate the paperwork” (p.140) As ESL instructional programs in many communities service a wide range of non-native speakers, ESL teachers are likely to find a speaker of Kaqchikel in their classroom.

Potential Sources of Cultural Difficulty

Imagine life in a world where few people speak the language spoken in your home. How would life be for you if everything, everywhere in your community and rest of the world were

written or produced in a language foreign to you and your family? You would never hear your language broadcast on television or radio. You could not listen to music with lyrics in your language. You could not read a book, magazine, newspaper, or even a street sign in your language. You would never be taught to read or write your language. In school, you would learn the foreign language you see and hear around you, without translation. Your teacher and classmates might even make fun of you, and tell you that the language you speak has no value. How might you feel?

Speakers of Kaqchikel experience this scenario as a regular part of life. EFL/ESL teachers must recognize the significance of teaching a language of global currency (LGC) to native speakers of a less commonly taught language (LCTL). Additionally, EFL/ESL teachers must accept responsibility for teaching native Mayan speakers a language that carries an even higher level of prestige, power, and wealth than the national language they have been forced to learn. Stigmatized and lacking a strong language foundation for academic learning, speakers of Kaqchikel require extra support and understanding in order to achieve success when learning English as a second or third language. Teachers of English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) must take special care not to promulgate hegemonic ideals and attitudes that serve to further marginalize and devalue Kaqchikel speakers. Instead, EFL/ESL teachers need to provide Kaqchikel ELLs with language tools that can empower them to transcend social barriers.

Rooted in a rich cultural history, the Kaqchikel language belongs to a group of people who have suffered centuries of poverty, injustice, denigration, and despair. Many Kaqchikel speakers know little about their native language and have been subjected to the dominance of Spanish-speaking ladino culture that conflicts with traditional Mayan values and way of life.

Transmission of dominant values through the educational system has taught members of Mayan communities “that they were a marginalized group with no legitimate history or culture of their own.” (Garzon, 1998, p.195) Perceived as an unwelcoming environment, the classroom becomes the center of negative attitudes, demoralization, and resistance.

Literacy and Learning

In general, bilingual speakers and readers gain increased flexibility to facilitate the acquisition of a third, or fourth language. However unfavorable conditions for learning Spanish- create social and affective barriers for native speakers of Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages that inhibit the development of literacy and language skills. “Spanish-language literacy almost always takes place in an environment that is foreign and unfriendly to the Mayas, while Mayan language literacy training, almost by definition, is a Maya-only enterprise since very few non-Mayas read and write a Mayan language.” (McKenna Brown, 1998, p.161) Consequently, the effects of socio-cultural/linguistic marginalization cause severe damage to the identity and self-view of many Kaqchikel Mayas. Concurrently, Western perspectives often clash with Mayan traditions and viewpoints. Awareness of the specific factors that influence Kaqchikel ELLs’ performance in the classroom informs EFL/ESL instruction and prepares teachers to meet students’ needs.

Due to lack of written materials, children and most adults are not literate in Kaqchikel. The national language, Spanish, has been the traditional basis for education and literacy in Guatemala, thus, “almost all Mayas literate in a Mayan language have prior, and in most cases greater, literacy in Spanish.”(p.160). Efforts to promote literacy in Kaqchikel are rising. The recent introduction of formal Kaqchikel instruction into the school curriculum will help establish

a stronger language foundation for the development of literacy skills among Kaqchikel students. In regards to literacy in the EFL/ESL classroom, teachers must recognize that children who are literate in Kaqchikel will likely have stronger Spanish literacy skills. Most Kaqchikel language learners will rely heavily on Spanish, their second language (L2) for transfer of skills. Cognates and closely related Latin-based alphabets support positive transfer from Spanish to English. However, teachers may expect little positive transfer of skills from Kaqchikel.

Language skills might transfer more easily from Spanish to English than from Kaqchikel to English, however the disparity between cultures that leads to distinct background experiences and sets of schema between English speakers and native Kaqchikel speakers presents a distinct challenge. Teachers can help to bridge the cultural gap by learning as much as possible about their students' culture. EFL teachers in Guatemala can empower ELLs by lowering affective filters, demonstrating interest in the native culture, language, and home lives of students, and incorporating literature, music, food, etc. that allow students to use developing English skills to strengthen cultural identity in positive ways. In addition to learning about students' culture and backgrounds, ESL teachers in English speaking countries must recognize the difficulties that Kaqchikel speakers have assimilating to life in an English-speaking country and provide additional encouragement and scaffolding to support acculturation and help students learn necessary survival skills.

Kaqchikel speakers may have difficulty accepting or coming to terms with new and foreign perspectives and ways of life. Many Mayan immigrants in the United States work as agricultural laborers earning low wages and often living in deplorable conditions. Others are undocumented immigrants without recourse to jobs, health care, or legal status. For various reasons, this specific group of ELLs may be reluctant to participate or hesitate to request

clarification, explanations, additional time, or assistance. Accordingly, Kaqchikel speakers may require an extended *silent period* to adapt to their new environment and become comfortable with new phonemes and language concepts before producing speech in English.

Hence, EFL and ESL teachers cognizant of students' specific needs can implement effective motivational strategies, and help students develop confidence to achieve personal language goals. As with all ELLs, teachers must encourage reasonable and achievable goals and deter unrealistic expectations of native-like mastery in order to facilitate success. By demonstrating interest and respect for the language, culture, and traditions of Kaqchikel Mayas and by providing opportunities for students to share personal knowledge and background experience, teachers of Kaqchikel speakers can cultivate a pleasant and attainable language learning experience that can encourage ELLS and empower Kaqchikel Mayas toward literacy, social justice, and success.

Interview with Kaqchikel Speaker

José Girón¹, a 32 year-old single man from Santa María de Jesús, Guatemala came to the United States in 2003 with his brother and uncle to earn money chopping trees for a lumber company in order to support their families in Guatemala. Deceived and frustrated with meager pay and inhumane living conditions, the men moved to Ormond Beach, Florida to join friends from Antigua. Currently, José and two brothers work for a local residential contractor.

José considers himself bilingual. The second eldest of eight children, he learned Kaqchikel and Spanish as a child. José's seven siblings understand, but do not speak Kaqchikel. Still, José can communicate well in Kaqchikel, but he only knows Kaqchikel numbers one through six. José's parents and grandparents spoke Kaqchikel, their first language, at home. Interested and curious, José made an effort to learn. Like most Kaqchikel parents, José's parents

encouraged their children to learn and use Spanish outside of the home to avoid mistreatment and humiliation. “La gente prefiere que sus hijos hablen español por que se burlan de tí.” People prefer that their children speak Spanish because people make fun of you. (J.Girón, personal communication, April 24, 2010) [trans.]

In Santa María de Jesús, José attended school through ninth grade with a Kaqchikel teacher and other Kaqchikel students. Yet, classes were conducted in Spanish. José learned to read and write Spanish. After ninth grade, José travelled to nearby Antigua to attend school with mostly *ladino* students. José spoke Kaqchikel privately with family members and friends.

José’s family regularly attended local protestant church services which were also conducted in Spanish, despite the fact that the entire parish spoke Kaqchikel. Frequently, missionaries visit the poverty-stricken village of Santa María de Jesús to provide assistance and relief. Three of José’s cousins met and married American missionaries, and now live in the United States- North Carolina, California, and Mississippi. The only book José has seen written in Kaqchikel is a version of the Bible that had been translated by an American missionary residing in the village.

Since arriving in the United States, José has met many other speakers of Mayan languages, most of whom do not speak Spanish or English. Aside from his relatives, José has not met other Kaqchikel speakers. José does not understand the other languages he has heard and is unable to communicate with non-Kaqchikel Mayas. At the soccer field, José and his brothers met a group of Mayas from Guatemala who live north of Ormond Beach. José mentioned that Americans often assume incorrectly that all Mayan speakers in the United States speak Spanish. When non-Spanish speaking Mayans require public assistance they are often given a Spanish

translator, to no avail. They are at a great disadvantage in Western society. Without a voice, these people receive harsh or unfair treatment, and cannot seek the help they desperately need.

When José and his brothers are not working, they attend services at a local Pentecostal church, socialize with friends from Antigua, or play soccer. José and his brothers briefly attended English language courses at Daytona State College, but long hours at work prevented them from continuing. Lack of time and isolation from the English speaking community has prevented José and his brothers from learning English.

Able to read and understand some English, José knows more than his brothers. After nearly eight years of living in the United States, José feels he should be able to communicate much better than he does. Access to Spanish media, and interaction with other Spanish speakers has enabled the men to survive in a white middle class community with little English language skills. José finds the sounds of the English language very foreign, and consequently very hard to distinguish and articulate. For example, he cannot distinguish the words *heart* and *earth* when he hears them. To him, the words sound exactly the same, and the combination of phonemes is next to impossible for him to articulate. Willingly, José read some Kaqchikel phrases aloud from the text *¿La ütz awäch?* so I could hear spoken Kaqchikel. His first time reading Kaqchikel, he took a moment to evaluate the written letters and symbols, but he deciphered the words quickly and easily. I had expected a much different pronunciation of the words. I could empathize with his experience trying to learn English. Repeating after him, I found it almost impossible to articulate Kaqchikel phonemes. Apparently, the sounds I had tried to teach myself from charts and descriptions were far from correct!

“Top 5” Challenges” in English for Kaqchikel ELLs
1. Phonological differences: Distinction and articulation of sounds make listening and speaking very difficult; Sound /symbol irregularities in English compared to Spanish create orthographic issues.
2. Motivation- a life of poverty places money-earning as the top priority for most Kaqchikel immigrants, resulting in little time and energy for language classes.
3. Affective filters: Fear of humiliation.
4. Literacy: Many Kaqchikel speakers are not literate or bilingual in Spanish.
5. Standard (SVO) Sentence Structure and Verb-only predicates reduce linguistic flexibility.

Classroom Resources

Seemingly difficult to find, resources to support Kaqchikel learners in the English language classroom are available in various forms for all age levels. The sources listed on the reference page provide a wealth of information about Maya and Kaqchikel history, language, and culture. Above all, the comprehensive guide created by the founders and directors of Oxlajuj Aj Intensive Summer Program in Kaqchikel Language and Culture, *¿La ützt awäch?* provides clear and detailed information about the Kaqchikel language, people and culture for teachers who would like to learn more about their Kaqchikel students.

Many traditional Mayan fables and folktales from the Ki'che' branch have been translated into English that teachers can introduce to younger students. Specifically Kaqchikel, *Tales of the Cakchiquels* by Larry Richman is a collection of Kaqchikel folklore presented in Kaqchikel, Spanish, and English. Tales are short and can be adapted easily for use in the

classroom. Nobel Peace Prize winner and K'iche' Maya, Rigoberta Menchú Tum has compiled two collections of stories from her childhood, *The Girl from Chimel* and *The Honey Jar*. The following internet websites with Mayan myths can be used with all ages:

Mayan Rabbit stories <http://www.kstrom.net/isk/maya/rabbit.html> and

Mayan Mythology http://www.windows2universe.org/mythology/maya_culture.html

Colibrí by Ann Cameron, the story of a young Mayan girl who has been separated from her true family is appropriate for older elementary students. *Red Midnight* and *Tree Girl* by Ben Mikaelson are fictional adventure stories describing the experiences of Mayan youth in their separate struggles to survive that would work well in a middle school classroom

For older high school students and adults, the sacred K'iche' Maya text *the Popol Vuh* provides the history and culture of the Maya people, and *I...Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* is a powerful firsthand account of survival and tragedy during the internal conflict which has also been released as a film. A documentary film by Menchú, *When the Mountains Tremble*, recounts events during the war between the Guatemalan military and the Mayan people. Another film, *El Norte*, tells the experiences of a Mayan brother and sister's immigration to the United States and their struggle to adapt.

List of Books, Films and Websites

Specifically Kaqchikel

McKenna Brown, R., Maxwell, Judith M., and Little, Walter E. (2006). *¿La ützwäch?*
Introduction to Kaqchikel Maya Language. Austin: University of Texas Press.

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As told to a Polish gypsy. Guatemala: Adventures in Education, Inc.

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Cameron, A. (2005). *Colibri*. New York: Laurel Leaf Library.

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Mythology of the Mayas

http://www.windows2universe.org/mythology/maya_culture.html

High School

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Footnote

¹ José Girón is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the interviewee.