

Structure of a Specific Language: The Mayan Family

LING 410 — Fall 2022

T,Th 11:35–12:55

Linguistics Building, room 002

Instructors

	Jessica Coon
<i>email</i>	jessica.coon@mcgill.ca
<i>office</i>	1085 Dr. Penfield, 221
<i>office hours</i>	Tuesdays 3:00–4:30pm or by appt.

Content of the course

This course is an in-depth investigation of the structure of a language (or language family) other than English. This year we will examine various aspects of the structure of languages of the Mayan family, covering a range of topics in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. While we will look at specific puzzles found within Mayan linguistics, we will do so with an eye toward their relevance to linguistic theory more generally. Throughout the semester, we will bear the following questions in mind: Do existing linguistic theories extend readily to language of the Mayan family? How does an in-depth investigation into Mayan provide us with tools to tackle bigger problems in the field? How do Mayan languages inform our ideas about Universal Grammar?

Requirements and evaluation

We will investigate the above topics through a combination of readings (both specific to the Mayan family, as well as general readings on the topics we are covering); class presentations (some led by me, others led by you); in-class and take-home datasets (created both by me and by you); as well as short writing assignments. Group work and in-class participation will be essential to successful completion of the course.

short assignments	50% (10 x 5% each)
final project	30% (paper = 25%; presentation = 5%)
article presentation	10%
course participation	10%

Readings

The readings will all be listed on the MyCourses website, either as directly-downloadable articles, or as links to the McGill library website. Your responsibility is to complete the reading before coming to class; all readings are required unless marked as optional. Due to the nature of the course, it is inevitable that you will encounter unfamiliar terms, concepts, and theories while doing the reading for the course. “Completing” the reading does not mean that you have thoroughly understood everything in a paper, and you may find it useful to skim in certain places. Part of the goal of this course is to develop skills in how to efficiently get through difficult readings. You can expect to read approximately 2 articles per week.

Short assignments

Over the course of the semester, you will have 10 short assignments to turn in, roughly one per week. These assignments are due on MyCourses at 11:59pm on Thursday night of the week they are listed (see *Late Work*

below). These will be graded on a 4-point scale: [✓+] = exceeds expectations; [✓] = meets expectations; [✓-] = below expectations; 0 = not turned in. This coarse-grained grading scheme allows me to get you feedback quickly, and for you to focus on learning outcomes rather than specific point break-downs. Importantly, because of the large number of assignments, grades will average out, and in previous years averages have been on par or above those for other similar courses. (In other words, please don't panic if you get 2/3 on some assignments!)

Late work

You have one free late-pass which you may use to turn in one of your short assignments 24 hours late. In order to use your late pass, you must let me know you are using it by the original deadline. Once this pass has been used, late work cannot be accepted for grades without a documented medical excuse.

Additionally, on the week when your group is scheduled to present an article in class, you may have an automatic 24 hour extension on your short assignment.

Your research language and small groups

Within the first couple of weeks, you will be assigned to a small group of 3–4 students. Each group will be responsible for presenting one article to the class (see course outline below). Presentations should be no more than 30 minutes, including at least 10 minutes for class discussion or in-class tasks.

As small groups, you will also be asked to adopt one of the following Mayan languages (and associated grammars) for the semester. Some of the short assignments will ask you to investigate certain aspects of your language, either alone or in your group.

1. Mam (Mamean) — England (1983), *A grammar of Mam, a Mayan language*
2. Jakalteek (Q'anjob'alan) — Craig (1977), *The structure of Jakalteek*
3. Itzaj (Yucatecan) — Hofling (2000), *Itzaj Maya grammar*
4. Sakapultek (K'ichean) — DuBois (1981), *The Sacapultek Language*
5. Tz'utujil (K'ichean) — Dayley (1985), *Tz'utujil grammar*
6. Ch'ol (Tseltalan) — Vázquez Álvarez (2011), *A Grammar of Chol, a Mayan language*
7. Sipakapense (K'ichean) — Barrett (1999), *A grammar of Sipakapense Maya*
8. Tseltal — Polian (2013), *Gramática del tseltal de Oxchuc*

Articles for group presentations (other requests can also be considered!):

- Barrett (2008) – 'Linguistic differentiation and Mayan language revitalization in Guatemala'
- Barrett (2016) – 'Mayan language revitalization, hip hop, and ethnic identity in Guatemala'
- Brown and Levinson (1993) – 'Uphill' and 'downhill' in Tzeltal'
- De León (1998) – 'The emergent participant: Interactive patterns in the socialization of Tzotzil (Mayan) infants'
- England (2007) – 'The influence of Mayan-speaking linguists on the state of Mayan linguistics'
- Haviland (2000) – 'Warding off witches: voicing and dialogue in Zinacantec prayer'
- Haviland (2005) – 'Dreams of blood: Zinacantecs in Oregon'
- Law and Stuart (2017) – 'Classic Mayan: An overview of language in ancient hieroglyphic script'

Class policies and university regulations

Respect and use of electronics

Classroom dynamics affect all of us. While vigorous discussion and conflicting opinions are always welcome, personal attacks, disrespectful comments, or sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, or other discriminatory remarks are not tolerated. Since disruptive behaviors are not always explicit and immediately apparent, all are encouraged to think critically and self-reflexively about listening and communication strategies and to take responsibility for group dynamics, in order to create an environment conducive to respectful dialogue.

Electronic devices may be used for taking notes and accessing information directly related to class content. Out of respect for the group, electronic devices should not be used for any other purposes.

Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Right to submit in French

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Copyright

© Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

OSD

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009

Territory acknowledgement

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Course outline (readings subject to modification)

date	topic & readings: □ = required, ☆ = recommended, ☑ = student presentation	due
Week 1 9/1	Introduction □ - England (2003) – ‘Mayan language revival and revitalization’ □ - Mateo Toledo (2003) – ‘The use of language names: The Mayan case’ ☆ - Aissen et al. (2017) – ‘Introduction to Mayan linguistics’	
Week 2 9/6 9/8	Introduction to Mayan languages and linguistics □ - Bennett et al. (2016) – ‘Introduction to Mayan linguistics’ □ - Bennett (2016) – ‘Mayan phonology’ ☆ - England and Baird (2017) – ‘Phonology and phonetics’	assn. 1
Week 3 9/13 9/15	Categories, roots and argument structure □ - Haviland (1994) – ‘ <i>Te xa setel xulem</i> [The buzzards were circling]’ □ - Coon (2019) – ‘Building verbs in Chuj’ ☆ - Coon (2016) – ‘Mayan morphosyntax’	assn. 2 + (England 2007)
Week 4 9/20 9/22	Argument structure, voice, ergativity □ - Larsen and Norman (1979) – ‘Correlates of ergativity in Mayan’ □ - Dayley (1981, sec. 1–3) – ‘Voice and ergativity in Mayan’ ☆ - Payne (1997, ch. 8) – ‘Voice and valence-adjusting operations’	assn. 3 + (Barrett 2008)
Week 5 9/27 9/29	Aspect and split ergativity □ - Bricker (1981) – ‘The source of the ergative split in Yucatec’ □ - Coon and Carolan (2017) – ‘Nominalization and structure of progressive’ ☆ - Payne (1997, ch. 9.3) – ‘Tense and aspect’	assn. 4 + (De León 1998)
Week 6 10/4 10/6	Verb-initial word order □ - England (1991) – ‘Changes in basic word order in Mayan’ □ - Clemens and Coon (2018) – ‘Deriving verb-initial word order in Mayan’ ☆ - Payne (1997, ch. 4) – ‘Constituent order typology’	assn. 5 + (Haviland 2000)
Week 7 10/11 10/13	Information structure □ - Aissen (1992) – ‘Topic and focus in Mayan’ □ - Can Pixabaj and England (2011) – ‘Nominal topic and focus in K’ichee’ ☆ - Aissen (2017b) – ‘Information structure in Mayan’	assn. 6 + (Barrett 2016)
Week 8 10/18 10/20	Syntactic ergativity □ - Aissen (2017a), – ‘Correlates of ergativity in Mayan’ □ - Coon et al. (2021) – ‘Mayan Agent Focus and EEC’	assn. 7 + (Law and Stuart 2017)
Week 9 10/25 10/27	Agent Focus and binding □ - Royer (to appear) – ‘Binding and anti-cataphora in Mayan’ ☆ - Henderson (2016) – ‘Mayan semantics’	assn. 8 + (Haviland 2005)
Week 10 11/1 11/3	Numerals and classifiers □ - Craig (1986) – ‘Jacaltec noun classifiers’ □ - Bale and Coon (2014) – ‘Classifiers are for numerals, not for nouns’	assn. 9 + (Law and Stuart 2017)
Week 11 11/8 11/10	Complex predication □ - Haviland (1993) – ‘The syntax of Tzotzil auxiliaries and directionals’ □ - Aissen (2010) – ‘Depictives and serialization in Tzotzil’	assn. 10
Week 12 11/15 11/17	“Non-verbal” predication and finiteness □ - Armstrong (2009) – ‘Copula sentences in Yucatec’ □ - Mateo Toledo (2011) – ‘The finiteness of NVPs in Q’anjob’al’	
Week 13 11/22,24,29	Class presentations (schedule TBA) — final presentations —	Final papers: Dec. 7

Readings

- Aissen, Judith. 1992. Topic and focus in Mayan. *Language* 68:43–80.
- Aissen, Judith. 2010. Depictives and serialization in Tzotzil. In *Hypothesis A/Hypothesis B*, ed. Donna B. Gerdts, John C. Moore, and Maria Polinsky, Current Studies in Linguistics, 1–17. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Aissen, Judith. 2017a. Correlates of ergativity in Mayan. In *Oxford handbook of ergativity*, ed. Jessica Coon, Diane Massam, and Lisa Travis. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Aissen, Judith. 2017b. Information structure in Mayan. In *The Mayan languages*, ed. Judith Aissen, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado, 293–236. Routledge.
- Aissen, Judith, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado. 2017. Introduction. In *The Mayan languages*, ed. Judith Aissen, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado, Routledge Language Family Series, 1–15. New York: Routledge.
- Armstrong, Grant. 2009. Copular sentences in Yucatec Maya. In *Proceedings of CILLA: The Conference on Indigenous Languages of Latin America-IV*. Published online by the University of Texas.
- Bale, Alan, and Jessica Coon. 2014. Classifiers are for numerals, not for nouns: Consequences for the mass-count distinction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 45:695–707.
- Barrett, Edward R. 1999. A grammar of Sipakapense Maya. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas Austin, Austin, TX.
- Barrett, Rusty. 2008. Linguistic differentiation and Mayan language revitalization in Guatemala. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12:275–305.
- Barrett, Rusty. 2016. Mayan language revitalization, hip hop, and ethnic identity in Guatemala. *Language and Communication* 47:144–153.
- Bennett, Ryan. 2016. Mayan phonology. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 10:469–514.
- Bennett, Ryan, Jessica Coon, and Robert Henderson. 2016. Introduction to Mayan linguistics. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 10:453–454.
- Bricker, Victoria R. 1981. The source of the ergative split in Yucatec Maya. *Journal of Mayan Linguistics* 2:83–127.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. 1993. “uphill” and “downhill” in Tzeltal. *Linguistic Anthropology* 3:46–74.
- Can Pixabaj, Telma, and Nora C. England. 2011. Nominal topic and focus in K’ichee’. In *Representing language: Essays in honor of Judith Aissen*, ed. Rodrigo Gutiérrez-Bravo, Line Mikkelsen, and Eric Potsdam, 15–30. Santa Cruz, CA: Linguistic Research Center.
- Clemens, Lauren Eby, and Jessica Coon. 2018. Deriving verb initial order in Mayan. *Language* 94:237–280.
- Coon, Jessica. 2016. Mayan morphosyntax. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 10:515–550.
- Coon, Jessica. 2019. Building verbs in Chuj: Consequences for the nature of roots. *Journal of Linguistics* 55:35–81.
- Coon, Jessica, Nico Baier, and Theodore Levin. 2021. Mayan Agent Focus and the Ergative Extraction Constraint: Facts and fictions revisited. *Language* 97:269–332.
- Coon, Jessica, and Elizabeth Carolan. 2017. Nominalization and the structure of progressives in Chuj Mayan. *Glossa* 2:1–35.
- Craig, Colette Grinevald. 1977. *The structure of Jacaltepec*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Craig, Colette Grinevald. 1986. Jacaltepec noun classifiers. *Lingua* 70:241–284.
- Dayley, Jon. 1981. Voice and ergativity in Mayan languages. *Journal of Mayan Linguistics* 2:3–82.
- Dayley, Jon. 1985. *Tzotzil grammar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De León, Lourdes. 1998. The emergent participant: Interactive patterns in the socialization of Tzotzil (Mayan) infants. *Linguistic Anthropology* 8:131–161.
- DuBois, John William. 1981. The Sacapultec language. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.
- England, Nora. 1983. *A grammar of Mam, a Mayan language*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- England, Nora. 1991. Changes in basic word order in Mayan languages. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 57:446–86.
- England, Nora. 2007. The influence of Mayan-speaking linguists on the state of Mayan linguistics. In *Endangered languages*, ed. Peter K. Austin and Andrew Simpson, volume Sonderheft 14 of *Linguistische Berichte*. Berlin: Helmut Buske Verlag.
- England, Nora C. 2003. Mayan language revival and revitalization: Linguists and linguistic ideologies. *American Anthropologist* 105:733–743.
- England, Nora C., and Brandon O. Baird. 2017. Phonology and phonetics. In *The Mayan languages*, ed. Judith Aissen, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala, 175–200. Routledge.
- Haviland, John B. 1994. “Te xa setel xulem” [The buzzards were circling] – Categories of verbal roots in (Zinacantec) Tzotzil. *Linguistics* 32:691–741.
- Haviland, John B. 2000. Warding off witches: Voicing and dialogue in Zinacantec prayer. In *Les rituels du dialogue*, ed. Aurore Monod Becquelin and Philippe Erikson, 367–400. Société d’ethnologie.
- Haviland, John B. 2005. Dreams of blood: Zinacatecs in Oregon. In *Dislocations/relocations: Narratives of displacement*, ed. Mike Baynham and Anna de Fina, 91–127. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishers.
- Haviland, John Beard. 1993. The syntax of Tzotzil auxiliaries and directionals: The grammaticalization of “motion”. In *Proceedings of the 19th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, ed. David A. Peterson, 35–49. Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- Henderson, Robert. 2016. Mayan semantics. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 10:551–588.
- Hofling, Charles A. 2000. *Itzaj Maya grammar*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Larsen, Tomas W., and William M. Norman. 1979. Correlates of ergativity in Mayan grammar. In *Ergativity: Towards a theory of grammatical relations*, ed. Frans Plank, 347–370. London/New York: Academic Press.
- Law, Danny, and David Stuart. 2017. Classic Mayan: An overview of language in ancient hieroglyphic script. In *The Mayan languages*,

- ed. Judith Aissen, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala, 128–172. Routledge.
- Mateo Toledo, Eladio. 2003. The use of languages' names: The Mayan case. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 69:151–153.
- Mateo Toledo, Eladio. 2011. The finiteness of nonverbal predicates in Q'anjob'al (Maya). In *New perspectives in Mayan linguistics*, ed. Heriberto Avelino, 160–182. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Payne, Thomas E. 1997. *Describing morphosyntax*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Polian, Gilles. 2013. *Gramática del tseltal de Oxchuc*. Publicaciones de la Casa Chata. México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
- Royer, Justin. to appear. Binding and anti-cataphora in Mayan. *Linguistic Inquiry*.
- Vázquez Álvarez, Juan J. 2011. A grammar of Chol, a Mayan language. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas Austin, Austin, TX.