

Tzeltal/Tzotzil

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Tzeltal, Bachajón: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Lowland Tzeltal, Tzeltal de Ocosingo” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzeltal, Oxchuc: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Cancuc, Chanal, Highland Tzeltal, Tenango, Tenejapa” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, Chamula: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Chamula” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, Chenalhó: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Chenaló” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, Huixtán: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Huixteco, Tzotzil de Huixtán” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, San Andrés Larrainzar: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Tzotzil de San Andrés Larrainzar” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, Venustiano Carranza: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “San Bartolomé Venustiano Carranza Tzotzil” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

Tzotzil, Zinacantán: Mayan language family, Alternate names: “Zinacanteco Tzotzil” (1). Classification: Mayan, Cholan-Tzeltalan, Tzeltalan (1).

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

Tzeltal, Bachajón: tzb (1).

Tzeltal, Oxchuc: tzh (1).

Tzotzil, Chamula: tzc (1).

Tzotzil, Chenalhó: tze (1).

Tzotzil, Huixtán: tzu (1).

Tzotzil, San Andrés Larrainzar: tzs (1).

Tzotzil, Venustiano Carranza: tzo (1).

Tzotzil, Zinacantán: tzz (1).

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): “The Tzeltal Mayans are located in central Chiapas, occupying both lowland and highland areas. Most of the 100,000 Tzeltal speakers are subsistence farmers” (3, pg: 1).

Tzeltal, Bachajón: East central Chiapas, Chilon and Ocosingo municipalities.

Tzeltal, Oxchuc: “East central Chiapas, Oxchuc area” (1).

Tzotzil, Chamula: “West central Chiapas, San Juan Chamula, Huitiupan, Simojovel, San Juan del Bosque, San Cristóbal Las Casas, Bochil, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan, Ocozocoautla, Ixtapa (Nibak), Jitotol, Teopisca, Amatan, Ishuatan” (1).

Tzotzil, Chenalhó: “Chiapas, Chenalhó region” (1).

Tzotzil, Huixtán: “Chiapas, Huixtán region.” (1).

Tzotzil, San Andrés Larrainzar: “West central Chiapas” (1).

Tzotzil, Venustiano Carranza: “Central Chiapas, Venustiano Carranza Municipio, Venustiano Carranza, El Puerto, and El Paraiso de Grijalva towns” (1).

Tzotzil, Zinacantán: “West central Chiapas” (1).

1.4 Brief history: “Historical data are scarce, because this region had very few of the items that were coveted by the Spaniards, and therefore they took no interest in it” (7, pg: 10).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: “100,000” (3, pg: 1).

Tzeltal, Bachajón: 100,000 (1993 SIL). 50,000 are monolingual. All Tzeltal varieties: 215,145 (1980 census) (1).

Tzeltal, Oxchuc: “90,000 (2000 S. Hoffman). 50,000 monolinguals” (1).

Tzotzil, Chamula: “130,000 (1990 census). All Tzotzil languages: 265,000 (1990 census)” (1).

Tzotzil, Chenalhó: “35,000 (1990 census)” (1).

Tzotzil, Huixtán: “20,000 (1990 census)” (1).

Tzotzil, San Andrés Larrainzar: “50,000 (1990 census)” (1).

Tzotzil, Venustiano Carranza: “4,230 (1990 census). 58 monolinguals. Ethnic population: 60,000 (1990 census)” (1).

Tzotzil, Zinacantán: “25,000 (1990 census)” (1).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): “Agriculturalists: maize, coffee; animal husbandry: cattle” (1). “Most of the 100,000 Tzeltal speakers are subsistence farmers, relying on maize, beans and squash as primary food crops” (3, pg: 1). “In addition to swidden farming of the Mesoamerican triumvirate of staples, the family diet is augmented by fruits, chilis, and uncultivated vegetables, as well as occasional meat and/or eggs. Many families have a few chickens and/or turkeys; a few have small cash crops of coffee, oranges, or peanuts; some even have a bull or pig that is fattened for slaughter at an appropriate time. The small agricultural surpluses and the time left over after subsistence activities are enough in this community to support several kinds of part-time specialists” (3, pg: 1). Slash and burn agriculture (5, pg: 15).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: **See 2.1 for information regarding proteins (3, pg: 1).**

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Pictures of wood-handled tools with blades; machetes, “hooked weed-holding stick”, etc (6, pg: 124).

2.4 Food storage: Heavy production of pottery (5). Gourds are also a key instrument in holding/storing food products (6, pg: 129). “Baskets are purchased from neighboring Chamula Indians” (6, pg: 132). “Net bags made from agave fibers” (6, pg: 133).

2.5 Sexual division of production: Men are in charge of farming, women do household/child-rearing duties (5). Women made pottery (5). “A woman rises with her husband or earlier, prepares and serves him his breakfast, wraps and hands him the posol and tortillas for his light noon meal. Then, when he has left, she grinds the maize, makes tortillas, cooks the beans and other foodstuffs, does the housework, hauls water, attends to the younger children, orders and directs the work to be performed by her older daughters, and finally sits down to spin or to weave. After her husband returns from his work in the fields and has dined, she starts again to grind and prepare supper, while boiling the maize for the following day; if it is “lime bitten,” she rinses it before retiring. Womanhood is made manifest in weaving: it is said in song that she weaves because she is a woman.” (7, pg: 51).

2.6 Land tenure: “The agricultural cycle of the Tenejapa Tzeltal is closely tied to the traditional Tzeltal calendar, which divides the year into a series of 18 months of 20 days each plus an additional month of 5 days, completing the solar year of 365 days. Each of the 19 months is named and is known by most conservative Tzeltal males” (6, pg: 118). Within each of the 19 months, there is a specific agricultural duty that is complete, for example: From March 10-29, final planting for all full-year swidden is finished during this month (6, pg: 120).

2.7 Ceramics: Yes. Certain families were more specialized in pottery-making (more artisanal) which they produced and sold/traded, while others made pottery for just their own household needs (5). **See attached tables from pgs: 24 & 26 (5).**

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Many of the books mention the fact that there tends to be overproduction of food goods, and so the community divides the extras with each other.

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): “Menstruation starts between twelve and fourteen years. A girl will be frightened and weep when she tells her mother what has happened to her. The mother explains that it is nothing to be fearful of, that she will see her blood every moon and that after many years it will disappear” (7, pg: 123).

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): 20 years of age for both men and women—probably a more modern average (7, pg: 124).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns: “Land usually belongs to the men and is inherited by male offspring only” (7, pg: 38).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Stories/tales are told as a means of keeping their children safe from danger while simultaneously socializing them (3).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time): Stories/ Myths of ancient Tzeltal who had sex/copulation via a woman’s armpit because they didn’t know where “the pussy cat” was located (4, pg: 2). “Semen is called “man’s strength for his child”” (7, pg: 102). The fetus is believed to start out in the form of a mouse.” (7, pg: 103).

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?: Myths about women having extramarital affairs (4, pg: 16). “A bride, whose firstborn must be a nine-month baby; otherwise she is accused of having premarital relations” (7, pg: 105). “Abortion is practiced by women without husbands, or when, unknown to the parents, a girl has had premarital relations with a brother-in-law or a member of the same lineage. It is never done by a married woman” (7, pg: 105).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: **See 4.18 “Sexual Freedom” for information about extramarital affairs (4, pg: 16).**

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?: “The status of old age is not expressed in material privileges, but in the respect due to “heat” possessed by the aged, believed to have accumulated throughout the years. The fact that the old have managed to survive is proof of their power to withstand evil, and of their wisdom” (7, pg: 71).

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal (3, pg: 1). Matrilocal residence patterns (7, pg: 128).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported cases of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism: Oral tradition that mentions cannibalism a little bit (4).

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: “They [the Tzeltal] comprise 18 separate communities distributed among 13 municipios, each community having its own recognizable dialect features, pattern of dress, and history as well as its own hierarchies of civil and religious cargo positions” (3, pg: 1).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): “About a tenth of the total Tzeltal population live in Tenejapa, organized through patrilineal family units dispersed throughout 21 parajes (hamlets) and articulated in terms of municipal institutions focusing on the ceremonial center. Tenejapa center is the site of a weekly market, the central stage for community civil and religious festivals, and the seat of a municipal government in which all 21 parajes are represented. It is occupied by a small number of Ladino (non-Indian) families and by a few elected Tzeltal municipal officials who are for the most part only temporary residents maintaining their permanent homes in outlying hamlets” (3, pg: 1).

5.4 Post marital residence: Matrilocal (7).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex): **See 6.7 “Sex Differences in RCR” for information regarding female positions of leadership (2, pg: 3).** “The stories of supernatural beings included here [See source 3] contribute to a Tzeltal worldview in which the concepts of safety and danger are firmly implanted. Safety and danger are polarized with respect to time, space and human behavior. Daytime, the home, and social behavior represent safety while nighttime, far from home, and asocial behavior represent danger. These oppositions might be restated as the oppositions culture vs. nature, order vs. disorder, or the known vs. the unknown in order to provide a generative base for evaluating specific times, places, and behaviors associated with safety and with danger” (3, pgs 36-37).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: “The normal household is ordinarily single nuclear family and it constitutes the basic unit of production and consumption in Tenejapa. In addition to swidden farming of the Mesoamerican triumvirate of staples, the family diet is augmented by fruits, chilis, and uncultivated vegetables, as well as occasional meat and/or eggs. Many families have a few chickens and/or turkeys; a few have small cash crops of coffee, oranges, or peanuts; some even have a bull or pig that is fattened for slaughter at an appropriate time. The small agricultural surpluses and the time left over after subsistence activities are enough in this community to support several kinds of part-time specialists” (3, pg: 1).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): Mention of ceremonial houses located in village centers (6, pg: 135). “The Tenejapa Tzeltal reside in rectangular, single-roomed, thatched-roof dwellings. The average floor size ranges from 49 square meters to 25 square meters. Structurally, the Tzeltal house is a post-and-beam construction, the roof being supported on a heavy wooden-beam framework. As typical of such structures, the walls of the house carry none of the weight of the roof” (6, pg: 136).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Mention of “part-time specialists” within the Tzeltal communities such as: curers, witches, hamlet guardians, cargo officials, messengers, charcoal makers, butchers, and musicians” (3, pg: 1). “There are men and women healers” (7, pg: 53).

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Myths/tales about “Hell” being an actual place after death (4, pg: 3). The Tzeltal believe that if one “sins a lot” one will go to hell (4, pg: 7). Belief in an afterlife (7, pg: 145).

6.4 Other rituals: Weaving ceremonies mentioned in (2, pg: 2).

6.5 Myths (Creation): Different Tzeltal myths/tales: “Black Demon, Treemoss, Backwards Foot, Wall Demon, Flesh Dropper, Whirling Arm, Children Die in the Petate, Longhair at Chico Hill, Rabid Demon, Headache Woman, Alligator, Severed Head...” (3, pg: iii). “The Tzeltal supernatural world is populated by a host of characters including gods, saints, ancestral spirits, naguals, animal spirit companions, virgins, souls, demons, monsters, and other categories. These characters are manifested not only in myths, legends, and folktales. They figure too in prayers, explanations and gossip as well as in just about every aspect of religious ritual performance. These characters, their behavior and interrelationships are an integral and important part of the Tzeltal beliefs system; a belief system that relates to much of the ordinary and extraordinary social behavior of the individual in Tzeltal society. It is a belief system, shared to a greater or lesser extent by every individual, that is largely acquired during childhood socialization, but augmented and modified throughout one’s lifetime” (3, pg: 30).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Ancient loom weaving techniques (2). Folklore/oral traditions used to socialize Tzeltal children (3, pg: 1).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: “The Yutil Na (literally, “inside the house”) is responsible for preparing all the ritual foods during major festivals. It is a lifetime position and considered to be of equal rank to the wale Alfereces who act as patrons and teachers of the festivals. The Yutil Na joins the Alferes in what is considered to be the most important act of the festival, that of public prayers to the saints” (2, pg: 3).

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Clothing that is weaved has heavy social and ceremonial importance/meaning. There is a lot of symbolic value to be found in garments woven by the Tzotzil. Many patterns feature flowers, toads, gods, and other mythological creatures that have religious emphasis (2, pg: 2). It seems like they worship modern saints, probably due to acculturation, but their weaving history is filled with animal-like creatures that symbolize different gods, and they also pay tribute to gods such as the “god of rain,” etc. It seems like their religion is a mix of old, ancient tradition and more “modern” acculturated practices (2).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut: “Women arrange their hair in two long braids hanging down the back” (7, pg: 27).

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): “The ceremonial garment worn by the women of Magdalenas, Chiapas, is one of the most beautiful and complicated examples of modern Mesoamerican weaving. The intricate designs that embellish this garment are symbols of flowers, gods, toads, and other beings of mythological importance” (2, pg: 2).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: “The ceremonial huipil is worn by the Lady of the Ensign-bearer (me’alperes), the highest female rank in the religious cargo system, as well as other female religious officials during major festivals. A woman who has held a religious position may also wear this style of huipil to festivals and during market days” (2, pg: 2).

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: “Santa Maria Magdalenas Aldama is a small Maya Tzotzil—speaking community that is part of the municipio of San Pedro Chenalho in the highlands of Chiapas. The women wear over their indigo blue skirts a rectangular garment that is generally referred to in the literature by the Nahuatl term “huipil,” although it is called k’u’il or chilil in Tzotzil. A huipil is made of two or three rectangular pieces (webs) of woven cloth sewn together with small openings for the arms and neck. The daily huipil in Magalenas is a simple garment made of two webs of red-striped woven cloth. Only between ten and twenty women know how to weave the ceremonial huipil in which intricate designs are created by placing colored threads in the fabric as it is being woven on a back-strap loom that has been used throughout Mesoamerica in basically the same form for over two millennia” (2, pg: 2).

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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