

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Bachajon Tzeltal (or Lowland Tzeltal, Highland Chiapas, or Tzeltal de Ocosingo), Maya language family. (Lewis)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): tzb (Lewis)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Central highlands of Chiapas (Tzeltal), mainly in Chilon and Ocosingo (Lewis)
- 1.4 Brief history: Little is known of the Tzeltal prior to the Spanish conquest between 1524 and 1545. From 1545 onward, missionaries had a somewhat significant influence on religion, but because they so readily embraced Catholicism (at least in comparison to other groups around the world), they were able to maintain many of their previous beliefs by mixing them with Catholicism. The 17th and 18th centuries were characterized by slavery and severe taxes on natives of the region. Now, the Lowland Tzeltal are the most isolated of the Tzeltal, with about 30% speaking Spanish in addition to Tzeltal, allowing them to live, for the most part, how they have traditionally lived. (Rojas)
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: missionaries had somewhat of an impact on religion and major cultural celebrations. The Spanish conquest sent many into poverty and reduced the population. (Rojas)
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): mountainous (Pitarch), Ocosingo is located in a valley (Redfield) The majority of trees are palms or pines. (Blom)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 100,000 (Lewis) Ocosingo barely has 1 person per square kilometer, while Chilon has about 24 people per square km. (Rojas) Usually only a few hundred people per village/town (Blom)

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): corn, chile, squash (Rojas), tortillas (Pitarch)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: beans (Tzeltal), rabbit (Rojas), birds, and deer (Nash)
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: long wooden spears for hunting (Rojas) machetes, guns, and knives (Nash)
- 2.4 Food storage: pottery and a bin of wood or reeds is used to store corn. (Rojas)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Planting is an exclusively male activity and only occurs after a period of fasting and sexual abstinence. Men cut and carry firewood. Men are in charge of the manufacture of any palm products, such as sleeping mats, hats and baskets. Women often help with the weeding and might do it alone. Women fetch water and are in charge of all laundry and kitchen duties. (Rojas)
- 2.6 Land tenure: patrilineal, men usually work in groups to begin planting the land, so each man is not solely responsible for planting his own land. Land is seen as being held by the household, which is why sons generally stay in the same household as their father. (Rojas)
- 2.7 Ceramics: produced by women, very widespread among the Tzeltal, though the Lowland Tzeltal do not necessarily specialize in pottery and ceramics. (Rojas)
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: people will only borrow or share things within their own barrio as there is a certain hostility between barrios. (Pitarch) Several neighboring houses usually share a *pus*, a stone or clay structure used for steam baths. Also, if someone accumulates wealth, they are expected to spend it on the community in the form of fiestas or other celebrations, since the Tzeltal do not value differences in or excessive wealth. (Rojas)
- 2.9 Food taboos:
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? none

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): 1.56 m for men and 1.44 for women (Rojas)
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): there is a preference for many children, though not a specific number. (Rojas)
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: proportion unknown, but when divorces do occur, the woman returns to her family with little more than her clothes and loom. (Anonymous)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: very rare, accepted in certain cases, but was not observed by many ethnographers. (Redfield)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: A collection of gifts are provided by the groom at the wedding ceremony to the bride's family for the celebration. There is also a tradition of bride service for the first year of the marriage where the groom will move in with the bride's family and visit his own family every few weeks. After this time period, the couple then build their own residence usually in close proximity to the man's father's residence, because of inheritance patterns. (Rojas)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Inheritance is patrilineal and only sons inherit land and possessions, women are barred from inheritance, except for less significant things, such as weaving tools. (Pitarch)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): barrios are traditionally endogamous (Pitarch)
- 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)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): within barrio (Tzeltal)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? They enjoy very few, women who engage in premarital and extramarital affairs are gossiped about and looked down upon by other women especially and the society in general. (Brown)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Orphaned children are raised either by godparents or other members of the clan. (Rojas)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: none
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): only one father is recognized, the society is hardly promiscuous, especially after marriage. (Brown)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? It is extremely important to greet people properly by stating what lineage one belongs. (Pitarch)
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Ironic expressions and rhetorical questions are very common among the Tzeltal, and are generally used jokingly. Women, for example, will often carry on a conversation in an ironic mode as an activity in and of itself. Women use irony the most, because it is expected that women who are related (by blood or through friendship) have a joking relationship mostly comprised of sarcasm or they are not considered related. It is often used to undermine gossip, especially concerning sexual exploits. So a woman might sarcastically talk about what she has done sexually, making it obvious that it never actually happened, so it makes it impossible for other women to take any gossip concerning that woman seriously. Men, on the other hand, instead of joking about what they would never be caught dead doing, joke about what they actually do, what if they would do it they could, and what they might have caught others doing. In courtship, women are also expected to feign outrage at being approached and will insult the man trying to court them. (Brown)
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: patrilineal lineages and clans (Pitarch)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: the old men of the clan regulate who marries whom to avoid incest. (Rojas) It is considered incestuous to marry someone with the same surname. (Redfield)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, it is composed only of the boy's and the girl's families and the old men of the clan. The oldest man formally pronounces the couple man and wife and recites their duties. The groom also has to bring specific gifts which are formally presented to the bride's family who formally accept the gifts. (Rojas)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? The father performs a ceremony soon after the child is born to give him or her a name. (Rojas)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) within barrio community (Tzeltal)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? The clan is in charge of regulating marriage and are always consulted by the parents of the bride. A boy's parents go about selecting a wife for him with his consent. The groom's family visits the girl's family several times over a period of several months to ensure the match is a good one. The visits are always at dawn and the groom's family must always bring a gift of two or three bottles of aguardiente. (Rojas)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: Young men will sometimes fight over a girl which might end in the death of one. (Nash)

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: for homicide the rate is about 251 to 100,000 people (Nash) There is little mention of warfare anywhere, largely due to the fact that there is almost no information prior to the Spanish conquest of Mexico.
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: homicide is seen as a reaction to a crime rather than a crime in and of itself. The victims are almost always male. The deaths of younger males are most often the result of betrothal conflicts, while the deaths of older males are usually the result of accusations of witchcraft. Killing of outgroup members commonly occurs during fiestas when people are drinking which is seen as an appropriate excuse of homicide. (Nash)
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): There is a lot of solidarity within Tzeltal communities, but not among them. So the Lowland Tzeltal would have little interest in what happens to other Tzeltal groups. (Rojas)
- 4.18 Cannibalism? None observed

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): none, not a mobile group
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Men run the government and political affairs, women are not involved. (Rojas)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Women ideally move in with the husband's family, so that a man lives in the same residence as his male offspring and their families. (Pitarch)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): very well-defined boundaries (Rojas)
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: women who are friends or related are expected to engage in conversations involving irony as a marker of their relationship. (Brown)
- 5.8 Village and house organization: a town center surrounded by *parajes*, political, religious and commercial center of community. Divided into two *barrios* (sections) with their own local authorities (Tzeltal). The town is divided into the barrios by an imaginary line

that runs north-south or east-west through the middle of the town. Houses generally have sides of 3-5 m and rarely have windows, only a door. Houses are chiefly used for sleeping and cooking, so are divided into two rooms, the front is a parlor or kitchen and the back room is the bedroom. Houses have thatched roofs and mud floors. (Rojas)

- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): *Pus* are stone or clay structures used by several neighboring families for steam baths. *Pus* are used for cleanliness as well as to strengthen women after childbirth and a cure for the sick. (Rojas)
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Bed is made of wooden boards placed on four forked poles in the ground with a sleeping mat on top. None but the very poor sleep on the ground. (Rojas)
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: patrilineal lineages are divided into clans (Rojas)
- 5.12 Trade: trade is common with the Ladinos as well as other Tzeltal communities and the Tzotzil which are a closely related group to the Tzeltal. The Tzeltal will often trade chickens and eggs with the Ladinos, since they are not commonly eaten by the Tzeltal except in times of sickness or during large celebrations. Ocosingo and Chilon are major commercial centers with markets frequented by Ladinos as well as other Indians. Transactions involve money or a trade of goods and services. (Rojas)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Men with higher social status can generally talk of souls openly, unlike those of lower status. Higher status males also tend to do most of the talking in conversations and those of lower status generally agree and might add information that might seemingly back up what the higher status male is saying, though they are subtly contradicting them. (Pitarch)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: The biggest celebrations are between December and May: Christmas, Carnival, Easter, San Juan, San Lorenzo, and the Virgin Mary. These celebrations are obviously the result of missionaries and the Spanish influence in the region and, as a result, the celebrations do not hold much meaning for the Lowland Tzeltal, and such questions confuse them. May through September is a very busy time where the people are mostly concerned with agriculture. (Pitarch)
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): There are 3 types of shamans: *pik'abal* (diagnostician), *poxtaywanej* (one learned in medicines), and *ch'abajom* (recoverer of souls). There is a certain obsession, according to some ethnographers, with illness and its origins, symptoms, and treatment among the Tzeltal as a whole. People will go to shamans when anything ails them. Illness is usually attributed to souls and witchcraft, so shamans are seen as the only qualified people to heal the sick. A person does not usually become a shaman until later in life and only once they have seen a very stereotypical dream "calling" them, in a way, to the profession. Healing often involves long, drawn out chants, cane liquor, and special herbs specific to the ailment. (Pitarch)
- 6.2 Stimulants: a combination of lime and tobacco is commonly chewed (Redfield)
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Ceremonies are performed at the birth of a child to protect against sickness and harm in general. (Rojas) When someone dies, they are placed on a wooden plank in the middle of the house for two days and nights when people come to visit and grieve. The body is traditionally buried along with others of the same lineage. (Anonymous)
- 6.4 Other rituals:
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): No real creation myths, because time is perceived on a continuum with no past or future, just a constant present. People will share stories about past events as told by elders in the community, but there is no timeline of these events and they are often told as if they happened recently. Some examples of these stories would be "when the burning happened" or "when the flood happened". (Pitarch)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): A corn doll is a common children's toy (Pitarch). Men engage in rudimentary woodworking. Women engage in spinning and weaving fabric for clothing and weaving tools are often passed down from mother to daughter. (Rojas) One type of dance performed at festivals involves red ribbons tied to long sticks and is performed by men. (Redfield) Simple geometric designs are carved into furniture and pottery and embroidered onto clothes. Major musical instrument include the harp, flute, drum, and guitar. (Anonymous)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Women play a very minor role in ceremonies and ritual. Men specialize in rituals and exclusively perform important ceremonies. (Rojas)
- 6.8 Missionary effect: The biggest celebrations, which occur between December and May are not part of traditional Tzeltal culture, but rather a result of missionaries. Altars, traditionally found in Tzeltal people's homes, are now often altars for Christian saints. Now, towns and barrios often have their own saint. (Pitarch)
- 6.9 RCR revival: none, as the natives never really stopped practicing their rituals and beliefs, but slightly modified them so as to lessen the ire of the missionaries. (Pitarch)
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Every lineage has a specific cave which their lineage is named after and where important ceremonies are performed by the men. Important men are often buried in the caves where their bones and ashes are placed in urns and jugs. (Rojas) When a person dies, *Naguales*, supernatural beings, eat the person's first soul and the second soul does whatever its patron saint has it destined to do. (Anonymous)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): religion is now a mixture of animism and Christianity as a result of Spanish missionaries. Their main beliefs are centered around the concept of souls. Humans are believed to be composed of 4 to 16 different souls which are held in the heart. *Ch'ulel* forms the human body and has a double that resides in the mountains where a parallel society exists. The rest of the souls are referred to generally as *lab* and take nonhuman forms, mainly different animals and certain atmospheric phenomena. Souls come from heaven and enter the embryo at conception and others are passed from relatives once they die. Souls are seen as being innate, inherited, and unchanging, while the body is artificial or fabricated and the source of morality. When a person uses the term "I" to refer to themselves, they are referring to their body rather than their soul or both, as personal identity is derived from physical appearance. Souls are never discussed openly except by people who hold

authority and have no need to fear souls. Most people just hint at souls and use many euphemisms and vague terms, like it is a public secret. (Pitarch)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: no evidence

7.2 Piercings: no evidence

7.3 Haircut: women wear their hair long and braided and men wear their hair short. (Rojas)

7.4 Scarification: no evidence

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: women wear red ribbons in their hair, earrings, and glass bead necklaces (Rojas)

7.8 Missionary effect: if there was any form of bodily adornment, such as piercing, the missionaries have effectively eradicated it, because there is no evidence of any in ethnographies or pictures of the Tzeltal (Blom)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: none

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate: they do exist, but are not a common practice today (Anonymous)

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Most ethnographers agree that the Tzeltal kinship typology is almost identical to the Omaha (Pitarch) (Redfield) (Rojas) (Anonymous)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- the calendar traditionally consists of 19 months. (Redfield)

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