

Divergent developments from laryngeal effects on vowels in Mocho' and Tuzanteco' Naomi Fox

This presentation will give a synchronic description of a posited incipient tonal contrast in Mocho', an endangered Mayan language of southern Mexico with less than forty fluent speakers, and the parallel developments in the related variety Tuzanteco which has fewer than 5 fluent speakers. In stressed ProtoMayan *CV?C sequences, Mocho' has a long vowel with falling pitch and no evidence of a glottal stop, which has created a phonemic contrast with the unmarked level or rising pitch pattern of 'plain' long vowels in stressed position, cf. /ka:n/ 'snake' vs. /kà:n/ 'sky', (grave accent represents falling pitch). In Tuzanteco the glottal stop in these sequences has been preserved and an echo vowel inserted, as in the word for 'sky': Mocho /kà:n/ vs. Tuzanteco /ka?àn/. It is likely that Mocho' and Tuzanteco shared the development of the echo vowel before Mocho' developed falling pitch in these segments. Tuzanteco speakers seem to have carried this development further in the other direction by analogy, as there is evidence of 'breaking' of plain long vowels in stressed position to form a V?V nucleus: however, the pitch patterns of these (more newly innovated) segments differs from the V?V segments which came from PM *CV?C syllables.

In this presentation I will describe the divergent developments of these segments and present examples collected during field trips in 2007 and 2008. The development of a tonal contrast in Mocho' has occurred quite recently, since historical evidence indicates the development occurred after the separation of the Mocho and Tuzanteco speakers, an event recounted by speakers as recent history (ca. 17th century). There are no grammatical descriptions of Mocho' or Tuzanteco and published work of any nature is sparse, although these languages contain features of special interest in Mayan linguistics and for linguistic theory in general and are in dire need of documentation. For example, although three other Mayan languages have tonal contrasts (Uspanteko, Yucatec Maya, one dialect of Tzotzil), the Mocho' situation offers a unique prospect of observing tonogenesis as a recent development and the parallel developments in a closely related but geographically distinct variety.