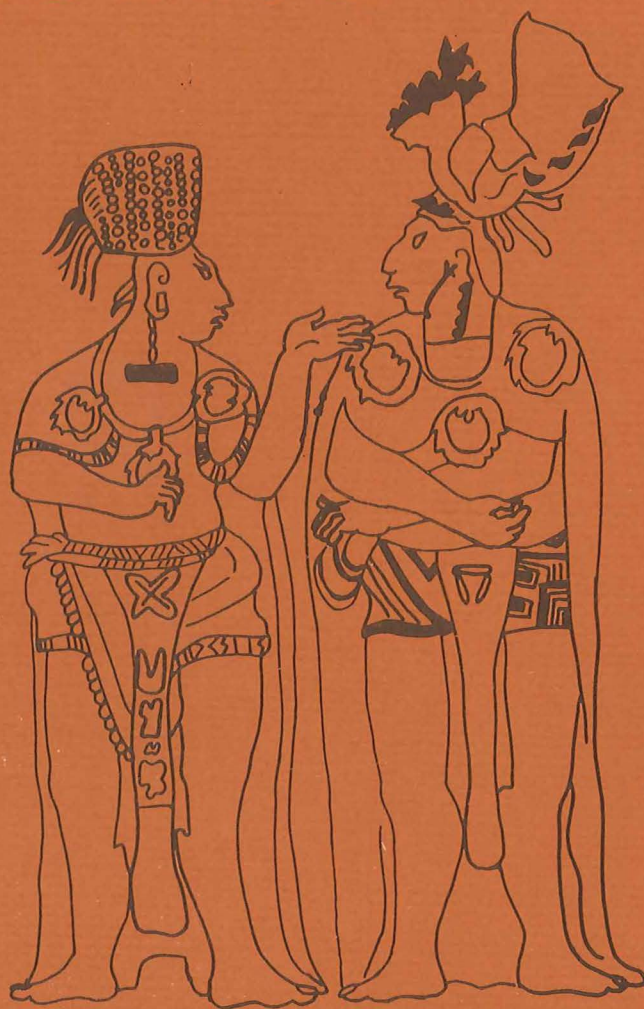


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The cover was designed by Barbara Borg, after Room 1, South Wall, Temple of the Frescoes, Bonampak, as reconstructed at the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.

AN EXAMINATION OF ADJECTIVAL FORMS  
IN THE CAKCHIQUEL LANGUAGE

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In the Mayan language Cakchiquel, there are several different ways to form an adjective. The grammars of the language have only partially displayed the full array of Cakchiquel adjectives, and have seldom attempted any semantic discussion of them.

The purpose of this paper is to present all the Cakchiquel adjectival forms and discuss their semantic interrelationships.

For the purpose of this explanation, I have categorized Cakchiquel adjectives into four basic classes: (1) regular, (2) distinctive, (3) emphatic, and (4) stative.<sup>1</sup>

I. REGULAR

The regular adjectives are found in both attributive and predicative positions. They are the most frequently used adjectives, have no particular form, and carry with them no special semantic meaning.

Plurality is generally inferred from the context of the sentence, although it may be specified by the insertion of the distributive particle taq between the adjective and the noun:<sup>2</sup>

iɟel winəq (evil person or people)  
iɟel taq winəq (evil people)

kow ab'əx (hard rock or rocks)  
kow taq ab'əx (hard rocks)

In addition, there are two adjectives in this class which have a special plural form:

	singular	plural
large	nim	nima'q
small	č'uti'n	č'uti'q

nima'q taq če' (big trees)  
č'uti'q taq wux (small books)

## II. DISTINCTIVE

Distinctive adjectives occur in attributive position, and are formed by adding a suffix of either -a or -i (see table I). Cakchiquel grammarians have noted the existence of this form, but attempted little semantic explanation of it.<sup>3</sup> The semantic consequences of the distinctive adjectival form in opposition to the regular adjectival form can be explained using the theory of markedness. This notion of markedness implies that in a given opposition, one form is the unmarked, or general form, and the other is more marked, or specific. The distinctive adjectival form in Cakchiquel has a more restricted lexical meaning than the regular form. A nim xay, for example, is a big house, whereas a nima xay is some special kind of big building, such as a courthouse. The distinctive form of the adjectival root č'ut (small) is restricted in meaning, such as in č'uti te'ex (aunt).<sup>4</sup> In some cases, the distinctive form may function as a diminutive, often showing endearment, such as the -ito or -ita suffixes in Spanish; a č'uti ač'in is an "hombrecito". When modifying colors, the distinctive form reflects a change in the tone or hue of the color: səq is white, while saqa is silver; q'eq is black, and q'eqa is jet black; kəq is red, but kaqa is crimson; rəš is green/blue, but raša is jade; q'ən is yellow, while q'ana is gold.

Table I

	Regular Adjective (unmarked)	Distinctive Adjective (marked)
large	nim	nim-a
small	č'ut(i'n)	č'ut-i
white	səq	saq-a
black	q'eq	q'eq-a
red	kəq	kaq-a
green	rəš	raš-a
yellow	q'ən	q'an-a
ripe	čəq'	čaqa'-a
old	ri'x	rix-a

Roman Jakobson has shown that marked forms are usually more complex or longer than unmarked forms.<sup>5</sup> We would therefore expect distinctive Cakchiquel adjectives to be phonetically more complex than regular adjectives.

Further research is needed to determine why some adjectives take the -a suffix while others take the -i (səq, for

example, can take either suffix).<sup>6</sup>

### III. EMPHATIC

Emphatic adjectives occur in attributive position, as do distinctive adjectives, and are formed by adding one of two suffixes: *-alëx* or *-ilëx*.<sup>7</sup> The semantic consequence of this form is that the adjective is more emphatic. An *uɸ ačín* is a good man, while an *uɸilëx ačín* is a very good man. *čox taq alab'o'* are righteous young men, while *čoxilëx taq alab'o'* are very righteous young men.

Table II

	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Emphatic</u>
small	č'ut	č'ut-ilëx
good	uɸ	uɸ-ilëx
bad	iɸel	iɸel-ilëx
thin	šaš	šaš-ilëx
thick	pim	pim-ilëx
acidic	č'ëm	č'am-ilëx
cold	tew	tew-ilëx
slick	liq'	liq'-ilëx
clean	č'axč'ox	č'axč'ox-ilëx
humble	č'uč'ux	č'uč'ux-ilëx
hard	k'ayew	k'ayew-ilëx
skinny	b'aq	b'aq-ilëx
fat	ti'ox	ti'ox-ilëx
crazy	moš	moš-ilëx
just	čox	čox-ilëx

We may continue to apply the theory of markedness in explaining the alternation of the a and i which we see surface again in the *-alëx* and *-ilëx* suffixes. In a previous paper, I used the theory of markedness to explain the use of the *-a'* and *-i'* plural noun markers in Cakchiquel.<sup>8</sup> I concluded that *-a'* was the general, or unmarked, and *-i'* was the more marked. If the i is the more marked of the two, we would assume that it carries with it a more restricted lexical meaning. The adjectives shown in table II all take the *-ilëx* suffix because of the semantic value inherent in this form. That is, *uɸilëx* is VERY good, *iɸelilëx* is VERY bad, and *šašilëx* is VERY thin. Being an extreme, all adjectives of this class have a more restricted usage and are found in more specialized cases. We would therefore expect them to take the i (*-ilëx*) more often than the a (*-alëx*). The only emphatic forms, in fact, which ever take the *-alëx*

suffix are those which also have a distinctive form of the suffix -a (see table III).

Table III

	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Distinctive</u>	<u>Emphatic</u>
large	nim	nim-a	nim-alëx (or nim-ilëx)
white	sëq	saq-a	saq-alëx (or saq-ilëx)
black	q'eq	q'eq-a	q'eq-alëx (or q'eq-ilëx)
red	këq	kaq-a	kaq-alëx (or kaq-ilëx)
green	rëš	raš-a	raš-alëx (or raš-ilëx)
yellow	q'ën	q'an-a	q'an-alëx (or q'an-ilëx)
ripe	čëq'	čaq'-a	čaq'-alëx (or čaq'-ilëx)
old	ri'x	rix-a	rix-alëx (or rix-ilëx)

The a from the distinctive form influences the formation of the emphatic adjective. The box in table IV illustrates this condition.

Table IV

from emphatic  
form:

		-ilëx (eg. nimilëx)
from distinctive form	a (eg. nima)	-alëx (eg. nimalëx or nimilëx)

In the upper right box, we see the influence of the pure -ilëx suffix that we would expect from the semantic quality of the emphatic adjective. We also see another influencing factor in the lower left box. This is the a from the distinctive adjectival form. Because of this dual influence, we find that either suffix can and does exist in these cases.<sup>9</sup>

Those adjectives which do not have a distinctive form of the

suffix -a can only take the suffix -iləx in the emphatic form. Moreover, since -iləx is the more dominant of the two suffixes, representing the emphatic semantic value of this adjectival form, it is taking over the place of the less frequent -aləx.

#### IV. STATIVE

The fourth class of Cakchiquel adjectives I will call stative. (These adjectives have been referred to by some grammarians as positionals.) Statives can be realized in Mayan grammar as intransitive verbs (eg. šoxpa'e' - we stood), transitive verbs (eg. šoxrupab'a' - he stood us up), and adjectives (eg. pa'el - stood up, or in an upright position).<sup>10</sup> The stative adjectival form is separate from the other adjectival forms in that it describes the state or position of the object being modified. Table V shows the four stative adjectival forms.

Table V

For verbs with vowels a,e,i,o:

Sample verb: -xeq-  
(to spread out)

	<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
less		
intense	xeq-el	xeqex-ox
more		
intense	xeqex-ik	xeqex-əq

For verbs with vowel u:

Sample verb: -xup-  
(to be face down)

	<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
less		
intense	xup-ul	xup-uł
more		
intense	xupux-ik	xupux-əq

The first form is the most common and is the past participle of the verb with which it is associated.<sup>11</sup> It consists of the stem of the verb and a suffix of the form vowel+l (the vowel



being the same as the vowel in the stem). If the stem of the verb ends in *l*, the suffix is *-an* rather than *vowel+l*.<sup>12</sup>

	verb	singular	
to spread out	-xeq-	xeq-el	spread out, in the state of being spread out
to get wet	-č'eq-	č'eq-el	wet, in the state of being wet
to hang	-ǰ'eq-	ǰ'eq-el	hung, in the hanging position
to grind	-pač'-	pač'-al	ground, in the state of being ground
to twist	-šot-	šot-ol	twisted, in a twisted position
to lean	-luk-	luk-ul	leaning, in a leaning position
to marry	-k'ul-	k'ul-an	married, in the state of being married

The three remaining forms are chiastic, in that they involve an ordered reversal of the original sequence of sounds of the stem of the verb. For example, a sequence of consonants and vowels  $C_1 V_1 C_2$  in the stem of the verb would produce a chiastic stem of  $C_1 V_1 C_2 V_1 C_1$ . This inverted repetition of sounds suggests an intensification in the adjective.<sup>13</sup>

The plural of the first form consists of the chiastic stem of the verb, plus the suffix *-ox* (except where the vowel in the singular form is *u*, then the suffix is *-uǰ*, and is added to the regular verb stem rather than the chiastic stem).<sup>14</sup>

	verb	singular	plural
to spread out	-xeq-	xeq-el	xeqex-ox
to get wet	-č'eq-	č'eq-el	č'eqeč'-ox
to hang	-ǰ'eq-	ǰ'eq-el	ǰ'eqeǰ'-ox
to grind	-pač'-	pač'-al	pač'ap-ox
to twist	-šot-	šot-ol	šotoš-ox
to lean	-luk-	luk-ul	luk-uǰ
to lie down	-koǰ-	koǰ-ol	koǰok-ox
to be face down	-xup-	xup-ul	xup-uǰ
to lean down	-pač'-	pač'-al	pačap-ox
to be straight	-xik-	xik-il	xikix-ox

The second set of adjectival forms suggest a more intense state or position than the former. *Xeq-el*, for example, is spread out, while *xeqex-ik* is VERY spread out. These adjectives are formed by adding the suffix *-ik* to the chiastic stem to form the singular and the suffix *-ǰq* to the chiastic stem to form the plural.<sup>15</sup>

	verb	singular	plural
to be face down	-xup-	xupux-ik	xupux-ëq
to be spread			
out	-xeq-	xeqex-ik	xeqex-ëq
to make round			
(eg. coin)	-set	setes-ik	setes-ëq
to make round			
(eg. ball)	-sir	siris-ik	siris-ëq
to make round			
(eg. circle)	-sur	surus-ik	surus-ëq
to be pointed	-çup-	çupuç-ik	çupuç-ëq
to roll up	-b'ol	b'olob'-ik	b'olob'-ëq
to lean	-luk-	lukul-ik	lukul-ëq
to mound	-b'ux-	b'uxub'-ik	b'uxub'-ëq
to be bald	-ç'ën	ç'anaç'-ik	ç'anaç'-ëq
to wad up	-b'oç	b'oçob'-ik	b'oçob'-ëq
to be loose	-tob'-	tob'ot-ik	tob'ot-ëq
to squash	-piç'	piç'ip-ik	piç'ip-ëq

In a recent publication, Roman Jakobson suggested that in modern linguistic research, the inquirer must "gain a widened scope and deeper insight by familiarizing himself with questions and working hypotheses raised in linguistics of the near and remote past and by testing them on the rich materials gathered and accumulated since."<sup>16</sup> This paper is the result of such an effort. Although I have a good speaking knowledge of Cakchiquel, I was not aware of all the adjectival forms until they surfaced in my studies of the works of Cakchiquel grammarians of the past. Subsequent data collection and investigation in Guatemala confirmed that they are indeed still part of the language today.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 I have used the Patzún dialect of Cakchiquel as the data source for this paper.
- 2 Blair, Robert W., et.al. Cakchiquel Basic Course. Vol. II, BYU Printing Services: Provo, Utah, 1969, p. 199. See also footnote 10.
- 3 Daniel Brinton acknowledges that some adjectives take an -a or -i suffix, but offers no semantic discussion of them. See Brinton, Daniel G. A Grammar of the Cakchiquel Language of Guatemala. American Philosophical Society, 1884, p. 363. (The manuscript from which Brinton translated his grammar is at least as old as 1692. See manuscript number 40.2 in the Gates Collection, Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.) See also Blair, et.al, p. 449.
- 4 The following minimal pairs should clarify the point here: č'uti tata'ax (uncle), č'uti'n tata'ax (small father); č'uti k'axol (nephew), č'uti'n k'axol (small son); č'uti mi'al (niece), č'uti'n mi'al (small daughter).
- 5 Consider the hierarchy of these degrees of adjectives: high/higher/highest. As they become progressively more marked, they also acquire more phonetic complexity. This is also true with male/female and author/authoress. See Jakobson, Roman, "Quest For the Essence of Language," Selected Writings II. Mouton: The Hague, Paris, 1971, p. 352.
- 6 The reason č'ut takes the -i suffix in the distinctive form might be explained by taking the theory of markedness one step further to show hierarchies among adjectival pairs (see Greenberg, Joseph. Language Universals with Special Reference to Feature Hierarchies, Mouton: The Hague, Paris, pp. 52-53). Nim (large) and č'ut (small) are at opposite poles of an adjectival pair where large is the general or unmarked member and small is the more marked. In a previous paper, I concluded that of the -a' and -i' plural noun markers in Cakchiquel, the -a' is the unmarked, and -i' is the more marked (see footnote 8). If this distinction holds true in Cakchiquel adjectives, we would expect -a to be the suffix to the unmarked (large), and -i to be the suffix to the more marked (small).
- 7 Brinton, p. 363.
- 8 Richman, Larry L. The Semantic Value of the -a' and the -i' Noun Plurals in Cakchiquel. Deseret Language and

Linguistic Society Symposium 1979, Brigham Young University: Provo, Utah, 1979, pp. 57-63. Also published in Notes on Linguistics 13, Summer Institute of Linguistics: Dallas, Texas, January 1980, pp. 31-36.

- 9 I have not been able to determine any semantic difference between these two forms which co-exist.
- 10 Blair, Robert W., Robertson, John S., et.al. Diccionario Español-Cakchiquel-Inglés. Garland Publishing: New York, to appear, pp. 441-2.
- 11 Rosales?, R.P.Fr. Carlos J. Gramática del idioma cakchiquel, Guatemala, C.A., 1978, pp. 66. See also Blair, pp. 29-33, 441.
- 12 Ibid., Blair, Robertson, et.al., p. 442.
- 13 Chiasmus also appears in Cakchiquel verb forms and has the same effect of intensification.
- 14 Rosales?, pp. 18-19.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Jakobson, Roman. The Framework of Language. Michigan Studies in the Humanities: Michigan, 1980, pp. 40-41.