

# Q'anjob'al in the Classroom: What K-12 educators might learn from linguists

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# Q'anjob'al: Facts and Figures

- A language spoken by 77,700 individuals (Ethnologue 2005) in Guatemala
- 12+ Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala
  - Some separated from each other by as much as 3000 years (= think English and Polish)
- No genetic relationship to Spanish
  - Loan words have entered the language due to colonial cultural influence but the grammatical structure of the language remains largely unchanged



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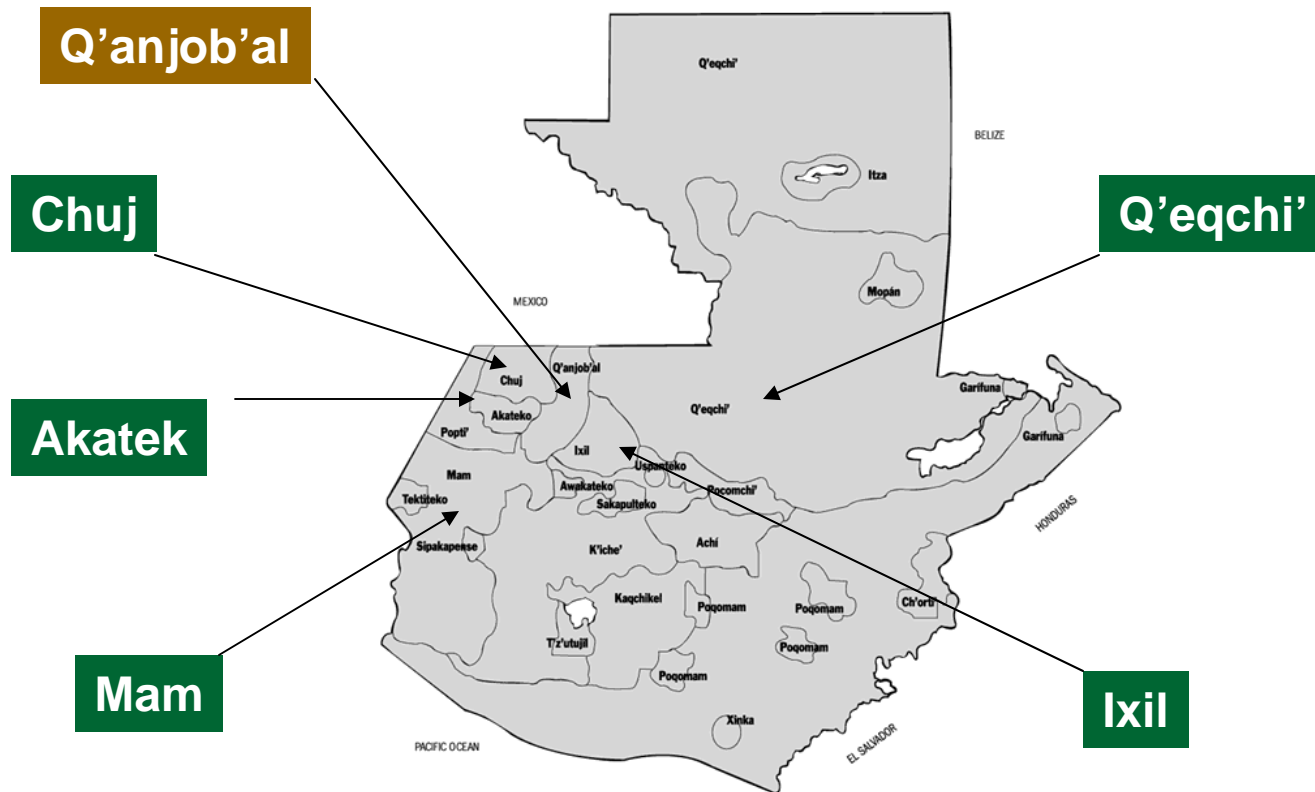
# Q'anjob'al: Facts and Figures

- Principal speech communities are in in the Department of Huehuetenango
  - Jolom Konob' (Santa Eulalia)
  - Yich K'ox (San Juan Ixcoy)
  - Yal Mox (Santa Cruz Barillas)
  - Tzuluma' (San Pedro Soloma)
- Huehuetenango was second only to Quiche in the number of civilian massacres that took place during the Civil War (1960-1996, *Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification*)
- Considerable stigma was associated with indigenous language during the war



# Linguistic Communities of Guatemala

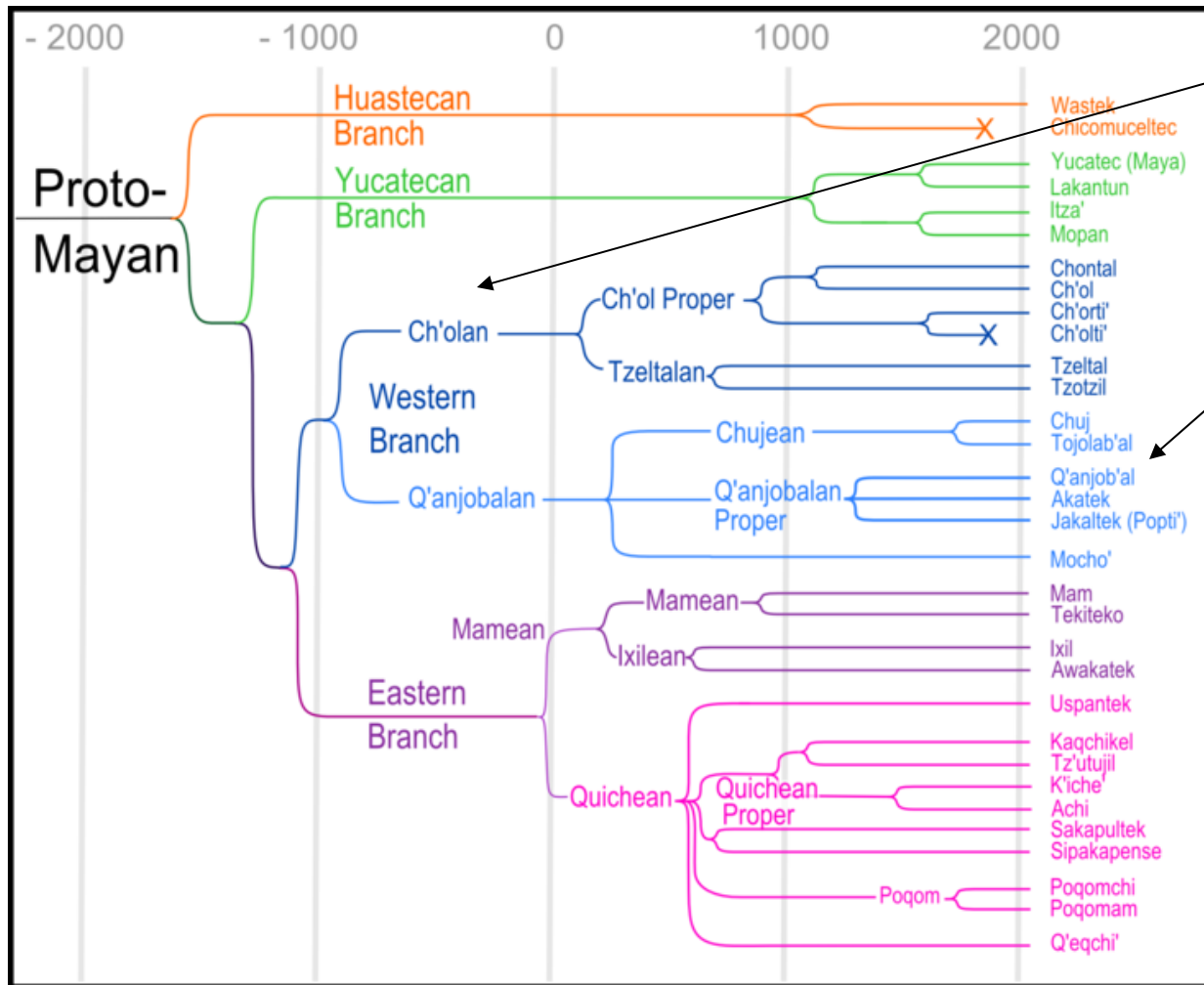
LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES OF GUATEMALA



SOURCE: BEST Project 520-0374, USAID - Guatemala



# The Mayan Language Family



Ch'olan

Chuj

Tojolab'al

Q'anjob'al

Akatek

Jakaltek

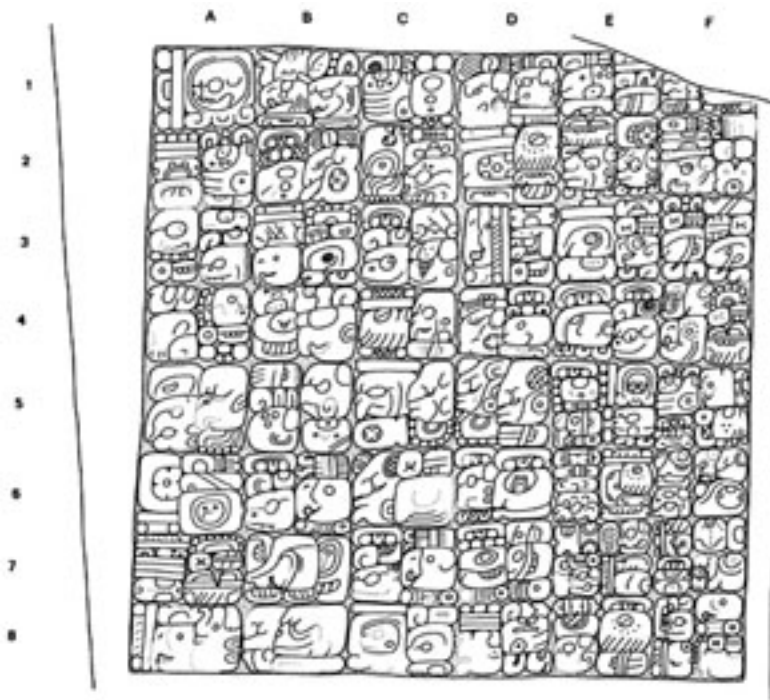
Mocho'





Yaxchilan, Lintel 15  
Peabody Museum, Harvard University





Yaxchilan, Lintel 10  
Peabody Museum, Harvard University



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# Q'anjob'al in Champaign-Urbana?

- There are approximately 150-300 native speakers of Q'anjob'al in Champaign County
- Age: from octogenarians to infants
- Origins: Santa Eulalia, Barillas, Soloma
- A good deal of monolingualism in Q'anjob'al
- Some speak virtually no Spanish
- They are interested in preserving and passing on their language, even in a diasporic context
- Thus, their needs are somewhat different from their counterparts in Guatemala







Jolom Konob' - Santa Eulalia



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# Q'anjob'al in Champaign-Urbana?

- 1976 earthquake
- Civil war (1960-1996)
- During the 1980s the majority of asylum applications were denied by the Reagan Administration (while 50% of fleeing Nicaraguans and Cubans were allowed)
- 40,000 to US a year throughout the 1990s (International Organization for Migration)
- Approximately 1 million Guatemalans now live in the US
- 2,500 deported from US annually
- [mayavisionus.com](http://mayavisionus.com)



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# Q'anjob'al Language Documentation

- Personnel
  - Ryan Shosted (PI, Linguistics)
  - Andres Juan and three other consultants from the Q'anjob'al community
  - Jill Hallet (Linguistics)
  - Karen Lichtman (Linguistics)
  - Claudia Crespo (Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese)
  - Ling 516 (F08,S10): Linguistic Field Methods
- Funding
  - William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
  - Campus Research Board, OVCR
  - Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
- Objectives
  - Record and archive the sounds of Q'anjob'al
  - Alphabet book and transcribed / recorded narratives
  - Produce a complete phonological grammar of the language
  - Produce an online, multimedia dictionary of Q'anjob'al (including a verb conjugation algorithm)





# Q'anjob'al Literacy

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# Q'anjob'al as L1

- Many children in Champaign County are living in monolingual Q'anjob'al-speaking homes or mixed bi-/tri-lingual homes (Spanish and English)
- In the latter cases, the Spanish and English input is marginal to poor
- Could children's English language acquisition be enhanced through the use of Q'anjob'al literacy materials?



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## *Tz'ib' Yul Ko Q'anjob'al*

(Juan & Hallett 2009)

- (31) Letters of the Q'anjob'al alphabet (Roman script)
- Accompanying sentences and their English translations: *k'u = jopopi yaq'an k'u*
- Royalty-free illustrations
- Alphabet posters
- To be freely distributed to members of the community



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## Narratives:

### Transcription, Recording, and Illustration

- Stories recorded so far:
  - “The North Wind and the Sun”
  - “The Boy Who Cried Wolf”
  - “Mythic History of Jolom Konob’ (Santa Eulalia)”
- Transcriptions in Q’anjob’al orthography, translations in English, and accompanying illustration



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# Difficulties so far

- Few literate speakers
- Orthographic discrepancies
  - $k' > g > k' > k'$
  - $k > c > k > k$
  - $q' > q' > q' > q$
  - $q > k' > q' > q'$
- Few lexical resources (two incomplete, and often inconsistent dictionaries)
- Dialect differences (in the same community?)
- Linguistically-informed Q'anjob'al vs. naïve Q'anjob'al







# Q'anjob'al Phonetics and Phonology

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# The Phonetic Inventory

- A large set of ejectives: [t' k' q' tz' ch' tx']
  - Ejectives occur in 18% of world's languages
- An implosive stop: [b']
  - Implosives occur in 10% of world's languages
  - Uncommon in the Americas
- Uvulars (contrasting with velars): [q q']
  - Q'anjob'al is among the subset of Mayan languages that retain uvulars from Proto-Mayan... they have merged with velars [k k'] elsewhere
  - Some younger speakers of Q'anjob'al have already merged the categories
- Three sibilant fricatives: [s xh x]
  - Fairly uncommon: Mandarin, Polish, Sanskrit



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# Consonants

- txamej 'nose'
- chanej 'dress'
- q'axan 'hot'
- kixkab' 'earthquake'
- ix 'woman'
- tixhtoq 'irrigate it'

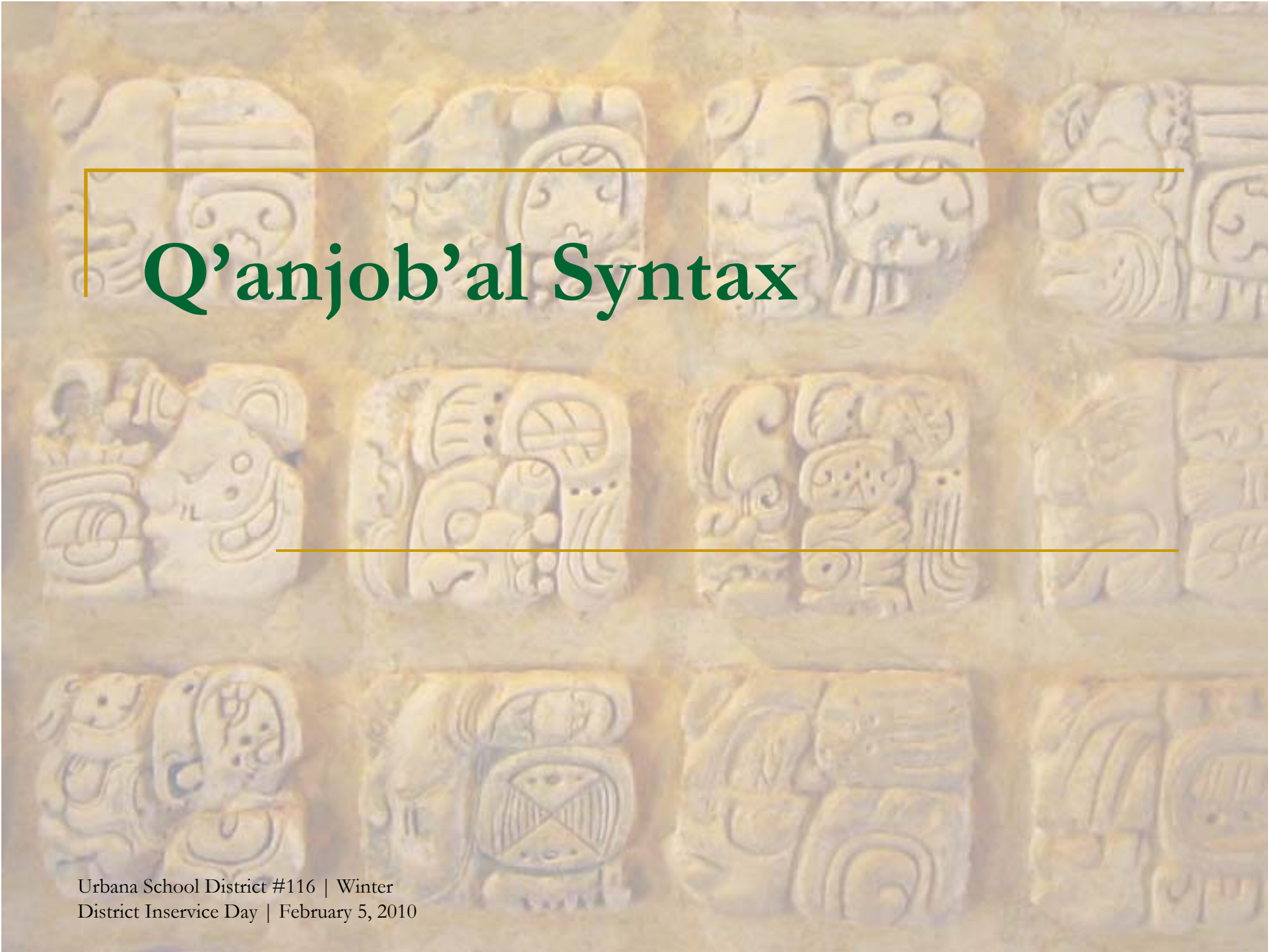


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# Some interesting sound changes

- Proto-Mayan [r] > [y] in Q'anjob'al
  - \*war > [way] 'sleep'
  - \*ra'x > [yax] 'green'
- q > [glottal stop]
- Vowel lengthening
  - [j] is lost in some dialects of Q'anjob'al, leading to lengthening of the same vowel:
  - tajnaq > ta:naq 'ripe'





# Q'anjob'al Syntax

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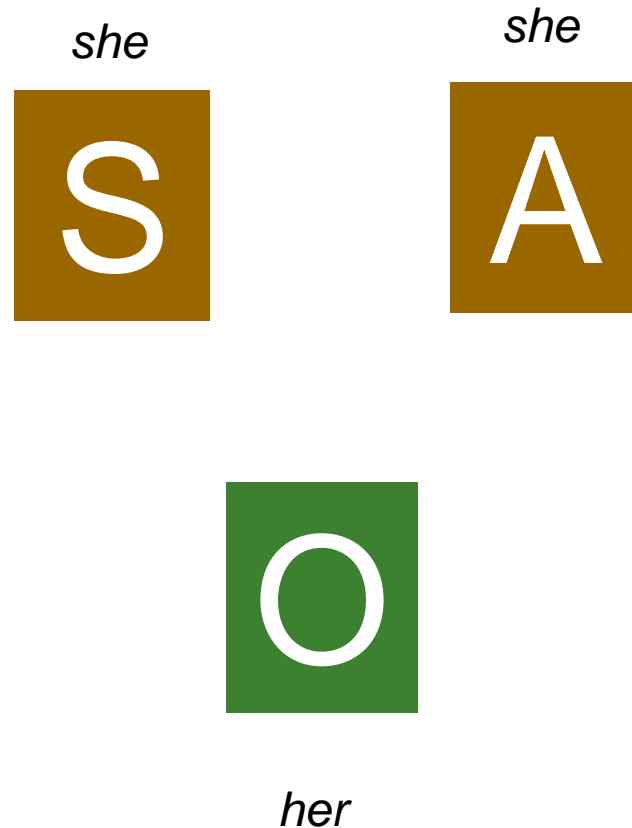
# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- Q'anjob'al marks the actors in a sentence differently than is the case in most European languages you are probably familiar with (NB Basque).
- In English: **She** kissed **him**,
  - **him** is in the accusative case (not *she kissed he!*)
  - **she** is in the nominative case (not *her kissed him!*)
- Note that **she** is the subject of a transitive verb (takes an object), *kiss*.
- If **she** were the subject of an intransitive verb (doesn't take an object), like *sleep*, the pronoun would still be **she** (i.e. *her sleeps* is not OK)



# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- In languages like English we see the following morphological (word-marking) pattern
  - **S** = subject of an intransitive verb (*sleep*)
  - **A** = subject of a transitive verb (*kiss*)
  - **O** = object of a transitive verb



# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- In languages like Q'anjob'al we see a **different** morphological (word-marking) pattern
  - **S** = subject of an intransitive verb (*sleep*)
  - **O** = object of a transitive verb
  - **A** = subject of a transitive verb (*kiss*)

-ach



-a



-ach





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# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- English is a Nominative-Accusative language, where S and A pattern against O
- Q'anjob'al is an Ergative-Absolutive language, where S and O pattern against A
  - Max-**ach** wayi
    - Compl- **Abs2Sg** sleep
    - *You (sg) slept*; Intransitive verb (no object)
  - Max-**a** lo te.on-**Ø**
    - Compl-**Erg2Sg** eat Avocado(OD)-**Abs3Sg**
    - *You (sg) ate avocado*; Transitive verb (with object)



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# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- Absolutive-Ergative systems can be challenging for Nominative-Accusative learners
- Consider some (amusing) errors I've already made:
  - Max-**a** lakaj te.mexa
    - Compl-**2sgErg** lift Det.table
    - *You (sg) lifted the table*
  - Max-**ach** lakaj te.mexa
    - Compl-**2sgAbs** lift Det.table
    - *The table lifted you (sg)*



# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- Q'anjob'al has what's known as a 'split-ergative' system
  - In some verbal tenses the case-marking is Ergative-Absolutive, in other tenses it is Nominative-Accusative
  - In progressive, case-marking is always Nominative-Accusative
- **Max-a** maq'ch puerta
    - **Compl-Erg2Sg** close Door
    - *You (sg) closed the door*
  - **Max-ach** b'eyi
    - **Compl-Abs2Sg** walk
    - *You (sg) walked*
  - **Lanan-a** maq'ch puerta
    - **Prog-Erg2Sg** close door
    - *You (sg) are closing the door*
  - **Lanan-a/\*ach** b'eyi
    - **Prog-Erg2Sg** walk
    - *You (sg) are walking*



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# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- Do verbs conjugate in Q'anjob'al?
  - Yes, but there are big differences between European languages and Q'anjob'al
  - Instead of changing the internal structure of words (= synthetic morphology), morphemes are stacked onto the verb (= agglutinative morphology)
  - In this respect, Q'anjob'al is more like Finnish and Turkish than it is like English



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# Q'anjob'al: The Verb

- Verbal root = uq' <drink>
- I am drinking (my) water = lanan in w-uq'-on w-a'ej
  - w- marks 1st person singular <I> on both the verb uq' and the object a'ej <water> (because they start with a vowel... otherwise they would be marked with in-)
  - on- marks the verb as transitive
- You are drinking (your) water = lanan in a-q'-on a'-ej
  - What marks the 2nd person singular?



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## Q'anjob'al: The verb

- Q'anjob'al marks present, future, and past actions
- Past actions can be completed or ongoing (I ate the avocado; I was eating the avocado)
- Present actions can be progressive or habitual (I am eating the avocado; I eat avocados (habitually))



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## Q'anjob'al: The noun

- Q'anjob'al has a rich set of classifiers, or ways of expressing the notions <the> and <a> depending on the type of noun
  - animals, animal-derived products (e.g. milk) = no'
  - corn = ixim
  - trees, some fruits, wooden products = te'
  - other fruits = sat
- Ex. **No'** leche aj piyioq' **no'** = the milk rose (and spilled)





yujwal a dios!

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