-- porke ja7at jch^ayem jolat
i ma7ba ya awich^ tal awinam
ya xtal sk^anantabat abiluk
ja7 yu7unil awil xtal ajok^obe bi7 a xch^ay awu7une
kjipat ta karsel xbaht kak^at ta karsel, ha-ha-ha
yawich^ awotan7a porke ya xch^ay sjol te sakil winik, ha-ha-ha

because you are crazy
and you don't bring your woman (wife).[2]
You have to take care of your things;
and look, it is because of this that you come to ask for what you lost.
I will throw you in jail, I will go to leave you in jail! ha-ha-ha
This will make you learn! ha-ha-ha

The tirade above was launched (mostly in jest) by angry Fransisca, the mother of my host family in Petalcingo, when after a frantic search all over the house for my little desk lamp it turned out that I had hidden it myself in my backpack earlier that day. The quote, which alternatively references me in the second and third person, is replete with references to *him* and *his*, and *you* and *yours*, which, rather than being realized as pronouns (as in English) are marked by agreement morphemes on the verb and the possessed noun. The morphology and syntax of these agreement morphemes is the topic of the present thesis. Since overt pronouns are quite rare in Tzeltal discourse, the agreement markers usually are the only way of indicating who is doing what to whom, and what is possessed by whom. The fact that the same markers are used to indicate the subject of a transitive verb as well as the possessor of a thing, while not entirely uncommon in the world's languages, is one of the interesting properties exhibited by Tzeltal. However, prior to embarking on the analysis of Tzeltal grammar in general, and agreement (person) markers in particular, an overview of both Tzeltal and the town of Petalcingo is in order.

About Tzeltal

Tzeltal is a Mayan language with between 265,000[3] and 278,000[4] speakers located mainly in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. It is a part of the Tzeltalan branch of the Mayan family:

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[2] Me supposedly having a wife in the next town over has been a running joke in the house.

[3] Data from Summer Institute of Linguistics Enthnologue.
http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Mexico

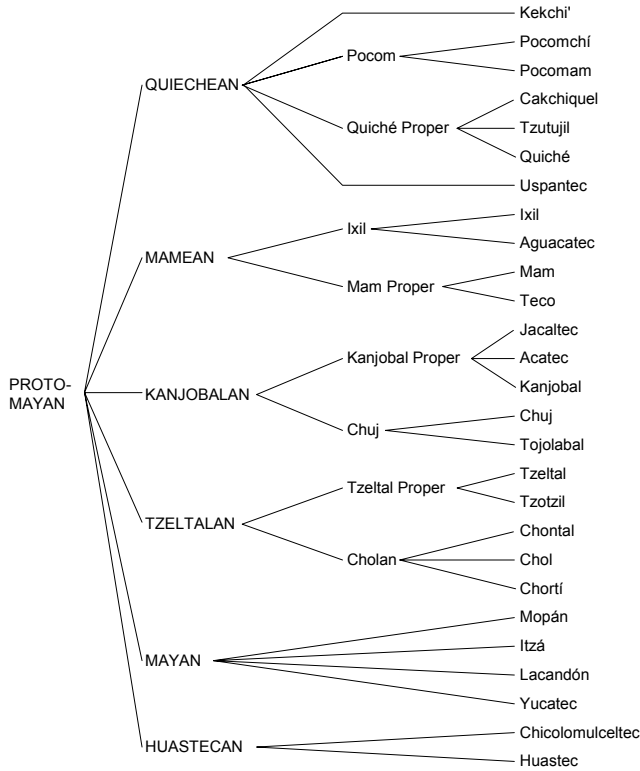[4] Haviland 2004, who sites Mexican 2000 census, INEGI.

Figure 1: Mayan Family Tree (adopted from Craig 1977, who credits Kaufman)

Together Chol, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal comprise the three most widely spoken Mayan languages of Chiapas. Geographically, these have roughly the following distribution:
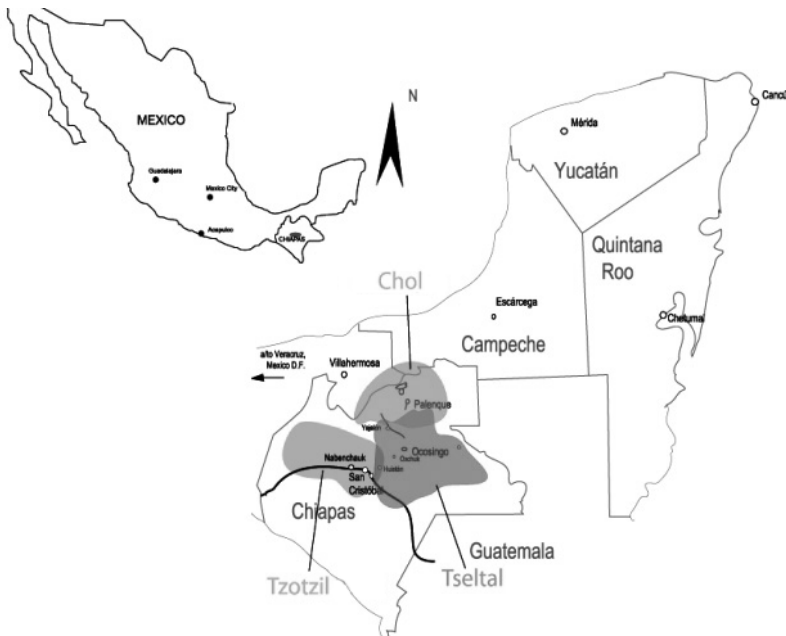

**Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Chol
(adopted from Haviland 2004)**

Kaufman 1971 tentatively identifies 5 dialects of Tzeltal, while Campbell 1987 proposes six, though both Campbell 1987 and Kaufman 1972 find many different variations, which could potentially be grouped into an arbitrary number of dialects. The Tzeltal dialect map proposed in Campbell 1987 is reproduced here as Figure 3, below.
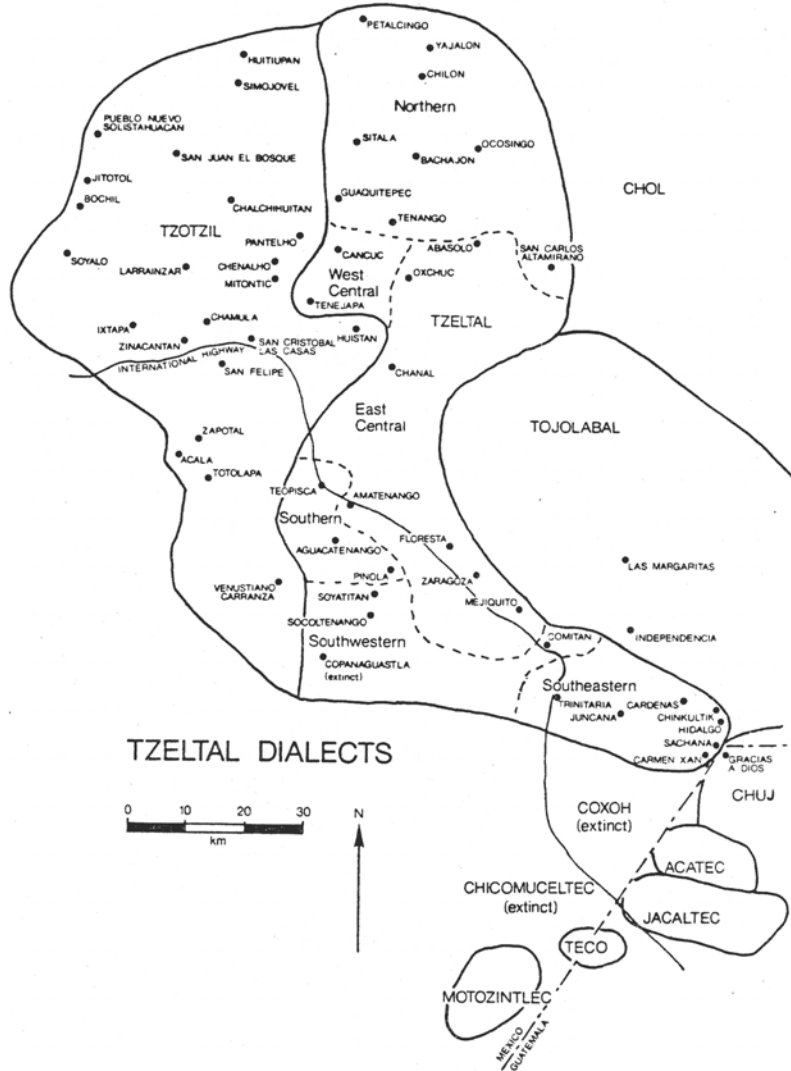

Figure 3: Tzeltal Dialect Map (adopted from Campbell 1987)

This thesis is primarily based on about nine months of fieldwork conducted in the town of Petalcingo, municipio Tila over four separate visits between June 2003 and January 2005.

Petalcingo, Municipio Tila, Chiapas

Petalcingo is a small town (population of about 7,000) nestled in the highland mountains of Chiapas, Mexico. The climate is rather mild, except for a few months in the winter when it gets quite cold (though never freezing). In the summer, owing to the elevation, the heat never gets unbearable, except for a few hours in the afternoon.

The majority of the population of Petalcingo engages in subsistence and commercial farming. The main cash crops are corn, beans, and especially coffee, of which Petalcingo is a

major producer. Diet is supplemented by bananas and various other greenery which grows (and is cultivated) in the corn fields and coffee plantations, as well as chicken and eggs, which the majority of families raise. Many families also keep pigs; however, pork is reserved for special occasions, and the slaughter of a pig is something of a minor festivity in the immediate neighborhood.

While the previous generations worked almost exclusively on their own land, younger people increasingly migrate away from Petalcingo to seek work elsewhere, primarily in Yajalon and Villa Hermosa, the capitol of the nearby state of Tabasco.

Roughly half of Petalcingo's population is Catholic, though very few attend church weekly. The other half is split between Protestants, Episcopalians, and members of the 'Profesia.' Petalcingo's patron saint is Saint Francis, whose holiday (which is celebrated for four days between the 1st and 4th of October) is the largest festival in Petalcingo.

Economically speaking, Petalcingo seems to be located squarely in the middle of the Chiapan scale. There are several multi-story houses, and while the older houses utilize mud-reinforced bamboo construction, virtually all new houses are built with cinderblocks and cement. Unlike some smaller rural Chiapan communities, Petalcingo has running water, as well as many paved roads, and reasonably reliable electrical power (blackouts happen only once every few weeks). The majority of families have radios, quite a few have televisions, and recently even a local Petalcingo radio station has begun broadcasting. Yet Petalcingo does not quite class with the nearby larger towns. While both Tila and Yajalon feature several Internet cafes and a large number of restaurants, Petalcingo has neither, though there are several public telephones located in grocery stores.

Politically, the township is governed by the assembly of land-owning heads of families, a little more than 300 in number. Some years ago Petalcingo was the site of much politically-related violence, including murders. The hostilities were mainly between supporters of the leftist Zapatistas and those of the right-leaning PRI, the traditional power in national Mexican politics. More recently, however, the political climate has calmed down, and though deep political divisions persist (many residents say that the village is divided in two), political violence is relatively uncommon.

The Linguistic Situation

Petalcingo represents the northern-most point in the Tzeltal-speaking zone (see Figure 3). It is surrounded on three sides by Chol-speaking communities, as can be seen from the map below:
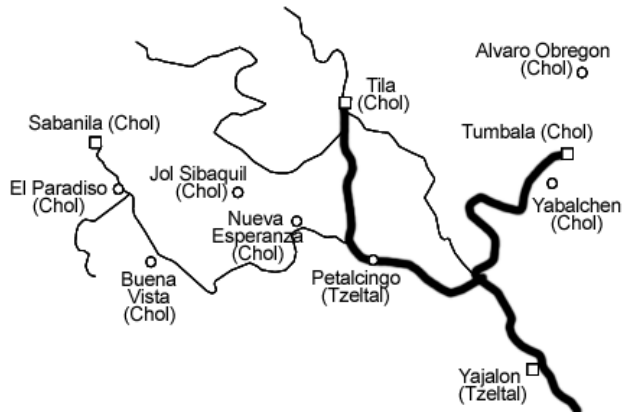

Figure 4: Communities and Languages around Petalcingo

Probably as a result of the contact with Chol, Petalcingo Tzeltal exhibits some unique (for Tzeltal) features. The most noticeable of these is the distribution of the two realizations of the first-person ergative morpheme, /k/ and /j/. The distribution is identical to that in Chol, which differs from all other dialects of Tzeltal. Though there is some evidence (to be discussed below) that /k/ is the more historically conservative reflex of this morpheme, it is likely that contact with Chol had a role in Petalcingo Tzeltal's preservation of the more conservative form.

At present, however, there no evidence of intensive contact with Chol speakers: when Petalcingo residents travel to sell or purchase supplies, the preferred trade center is Tzeltal-speaking Yajalon[5], rather than Chol-speaking Tila, though the two are roughly equidistant from Petalcingo, and Tila is the local administrative center. It is possible that the trade with Tzeltal-speaking people is a relatively recent phenomenon, and is a result of contemporary improvements in transportation infrastructure. Whatever its nature, it appears that there are certain "normalization" pressures on the Petalcingo Tzeltal speakers. Perhaps as a result, some younger speakers have a more classic Tzeltal distribution of the 1st-person ergative prefix.

The majority of the population of Petalcingo is bilingual in Tzeltal and Spanish. While monolingualism is more common in the older generation, virtually all the residents under the age of 30 are bilingual. A few members of the community also speak Chol, but for most people in Petalcingo knowledge of Chol is limited to a few words. Spanish is the language of education, commerce, and government, as well as much of the liturgy. All of the broadcast programming available in Petalcingo (including Petalcingo's own radio station) is exclusively in Spanish. Most children attend local schools at least until the middle grades of 'segundaria' or middle school. The education is conducted almost exclusively in Spanish: while there is

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[5] The Yajalon dialect of Tzeltal features regular (for Tzeltal) distribution of /k/ and /j/ 1st-person ergative morphemes.

one bilingual school in Petalcingo, most of the teachers even at this school do not speak Tzeltal, and the goal is usually to move the pupils into Spanish-only education.

Many families where young children are present now speak Spanish in their homes. While the parents in these families grew up in monolingual Tzeltal homes, they feel that their children will benefit from a better command of Spanish in school or when searching for work, and that the kids "will learn to speak Tzeltal anyway." At the same time, some older members of the community express frustration at what they see as the young people's lack of desire to speak Tzeltal.

About This Thesis

Nine months of fieldwork on an under-researched language is not nearly enough time to accomplish much of anything, or at least this was the situation in my case. Perhaps if one knows in advance what one would like to research, an in-depth investigation of a single phenomenon is possible in such a limited timeframe. Unfortunately, most of my trips to Petalcingo were not made with a particular investigative topic in mind, but rather with the idea to learn as much about the language as possible. Therefore the inadequacies of my research will become patently obvious to an astute reader, and I beg the reader's indulgence in advance. I try to note, wherever possible, both the cases in which I do not feel at ease in making a judgment, and areas in which my understanding of Tzeltal grammar is not deep enough.

These faults of the present work notwithstanding, the stance adopted in this thesis is formal in a sense that absent compelling reasons to the contrary, the most attractive analysis treats like forms as instantiations of one and the same entity. Thus it is assumed wherever plausible that identical forms are not syntactico-semantically disjunctive homophones. The philosophical underpinnings of such a move derive from the assumption that we (or I in particular) do not yet know all there is to know about the world's languages; that is, without a formal (in the preceding sense) analysis, we may fall into the trap of force-fitting unexpected or heretofore unseen linguistic phenomena into the mold of already well-studied languages. There are many historical examples of this kind of analysis, that is, one that overlooks interesting linguistic facts; however, one seems particularly relevant here: in the first half of the previous century many ergative languages were analyzed as lacking active voice and instead only featuring some kind of passive. While this analysis captured an important intuition, and one that has proven to be a factor in the diachronic analysis of ergative languages, it obscured the basic facts of the languages under scrutiny. It may be the case that the "form first" principle may occasionally be compromised in order to save a particular analysis in this thesis, but I hope the benefits of such an analysis are seen to outweigh the possible injustice perpetrated on the language itself. In other instances in which an identical form is given divergent treatment, the culprit will probably be the author's imperfect knowledge of Petalcingo Tzeltal grammar.

I've tried to use textual examples as much as possible, rather than elicited ones. The pitfalls of elicited examples are well known, and besides being more lively, the textual examples may offer glimpses of phenomena that this investigator may have mis-analyzed, or had not thought to pursue. However, since the dialect under investigation is understudied the textual corpus at my disposal is not particularly large. As a result, many of the examples in this thesis still come from elicitation sessions. With a view towards possible analyses different from mine, the theoretical claims advanced in this thesis are generally not pressed in the examples.

This means that if a null agreement is proposed (for example, with all intransitive auxiliaries, in Chapter 2), the null agreement morpheme only appears in the proposed morpheme divisions where directly relevant, that is, not outside of the context in which this theoretical claim is advanced. This practice should not be taken as a sign that the claim is abandoned, but rather as an acknowledgement of the possibility that a better analysis could be proposed.

Disclaimers and manifestos aside, this thesis is organized as follows: the first half (contained in Chapter 1) is a very partial grammatical sketch of the Petalcingo variant of Tzeltal. The rest of the present thesis presents an analysis of some interesting phenomena in this language. Chapter 2 analyzes participle constructions. It is argued that the *-el* participles in Tzeltal are nominal forms, which explains several of their curious grammatical properties. This analysis is then extended to the *-bel* participles. Although these seem to be in similar distribution to the *-el* participles, their nominal properties are much more open to question. In the latter half of the chapter, a nominal analysis of all transitive verbs is considered. While this analysis is found to present some advantages, it is judged to be premature based on a number of formal criteria. Chapter 3 considers the striking phenomenon of identical ergative and possessive marking. In keeping with the formal orientation of this thesis, the nature of these markers is examined first: they are argued to be clitics, rather than affixes, as has previously been thought. The latter half of the chapter examines the phenomenon of identical ergative and possessive marking in a broader context of world's languages, from functional, typological, diachronic, and syntactic perspectives. Following the conclusion, several Petalcingo Tzeltal texts are included for reference.