Rethinking the Maya: Understanding an Ancient Language
in Modern Linguistic Terms

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Since the 1500s, Mayan language and glyphic systems have been romanticized by Eurocentric interpretations. In recent years, many anthropological works have perpetuated these myths by presenting inaccurate analyses of Maya linguistics. Rather than showing the Maya as an advance and civilized people, these texts promoted a weak, barbarous Maya who could be easily manipulated by European culture, language, and written form. Utilizing French poet Charles Baudelaire's (1821-1867) idea of the Palimpsest, traditional anthropologists have perpetuated the Mayan Palimpsest, or the masking over of the original Mayan culture with the new. Rather than revealing the underlying cultural characteristics of the Mayan languages, as Baudelaire's theory would have presumably encouraged, Westerners have reinvented the Mayan past and masked over Mayan spoken and written languages with new vague and biased interpretations of their peoples and languages. The underlying goal of this paper is to deconstruct the Mayan Palimpsest; that is, the Eurocentric views within traditional Mayan language studies, in order to promote a more accurate interpretation of the Mayan linguistic past.

Over the past sixty years, many anthropological works have promoted a romanticized view of the Maya language and its glyphic system. Rather than showing the Maya as an advance and civilized people, these texts promoted a Eurocentric interpretation of the Maya and their languages. It is under these pretenses that French poet Charles Baudelaire's (1821-1867) idea of the Palimpsest is brought into anthropological thought. Reminiscent of Baudelaire's argument about literary overgeneralizations in his poem *Le Masque* (1861), romanticized Mayan language studies have produced flawed, vague, and biased interpretations of the Mayan past. Rather than revealing the underlying cultural characteristics of the Mayan languages, as Baudelaire's theory would have presumably encouraged, traditional anthropologists have perpetuated what Baudelaire refers to as the Palimpsest, or the masking over of the original with the new.[1] In an attempt to combat this Palimpsest view, modern anthropology has worked to

incorporate a more linguistically based study of Mayan languages and glyphs. However, many modern anthropological scholars have continued to use romanticized Mayan language studies as the basis of their works, which has indirectly helped to perpetuate the Palimpsest view of the Maya. The underlying goal of this paper is to deconstruct the Mayan Palimpsest, (i.e., the Eurocentric views within traditional Mayan language studies), in order to promote a more accurate interpretation of the Mayan linguistic past.

This paper is divided into sections focusing on the Mayan Palimpsest and its relation to the Mayan written and spoken languages. Section 1 is an examination of the Mayan linguistic structure, both written (glyphic system) and spoken (languages). Using modern linguistic terms, this section provides a foundation for analyzing the language-based problems within traditional anthropological studies. Using a number of comparative elements from the Mayan language structure (i.e., lexicon, phonology, and syntax), this section illustrates the oversimplification of Mayan languages in traditional anthropological settings. [2] Sections 2, 3, and 4 discuss the negative impacts of Eurocentric mentalities on Mayan language and glyphic systems. Specifically, Section 2 looks at Mayan conquest and colonization and the negative Spanish interpretations of Mayan spoken and written languages. This section illustrates how the Spanish disguised both the Mayan glyphic and spoken language in Latinized terminology in order to promote a Eurocentric and Hispanized view of Mayan culture. Section 3 illustrates the Eurocentric mentality of Mayan inferiority through the analysis of biased 'scientific' theories associated with early Mayan anthropological studies. Section 4 explores the negative impacts nineteenth century theoretical approaches had on the interpretation of Mayan languages. This section also highlights the problems associated with incomplete

linguistic understandings in romanticized anthropological views of the Mayan language; that is, having a comprehensive understanding of spoken and written Maya languages vs. having knowledge of only one language. Section 5 explains the progress within the modern Mayan linguistic community. Specifically, this section discusses key scholars, such as Tatiana Proskouriakoff, Michael Coe, Yuri Knorosov, and Linda Schele, and their impacts on the understanding of the Mayan languages and glyphs. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper and proposes possible solutions to the concept of the Mayan Palimpsest.

As mentioned earlier, romanticized anthropological language studies have played a major role in the traditional interpretation of the Mayan past. Many of these texts have been used to trivialize the complexities of Mayan language and culture in order to reflect the Eurocentric belief in a pacified, "noble" language. Adding to this problem, Maya languages have only been recently translated since the 1930s, and, in many cases, done so by non-Mayan speakers and scholars. In Baudelairean terms, Mayan anthropologists, in the absence of true linguistic understanding, masked the Mayan past with personal rhetoric and biases. [3] Here, the notion of the Palimpsest is used to argue against this blatant reconfiguration of the Maya language. As such, traditional translations of Mayan languages transformed the reality of the Maya and portrayed a subjective, pro-European perspective. In order to deconstruct the Mayan Palimpsest, it is important to explain the linguistic structure of Mayan languages. Section 1 will address the intricacies of Mayan languages in order to expound upon the historic problems in traditional and romanticized Mayan linguistic studies.

A Linguistic Understanding of Mayan Glyphs and Speech

> [T]he vast bulk of [primary and secondary literature on Mayan language] is of more antiquarian than scientific value. Most of it is characterized by poor phonetic transcription (and worse phonological analysis), Latinizing grammatical sketches, extensive plagiarism (or, to be charitable, minimally original restatements) and frustratingly superficial and incomplete data-gathering. (Straight 18)

As H. Stephen Straight suggests, the inaccuracies within Mayan language studies have hindered scholastic understanding about the Mayan past. In order to deconstruct the Mayan Palimpsest, it is important to understanding the inconsistencies in Mayan language analyses. Modern research has illustrated that one of the largest problems within Mayan language studies is a general failure to understand the pre-Columbian structure for both the Mayan spoken and written languages. As mentioned earlier, a number of factors have impacted traditional Mayan language interpretations such as the late translation of the glyphic system since the1930s, the romanticization of the Mayan culture and people, and lingering Eurocentric ideals of conquest and colonization. In addition, research has shown that the Europeanization of Mayan peoples coupled with the Latinization of the Mayan language led to the corruption of both the Mayan spoken and written languages, two factors which have hindered modern research. As such, many early Mayan researchers, both intentionally and unintentionally, promoted a Palimpsest view of the Maya; for example, in the absence of written translations, many scholars relied solely on the Mayan spoken language in order to understand and interpret their culture. As a result, Mayan scholarship has inadvertently perpetuated an inaccurate view

of the Maya. The remainder of this section provides readers with a brief explanation of the Mayan language structure in order to illustrate the complexities of the pre-Columbian Mayan world and to demonstrate the drastic changes in the Mayan language during European contact.

 1. The Mayan Language (See Chart A)

 First, it is important to note that the term "language" is used loosely in the context of this paper. Following Baudelaire's rationale in *Spleen de Paris* (1857), the term language can be interpreted differently in various contexts. In essence, Baudelaire argued that commonly used terminology can be reshaped to express generalizations, specific elements, or mixtures of meanings based on an author's personal interpretation and biases (Carpenter 101-103). It is with this context in mind that the term language is used in this paper; that is, language encompasses all that is spoken and written by the Maya.[4] Language can be interpreted as both a verbal and written communication of ideas. Since these ideas are complex and traditionally excluded from romanticized interpretations of the Mayan past, the author of this paper has classified spoken and written language separately in order to stress the importance of both in the Mayan context.

 To simplify the analysis of the various Mayan languages, modern anthropologists and linguists divided Mayan spoken and written languages into two general groupings: highland and lowland. This text will only refer to those languages existing in the lowlands regions since they spoke the language of elite and were the writers of Mayan glyphic system.[5] In the northern lowland region, more specifically the Northern and Central portions of the Yucatan peninsula and Belize, the Yucatec (also known as Maya) and Itza languages were spoken.[6] These two subfamilies are considered to be the

languages used by the pre-conquest Mayan elite.[7] Located in the Caribbean coastal region, these speakers were the first to have contact with Spanish colonizers. Since these groups were connected to Mayan royalty, the Spanish believed societal conquest and domination justified the transformation of their culture and languages. As such, the Itza and the Yucatec languages were more susceptible to Spanish conquest and colonial linguistic subjugation.[8]

Stretching from the state of Tabasco to northeastern edge of Honduras in the southern lowlands, the Greater Chollan or Choloid language families make up the largest speakers in the southern region. Archaeologist J. Eric Thompson argued that the Choloid languages - i.e. Chontal, Chol, and Chorti - are closely related to the Yucatecan languages of Mopan and Yucatec, making them significant contributors to the Mayan spoken and written past.[9] Thompson's overall argument stressed that the Yucatecan and Choloid language families were the creators of the glyphic writing system and the inventors of Classic Mayan architecture, religion, politics, and culture, making both their written and spoken languages crucial for understanding the Maya (Thompson 16; 285). Ironically, Thompson's research created both the foundations for pre-Columbian Mayan language studies and many of the inaccuracies within Mayan linguistic field. In spite of this problem, scholars agree that Thompson's work established the framework for modern Mayan linguistics (Adams 1977).

In addition to the problems with Thompson's work, the conquest and colonization of the Maya impacted Mayan linguistic interpretation. Based on the power and influence of both the Yucatecan and Choloid language families, these groups became targets for Spanish societal subjugation. Spanish intolerance and fear encouraged the

marginalization of these Mayan language groups. As such, the Spanish forcibly transformed Mayan languages in the lowland regions in order to mimic their own interpretations of 'proper' language. The following subsections provide readers with general understanding of Mayan lowlands language groups in order to deconstruct the colonial mentalities inhibiting their interpretation.

2. Pre-Conquest Mayan Glyphs

Similar to Mayan spoken languages, pre-Conquest Mayan written languages were constructed in a complex fashion. As mentioned earlier, the complexities of this glyphic system have only been recently deciphered, particularly since the 1930s. Coupling this issue with the deliberate destruction of Mayan glyphs by early European colonizers since the 1540s, the Mayan glyphic system is an important linguistic tool for reconstructing the complexities of pre-Columbian Mayan society. In addition, the glyphic system is key illustration of the Mayan Palimpsest; that is, the continual imposition of European language practices into Mayan speech and writing, c.a. 1540s-present. Combining with the forced eradication of the glyphic system from Mayan society in the 1750s, European colonizers were able to mask much of the original meaning and interpretation of Mayan culture. The remainder of this subsection explores the complexities of the pre-Columbian Mayan language in order to give readers a better understanding of the language prior to its transformation by European contact.

To begin with, pre-Columbian Mayan glyphs combine the use of homophones with monosyllabic words, verbal roots, and signs, in order to create a complex linguistic record of their political, social, and cultural Mayan histories. More specifically, the construction of glyphs combined phonetic logographs and symbols, each of which made

up the subject of the glyphic topic, in order to explain cultural occurrences, like royal histories, battles, myths, and timelines of the era.[10] Similar to the structure of Asiatic languages, the Mayan glyphic system indicated the subject discussed in each glyph by placing the main sign, the subject, either logographs or syllable, of one or more glyphs, in the center of the glyph and attached semantic determinatives, phonetic expressions, and phonetic complements around it in order to construct sentences, words, and ideas into a glyph block. Along within these glyph "attachments," Mayan scribes used *infixes*, a detail added to the interior of a glyphic element, *affixes*, a detail attached to the glyphs outer edge, *prefixes*, when a detail or affix is positioned to the left of the main sign, *postfixes*, when a detail or affix is positioned to the right of the main sign, *superfixes*, when a detail is positioned above a main sign, and *suffixes*, when a detail is positioned below a main sign, in order to explain the glyph block's overall meaning (Thompson 13). Adding to the glyph's complexity, fixes can be used interchangeably with other "attachments" or fixes, to explain the meaning of the phrases, words, or syllables in each glyph or glyph block. Linguistic anthropologists refer to the interchangeability of word and phrase components as the rebus principle. In short, the rebus principle explains how symbols, fixes, or "attachments" can be used to represent one or more word/syllable in each glyph or glyph block. More specifically, the principle addresses the various ways these components can be combined or used to represent other words, concepts, or ideologies which contain similar sounds or pronunciations.

For example, the glyph for the word *xoc* or *xooc* is constructed along the lines of the rebus principle. Depending on the surrounding glyph blocks, the *xoc* glyph-depicted as a fish head-can either mean a mythological "fish" in Yucatec or the phrase "to count"

(Thompson 46). Thompson argues that the Maya associated the symbol fish with their numerical calendar, which had both religious and cultural meaning (Thompson No. 2). Furthermore, Thompson stated that if the sign was interpreted as a numerical measure and the fixes were moved or omitted in the main glyph, then the *xoc* glyph's meaning represented the phrases "to counting backwards or forwards," depending on the positioning of the fixes (Thompson 46). In essence, the placement of the glyph determined its meaning and usage in the glyph block.

Adding to Thompson's work, anthropologist George Kulber suggested that symbols and logographs in glyph blocks were not only meant to denote complex sentences and phrases, but they were also used to describe isolated subjects or personifications. In such cases, the meaning attributed to them served as a symbolic device for an extended meaning (Kubler 5-6). As Kubler illustrates, "If a meander, for example, appears in too great a variety of extended contexts, it is probably an empty ornament; if it appears only in relation to certain narrative forms, as in Mixtec genealogical manuscripts, it may be interpreted as having the meaning of a specific toponmy, like the black-and-white design [emblem glyph] for Tilantongo ("black earth") in the *Relación de Teozacualco*" (Kubler 5-6). Therefore, the glyph in isolation could be connected to other meanings such as religious, political, social, and cultural beliefs that are associated with the main sign or with independent concepts not directly referenced in the glyph block. In an interesting way, Mayan glyphs illustrate Baudelaire's metaphor of a pre-Columbian Mayan Palimpsest. In his work *Paradis artificiels* (1860), Baudelaire argued that each layer of the mind contained numerous representations of life and reality. As a reader of the globalized text (i.e., the world), people produce various forms of

meaning. The same can be said for Mayan glyph blocks. Individuals have the ability to interpret and reinterpret the information based on the Palimpsest nature of their minds; as such, individuals have the ability to interpret life and to create different "layers" of reality as illustrated in the divergent representations of glyphs in the glyph blocks. However, this form of the Palimpsest differs drastically from the Spanish version of the Mayan Palimpsest. Rather than reconstructing a new layer to mask the old, as the Spanish did, pre-Columbian Palimpsests built on previous layers, exposing each level, in order to strengthen their understandings about each other and their pasts.

In addition to the main sign and the concept of the single glyph, glyph blocks can also represent themes, motifs, and symbols to describe everyday experiences. Anthropologist Erwin Panofsky suggested that Mayan artists used visual forms to describe in detail the objects occurring in the natural world (Kubler 10). Using characteristics to represent these occurrences, Mayan artists divided life into general stylized motifs (Kubler 10) as represented by different elements of the glyph blocks. Proskouriakoff's research concluded that Maya stylistic motifs went through significant changes based on artistic interpretations of individuals rather than specific changes in subject material.[11] In addition, motifs were combined together in order to form thematic occurrences in the glyphic texts. In essence, the subject matter, either the image, story, or allegory used in a particular glyph block, was combined with specific motifs to illustrate general themes within a particular historical context. For example, at the Temple of the Sun in Palenque there exists two wall supports which combine freehand drawing and graphemic convention marks to create two full figured glyphic figures on the wall inscription. As Kubler explains:

The two officials, tall and short, are historical portraits... The tall man stand upon the back of a spirit who wears a glyphic long-nosed head and the glyphs of God C on his arm, thigh, and back. The short man who stands on the arch back of another spirit also wears a glyphic head and shell or eye glyph on his body…All four figures are freehand to [indicate] body pose and motions, but glyphic [are used as well] to identify traits… [The use of glyphs and art] stresses great differences in meaning between the allegorizing tendency of such personifications, and direct commemorative portraiture. The semantic distance is clearly stated between history and an animistic allegory based on personifications of natural forces. (Kubler 7)

As this example illustrates, pre-Conquest Mayan imagery mixed with glyphic representations to portray complex cultural ideologies, ideas that were later excluded in the Europeanized Mayan language. In the context of Baudelaire's poem *Le Masque*, mixture is seen as a complex amalgamation of fragmented ideas that have been combined together to illustrate different chains of association (Carpenter 103). In a very literal sense, the inscriptions at Palenque illustrate that point. Looking at the mixture of drawings and the combination convention marks produced by the Maya, one can see how they used cultural symbolism and glyphic representations to create thematic sequences. Combining symbols and motifs with thematic elements enabled the Maya to create syncretic concepts within Mayan religious, cultural, and political portraits. As such, Mayan artists were able to adapt similar themes, symbols, and motifs in their glyphic pieces to stress paralleling Mayan values, and at the same time retain certain elements of

individualism in their artistic portrayals of life. Unfortunately, the majority of these complexities were lost during the Hispanization of Mayan speech and writing.

   3. Pre-Conquest Mayan Speech

   Similar to the Mayan glyphic system, pre-Conquest Mayan spoken languages were constructed in a very complex manner. As previously mentioned, the continual imposition of Latinized language practices during the colonial Spanish era significantly impacted the later understanding of Mayan language and culture. In addition, the failure to address the impacts of the Europeanized Mayan spoken language in anthropological scholarship has been one of the strongest factors used to promote the romanticized interpretation of the Maya. Scholars have tended to use these interpretations in pre-Columbian Mayan contexts, which, in many ways led to the construction of the Mayan Palimpsest. The remainder of this subsection will explain the complexities of the pre-Columbian spoken language in order to give readers a background for understanding the corruption of the language after European contact.

   In its traditional form, Mayan lowland spoken languages consisted of a subject, verb, and object or SVO.[12]   In addition, the Mayan language used glottalized and prevoiced stops, voiced and voiceless spirants, nasal and non-nasal fricatives to express words, sentences, concepts, and phrases (Straight 24-34). Like Asiatic languages, pre-conquest Mayan spoken language used signs and symbols to represent syllables, words, and entire phrases, a concept again paralleling Baudelaire's Palimpsest. In addition, the Mayan syllabury contained specific references to the structure of words and the use of vowels and consonants. As Straight's research suggests, "the hierarchic principles of [lowland Mayan] syllabification are: 1) that every syllable must begin with a consonant,

2) that closed syllables are preferred to open, and 3) that consonant clusters are preferred in [the initial use of the syllable]" (Straight 27). In addition to the syllabic structure, lowland Mayan languages contained what Straight labels as an abstract phonology, one which incorporated vague understandings of phonetics and phonemics (a concept that differed drastically from Latin-root languages like Spanish.) Making matters worse, many of the Mayan languages, including the Yucatecan and Choloid subfamilies, were considered ergative languages. As linguistic archaeologist Linda Schele explains

> [Ergative language] means languages in which the subject of an intransitive verb [a verb that separates itself] and the object of a transitive verb [a verb that connects itself to a subject of object] are expressed by pronouns or nouns in the nominative (or "absolute") case, while the subject of a transitive verb is expressed by a pronoun or noun in an oblique [the "irregular" or ergative] case,… which in [Mayan] coincides with the possessive case as employed for the possession of nouns. (8)

In other words, the Mayan language uses two set of pronouns, "one which marks the subjects of transitive verbs and the possessors of nouns [set A], and the other which marks the subjects of intransitive verbs and the objects of transitive verbs [set B]" (Schele 8). In certain Mayan subfamilies, like Cholti, the use of these classifications varied, making specific translations even more complicated. In addition to the transitive and intransitive verb classifications, there is a third category which described the position and associated meanings of each glyph's placement. Known as the postionals, this category describes the variation of meaning in glyphs based on its position, number of fixes, and placement on a glyph block. As the *xoc* glyph illustrated earlier, depending on the

placement of the fixes and their positions in relation to the main sign, the verb meaning can change (e.g. "counting forwards or backwards"). As a result, slight changes in the verb and its placement on the glyph block can dramatically change the meaning of the word, sentence, or phrase. Similarly, slight changes in speech patterns and word placements can change the entire meaning of a spoken word, sentence, or phrase, another idea that Baudelaire toyed with in his collection *Spleen de Paris*. Complicating this matter further, Mayan words and syllables are typically expressed through the use of bound pronouns. As Linda Schele explained, typical Mayan spoken language used bound pronouns which were associated with clitics,[13] prefixes, or suffixes and attached to nouns and verbs. For example, in Choloid languages, bound pronouns are "formed on demonstrative bases and inflected with set B bound pronouns." While Yucatecan languages, bound pronouns classify their bases with a numeral or human classifier.

As one can see, pre-Columbian lowland Mayan languages utilized written and spoken language to illustrate complexities related to all aspects of their culture. Word usage and meaning, glyphic structure, and fix placements were used to expound upon personal preference, interpretation, and cultural biases. However, the conquest and colonization of the Maya drastically changed the way the Maya communicated their written and spoken interpretations of life. As the remainder of this paper illustrates, European contact and notions of linguistic superiority led to the introduction of the Mayan Palimpsest and the continual misinterpretation of the Mayan language.

Spanish Conquest

As the previous section suggested, the Mayan language is a very complex subject, one which scholars have tried to understand for centuries. In order to appreciate these

complexities, it is important to place both Mayan written and spoken languages in a historical framework that addresses the hindrances in Mayan language studies. With the completion of the *reconquista* guaranteed by the fall of Granada in 1492, and Queen Isabella's expulsion or forced conversion of the Jewish population in the same year, Spain was left with a crusading mindset that it soon refocused to new lands in order to offset the financial burdens of internal warfare. Implementing the expansionistic attitude that brought Spain territorial unity and wealth in the days of Moorish conquest, Spain set out to obtain wealth, spread Christianity, and implement proper European societal practices throughout the world. Columbus' "discovery" of the New World in 1492 provided Spain with hopes of securing wealth and power and increasing political and religious status among their European counterparts (Rogers 103). Deeming this expansion as a worldwide crusade to save the newly discovered non-Christian peoples, Spain and Portugal, with the authority of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, divided the world between themselves to obtain wealth and spread Christian doctrine (Cline 73-74). Reflecting this mentality, many Spanish archival documents from this era portrayed natives as weak, uncivilized pagans who desperately needed political, social, and religious guidance.[14] Fernando Cortés's first letter to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1520 illustrated this propagandist mentality in his description of the Mayan Indians of Cozumel:

> [N]ot one year passes in which [the Mayans of Cozumel] do not kill and sacrifice some fifty persons in each temple…Let Your Royal Highnesses consider, therefore, whether they should not put an end to such evil practices, for certainly Our Lord God would be well pleased if by the hand

of Your Royal Highnesses these people were initiated and instructed in our Holy Catholic Faith, and the devotion, trust and hope which they have in these their idols were transferred to the divine power of God; for it is certain that if they were to worship the true God with such fervor, faith and diligence, they would perform many miracles. And we [Fernando Cortés, Alonso Fernández Puerto Carrero, and Francisco Montejo] believe…that Your Majesties may gain much merit and reward in the sight of God by commanding that these barbarous people be instructed and by Your hands be brought to the True Faith. (35-36)

Successfully employing this mentality of conquest on the Aztecs in 1521, the Spanish reinstated imperialistic measures in order to seize the Yucatan peninsula under the guidance of Francisco Montejo I in 1527. In terms of the Mayan Palimpsest, the Spanish used colonial propaganda to promote negative perceptions of the natives and their customs-replacing the old-in order to justify conquest and implement 'proper' European societal and religious practices-instating the new. However, this campaign quickly ended due to Montejo's inability to control his rivals and enemies underneath his own military command (Farriss 13). However, the creation of tribal alliances and the promise of native sovereignty by the Spanish led to the eventual conquest of the Yucatan peninsula by Francisco Montejo II and his cousin Francisco Montejo III in 1542 (Farriss 24).

Implementing an imperialistic religious and cultural mentality, the Spanish condone the destruction of Mayan codices and glyphs in order to create a more Europeanized and Christian based language structure. For example, Franciscan Friar Diego de Landa's orthography of the Mayan language[15], the <u>Relación de Las Cosas de</u>

Yucatán (c.a. 1566), which was rediscovered in the mid 1800s by French abbé Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, intentionally manipulated words in order to promote Christianity and the Hispanization of Mayan speech and writing. [16] Viewed as one of the most influential documents for translating the Mayan language, Landa's text was used to "decipher" the Classic Mayan spoken and written languages well into the modern era. Unfortunately, his "translations" caused major problems for Mayan language analysis. For instance, Landa's orthography applied a Spanish alphabetic structure[17] to the Mayan written language, a concept foreign to the traditional logographic structure in both Mayan speech and writing.[18] As Landa stated

> They (the friars) learned to read and write in the language of the Indians, which was brought so well into the form of a [Mayan] grammar that is was like Latin… And considering that they [the Maya] had different characters for [certain letters and words], there was no necessity of inventing new forms of letters, but rather to make use of the Latin letters, so that the use of them should be common to all . (74)

As this quote illustrates, Landa's alphabet intentionally transformed the traditional Mayan language and its meaning by applying foreign concepts to its structure, specifically, applying a Latin alphabet to a language with an Asiatic root syllabify. In terms of the Mayan Palimpsest, Landa intentionally utilized his own misconceptions about native peoples in order to bury the barbarous "old" ways of the Mayan language with a "new" Latinized indigenous tongue. As Thompson states "There is no doubt at all that Landa was wrong in trying to extract a Maya alphabet…Maya symbols appear usually to have represented words, occasionally perhaps syllables of compounded words,

but never, so far as is known, letters of the alphabet" (Thompson 46). Further illustrating the inaccuracies in Landa's alphabet, the word *ac* ("turtle") in Yucatec is written as *a* in Latin; the term *be* ("road") in Yucatec is written as *b* in Latin, and the word *cai* ("fish") in Yucatec is written as *ca* in Latin (Thompson 46). The modification of Mayan words into the Latin alphabet changed the traditional root meaning of Mayan words, phrases, and sentences. Based on the generalization of Mayan terms and syllabify, the Maya language lost the majority of its cultural, political, religious, and societal importance in the colonial era. As illustrated earlier, the symbol *xoc* or *xooc,* the symbol and word for fish can be written in different ways, depending on its specific placement in a glyph and the context in which it was being used when spoken. As a result, the simplification of this word/phrase to a single symbol would limit its meaning in a traditional Mayan context. As these examples illustrate, Landa's oversimplifications led to a number of inaccuracies in the interpretation of Mayan language, further illustrating the impacts of the Mayan Palimpsest on the decipherment of Mayan languages.

In addition to these problems, fifteenth century Spaniards misperceived the Mayan language as a uniformed grammar, one that was modified on the basis of dialect rather than on variants in the language structure. As Landa states "In this country [the Yucatan peninsula] there is but one language [Yucatec]; and this had aided much in their conversation, though along the coasts there is some difference in their words and in their manner of speaking, and therefore those of the coast are more polished in their behaviour and language" (Thompson 16). As explained earlier, modern research has shown that there are many different language families in the Mayan world. Within the lowland region, the Yucatecan and Chol families are considered to be the two most influential

languages, which immediately illustrates the inaccuracies of Landa's generalized claim.[19] As Thompson stated, "I believe that…the language of the glyphs would have been understandable by [Yucatecan and Chol speakers]. Phonetic elements in the glyphic script, particularly examples of rebus writing, suggest that the inventors of the glyphic writing spoke a language closest to sixteenth century Yucatec [and possibly Chol or its dialect Chorti]"(Thompson 16-17). In essence, Thompson argued that the syllabify within the glyphic system encompassed elements of more than one Mayan language, an idea foreign to Landa's interpretation of Mayan linguistics. One can argue that the result of Spanish imperial notions of cultural superiority caused the reduction of the Mayan language to a single language family which inaccurately portrayed Mayan written and spoken forms. For the concept of the Mayan Palimpsest, the replacement of the old with the new brought about the transformation and subjugation of Mayan society. In sum, rather than challenging the Mayan linguistic structure, the Spanish assumed a united Mayan language which negated their differences and caused significant problems in accurate decipherment and translation of the languages.

Furthermore, the oversimplification of Mayan languages can be attributed to the biases held Spanish conquerors and their perceptions of "Hispanized" native groups. Having had contact with the natives of Northern Yucatan since the arrival of Columbus in 1493, the Spanish believed that the acculturation of European customs by the inhabitants of the lowland region caused their everyday functions and activities to be more refined than other natives. Choosing to accommodate Spanish notions of proper societal actions allowed these groups, specifically the Yucatecan language groups, to be viewed favorably by the Spaniards. Therefore, one can argue that the improper reduction of the

Mayan language and its structure to the speakers of the Yucatecan family group was the result of Spanish cultural favoritism. Overall, Landa's corruption of the Mayan language and the Spanish imperialistic need for native Hispanization led to the oversimplification of Mayan spoken and written languages. As the next section illustrates, the rediscovery of Landa's text in the 1800s caused more problems with the analysis of Mayan languages.

Darwinian and Aristotelian Anthropology

In addition to the colonial problems associated with the Mayan language, early anthropologists contributed to the problems with analysis of the Maya. Due primarily to the popularization of the Darwinian viewpoint of human evolution, the use of Landa's orthography, and the popularization of Aristotelian mentalities of primitiveness in the 1800s, many scholars viewed Mayan language and writing as a primitive and biologically inferior (Tylor 179). More specifically, early anthropologists incorporated Spanish beliefs of cultural superiority with Aristotle's idea of natural slavery, a practice which ultimately justified the transformation of Mayan language structures.[20] In essence, Aristotle's theory argued that some humans, in this case the Mayans, were incapable of rational and moral choices. This was a Spanish revision of the Greek philosopher's thought that had been incorporated into European thought since the medieval and Renaissance eras. The Spanish believed, and early anthropologists concurred, that the barbarous patterns present in Mayan social structures and belief systems illustrated the Aristotelian implications of an irrational 'natural' man, and justified the destruction of their written and spoken languages (Pagden 3). Therefore, the mistreatment and disregard of traditional Mayan beliefs and languages became acceptable measures in the overall process of Hispanizing the natives. Anthony Pagden in his book, The Fall of Natural Man, argued that sixteenth-

century Europeans believed that the Mayan language could be justifiably transformed because they were considered, by Aristotle's theory of an uncivilized man, as incapable of exhibiting "proper" cultural practices without European support. Perpetuating this issue, Sir Edward Tylor, the inventor of modern anthropology in the nineteenth century, promoted the idea that the evolution of man was based on the transformation of barbarous to civilized peoples. He argued that analyzing a language created by a primitive society, the Maya included, was not as important as studying the 'civilized' European languages (Pagden 3). In addition, Lewis Henry, an American lawyer and scientific expert in the 1800s, popularized the idea that all societies had to pass through levels of evolutionary development to reach a "civilized" stage. Both Tylor and Henry supported Aristotelian and Darwinian concepts in their works, arguing that a rigid ordered sequence was needed in order for a society to develop into a complex, civilized system, neither of which were accomplished by the Maya. They argued that societies went from "savagery [hunting and gathering], through to barbarism [agriculture and animal husbandry, with clan organization], to civilization [containing a territorial organization/state]" (Coe 25). As Baudelaire would argue, both Tylor and Henry attempted to overwrite indigenous histories in order to justify the destruction of their "old," barbarous societies and implement a "new" Europeanized rationale in New World anthropology, in other words, the perpetuation of the Mayan Palimpsest. Unfortunately, this mentality significantly impacted early anthropological studies of indigenous languages and peoples, including those of the Maya. For example, in the early 1900s, Mayan scholars promoted a similar evolutionary development of complex societies. Mayanist Sylvanus Morley proposed a

evolutionary development of writing based on the concept of "primitive to civilized." In his theory, he argued that writing went through three stages:

> Stage one: writing is pictographic, the object or idea being given by a drawing, painting or some such; nothing is meant by the picture itself except what is depicted. Stage two: ideographic writing appears, in which the idea or object is given a sign having no resemblance or only a distant similarity to it…Stage three: phonetic writing appears, in which signs lose all resemblance to the original images of objects and denote only sounds; syllabic signs appear fist …with alphabetic one appearing later…. [In essence] we [Europeanized countries] have phonetic writing and the alphabet and they [all those savages, barbarians, and Chinese don't]. (Coe 25)

As this quote illustrates, early anthropologists incorporated the Darwinian concept of evolutionary progression and Aristotelian mentality of cultural superiority to undermine the Mayan language and glyphic system. Unfortunately, this practice was reinforced in the twenty-first century, which the next section discusses.

The Repercussions of Tylorian and Thompsonian Thought

Based on the incorporation of Tylorian thought in late nineteenth century anthropological works, early twentieth century Mayan language studies continued to consist of incomplete and vague understandings of the Mayan language and culture. As a result, traditional Mayan linguists, such as Morley, attempted to apply their own understandings to the Mayan spoken and written languages, a further illustration of biases in early Mayan linguistics and the mindset of the Mayan Palimpsest. As evidence of the

imperialistic mentalities in early anthropological thought, many "linguists" perpetuated the classifications of language on the basis of "primitive" versus "civilized".[21] As such, linguistics classified the Mayan language as "primitive." Mimicking Landa's notions of Mayan simplicity, these scholars simplified the categorization of the Mayan language by pegging it as an agglutinative, also known as agglutinate, language. In essence, they believed the successive morphemes within Yucatec, one the most commonly spoken Mayan languages, could easily be divided into separate segments which constituted separate functions in the language.[22] As Coe suggests "although Mayan languages are predominately agglutinative, [they contain grammatical differences, they borrow terms, mix meanings, use homonyms, and contain inflectional elements, making it much more complicated]" (Coe 23-28). As previously mentioned, the Mayan language was traditionally structured in a logographic format meaning that the application of a single archetype, such as the one suggested by twentieth century anthropologists, would dilute the understanding of the language. In addition, the interrelation of components, fixes, and "attachments" in the Mayan language went against the separate segment theory of traditional anthropologists, illustrating another inaccuracy in early Mayan language studies.

One of the more egregious miscalculations of traditional Mayan anthropologists was a general belief that it was not important to speak or understand Mayan languages in order to be a glyph expert. In addition, the relatively late application of modern linguistic terminology in anthropology perpetuated the misunderstandings of the language. Resulting from the fact that anthropologists relied heavily on their own interpretations of language rather than formal linguistic analysis, many of the early studies of Mayan

spoken and written languages were impartial and incomplete. Perpetuating this problem, early twentieth century Mayan scholar and father of modern Mayan glyphic analysis Sir J. Eric Thompson reaffirmed the simplicity of Mayan society by arguing that the analysis of Mayan glyphs could be conducted without an understanding of the written language. As archaeologist Michael Coe states "Thompson could neither speak nor read Yucatec or any other member of the Mayan language family; he relied of Ralph Roys, Carnegie's authority on Yucatec, when he thought he needed some linguistic expertise, which given his conviction that the glyphs has little of nothing to do with spoken Maya, was seldom indeed" (Coe199). As the leading scholar in the field of Mayan glyphic studies, Thompson's views about linguistic scholarship impeded the analysis of Mayan spoken and written language for the better part of the twentieth century. This mentality still plays a major role in modern anthropology as a number of scholars still consider the understanding of spoken language and its application to writing as an insignificant factor in the anthropological studies of the Mayan language. As Coe continues "even today there are Maya epigraphers…who haven't mastered the [Yucatec or Chol] language…Contrasting this with those whose who work on Old World scripts- it would be unthinkable for a cuneiform specialist not to know Akkadian or some other early Semitic tongue, or for a Sinologist not to speak Chinese. But Maya studies have been a world apart for over a century" (Coe 199). As Coe suggests, anthropological studies of the Mayan language have been incomplete and some scholars in the field have taken a very hands-off and incomplete approach to linguistic analysis. Fortunately, more recent linguistic anthropological scholarship has argued for the deconstruction of traditional and

romanticized Mayan analyses. The next section discusses the work of recent scholars and their attempts to deconstruct the Mayan Palimpsest.

The Recent Progression of Modern Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology

In an attempt to combat the issues of earlier colonial and anthropological thought, progressive linguistic scholars and anthropologists Tatiana Proskouriakoff, Michael Coe, Yuri Valentinovich Knorosov, and Linda Schele have attempted to promote a more accurate interpretation of the Mayan language and culture. Arguing that objective social histories are crucial for providing a more concise understanding of the past, these scholars have helped to recreate a general interpretation for Mayan culture and history. Bringing to mind Baudelaire's ideal that layers within the Palimpsest can be immersed in the mind but never destroyed, these scholars have pealed away centuries of misinterpretation in Mayan language studies in order to illustrate the complexities of Mayan society rather than to simplify them. As such, they have helped to clarify the Mayan written languages and cultures in recent years, which has brought a more accurate interpretation of Mayan history to light.

One of the most important accomplishments in modern Mayan linguistics is the formalized acceptance of both the written and spoken languages as necessary tools for interpreting the Mayan past. As linguistic anthropologist George Kubler states

> [The historical progression of Mayan history has illustrated the complementary characteristics of Mayan written] text and images. They both work as complementary components, feeding on each other's representation of time (text) and in space (image)… Understanding that

most Mayan records are divided on such [lines makes the modern analysis of both invaluable]. (4)

In essence, modern research has taught that one must understand both the written and spoken forms of a particular language in order to create an accurate understanding of its people and their culture. As the previous sections suggested, this concept has been a foreign one in Mayan languages studies since its inception in the colonial era. The modern movement to include both languages has helped to clarify the importance and complex history of the Mayan people.

This concept was further expounded on by Russian Yuri Valentinovich Knorosov, who explained the logo-syllabic script in Mayan texts in the 1950s-60s. Knorosov was the first to systematically challenge Landa's *Relación* by arguing that, unlike Landa's alphabet which stressed Maya speech in terms of alphabetic letters, "[Mayan] hieroglyphic writing incorporated ideograms (or logograms) [symbols or signs that [stand] for a word, syllable, or phrase] which contained both conceptual and phonetic value; phonetic signs; and "key sings" or determinatives, [which are] classificatory signs with conceptual but not phonetic value [into their system]" (Coe 148). Illustrating the complexity of the language in both its spoken and written forms, Knorosov's work helped to demystify the Mayan language, as Baudelaire might say, and to expose the true value of their cultures and peoples. At the same time, it shed light on the inaccuracies in previous linguistic studies, including those conducted by Knorosov's colleague Sir J. Eric Thompson.

Adding to the complexity of the Mayan past, art historian and Siberian archeologist Tatiana Proskouriakoff discovered historical information within Mayan

glyphic inscriptions in the 1950s-1970s which led to a deeper understanding of the Mayan written past. Based on the simplification of traditional Mayan language studies, scholars assumed that Mayan glyphs only discussed information about politics and religion. Proskouriakoff's work proved this theory incorrect. During Proskouriakoff's archaeological works in Piedras Negras, a ruined Maya city of the Classic period in Guatemala, one of the greatest breakthroughs in twentieth century Mayan history was uncovered, which shed light on the historical past of the elite Maya (Coe 168). Analyzing the glyphic remains from the site, Proskouriakoff determined that the subject matter of the monumental texts, stelae, and lintels were a form of history rather than astronomy, religion, and prophecies as earlier scholars had argued (Coe 171). As Coe states:

> [T]his extraordinary woman had cut the Gordian knot of Maya epigraphy, and opened up a world of dynastic rivalry, royal marriages, taking of captives, and all the other elite doings which have held the attention of kingdoms around the word… The figures on the stelae and lintels …were mortal men and women, not gods, or even priests… [Resulting from her work] the Maya had become real human beings [rather than distant images of the past]. (171)

Therefore, her work contributed to the understanding and complexity of the ancient Mayan people rather than the simplification of their social and cultural practices.

Adding to the previously mentioned modern Mayan historical and anthropological works, twenty-first century scholars Michael Coe and Linda Schele have helped to popularize the Mayan culture in the public realm. Writing numerous works on the subject, compiling general texts for students and historical enthusiasts, and taking part in

theatrical documentaries of the Mayan past, Coe and Schele have helped to expose the modern world to the complexities of the Maya people through popular culture. As a result, the general public has become more aware of the Maya and the problems with traditional representations of their culture.

Conclusions

Overall, the study of Mayan languages has been a long and complex process. As this paper illustrated, traditional Mayan language studies both inadvertently and intentionally fragmentized the Mayan language and its usage, resulting in an incomplete understanding of both its structure and grammar. However, recent anthropological scholarship has shed light on the problems with traditional and romanticized Mayan language studies. Using Baudelaire's concept of the Palimpsest, this paper has illustrated the biases within traditional European interpretations of the Maya, the historic shortcomings of traditional and romanticized Mayan language studies, the progressions in the modern field of Mayan linguistics, and the general need for the restructuring of Mayan language studies.

This paper also sheds light on the importance for creating a more comprehensive and inclusive interpretation of the Mayan past. Scholars need to rethink the Mayan past and incorporate a more accurate depiction of Mayan spoken and written languages. In addition, Mayan scholars need to move away from romanticized interpretations of the Mayan language in order to deconstruct the problems in traditional Mayan language studies. In order to do so, scholars need to implement multi-component language studies universally. More specifically, all Mayan linguistic scholars (not just a select few) should incorporate both written and spoken forms of the Mayan language, rather than just one

aspect of the language, as traditional anthropologist suggested. Looking at both elements in conjunction will not only explain the social and cultural factors influencing word construction and usage, but it will also be helpful for clarifying the historical factors influencing their creation in the Mayan context.

It is also important for scholars to recognize the shortcomings of romanticized Maya language sources and to deconstruct the biases within these works before using them in modern Mayan linguistic research. As this paper has illustrated, these sources have been for centuries used as justification for inaccurately depicting the language of the Maya. This is not to say that certain information in these documents cannot be used to explain colonial perceptions of the Maya or even colonial Mayan linguistic structures; but, scholars need to recognize that these documents are not representative of the pre-Columbian Mayan language structures. Generally speaking, scholars have used these documents to speculate about both pre-Columbian and colonial Maya peoples. Rather than continuing this cycle, scholars need to rethink their use of these documents in order to more accurately depict the pre-Columbian Mayan past. In this time of Mayan decipherment, it seems more applicable to use pre-Columbian Maya codices and translated glyphic images to depict life prior to European contact rather than colonial depicts of the romanticized Mayan culture.

Also, modern linguists need to realize that the complexities within Mayan language analyses need to be more case specific in order to produce the best results. Many studies have provided generalizations about the Mayan language and its people. As Kubler and Coe explained, there are a number of different Mayan languages and peoples that make up the Mayan cultural community. In order to truly understand the intricacies

of these groups, languages need to be studied in isolation in order to properly contextualize the Mayan experience in different regions and settlements before placing them into a larger, globalized context. It is only then that scholars can accurately discuss and accurately depict the complexities within Mayan spoken and written languages as a whole.

As this paper suggested, a better understanding has been applied to Mayan research in recent years. However, the broad application of generalizations to Mayan languages has been slow to change (Carpenter 103). In spite of these problems, the contributions made by recent scholarship has expanded our knowledge of the Maya. The incorporation of modern linguistic knowledge and the creation of more objective interpretations of Mayan social and cultural histories have allowed modern scholars to create a more representative interpretation of the Maya language and culture. At the same time, many of these same scholars have helped to deconstruct the concept of the Mayan Palimpsest by reducing the impact of traditional and romanticized Mayan language studies in their works. As more linguists enter in the field of Mayan studies, this progression will hopefully continue and help to create an even more complete history for the Maya. As Baudelaire expressed, life is a mixture of ideas and contexts within the mind. It is in these contexts that the world as a whole will be better understood. In the case of the Maya, it is the author's hope that their world will be better understood and the understanding of their languages will continue to grow well into the future.

Chart A: Linguistic Graph of Mayan Languages

- It is important to understand that Maya language classifications change rapidly. In my text, I combined the classifications provided in Thompson's 1963 text <u>Maya Hieroglyphic Writing</u> with more recent information on for Coe's 1977 text <u>The Maya and Their Neighbors: Essays on Middle America Anthropology and Archeology</u>

Family	Sub-Family	Group	Language	Variety	Dialect	Variation
Mayoid	Huaxtecan	Huaxtecan	Huaxtec Chicomuceltec		Potosino Veracruzano	
	Maya Proper	Maya	Maya	Yucatec (Maya), Mopan, and Yucatec Lancandon		
			Choloid	Chontal of Tabasco, and Chol	Chol (*Cholti), *Chorti, Chol Lacandon, * ?Acala, *?Toquwgua, and *?Manche	
		Chañabaloid	Tzeltaloid	Tzeltal (Tzendal) Zotzil (Tzotzil,*Quelene, and Chamula)		
			Chañabal (Tojolabal) Chuj			
		Motozintlecan	Jacaltec (*Subinha) Motozintlec			

* means extinct
? Means unsure about origins

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Notes

[1] Many of Charles Baudelaire's works (e.g. *Le Masque*, *Artificial Paradises*, and *Correspondances*) highlighted the complexities inherent in literary interpretation and the flaws that resulted from overgeneralizations and cross-cultural comparisons. In is along this line of reasoning that the analysis of Mayan language can be discussed. See Carpenter 101-103.

[2] Beginning in the twentieth century, scholars, such as French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, began to create complex theories of about grammar and language structure. In the late twenty first century, linguist Noam Chomsky expanded on Saussure's ideas and developed theories about the innateness of language and its relation to universal language structures. See Newmeyer, Electronic source.

[3] Synesthesia is the theory that the world itself functions as a text to be deciphered. Therefore, people themselves are readers who are required to continually interpret the world and those around them. Interpretation, imagination, and forms of reality are all factors that humans must use to interpret life. But as Baudelaire argues, it is the way in which people interpret various texts which allow individuals to see the latent reality of life itself. See Carpenter 101-103.

[4] Research compiled by the Michael Coe in 1992 demonstrates the existence of approximately thirty extinct, active, and isolated[4] Mayan languages in the Mexican states of Tampico, Veracruz, and Yucatan in present-day Mexico, and in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and Nicaragua.[4] Archaeological research in the past fifty years suggests that modern Mayan languages derive from the pre-Classic proto-Mayan stock, circa 1650 B.C.[4] Over time, as people migrated to different geographical locations and developed

various independent chiefdoms, language variations occurred which eventually developed into distinct language families and subfamilies.

[5] Archaeologists believe that the languages of the northern highlands (in the areas on southern Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) were derivatives of the lowland spoken and written languages. As such, these languages developed after the development of Classical Mayan society and the construction of the Mayan glyphic system. Therefore, their relevancy is not important for establishing an understanding of traditional Mayan hieroglyphs or spoken languages.

[6] The term language family means the historically based relation of different languages to a base or proto language (e.g. the Yucatecan family is derived from the proto-Maya language). As languages develop, correlations between certain languages cause them to be categorized as more structurally similar groups known as subfamilies (e.g. within the Yucatecan family, Yucatec is a subfamily).

[7] Archaeologist considered the Yucatec, Itza, and Choloid subfamilies to be the languages both spoken and written by the Mayan ruling families. Codices or native texts written in the pre-conquest era tended to contain a combination of these languages. Glyphic images and texts varied in language usage depending on the region they were from, however glyphs of importance (e.g. royal lineages or histories) tended to be written in a form of Yucatec or Chol. See Thompson 16-17.

[8] Two Yucatecan languages, Lacandon[8], and Mopane in English (or Mopán), are spoken in much less frequency in the southern lowlands regions of northern Guatemala, northwestern Honduras, and southern Belize. Since these language groups are not considered by scholars as significant contributors to the Classic Mayan written or spoken

languages, they will not be discussed in this paper. See Coe 5-7; Hay, Linton, Lothrop, Shapiro, and Vaillant 1977.

[9] Thompson's research argued that the phonology of both language families suggested a similar root origin (i.e. proto-Mayan) and strong connections to the socially complex Classical Mayan civilizations. See Thompson, 17.

[10] It is important to note that the artistic interpretation allowed for semantic differences between glyphs in different city-state. However, glyphic meanings between states and individual artists tended to generally exhibit similar characteristics.

[11] See Coe 2003.

[12] It is important to note that not all Mayan languages contain the SVO structure. Specifically in the highland region of Guatemala, the SVO structure is replaced by an OSV structure. Anthropological linguist Victoria Reifler Bricker and Richard Diebold argue that the OSV structure in the Huastec language, a Mayan isolate near the Valley of Mexico, may be the closest relative to the proto-Mayan language which suggests a similar language structure in both languages. In addition, the Mópan language contains the VOS structure, making it a unique case in Mayan speech. However, further research is necessary to substantiate the conclusions of these results. See Bricker 1977; Dubravac 26 April 2005.

[13] A clitics is a grammatical element treated as a separate word but is usually associated with a word preceding or following it.

[14] It is important to note that some Spanish scholars, e.g. Bartolome de Las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria, condone the negative perceptions of New World native peoples. Arguing that the natives were naïve as a result of their lack of "proper" social training

rather that their failed intellect, pro-Indian scholars suggested that natives should be treated as human but taught proper European cultural practices. See Pagden 87- 99.

[15] Both historians and anthropologists have used Landa's transcriptions of the Mayan language to decipher Mayan glyphs and spoken language. Although this has helped both fields tremendously, it has also contributed to the problem with an accurate Mayan language decipherment.

[16] Orthographies in this case references the traditional spelling system developed by Spanish friars to transcribe Mesoamerican languages. It is important to note that Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (the emperor of Spain during the conquest of the New World) and his son Phillip II (the King of Spain during the colonization of the New World) encouraged the continued usage of Mesoamerican languages by the natives. Unfortunately, the use of these languages were expected to fit the Spanish written structure and a Latin alphabetical format which ultimately diluted traditional meanings and structures of many New World languages, including the Maya.

[17] Having an alphabetic structure implies that a consonant and vowel are associated with a single sound within a given language.

[18] Logographic structure indicates that the semantic (meaning) elements of written language are expressed by logograms. A logogram consists of a written sign which stands for a single morpheme or sometimes a complete word. See Coe 27.

[19] It is important to note that both language families are considered to be spoken and written in different forms depending on the city-state an individual belonged too. In addition, scholars believe that the Choloid languages were considered the languages of the lower class, and the Yucatecan languages were of the higher classes. However, recent

evidence has challenged this notion by illustrating a mixture of both languages on stelae in various city-states. See Thompson 6-7.

[20] It is important to note that natural, in the sense of Aristotle's theory, was in reference to barbarous activities (i.e., ritualistic killings, human sacrifice, and heathenistic mentalities.) Any group manifesting characteristics of a barbarous nature was included in various subcategories of natural man.

[21] Morphology can be defined as the study and description of word formations as they apply to grammar. Syntax can be defined as the internal structure of sentences and the interrelation between sentence elements such as competency, performance, grammatical structure, and the use of language lexicon. See Salzmann 89-90; 95.

[22] Epiclassic refers to the final phase of Mayan civilization prior to Spanish contact. It is important to note that the Yucatecan language family consists of the largest group of Mayan language speakers (Yucatec, Itza, Lacandon, and Mopan) each of which constitute the ruling factions in Mayan history; suggesting that an understanding of Yucatec would be beneficial for understanding Mayan hieroglyphics.

[23] Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Dr. Stacy Dubravac, Dr. Clifford Brown, and my mentor Dr. Graciella Cruz-Taura for their ever present insight into linguistic and historical writing. I would also like to thank Dawn Hutchins for graciously editing this document.

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