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Paipai (Baja California, Mexico) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Paipai (alternative names: Akwa’ala, Pa ipai)
Language Family:	Cochimí-Yuman, Pai branch
ISO 639-3 Code:	ppi
Glottolog Code:	paip1241
Population:	less than 50
Location:	31.6568061, -115.8281493
Vitality rating:	Severely endangered

Summary

Paipai is a Yuman language spoken in Baja California, Mexico, primarily in and around the indigenous community of Santa Catarina, a rural area two hours east of the city of Ensenada.¹ Out of approximately 100 inhabitants in Santa Catarina, only 25% speak the language, and most of the speakers are over 50 years old. The Paipai have been historically affected by cultural assimilation resulting from the colonization of their original territories. The existing documentation of this language includes some descriptive work, done through theses, wordlists, and translated traditional narratives. In recent years, additional research has included more comprehensive studies on their language and culture, a pedagogical book, and some audio-visual materials. The domains of use of Paipai are limited to conversations between elders of the community, and language transmission at home has almost completely stopped. However, many members of the community support language maintenance through school education. Current research, by this author as

¹ The location coordinates given above are for Santa Catarina since this community holds the highest number of speakers and because it is where most of my fieldwork has taken place.

well as others, is focused on expanding the documentation of the language to support language revitalization efforts.²

1. Overview

Paipai is a Yuman language of the Pai branch (Figure 1), historically and linguistically related to the Upland Pai, also referred to as Arizona Pai. Due to a migration approximately 800 years ago, it is the only language of the Pai branch whose speakers live in Mexico, close to speakers of other Yuman languages, such as Kumeeyaay (Tipai and Ko'ahl),³ Kiliwa, and Cocopa (Laylander 2015: 127). These Yuman groups never formed communities as rigid sedentary units (Garduño 2011), having instead a multi-ethnic structure of lineages, living as hunters and gatherers with complex semi-nomadic lifestyles where exogamy and self-identification were practiced. Currently, this multi-ethnic structure exists as a pan-Yuman identity of alliance (Sempio 2013: 257), that is, a multi-ethnic macro-community.

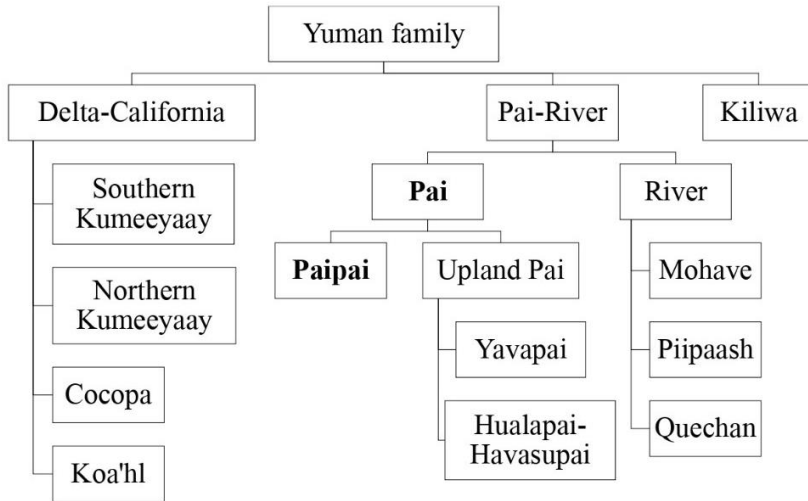


Figure 1. Classification of the Yuman languages (Miller 2018: 386)

² This research would not have been possible but for my friend and colleague Eloisa González, who introduced me to her friends and family and who has a major force in both language and land reclamation. I thank her sincerely for her invaluable work. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editor of this journal for their thoughtful comments towards improving the manuscript.

³ Also known as Kw'ally, Kwatl or Kual.

According to Mexico's National Indigenous Languages Institute (INALI), the Paipai language is spoken in 32 different localities, in which the municipality of Ensenada is included (INALI 2012). Most speakers live in the indigenous communities of San Isidoro and Santa Catarina, the latter having the highest number of both population and Paipai speakers. Santa Catarina is located in Baja California, Mexico (see Figure 2), approximately a two-hour drive from the city of Ensenada and three and a half hours from Tijuana. The latest Mexican census reported 101 people living in this community (INEGI 2015).



Figure 2. Traditional territories of Yuman groups⁴

⁴ This map, created by Verónica González Castillo, is based on Laylander (2015: 116).

However, the traditional Paipai territory extended from the Pacific Coast far north from Punta Banda to Sierra Juarez, and south from Bahía de Todos Santos to San Felipe (Hohenthal et al. 2001).

1.1 Changes of lifestyle

The lifestyle and cultural practices of the Paipai have primarily been affected by three historical events:

1. the establishment of the Mission of Santa Catarina Virgen y Mártir (1797-1840) on *Jaktubjol*, a traditional seasonal settlement (Magaña 2015: 162);
2. wage labour was introduced as a result of the California Gold Rush (1848-1855), during which the Paipai began to be employed as farmers and cattlemen because of their knowledge of the land (Garduño 2015: 103); and
3. Mexican land reform of 1934 created the legal form of land ownership called *ejidos*, which are government-granted plots of land to be exploited economically through agriculture or cattle related activities by groups of people. This called for the Paipai to establish a commission for the representation of their territory before the government (Magaña 2005: 115), thus forcing people from different lineages who had never previously formed a community to settle together (Garduño 2011: 60). Both the reduction of their original territory and the outlawing of traditional hunting and gathering practices led them to extreme poverty (Yee 2010: 113).

In recent years, economic hardship has forced the Paipai to leave their communities. For instance, between 2000 and 2015, there has been a reduction by half the population in Santa Catarina, from 201 inhabitants to 101 (INEGI 2000, 2015).

1.2 Language shift

Although 82.7% of the population of Santa Catarina enumerated in the 2015 census is indigenous, none of them are monolingual speakers of an indigenous language. Rather, Spanish is the most commonly used language in this community (INEGI 2015). According to INALI, in 2012 there were 57 speakers of an indigenous language in Santa Catarina, but this does not differentiate Paipai speakers from those using other languages. This data was later clarified by Gómez & Ibáñez (2010), who explained that only 25 people spoke Paipai in Santa Catarina, with the census also including Ko'ahl and

Kumeyaay speakers. In 2015, an in-depth study indicated that 49 Paipai speakers lived, permanently or temporarily, in or around Santa Catarina (Ibáñez 2015: 17).⁵

The main factor contributing to language loss is the schooling system, which commenced in the 1970s as literacy efforts with religious purposes, where the use of languages other than Spanish was prohibited and punished (Ibáñez 2015). This resulted in a hispanicization effect on the population. However, in 2014, teachers of Santa Catarina's bilingual primary school received training to counteract the hispanicization measures taken by the government-established basic education system (Sánchez 2016: 19).

Nowadays, the use of the Paipai language is limited to conversations between elders, as well as some use in short phrases or expressions on social media by semi-speakers. Children are exposed to written materials at school, resulting in literacy promotion through which students learn some basic aspects of the language. Nevertheless, this school system has yet to develop fully-fledged language speakers.

1.3 Attitudes

Sánchez & Rojas-Berscia (2016) found that children want to learn the language and the inhabitants of Santa Catarina do not wish it to be completely lost. My interactions with women from the community show that they support language maintenance, although they perceive language acquisition as a process that children should embark on through the school system. They believe that, even as speakers of Paipai, they are unable to transmit the language effectively since they are not trained as teachers.

1.4 Documentation

The available documentation of Paipai can be considered fragmentary, and does not include grammars, dictionaries, or annotated audiovisual materials. The most prominent linguistic work consists of a descriptive thesis on morphology and phonology by Joël (1966), followed recently by phonology studies by Ibáñez (2015) and a study on deixis by Sánchez (2016). The first wordlists date from the 20th century (cf. Gifford & Lowie, 1928; Hohenthal et al., 2001[1950]; Robles, 1964), followed by some descriptive work in the late 1960s (cf. Joël 1966; Shaterian 1966; Wares 1968). The first glossed texts were published in the 1970s

⁵ For a summary of prior vitality assessments for Paipai, see the Endangered Languages Catalogue: www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/1538 (accessed 2019-11-01).

(cf. Joël, 1976a, b), followed by some other translated texts (cf. Mixco, 1984, 1997). In addition, there are two pedagogical books (Cuero et al., 1982; González & Sánchez, 2018) and a few videos of songs and narratives available (cf. Albañez, 2016; Albañez et al., 2018; Gabayet & Cantón, 2011).

1.5 Current Research

The most recent work is two descriptive linguistics theses (cf. Ibáñez, 2015; Sánchez, 2016) on phonology and deixis respectively, as well as an article on phonologic analysis of semivowels and a survey of language vitality (cf. Ibáñez, 2017; Sánchez & Rojas-Berscia, 2016). These authors have also participated in maintenance efforts (cf. Ibáñez & Delgado, 2009; González & Sánchez, 2018).

My current MA thesis research is a documentation project on Paipai and includes fieldwork for an interrupted period of two months over ten visits throughout 2018-2020. The resulting collection of primary data consists of four hours of audio recordings including three conversations, three procedural texts, and one song, involving participation from seven different female collaborators. The recordings and annotated corpora are available through the Repository of Languages of the Northwest of Mexico from the University of Sonora.⁶ My goal is to carry out a collaborative documentation project that results in the creation of educational materials that could benefit current linguistic and cultural revitalization.

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⁶ www.masad.uson.mx

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