The Pueblo Region as a Linguistic Area:
Diffusion Among the Indigenous Languages of the
Southwest United States

Catherine Bereznak, Louisiana State University and Agricultural &
Mechanical College

Date of Award
1995

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Department
Linguistics (Interdepartmental Program)

First Advisor
Lyle Campbell

Abstract
The goal of this dissertation is to investigate whether the Pueblo region of the Southwest
United States is a legitimate linguistic area (LA). The Pueblo region has long been
recognized as a cohesive culture area, but an in-depth examination of the Pueblo region
as a linguistic area has not previously been done. Because a linguistic area is by
definition an area in which linguistic features have spread through diffusion, traits which
are widespread for other reasons (e.g., genetic inheritance or independent parallel
development) must be eliminated as evidence for a Pueblo LA. The methodological
approach which I adopt emphasizes the historical aspect of diffusion; therefore,
whenever possible I identify the source and recipient languages of diffused traits.
Through a detailed analysis of the available data on the Pueblo languages, I demonstrate
that the Pueblo region is a linguistic area. Furthermore, while the origin of the Pueblo LA
most likely predates the arrival of the Navajo in the Southwest (approximately 500-600
years ago), the Navajo have played an important role in the development of the Pueblo
LA. Four traits in particular are widespread among the Pueblo languages, and are likely to
have been borrowed in one or more of the Pueblo languages, but do not occur in
neighboring languages; therefore, these traits strongly support the Pueblo linguistic area.
Many examples of localized diffusion provide additional evidence. Other traits which
extend beyond the Pueblo region, but show evidence of being diffused in some of the
Pueblo languages, suggest that the Pueblos are linked by linguistic diffusion to
surrounding areas, such as the Great Basin, the Great Plains, and the non-Pueblo
Southwest. Pueblo areal traits have important implications for several aspects of
linguistic theory. A number of Pueblo areal traits are counterexamples to proposed
linguistic universals, and the occurrence of structural diffusion with relatively little lexical
diffusion has repercussions for theories of contact-induced language change. Diffusion
among the Pueblo languages also has consequences for theories of Kiowa-Tanoan
subgrouping and prehistory, as well as for the proposed Aztec-Tanoan language family.

Recommended Citation
Bereznak, Catherine, "The Pueblo Region as a Linguistic Area: Diffusion Among the Indigenous
5996.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5996

Pages
223
The Pueblo linguistic area (or Pueblo Sprachbund, Pueblo convergence area) is a Sprachbund (group of languages with similarities due to language contact) consisting of the language spoken in and near North American Pueblo locations. There are also many shared cultural practices in this area. In the 21st century there are 21 surviving pueblos in the Southwest of the United States, Taos, Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi are the best-known. The main pueblos are located primarily in the states of New Mexico. Contour systems are typical of languages of the Mainland Southeast Asia linguistic area, including Tai–Kadai, Vietic, the Afroasiatic, Khoisan, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan languages spoken in Africa are dominated by register systems. Many languages use tone in a limited way. Pueblo Indians: Pueblo Indians, North American Indian peoples known for living in compact permanent settlements known as pueblos. Representative of the Southwest Indian culture area, most live in northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico. Early 21st-century population estimates indicated approximately. Pueblo Indian pottery: (left) Acoma water jar, c. 1890, (centre) Santa Clara vase, c. 1880, (right) San Ildefonso water jar, c. 1906, in the Denver Art Museum. Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado. Each of the 70 or more Pueblo villages extant before Spanish colonization was politically autonomous, governed by a council composed of the heads of religious societies.