INDIAN LANGUAGES OF THE PARAGUAYAN CHACO

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0. Introduction
1. Zamuco family
2. Mascoi family
3. Mataco/Mataguayo family
4. Guaykurú family
5. Tupi-Guaraní family

0. Paraguay is divided into two geographical zones: the Oriental or eastern part of the country, and the western part or Chaco. The latter, consisting of 60% of the land mass of Paraguay, is inhabited by 3% of the country's population. It is also the area which is home to the largest number of Paraguayan Indians, representing thirteen languages and five linguistic families.

The purpose of this essay is to describe the present linguistic situation of the Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco. Such a survey requires a description of the geographic and demographic distribution of these peoples as well as a discussion of the distinctive socio-linguistic features of their languages. Both are best described in the light of a series of migrations.

Generally the Indians of the Chaco have gone from hunting or fishing and gathering to a cash economy. Even groups such as the Ayoreo, Chамакоко, and Choroti which have been most tied to their traditional ways have participated marginally in the national economy by selling the skins of the animals that they have hunted. However, as more and more of their former territories have been turned into ranches, wild game has been diminishing. This in turn has prompted the Paraguayan government, as a conservation measure, to ban the sale of animal skins. Thus with their hunting lands disappearing and no market for their skins, Indians such as those mentioned above have begun to look for work as laborers on neighboring ranches and military bases, or have been migrating to the central Chaco to find work in the Mennonite colonies there.

Other Indian groups have been involved in a cash economy for up to three or four generations. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many of the Mascoian Indians migrated to towns along the Paraguay River that offered employment in their tannin factories. However, with the recent demise of most of these factories, there has been a shift of Indian groups...