May Helena Plumb   **Graduate Research Plan Statement**

Introduction. I propose a synchronic and diachronic study of word order in Valley Zapotec, specifically in the variety spoken in San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, Oaxaca, Mexico (SJT). This dissertation research is an initial component of my larger plan to document and describe Valley Zapotec, as outlined in my Personal Statement.

Language Background. Western Tlacolula Valley Zapotec (Otomanguean, [zab]) refers to the continuum of Central Zapotec languages spoken in the valley between Oaxaca City and Tlacolula de Matamoros, Oaxaca, Mexico. The high level of linguistic variation— each town has a distinct variety of Zapotec—makes the Tlacolula Valley an exciting area for linguistic research. Additionally, Colonial Valley Zapotec is attested in a corpus of over 400 monolingual documents written in the Valleys of Oaxaca between 1550 and 1810. This colonial record allows researchers to delve into the history and development of Valley Zapotec. Of the Valley Zapotec varieties, I have chosen to work on SJT Zapotec because it has a unique connection to the historical record: it is the town where Fray Juan de Cordova wrote his grammar of Colonial Valley Zapotec in 1578.[1] The language as it is spoken today, however, is virtually unstudied.

Research Background. Valley Zapotec languages (like most Otomanguean languages) have canonical verb-subject-object word order, but pre-verbal arguments are permitted in certain contexts. San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec, for example, allows pre-verbal subjects in topic and focus constructions.[2] In Tlacolula de Matamoros Zapotec, on the other hand, subject-initiality seems to be a neutral word order.[3] Lillehaugen recently studied pre-verbal subjects in Colonial Valley Zapotec,[2] but the details of topic and focus constructions, such as the use of post-verbal resumptive pronouns, remain undescribed. My preliminary research on SJT Zapotec indicates that both verb-initial and subject-initial clauses are grammatical in this variety, but this is still an open area of research.

Syntacticians disagree about the best theoretical derivation for verb-initial word order. Within the Principles & Parameters/Minimalist framework, many linguists propose an underlying subject-verb-object order and derive verb-initiality via either verb- or predicate-raising;[4] Foreman and Lee, respectively, have argued for both raising analyses in different Zapotec languages.[5,4] Alternatively, for Tagalog, another verb-subject-object language, Sabbagh derived verb-initiality through subject-lowering, motivated by prosodic constraints.[6] These movement-based approaches preserve the constituency of the verb phrase. Broadwell, however, has argued that San Dionisio Ocotepec Zapotec lacks a verb phrase constituent and therefore can be analyzed with an underlying flat structure under Lexical-Functionalist Grammar.[7]

Research Plan: SJT Zapotec Word Order.

A synchronic and diachronic description. In my dissertation research, I will ask two main questions: (1) When are pre-verbal arguments grammatical in SJT Zapotec? (2) How has this word order developed since the colonial period? To answer the first question, I will focus primarily on collecting and analyzing monolingual, naturalistic texts in SJT Zapotec, which will also form the foundation for a more general linguistic description of the language. I began text collection during my June 2018 field trip; most of these texts are descriptions of agricultural practices and cultural events. During future trips, I will collect texts from other genres, such as conversations and narratives. This data will be augmented by elicitation sessions, including a survey study of at least 25 speakers.

To answer the second question, I will continue my research on Colonial Valley Za-

potec, analyzing texts from a wide variety of towns in order to understand possible dialectal variation in the corpus. I will also carefully interpret the available information in Cordova's colonial-era grammar.[1] After developing a synchronic description of word order in Colonial Valley Zapotec, I will investigate the diachrony of Valley Zapotec word order through comparison of the modern and colonial languages. One important source of data will be the re-elicitation of colonial texts in order to directly compare the modern and colonial languages. For example, during my June 2018 research I created a modern SJT Zapotec translation of a Colonial Valley Zapotec testament from SJT.

A theoretical model. I begin this project unwed to any specific syntactic theory. While any description requires some imposition of a theoretical framework, I try to limit this effect in my initial research and approach SJT Zapotec "from the bottom up". As my research progresses and I develop a better understanding of SJT Zapotec grammar, I will evaluate modern syntactic theories based on how elegantly they model SJT Zapotec. As discussed above in 'Research Background', the derivation of verb-initial word orders is a contentious debate. I am particularly interested in exploring how different theories can model diachronic Valley Zapotec data.

An eye towards dialectal variation. Linguistic diversity in the Tlacolula Valley—particularly syntactic variation—is understudied. Although describing the phylogeny of Valley Zapotec is outside the scope of this dissertation project, I will endeavor to make connections between my research on SJT Zapotec and existing documentation of word order in other varieties, with due consideration to the sociolinguistic context and other extra-syntactic factors. This will allow my dissertation to flow naturally into future research on linguistic variation and identity, as discussed in my Personal Statement.

Intellectual Merit. Language documentation supports research in a diverse group of fields, from linguistic typology to anthropology to biology.[8] My analysis of colonial documents will be particularly useful to historians. Within linguistics, this project will contribute most directly to studies of verb-initial word order, diachronic syntax, and Valley Zapotec dialectology. Where possible, I will facilitate future research by publishing my data and analyses in open-access forums.

Broader Impacts. Linguistic discrimination is ubiquitous in Oaxaca. Like most Zapotec languages, SJT Zapotec is experiencing language shift; there are no fluent speakers under the age of 40. I am committed to supporting community-led language revitalization and revalorization projects. Language documentation creates a resource for future pedagogy, and analysis of the colonial documents contributes to the un-erasure of Zapotec history. I will adapt my research plan to align with the goals and interests of my Zapotec teachers and encourage them to learn more about their language.

[1] Cordova, F. J. d. 1578. *Arte en lengua zapoteca.* Mexico: En casa de Pedro Balli. [2] Lillehaugen, B. D. 2016. The syntax of preverbal subjects in Colonial Valley Zapotec. SWL. [3] Lillehaugen, B. D. 2006. Expressing Location in Tlacolula Valley Zapotec. PhD dissertation. UCLA. [4] Carnie, A. et al., eds. 2000. *The syntax of verb initial languages.* Oxford University Press. [5] Foreman, J. O. 2006. The morphosyntax of subjects in Macuiltianguis Zapotec. PhD dissertation. UCLA. [6] Sabbagh, J. 2014. Word Order and Prosodic-Structure Constraints in Tagalog. *Syntax* 17, pp. 40–89. [7] Broadwell, G. A. 2005. It ain't necessarily S(V)O: Two kinds of VSO languages. In: *Proceedings of the LFG Conference.* [8] Himmelmann, N. P. 2006. Language documentation: What is it and what is it good for? In: *Essentials of Language Documentation.* de Gruyter.