

Apachean Languages

ROBERT W. YOUNG

The Apachean languages, consisting of Navajo, Western Apache, Chiricahua, Mescalero, Jicarilla, Lipan, and Kiowa-Apache, comprise the southernmost geographic division of the Athapaskan language family (fig. 1). The two related divisions are the Pacific Coastal, containing eight languages spoken or formerly spoken in California and Oregon, and the Northern, embracing 23 languages distributed over a wide area in western Canada and interior Alaska. The languages of the Apachean group constitute a dialect complex derived from a common ancestral prototype.

Prehistory

Although anthropologists and linguists had hypothesized a northern origin for the Apacheans since at least William W. Turner in 1852 (Krauss 1980), it remained for Sapir (1936) to present the first formal evidence in support of the hypothesis.

Available evidence, derived primarily from comparative linguistic studies, points to a comparatively recent period as the probable time at which Proto-Apachean separated from the Northern language complex, and glottochronology has estimated the date of "separation" as about A.D. 950–1000 (Hoiyer 1956a). (Glottochronological dates of "separation" are theoretical constructs with a complex relation to actual prehistoric interruptions of communication; they are used by some comparative linguists to give rough estimates of linguistic prehistory.) Some time later the ancestral Apacheans began the southward movement along the eastern flank of the Rocky Mountains that culminated in their appearance in the American Southwest only a few centuries ago.

Archeological evidence is scant, except for the ancestral Navajo segment during the period following their arrival in the Navajo Reservoir–Governador–Largo Canyon region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, a general location known in Navajo tradition as *Dinétah* 'Navajoland' (literally 'among-the-people'). Tree-ring specimens from Navajo sites in Gobernador Canyon date from the period 1491–1514 (Hall 1944), supporting the belief that at least one Apachean group had arrived in the Southwest as long ago as A.D. 1500 (Dittert, Hester, and Eddy 1961; Hester 1962; Hester and Shiner 1963; Schroeder 1974b; Ellis 1974). Later

studies have argued for a slightly later date ("Comparative Social Organization," this vol.; see also "Historical Linguistics and Archeology" and "Southern Athapaskan Archeology," vol. 9).

Wedel (1959) suggests the possibility that archeological sites relating to the Dismal River aspect in western Nebraska, western Kansas, eastern Colorado, and southeastern Wyoming may be associated with Plains Athapaskans, possibly Apacheans, although the earliest tree-ring dates so far discovered do not precede A.D. 1650.

The ancestral Apacheans drifted piecemeal into the Southwest and gradually spread to occupy a broad expanse of territory surrounding the Pueblos, including much of southeastern Colorado; northern, eastern, and southwestern New Mexico; western Texas; northern Mexico; and central and southeastern Arizona.

Spanish chronicles mention a few nomads in New Mexico west of the Rio Grande as early as 1583, but the number of such non-Pueblo people is not represented as substantial until the 1620s. The designation Apache first appears in Spanish documents of 1598. It appears, from Spanish accounts, that a western group, called collectively the Gila Apaches, spread south and west from the Manzano-Datil Mountains of New Mexico, with a subsequent movement northwestward into southeastern Arizona sometime between the late 1500s and the 1680s (Schroeder 1974b). All the Apacheans living west of the Rio Grande were indiscriminately termed Gila Apaches until the close of the seventeenth century, after which time distinctive band names came into use, for example, Chiricahua, Mogollon, Pinal, Mimbres, Arivaipa (Schroeder 1974b).

Schroeder (1974b:15) and Wedel (1947) cite archeological evidence pointing to cultural changes that were taking place on the Plains in the mid-sixteenth century, at a period contemporaneous, coincidentally, with the advent of the first Europeans in the region. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado reports encounters with nomadic hunters during his trek into the Plains in 1541, to whom his chroniclers applied the names Querechos and Teyas. The name Querechos was borrowed by the Spaniards from the Pecos name later used for the Apacheans, and it almost certainly referred at least in part to Apacheans in the sixteenth century (see the synonymy in "The Apachean Culture Pattern and its Origins," this vol.).

Chronology

Application to Athapaskan of the lexicostatistical method of estimating the time of first separation of genetically related languages shows dates of "separation" for the several Apachean languages from Sarcee, their nearest geographical relative in the Northern Athapaskan division, at about A.D. 1000 (Hoijer 1956a).

The high proportion of lexical cognates within the Apachean languages, and the relatively narrow limits of phonological and morphological diversity that characterize them in their relationship to one another, indicate that the Proto-Apacheans were a homogeneous ethnic group, sharing a relatively uniform common language at the time of their separation from the Northern complex. This basic homogeneity was shared by at least a part of the ancestral Apacheans at the time of their arrival in the Southwest. The close kinship among the Apachean languages is reflected in the relative dates of their "separation" from one another, ranging up to 419 years for that between the San Carlos dialect of Western Apache and Lipan, the westernmost and easternmost of the languages compared (Hoijer 1956a).

The periods of time separating the Apachean languages from one another are brief, and Benavides's comments of 1630 are perhaps pertinent when in his section on the "huge Apache nation" he notes that "although, being one nation, it is all one language, since it is so extensive it does not fail to vary somewhat in some bands (*rancherías*), but not such that it cannot be very well understood" (1916:131-132). This observation implies that the Apachean languages were still quite similar to one another in the early seventeenth century, at least those that came to Benavides's attention.

Historical Phonology

In the 1920s Edward Sapir introduced the science of comparative linguistics to the study of the Athapaskan languages (Krauss 1980), an approach that he first applied to include one of the Apachean languages in Sapir (1931). This study was concerned with the comparative development of three reconstructed Proto-Athapaskan consonant series, in stem-initial position, in four languages representing three widely separated geographic areas within the Athapaskan language family: Hupa (Pacific Coastal), Navajo (Apachean), and Sarcee and Chipewyan (Northern).

The results of this important study, summarized in table 1 with reference to Navajo, showed that the Proto-Athapaskan phonemes in Sapir's series I and II were retained intact by Navajo, while four of those in series III had merged with the corresponding phonemes of series I. This merger, involving the shift of Proto-Athapaskan $*g-/*k-/*k̄-$ to Navajo $ɜ-/c-/č-$ (orthographic

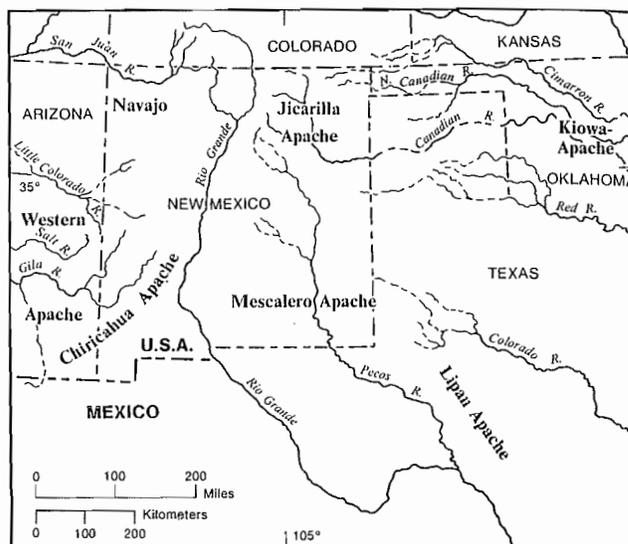


Fig. 1. Approximate locations of Apachean groups in the 18th century.

dz-/ts-/ts'-), respectively, was highly significant, for it set Navajo apart from the Pacific and Northern languages, where the developmental history of the same Proto-Athapaskan phonemes was shown to have followed a different course. This discovery suggested that Navajo, along with the other Apachean languages, might conceivably constitute a separate and distinct dialect complex.

Although Sapir did not pursue the matter further in print, one of his students, Harry Hoijer, using data placed at his disposal by Sapir, set about the task of determining the linguistic position of the Southern Athapaskan (Apachean) languages both with respect to one another and to the related languages spoken on the Pacific Coast and in the North. The broadened data base included not only additional languages but also the full inventory of reconstructed Proto-Athapaskan consonants. And for Apachean the analysis included the languages within the southwestern complex. The most significant of Hoijer's (1938) findings included:

1. The merger of Proto-Athapaskan $*g-/*k-/*k̄-$ to $ɜ-/c-/č-$, as demonstrated for Navajo by Sapir's (1931) analysis, was shared by all the Apachean languages. (This conclusion had to be revised in the 1960s when new information showed that Kiowa-Apache had a different treatment of this series of phonemes.)

2. Proto-Athapaskan $*x-$ became *s-* in all the Apachean languages with the exception of Kiowa-Apache, where it appeared as *š-*.

3. Stem-initial Proto-Athapaskan $*k-$ was retained in all the Apachean languages, except that in Kiowa-Apache $*k-$ appeared as *č-* before the vowels *e* and *i*, remaining as *k-* only before *a* and *o*.

4. Stem-initial Proto-Athapaskan $*t-$ was retained in Navajo, Western Apache, Chiricahua, and Mescalero