

## **A typological comparison of Seri with nearby Southern Uto-Aztecan languages: The use of posture verbs in locative descriptions**

Carolyn O'Meara  
IIFL-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Lilián Guerrero  
IIFL-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

### **Abstract**

Seri, or *Cmiique Iitom*, as Seri speakers refer to it, is a language isolate (Marlett 2007) spoken by around 900 people in two small villages along the coast of Sonora, Mexico. It has been reported that the Seris had close contact with both Yaqui and O'odham speakers during the last few centuries, although, considerably less contact in the last few decades (Marlett ms.). In one of the first comparative analyses, Beals (1961) evaluated the Seri kinship system against the kinship systems of four Uto-Aztecan languages; he found many interesting similarities and suggested a possible deeper connection between Seri and neighboring languages. To go one step further, in this paper we begin a comparative analysis of linguistic structure, by exploring the use of posture verbs in locative descriptions in Seri in comparison with nearby Southern Uto-Aztecan languages, especially with Yaqui.

**Keywords:** Seri, Yaqui, Uto-Aztecan, posture verbs, locative description

### **Resumen**

Seri, o *cmiique itom*, como los hablantes seris la nombran, es una lengua aislada (Marlett 2007) hablada por cerca de 900 personas en dos pequeños pueblos en la costa de Sonora, México. Se ha dicho que los seris tuvieron contacto con los hablantes del yaqui y o'odham durante los últimos siglos, aunque ese contacto ha sido menos frecuente en las décadas recientes (Marlett ms.). En uno de los primeros trabajos comparativos, Beals (1961) comparó el sistema de parentesco seri con los de otras cuatro lenguas yutoaztecas, y encontró varias similitudes que le permitieron sugerir una posible conexión más fuerte entre el seri y lenguas vecinas. Para dar un paso más, en este trabajo damos inicio al análisis comparativo de estructuras lingüísticas, y exploramos el uso de verbos de postura en descripciones locativas en seri en comparación con lenguas yutoaztecas sureñas cercanas, en especial con el yaqui.

**Palabras clave:** Seri, Yaqui, Uto-Aztecan, verbos de postura, descripción locativa

### **0. Introduction**

It has been reported that the Seri people, or *Comcaac*, were in close contact with both the Yaqui and O'odham peoples during the last few centuries, although, there appears to have been considerably less contact in the last few decades (Marlett ms.). While Seri is categorized

as a language isolate, Yaqui and O'odham belong to the Uto-Aztecan family. As part of an attempt to better understand the level of contact between the Seri, a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer group, and the neighboring indigenous communities that are sedentary agriculturalists, Beals (1961) compared the Seri kinship system with the kinship systems of four Uto-Aztecan language communities -- Tarahumara, Huichol, Cora and the Cahita languages.<sup>1</sup> His work shows many similarities between these systems, including, for instance, the fact that all of the groups consolidate cousins with siblings (Beals 1961: 133) and that the Seri kinship system shows many similar distinctions as the Cahita one, for example in the distinctions of the siblings of the father and mother. Within the Uto-Aztecan systems studied, there are many lexical similarities apparent. Not surprisingly, once the Seri data are added into the mix the lexical similarities disappear, but structural or classificatory similarities are observable when comparing the more basic properties of the kinship systems. These similarities suggest a possible deeper connection between Seri and some of the southern Uto-Aztecan languages (following Marlett ms.).

Of particular interest and in contrast with many Uto-Aztecan languages, Seri is a language with a relatively low number of loanwords, but many of the loanwords that do exist are from neighboring Uto-Aztecan languages or from Spanish via these Uto-Aztecan languages. The comparisons of kinship systems, loanwords, as well as creation myths and other culturally significant characters in tales (Marlett ms.) seem to reiterate the likelihood that Seri speakers have been in contact over a long period of time with speakers of Uto-Aztecan languages. To go one step further, in this paper we present a comparison of the use of

---

<sup>1</sup> The term Cahita was first used in Buelna's (1890) manuscript to refer to Yaqui, Mayo and Tehueco, an extinct language; Opata (also extinct) is occasionally included in this group. There has been some discussion as to whether Yaqui and Mayo are one or two languages since their speakers maintain 90% intelligibility with each other (see the discussion in López and Moctezuma 1994: 221).

posture verbs in locative descriptions in Seri in comparison with Yaqui and other Uto-Aztecan languages spoken nearby, contributing the first step to a comparison semantic categorization between Seri and Southern Uto-Aztecan languages.

The types of expressions that are of interest in this paper are ones that are potential answers to *Where*-questions. As discussed in Levinson (2003: 65), there are different possible ways to answer this type of question, in other words, there are different possible ways linguistic strategies that one can use to locate an entity. Languages like English and Spanish make use of a simple copula, e.g. 'the cup is on the table', while many other languages have a set of alternative verbs or verbal affixes that describe the position or collocation of that entity, such as verbs like 'sit', 'stand', 'lie', 'hang', among others (Ameka and Levinson 2007: 847).

Following Newman's (2002) typological study, we place particular attention to the locational expressions or constructions where there is an extension of the central meanings of the posture predicates to non-human referents. By locative descriptions, we mean utterances which describe a static array consisting of a figure object as it is located with respect to a ground object (following Talmy 1983). The use of posture verbs in constructions that locate human figure objects in these languages correspond with the actual posture of the person being located. However, the type of classification that occurs when speakers locate non-human entities in constructions involving posture verbs is of particular interest, especially with respect to the relevant information that determines the use of a particular posture verb with a particular referent. We identify the types of geometric properties that are relevant to the selection of the posture verbs, as well as force dynamic properties that seem to play a role in verb selection (following Newman 2002: 1-2).

We are particularly interested in expressions of static location, regardless as to whether a spatial frame of reference is instantiated or not. Unlike other studies (Jackendoff and Landau 1993), we do not focus on the role of adpositions in locative descriptions. Rather, the primary focus is on the type of classification of figure objects based on their co-occurrence with posture verbs in locative expressions, with particular emphasis on the spatial properties that these verbs select for.

## **2. Background information on Seri and nearby Uto-Aztecan languages**

The Seri people or *Comcaac*, as they refer to themselves, reside in two small coastal villages along the Gulf of California in Sonora, Mexico. As of 2007, there were approximately 900 Seri people<sup>2</sup> living in the two small coastal villages (Lewis 2009), *Socaaix* (Punta Chueca) and *Haxöl Iihom* (El Desemboque del Río San Ignacio) that serve as the primary places of residence for the Seri. The majority of the residents of these two villages speak the Seri language, exceptions being non-Seri residents.

The Seri language, or *cmiique iitom* (lit. ‘what a Seri person speaks’), is considered to be a language isolate. It has been suggested that Seri is part of the putative Hokan stock, which includes the Pomo languages of California, the Yuman languages of Baja California and the southwestern United States and Oaxaca Chontal (Tequistlatec), among other languages. However, Seri’s status as part of the Hokan stock has proven difficult to confirm or disconfirm definitively (Marlett 2007). As a result of the lack of evidence, some linguists have decided to not consider the Hokan hypothesis at all (Marlett 2008; Campbell 1997).

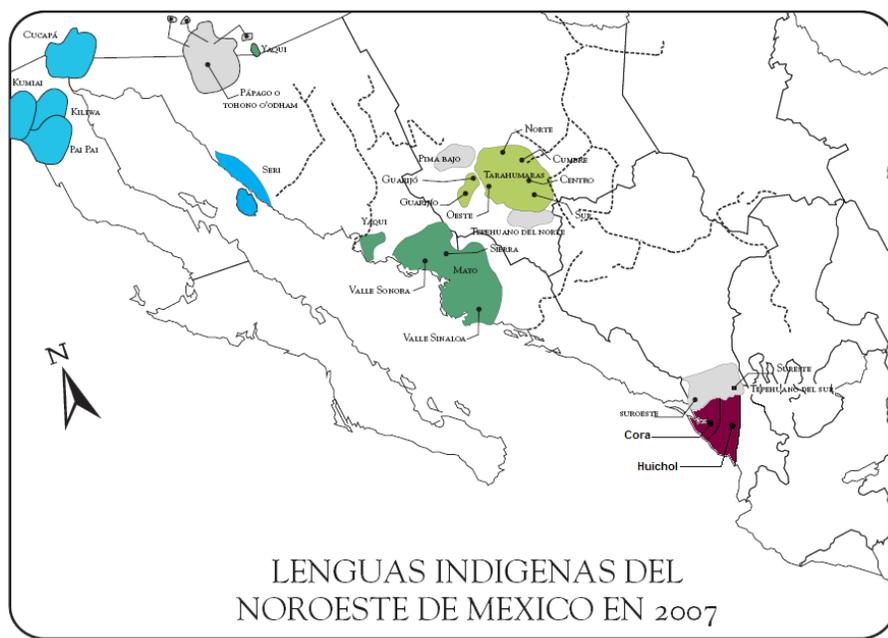
The Uto-Aztecan family can be divided into a Northern and a Southern branch. The Northern branch consists of four subgroups (spoken in the United States), while the Southern

---

<sup>2</sup> This figure is higher than the 2000 census. It more closely reflects the opinions of Seri government officials (Marlett ms. 39, footnote 33).

branch (mainly spoken in Mexico and Central America) consists of up to six subgroups. Although the internal organization of the Southern branch is still under discussion (Miller 1984; Cortina-Borja & Valiñas 1989; Campbell 1997), five major groups are generally recognized: i) Tepiman (Southern and Northern Tepehuan, Mountain and Lower Pima, O'odham; ii) Taracahitan (Tarahumara varieties, Guarijio, Yaqui, Mayo), iii) Tubar (extinct), iv) Corachol (Cora, Huichol), and v) Nahuatl varieties (including Classic Nahuatl and Pipil). The Taracahita and Tepiman languages are commonly termed the Sonoran languages. The comparative analysis focuses mainly on Yaqui data. This language was traditionally spoken by the Yoeme people living along the Rio Yaqui in Sonora, Mexico. After the Mexican Revolution in 1920, a large group of speakers settled in Arizona. Today, there are approximately 15,000 speakers in Sonora and an estimated 6,000 in Arizona.

The location of Seri with respect to the closer Sonoran languages, that is, Yaqui, Mayo, and O'odham can be seen in Map 1 below. While the Seri territory is located on the coast of the Gulf of California, Yaqui and Mayo villages are located in the valley of Sonora and Sinaloa; O'odahm communities and the other Tepiman communities are located in the mountain zone of Sonora, Arizona and Chihuahua.



Map 1. Indigenous languages in Northwestern Mexico (Moctezuma, in press)

### 3. Methodology

Some of the Seri data presented in this paper is drawn from data collected with the Topological Relations Picture Series, also known as BowPed (Bowerman and Pederson 1993; see also Levinson and Wilkins 2006: 570-575) and the Picture Series for Positional Verbs (Ameka *et al.* 1999), as well as from fieldwork conducted with Seri speakers in El Desemboque. If an example was elicited with one of the stimuli, the name of the stimulus and the number of the picture in the picture series is indicated after the free translation. As for Yaqui, the data also includes observations from the BowPed picture series, descriptions obtained through a series of photos designed to collect data of inanimate entities holding different positions (Gutierrez 2011), data from the Yaqui-Spanish dictionary (Estrada *et al.* 2004) and from fieldwork conducted with Yaqui speakers in Estación Vicam.

For a preliminary comparative analysis, we also explore data from other Sonoran languages as they appear in the *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México*, which include the volume for Seri (Moser 1996), for Yaqui (Estrada Fernández 2009), for Mayo (Freeze 1989),

for Lower Pima (Estrada Fernández 1998), and for Guarijio (Miller 1993); we also include some observations about Southern Uto-Aztecan cognates involving posture verbs (Dakin, ms; Stubbs 2008).

#### **4. Posture verbs in locative descriptions**

##### **4.1 Seri**

Seri is, for the most part, a head-final language (Marlett 2005: 54). This can be illustrated by the fact that main clauses follow dependent clauses; verbs follow their complements; adpositions are postpositions, i.e., follow their complements; possessed noun phrases follow possessor noun phrases; etc. Seri exhibits many properties of a head-marking language (Marlett 2005: 62) and has no case marking. Finite verbs are marked for person and number of the subject and direct object and for the person of the oblique when applicable.

The construction that is primarily used in locative descriptions in Seri follows the language's basic word order of SV involving a noun phrase that refers to the figure object, a postpositional phrase which contains a noun phrase that refers to the ground object and a verbal head, in this order. Posture verb roots play an important role in Seri locative constructions. The posture verb roots that act as the base for some of the definite articles in Seri (Marlett and Moser 1994, Moser 1978) occur as finite verb forms in locative descriptions. The following examples show locative descriptions involving the following posture verbs: – *oom* 'be lying' in example (1), *-oop/-aap* 'be standing' in example (2), and *-ijj* 'be sitting' in example (3).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations used: 1, 2, 3 person; ABS: absolutive, ACC: accusative, ART: article, DECL: declarative, DEF: definite, DEM: demonstrative, DETRANS: detransitive, DET: determiner, DP: distant past, GEN: genitive, INTERR: interrogative, LOC: locative, NMLZ: nominalization, NOM: nominative, OBL: oblique, PASS: passive, PFV: perfective, PL: plural, POSS: possessive, RP: recent past, SBJ: subject, SG: singular, UNSPEC: unspecified.

- (1) *I-c-aaspoj* *com* *hant i-ti* *i-c-aaspoj*  
 3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-write DEF.ART.SG.lie land 3.POSS-on 3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-write  
*com* *i-ti* ***m-oom.***  
 DEF.ART.SG.lie 3.POSS-on RP-lie  
 ‘The pencil (lit. with which one writes) is on the desk (lit. land on which one writes).’  
 (GHF BowPed 59)
- (2) *Cmaacoj cop* *ha-aco* *cap*  
 man DEF.ART.SG.stand ABS.POSS-house DEF.ART.SG.stand  
*i-sxap* *hac* *i-ti* ***yoop.***  
 3.POSS-top.of.head DEF.ART.SG.LOC 3.POSS-on DP.stand  
 ‘The man is standing on the roof of the house.’ (GHF BowPed 34)
- (3) *Siip quij* *hehe i-ti* *i-qu-iicolim* *quij*  
 boy DEF.ART.SG.sit wood 3.POSS-on 3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-sit.PL DEF.ART.SG.sit  
*i-pac* *hac* *ano* ***mij.***  
 3.POSS-back DEF.ART.SG.LOC 3.POSS.on RP.sit  
 ‘The boy is sitting behind the chair (lit wood on which one sits down).’  
 (GHF BowPed 64)

The root of the locative verb that occurs in each of the examples above is the root that the definite article that co-occurs with the figure nominal is derived from (*quij* and *-ij*). Also note that examples (1) and (3) contain verb forms which have the recent past prefix on them, while example (2) contains a verb form with the distant past prefix. The recent past prefix<sup>4</sup> (*m-/mi-/im-*) is generally used for imperfective predication and the distant past prefix<sup>5</sup> (*yo-/y-*) is claimed to be used for past-time reference or habitual actions (Moser and Marlett 2005).

The following examples illustrate locative descriptions which contain the general locative predicates *-iih* ‘be (located)’ in (4) and (5) and *-aahca* ‘be (located)’ in (6) and (7).

- (4) *Zixcam i-pxasi* *iictim* *quih* *eenim* *com*  
 fish 3.POSS-meat OBL.NMLZ-be.cut DEF.ART.SG.UNSPEC knife DEF.ART.SG.lie  
*i-ti* ***y-iih.***  
 3.POSS-on DP-be.LOC  
 ‘There is a piece of (fish) meat on the knife.’ (GHF BowPed 12)

<sup>4</sup> In other descriptions of Seri it has been called the proximal (mood) prefix (Moser and Marlett 2005; Marlett 1981).

<sup>5</sup> This is called the distal (mood) prefix in Moser and Marlett (2005) and Marlett (1981).

(5) *Ha-p-aspoj ha-noocaj tiix hant i-ti*  
 SBJ.NMLZ-PASS-write SBJ.NMLZ.PASS-hold DEM land 3.POSS-on  
*i-qu-eaacalca com i-yat*  
 3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-store.possessions DEF.ART.SG.lie 3.POSS-on.top  
*hac i-ti y-iih.*  
 DEF.ART.SG.LOC 3.POSS-on DP-be  
 ‘The book (lit. what is written that is held) is on top of the bookshelf (lit. land on which one stores possessions).’ (AIM BowPed 8)

(6) *Ziic i-ime hehe cap i-ti c-aahca iha.*  
 bird 3.POSS-nest wood DEF.ART.SG.stand 3.POSS-in SBJ.NMLZ-be.LOC DECL  
 ‘The nest is in the tree.’ (RHF BowPed 67)

(7) *I-iqui cöiyanaaaaj ihmaa pac i-ti*  
 3.POSS-toward OBL.NMLZ.curve.around other some 3.POSS-on  
*c-aahca ha...*  
 SBJ.NMLZ-be.LOC DECL  
 ‘It is on the other part that is like a curve...’ (AIM NovelObjects\_PartElic 1)

In contrast with examples (1)-(5), examples (6) and (7) illustrate locative constructions that have nominalized forms of locative predicates followed by a declarative marker, as opposed to recent past or distant past prefix markers. The use of a nominalization plus a declarative marker is not specific to the verb *-aahca* ‘be (located)’ (nor to locative descriptions), as is illustrated below with *-iij* ‘be sitting’ in (8), *-ocaa* ‘be hanging’ in (9), and *-oom* ‘be lying’ in (10).

(8) *Hehe i-s quij ha-mcanoiin quij ano*  
 wood 3.POSS-fruit DEF.ART.SG.sit ABS.POSS-pot DEF.ART.SG.sit 3.POSS.in  
*qu-iij iha.*  
 SBJ.NMLZ-sit DECL  
 ‘The fruit is in the pot.’ (RHF BowPed 2)

(9) *Ziix c-oqueht an i-c-oopxoj*  
 thing SBJ.NMLZ-bounce 3.POSS.in 3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-DETRANS.inflate  
*quij hehe com i-ti c-ocaa ha.*  
 DEF.ART.SG.sit wood DEF.ART.SG.lie 3.POSS-on SBJ.NMLZ-hang DECL  
 ‘The balloon (lit. thing that bounces) is hanging from the tree.’ (RHF BowPed 20)

(10) *Canaaa com xepe com i-ti c-oom iha.*  
 boat DEF.ART.SG.lie seawater DEF.ART.SG.lie 3.POSS-on SBJ.NMLZ-lie DECL  
 ‘The boat is in the ocean.’ (RHF BowPed 11)

The examples above illustrate subject nominalizations, but there are also separate object and oblique nominalization prefixes in Seri. The form of the declarative marker that appears at the end of the utterance is determined phonologically.

When it comes to animate referents, locative predicates headed by posture verbs describe the actual posture of the referent of the figure nominal, as this type of referent has the possibility of volitionally putting itself in a particular position. This is shown in example (11), where the figure nominal refers to a boy who is in a seated position behind a chair (this is a description of one of the BowPed illustrations). The posture verb *-ijj* ‘be sitting’ is used to describe the boy’s posture.

- (11) *Qu-isil*            *ctam quij*            *hehe*    *i-ti*            *i-qu-iicolim*  
 SBJ.NMLZ-small    man    DEF.ART.SG.sit    wood    3.POSS-on    3.POSS-UNSPEC.SBJ-sit.PL  
*quij*                    *i-pac*                    *hac*                    *ano*                    *qu-ijj*                    *iha*.  
 DEF.ART.SG.sit    3.POSS-back    DEF.ART.SG.LOC    3.POSS.in    SBJ.NMLZ-sit    DECL  
 ‘The boy (lit. little man) is sitting behind the chair (lit. wood on which one sits).’  
 (RHF BowPed 64)

In example (12), the figure nominal describes a dog that is in a seated position next to a dog house. Since the dog is sitting, the posture verb *-ijj* ‘be sitting’ is used here, just as this verb root is used to describe the posture of the boy in (11).

- (12) *Ha-xz*            *tiix*            *y-aaco*            *cap*                    *i-hiin*                    *hac*  
 ABS.POSS-dog    DEM    3.POSS-house    DEF.ART.SG.stand    3.POSS-    near    DEF.ART.SG.LOC  
*i-ti*                    *yijj*.  
 3.POSS-in    DP.sit  
 ‘The dog, it is sitting near its house.’ (AIM BowPed 40)

In order to describe the location of a man who is standing on the roof of a house, the posture verb *-oop* ‘be standing’ is used, shown in example (13).

- (13) *Cmaacoj*    *cop*                    *h-aaco*                    *i-yat*                    *hac*  
 man            DEF.ART.SG.stand    ABS.POSS-house    3.POSS-point    DEF.ART.SG.LOC  
*i-ti*                    *yoop*.  
 3.POSS-on DP.stand  
 ‘The man is standing on top of a house.’ (AIM BowPed 34)

Finally, example (14) shows how *-oom* ‘be lying’ is used to describe the posture of a dog as it is lying inside of its dog house.

- (14) *Ha-xz*            *quih*                            *y-aaco*            *cop*  
 ABS.POSS-dog DEF.ART.SG.UNSPEC 3.POSS-house DEF.ART.SG.stand  
*ano*            *yoom*.  
 3.POSS.in DP.lie  
 ‘The dog is lying in its house.’ (AIM BowPed 71)

The locative verb roots that are unspecified for posture, *-aahca* and *-iih*, both ‘be located,’ are used in locative descriptions involving figures where the actual posture or disposition of the figure referent is unknown. For instance, *-iih* is commonly used when asking where someone or something is. Examples of such expressions are provided in (15), where the referent of the figure nominal is animate, and in (16), where the referent is inanimate.

- (15) *¿Rebeca quih*                            *háqui*    *t-iih?*  
 Rebeca DEF.ART.SG.UNSPEC where INTERR-be.LOC  
 ‘Where is Rebeca?’ (GHF Landscape 7/11/06 1)

- (16) *¿Ziix*    *an*            *icoosi*                            *quij*            *háqui*  
 thing 3.POSS.in OBL.NMLZ.DETRANS.drink DEF.ART.SG.sit where  
*t-iih?*  
 INTERR-be.LOC  
 ‘Where is the cup (lit. thing with which one drinks)?’ (AIM BowPed 2)

*-iih* ‘be located’ has a separate polysemous sense ‘live’ or ‘reside’. This is shown in the question in (17), which asks the addressee where they live.

- (17) *¿Me zó*    *hant*    *ano*            *qu-iih-ya?*  
 2 what land 3.POSS.in SBJ.NMLZ-be.LOC-INTERR  
 ‘Where do you live?’ (Moser and Marlett 2005: 497)

Finally, among inanimate figure objects, *-iih* selects for objects that are flexible, again, without any specification for a particular posture.

The second general locative verb, *-aahca* ‘be located’, also appears in locative descriptions. Like *-iih*, this locative verb root does not express a particular posture or disposition of the figure object. An example of an instance of this verb root being used to describe one of the BowPed line drawings is provided in (18).

- (18) *Ziic i-ime hehe cap i-ti c-aahca iha.*  
 bird 3.POSS-nest wood DEF.ART.SG.stand 3.POSS-in SBJ.NMLZ-be.LOC DECL  
 ‘The birds nest is in the tree.’ (RHF BowPed 67)

It is at this time unclear what the precise semantic differences are between *-aahca* and *-iih*. *-Iih* seems to occur in locative descriptions of objects that are flexible as well as groups of small entities, such as beans or other less identifiable objects that are generally presented in mass. *-Aahca*, on the other hand, does not seem to possess any such classificatory properties, at least not as it appears in locative descriptions.

Other dispositional verb roots, which do not lexicalize postures, likewise play an important role in Seri locative descriptions. Examples of such verb roots include *-ocaai* ‘be hanging’, *-iti* ‘connected’, *-oocp* ‘stuck to’. These verb roots are not discussed in further detail in this work, but see O’Meara (2010) for examples and further discussion on the use of these verb roots in locative descriptions.

The types of objects that occur with the posture predicate *-ijj* ‘be sitting’ in Seri can be categorized as not being tall and being somewhat stout in their shape, in other words, generally be further extended on the horizontal axis than on the vertical one. However, these entities are not always wider than they are tall, but for the most part require a solid base that makes contact with the ground, such as a water drum, which is described as sitting. It also seems that this predicate is used with entities that have to do with being in a seated position, such as chairs and bicycles. Nominals/nominal expressions that occur with *-ijj* ‘be sitting’



expressions that occur with *-oom* ‘be lying’ include *canoaa* ‘boat’, *icaaspoj* ‘pencil’ (lying on desk), *hateeya* ‘bottle’ (when on its side), *hax ixapz ano yaii* ‘cooler’, *hant ipasaquim* ‘broom’ (lying on the ground or leaning on the house), *hehe iti icoohitim* ‘table’, *eenm icaatj* ‘hammer’, *ziix ihacaptax* ‘drill’.

As mentioned earlier, certain groups of items that are in a pile or are identified as a group and not as individual items are categorized using the locative predicate *-iih* ‘be located’, as opposed to a particular predicate that lexicalizes posture semantics.

Nominals/nominal expressions that occur with *-iih* ‘be located’ include *hazaamt pac* ‘some bricks’ (in a pile) and *hacaalca hapsaalim pac* ‘some hung clothing’.

#### **4.2 Yaqui**

Yaqui is a synthetic/agglutinant, head-final language. In contrast to the other languages from the same branch, Yaqui keeps track of syntactic functions of nominal arguments using a nominative-accusative case system; the nominative case is unmarked and the accusative case is marked by the suffix *-ta*; plural nominals are marked by *-(i)m* excluding case marking. The strength of the head-final order is seen in the predominant use of postpositions, and verbal suffixes; also, the genitive follows the possessive noun, and adjectives usually precede the noun.

Previous studies dealing with some aspects of motion and locative descriptions in Yaqui include the brief description in Dedrick and Casad (1999), and the monographic studies in Guerrero (2004, submitted), Belloro and Guerrero (2012), and Gutierrez (2011). There is a small set of verbs that describes a locative situation in Yaqui; some of these verbs are unspecified for posture, but others describe the position or posture of an entity.

General locative verbs like *orek* ‘be placed’ and *manek* ‘be situated’ describe the location of inanimate entities without a concrete geometrical shape. For instances, *orek* is used

in locative descriptions involving *chichi* ‘saliva’, *baajup* ‘wastes’, *piisam* ‘blankets’ and *tomi* ‘money’ (20a), while *manek* is used with figure nominals used to refer to seeds and liquids, or containers used to hold liquids (20b). There is also a general locative predicate that is used to refer to human entities, *aane* ‘be around’; the clause in (20c) is the natural response to the question ‘where is your mother?’ when the actual posture of the figure entity is unknown.

- (20) a. *U ji’osia tomi-Ø mesa-po orek.*  
 DET paper money-NOM table-LOC be.placed  
 ‘The money is on the table.’
- b. *U joyo-Ø pu’ato-po manek-ame siime go’ote-k.*  
 DET poison-NOM plate-LOC be.placed-NMLZ everything  
 fall.NONCOUNTABLE-PFV  
 ‘The poison which was inside the plate fell down.’ (Estrada *et al.* 2004)
- c. *In maala-Ø kosina-po aane.*  
 1SG.GEN mother-NOM kitchen-LOC be  
 ‘My mother is in the kitchen.’

Most commonly, locative descriptions make use of posture verbs. In addition to the encoding of state, inchoative and causative interpretations, posture verbs in Yaqui have suppletive forms depending upon the number of the figure (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> Notice that the stative alternations are marked by the past perfective *-ka ~ -k*, the inchoatives are marked by *-te* and the causatives take the transitive marker *-(t)a*. The examples below illustrate the actual posture of humans and certain animate entities while ‘standing’ (21a-b), ‘sitting’ (21c), and ‘lying down’ (21d).

	stative		inchoative		causative	
	singular	plural	singular	plural	singular	plural
lie, be lying	<i>bo’oka</i>	<i>to’oka</i>	<i>bo’ote</i>	<i>to’ote</i>	<i>yecha</i>	<i>joa</i>
sit, be sitting	<i>katek</i>	<i>jo’oka</i>	<i>yejte</i>	<i>jo’ote</i>	<i>te’eka</i>	<i>to’a</i>
stand, be standing	<i>weyek</i>	<i>ja’abwek</i>	<i>kikte</i>	<i>japte</i>	<i>kecha</i>	<i>ja’abwa</i>

Table 1. Posture verbs in Yaqui

<sup>6</sup> The use of suppletive forms in posture verbs is very common inside the Uto-Aztecan family (see Guerrero, in press).

- (21) a. *Ju'u yoeme kari-bepa weyek.*  
 DET.NOM man.NOM house-on.the.top be.standing.SG  
 'The man is standing on the top of the house.' (BowPed 34)
- b. U *chu'u-Ø bankoa naa weyek.*  
 DET dog-NOM chair near be.standing.SG  
 'The dog is standing near the chair.'
- c. U *chu'u-Ø kari-po pa'aku katek.*  
 DET dog-NOM house-LOC outside be.sitting.SG  
 'The dog is sitting outside the house.' (Bowped 6)
- d. U *chu'u-Ø rama-po bo'oka.*  
 DET dog ramada-LOC be.lying.SG  
 'The dog is lying down under the ramada.'

The most interesting cases are locative descriptions of inanimate entities and animates that are conceived of as not being able to change their position volitionally, since posture verbs normally encode inherent or salient orientational properties of those entities. For instance, 'standing' is usually associated with trees, since they have a salient vertical extension, while 'sitting' encodes the canonical position of buildings, highlighting their horizontal extension over a flat ground. Yet, the locative description of ants, lizards, apples, hats, or grains can be slightly more difficult to classify in terms of the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Among the three basic posture verbs, *bo'oka/to'oka* 'be lying' is, perhaps, the easiest to describe since it expresses the location of entities that are spread out horizontally on a flat surface. Among the inanimate entities associated with this posture verb are *wako'i* 'comal', *tajkaim* 'tortillas', and *laapis* 'pencil' in (22a). Items such as tableclothes and blankets are also associated with *bo'oka/to'oka* when extended over or covering the ground as in (22b-c), though the posture verb *katek* 'be sitting' can also be used when these items are not covering the surface but are supported by it, as in (22c).

- (22) a. *laapis-Ø*      *eskritorio-po*    ***bo'oka.***  
 pencil-NOM      desk-LOC      be.lying.SG  
 'The pen is on the desk.' (BowPed 59)
- b. *selbietam*      *mesa-po*      ***bo'oka.***<sup>7</sup>  
 table cloth.PL      table-LOC      be.lying.SG  
 'The tablecloth is on the table.' (BowPed 29)
- c. *U*      *jipetekia-Ø*      *kama-po*      ***bo'oka.***  
 DET      blanket-NOM      bed-LOC      be.lying.SG  
 'The blanket is on the bed.'
- d. *piisam*      *kaamam*      *bepa*      ***katek.***  
 blanket.PL      bed.PL      over      be.sitting.SG  
 'The (folded) blankets are on the bed.'

This predicate is also used to describe the inherent position of certain animals, including reptiles, snakes, worms and several other insects whose bodies are in full contact with the ground, e.g. *wuikuim* 'lizard' (23a), *eyeekuim* 'centipede', *kurues* 'boa', *porowim* 'cuija lizard (*coleonyx variegatus*)', *bejo'orim* 'spiny lizard (*Sceloporus spp.*)', *waitopichim* 'salamander', *sakkoam* 'gila monster', *bakot* 'snake' and *chumkuria* 'worm'. By semantic extension, objects like *maangera* 'hose' can also be described as lying (23b). In (23c), *bo'oka* describes the depth of the cave.

- (23) a. *U*      *wuikuim*      *teta-t*      ***bo'oka.***  
 DET      lizard.PL      rock-LOC      be.lying.SG  
 'The lizard is on the rock.'
- b. *U*      *mangeera-Ø*      *kuta-t*      ***bo'oka.***  
 DET      hose-NOM      trunk-LOC      be.lying.SG  
 'The hose is on the top of the trunk.'

---

<sup>7</sup> Another piece of evidence for semantic categorization of the arguments in locative clauses comes from sentences like (i-ii), where the number of the entity does not 'agree' with the number of the suppletive verb. This explains the combinations found in (22b, d), (23a), (26d), (27a), (28a, c). See Gutiérrez (2011) for a preliminary explanation of these cases.

- i. *sakkaom*      *juya-po*      *katek*  
 gila.monster.PL      hill-LOC      be.sitting.SG  
 'The gila monster is standing on the hills.'
- ii. *chiinim*      *saako-po*      *waiwa*      *katek*  
 cotton.PL      sack-LOC      inside      be.sitting.SG  
 'The cotton is sitting inside the sack.'

- c. *U teeso-Ø tebesi bo'oka.*  
 DET cave-NOM long be.lying.SG  
 'The cave is very deep.'

The types of entities that are categorized as being in a lying position generally illustrate a longer horizontal axis than vertical one, in the sense that they can be extended over a surface, e.g., *pu'ato* 'plate', *wako'i* 'comal'; *tajkaim* 'tortillas', *piisam* 'blanket, tablecloth', *saaweam* 'underwear', *jiniam* 'shawl', *wichara'akiam* 'sling', *jipetam* 'bedroll (made with palm)', *josoim* 'bedroll (made with 'zarzo')'. Figure objects that can be described as being in a lying position also include *kookam* 'necklace', *reepam* 'earrings', *kandaom* 'padlock', *kareenam* 'chains', *tepojt看* 'branding iron', *kutam* 'wood', *chichikia* 'comb', *bo'o* 'path', *mangeera* 'hose', *inyeksionim* 'syringe', *peena kabai* 'bit' and *chaptiam* 'scissors'.

Additionally, there are figure objects are conceptualized as a group (mass) that lies on a surface like *ainam* 'flour', *arosim* 'rice', *sapam* 'ice, hail', *chinim* 'cotton', *ji'um* 'quelites', *mamyam* 'quelites', *ejootem* 'green beans'; *jiosiam* 'leaves'; *naapo jisi'am* 'Milky Way', *masam* 'wings', *seriom* 'matches', *teneboim* 'butterfly cocoons used for dancing'.

According to Newman (2002: 2), the posture of 'be standing' demands a higher control and volition on the part of the entity to maintain that position. As such, it would hardly describe the most natural posture for human entities. In Yaqui, animals with four legs like horses, cows and deer, occur with *weyek/ja'abwek* 'be standing' as in (24a). In addition, 'standing' describes the inherent posture of *toto'im* 'hens' (24b), *kampamoochi* 'praying mantis' and *esuki* 'ants' (24c).

- (24) a. *U kaba'i buki-Ø kora-po weyek.*  
 DET horse baby-NOM corral-LOC be.standing.SG  
 'The baby horse is in the corral.'

- b. *Toto 'i-m bwia-po ja'abwek.*  
 hen-PL ground-LOC be.standing.PL  
 'The hens are on the ground.'
- c. *Esuki-Ø kuta-t weyek.*  
 ant-NOM stick-over be.standing.SG  
 'The ant is on the stick.'

With inanimate entities, *weyek/ja'abwek* combines with (usually long and thin) objects that can be standing up or can maintain a vertical position with respect to the ground. This is the natural position for all types of *juyam* 'trees' (25a) or things that, because of their function, are expected to be in a standing position like *sapti* 'walls (made with giant reeds)', *kanteelam* 'candles', *jichikia* 'broom', *ejkalea* 'ladder', the flag pole standing outside the school. Among the terms used to refer to body parts, all of which involve reference to hair are also described as 'standing', e.g. mustache and beard. Interestingly, the locative description of a *teekuku* 'whirlwind' is also conceived of as being in a vertical orientation with respect to the ground (25b), but a fence can be both, 'standing' (25c) or 'sitting' (25d).

- (25) a. *Juupa-Ø juya-po weyek.*  
 mesquite-Ø hill-LOC be.standing.SG  
 'The mesquite tree is on the hill.' (BowPed 17)
- b. *U teekuku-Ø mekka jikau weyek.*  
 DET whirl-NOM far away up be.standing.SG  
 'The whirlwind is far away.'
- c. *U sapti-Ø kari naapo weyek.*  
 DET reed.fence-NOM house near be.standing.SG  
 'The fence is near the house.' (BowPed 15)
- d. *Waka-ta kora-Ø bene'e-ku katek.*  
 cow-ACC kora-NOM shallows-LOC be.sitting.SG  
 'The cow's fence is on the shallows.' (BowPed15)

The types of entities that typically co-occur with *weyek/ja'abwek* 'be standing' in locative descriptions can be characterized as being taller than they are wide. Entities that

combine with this posture predicate include all types of trees, *sapti* ‘wall’, *baaka* ‘carrizos’, *pu’eta* ‘door’, *raama* ‘ramada’, *tambo* ‘barrel’, *saakom* ‘sack’, *kanteelam* ‘candle’ and *kora* ‘corral’; figure objects like *tepuam* ‘machete’, *cahptiam* ‘scissors’, *antorchaam* ‘torches’, *juiwam* ‘arrows’, *laabos* ‘nails’, *eskalea* ‘ladder’ are also described as ‘standing’ when leaning on a wall, for instance.

The third posture verb *katek/jo’oka* ‘be sitting’ is a little more complex to characterize than the other two because it can be associated with several types of entities without an apparent common geometrical property. For instance, ‘be sitting’ is the default position for different types of birds (26a) and amphibians like *kuchu* ‘fish’ (26b). Other animate entities associated with this posture include *mochik* ‘turtle’, *boobok* ‘frog, toad’, *chana* ‘blackbird’, *balakasi* ‘cicada’, *baro* ‘parakeet’, *chiiwi* ‘wild turkey’, *chirik* ‘thick-billed kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*)’, *choa’awe* ‘hawk’, *kooni* ‘raven’, *se’eboi* ‘fly’, *jupa* ‘skunk’ and *chupiari* ‘chameleon’. Additionally, the locative descriptions of stars and the Milky Way also involve ‘be sitting’ (26c).

- (26) a. *Wiikit-Ø juya-t katek.*  
 bird-NOM tree-over be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The bird is in the tree.’
- b. *U kuchu-Ø frajko-po ba’am waiwa katek.*  
 DET fish-NOM container-LOC water inside be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The fish is inside the water container.’ (BowPed 32)
- c. *U-me’e chokim mek-jika-t jo’oka.*  
 DET-PL star.PL far-up-over be.sitting.PL  
 ‘The stars are over there.’

The locative description of a town, house, church, mountains, water springs and nets, furniture like tables, chairs, beds, latrines, figure objects like cups, glasses, pitchers and pots, as well as cars, boats, and wheelbarrows are all situated using *katek/jooka* ‘be sitting’; some

examples are shown in (27a-b). Some body parts also co-occur with ‘sitting’ like *puusim* ‘eyes’, *naakam* ‘ears’, *bi’am* ‘nape’, *chooam* ‘crown of head’, *gokterokim* ‘ankle’, as well as internal organs like *o’orem* ‘brain’, *siniam* ‘intestine’, *chibusi’ika* ‘gallbladder’ and *jeemam* ‘liver’. In addition, inanimate objects with a round shape like squash, tomatoes, onions, lemons, eggs, stones and balls are all described as ‘sitting’ (27c-d).

- (27) a. *Wiibisim Rajum-met cha’aka katek.*  
 Wiibisim.PL Rajum-LOC.PL after be.sitting.SG  
 ‘Huírivis is before Rahum.’ [both are villages located one after the other]
- b. *U kaaro-Ø bo’o-po katek.*  
 DET car-NOM road-LOC be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The car is on the road.’
- c. *mansaana-Ø soto’i-po waiwa katek.*  
 apple-NOM pot-LOC inside be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The apple is inside the pot.’ (BowPed 2)
- d. *U pelo’otam banko betuk katek.*  
 DET ball.PL chair under be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The ball is under the chair.’ (BowPed 16)

Most of the figure objects associated with ‘be sitting’ can be described as having particular geometric properties outside the vertical or horizontal dimensions, e.g. some sort of solid base or bottom part that allows them to be supported by or be in contact with the ground. Indeed, some of these figures can only co-occur with ‘be sitting’, especially those that have a round shape. The locative description of the book on a shelf (28a), the hat on the head (28b), and even the bugs on the wall (28c) also involve the verb ‘be sitting’.

- (28) a. *U-me librom tabla-po jiikat katek.*  
 DET-PL book.PL shelf-LOC up be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The book is up in the shelf.’ (BowPed 8)
- b. *Mobei-Ø kooba-t katek.*  
 hat-NOM head-over be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The hat is on the head.’ (BowPed 5)

- c. *U-me animal-im sami-t katek.*  
 DET-PL animal-PL wall-over be.sitting.SG  
 ‘The animals (bugs) are on the wall.’ (BowPed 52)

The BowPed picture series was designed to also allow for the collection of some data on locative verbs that potentially do not lexicalize posture, but a specific collocation of the entity with respect to the ground, e.g. *cha’aka* ‘hang’, *chu’akti* ‘stuck/attached to’ and *suma’i* ‘be tied’. Unlike posture verbs, these predicates that describe these dispositions do not show suppletive forms, and their use is slightly easier to predict given the position or disposition of the figure with respect to the ground; for this reason, we do not describe them here.

### 4.3 Other nearby Southern Uto-Aztecan languages

There are no monographic studies dealing with posture verbs in other Sonoran Uto-Aztecan languages, and the available grammars barely mention the possible combinations of these locative predicates with different types of entities. Yet, the data presented in the *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas* series<sup>8</sup> includes several examples of locative descriptions which, potentially, involve posture verbs. Table 2 summarizes the examples for Mayo (Freeze 1989), Guarijio (Miller 1993), Lower Pima (Estrada 1999), in addition to Seri (Moser 1996) and Yaqui as documented by Estrada Fernández (2009). Unfortunately, we do not have the relevant data to compare posture verbs in O’odham at this time. When alternative locative expressions are found in Seri and Yaqui from data collected during our fieldwork (i.e. stylistic variations, alternative postures), we include them in a second line.

The questionnaire includes a dozen sentences exploring locative descriptions; occasionally, the sentences come in pairs such as the first sentence that asks for the location of

---

<sup>8</sup> The *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas*, published by El Colegio de México, is a collection of volumes describing basic linguistic structures obtained by a syntactic questionnaire including intransitive and transitive sentences, simple and complex constructions. The goal of this publication is to provide a first set of morpho-syntactic data that can be used to compare different languages; so far, there are more than 30 *Archivos* from languages from different linguistic affiliations.

an entity (e.g., where is the church?) and the second one that provides a locative clause as an answer (e.g., the church is in the town). Unlike the BowPed questionnaire, there is no visual stimulus for this data, it is a translation questionnaire.<sup>9</sup>

	Seri	Yaqui	Mayo	Guarijio	Lower Pima
human	<i>quiij</i> ‘sit’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>a:ne</i> ‘be’	<i>kahtí</i> ‘sit’	<i>daha</i> ‘sit’
dog	<i>caap</i> ‘stand’ <i>coom</i> ‘lie’	<i>bo’oka</i> ‘lie’ <i>weyek</i> ‘stand’ <i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>a:ne</i> ‘be’	<i>cuhkú</i> ‘kneel’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
bird	<i>quiij</i> ‘sit’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
fly	<i>quiij</i> ‘sit’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>cuhkú</i> ‘kneel’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
pot	<i>quiij</i> ‘sit’	<i>bo’oka</i> ‘lie’ <i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>dah</i> ‘sit’
machete	<i>caap</i> ‘stand’	<i>weyek</i> ‘stand’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>po’i</i> ‘lie’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
church	<i>caap</i> ‘stand’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
house	<i>caap</i> ‘stand’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
store	<i>caap</i> ‘stand’	<i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>kiika</i> ‘stand’
fence	<i>quiij</i> ‘sit’	<i>weyek</i> ‘stand’ <i>katek</i> ‘sit’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>werí</i> ‘stand’	<i>kiik(a)</i> ‘stand’
clothes	<i>quiih</i> ‘be’	<i>aayuk</i> ‘be’ <i>manek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>maní</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>vivuta</i> ‘be <sub>inside</sub> ’
beans	<i>quiih</i> ‘be’	<i>manek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>o:rek</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>maní</i> ‘be <sub>placed</sub> ’	<i>vivuta</i> ‘be <sub>inside</sub> ’

Table 2. Some correspondences of locative descriptions in Seri and Sonoran Uto-Aztecan

Based on this preliminary set of data, we find some interesting correspondences. First, it seems that all of these languages make use of some sort of classification of animate objects with respect to their actual posture (or default posture) and inanimate objects with respect to their geometrical properties. Second, the locative descriptions involving a human entity in this questionnaire are preceded by the question ‘where is your father?’ meaning the person does not know the actual position of the human referent. The interesting point here is that, except for Mayo, all of the languages make use of the ‘sitting’ posture verb as the default answer to

<sup>9</sup> As it was constructed, the questionnaire used in the *Archivo* does not motivate the occurrence of a ‘lying’ posture predicate, but the lack of this data here does not mean the language lacks this posture predicate in locative descriptions.

that question.<sup>10</sup> Note that in the question itself Seri and Mayo use the locative predicate unspecified for posture and the other three languages use the posture predicate ‘be sitting’. Third, figure objects referring to birds and flies are described as ‘be sitting’ in Seri, Yaqui and Mayo, but are described as ‘be standing’ in Pima; in Guarijio, birds are described as ‘be standing’, while flies and dogs are both conceived of as being in a kneeling position. And fourth, in all of the languages in the sample locative descriptions involving entities that are identified as a group of non-individuated entities (e.g. items that have a mass interpretation like clothes and beans) co-occur with general locative predicates that do not lexicalize posture meanings.

While the data from both Yaqui and Seri show that there is a tendency for classifying figure objects based on their posture and geometric structure, the preliminary data from Mayo show a very different situation: instead of posture verbs, the language makes use of the general locative verb *aane* ‘be’ when describing the location of animate entities and *o:rek* ‘be placed’ to locate inanimate entities. As shown in (20) above from Yaqui, and (29) below in Mayo, these locative verbs do not lexicalize posture semantics. This is of particular interest due to the fact that Yaqui and Mayo are much closer in grammatical terms. Based on the evidences we have from the other Sonoran languages, we have to say that Mayo is shifting away from using posture verbs to preferring general locative and/or existential verbs; perhaps the preference for a non-posture verb in locative descriptions has been induced by contact with Spanish where speakers also prefer a generic locative verb *estar* ‘be located’. All of the other languages of this study have had contact with Spanish, but this situation has not yet

---

<sup>10</sup> In the Archivo of Lower Pima, *daha* ~ *dah* is glossed as ‘standing’; however, after reviewing some other publications and looking for some cognates with other Uto-Aztecan languages (Dakin, ms.), it has become clear that this verb refers to ‘be sitting’ and it comes from the causative alternation *yasa/yecha* ‘to put in a sitting position’ found in other Sonoran languages; the stative version is also found in Tarahumara and Eudeve. *Kiika* is clearly related to *kikte* ‘stand up (sg)’.

changed the predominance of posture verbs in locative descriptions.

- (29) a. *In pa howa-po a:ne.*  
1.POSS father house-in is.LOC  
'My father is in the house.' (Freeze 1989: 80)
- b. *Haku-su a:ne hu' ču:'u?*  
where-EMPH is.LOC this dog  
'Where is the dog?' (Freeze 1989: 82)
- c. *Soto'-ri bwiya-po o:rek.*  
pot-ABS ground-in put  
'The pot is on the ground.' (Freeze 1989: 81)

In Guarijio, there is another posture verb describing a 'standing' position for animals using four legs as in (30a). As far as we can tell, there is no equivalent of this posture verb in Yaqui or any of the other languages of the sample. The locative description in (30b) involves a machete in a 'lying' position; the verb *po'í* in Guarijio is cognate with *bo'ote* 'be lying' in Yaqui.

- (30) a. *ahká=na cuhkú cuhcúri?*  
where=MODAL be.standing.with.four.feet dog  
'Where is the dog?' (Miller 1993: 70)
- b. *Weh-cí po'í macíra=ga.*  
ground-on is.lying machete=EMPH  
'The machete is on the ground.' (Miller 1993: 69)

Apparently, the locative description of pots and machetes are not easy to compare since in Seri, Yaqui and Lower Pima, pots are categorized as 'sitting', while machetes are categorized as 'standing', but in Guarijío, pots 'stand' and machetes 'lie'. On the other hand, locative description of churches, houses, stores and fences co-occur with 'standing' in Seri, Guarijío and Pima, but not in Yaqui.

Therefore, based on this small corpus, we may say that Seri, Yaqui, Guarijio and Lower Pima utilize a small but contrastive set of posture verbs in locative descriptions, while

Mayo tends to use a single locative verb, i.e. suppletive forms for animate/inanimate entities, in order to locate objects in space. However, as mentioned above, the types of entities that occur with the different posture predicates in Seri, Yaqui, Guarijio and Lower Pima differ depending on language specific properties of spatial or geometric classification of entities. Before we conclude, we continue this discussion of locative descriptions by sharing some observations with respect to the semantic properties that seem to determine which posture predicate is utilized in locative descriptions in Seri and Yaqui, which can be found in the following section.

## **5. Discussion**

Following Newman (2002) and Ameka and Levinson (2007), locative descriptions involving posture verbs can be characterized by either the disposition they describe and/or by concrete or abstract properties of the figure object. As expected in languages of that use a handful of posture verbs in locative descriptions (following Ameka and Levinson 2007: 858-890), posture verbs in Seri and Yaqui draw on the human posture verbs ‘be sitting’, ‘be standing’ and ‘be lying’; in the two languages, they combine with abstract and concrete nominals. There is also a pair of less anthropomorphic positional verbs like ‘be hanging’ and ‘be stuck to’. At least in Yaqui and other Uto-Aztecan languages, all posture verbs have a causative counterpart (see Guerrero 2004 for Yaqui).

In contrast to neighboring languages, Seri has developed a very complex system of articles and demonstratives based on posture predicates. Just as is the case with the use of Seri articles derived from posture verbs, the use of these verbs in locative descriptions is, at least, partially determined by physical or abstract geometric properties of the figure object and this appears to apply across all of the languages in the sample. For some entities and some positions,

the horizontal axis is relevant, for others, the vertical dimension is crucial. In addition, some entities are canonically associated with certain postures, i.e. the position in which an object normally occurs, is used, or stored; this is particularly true for locative descriptions of inanimate entities (see Gutiérrez 2011, for Yaqui and O'Meara 2008 for Seri). To get a better idea of the semantic properties of the posture verbs in Seri and Yaqui and the types of entities that tend to occur with these posture verbs in locative descriptions, see Table 3.<sup>11</sup>

As can be observed from the information presented in Table 3, the types of factors that play a significant role in the semantic subcategorization of the types of entities that co-occur with these posture predicates in Seri and Yaqui are strikingly similar. This is in contrast with the lexical differences that exist between Seri and Yaqui and the lexical similarities that are present between the Sonoran Uto-Aztecan languages. However, looking behind the lexical realization of these verbal predicates, we see similar strategies in categorization based on spatial affordances and geometric properties of objects.

---

<sup>11</sup> Newman (2002) suggests four central semantic factors that are associated with English *sit*, *stand* and *lie*: the spatio-temporal domain, the active zone, the force dynamics and the social/cultural domains. We do not include the last two here, since they are primarily relevant for human/animate entities, i.e. only certain entities can show a higher or lower degree of control and balance to hold and maintain a standing position.

SEMANTIC DOMAIN	POSTURE VERB	BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FIGURE OBJECTS IN SERI	BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FIGURE OBJECTS IN YAQUI
SPATIO-TEMPORAL	'be lying'	Entities showing a longer horizontal axis than vertical one that can be supported horizontally by the ground, including items like boats on the water and knives; this is the canonical position for humans.	Slightly flat and/or long entities which can be supported horizontally by the ground (i.e., horizontal axis); animate entities like reptiles select this posture as their canonical position.
	'be standing'	Entities that can best be characterized as having one axis that is much longer than the other axis is wide, especially thin entities like trees and poles, but this also includes water in a container.	Thin and/or tall entities that can hold a vertical position from the ground (i.e. vertical axis), including trees, containers; they may be able to hold a vertical position or be leaning on the ground, like machetes or broom.
	'be sitting'	Tall entities, somewhat stout in their shape, generally wider than they are tall. However, these entities are not always wider than they are tall; it also seems that this predicate is used with entities that have to do with being in a seated position, like chairs and bicycles.	The orientation in terms of horizontal and vertical axis is not central, but volume or shape. Animate entities like birds, insects, and amphibians select this posture as their canonical position, the same that round objects, and multiple or mass-type figure like water, sand, seeds (i.e. usually contained objects)
ACTIVE ZONE	'be lying'	Extended contact between the figure and the ground.	There is a full, or almost full contact between the figure object (or a salient part of the figure) and the ground.
	'be standing'	Support of the figure is provided by some stabilizing component such as legs (of a table or ladder) or roots (of a tree).	Figure objects usually have some sort of support (e.g. legs, feet, roots), that allows them to maintain this position.
	'be sitting'	For the most part requires a solid base that makes contact with the ground, providing support to the figure entity.	Some contact of the bottom part of the figure with the ground; the entity is supported by below.

Table 3. Semantic factors associated to Seri and Yaqui posture verbs

## **6. Conclusions**

To conclude this paper, we return to the topic of contact between Seri and the Sonoran Uto-Aztecan languages spoken in the same larger geographic area of what is currently northwestern Mexico. Given that Seri is a language isolate spoken among various Uto-Aztecan languages, it would be expected that one would find evidence of contact between Seri speakers and their neighbors. Although it is not definitively clear how long the Seri have been inhabiting northwestern Mexico, Bowen (1983: 222) has indicated that their arrival predates ceramic times, which translates to around twelve centuries before the present, following Marlett (ms. 38). It has also been suggested by Beals (1961) that there is potential evidence of contact at a social level that is visible through the linguistic repercussions as observed in the Seri and Cahita kinship systems. We also observe certain similarities in the way that Seri speakers and Yaqui speakers categorize objects based on their use of locative verbs that involve posture semantics (see Table 3). The spatial and geometric characteristics that determine the use of the posture predicates in locative descriptions are strikingly similar between the two languages.

A potential explanation for the similarities that we observe could be related to the fact that Seri speakers and the nearby speakers of Uto-Aztecan languages have been in such close proximity over the course of many years, undoubtedly with many contact opportunities. While we see relatively few loanwords in Seri (some of them being of Uto-Aztecan origin), it is possible that contact has manifested itself linguistically in other ways, such as that which we observe in this paper. Regardless of our tentative conclusions, it is clear that more work should be conducted in order to further investigate not only the potential linguistic evidence of contact between these groups, but also the historical and archaeological evidence that can corroborate similarities.

## **References**

Ameka, Felix K. and Stephen C. Levinson. 2007. The typology and semantics of locative predicates:

postural, positional and other beasts (Introduction to a special volume). *Linguistics* 45-5: 847-871.

Ameka, Felix K., C. de Witte and David P. Wilkins. 1999. Picture series for positional verbs: Eliciting the verbal component in locative descriptions. In David P. Wilkins (ed.) *“Manual” for the 1999 Field Season*. Nijmegen: Max Planck Institut für Psycholinguistik, Language and Cognition Group, pp. 48-56.

Beals, Ralph L. 1961. Kinship Terminology and Social Structure. *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 25: 129-148.

Belloro, Valeria and Lilián Guerrero. 2012. La interfaz gramática-discurso en las construcciones de movimiento en yaqui, *Lingüística* 27: 1-24.

Bowerman, Melissa and Eric Pederson. 1993. Topological relations pictures. In Eve Danziger and D. Hill (Eds.) *'Manual' for the Space Stimuli Kit 1.2*. Nijmegen: Max Planck Institut für Psycholinguistik, Cognitive Anthropology Research Group, pp. 40-50.

Buelna, Eustaquio. 1890. *Arte de la lengua cahita por un padre de la Compañía de Jesús*. México: Imprenta del Gobierno Federal.

Campbell, Lyle. 1997: *American Indian Languages. The Historical Linguistics of Native America*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dakin, Karen, (n.d.). Revisions on Miller’s Uto-Aztecan Cognate Sets. Not published.

Dedrick, John and Eugene Casad. 1999. *Sonora yaqui language structure*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

Estrada Fernández, Zarina. 1998. *Pima Bajo de Yepachi, Chihuahua*. Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México 21. Mexico: El Colegio de México.

Estrada Fernández, Zarina. 2009. *Yaqui de Sonora*. Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México 29. Mexico: El Colegio de México.

Estrada Fernández, Zarina, Crescencio Buitimea Valenzuela, Ariadna E. Gurrola Camacho, María

- Elena Castillo Celaya, Anabela Carlón Flores. 2004. *Diccionario Yaqui-Español y textos, obra de preservación lingüística*. Mexico: Plaza y Valdez.
- Guerrero, Lilián. 2004. Verbos de movimiento y posición en yaqui. In Zarina Estrada, A. Fernández, and A. Álvarez (Eds.), *Estudios en lenguas amerindias. Homenaje a Ken Hale*. Hermosillo, Sonora: Universidad de Sonora, pp.199-222.
- Guerrero, Lilián. Submitted. La naturaleza de las frases locativas en construcciones de movimiento en yaqui. *Revista Liames*.
- Guerrero, Lilián. In press. La marcación de plural en verbos y sustantivos en lenguas yutoaztecas. In Carmen Conti Jiménez, Lilián Guerrero, Saul Santos (Eds.), *Aproximaciones a la documentación lingüística del huichol*. Jaén, Spain: Universidad de Jaén.
- Gutiérrez, Paola. 2011. Predicados supletivos de posición y plurales léxicos en la lengua yaqui. Undergraduate thesis, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City.
- Freeze, Ray A. 1989. *Mayo de los Capomos*. Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México 14. Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Levinson, Stephen C. and David P. Wilkins. 2006. *Grammars of space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, M. Paul (Ed.). 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
- López Cruz, Gerardo and José Luis Moctezuma Zamarrón. 1994. Dialectología Cahita. In Gerardo López Cruz and Jose Luis Moctezuma Zamarrón (Eds.), *Estudios de lingüística y sociolingüística*. Hermosillo, Sonora: Universidad de Sonora and Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, pp. 221-274.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2005. A typological overview of the Seri language. *Linguistic Discovery* 3.1: 54-73. Available online: <http://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/2/xmlpage/1/article/282>.

- Marlett, Stephen A. 2007. La relación entre lenguas “hokanas” en México: ¿Cuál es la evidencia? In Cristina Buenrostro et al. (Eds.), *Memorias del III Coloquio Internacional de Lingüística Mauricio Swadesh*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, pp. 165-192.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. The Seri-Salinan connection revisited. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74.3: 393–99.
- Marlett, Stephen A. ms. A Grammar of Seri. Available online:  
[http://www.und.nodak.edu/instruct/smarlett/Stephen\\_Marlett/GrammarDraft.html](http://www.und.nodak.edu/instruct/smarlett/Stephen_Marlett/GrammarDraft.html)
- Marlett, Stephen A. and Moser, Mary B. 1994. El desarrollo de clases nominales en seri. In Gerardo López Cruz and José Luis Moctezuma Zamarrón (compilers), *Estudios de Lingüística y Sociolingüística*, Hermosillo, Sonora: Universidad de Sonora, pp. 97-105.
- Miller, Wick R. 1993. *Guarijío de Arechuyvo, Chihuahua*. Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México 16. Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Moctezuma Zamarrón, José Luis. In press. La familia yutoazteca sureña: una introducción. Carmen Conti Jiménez, Lilián Guerrero and Saul Santos (Eds.), *Aproximaciones a la documentación lingüística del huichol*. Jaén, Spain: Universidad de Jaén.
- Moser, Mary B. 1978. Articles in Seri. *Occasional papers on linguistics* 2: 27-89. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University.
- Moser, Mary B. (in collaboration with Stephen A. Marlett). 1996. *Seri de Sonora*. Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México 19. Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Moser, Mary B. and Marlett, Stephen A. (compilers). 2005. *Comcáac quih yaza quih hant ihíip hac: Diccionario seri-español-inglés*. Hermosillo, Sonora and Mexico City: Universidad de Sonora and Plaza y Valdés Editores.
- Moser, Mary B. and Stephen A. Marlett. 1989. Terminología de parentesco Seri. *Anales de*

*Antropología* 26: 367-388.

Newman, John. 2002. *The Linguistics of Sitting, Standing, and Lying*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

O'Meara, Carolyn. 2008. Basic locative construction in Seri. *IX Encuentro Internacional de Lingüística en el Noroeste, Hermosillo, Sonora, México*. Tomo 2, pp. 253-267.

O'Meara, Carolyn. 2010. Landscape classification and spatial reference. Unpublished PhD dissertation. University at Buffalo, SUNY.

Stubbs, Brian Darre. 2008. *Uto-Aztecan: a comparative vocabulary*. Yorda Linda, California: Shumway Family history services.