

Xinkan and Lencan

The labels Xinkan and Lencan are used to refer to two distinct and independent language families. Both of these language families are relatively small and have been extinct since the last part of the twentieth century. Xinkan is a family of at least four languages and Lencan is a family of two languages. Comparatively, the estimated time of divergence for the Lencan languages is much greater than the estimated time of divergence for the Xinkan languages. There is no genetic connection between the two language families (no common linguistic ancestor), though they do share a common sociolinguistic history including contact with speakers of many other languages leading to the eventual shift toward more widely used languages, such as Spanish. While relatively unknown among scholars interested in Central American languages, they exhibit some interesting and salient cross-linguistic features including, a large number of glottalized consonants (including glottalized resonants), unique patterns of vowel co-occurrence restrictions, semantic alignment, and a host of inflectional and derivational affixes, among many others. This chapter surveys the grammatical patterns of each language family, as they are currently known, the current sociolinguistic environment of each family, and the relationships between the languages in each family and between these two families and others spoken in the same geographical area.

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