



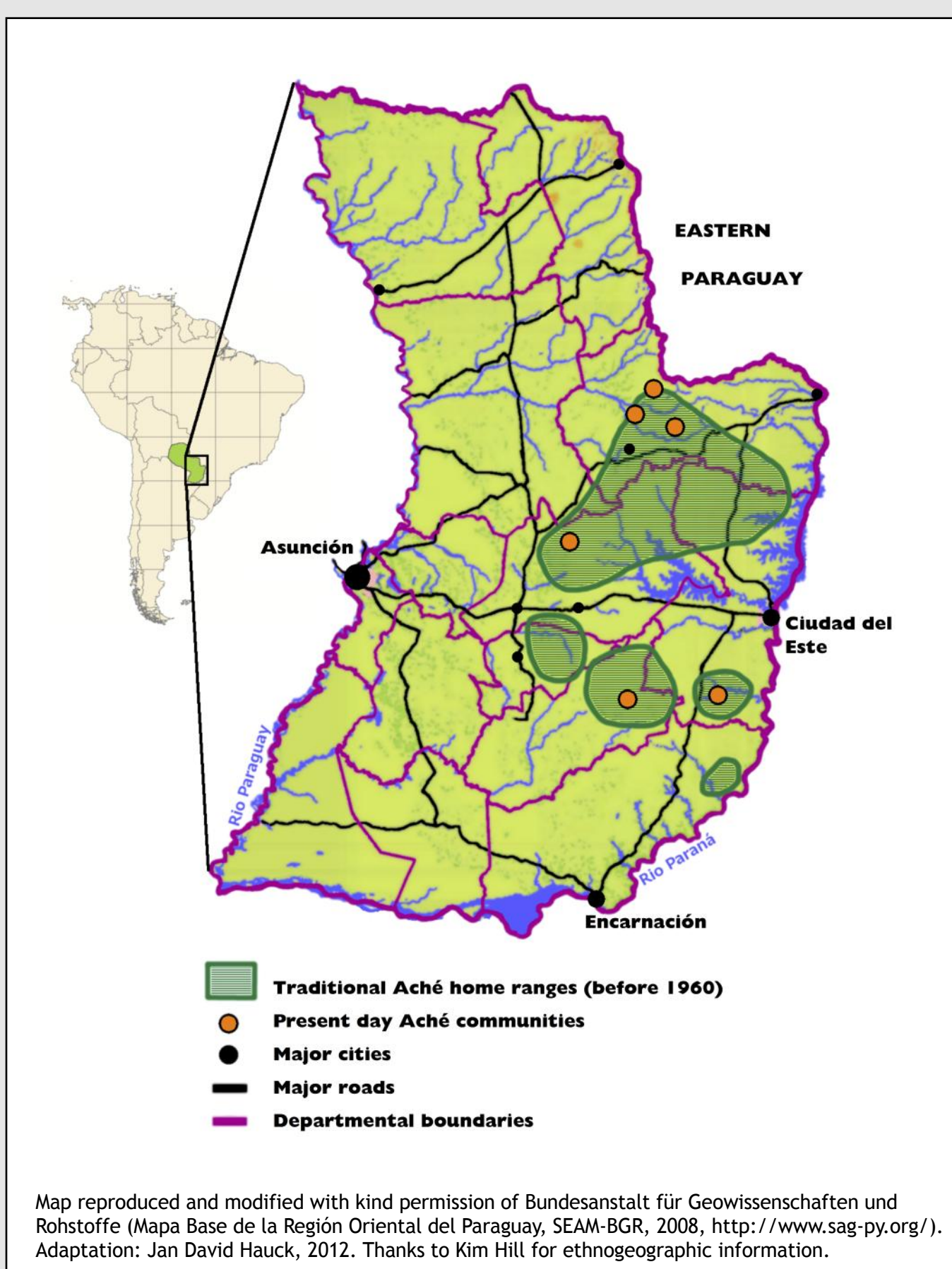
A Tupi-Guarani Language of Eastern Paraguay

The Aché Documentation Project (ADOP) documents the language and traditional knowledge of the indigenous Aché groups of Eastern Paraguay.

The Aché

The Aché (also known as Guayaki) are former hunter-gatherers, who lived in small foraging bands in the Atlantic coastal forests west of the Paraná River. For most of the twentieth century, there existed four agglomerations of allied bands based on what the Aché describe as “habitual friendship.” These subgroups were almost entirely endogamous, and they shared a common dialect and common rituals.

The Aché were the object of attacks and kidnapping by Paraguayan colonists over the 19th and 20th centuries. Contact-related violence, deforestation, and virgin soil epidemics forced all Aché subgroups onto reservations between 1959 and 1978. Since then, they have gradually abandoned most of their traditional rituals and cultural practices. Older Aché continue to hunt when able, but hunting is no longer the primary means of subsistence. Most communities subsist by a combination of small-scale agriculture, wage labor, and soybean production. Since 1978, most Aché have converted to evangelical Christianity.



The Aché Language

The Aché language is classified as a member of the Tupi-Guarani language family due to its high lexical similarity with other languages of the family. Some grammatical features are markedly different from those of other TG languages, however, and various specialists have suggested these differences might have resulted from language contact.

Aché is severely endangered as it is spoken today only by around 200 fluent speakers and 400 semi-speakers belonging mostly to the older generations. Intergenerational transmission is interrupted and most younger speakers have shifted to Paraguayan Guarani. Multiple social, economic, and ideological factors are contributing to language shift, most importantly the aforementioned changes of way of life and environment, the hegemony of the Guarani language in rural eastern Paraguay, and changing socialization patterns. The shift is also likely intensified by the lexical and structural similarities of Aché and Guarani.



Aché man with body decoration of charcoal and vulture down (2010) (Eva-Maria Roessler)

The community schools, encouraged and supported by the documentation team and educational institutions such as the Ministry of Education of Paraguay, are currently developing a unified orthography and teaching materials in the Aché language for the primary education of Aché children.

The Projects

Since 2008 the Aché Documentation Project documents the traditional speech genres of the language. Combining linguistic data collection with ethnographic field research, and recording personal narratives, mythology, traditional songs, cultural practices, and interviews, this project works towards a comprehensive multi-media archive of the Aché. The archive also includes controlled language data relevant for language description, as well as donated audio recordings dating from 1960 and video recordings from 1978, and unpublished ethnographic material from the 1910s.

A second project, the Aché Language Studies Project (ALSP) started in 2012. This project investigates the history and mechanisms of contact-induced language change through (a) a detailed description of the grammatical features of Aché that distinguish it from other Tupi-Guarani languages, (b) an ethnobiological comparison of Aché foragers with Guarani horticulturalists, and (c) the examination of socialization patterns to document present day language shift.



Aché hunters (1991) (Bjarne R. Fostervold)

The Team

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Aché woman with carrying basket (2009) (Eva-Maria Roessler)

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Captured Aché girl (1932) (photographer unknown)

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