

Esselen Structural Prehistory

Author(s): David L. Shaul

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Esselen Structural Prehistory<sup>1</sup>

David L. Shaul

University of California, Berkeley

This paper reviews the structural (grammatical and phonological) prehistory of the Esselen language isolate from an areal point of view; for the geographic location of Esselen and surrounding languages, please refer to Map 1. A section of background information will be given. Methodology will then be discussed, and then the results of the survey will be presented by presenting the essential grammatical features of Esselen. Conclusions reached will be related to other results of linguistic prehistory studies in the area of central California, as well as to findings of non-linguistic study of the area.

Esselen was one of the smallest aboriginal speech communities in California, and the first to become extinct. Isolated in the Big Sur country in essentially undesirable land, the Esselen language was an enclave in the Costanoan culture area, sharing an eastern border with Salinan. Ethnohistorical sources report the Esselen similar in material culture to the Costanoans, with whom they were friendly. Hostile relations obtained between the Esselen and the Salinan.

This is borne out by the archaeological record. Relations along the Costanoan-Esselen border with Salinan were hostile- an effective trade barrier. An archaeological site near the coast along this border may reflect hostility and competition for valuable shell resources in the area (Pohorecky 1978; written 1964). The only site well inside the historic Esselen territory that has been excavated is the Isabella Meadows Cave which was occupied for at least 470 years, A.D. 1350 to 1825, if not about 1000 years (Meighan 1955:24). Meighan found that "the few scraps available suggest that the Esselen were culturally more similar to Costanoan than to the Salinan... for the present the Esselen must be regarded as a group with fairly distinctive technological pattern (in basketry, arrows and cordage)" (1955:26). Yet the Esselen must have been highly conservative culturally, for the large sample of fragments of all sorts of baskets "has a unique kind of twining with highly specialized technology not known anywhere else in America" (Dawson 1973:2). Linguistic similarity may be more expected between Esselen and Costanoan because the Esselen were an enclave in a Costanoan matrix culture.

Even earlier linguistic relations between Esselen and other languages is suggested by Beeler's study of the Esselen numeral system: "examination of Esselen numerals has shown us a basically quinary system that has been overlaid, in prehistoric times, by a quaternary and, later, by a decimal system" (1978:33). Esselen is a member language of the Hokan hypothesis, which is supported by both

grammatical and lexical data (Sapir 1925). A broad view of early Esselen linguistic prehistory would begin with the traditional view that Hokan-speaking groups were forced from central California into peripheral areas by Penutian-speaking groups (Shipley 1978:81). It may be inferred that Esselen was once spoken over a larger area than its historical location, yielding territory to Penutian-speaking groups to the north (Costanoan) and to the south (Yokuts).

Kroeber was the first to suggest a more extensive northerly territory for the Esselen (1925:544-545). Two of the Esselen:Costanoan lexical resemblances may point to an Esselen substratum for Costanoan (Beeler 1961), while it is impossible to determine the direction of borrowing with other sets (Beeler 1978:35). Some of these resemblances are found in other languages of central California and the Great Basin (cf. Nichols 1981).

Esselen:Uto-Aztecian resemblances, including some loanwords from Uto-Aztecian into Esselen, may indicate a more southern spread of Esselen speech prior to the Yokuts (Penutian) occupation of the Central Valley. This parallels Klar's observation that Obispeño (Northern) Chumash has more loanwords from Uto-Aztecian than any other Chumash variety (1973:62-63).<sup>2</sup> In light of Whistler's model of a series of Penutian migrations into central California from the north (Whistler 1977), further study of the two "frontiers" involving Esselen might prove fruitful.

That is what I would like to do here using Esselen structural data, reserving the lexical study as a sort of check to the findings of this first study.

An outline was made of those features of Esselen structure that can clearly be demonstrated or are reasonably sure. This was done by surveying the four grammatical analyses that have been made of Esselen (Kroeber 1904, Harrington 1913, Beeler 1978 and Shaul 1981b). It would be beyond the scope of this paper to justify every point made about Esselen structure. These touch points formed a dragnet that was used to survey languages that may have been in contact with Esselen: Salinan, Costanoan, Chumashan, Uto-Aztecian and Yuman-Cochimi. In order to be considered significant, a given structural feature had to meet three criteria: (a) have identical phonological shape, (b) have the same function, and (c) have the same distribution. A model was then constructed of Esselen linguistic prehistory which may be checked by a follow-up study on Esselen lexical prehistory.

The results of the survey will be presented under seven rubrics in the following order: 1. phonology, 2. syntax, 3. noun syntagma, 4. noun classes, 5. pronominal forms, 6. transitive verb syntagma, and 7. stative syntagma.

### 1. Phonology

The minimal phonemic system for Esselen proposed by Shaul (1981a) is given in (1), along with the rosters for Proto-Yuman (Wares 1965:99; Langdon 1968), Southern Cochimi (Mixco 1978), Uto-Aztecian (Langacker 1977:21), Proto-Chumashan (Klar 1977:32), Salinan (Turner 1980), and Costanoan (Okrand 1977). All exhibits follow the text of the paper.

In terms of basic consonants, vowels, consonant series, syllabic

shape and stress, the following are impressionistically like Esselen in descending order of likeness: Costanoan, Uto-Aztecan, Proto-Chumashan, Proto-Yuman, Southern Cochimi, and Salinan.<sup>3</sup> I will discuss the similarity of the Esselen sound system to Costanoan in detail.

Typologically, Esselen may be compared to the convenient summary of Proto-Penutian compiled by Shipley (1978:82) and Proto-Hokan compiled by Langdon (1974 and 1979). Hokan is likely to have had monosyllabic roots, a three-vowel system and perhaps a series of glottalized stops. On the other hand, Proto-Penutian was likely to have had the same five-vowel system as the one inferred for Esselen, a number of sonorants (m, n, r, l, w, and y) and roots with a CVCV(C) structure, where the vowels frequently were identical in quality. This concurs well with Esselen syllabic structure, where a noticeable number of the roots have identical vowels. Typologically, Esselen seems much closer to the Penutian type than to the Hokan type to which it is supposed to belong.

More specifically, the segment inventory of Esselen proposed in Shaul (1981a) closely resembles Costanoan languages. The main differences between these two rosters is that a palatal series is phonemic in Costanoan (but not in Esselen?). The Mutsun and Esselen vowel systems are identical: /i e a o u/. Syllabically, Mutsun had medial consonant clusters, including geminated ones (Okrand 1977:89). Consonant clusters are atypical of Esselen, though there is some question as to whether length was a syllabic property in Esselen as is typical in Costanoan languages (Okrand 1977:90).

The typological similarity between Esselen phonology and Costanoan phonology, noted by Kroeber (1904:80), may have prompted Harrington's stray remark that "Esselen belongs with Smuhwichoid Penutian as opposed to Eastern Penutian" (Beeler 1978:8). At any rate, most of Harrington's rehearsals of Esselen material with his Rumsen consultant Izabel Meadows concentrate on this problem. Izabel's varied preference for forms of a given word with and without consonant or vowel length may well be interference from her native Costanoan variety (cf. Beeler 1978:4 on the problem of language interference).

In an article entitled "Sibilants and Naturalness in Aboriginal California, William Bright found that the "retracted [ʂ], rather than the non-retracted [s] should be regarded as the normal, natural, unmarked sibilant for a large area of Western North America... which seems to center in California" (1978:48). Esselen is no exception to this. It was suggested (Shaul 1981a) that Esselen may have had both /s/ and /ʂ/, and that the /s/ may have been [ʂ] phonetically. On the basis of the data in (2), it seems likely that Esselen shares in this /s/:/ʂ/ area. As with word order considerations, below, this particular trait does not reveal any specific pattern of prehistory with regard to Esselen.

## 2. Syntax

Esselen had both SOV characteristics and SVO characteristics, as seen in (3). From this, I infer a basic SOV type for Esselen. The order head + relative clause, however, is not a typical SOV trait. It is interesting to note that Arroyo de la Cuesta noted that

the Esselen speech community probably had a larger territory anciently (as suggested above). The situation of Uto-Aztecan in the southern part of the Central Valley has been inferred in recent work by Klar.

Klar (1977:164) presents evidence of ancient contact between Uto-Aztecan and Chumashan, which are historically situated a considerable distance from each other. Klar postulates that after contact between Chumashan and Uto-Aztecan, the southward Yokuts movement split the Uto-Aztecan and Hokan groups apart (1977:164). In particular, "Obispeño [Northern Chumash] shares so many loanwords from Uto-Aztecan languages, loanwords not shared by other of the Chumash dialects to the south, with whom Uto-Aztecan had direct contact in historical times" (1977:165) that the Northern Chumash:Uto-Aztecan contact must have been ancient. Klar (1980) gives a convenient example, shown in (22), noting that no Yokuts or other Chumash language has this item as a word for 'one' (Klar 1980:115).<sup>7</sup>

Turner's work on lexical prehistory of central California (1981) confirms Klar's hypothesis. Her lexical sets involving Salinan show that Salinan must have been farther east and south than at contact. In particular, Salinan had contact with Uto-Aztecan, probably at two different periods. In addition to sharing lexical resemblances with southern distribution in Uto-Aztecan (indicating ancient contact), Salinan also has lexical resemblances with the Takic subfamily of Uto-Aztecan. Turner suggests that Chumashan:Uto-Aztecan contact was more intensive than Salinan:Uto-Aztecan contact, and that Salinan:Uto-Aztecan was particularly intensive with the Numic subfamily of Uto-Aztecan.

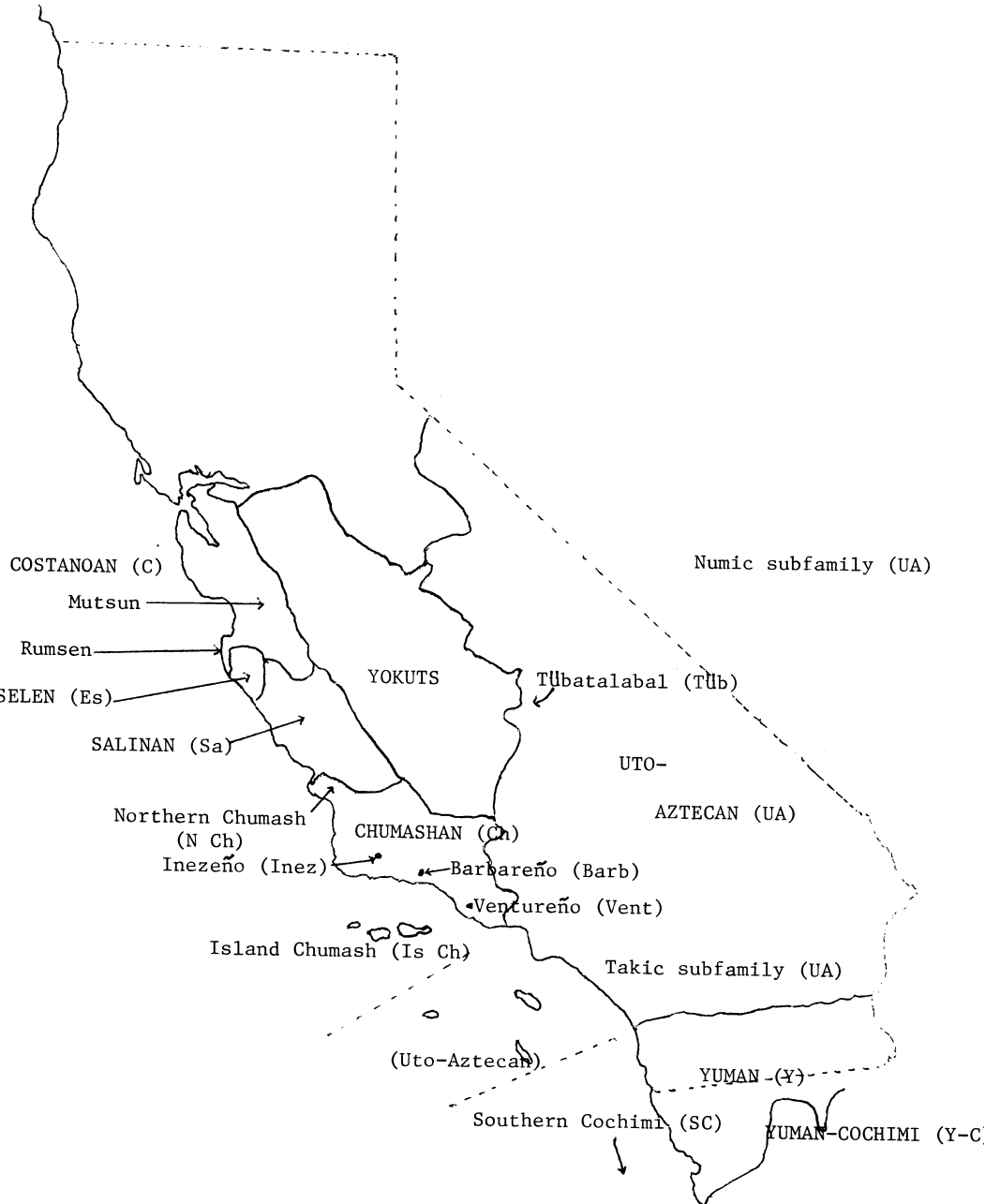
Taken together, the hypotheses presented here and by Klar and by Turner point to an arrangement of speech communities in the southern portion of the San Joaquin Valley that is roughly sketched in (23). The location of Yuman and Salinan is problematic.

### Discussion

Traditionally, the epistemology of linguistics has treated language as an isolated, self-contained phenomenon. This has prevailed from Bloomfield on to the present day. Despite the convenience of describing languages as self-contained, reductionism should not be allowed to dictate linguistic theory. Reconstructed entities should be as variable as their descendents. Such constructs as basic vocabulary and kernel morphology do not hold absolutely.

The contribution areal linguistics can make to linguistic theory is by showing that social environments in the past have influenced the infrastructures of languages. This suggests that a universal base hypothesis is untenable, and that a universal or near universal grammar should not be predicated on any single language or observation. The beneficial effects of doing areal linguistics simultaneously with comparative method is not new. However, areal linguistics, if taken seriously, has implications for linguistic epistemology, for a theory of language change, and ultimately for constructing an explanatory cross-language theory.

Map 1. Situation of Esselen and Surrounding Languages



(1) Esselen (Es)  
 p t ṭ k k<sup>x</sup> ? i u  
 c ṣ e o  
 s(r) x h a  
 m n  
 w y  
 /p/ → [ɸ] /V\_\_Vfront  
 /s/ → [ṣ] /V\_\_Vfront  
 /c/ → [tṣ] /V\_\_V  
 Syllable canon: CV; common  
 root shapes: CV, CVCV, CVCVCV;  
 stress: penultimate

Proto-Yuman (Y)  
 p t ṭ k<sup>y</sup> k k<sup>w</sup> ? i u  
 c ṣ x x<sup>w</sup> a  
 v n n<sup>y</sup>  
 l l<sup>y</sup>  
 w r y  
 Phonemic vowel length; syllable canon: (C)V(C); root types: mono- and di-syllabic; stress: on first syllable of root

Southern Cochimi (SC)  
 p t ṭ k k<sup>w</sup> ? i u  
 (b) (d) (g) (e) (o)  
 s (š) x x<sup>w</sup> a  
 m n n<sup>y</sup> ŋ  
 w l y  
 No vowel length indicated;  
 syllabic canon: CV most common  
 pattern; final stress

Proto-Uto-Aztecan (UA)  
 p t c k k<sup>w</sup> ? i ī u  
 s h o  
 m n a  
 w l y  
 Phonemic vowel length; syllable canon: CV; root types: CVCV, CV;  
 stress: penultimate

Proto-Chumashan (Ch)  
 p t k q ? i (ī) u  
 p̣ ṭ ḳ q̣ e o  
 s (c) a  
 ṣ č  
 m n /s/ vs. /ṣ/ likely (KW)  
 ṃ ṇ /ī/ is certain (KW)  
 w l y [ʃ] phonetic (?) (KW)  
 ẉ ḷ ỵ  
 Allophonic series of aspirated stops (KW).  
 Phonemic vowel length; syllable canon: CV, VC, V, CVC; typical roots: -CVCV- (Central Ch), some -CCV- in Northern Ch; stress: penultimate

Salinan (Sa)  
 p t ṭ c č k ?  
 p̣ ṭ ṭ č ḳ e o  
 s ṣ x h a  
 m n l  
 ṃ ṇ ḷ  
 w r y  
 ẉ ỵ  
 Phonemic vowel length; syllable canon: (C)CV̄(:)(C)(C); roots: mono-, di-, and tri-syllabic; stress: not predictable, phonemic

Costanoan (C): Mutsun  
 p t t<sup>y</sup> ṭ k ? i u  
 c c̣ e o  
 s ṣ<sup>y</sup> a  
 m n n<sup>y</sup>  
 l l<sup>y</sup>  
 w r y

Length contrasts affect syllable shape; syllable canon: CV(:)C; common root types: mono-, di-syllabic; stress: mostly morpheme-initial

(2) Sibilants

Rumsen	/s/	/s̥/	/š̥/
Mutsun	/s/	/s̥ʷ/	
Ch (Inez.)	/s/		/š̥/
Ch (Barb.)	/s/		/š̥/
Ch (Vent.)	/s/		/š̥/
Ch (North.)	/s/	/s̥/	
Salinan	/s/		/š̥/
Proto-Yokuts	/s/		/š̥/

Rumsen (Okrand 1980); Barb.  
Ch (Beeler 1976); Inez. Ch (Applegate 1972); Northern Ch (Klar 1973); Salinan (KT); Proto-Yokuts (Golla 1964); Vent. Ch. (KW)

(3) Es. Syntactic Traits

SOV: modifier + noun  
noun + postposition  
possessor + possessed  
consistent OV order  
SVO: head + relative clause

(4) Syntactic Characteristics

	<u>order</u>	<u>head + rel.</u>
Y	SOV	+
SC	SOV	+
JA	SOV	+
Ch (N)	VOS	+
Ch (Cent)	VOS	+
Ch (Is)	SVO	?
Sa	(below)	?
C	SVO	+

Sa has VS, VOS, VO and VSO word orders attested; these may be an artifact of translation from Spanish (KT). VOS is rare in Ch., as subj. fronting gives SVO (KW)

(5) Es. Noun Syntagma

modifier + (s̥) + stem + 1 + 2  
= non-class derivatives or class suffix + postposition or predicative -k  
s̥- co-occurs with possessed nouns, possibly only with body parts and kin terms

(6) Other Noun Syntagmas

Y	poss. - stem - dem - case/postp
SC	stem - dem
	{ numeral } { stative } poss
UA	poss - stem - { class } - case
	{ pl } { postp }
Ch (Barb)	dem - poss - <u>is</u> - stem -suf
Ch (Inez)	{ art } - poss - <u>is</u> - stem -suf
	{ agt } dem
Ch (Is)	art - poss - <u>is̥/is</u> - stem -suf
Sa	prep - { dem } - adj - stem - pl - poss
	{ art }
C	poss - stem - 1 - 2

In C, 1 = pl and other, 2 = postp and other; Sa data is from a text analysis of KT and Mason (1918)

(7) is Constructions

Es	poss - <u>is̥</u> - stem - X
Ch (Is)	poss - <u>is̥/is</u> - stem - X
Ch (Barb)	{ art } - <u>is</u> - stem - X
	{ poss }
Ch (Inez)	poss - <u>is</u> - stem - X

(8) \* -is- in Chumashan

	<u>alien.</u>	<u>inalien.</u>
Ch (Is)	-	+
Ch (Barb)	+	-
Ch (Inez)	-	+

Absent from Northern Ch (KK).

## (9) \*Ch inalienable:

mi-/si-poss-noun  
\*Ch alienable: article-poss-noun

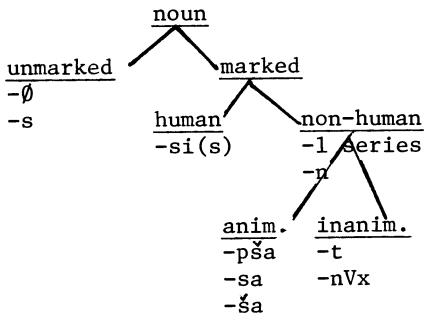
(10) Es. Postpositions

-nu	instrumental
-manu	comitative
-no	locative
-pam	illative (?)

Y -m	instrumental
Y -m	comitative
SC -mo	locative
SC -no	locative

(11) Nomic Compound Suffix

$[-\beta i] + [\check{c}i] = [-\beta it\check{c}i] / -pici/$   
 agt        dimin

(12) Es. Noun Classes(13) Es. Noun Class Endings

- x, -nVx, -sVx
- \* -s, -sa, -si(s)
- \* -š, -ša, (-sVx)
- \* -l, -lV, -lVx
- n, (-nVx)
- \* -t, -ta
- \* -pša

UA (Takic)	-ča (←-ša)	-la	-ta
	-š	-l	-t
UA(T'lb)	-∅	-l	-t

(14) Salinan Stem Final Consoants

- ∅ (-V)
- t, -ṭ, -ta
- L, (-lax)
- n, (-nax)
- s, -ša, -ša
- k
- p

N.B. The suffixes in -x are pl.

(15) Subject Pronoun Tactics

	<u>indep.</u>	<u>affixal</u>
Es	+	-
Y	-	+
SC	-	+
UA	+	-
Ch	-	+
Sa	-	+
C	+	-

Es, UA, and C have the optional of using a subject clitic.

(16a) Object Prefixes

Es	ε -	3rd obj
Es	mi-	indef obj
Es	ha-	3rd obj
*Ch	mi-	possessor
SC	m-	obviative
SC	n-	indef

(16b) Es. Plural Pronouns

we	le:-č
you	nem:e-č
they	la-č, lawa-ni

Cf. Y -č pl (to nouns, verbs and pronouns in some languages; LH)

(17) Transitive Verb Syntagmas

Es 1-2-s-stem-tense/aspect  
 1 and 2 are interchangeable, and may include: čili- hort/imp, e-, ha-, both obj markers; -s- is a transitive marker; tense/aspects: -lala fut, -nV continuative

Y subj/obj-s-stem-suf  
 SC subj/obj-stem  
 UA obj-stem-na-tiwa-suf (Steele 1979)

Ch(Inez) ...-subj-sV(s)-stem-...

Sa conj-neg-k-stem-pl-fut-subj  
 {p} {obj}  
 {t}

C stem-s-(obj)-tense

Sa k- is stative, while -p is active (KT); t- is a nom. UA -na is a caus and UA -tiwa is pass. Transitivity is not a syntactic category in Ch. (KW)

(18) čili- hort/imp -nV cont

Es	+	+
Y	?	-
SC	?	?
UA	-	+
Ch	+	?
Sa	?	- <u>no-</u> fut
C	-	-

(19) Stative Syntagma

Es stem-k(I)  
 Y \*kw-stem  
 SC stem-ku  
 UA stem-k  
 Ch(Inez) ?  
 Sa k-stem  
 C stem-tense

Statives marked like other verbs in Ch. (KW)

(20) Data Summary

1. CONSONANT TYPES: Es, C; maybe: Y-C, UA
2. CONSONANT SERIES: Es, C, UA, Y-C
3. VOWEL TYPES: Es, C
4. SYLLABLE SHAPE AS CV: Es, C, UA, Ch

## (20) continued

5. PENULTIMATE STRESS: Es, C, UA, Ch
6. SOV ORDER: Es, Y-C, UA
7. NOUN SYNTAGMA: Es, C, UA
8. POSS-IS-NOUN: Es, Ch
9. -M COMITATIVE/INSTR: Es, Y-C
10. -NV LOCATIVE: Es, SC
11. NOUN CLASS MARKERS: Es, UA, Sa(?)
12. BASIC SUBJ MARKING TACTICS: Es, UA, C
13. M(I)- INDEFINITE: Es, Ch, SC
14. OBJ-S-STEM (TR): Es, Y, Ch
15. ČILI- HORT/IMP: Es, Ch
16. -NV CONT: Es, UA
17. STATIVE SYNTAGMA: Es, SC, UA

(21) 3+ Member Sets

Es,C,UA,Ch:	(3), 4, 5
Es,C,UA,Y-C:	(1), 2
Es,C,UA:	7, 12
Es,Ch,Y-C:	13, 14
Es,UA,Y-C:	6, 17

Sets of Two Members

Es,C:	1, 3
Es,Ch:	8, 15
Es, UA:	11, 16
Es,Y-C:	9, 10

(22) N. Ch sumo 'one' \*UA sĩmĩ 'one'

## (23)

	Numic
	UTO-AZTECAN
ESSELEN	
	Takic

SALINAN

CHUMASH  
 YUMAN-COCHIMI

Subfamily names are in lower case.

## Notes

1 Thanks to the following persons for personal communications: Leanne Hinton (LH), Kathryn Klar (KK), Katherine Turner (KT), and Ken Whistler (KW). Other primary sources are given in the first paragraph of Section 1, Phonology. Other abbreviations include the following:

3rd	third person	inanim	inanimate
adj	adjective	indef	indefinite
agt	agentive	intr	intransitive
anim	animate	neg	negative
art	article	nom	nominalizer
caus	causative	obj	object
conj	conjunction	pl	plural
cont	continuative	poss	possessive
dem	demonstrative	postp	postposition
dimin	diminutive	prep	preposition
fut	future	subj	subject
hort	hortative	suf	suffix
imp	imperative	tr	transitive

Language names are abbreviated on Map 1.

2 The exception is perhaps the portion of Ventureño that was in historical contact with Uto-Aztecan, especially Kitanemuk (KK).

3 The factors mentioned here (consonant types, vowel types, syllable canon, consonant series, stress) are considered individually in the analysis section.

4 The distinction is actually preserved in Inezeño; there are two *-is-* markers with exactly opposite meanings: one alienable, one inalienable (Applegate 1982).

5 Esselen *-piši* or *pisi* may be compared to northern Uto-Aztecan forms as in (11). The resemblance is striking, and, while some of the Numic (Uto-Aztecan) languages place postpositions after the form *-pici*, it is not clear how old this formative is in Uto-Aztecan.

6 Chumashan languages have a noun formative usually termed "resultative", which has the form *-Vś*, but nothing that really resembles the Esselen or Uto-Aztecan systems.

7 The entire numeral system was displaced by this borrowing.

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