INITIATION AT SCHOOL
A Sayula Popoluca Text

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This text was recorded in 1956 by Gaudencio Hernández, a native speaker of Popoluca, a dialect of Zoque-Mixe, spoken in Sayula, Veracruz. Gaudencio was seventeen at the time of this recording and he relates here the very difficult and trying experience he went through in order to get started on his high school education. The Mexican town of Acayucan is five miles from Sayula on the trans-isthmus highway and many students from Sayula travel the distance by bicycle in order to attend the high school there. Gaudencio mentions that there were also four other students from Sayula going to high school there, and this is an interesting commentary on the progress of the Sayula Popoluca. Sayula, once isolated from Mexican life, was put into the mainstream of "civilization" by the construction of the trans-isthmus highway in 1950 which cut through Sayula. At this writing there are many from Sayula who have completed their high school education and some have gone on to university training! There are many from Sayula who now serve as school teachers in many rural areas of Veracruz state. However there are those who have dropped out of high school and one wonders if the initiation rites mentioned in this story contributed to this discouragement on the part of the pupil. It is interesting to learn that these rites have been discontinued.

The story is told in the third person since the speaker at the time didn’t want it known that he was referring
to himself. The hesitation form ayépah is not included in the free translation.

The orthography is phonemic. The dot following the vowel indicates vowel length, š is phonetically š. ě and č are affricates. ľ is a high, central, unrounded vocoid. ř is a trilled alveolar vibrant, r is a flapped alveolar vibrant.

**Initiation at School**


**Literal Translation**

1. Companions! I-will-tell-you- here one story-little where one young-man he-entered school secondary 2. That young-man here he-studied-first 3. and then when-he-finished here he-went to Acayucan-to 4. after he-went there then he-enrolled-himself 5. When-he-left-now there the-rest the-pupils they-began they-to-say-to-hm that they-will-take-him to park-edge 6. after they-took-him to there when-they-grabbed-him began they-to-cut-hair his-head 7. his-hair much-very they-took-off 8. they-left-to-him

**Free Translation**

Companions, I'll tell you a little story about a young man who went to high school after having studied here (in Sayula). Having completed his schooling here, he went to enroll himself in high school. As he was leaving that place, some of the students said they would take him to the park. There they grabbed
14. and then when they took him again another place there they put on him paint his head on 15. and then when they put paint this of young-man angry very 16. when he grabbed one he gave him one nose blow then he took out of him blood (he made him bleed) 17. when he too out blood he left them 18. they came again they grabbed him 19. when they grabbed him and began to cut off his hair. They cut it all except one tiny lock to which they tied a small vine. Then they said to him: "Mongolian! Mongolian!"

From there they took him to the church, and then all around the park making noise after him with a can. How the others laughed! Then the young man tried in vain to get away, but they grabbed him, and he couldn't do anything.

Then they took him somewhere else and put paint on his head. This made him very angry. He grabbed one of them and socked him in the nose causing it to bleed. Then he fled, but they chased him and grabbed him again. They

one piece-little-just 9. then that young-man they-tied-to-him one vine-little and began they-to-say-to-him mongolian! mongolian!

10. and then they-took-him to where they-were the-nuns 11. from there they-took-him to park-edge when they gave-turn but they-sounded-to-him can his behind-edge 12. the young-men they laughed how! 13. and then here of the young-man in vain he wanted to flee but since they grabbed him nothing he couldn't do
tángah imuniškawatu imóygaw bwéltta merkado?ám. 20. hem kéhama awá?nama igíkhó?nganu


him they-took-him-again they-gave turn market-edge 20. there really angry-now they-let-him-loose-now

21. after he-put-on-now cap-little he-came-now to here 22. came he-got-himself-a-haircut house-at Vicente Isidoro 23. there that one his-son he-cut-his-hair 24. he-made-him baldhead baldhead 25. he-passed-on-him razor 26. and then there that young-man they-cut-to-him his-eye-hair (his eye lashes) 27. that's-why now not-very-well he-walks 28. he-has one bicycle 29. and there where he-passes school they-say-to-him Verdugo because Verdugo that one is-a-wrestler of México-of and he-his-gourd-headed-also. 30. that's-why they-take-it for him

31. well and then now he-went-and-came-back yesterday Acayucan-to they-found-him-again he-saw-them the-rest the-young-men 32. after they-grabbed-him the-rest the-young-men the-same they-did 33. because there they-not-good-very

made him go around the market, but he was really getting angry now, so they let him go.

He put on a small cap and returned home (to Sayula). When he arrived, he went to the house of Vicente Isidoro to get a haircut. Vicente's son shaved his head with a razor, making him completely bald. The students had also cut the young man's eyelashes which is the reason that he cannot walk very well now.

He went back to school on his bicycle, and when he passed by they called to
always like-that they-enter and after they-grabbed-him that-one began they-to-gourd-head-him (to shave his head) but he-didn't-leave-himself (he didn't permit it) another more big-very began they-grabbed-him-again they-hit-him-hard and then they-asked-him they-said-to-him your-town-in there-is a-highway (query) here young-man he-said that yes he-said and how-many highway there-are he-said well there-is one he-said oh good he-said well that-then how that highway wide or little-little he-said well half wide began they-to-do-to-him one road his-head-on one piece wide and then that-then he-said that-then there-is theatre your-town-in (query) he-said yes he-said oh good well he-said how-many there-are 51. he-said there-are two him: "Verdugo!" (Verdugo is a bald wrestler from Mexico city. That's why they called him that.) Well, he had returned to Acayucan the day before when they found him again. He saw the others, and they grabbed him, and did the same again. They are not very nice there. That's what always happens when a person goes there (to school). After they had grabbed him, they began to shave his head. Another boy who was quite big didn't yield himself, so they all grabbed him and hit him hard. Then they asked him if there was a highway near his town. He said there was, so they asked him how many there were. He said there was just one, and they replied: Good! Then they said: "How is the highway? Is it wide, or very narrow?" He said it was kind of wide, so they cut him a road on his head, a nice wide piece. Then they said: "Is there a theatre in your
mečk 52. inim a pos nawatkáh 53. iwátkahaw mečk mečk īruedanáʔhat ašam tuʔk pantáyanáʔ 54. inim mit ayéphah inyíʔhópakniʔk yámay itp nat inihy kuyhúk o caʔítp 55. inim itp kuyhúk 56. inim pos yo kreo ke niʔk mas oy našʔahkaʔwáʔn ayé kuyhuknáʔ 57. kiš igíʔaktánga čúčiw igikupeʔpiʔhna nuʔpíhín

58. mit kiš inimp ayéphah inimp hínáp miʔiwáh 59. inim po tíngahátpe 60. inimp poesía inyímáh 61. inim tíngahátpéy 62. inim ti inhátp 63. inim netí 64. inim a po itp ti ichatwáʔn tuʔk kósa 65. inim po tíngahátp netí 66. inim ingahátp 67. inim kaʔ

52. he-said oh well we(incl.)-will-make-it 53. they-did-to-him two two wheels like one 54. he-said and that-then your-town-in those-of there-is how its-name (what's its name) forest or there-isn't (query) 55. he-said there-is forest 56. he-said well I think that that more good we(incl.)-knock-down- that forest 57. then when-they-grabbed-him began to-cut-hair-all-to-him all

58. and then he-said that-then he-said now you-will-sing 59. he-said but I-dont't-know-how 60. he-said poetry you-will-say 61. he-said I-don't-know-how-also 62. he-said what do-you-know 63. he-said nothing 64. he-said oh but there-is that you-know-how (you have to know it) one thing 65. he-said but I-don't-know nothing 66. he-said you-don't-know-how (query) 67. he-said no!

town?” When he said there was, they said: “Good! How many?” He told them there were two, and they said they would make them. They made him two, two wheels like screens. Then they said: “And in your town—what's its name?—is there a forest or not?” He said there was, but they said they thought it would be better to cut the forest down. So they held him tightly and began to cut off all his hair.

Then they told him to sing, but he said he couldn't. So they told him to recite a poem, but he replied that he didn't know one. Then they asked him what he did know, and he replied: “Nothing.” “Oh, but you must know something,” they said. “But I don't know anything,” he said. “You don't know how? “No.”
Then they grabbed him and piled on top of him and made him grunt. Then they said: "Sing that!" So he sang for them, but they didn't like that either, and said: "No, we don't want that song. Sing us a better one." So he began again and sang a better one. But they didn't want that either. "Say some poetry," they said. He protested that he didn't know how, so they said he should say from memory whatever he wanted.

He began saying that he didn't want to when they said: "Get down! Now
pú•htat ikumpalná? ituší•hkap ni?p k pú•ru kopakčimná? hem éckap


85. the-rest his-companions they-laughed-at-them because only gourd-head there they-danced

86. well and then that-then they-finished-now that another they-made-go-up the-same they-did 87. and now that young-man will-go Monday to-study there 88. here many-very they-have-gone-now to there 87. about four-now-probably 90. four pupils 91. I think that that more good-of there we(incl.)-go 92. but it-would-be-the-same here but when there-is money everywhere can you-go

dance!" So he got down and just the bald ones started to dance. They danced there in the school while their companions laughed at them.

When they had finished with them, they made another one go up and they did the same to him. The young man will go there on Monday to study. Very many have gone there from here. Probably about four students. I think it is better to go there. It would be the same here, but when there is money you can go everywhere.