Preserving the past: Timucuan voices in the 21st century

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The oldest texts in an indigenous language of the United States are written in Timucuan, an extinct language of north-central Florida and southeast Georgia. The catechisms, confessional, and other materials—totaling nearly one thousand pages—comprise a significant corpus, the composition of which has required a careful mix of philological and linguistic skills as Timucuan does not have a uniform spelling and sources are by more than one author and in more than one dialect.

How does one preserve and translate these important, early texts given the lack of native speakers and a reliable dictionary?

Our presentation describes an attempt to solve this problem by combining the best practices in philology and linguistics to create a modern database and dictionary, which facilitate grammatical analyses. We illustrate the results of our research with a new translation of the 1612 Catechism in Timucua and Spanish.