

PERFORMING FOR THE FUTURE. THE POWER OF ARTS AND THE MEDIA IN LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

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Resumo

Nesta contribuição, apresentarei um projeto em andamento no campo da revitalização da linguagem com várias línguas indígenas no México. O projeto, que tem estado ativo há mais de duas décadas, é intitulado Projeto de Revitalização, Manutenção e Desenvolvimento Lingüístico e Cultural (Revitalização da Língua e Cultura, Manutenção e Desenvolvimento) realizado em diferentes partes do México indígena por equipes de pesquisadores ativistas indígenas e não- indígenas, equipes interculturais. Seus principais objetivos são orientados para a capacitação e empoderamento de falantes de línguas indígenas mexicanas através de uma série de meios. Excepcionalmente, nos engajamos no desenvolvimento de métodos indiretos de revitalização da linguagem. Estes incluem o desenvolvimento de oficinas informais de audiovisual com as realizadas nas comunidades e nas línguas indígenas, especialmente com crianças. Nesses *workshops*, a idéia de revitalização indireta do PRMDLC baseia-se num modelo participativo informal, emergente e relacional. Revitalização indireta significa que o público tem a prerrogativa de intervir ativamente se a motivação assim o ditar, a qualquer momento, ainda que não seja obrigado. Desta forma, os oradores desenvolvem sua própria dinâmica com base na arte verbal indígena, incluindo trocadilhos, enigmas e outros gêneros literários orais que, por sua vez, foram produzidos em colaboração com eles em animações de alta qualidade que são apresentadas para desencadear a participação. Nesse sentido, os jogos de linguagem audiovisual permitem dinâmicas que vão além dos rituais escolares, geralmente repetitivos e desprovidos de conteúdos relevantes, tendendo a inibir o conhecimento, o que é conhecido como o ‘paradoxo escolar’. Assim, a produção de materiais de alta qualidade em diferentes formatos fornece *status* para a língua ameaçada, sendo os materiais produzidos em coautoria com equipes de artistas indígenas, com base em epistemologias locais e gêneros como enigmas, trava-línguas e contos. O projeto pretende inspirar um consumo cultural local, reunindo tradições antigas e novas em diferentes meios, favorecendo um processo de revitalização pelo menos incipiente, conferindo prestígio às línguas e culturas locais e potencializando a sua estética no mundo multimídia contemporâneo e circulando nos lugares apropriados das comunidade, como por exemplo, as famílias. Ao mesmo tempo, procura-se impactar a sociedade dominante, em uma dupla estratégia de empoderamento sociolingüístico e emancipação.

Abstract

In this contribution I will present an update of an ongoing project in the field of language revitalization with a number of indigenous languages in Mexico. The project, which has been active for over two decades, is entitled *Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural (PRMDLC)*. These include the development of informal audiovisual workshops with the communities in the indigenous language, especially children, based on an informal, emergent, relational model in which participation is the prerogative of the audience, allowing the dynamics to go beyond characteristic empty memoristic school rituals, which tend to inhibit knowledge. In this way the project pursues to inspire a local cultural consumption by bringing together old and new traditions in different media, in the end favoring a process of revitalization providing social prestige to the local languages and cultures by potentiating their aesthetics in contemporary multimedia formats that circulate on a community base level, while at the same time looking to impact mainstream society.

Keywords: Reversing language shift in Mexican endangered languages, Nahuatl, Maya, indigenous education and methodologies, arts and audiovisual media in language revitalization, coauthorships.

Introduction

In this contribution I will present an ongoing project in the field of language revitalization with a number of indigenous languages in Mexico. The project, which has been active for over two decades, is entitled *Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural: PRMDLC* (Language and Cultural Revitalization, Maintenance and Development Project) carried out in different parts of indigenous Mexico by teams of native and non-native research-activists, intercultural teams. Its main goals are oriented to the empowerment of speakers of Mexican indigenous languages through a number of means. Outstandingly, we have engaged with the development of indirect methods of language revitalization. These include the development of informal audiovisual workshops with the communities in indigenous languages, especially with children. In these workshops, the idea of indirect revitalization of the PRMDLC is based on an informal, emergent, and relational participatory model. Indirect revitalization means that the audience has the prerogative to actively intervene if motivation so dictates, at any time, and of course not obliged to. In this way speakers even develop their own dynamics on the basis of indigenous verbal art, including puns, riddles and other oral genres, which in turn have been collaboratively produced with them in high quality animations (cartoons) that are presented to trigger participation. The dissemination of high quality materials in different formats provide status to the endangered language and are produced in co-authorships with teams of indigenous artists, based on local epistemologies and genres such as riddles, tongue twisters and tales. In this respect, audio visual language games allow dynamics beyond characteristic empty repetitive school rituals, which tend to inhibit knowledge, conceived as the school paradox. Therefore the project pursues to inspire a local cultural consumption by bringing together old and new traditions in different media, in the end favoring a process of at least incipient revitalization, providing prestige to the local languages and cultures by potentiating their aesthetics in contemporary multimedia that are meant to circulate on community local key ambits as families while at the same time looking to

impact mainstream society, a double fold strategy of sociolinguistic empowerment and emancipation.

The Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural (PRMDLC)

This article seeks to present and discuss some of the main theoretical, methodological and empirical research questions to reverse language shift from a holistic, multidisciplinary perspective. Highlighting the powerful role of the arts and the media in language revitalization, based on an action research approach, not limited to Mexican languages ¹, the PRMDLC is developed in as many as possible indigenous regions in Mexico by teams of indigenous and intercultural researchers, film makers, painters and musicians and of course local groups of language activists and guardians. The PRMDLC has been active for over 2 decades in which span it has produced over 20 books in different indigenous tongues (Mexicano or Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya, Ñu Savi (Mixtec), among several others). Quantitatively, some of these books have even been selected by the national school system, with high runs that all together sum up to over 300,000 copies in notably 4 mayor Mexican indigenous languages (Mexicano or Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya, Ñu Savi (Mixtec), and Hñahnu (Otomi). It has also produced revitalization corpora in the form of a series of other materials available online, including audio, video, animation, documentary film, games, and most recently music (see <https://www.lenguasindigenas.mx>) ².

In the outset, let me stress that one of the main aims of the PRMDLC is to bridge the gap between (socio) linguistic research and revitalization. For this purpose, a research-action model, based on indigenous methodologies, with orally-rooted endangered languages is critically developed, aiming at advancing language reversal in different forms and formats and with different groups of people. In order to develop an efficient revitalization, maintenance, linguistic and cultural development of endangered languages in general and of those in the American continent in particular, specifically although not exclusively in Mexico, informal, innovative, emergent, even experimental indirect methods of revitalization which recover local epistemologies through the arts and the media together with local actors is conceived as strengthening the Mexican and other endangered linguistic threatened legacies. The efforts already displayed in several languages such as Nahuatl and Maya (mostly Yucatec, although some work has also been done in other Maya languages; cf. for instance Flores Farfán 2001, 2005, 2015) will be briefly reviewed, together with the recent developments of the PRMDLC. In sum, our approach is sustained on action research models, particularly on the idea of active or activist documentation (cf. Flores Farfán and Ramallo, 2010), grounded on indigenous methodologies, pursuing to bridge the gap between research and the development of language and cultural empowerment, most of all targeting linguistic revitalization ³.

1 And even other endangered languages in the American continent, as is the case with supporting an Ojibwe book, with versions in Kikapoo and Yucatec Maya, together with an online multilingual production which includes English and Spanish. For more details see: <http://www.linguapax.org/archives/gaye-giin-giganawaabamin-la-estrella-de-la-manana-3>

2 Also please visit https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCd0ZtAAIHPk_Qqlf-VY03Vg and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/348997718814172/?fref=ts>.

3 As we will see, in the PRMDLC researchers as myself are conceived as language revitalization facilitators, that pair with indigenous authors to produce tangible revitalization corpora, which recovers and array of complementary skills to produce significant culturally sensitive materials in minoritized languages.

Prior to talking of the project itself, at least some terminological clarification is needed. For instance the term “revitalization” stands out among a series of biological and medical metaphors that are non-critically assessed when talking about the work to favor the possibility of reversing language shift, a more accurate concept, while at the same time depicting a situation of language deprivation and loss. This term is applied indistinctly, at least in Mexico, to a number of very different situations in the reversing language shift praxis within a continuum of retention or displacement of endangered languages. It is important to notice that, if it is not to lose its meaning completely, strictly speaking the term revitalization should refer to situations where the language is in a critical position, although not reaching the tip of extinction, and at least some action can be taken in reversing language shift. This is opposed to a totally moribund or better dormant language where one or at most a handful of speakers exist, the so called last speakers of a language. In this case apparently at least it is most likely that only a more passive or received documentation effort can be carried out. Passive or so called comprehensive documentation is the dominant view in the field of language endangerment, even when it is indeed possible to revive a language. In the case of endangered languages a number of new phenomena historically emerge, such as neo-speakers, new types of individuals representing various language varieties related to the development of the language in different (re)vitalization contexts. Yet the topic of endangerment and revitalization alike is always a matter of degree. At times it is difficult to draw a clear cut line and in practical terms it is maybe not even necessary to distinguish between different types of endangerment, since in the same region often times (very) different degrees of displacement coexist in a not discrete and complex continuum. Even when the required or possible interventions and revitalization or reversal actions of course can vary, in our experience the same materials and approaches can be adapted to diverse situations of endangerment, ranging from so called moribund languages to tongues with still high degrees of vitality.

In general, in so far constrained to a comfortable zone, the recording of so called vanishing voices, not really albeit rhetorically thought for future generations, yet principally pursuing scientific aims, the received scope of language documentation is a pessimistic and even fatalist one, which often times even favors language shift. Commodification of linguistic data and their speakers is a usual practice in received documentary linguistics, reflecting different power differentials that in turn produce several different sociolinguistic arrangements in a complex set of relationships. For instance, in Mesoamerica last speakers of languages reach the point of becoming part of a linguistic market in which words become cash, competing for the authenticity of words and of course prices too. In such commodification context, ideologies of authenticity and purism are typically deployed as outstandingly manifested in lexical issues or lists of words. Importantly, this invites a most needed critique of such different ideologies that prevail even in the academic world and beyond, regarding for instance such set of terms as revitalization and approaches to endangerment such as documentation, which ultimately are part of institutionalized power differentials. For instance, the dominant approach towards endangerment is oriented to document and produce huge amounts of linguistic data of the threatened linguistic legacy of the world, with little involvement of the speakers of the language, while revitalization stresses the political interests of speakers in their languages beyond the languages themselves. This tension is one way to distinguish documentation from revitalization, although recently the documentation agenda is pursuing to bridge the gap between both agendas, speaking of documentation with revitalization in

mind (Amery 2009), or of an active or even an activist documentation and other similar approaches (cf. for example Flores Farfán and Ramallo 2010).

All in all, if we are to contribute to the future of endangered languages, it is evident that speakers should be at the core of our efforts. This invites reflecting on different issues, such as challenging the agenda of priorities and methods in linguistic and other social research practices. In this respect, our work inscribes itself in these and other paradigms along the lines of “committed linguistics” (Hale 1992) or “activist anthropology” (Hale Ch. 2008, 2006a). Not conceiving its revitalization practices as a bottom down perspective which often times is linked to a paternalistic empowerment (see Edwards 2006), such as the one eloquently associated to the Mexican State. On the contrary, as we will see, our approach departs from a bottom up actor engagement through a collaborative methodology in the form of co-authorships. Even when it is almost impossible to totally suppress power differentials, we pursue to level power relationships in the making of research while fostering micro language planning initiatives⁴. The comparison between e.g. prescriptive or descriptive, documentary and revitalization linguistics illuminates different approaches and (conflicting) interests as expressed in the making of linguistic research, pinpointing to different political agendas.

Some other ideas that inspire our work include important approaches and distinctions, such as a therapeutic (Fishman 1991) or even preventive linguistics (Crystal 2000); generally underdeveloped aspects in linguistic research to which we also propose to contribute with our work. Relatively speaking and inspired by Catalan and Basque theoretical and practical sociolinguistics, our work could qualify as *militant* or *activist sociolinguistics*, which in the case of Catalonia is manifested in a number of facts, such as writing in Catalan (cf. for instance the series of works published by Toni Mollà e.g. 1997) and the efforts oriented to “normalize” the language, such as putting the language in use in new domains, such as scholastic and administrative settings, in strategies here termed “inverse monolingualism” and referred to in the abovementioned contexts as processes of “normalization”.

Due to the complexity of the field, this article only invites an examination of some of the abovementioned issues, which I consider fundamental for an efficient linguistic policy with

⁴ What we could term the basic or permanent team of collaborators include two speakers of Mexican languages, Cleofas Ramírez Celestino (Mexicano or Nahuatl) and Alejandra Cruz Ortiz (Ñu savi or Mixtec), which in the institutional ambit are officially mentored by the author of these lines. From an administrative point of view, they are considered “bilingual technicians”, the label of the job description. Such an administrative profile of this “permanent” staff also means that we 3 receive a salary from the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social*, CIESAS (Centre for Investigations and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology), our workplace. In my case the bureaucratic figure is researcher professor, and coordinator of the Victor Franco laboratory of CIESAS. These bureaucratic figures and hierarchies have been very difficult to overcome, and actually constitute, in the case of the abovementioned speakers, part of a neocolonial legacy inherited from the very inception of the institution; 40 years ago, when they were merely eloquently considered “informants” of the “bosses” of the at that time recently installed linguistics program. Even when we inherited such structures, long term efforts to leave colonial legacies behind have included liberty of these speakers to define their own research agendas, monetary compensation in terms of royalties of some of the commercial books that we have also inserted in the global market, and recognition of their abilities on an equal footage with other participants, not to speak of other type of human relationships, such as ritual kinship and friendships. Many other participants are reimbursed or compensated (or both) in different ways, ranging for paid freelance participation (for example in the case of the animators which produced the Maya and Nahuatl cartoons utilized in the field as stimulus), restituting and dignifying different types of participation in several other forms, such as freely bringing back materials to the community base via the alluded workshops and direct donations. Apart from literate and collecting texts in her own language, Cleofas is a talented native painter of amates (bark wood paper, for examples see below) which have illustrated several materials of the PRMDLC; whereas Alejandra is actively engaged in collecting, transcribing and even creating several texts in her heritage language. My role in the project includes securing funds, coordinating and facilitating workshops, documenting and recreating oral and written genres, among other activities, such as promoting and conceiving new materials and revitalization initiatives, as those depicted more in detail in this article and elsewhere (see for example Flores Farfán, 2011). Other key participants of the project include Marcelo Jiménez Santos, a well-known Maya artist and cartoonist in Quintana Roo (a state which is part of the Yucatec Peninsula, in Mexico), Fidencio Briceño Chel, a Maya linguist, with whom we have produced 5 books (see references), with audio and animations, a kit used in the participatory model in action in the Yucatec region.

endangered languages, as suggested by contexts that differ greatly from the Mesoamerican one, such as the abovementioned ones. In this regard, the examples I present here are not reduced to the implementation and the promotion of an alleged necessity of a written tradition ---a very important language vindication bastion in the case of written cultures such as the Catalanian---, which has been the pulpit of official intervention regarding linguistic policies in many Latin American countries, and particularly in Mexico, together with a bottom down schooling approach, or what I call “the school paradox”, a reductionist approach to language planning (see Flores Farfán e.g. 2005, 2011).

Mutatis mutandis, in Mexico the introduction and, especially, the efficient use of writing in oral cultures have been historically circumscribed mainly to the sphere of organizations such as religious SIL-like proselytism. Although it has been limited to a group of key individuals in the dissemination of evangelical, babelic ideologies, it has had a crucial impact on transforming the communal relations within the communities themselves and, without oversimplifying the complex internal conditions of these communities, it has even given rise to critical conflicts within them, as for instance in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, where some religious expulsions have ended in bloodsheds. Let us emphasize that such efficient introduction of the written script for religious proselytism has been a means for an oral practice and not for favoring yet alone establishing literacy as a social function in the numerous communities where the SIL has worked, not only in Mexico, but, we believe, worldwide.

With the purpose of elucidating or at least suggesting options to smooth the path for an efficient linguistic planning in such contexts, a number of significant examples will be presented which, in the light of our experience, reveal key issues for an efficient language planning that highlight the use and appropriation of the arts and the media in language revitalization. These examples include the Nahuas of the Alto Balsas, Guerrero, and the Mayas of Yucatan, groups with whom after 2 decades we are still currently working in the production and dissemination of a “revitalizing” corpus, recovering local epistemologies and recreating them in different formats together with the active collaboration of speakers themselves. Among the issues revealed by these case-studies are some complex, interesting questions such as how to efficiently involve the speakers in the reversion of language displacement, and which are the linguists’ responsibilities and roles in the maintenance or displacement of native languages. As suggested, I start from the assumption that models and methodologies for linguistic surveys and descriptions generally evidence the differences and most of all conflicts between the agendas of researcher and researched. Our approach seeks particularly to develop strategies to close the gap between native agendas as opposed to the received guidelines underlying research agendas, decolonizing anthropology and linguistics, thus mitigating political and ideological dissonances or sociolinguistic distance, pursuing leveling at times extremely asymmetrical power differentials (for a brief analysis of such power issues in field linguistics cf. Flores Farfán and Ramallo 2010).

All these issues deserve to be examined separately, and although in the academic sphere they confine us to outline a research program, they also invite us to reflect on useful ways of intervention for and most of all *with* speakers themselves. For instance, a product derived from this discussion would outline a research guide and a field intervention that motivate speakers to develop active or activist

documentation, and move them to recover and recreate specific endangered languages, as well as to retain and even develop their heritage languages through different creative means, as we will outline in the following review of our project.

The revitalization, maintenance, linguistic and cultural development project (PRMDLC)

The linguistic planning model related to the PRMDLC developed over 2 decades now (see Flores Farfán 2011) seeks to establish alternatives for the reversion of language shift, characteristic in different degrees all situations of most minoritized languages, not only Mexican. For this purpose, we posit a series of necessary yet never sufficient conditions for the reversion of language shift that are related to “empowerment”, understood as the speakers’ active participation and appropriation of the initiatives and strategies favoring the possibility of strengthening endangered languages and cultures. This means among other things increasing the number of activists involved in developing community based revitalization practices as well as facilitating the availability of culturally sensitive materials, together with expanding and recreating existing genres and creating new ones and even new linguistic varieties and domains of use. All of which impacts the social and political status of the threatened languages. In this context empowerment is not a static dichotomy where the researcher has power which s/he grants to speakers or where the speaker does not have any power. In this respect, in our experience setting communities of practice (cf. Meyerhoff, 2004) for the production of revitalizing materials produce empowerment effects in a number of ways that I will briefly touch upon in this paper.

As for one thing, endangered languages gain visibility when recovering and putting them in contemporary formats, overcoming ideas that heritage language are “things” of the “past”, which recreate native art in different media, including although not limiting such materials to the printed and written form, but rather appealing to a multimedia and multimodal approach which includes visual and audio means, recovering indigenous own favorite epistemologies. In this respect, we have for instance produced and are producing a library of picture books in several languages with audio which at the same time are audio coloring books for children (see some examples below). These audio-coloring-books are conceived under different premises which in turn are thought as having a number of positive implications. Picture books allow the written text to “breathe” and gain space, promoting “slow”, enjoyable reading, and thus highlighting its attractive, joyful nature, capturing and even seducing the users’ eyes. In so far the text is administered in low “dosages”, the child or other reader is not overwhelmed with the book, a fact especially valuable in oral cultures⁵. Briefness is conceived as a very interesting resource in oral (and even written) literature. In the PRMDLC such characteristics are productively recovered and constructively exploited in order to highlight the aesthetics and productivity of the languages, a feature deliberately recovered in the production of the audio-coloring books. Let us provide a couple of examples.

As I have pinpointed elsewhere (e.g Flores Farfán, 2008), notice how in for instance the tongue twister of the scissors (1.1.) one of the main features of the Nahuatl language is fully displayed, its polysynthetic nature. It will suffice to say that this is one of the main shifts in Nahuatl varieties

5 For some examples visit: http://books.google.com/books?id=VK8CZvY52gC&pg=PT43&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false.

which are losing ground and becoming highly endangered, reaching the tip of extinction, a powerful reason to vindicate them via these materials. Among other traits as reduplication and agglutination, polysynthesis has to do with resources such as incorporation, therefore with the possibility of Nahuatl lexical coinage, as these contemporary examples eloquently show:

1. Φ -*Pitso-naka-meka-kwitlax-kol-kimil-li* ⁶

3sg-pig-meat-cord-intestines-twist-bundle-abs

“Pig sausage”

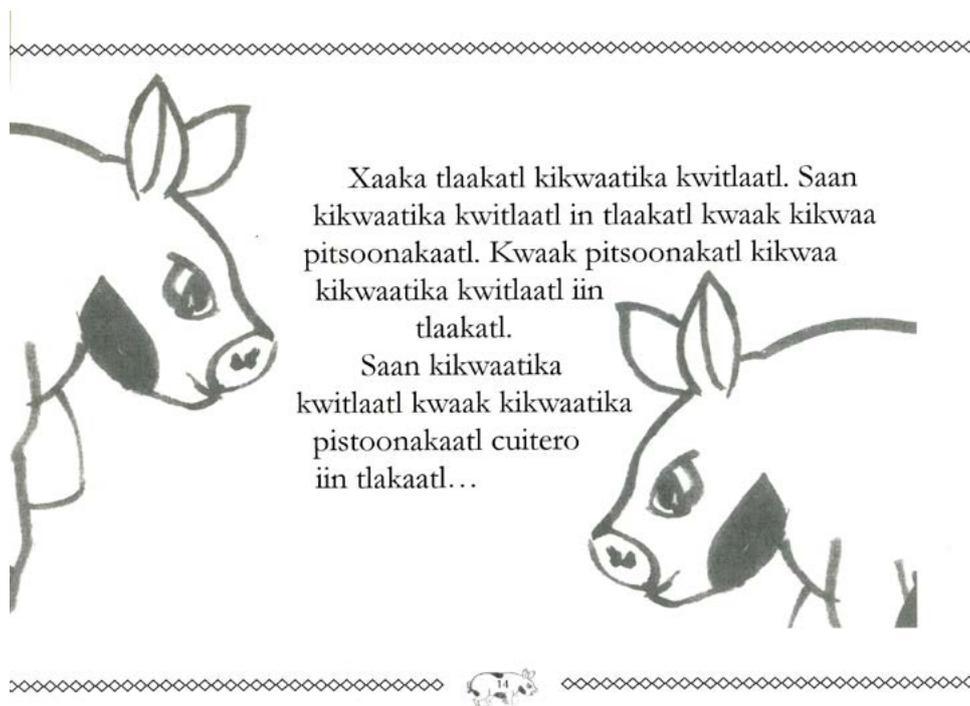


Illustration 1

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. and C. Ramírez (2008) *Tsintsiinkirianteenpitskontsiin*, México: Obra Social Caixa Sabadell-Fundación Aurèlia Figueras-CIESAS-Ajuts Vila de Masquefa: 14.

⁶ I gratefully acknowledge *Yohualli Nezahualcoyotl*, Nahuatl speaker and activist from Tezcoco, in the State of Mexico, for providing me with this example.



Illustration 2

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. and C. Ramírez (2008) *Tsintsiinkirianteenpitskontsiin*, México: Obra Social Caixa Sabadell-Fundación Aurèlia Figueras-CIESAS-Ajuts Vila de Masquefa: 15.

1.1.Φ-*Tsin-tsiin-kirian-tsiin-tsoon-kwaa-kwaa-φ*

3sg-Buttocks-dim-type of tree-dim-hair-red-eat=bite-abs⁷

What is a thing that has buttocks, a trunk like a tree, and bites the hair from you and me?

“Scissors”

⁷ Abbreviations are as follows: abs: absolute, aux: auxiliary, dim: diminutive, imp: impersonal, int: interrogative, li: ligature, obj: object, pres: present, red: reduplication, ref: reflexive, sg: singular.



Illustration 3

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. and C. Ramírez (2008) *Tsintsiinkiriantsoonkwaakwaa...*, México: Obra Social Caixa Sabadell-Fundación Aurèlia Figueras-CIESAS-Ajuts Vila de Masquefa: 18



Illustration 4

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. and C. Ramírez (2008) *Tsintsiinkiriantsoonkwaakwaa...*, México: Obra Social Caixa Sabadell-Fundación Aurèlia Figueras-CIESAS-Ajuts Vila de Masquefa: 19

(Notice that these tongue twisters are at the same time riddles and neologisms)

These language games have been around for several centuries –they were already in use in Prehispanic times. Their use at the community level is indeed an outstanding way to measure the vitality of the language and types of speakers. An example of an old tongue twister which is presented in the section of riddles of the Florentine Codex is:

2. *Zan zan tleino*

Only only int

Guess one and only one riddle!

Φ -*Tepetozca-tl* ϕ -*qui-toca- ϕ - ϕ*

3sg-valley-abs 3sg-obj-follow-pres-sg

ϕ -*Mo-ma-ma-tlaxcal-lo-ti-w- ϕ*

3sg-ref-red-hand-tortilla-imp-lig-aux-sg

Around the valley she strolls, like a woman making tortillas she flows!

Papalotl

“Butterfly”

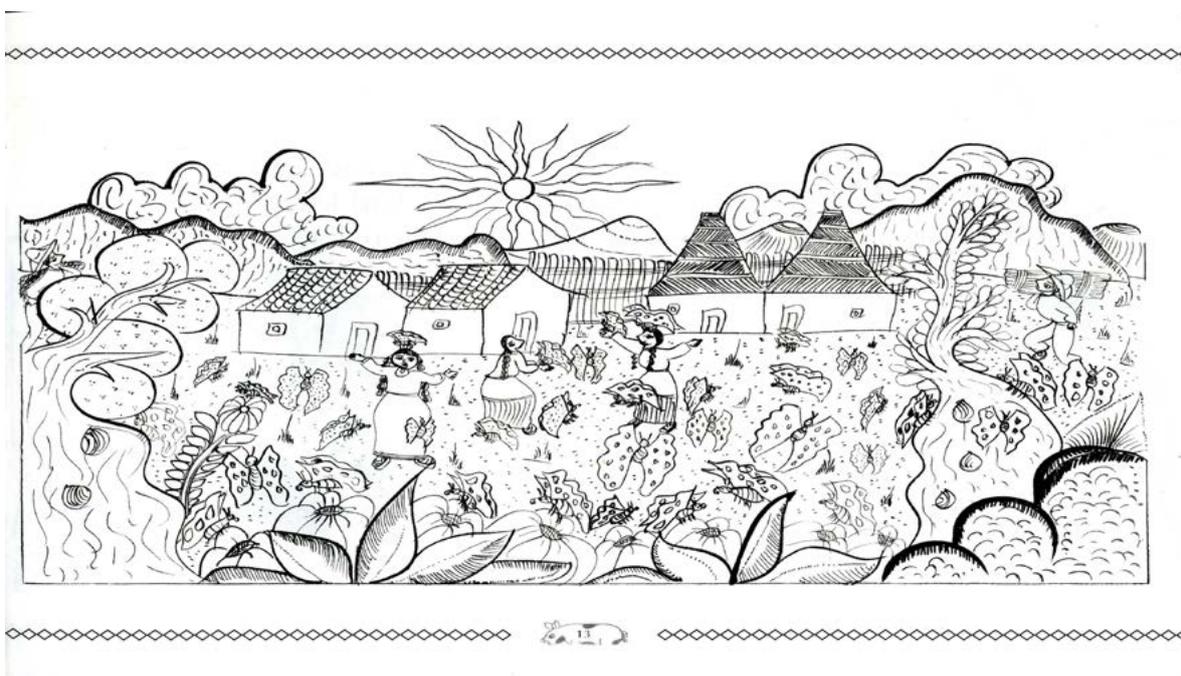


Illustration 5

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. and C. Ramírez (2008) *Tsintsiinkirianteenpitskontsiin*, México: Obra Social Caixa Sabadell-Fundación Aurèlia Figueras-CIESAS-Ajuts Vila de Masquefa: 13

Bringing back to the communities and even recreating these types of materials is a basic aim of the PRMDLC, interrupting the colonial legacy which gate keeps this knowledge in the academic realm. In verbal art cultures of several Mexican communities, such short texts stimulate the development of native interactive linguistic games which are highly valued from an actors' perspective as speech 'contests' or shibboleths, native ways of enjoying linguistic abilities and genres. Against an ethnocentric (written or only-school oriented) perspective in which riddles or tongue twisters and the like are considered 'minor' genres, 'children' games, such genres constitute historical bastions of native socialization and reproduction of the native language and culture, identity games in practice.

Consider for instance that in Prehispanic times to become a Maya *Dz'ul* ('lord, prince') the potential candidate had to go through a series of passage rites, including solving riddles and quizzes that a *X-men* (Shaman) posed, such as 'find a fire fly licked by a jaguar': the potential young *Dz'ul* would have to come back smoking a cigar⁸. Consider a Maya contemporary example:



Illustration 6

Source: Briceño Chel, F. et al (2013) *Adivinanzas mayas yucatecas. Na'at le ba'ala paalen. Adivina esta cosa ninio.* México: Artes de México: 11.

8 See Alfredo Barrera Vázquez and Silvia Rendón (1963).



Illustration 7

Source: Briceño Chel, F. et al (2013) *Adivinanzas mayas yucatecas. Na'at le ba'ala paalen. Adivina esta cosa ninio*. México: Artes de México: 12.

As suggested, at the same time such short, concise texts such as tongue twisters and riddles also pose the question of “poor vs. good”, “fluent”, “competent”, “best” speakers or even “owners”, “guardians”, “possessors” of the language. From the native perspective these types of speakers have their own denominations; highlighting their cultural salience and prestige: for instance in Balsas Nahuatl such a top speaker is a *Tentetl*⁹, literally a “lip-(ten-) rock (*tetl*)”, someone that has lips as a rock, figuratively speaking someone that has a “hard mouth”; namely, an outstanding, fluent, eloquent, speaker. In this respect, a whole typology of speakers is at stake from the point of view of the communities themselves, anchored in the performance of genres such as riddles and tales, not to speak of the highly respectful honorific speech¹⁰, which constitute clearly marked sociocultural behaviors differentiating speakers, indexicalizing sociolinguistic power as powerful ways of reproducing a sense of identity and prestige in predominantly oral cultures.

Other features that should at least be briefly elaborated as part of the presumed empowerment construction of the PRMDLC include favoring co-authorships, in which the work of native artists and speakers gains visibility and public recognition and economic income, even when remuneration

⁹ This Nahuatl word in Prehispanic times meant the precious turquoise jewel that members of the elite, priests, and of course the Tlatoani, ‘top ruler’, in so called Aztec culture, used to symbolize the power of discourse and the discourse of power in ancient Mexico.

¹⁰ For an example see Ramírez Celestino and Flores Farfán, 2008.

is not the principal motivation of these collaborative structures of participation, but rather the goal of maintaining and reinforcing the use of the heritage language and culture. In turn, often times invited audiences tend to appropriate and recreate in their own dynamics the workshops, nurturing them with new genres (e.g. performing children's songs) or developing their own tongue twisters or other linguistic games and activities.

Another evidence of good revitalization practices is the generosity of Maya activists and local authorities to develop the workshops; for instance, artist Marcelo Jiménez Santos, not only donates part of his work in the form of coloring versions of the full color books to produce the coloring versions; he directly organizes workshops in different Maya communities *ad honorem*, as does the other principal co-author of similar initiatives and materials, Fidencio Briceño Chel. The past (children's voices for the riddle animation ¹¹, from Tihosuco, a Maya town in the Yucatan) and recent additions of other Maya authors in the production of voice for as many as possible of the books produced for the Maya area ¹² suggest that the PRMDLC has reinforced inter-generational transmission at the household via at least some of the materials of the project. New directions in constructing good practices in Maya Yucatec revitalization, such as the production of classical music based on old Maya narratives as the *Chilam Balam* have also been achieved ¹³. Ongoing work in progress includes understanding and reinforcing the impact that new emergent musical genres, such as Maya Rap and Reggae, has in the revaluation and continuity of Maya Yucatec (for critical advances in this respect, see Cru, 2015).

Other interesting observed revalorization facets of the PRMDLC are the relatively independent life of a book (or any other product) that is launched to the field as cultural sensitive materials meant to revitalize the language on an independent basis, in so far entailing cultural sensitive 'artifacts' or cultural sensitive products, as the ones produced collaboratively with indigenous artists, linguists and activists, the user establishes an open relationship with the product itself; just as an infant does with a toy, depending on the actors' own prerogatives linked to their own agency in line with our open indirect revitalization methodology, which after all is open to speakers own constructions. As with the workshops, this is to say that the structure of participation is not meant to be imposed on the intervening actors. Even the definition of who can participate is quite open to different audiences and types of speakers, including among others owners of the language alongside with neo-speakers as represented by children and the youth. Books are thus thought of as stimuli to deploy open activities (individually or not), consonant with the local familiar language genres, and therefore frequently include kits of interactive materials such as the alluded coloring books, often with audio and animation referents too, both physical or online (see <http://lenguasindigenas.mx/libros/item/209-advdivinanzas.html>)

11 Cf. credits in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwmglUg0J0> This animation has almost 35,000 visits, only after the Nahuatl riddle animation, which was the first to be done –about 15 years ago– and reaches almost 45,000 visits. In it also voices from children and other speakers from San Agustín Oapan, a town which is a bastion of Nahuatl vitality in the Balsas region, can be heard, together with one of the two at the time very young female collaborators, daughters of Cleofas Ramírez Celestino, the Nahua *tlacuila* (painter) of the PRMDLC already mentioned. It is worthwhile recalling that since Felix Ramírez Celestino participated producing voice for these animations, she activated her speaking knowledge of Nahuatl, demonstrating that language revitalization is indeed possible. Today at her mid-30s, she works as a Nahuatl teacher and is an active speaker of Xalitla's variety of Balsas Nahuatl (for more details on the Balsas region see e.g. Flores Farfán, 1999).

12 Outstandingly, Flor Canché Teh, who enthusiastically also donated her work, together with producing a critical albeit positive diagnosis of the "preliminary" outcomes of the first decades of the project at the community level, evaluating them positively. Cf. Flores Farfán J.A. 2015.

13 Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaEhJJoZvg>

Maya	Na'at le ba'ala' paalen: Juntúul maák ya'ab u xikin utia'al u yu'ubik tuláakal tsikbal.
✿	
Chuj	
✿	
Mam	Ay jun te' te' nab'a chikinnhej kilani, syab' masaniil ab'ix.
✿	
Tsotsil	Ju fa tse' aje ta xhkvi kyaqil ti'b' ntsatab'i' ila'ta kawb'e'ts to twi'.
✿	
Tzeltal	Yepal xchikin, buyuk cha'i lo'il.
✿	
Q'anjob'al	Ay itul lumalfik bayal ya yaay k'op ya yaay stoioil te mach'a ya yak' mantal.
✿	
	Jun te'ej tol txikineik'al chi yab'k'al tzet chi ali.

Pilich • Ate' wanakaste • Tse' wanakaste • Pit • Pit • Te' wanakaste

Illustration 8

Source: Briceño Chel, F. et al (2010) *¡Ach unin, nanab'eli!* México: CIESAS, CONACyT, Generalitat de Catalunya, Linguapax, ADLI: 8.

URL: <http://lenguasindigenas.mx/audios/item/270-cd.html>



Illustration 9

Source: Briceño Chel, F. et.al (coord.) (2010) *¡Ach unin, nanab'eli!* México: CIESAS, CONACyT, Generalitat de Catalunya, Linguapax, ADLI: 9.

URL: <http://lenguasindigenas.mx/audios/item/270-cd.html>

With these ideas in mind, a facet our intercultural team has also been developing materials to sensitize mainstream society regarding the value of first languages and cultures. This approach has a double positive effect on indigenous speakers, since valuing their language among mainstream society promotes respect among the wider population, contributing to change very common and most negative ideologies regarding indigenous people and their languages. Impacting both indigenous and Spanish-speaking population, the society as a whole, we have for instance developed a 3D high quality animation entitled *Las Machincuepas del Tlacuache*¹⁴ (The Opossum's Somersaults,) in which the opossum, the Mesoamerican trickster who donated fire for humanity to exist, tours through the Mexico City metro deciphering the Nahuatl names of a number of stations and introducing the lay man to the Nahuatl language and (ancient) culture. In this product also curiosity and self-study is stimulated, inasmuch the user is quizzed with a number of options to unravel on his-her own, always in a joyful spirit, posing "research" questions for the audience. An example is the origin of the word *gachupin* "Spaniard" in Mexican Spanish, which is a matter of debate. All this is done providing the user with a number of tips to learn Nahuatl based on his already existent knowledge of the several Nahuatl names that dwell in his Mexican variety of Spanish and urban (or not) sociolinguistic landscapes¹⁵.

Another such material is the *Axolotl*, "Water monster", an amphibian endemic to Mexico and parts of North America, which has neoteny, the capacity to reproduce as a larva, as one of its most astonishing features. This is a good example of a multi-cultural product which has a Nahuatl, Spanish, English and even Catalan versions online¹⁶. The Axolotl story is about the origin of the sun and the moon, one of the foundation myths of Mexican (indigenous) society in which one god, *Xolotl*, tried to escape from being sacrificed, becoming Axolotl when trapped by the god of the wind, *Ehecatl*, precisely in the water when trying to escape. In turn, this material introduces a documentary about the situation of the Xochimilco lake, to which Axolotl is emblematic of its endangered status since the Axolotl itself is in a critical condition due to the high levels of the lake's pollution and only breed in captivity¹⁷.

14 Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Drzu0eT8wUk>. An expanded printed version also exists, see <https://books.google.com.mx/books?id=iofH6jQqI-0C&dq=las+machincuepas+del+tlacuache&hl=es&sitesec=reviews> Creators of this material include animators and film makers, Jaime Cruz and his team of *Barlovento* Films, with whom we have produced 5 professional animations based on indigenous oral legacies, including *Tlakwatsin*, *el Tlacuache* (Opossum) *Aalamatsin*, *The Mermaid*, *Axolotl*, and two set of riddles in Nahuatl and Maya, respectively. All this material is available on line, and altogether has received over 100,000 visits (see: <https://www.youtube.com/user/LabLenguasY Cultura/> These materials have also been directly donated to community members in the form of VHS (when they were still in use, recall that the PRMDLC has about 20 years operating), and more recently DVDs, since in not all communities internet is available or is of a very poor quality.

15 Cf. <http://www.cieras.edu.mx/jaff/multimedia.html> or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8epS5wqlq0E>

16 Cf. <http://www.youtube.com/user/LabLenguasY Cultura#p/u/14/ZD4mytVYG3o>. For more materials produced by our lab, including music and animations in indigenous languages, please visit <http://www.youtube.com/user/LabLenguasY Cultura>.

17 Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0WPB6dZOSE>



Illustration 10

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. (2017) *In Axolotl. El Ajolote*. México: CNDH, CIESAS, LINGUAPAX, ADLI.



Illustration 11

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. (2017) *In Axolotl. El Ajolote*. México: CNDH, CIESAS, LINGUAPAX, ADLI.



Illustration 12

Source: Flores Farfán, J.A. (2017) *In Axolotl. El Ajolote*. México: CNDH, CIESAS, LINGUAPAX, ADLI.

These examples have shown that recovering the arts and the media to produce high quality materials in multimodal formats is an excellent way to influence the public life of endangered languages, based on emerging empowerment methodologies built with the actors of the processes themselves. For this purpose, our interventions not only include the production of the materials as an isolated effort, but rather develop strategic workshops to disseminate them both at the indigenous communities and mainstream society and favor revaluation and revitalization processes. The workshops are conceived as places for the innovative recreation of indigenous languages, from a relational, interactive, bottom up perspective. Our *Modus Operandi* is as follows. Preferably in especial community celebrations such as the Patron's feasts, in coordination with local authorities, we present ourselves offering showing a movie for the community, especially to children. The movies are animations of tales (e.g. *Tlakwaatsiin*, "The Opossum" *Aalamatsiin*, "The Mermaid") and *Saasaanilteh* "riddles" (all in Nahuatl, although we have also developed this activity in the Maya Yucatec area with similar products)¹⁸, of course all carried out in the indigenous language. Participation is open to all. Frequently children attend the workshops together with a sibling or even one of their grandparents, a unique opportunity to spontaneously favor the possibility of strengthening intergenerational transmission of the endangered language. The dynamics are quite simple. We (at least 3 leads, one operating the machines, a speaker conducting the workshop and one more supporting "staff") show the movie(s) and then ask for opinions in the case of the tales or answers in the case of riddles (or both). It is telling enough that at the beginning the children are pretty silent and behave as if they were attending school. Since participation is a prerogative of the audience and stimulated by granting the audio-coloring-books or the animated videos to those who reply to the riddles, provide new ones or share other versions or comments of the tales (or new ones), the audience swiftly changes from a school presentation of the self to a more open, own agency oriented, collaborative spontaneous and familiar

participation, which becomes an indirect way of revitalizing the language and culture. In turn, this provides status to the endangered tongue since all the products are on prestigious social media, shown on TVs monitors or on the internet, something fairly uncommon for indigenous children, triggering joy (in the form of e.g. smiles, laughter or comments), curiosity and enthusiasm, contributing to the reevaluation of the endangered language.

Without the active participation of speakers themselves such ‘empowerment’ exercises would not transcend the academic sphere, or be left as mere academicism or a patronizing practice, which can be analyzed as a part of the colonial legacy of societies, especially in the Mexican context. Empowerment is not necessarily or exclusively conceived as a process whereby the population is made aware of its endangered status. As the examples of the materials and the workshops suggest a more positive and optimistic view on endangered languages is possible, a proactive one. Even if it is taken for granted that research must turn first and foremost to the actors themselves, it must also be developed jointly and dialogically, even reaching beyond the group on which the “revitalizing” intervention is initially focused (e.g. reaching also mainstream society or groups of the community that are not involved at early intervention stages). For instance, an empowerment exercise could include favoring the use of stigmatized contact varieties such as indigenous Spanish with public purposes such as teaching indigenous tongues, a resource and not a problem approach (Ruiz 1984). Or linking these heteroglossic varieties to (written or not) literary or musical productions, which legitimizes marginal identities within prestigious institutions and media, as has become the case with Chicano speech or Afro-Americans ebonics in US universities, as is albeit marginally being explored in the Latin American context, in their use in the literary realm ¹⁹.

Often times from the (e.g. Mexican) States’ vision, linguistic empowerment is frequently conceived as a compensatory form which timidly or even obscurely justified on the acknowledgement of historical oppression and prejudices associated with colonization and injustice, a fatal conscience demanding to restore and at times even repatriate at least part of the pillaged heritage, as in the case of reservations for first peoples in the US or Australia. This concession implies a passivity ideology regarding ethnic minorities which ultimately perpetuates an unequal, paternal and colonialist conception denying the capacity and agency of the “weak”, looking to prevent and deny the oppressed from “solving” their own ethnolinguistic dilemmas. In this way, for instance schools are financed which will theoretically empower “unprotected” groups, reducing intervention to the possibility of writing and schooling endangered languages and their speakers, holding a deficit approach, all obsessions which originally belong to the colonizer and not in principle to the colonized. More often than not, in the case of the Mexican State this top down approach towards indigenous people in practice subordinates indigenous languages and cultures to translating the national standardized curriculum or the National constitution and singing the national anthem at schools, only allowing a couple of hours of the endangered language instruction per week. At the bottom line, such minimizations or reductions in practice introduce and foster schools as bastions of assimilation. No matter how intercultural or bilingual they are presumed to be, in Mexico and beyond schools have historically been THE place for paternalistic empowerment in modern ‘politically correct’ times or historically the *loci* of open assimilation. Of course leaving

out other forms of cultural and linguistic survival which in effect exist as active responses to the forces of assimilation and globalization of the groups involved and that could be incorporated in another type of (alternative) schools or learning approaches, such as most recently the use of social networks as Facebook to promote indigenous languages and cultures, as we will also see in more detail below when talking about the *amate*. All in all, recall Fishman's (1991) statement that there are more important spheres than others to reverse language shift, outstandingly the house hold, as opposed to school, with which we conclude that reversing language shift cannot be reduced to a formal educational 'empowerment', less yet isolated from the specific contexts that favor it in a holistic, more context sensitive ways (see Flores Farfán 2006).

As I have suggested, our approach to empowerment is based on a different conception, opposed to the compensatory paternalistic view, and is related to an intercultural conception that assumes the "powerless" to have and practice active responses against the assaults of the larger society –a counter power agency– which is frequently manifested in the way communities themselves independently mobilize against disruption projects designed from the outside with which a committed academia would relate consonantly as solidary activists. Maybe the best example of this is the case of the Balsas Nahuas, who successfully opposed the construction of a dam in their territory, not to mention the Zapatista movement, although they are by far not the only ones (cf. Hindley, 1999).

So far we have outlined some of the most outstanding characteristics of the groups with which we have developed a "revitalizing" intervention work, pinpointing some key starting points that guide the work of "empowerment" of endangered languages and cultures, especially regarding the role of the arts and the media. Our base is the assumption that a first step is to develop a reflection that allows us to identify the most conflicting points when comparing the agendas of researcher and researched, for which the appropriation of such aspects has been in our experience quite stimulating. On the contrary, as I have already suggested, we can assume that the interest in writing, and most of all in the development of written, prescriptive grammars, corresponds to a more academic ideology that often exerts epistemic violence on speakers (for a more detailed analysis of such power differentials cf. Flores Farfán and Holzschetzer 2010b). Rather, it is imperative to know the expectations, assessments and potential of speakers themselves regarding their linguistic and cultural heritage, so that the researcher's agenda will look to coincide, or at least be reflectively compared and approximated, as much as possible, to and most of all with the speakers' agendas. This touches, not just tangentially, upon the issue of the researcher's responsibility regarding his/her study "object", or more properly speaking, regarding the individuals that are jointly participating in the research ---*speakers*– hence the concepts of co-authorship and co-participatory methodology brandished by the PRMDLC. The examples of these co-authors have their own stories. More often than not types of (not only classic) neospeakers emerge, as within one recent book on the morning star produced in Ojibwe translated into other indigenous tongues, Kickapoo and Maya included, in which one of the Maya participants actually recovered his language as a second language ²⁰, a common feature of several types of neospeakers. She or he who has learned the indigenous language at a later stage of a lifetime at times happily even develop new repertoires and varieties, especially important in language revitalization, such as those which occur in

20 Cf. <http://www.linguapax.org/language/es/?s=Ojibwe>

social networks, producing new translinguistic varieties that among other things might contribute to a sense of linguistic unity and respect for linguistic diversity.

Coauthorships invite to reflect on the status of the researched in the research agenda and on the researcher's role in reversing language shift. One of the main question might be summed up in whether we are doing research about, with or for the involved subjects. The suggested joint participatory methodology which allows constructing communities of revitalizing praxis opens a space for the subjects to air their own methods, their ethnomethodology, constructively comparing it to the researcher's abilities and his/her linguistic and cultural skills, in a complementary manner. Power relations are much more balanced and even equitable, since participants of the products have their suitable credits explicitly stated for each of authors' contributions and their specific retribution, dignifying their work and personhood. Authorship is properly acknowledged and even facilitated in a bi or even multidirectional mode. At this point, the issue of who has the power and in which terms it arises is posed again. We may of course conclude that it is NOT a question of whether power is built and unequally distributed, not only unilaterally, from the researcher towards the researched. In other words, it is not a question of granting a voice to the researched, nor of conceiving them as "informants", but rather of developing alternative forms of knowledge and, in the field that interests us –bottom up language planning with endangered languages–, of jointly acting against language and cultural loss. In this regard, we should not only overcome the dichotomic reductionism powerful-powerless, but also build collaborative, gregarious forms where the researcher is only one and not the one and only one, just one among other active subjects of mutual collaboration against linguistic and cultural assimilation, some of which were already key independent creators, conceiving our abilities as complementary skills, pursuing to overcome received, reductionist (e.g. dichotomic) models of empowerment, moving a step further in the democratization of knowledge production in a collaborative manner, preferably in published, tangible forms, which in turn are disseminated at a community base by (co)authors themselves. As we have seen, this is the case for instance of work done in the Yucatec Peninsula (for a recent example cf. Briceño et al 2017).

The case-studies I have briefly alluded to start precisely by recognizing the ethic responsibility of developing a profound knowledge of the realities under investigation. This ratifies the role and value of research as it is part of the need to do justice to the facts described in the research itself, including vindicating the actors' own perspectives and agendas. Although at the same time it also recognizes the interventive side of every research, no matter how much one tries to minimize it. As suggested, reducing empowerment to formal education results in an excessive emphasis on school and writing which, at least in Mexico, summarizes the official political history towards indigenous languages (cf. Flores Farfán 2005). On the contrary, the approach we support to empower endangered languages is related to an emerging intercultural conception evidently opposed not only to the abovementioned paternalist biases, but also to such a segregationist views historically characteristic of education for indigenous people within the Mexican state. This approach implies recovering local perspectives of speakers themselves in terms of their counter power, highlighting the possibility of reverting power relations. In sum, ratifying the complementarity of the abilities of intercultural groups, we look to develop jointly participative methodologies for the production of a culturally sensitive revitalizing

corpus, for example via privileged media by members of the communities themselves, such as the oral and image means crucially explored. In this respect the example of the *amate*, the “bark painted paper” is eloquent. The Balsas Nahuas have captured the “taste” of tourists for “old” and “naïve” art to produce a series of fairly successful handicrafts that they have been able to introduce in the tourist market, producing considerable economic wealth for the communities while at the same time reinforcing their ethnolinguistic legacy. Adapting their aesthetic tradition linked to a very ancient practice of pottery production, transferring it to the *amate* and other materials, has not only demonstrated the capacity of this people to adopt and adapt to changing circumstances, but created a “new” tradition in which the Nahuas depict their everyday and ceremonial social life, strengthening their own cultural epistemologies, while at the same creating a huge production of amates together with the emergence of native artists, *Tlacuilos* “painters”. As stated, one such person is part of the PRMDLC since its inception, Cleofas Ramírez Celestino, with whom we have co-coauthored a series of books and developed workshops at the community level.

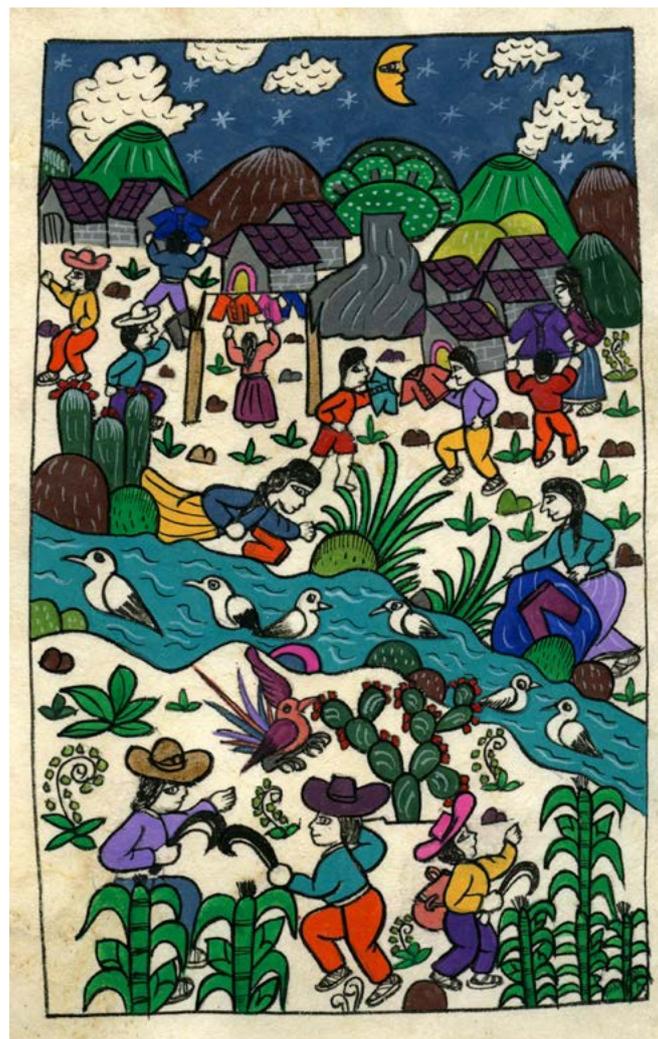


Illustration 13

Amate by Cleofas Ramírez Celestino

At the same time, these corpora has been recreated in different media that have presence and status in the communities, such as TV; DVDs and audio, more recently cell phones and of course social media.

Thus the premises that serve us as revitalization bases include the production of high quality materials recovering local art and the media, conferring status to endangered languages while at the same time recovering own local epistemologies. Tangible demonstrations of linguistic equity among languages even reversing hierarchies as when we position the minoritized language in the first place always or even produce monolingual materials result very inspiring work to (re)activate different competences, constituting solid, material bases which actually counteract dominant languages. Disseminating such materials through informal workshops and other related activities based on own models of socialization and entertainment of the communities, such as local celebrations, cannot be limited to school or even less to writing. In any case, at initial stages of language revitalization, writing is a medium that confers a symbolic status and constitutes another very important proof of language “equality”, which again of course has a very important demonstrative effect, useful in destroying at times very deep rooted stereotypes such as linguistic stereotypes and prejudices (e.g. indigenous languages cannot be written), even if in practice writing in the Roman script still constitutes a relatively alien, historically imposed reality among Mexican indigenous lay population in general.

Intervention is developed looking to relate to existing solidarity networks between local and external collaborators, an idea also related to the co-authorships methodologies, seeking to recover a performance approach for the reversion of language shift, which by the way coincides with a very old conception of indigenous peoples regarding the holistic expression of the arts which by no means separated artistic expression from other spheres of social life, such as ritual communication with the gods. The workshops in which materials are distributed of course emphasize the exclusive use of the indigenous language, a total immersion strategy that as we known is one of the most effective ways of (at times re-) learning a language, here termed “inverse monolingualism”, as a stage to open up to new forms of multilingualism. This is of course a paradox, a symbolic means of which language revitalization is nurtured, together with contradictions, conflicts and dilemmas.

The PRMDLC is also conceived as an ethno-therapeutic exercise where the speakers themselves are the key participants of their own linguistic reversion process, without reproducing the monolingual unilateral approach that conceives empowerment as something granted by the powerful to the unprotected, in a top down approach ²¹. Rather ratifying the local processes of adaptation and appropriation of external gazes by local gazes, where the question, as suggested with the *amate*, is “who studies who?” is given space, aired and recreated. As we have alluded to, the Balsas example serves to illustrate an interesting case of an ethnomethodological study of the “other”, which in this case expresses itself in the touristic handicraft market, where Balsas Nahuas have studied and understood the “touristic” appeal for handicrafts in order to successfully adapt their own artistic “tradition” to the imperatives of such market, captured on the *amate*, without destroying their own ethnolinguistic heritage. In the case of the Maya example, vigorous living traditions as expressed in language games such as tongue twisters, riddles or tales, favored by local Maya activists themselves, also of course require and pursue to reach appropriate audiences, looking to reinforce already existent consciousness of ethnolinguistic pride and unity, fostered by the value of local artists as activists as well.

21 A way that we have developed in this same direction is the autobiography as a genre allowing triggering this type of reflexivity identifying the differences between the agendas of researcher and researched, between observers and observed (see Flores Farfán et al. 2009).

All this can be summarized in terms of developing indigenous methodologies as strategies for cultural and linguistic survival and even cultivation, for which the PRMDLC has developed an intervention-research approach based on local empowerment strategies and epistemologies, recreating local cultures, language and imagery in prestigious, globally competitive media and the arts, keeping a distance from models that overemphasize literacy and schooling as the presumed only “solutions” to linguistic and cultural assimilation.

Final remarks

In order to advance and overcome some of the key gaps posed by the several dilemmas faced by endangered languages and most of all their speakers, favoring a different approach that goes beyond received models of language planning, I have suggested some specific courses of action which we have developed for over two decades in the PRMDLC. Pursuing to close the gap between differing agendas between observer and observed, researchers and researched, the development of co-authorships which recover media and the arts have proven to be very powerful means to vindicate endangered languages and cultures, becoming highly effective ways to empower speakers agency and their tongues, with products which are obviously not limited to the academic sphere, but rather designed to educate and impact different groups of the communities, especially children – who after all are the future of endangered languages---, while at the same time creating awareness among a broad public. This can be thought as an exercise of public anthropology or popular linguistics, claiming the right to a positive view of the “others”, celebrating linguistic and cultural diversity, creating, disseminating and recreating a “revitalizing” corpus through the arts and the media, while at the same time developing different paradigms in the making of research, with which we will hopefully see more positive outcomes in several years to come.

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