LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION

Vol. 3, No. 2 (December 2009), pp. 176-191
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/
http://hdl.handle.net/10125/4438

Documentation and Language Learning: Separate Agendas or Complementary Tasks?

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In the indigenous communities of the Malintzin volcano highlands in Mexico, in the border region of the states of Puebla and Tlaxcala, speakers of Nahuatl have responded variously to the displacement of their language. In a few localities, evidence of a significant erosion appears to have sparked increased interest in both documentation (e.g., preserving a record of extant traditional narrative) and second language learning of the indigenous language by first language speakers of Spanish, and by speakers of Spanish who were once fluent speakers of Nahuatl. Modest interest has been expressed in bilingual instructional models for public schooling for children who are first language speakers of Nahuatl. Even though a small number of towns in this region have maintained high levels of Nahuatl language proficiency across the population (approaching ninety percent in two cases) continued and most likely accelerated erosion in the coming years appears to be inevitable. All demographic and sociolinguistic indicators point in this direction. We report on advances that have been made in a project that seeks to combine the tasks of Documentation and Language Learning. The following argument is presented for wider discussion: that in fact there are no inherent conflicts of interest between scientists (internal and external to the speech community) and indigenous communities as a whole regarding the goals of language maintenance, language use, and research projects related to recording and preserving an archive of the language and its various discourse forms.

1. INTRODUCTION. This report is about language loss and language preservation in an indigenous community in Central Mexico where, paradoxically, both loss and preservation go hand in hand. For example, in recent years the more rapid erosion of the indigenous language seems to have motivated new efforts by many townspeople to preserve it. These contrary but also complementary developments (if we could call them that) prompted us to reread an article in a recent issue of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* by Richard Grounds on a closely related issue: "documentation or implementation." The questions that called our attention were:

(1) What might be some of the tensions or conflicts between the work of documenting an endangered language for academic and scientific purposes, and implementing a language revitalization program for learners of the language; and

(2) Can outside researchers and community members always find a common purpose that benefits both kinds of work—documentation and implementation of a program for language learning? One point of view is that finding a common purpose is inherently difficult

E-ISSN 1934-5275

because of deep-rooted conflicting interests: "When it comes to saving native languages, linguists and small native communities would seem to be natural partners. But beneath the surface, the demands of the academy and the needs of the community constitute separate agendas" (Grounds 2007:28). In the following discussion we will argue that, contrary to this popular perception, outside researchers and indigenous communities (which also include researchers) are more likely than not to be able to negotiate a natural partnership, because beneath the surface they share more in common than occasional appearance and transient misunderstanding sometimes suggest. The issues at stake are important because the claim of "separate agendas" represents a strong viewpoint in the broader field of Indigenous Studies (IS) that extends far beyond language documentation and conservation. It appears to be, in fact, the dominant view among a wide range of researchers and community activists; see Brayboy and Deyhle 2000, Denzin et al. 2008, and Mihesuah and Wilson 2004.

2. THE IDEA OF BILINGUALISM AS RESOURCE FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. The evolution of our project over the years has brought these questions forward for more serious reflection. We began the project many years ago with the "implementation" idea in mind. With most school-age children at the time being fluent speakers of their native language, Nahuatl, our research focused in large part on ways in which the language could be integrated into the elementary school program, alongside Spanish. Despite a noticeable shift toward the use of Spanish among children, the majority today are still native-speakers of Nahuatl. An important question was, and still is: how might the inclusion of the indigenous language improve literacy learning overall (that is, in both languages)?

A working hypothesis proposed the following relationship between national language (NL), which is Spanish, and indigenous language (IL): if bilingual children are afforded the opportunity to develop academic language abilities through IL-medium instruction, alongside instruction in Spanish, ultimate literacy attainment would be favored in some important ways. We should be able to see quantifiable improvements in specific skills of reading and writing. For children whose IL is their first language, the benefit of such a bilingual instructional model would be manifested even in the short term, in a more efficient initial learning of (school) language abilities and specific literacy abilities. Conceiving of the IL as a cognitive and culture-specific learning resource in this way is counter-posed to the theory that the use of minority/indigenous languages in school does not contribute in any significant manner to higher academic achievement. For a presentation of different aspects of our proposed model, see: Francis and Navarrete Gómez 2000, 2003; Francis and Paciotto 2004; and Hamel and Francis 2006. Ngai (2006) outlines the challenges of integrating IL-medium instruction into the school curriculum, and Trudell (2006) does the same for extra-curricular programs. Hinton (2003) takes up the more general problems of revitalization. Crucially, what we could call the IL-literacy hypothesis is proposed to hold true in all IL-NL bilingual situations in which the IL is still spoken by children: that literacy learning is facilitated to some measurable degree, regardless of the numerical weight of the speech community ("small languages" included), sociolinguistic status vis-à-vis the national language, degree of integration into the national culture, uses of literacy in general, and availability of written material in the IL. For example, even in the absence of IL written materials, study of the formal and aesthetic genres of the oral tradition (narrative being

among the most accessible) can contribute to the development of higher-order language abilities associated with literacy and academic discourse in general. Again, while the greatest facilitative effect is to be expected for IL-speaking beginner L2 learners of the national language, indigenous children who are already proficient speakers of the national language stand to benefit as well.

Literacy learning and literary creation in the indigenous language contribute to children's overall academic achievement, not just for L2 learners of Spanish. As was mentioned above, this language learning circumstance corresponds to what we could call the "narrow" or "immediate" justification for including the IL among the media of instruction. As a positive cultural affirmation, it potentially contributes to leveling the playing field with the national school population, reinforcing the idea that the linguistic resources of the IL and the culture that it is associated with are also relevant and useful for schooling (Chiodi and Bahamondes 2002; López and Sichra 2008). This affirmation applies to L2 learners of Spanish, indigenous children who are already bilingual, and those who have only acquired their IL incompletely. These children now become a positive example to their peers who may only know Spanish (today a rapidly growing number among indigenous elementary school students), turning the tables so to speak, as it is often the latter group, ironically, that is looked up to as more advanced academically and socially.

FIGURE 1: School

The underlying theoretical underpinning for the IL-literacy hypothesis is the concept of a common underlying proficiency (Cummins 2000), extended in our case to the sharply imbalanced language contact situation of IL-NL bilingualism. Stated simply: Literacy-related abilities, although they may be learned via instruction in one language or the other, are to a large degree not language-specific; that is, they are "shared," accessible to the bilingual from a common non-linguistic conceptual domain. For example, comprehension abilities acquired via early extended exposure to (oral) traditional narrative in Nahuatl can be subsequently deployed in the performance of related (written) language tasks in Spanish. Likewise, non-linguistic knowledge structures and abilities are "available" to the child when they need to be applied to performance in Nahuatl, even though they may have been learned through the medium of Spanish. Most important for our situation, it appears that this kind of "sharing" of cognitive resources is not cancelled or blocked by the sociolinguistic imbalance between IL and NL; knowledge structures and abilities are still available despite the vast differences in status, communicative utility, and access to material resources. Findings so far from our studies are consistent with this concept of bilingual ability (Francis 2005). In similar conditions of imbalanced language contact, Hamel (2008) has reached parallel conclusions. Conclusive evidence confirming the IL-literacy hypothesis, however, is still a ways off, pending more extensive and more controlled experiments.

3. SHIFT TO MONOLINGUALISM IN SPANISH. With time, as evidence began to appear that Nahuatl was beginning to erode in the communities under investigation, with more and more children only speaking in Spanish with each other during play time, and even with their parents at home, a new direction for our work presented itself: documentation. Friends and associates of the project suggested that a collection of traditional narratives be compiled and transcribed. It had been evident for some time that the stories and other formal genres had also been in decline. In all the neighboring indigenous towns, the Nahuatl language, along with the oral traditions, has seen an even sharper erosion, with many communities having already shifted to a virtually complete monolingualism in Spanish.

Geographically, the indigenous towns are not far from the major urban centers of Central Mexico, in Puebla and Tlaxcala states; and with electrification and the paving of the old dirt roads none of the indigenous communities in this region today can be considered any more as remote and isolated. Integration into the national culture and economy has brought a more diversified local economy with a certain measure of prosperity, expanded higher educational opportunities, modern government-sponsored health care, basic literacy for new sectors of the population, and access to electronic media, including the internet.

Thus, in a way, it was inevitable that the Nahuatl language would begin to find itself at a big disadvantage to Spanish in this region, beginning in contexts of language use where it would be most vulnerable. Sometimes it's surprising which of the domains of everyday life lend themselves most effectively to the penetration of Spanish. To give just one example: when someone takes a husband or wife from another town who does not speak the indigenous language, and then establishes a household in the community, it isn't obvious right away (as it was in the past) in which language to speak to the children. The research on language shift and language attrition among children within the family unit is particularly instructive on this point (Allen et al. 2006; De Houwer 2006; Köpke and Schmid 2004). For example, given that, regionally, native speakers of the IL tend to be bilingual to a greater

degree than native NL speakers, "mixed marriages" on the average automatically favor use of the NL; and this would be only the most obvious bias that favors it in cases where both spouses know the NL. The factors that account for child language attrition (i.e., replacement of a first language by a second) are even more complex and still not well understood today. But what the research has shown is that language replacement often proceeds rapidly, surprisingly so, once a certain "tipping point" threshold is crossed. Interestingly, the bias in favor of the NL is often very subtle; and even in families that deliberately promote the use of the minority language at home, children sometimes begin to favor the NL, not only in their conversations but cognitively as well (reflected in actual ability).

The communities in which the project has been active are located near the capital of Puebla, a major commercial and industrial center. In fact, the two indigenous towns that are well known for having resisted the shift to Spanish monolingualism most successfully are only forty-five minutes from downtown. Regular bus service along the newly paved highway has been putting townspeople in contact with new kinds of employment and formal education in numbers that are growing every year. Both young men and young women come into contact, and sometimes make friends, with young people who only speak Spanish. In years past this almost never happened. For most community members, evidence of an unmistakable historical trend leaves little room for doubt. To put everything into a broader perspective: at the beginning of the past century in this highland region of Puebla state and neighboring Tlaxcala state, the number of towns and villages with a majority of Nahuatl speakers easily surpassed forty or fifty. Today, depending on how one wants to count, four, or perhaps five, remain (INEGI 2000).

In discussions like this of attrition and language shift, it is in the interest of both researchers and IL communities to begin with an objective assessment of empirical findings. Understanding the complex problems of language replacement is not well served by approaches distinguished by alarmist calls to action or by evoking overriding moral imperatives. Languages suffer erosion and extinction because of circumstances that are truly reprehensible, from social inequality and discrimination to the physical extermination of their speakers.[1] But other kinds of material factors related to historical language change (Cavalli-Sforza 2008), over time, tip the balance in one direction or another in ways that are beyond the control of any local, regional, or national agency or social movement. Then, most interestingly, there is that set of factors that tend to favor language shift, which most townspeople would surely view as positive, related to a greater access to the larger economic opportunity structure, a greater integration into the national culture (e.g., access to television), and the slow but steady democratization of Mexican society, in our case.

In a balanced summary of factors that contribute to language maintenance and language loss, Baker (2001:58–62) includes, among the many factors listed, some that should give readers reason for pause. Taken as a whole, the circumstances leading to replacement of one language by another are complex, "double-edged," often presenting minority language speakers with difficult dilemmas:

> Associated with maintenance
> "stability in occupation"
> "low social and economic mobility"
> "low emphasis on education if in majority language"

Associated with loss
"shift from rural to urban"
"employment requires use of the majority language"
"high levels of education"

For an overview of the dynamics of language displacement in general, see Hill 2001, Mufwene 2003, and Walsh 2005.

A second highly visible example is emblematic of these changes, having unfolded in the few years during which we have worked in the two most linguistically conservative communities of the region. At the time (1992–1993) of our first field studies of bilingualism and literacy in one of the elementary schools, the composition of the grades showed a dramatic trend: while in first and second grades there was an almost equal number of girls and boys, the sixth grade graduates were overwhelmingly boys. Still fewer girls advanced to *secundaria* with a chance later to go to high school. Today, at the same school, there is a near parity between the sexes in sixth grade. In an interview conducted with the principal of the recently established first ever local public high school, the influx of girls to the upper grades, beyond elementary and middle school for the first time, was pointed to with a sense of genuine accomplishment. Increasing numbers of young women can be seen waiting for the morning bus to Puebla, not on their way to the market, but to a wage job, in non-traditional dress.

In the recent past, mothers could be counted upon to be more reliable transmitters of the indigenous language to their children than fathers. Thus, regarding the changes along this dimension of intergenerational linguistic continuity (as one example among many), it's simply a matter of doing the math. But more important, and aside from its inevitability, few reasonable people would view this correlate of language shift in entirely negative terms. We thus need to take into account the interaction among *contradictory and counteracting factors* that contribute to language shift: those related to social inequality and discrimination, on the one hand, and "natural" language change tendencies, the result of wider opportunities and a breakdown of segregation and isolation, on the other hand. In the end, the idea that communities might be "protected" in some way from the effects of integration into the national economy and globalization turns out to be as utopian as it is reactionary.

The purpose of this digression, for the present discussion, is to emphasize the complexity of language revitalization; after many years of research the relative efficacy of different action proposals for reversing the shift toward exclusive use of national languages has still not been conclusively demonstrated. To take our project as an example: even if the IL-literacy hypothesis turns out to be supported by strong empirical findings, it is a separate question whether or not, over the long term, IL-inclusion in literacy learning and schooling would have any appreciable effect on the course of language shift. The same holds true for models that appear to promote the use of indigenous languages in non-institutional settings. Thus, there appears to be little justification to insist with absolute certainty that one or another kind of documentation/conservation project objective does or does not favor the goals of language revitalization. Again, the effectiveness of language preservation activities depends on conditions and limitations that are still the object of study. This we propose as another reason why project activities that seem on the surface to serve different "agendas" may not be as mutually exclusive as first appears. The evidence presented so far

to support this proposal may in fact be specific to the situation of language contact in the Nahuatl-speaking communities of Tlaxcala and Central Puebla. We present it here for the purpose of discussing and accounting for different and potentially disconfirming findings from other projects.

FIGURE 2: San Isidro Church

4. DOCUMENTATION—IMPLEMENTATION. Within the project, the work of documentation was conceived initially as a way to preserve a record of the Nahuatl language, as it is spoken in the area, and the traditional genres associated with the local culture. Narrative was the logical first choice because the traditional stories are still widely known, and because of the sheer volume of the existing material (Navarrete Gómez 2009). Unlike other more specialized genres (e.g., ceremonial speech), no particular context or restriction is associated with telling a story in Nahuatl. In the process of collecting the narrative material on audiotape, transcribing, and correcting, a group of mainly young people came together. Informal discussion led to the idea of forming a kind of workshop or seminar, to be called the Seminario de Estudios Modernos y de Cultura Acal-lan (SEMYCA), "Acal-lan" being the traditional Nahuatl reference to the community's location on the mountain.

But then the question of "documentation or implementation" came up again. Here, the case of Nahuatl may be special in some ways, not being representative of most situations of erosion in which indigenous languages of the Americas find themselves. While the

demographic trend in the Puebla-Tlaxcala region indicates a dramatic decline, with many towns having lost the language completely, there are still upwards of over a million speakers across the country. And for historic reasons, rightly or wrongly, the Nahuatl language maintains a kind of privileged position in Mexico ("privileged" should be in quotes here because actual native speakers of Nahuatl still suffer from discrimination and derision in their contacts with non-indigenous monolingual speakers of Spanish). As the language of a once great empire whose capital, Tenochtitlan, is the location of the modern capital of Mexico, it attained a level of development in literature, higher education, culture, and official government use that extended over a hundred years into the colonial period itself, long after the Spanish conquest (León-Portilla 1996). In libraries and archives around the world, thousands of books written in Nahuatl give testimony to this "golden age." For its academic, cultural, and scientific value, it is learned and studied as a second language by scholars in most major Mexican universities and internationally in North America and Europe.

Not surprisingly, in and around the actual indigenous communities many people of all ages take classes either to improve their language ability or to learn the language of their parents and grandparents for the first time (one example of how "loss and preservation go hand in hand"). For all the above reasons Nahuatl is subject to contradictory perceptions and valuations, on the part of speakers and non-speakers alike. In Tlaxcala state, for example, we have interviewed Spanish-speaking adults who even over-estimate their proficiency in the language, demonstrating their knowledge, for example, by reciting memorized poems from the classical period; see Messing and Rockwell 2006 for an ethnographic account of these tendencies. The authors point out that while the recent interest in bilingual education and other language promotion projects is unlikely to be scaled up to the point where it would be able to impact region-wide trends, it has "opened up a new discursive space" (272) in some communities. This space for the discussion of language issues we have taken notice of as well. So therefore, we cannot say for sure what exactly the future holds for this indigenous language.

One answer to our question then became obvious: find ways in which the project can be one of "documentation *and* implementation." Even taking into account the exceptional situation of languages like Nahuatl, the approach of combining these two tasks wherever feasible appears to be a potential solution to the dilemma posed at the beginning of this article. In a way, the dilemma seems to be about a competition for limited resources under the pressure of the clock ticking down on the remaining speakers of the endangered language. From our experience, however, we are convinced that this "competition" can become *combination* if we begin to think in terms of language resources doing double duty. Going out on a limb here, there shouldn't be any exception to this possibility.

In the first place, to be able to integrate research tasks and language revitalization tasks, linguists and community members need to share each other's objectives and deliberately plan project activities together. As some field investigators have suggested, in certain areas of work the combination of tasks can begin to break down unnecessary divisions of labor (Furbee and Stanley 2002; Penfield et al. 2008). In an attempt to move toward this kind of integration, SEMYCA, the "seminar," discussed five related aspects of our work around which the objectives of documentation and implementation could come together.

On each one we are happy to say that some progress has been made: on some aspects only to a limited degree, on others much more.

4.1. ACCESS TO RESEARCH MATERIALS. Original research data should be archived in an institution, above all for safekeeping, but also so that it will be accessible to both scientists and community members. For example, the only copy of these materials should not reside in a different country or in a location thousands of miles away from the research site. This is easier said than done, but important. Our own efforts regarding this shared objective have not yet borne fruit; but negotiations are pending. Creating an archive does not mean that the language is being packed in ice; metaphors along these lines to characterize this work, from our point of view, are unfortunate. Documenting and maintaining a record of languages at risk of further erosion is important because any loss of oral tradition material is a loss to our universal cultural inheritance and the cultural inheritance of the communities where the language is still spoken. If not recorded, irreplaceable cultural artifacts would be lost to science and to the descendents of the present-day creators of these traditions. Even in cases of terminal language replacement, the possibility cannot be excluded that in the future communities can recover important parts of the record for specific purposes.

4.2. ACTIVE CONSULTATION AND INTEGRATION OF LOCAL INFORMANTS. All parties benefit when project tasks include an expanding circle of interested participants. We have been able to advance rather far toward this goal, especially when we formalized consultations and information gathering in the SEMYCA. Tasks have included the following: locating and working with storytellers, involving research assistants as narrators themselves, consulting on questions of grammar and correct usage during transcription and editing of stories, word processing, distributing of published material, and offering comments and observations on, and critiques of published stories. Friends and associates of SEMYCA keep a lookout for other community members who are engaged in cultural activities. This kind of networking benefits researchers because it brings in fresh information. Expanding the circle in this way helps to confirm or disconfirm working hypotheses. At the same time, assistants learn new skills, and sometimes become interested in taking a more active and leading role in creative work themselves. Informants come to be integrated into the different tasks of the project and start to take on new responsibilities. The most recent posting to the seminar's website listed thirty-six people (thirty-two of whom reside in the community) who participated in the work of compilation in one way or another.

One example of how project associates work together at different levels is in the preparation of narrative material. In contrast to the compilation of samples for linguistic analysis, gathering what Furbee and Stanley (2002) call "high-register" discourse for the purpose of editing an anthology often requires *non-spontaneous* performance. One fieldworker, with the indicated social connections in a particular neighborhood, might identify the potential narrator and make the initial proposal. On another occasion, a meeting can take place for rehearsal and setting up the most propitious context (e.g., an audience of the narrator's child family members). Subsequently, other members of the seminar might participate in the audio/video recording. A different group of informants/narrators participates in commentary and narration of alternative versions. Transcription and integration of the different versions is followed by correction and revision, and so forth. On the other hand,

except for the first step, none of this applies, necessarily, to samples destined for grammar and discourse analysis. But as should be self-evident, the different tasks for different purposes can be easily combined.

4.3. LOCAL DISSEMINATION. Publishing of selected materials that have literary merit or cultural interest within the community and the region is in the interest of both researchers and language maintenance activists. After years of patient work of compilation, selection, and editing, we are pleased to announce the release of *Cuentos náhuatl de la Malintzin* [Nahuatl stories of the Malintzin]. Finding a way to disseminate materials locally, without the restrictions imposed by commercial publishers, is important so that they get into the hands of people who still know the language.

A widely commented-upon dilemma presents itself in the case of traditional narrative: how widely should this material be disseminated? Our own point of view is that in communities where this is an issue, limitations imposed on access (specific contextual constraints aside) should be discussed and reconsidered. Such restrictions, especially in situations of advanced erosion of oral tradition transmission, primarily deny access to this cultural inheritance to members of the speech community itself—in particular, young people with diminished contact with the traditional discourse domains. The notion that knowledge of a literary heritage can be taken away, subtracted, deserves thoughtful reflection and debate, and researchers and language activists alike should not be afraid to engage with it. However, in the end, the community's determination on this question should be respected. This, of course, presents an interesting problem: as in internally diverse communities everywhere, it should, normally, be an authoritative body, speaking for a majority/consensus view that makes such a determination.

We are aware that this is a controversial point of view, and our work in one community should not be taken as evidence that it is correct. Rather, we are proposing a critical discussion on this and related questions of "ownership" applied to the traditional genres of indigenous communities. An important related issue includes the notion of "intellectual property rights" over research findings. Hill (2002:121–123) presents a clear summary of an opposing view, which strongly questions the concept of a "universal ownership" or that linguistic artifacts "belong" to a "common humanity." We propose that a discussion of these complex issues would be better served if the focus were shifted away from the "discourse of theft" and notions such as "property," "belonging," and "owning." That is our proposal for the debate. Far from a purely theoretical question, it is one that is directly related to the idea of academy-community "separate agendas" in the work of documentation and language preservation and in the broader IS field. To be fair to Hill, it is not completely clear what specific proposals or concepts related to restrictions on open access to the linguistic resources of a community she endorses. For example, a version of the theme of language as a universal patrimony is marked for exception as a valid principle: one related to a "technical reason" that applies to the work of linguists.

4.4. USE OF TECHNOLOGY. We were caught by surprise, and at first unprepared, for the phenomenal growth of internet access in the indigenous communities of the Malintzin. When we started working in the largest community in the highland area sixteen years ago, the only electronic "contact with the outside world" was one phone line to a corner store

near the town plaza. Today, at last count, there are four internet cafés, all of which do a brisk business at ten pesos per hour. Young people have email accounts, and when they surf the web they can now find on the SEMYCA website some of the stories that their parents may have forgotten. Links will take them to Nahuatl language sites that have cropped up around the world. Use of the internet and other computational tools for both language learning and documentation is a rapidly growing applied field, presenting users with unique and innovative resources (Rau and Yang 2007). It seems counterintuitive at first glance, but the interactive processing capabilities that can be made available to learners and researchers by the computer often surpass those of personal face-to-face interaction. And here we have an example of the use of electronic media, typically associated with the growing proficiency in the national language among young people (again, a historic development that should be viewed positively), for the purpose of studying and learning indigenous languages. To reiterate, as with the question of publication and dissemination, posting artifacts to the internet is subject to all relevant local customary and legal-governmental restrictions.

The exploitation of internet resources is also a partial solution to the problems outlined above in sections 4.1, on access, and 4.3, on local dissemination. While access to research findings and materials via a webpage presents certain limitations for communities, it at least begins to make information available that should not be locked away. Internet access to project materials opens the door for negotiating more complete availability. Similar considerations apply to dissemination. The interesting advantage of posting to a network that is "world-wide" is that it can also be very "local" in regard to its actual audience, and much more effective in a community-wide dissemination than any other medium (for example, a YouTube reading of new poetry or other creative writing. Stay tuned to: http://www4.nau.edu/seminario/).

4.5. PROMOTION OF CREATIVE WRITING AND OTHER KINDS OF EXPRESSION. It is an error to stereotype indigenous cultures in Mexico today as fundamentally "oral" (as opposed to "literate" and "modern"). For speakers under the age of sixty, literacy is no longer a special ability reserved for an educated minority. So we should not have been surprised when we discovered recently that two separate groups of young people have been exchanging among themselves examples of their own writing. One small group, at the community high school, chose poetry, typically composing the first draft in Spanish (the language associated with school literacy), then translating to Nahuatl (the students' native language, in which oral proficiency is usually on par with Spanish, but for which writing skills are less automatic). The second group, independent of the first, is composed of college-age young people—students at the nearby public university in Puebla. Their genre of choice is expository: short essays on Nahuatl culture gathered together in an informal bulletin. It is significant that both of the writing circles emerged and now sustain themselves independently and extracurricularly, without any guidance by teachers. Some of the participants, in fact, were child subjects from some of our early literacy studies, who many years later went on to form the writing groups on their own.

Here, we observe the possibility of an interesting contrast among the discourse types mentioned above. Traditional narrative circulates naturally only in oral form, with its written version being the product of the deliberate and organized work of recording, transcription, editing/correction, and publishing. New poetry (as opposed to the traditional poetic

genres performed at ceremonies) appears to take written form from the very beginning, as was confirmed by inspection of the students' notebooks and their account of how poems are composed. The possibility for organizing writers' workshops (Weber et al. 2007) has sparked keen interest in this "non-traditional" avenue of expression. The convocation for the first workshop will be announced at: http://www4.nau.edu/seminario/

FIGURE 3: Corn crib

5. CONCLUSION. Available resources of time and energy are always scarce, especially in situations of end-state endangerment. However, there is no clear evidence from past practice to guide us in determining ahead of time which language preservation activities and projects are most effective for delaying or possibly reversing (if this is a viable perspective) the already advanced attrition of a language that is no longer spoken by children. Current proposals for reversing language shift involving schools, literacy, and different kinds of formal and informal teaching remain controversial to some degree. From the point of view of the linguist, we can venture to say that any expansion of creative language use in the IL favors research and documentation if for no other reason than because it extends the life of the object of study and provides data that are richer and more complete grammatically. In turn, documentation, properly implemented, under certain favorable conditions, may make a modest contribution to enriching the life of a language (and even perhaps that of its speakers), sometimes in unexpected ways. Again, while the situation of languages with large numbers of speakers allows for a wider range of options, we propose that the basic principles of researcher-community partnership apply with equal force to indigenous languages of smaller size and diminished resources for maintenance as a spoken language. In fact the partnership is of higher stakes, for all concerned parties, for moribund languages

and languages undergoing complete replacement in the short term. These are the situations where working together actually becomes more of an issue (e.g., for a non-endangered language, one could argue that there is still time before the work of documentation must be initiated). It is a mistake, we believe, to evoke conflicting agendas when the potential exists, almost always, for just the opposite: there are no community implementation activities that involve language learning that cannot be useful to researchers; and the *products* of archival/documentation work of linguists become a permanent acquisition of the community, all of it forming an invaluable part of its cultural heritage. For another opposing point of view, from a different slant, see Newman 2003. In addition, the very *process* of gathering data lends itself to the most productive and interesting kinds of language learning (Seifert 2000). Both researchers and language teaching activists need to be sensitive to and on the lookout for these cross-disciplinary opportunities. Our proposal for further discussion is that there are no inherent conflicts of interest.

NOTE

1. Genocide as a factor in language displacement is well documented; examples come to mind from Central and Eastern Europe in the past century, and the Western United States during the 1800s. Slow but steady progress by humanity in understanding this phenomenon (Pinker 2002), and in its ability to take collective action to sanction it, make it less likely (in broad historical terms) to be a cause of language loss in the future.

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