Exploring formats and review practices of text material stemming from documentation projects

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Introduction

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In this talk we look at examples of text material prepared for two different communities in Mexico: Ayutla Mixe and Seri
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  - the formats that texts in native languages are presented in (bilingual or monolingual)
  - different approaches to editing and preparing material collaboratively
  - different approaches to accommodating dialectal variation
  - taking into consideration local literacy levels in planning the presentation of the text material
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2 types of text publications of indigenous languages of Mexico

- General-purpose publications:
  - Ambriz & Gurrola (eds.) 2012, Southwestern Tepehuano or O'dam
  - Monforte, Dzul & Gutiérrez (eds) 2010, Yucatec Maya
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- In Ayutla, 64% of the population is reported to have some degree of literacy in Spanish and literacy in Mixe is effectively non-existent
  - There are few printed materials in Mixe (for all of the dialects), although the number has increased over the past decade
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    - one gives an overview of the Mixe people, their language, and the editorial process
    - the other presents a study about the Mixe writing system
Case studies – Ayutla Mixe

The target population for the book included:

- General community, particularly teenagers or people under 40, with secondary or college education
- School teachers
- Spanish speaking readers
Case studies – Ayutla Mixe

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▶ Outside the community
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▶ It has been used for L2 Mixe classes
▶ People who do not speak Mixe find it fascinating to read about Mixe culture
▶ It creates awareness of the fact that indigenous languages have writing systems
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El Cristo de San Pablo Güilá

Narradora: Sofía de Jesús

1 Les voy a contar cómo fue que se apareció el Cristo que ahora conocemos como de San Pablo Güilá y cómo fue que llegó hasta allí. 2 En un principio el Cristo se apareció en Yalalag, lo encontró la gente de Yalalag, la gente de Yalalag lo recibió. 3 Si bien la mitad del pueblo lo aceptó, la otra mitad no lo quería. 4 Cuando llegó al pueblo, la mitad de la gente de Yalalag le brindó el debido respeto. 5 La mitad del pueblo fue a comprarle un petate. 6 El cristo estaba sucio, no estaba limpio; el Cristo olía como si se estuviera pudriendo, no estaba limpio. 7 La mitad del pueblo lo tuvo asco y la otra mitad sí lo quería. 8 La mitad del pueblo le dio su respeto, así fue. 9 El pueblo le dio su casita, el pueblo le dio su iglesia al Cristo de San Pablo Güilá. 10 Cuando estuvo ahí ocho o diez días, no se sabe cuánto tiempo, la mitad de la gente de Yalalag lo atendió muy bien y la mitad no lo atendió. 11 Si lo cuidaron, si le tenían mucho respeto, sí lo atendieron, sí lo curaron, porque tenía muchas llagas, toda su cuerpo estaba cubierto por llagas. 12 Pues ahí se quedó, ahí estuvo mucho tiempo, ahí lo cuidaron y lo atendieron, ahí lo cuidaron muy bien en cama, la gente de Yalalag le dio lo de comer y le dio de beber. 13 Una tarde, cuando iba de salida, cuando dieron que se iba, le dijo a la gente de Yalalag que le hicieran un favor, que ya se iba al lugar donde iba a vivir.

14 “Mañana me estoy yendo, muchas gracias por haberme cuidado”, así le dijo a la gente de Yalalag. 15 Entonces la gente de Yalalag le dijo: “¿Ya te vas, abuelo?” 16 “Ya me voy, tú sabrás dónde encontrarlo”, así le dijo. 17 Eso fue lo que dijo esa tarde, y fue entonces cuando el Cristo, digamos que el abuelo, se fue.

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Case studies – Seri

Seri is a language isolate spoken by around 900 people along the coast of the Gulf of California in Sonora, Mexico

- Literacy in Seri is quite low with only a few exceptions
- In recent years, use of Spanish has been on the rise, especially with children
  - The materials created so far are directed at young speakers and school teachers who have little to no literacy training
Case studies – Seri

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▸ Next, we formed an editorial group of young speakers who had taken Seri grammar classes with a fellow linguist, Steve Marlett

▸ Some additional complementary texts were written by René
▸ Drawings were commissioned locally to accompany some of the texts

▸ I wrote an introduction in Spanish discussing the editorial process, the orthographic system used and the content of the Seri texts
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- In other words, I wanted to challenge my target audience and evaluate the result
Hai xepe imac quij cop iicp hac

Óscar Perales Torres quih ozaxó iha*

Hai xepe imac quij cop iicp hac hizaax oo compacta. Hai xepe imac quij cop, tiix hai ihaapl cop iti hai isoj iha. Hai xepe imac quij hapah quih hai ozaxöt quih chaa iti coofija tanticat cmis zo haquix imih iha. Tiix hai caaixaj isoj quih chaa ha. Hai mos áno caaixaj, tiix thaa ma x, haquix tiih ma x, hamiyaj. He mos hapi hisoj hipquij taax oo hant cótap ma, hmiya. Tiix xnaai z itcommis, haapa z immis iha. Hai xepe imac quij cop, tiix ihaapl iti hai ha. Hai xepe imac quij hapah cop intooi ma x, hoopatalca quih íisax quihiih quih

Case studies – Seri

- The **pros** of the editorial decisions include the following:
  - Many of the teachers in the Seri villages are not Seri speakers, thus, making this material difficult for them to use.
  - Spanish dominant children showed more difficulty reading the material.
  - Individuals who are interested in Seri culture will have limitations, but the introduction tries to compensate for that.
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  - The editorial group allowed for speakers to actively review and use the material
  - The editorial process allowed for younger speakers to consult elders when they were unsure of content
- The **cons** of the editorial decisions include the following
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  - Spanish dominant children showed more difficulty reading the material
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  - Spanish dominant children showed more difficulty reading the material
  - Individuals who are interested in Seri culture will have limitations, but the introduction tries to compensate for that
Discussion

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- We are both working with languages with low levels of literacy, with little text material available

- Both language contexts show tendencies toward Spanish becoming more dominant

- School teachers (who could use this material) are not always native speakers of the language

However, they also differ in certain ways

- We took different approaches to presenting the text material

- In the Ayutla Mixe case, Romero chose to present the text bilingually, in a mirrored format

- Whereas in the Seri case, I chose to stick a monolingual presentation to prevent speakers from reading exclusively the Spanish part
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  - the **distribution** of the publication (how and where)
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- In general, all of these considerations are aimed at creating **guidelines** on how to create such material
Developing standards for the creation of text material stemming from language documentation projects (or at least talking about them!) can help us be more successful in creating and implementing such material.
Closing remarks

- **Developing standards** for the creation of text material stemming from language documentation projects (or at least talking about them!) can help us be more successful in creating and implementing such material.

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- Finally, it’s crucial to distinguish between texts designed for use by **different audiences**.
Acknowledgements

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Thanks!