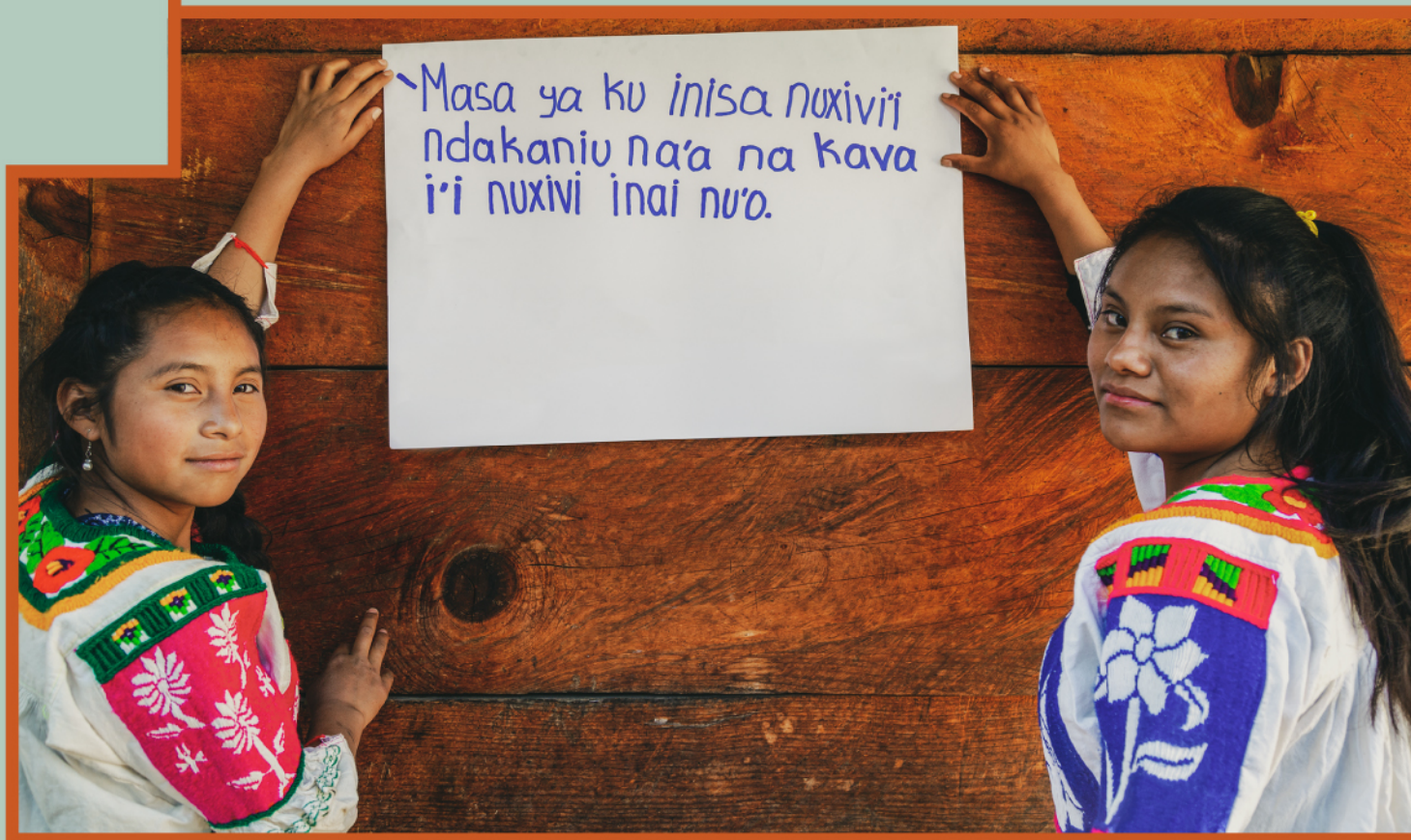


Theoretical reflections

around the role of
fieldwork in linguistics and
linguistic anthropology:

CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIGENOUS
RESEARCHERS FROM SOUTHERN MEXICO

Edited by Emiliana Cruz Cruz



LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION SPECIAL PUBLICATION 23

Theoretical reflections around the role of fieldwork in linguistics and linguistic anthropology: Contributions of Indigenous researchers from southern Mexico

Translation from Spanish of *Reflexiones teóricas en torno a la función del trabajo de campo en lingüística-antropológica: Contribuciones de investigadores indígenas del sur de México*. LD&C Special Publication 22, 2020.

Emiliana Cruz Cruz

CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES Y ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES EN ANTROPOLOGÍA SOCIAL (CIESAS)

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EDITORIAL AND COVER DESIGN

Judith Romero

COVER ILLUSTRATION

From the photographic series, *Ourselves: Narratives for a future*
(Translation of the Mixtec written phrase in the photo: 'I wish that in this world,
we women could be respected'). ©Judith Romero / San Pablo Tijaltepec, Oaxaca, 2020

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TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

Megan J. Crowhurst, Nora C. England, Patience L. Epps, Sofia G.
Pierson, May Helena Plumb, James B. Tandy, Paige Erin Wheeler,
Elizabeth A. Wood, and Anthony C. Woodbury
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The present Language Documentation and Conservation Special Publication is a full translation into English of an earlier Special Publication in Spanish:

Cruz Cruz, Emiliana, ed. 2020. Reflexiones teóricas en torno a la función del trabajo de campo en lingüística-antropológica: Contribuciones de investigadores indígenas del sur de México. *Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication* 22. [PDF](#)

This translation is an effort and product of the University of Texas at Austin Department of Linguistics, to which we belong as faculty and doctoral students, and of our Center for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA). CILLA, a part of the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at UT, was established in 2001 when one of us, Nora England, joined the Linguistics faculty with a mission to promote teaching and research focused on the documentation, description, conservation, and support of Latin American Indigenous languages. Nora's guiding idea was that the centerpiece of any such enterprise should be the doctoral training of native and heritage speakers of Indigenous languages of Latin America in linguistics and allied fields like anthropology; from that, she maintained, the rest would follow (described in Woodbury and England 2004). In the years since then, nine Indigenous students from Latin America have earned their degrees here, with one more shortly on the way, writing doctoral dissertations on a range of mostly documentary and descriptive topics on their own or other languages and working alongside other

graduate students and faculty from a variety of other backgrounds. We believe that respecting, promoting, and integrating Indigenous students' perspectives and goals has led to new thinking about disciplinary agendas and also reflects and supports our commitment to acknowledging and rectifying discrimination in academia at all stages. This volume, it seems to us, is an outstanding example of such new thinking.

We had several interlocking motivations for undertaking this translation. Above all, we want English readers to know this work and the thinking it represents and for them to consider it among the growing number of critiques of linguistics and linguistic anthropology from indigenous and other perspectives: see for example Charity Hudley and Bucholtz (2020) and the several responses and commentaries it received, including especially the Australian and North American Indigenous perspectives offered by Gaby and Woods (2020) and Leonard (2020). The volume consists of six papers, with an introduction and a preface, all by linguists who are native speakers of Indigenous Mexican languages, writing on themes arising in their experience as linguists and linguistic anthropologists working in their own or other communities, becoming involved in language activism and revitalization, and becoming a part of academia abroad in the United States, at home in Mexico, and across the world. The themes in their writing range from the scientific and humanistic, to the social, political, practical, and personal; in our view their ideas, accounts of their experiences as linguists, and their formulations of disciplinary goals are new and important.

We were also motivated by our institutional connections with the authors. Three are graduates of our program: Emiliana Cruz Cruz, Hilaria Cruz Cruz, and Jaime Pérez González. Two more, Ana Alonso Ortiz and Isaura de los Santos, have in turn been graduate students of Emiliana Cruz Cruz at the University of Massachusetts, and even earlier, of summer workshops for Otomanguan speaker linguists in Oaxaca organized by Emiliana Cruz Cruz with participation by Anthony Woodbury. And three, Emiliana Cruz Cruz, Jaime Pérez González and Margarita Martínez Pérez, are or have been graduate students or faculty in the masters and doctoral programs in *Lingüística Indoamericana* at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City and Chiapas, with which our department and CILLA have had a long and fruitful collaboration. Finally, alongside those institutional connections, various sets of us—authors and translators—have been collaborators in teaching and research.

Our translation process has been deeply collaborative and has been carried out in the context of the collegial relationships among our whole group, authors and translators. If perhaps it might serve as a model for other such work, we would like to explain it.

The translators all are native speakers of English and proficient in Spanish; one of us, Elizabeth Wood, also is a native speaker of Spanish. The idea for a translation arose in the context of a longstanding collaboration between the original editor, Emiliana Cruz Cruz, and Anthony Woodbury, who decided to serve together as trans-

lation editors. Once recruited, the translators, alone or in pairs, assigned themselves to the articles and produced draft translations by early 2021. From there the authors, all proficient in English, read the translation drafts and commented on them, following a variety of working styles which some of the author-and-translator teams have described at the ends of the translations. That led to new translation drafts.

Then, during the Spring 2021 semester, each author was invited to visit an ongoing graduate class in UT's Department of Linguistics called *Research in Documentary, Descriptive, and Historical Linguistics*. The class meets once a week every semester and includes all documentary, descriptive, and historical linguistics graduate students, faculty, and postdocs, along with interested undergraduates and outside guests. Its mission is to vertically integrate our whole scholarly community around ongoing research and common interests, especially with respect to deeper issues of purpose, agenda, and ethics that arise within our field. All of that made the class a natural setting for exchanges with the authors and critical support for the translators.

That Spring, the class met entirely online due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and so—conveniently—the authors' visits could proceed without the need for travel. The purpose of the visits was to share commentary on the authors' original paper as well as the translation draft, which were posted online beforehand, with an open invitation for written comments on any aspect of the translations. The discussions were in some cases in Spanish and in some cases in English (virtually everyone is bilingual) and were moderated by the visitor's translator(s). Conversations were wide ranging, but tended to focus most on the authors' content and on further issues inspired by that content; meanwhile, the more technical or mechanical commentaries on the translations tended to show up in written form on the shared documents. After the visits, the translators were responsible for producing a yet further revised draft based on all of the input received, in many cases alongside further exchange with the authors; then there was a final round of editing by the two translation editors.

Each translator-author team found itself having to make decisions about a recurring set of questions of translation and, alongside that, of contextual and cultural explanation. That led on the one hand to some translation choices that we have tried to use consistently across all the articles and, on the other hand, to a jointly constructed *Cultural Glossary* in which we compiled certain decisions while also giving background that should help in reading all of the articles. In particular, this document offers explanations for some basic features of life and of the social and political organization that are common across indigenous communities in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, where the authors are based. The *Cultural Glossary* is admittedly somewhat eclectic and haphazard, but we think it gives crucial background and we also hope that it will be interesting and informative if simply read through from beginning to end. At the same time, the translation editors have taken a somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude, preferring to let choices emerge within each article translation that the author-translator team is happy with and likewise letting the

translators elaborate in footnotes those further elements of context that they would like to include.

The translator-author groupings are interesting and varied, including graduate students translating fellow graduate students; graduate students translating more senior scholars; and senior scholars translating their students, former students, and colleagues. In several cases, there has been even more to say about the translation process: Nora England and Margarita Martínez Pérez offer a joint reflection on the translation of Margarita's article; Anthony Woodbury reflects on his experience at the end of Isaura de los Santos's article; and Sophie Pierson and Emiliana Cruz Cruz present a dialog at the end of Emiliana's article that explores translation in collaboration.

In all, we as translators found the whole process highly rewarding. We especially felt that by devoting considerable time to the volume and its translation in the *Research* course, we were able to work toward our goal of engaging the deeper issues of purpose, agenda, and ethics that arise in documentary linguistic research and to make that an integral part of training in our field. On a number of occasions, translators and other class members commented on the deeply personal and emotional dimensions of fieldwork and on the commitment revealed in the articles and discussions; they expressed gratitude to the authors for being willing to face—and expand upon—their own, often difficult, experiences. In turn, several of the authors said that, for themselves, there was value in being able to discuss and be heard about these issues, especially in a somewhat formal academic context. Making and refining translations, too, added important and unexpected facets to the discussions: we take translation to be not merely intralinguistic conversion but rather a hermeneutic, interpretive process, and that invited us all—authors, translators, and other class members—to dig deeper into the articles and thereby consider further meanings.

In this light, we offer this volume of translation, as well as the method of its making, as tangible steps along the way in our department's now two-decade long effort to build a program in language documentation around professional training and subsequent professional support for native and heritage speakers of Indigenous languages of Latin America; we also hope that it serves as a way of acknowledging and promoting the new thinking that the authors of this volume have achieved.

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FOREWORD

Intellectual work and research strategies

Gladys Tzul Tzul

AMAQ INSTITUTE

Translated from Spanish by Patience L. Epps, University of Texas at Austin

These six articles, all fruit of the work of Indigenous researchers, come to us at an important moment, feeding the existing debates on “fieldwork” led by Indigenous researchers in the social sciences generally. Yet the volume *Theoretical reflections around the role of fieldwork in linguistics and anthropology: Contributions of Indigenous researchers from southern Mexico* is a pioneering study into the critiques, discourses, and limitations associated with fieldwork and research in the places where we live and where our families live. This critical edge must be considered when thinking about fieldwork and research in general.

For several years, Indigenous researchers have sought to understand communal political logic; to write about and record Indigenous history; and to document and valorize the linguistic structures of the places where our grandparents lived and where the next generations of our families will grow up. This condition presents a series of difficulties and challenges for research, while at the same time it has forced us to imagine research strategies that combine critical rigor with care. Herein lies the importance of this volume, as it presents six reflections from the points of view of five women and one man who have overcome the difficulties of documenting, recording, and interviewing in social and linguistic research.

Here Zapotec, Chatino, Tseltal and Tsotsil researchers offer us a vigorous reflection into their material and symbolic conditions. It is these conditions that have shaped their strategies for addressing the challenges presented by time constraints, gender relations, and working conditions in carrying out their research, and have at the same time driven political processes of language revitalization. For this reason and in this sense, it is useful to contrast the male Indigenous researcher's unique experience of the research and fieldwork process; this volume offers the reader an opportunity to analyze these differences.

Accordingly, these articles offer us a view of the material and subjective conditions associated with academic research and documentation, and also of the strategies that communities themselves develop for labeling and interpreting the world, and for preserving and curating their knowledge.

From the start, as investigators of our own struggles, we have insiders' perspectives on social intrigues, political disputes, and the complex and contradictory nature of community histories. Our status as internally positioned researchers thus forces us to consider the critical horizons and political implications of what we wish to promote through our research: to support the political demands of our communities, and to reassess theoretical approaches to characterizing native peoples.

The authors of these six articles have all been trained in research methods and are involved in multiple theoretical and political debates. In their academic careers, they publish and present their research at academic conferences, like any other researcher.¹ In several of these debates, they have had to swim against the current, pushing back against hierarchical and racist structures that prevail in academia, both in Latin America and the United States. Moreover, these authors were born into and remain entwined within the communal networks that organize their lives collectively with their nuclear and extended families; they are a part of the community organization of festivals, funerals, forest stewardship and the various other activities that take place in this communal world.

For this reason, there is a *double source of power* from which their research proceeds — power in both methodological and theoretical terms — which broadens the horizon of debates concerning what is generally known as “fieldwork in our communities of origin”.

Some of the fundamental issues addressed across the articles, relating to fieldwork as a component of research, are indicated below:

- a. The authors dialogue and converse with various studies addressing the issue of fieldwork in Indigenous communities. I refer to Linda Tuhiwai

1 I had the opportunity to attend the session that gave rise to this volume at the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), in May 2019 in Boston.

Smith (1999) and her work '*Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*', and many other sources that parallel her research.

- b. Fieldwork is not an abstract place; it is the place of family, of festivals, of relationships, of disputes, of obligation. For this reason, fieldwork is also the political work of interpretation.
- c. As researchers, their work is under constant scrutiny from community members, which may generate both mistrust and expectations (Margarita Martínez Pérez; Hilaria Cruz Cruz; Isaura de los Santos).
- d. The conditions for doing fieldwork are linked to the historical background of the families to which we belong. Just as the research will be questioned, depending on the results, the family also will be examined (Hilaria Cruz Cruz; Ana D. Alonso Ortiz).
- e. Research resulting from investigation based on fieldwork in the researcher's own community has been discounted by the corporate academy. Opinions from within the institutional academy concerning the intellectual work of researchers who investigate their own struggles are based in racist and classist arguments. At the same time, the work of Indigenous academics generates debates within these communities themselves (Emiliana Cruz Cruz).
- f. Fieldwork carried out by researchers who study their own communities is potentially profound, and sidesteps the clumsiness and confusion that are often experienced by researchers who are outsiders (Jaime Pérez González).

The articles in this volume contribute to the continued exploration of key postulates of the general social sciences: How does one investigate? What are the effects of this research on the researcher? Authors who initiated this debate focused, for example, on the notion of the subject and object of research, and the power relations that accompany this relationship. Rabinow (1977) problematizes his research and fieldwork through his knowledge of himself as an outsider in Morocco, and observes that this puts him in a relationship of power over the subjects. In contrast to Rabinow, we have the methodological turn proposed by Rivera Cusicanqui in *Sociology of the Image* (2015), a book in which the sociologist presents her students from El Alto, in La Paz, Bolivia, with strategies to investigate the stories, struggles, and geographies in which they themselves are inserted. This author discusses research techniques, participation, and observation — fieldwork — and observes that “participation is not an instrument at the service of observation, but rather its prerequisite”. On the other hand, Spivak writes in *Studies of Subalternity: Deconstruction of historiography* (1985), that in her work as a Hindu woman, scholar, and writer, she simultaneously occupies the position of subject and object in the research process.

This set of articles expands and elaborates on this discussion of the ethical, political, and epistemological foundations of social research: How and in what ways

are linguistic theory and science produced from Indigenous communities? What implications does research have for Indigenous researchers, when this is sited in their communities of origin? These are key questions, and here we have six voices that address them through contextualized stories.

Finally, I observe that research is a job, and as such we are subject to criticism. While in our communities, we are frequently the targets of questions such as ‘how much do you earn from this work?’, and of comments concerning whether we ‘accumulate profits from our research’. Yet I think we must recognize that also present in our communities are merchants, farmers, carpenters, bricklayers, who likewise work and may be criticized for their trades and their outcomes. In the same way, we too will be criticized as researchers.

In fact, this condition brings our research process much closer to reality. It pushes us to be more reflective and reveals parts of the critical apparatus of the self-regulating networks in which we have lived. Intellectual work is also a *tequio* — a communal duty — and as such it will be collective, measured, criticized...

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INTRODUCTION¹

Emiliana Cruz Cruz

CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES Y ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES EN
ANTROPOLOGÍA SOCIAL (CIESAS)

Translated from Spanish by Patience L. Epps, University of Texas at Austin

I have reflected for a long time on the responsibilities that Indigenous researchers have, both within our communities and within academia. I remember the words of my father, Tomás Cruz Lorenzo, who said that formal education was a privilege, and that not everyone could have access to it — and I understood that, in having this privilege, my education had to be at the service of the community. When I made this commitment, I decided that my way of contributing was through the study of the Chatino language, my first language, so I chose to focus on linguistic anthropology. However, as time went by, responding to the needs of my community was not an easy task — especially since, as I progressed in my studies, it became increasingly difficult to travel to my town; I could only go there on vacation. So, while far away,

¹ I want to thank each of the contributors to this volume. They all put in a lot of time, both in writing and editing their articles; and moreover they have put their hearts into describing their experiences for this volume. I also want to thank Nick Thieberger and Anthony C. Woodbury for initiating the discussion with me when I proposed to do a volume in Spanish for *Language Documentation and Conservation*. Finally, I want to thank Ana del Conde, Regina Martínez Casas, Néstor Hernández Green, Gladys Tzul Tzul, Sol Aréchiga Mantilla and Kate Mesh who supported this project by reading the articles; and to the external reviewers (who carried out blind peer review) for their diligent work in reviewing each article.

I began to reflect on my role as an Indigenous researcher. In particular, I thought a great deal about the collaborative projects that I was working on, at a distance, with young people from my community; projects that generally do not fit neatly into academic obligations such as publications, lectures, and courses, among many others.

Also from a distance, I began to accept that collaborative projects within the community are full of complexities; for example, involving local politics. So I decided that I should think more about my own position as a female researcher who lives far from her community, yet does research there. This exercise helped me to realize how complex my situation is; and it is an exercise that I have not completed, because all this is part of life, and as such time passes and it brings new things.

As I entered into this self-reflexive exercise, I realized two things. One is that there are few spaces associated with research methodology where Indigenous researchers can talk about their experiences; a second is that, in general, books on field methodologies are designed for people who are not part of the community in which the research takes place. The experiences of those who investigate their own culture are different from those who investigate cultures other than their own. I gave myself the task of broadening perspectives and making Indigenous researchers' voices heard concerning their experiences. Through this effort, I learned that there is a great need to talk about our position and our own experiences, both inside and outside the community.

Since 2012, I have been organizing workshops for speakers of Otomanguan languages. Designed to give linguistic tools to those who have revitalization projects underway in their communities, the workshops have been directed to the study of tones, the development of pedagogical grammars, and the elaboration of texts. These workshops have been focused on the languages, with little attention to sociolinguistic and anthropological considerations — this for reasons of time, given that the workshops are held only one or two weeks per year. Many Indigenous people who have passed through these workshops have gone on to postgraduate studies, as is the case with Ana D. Alonso Ortiz and Isaura de los Santos, whom I recruited to study at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and who contribute to this volume.

While most of the workshop participants are engaged in community-based projects, I will focus on these two scholars' stories to illustrate why I invited them to join this editorial effort. Ana D. Alonso Ortiz won a cultural scholarship in 2017 to work with her community collective *Dill Yelnbán*, awarded by the Program to Support Municipal and Community Cultures (PACMYC, its initials in Spanish) of the Mexican Federal Government's Secretary of Culture.² In the summer of that same year, Ana told me that the local authority had not approved her project — and not only that, they had also hurtfully devalued her commitment to her language,

2 https://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/pdf/2018/Padron_Beneficiarios_PACMYC2017.pdf

Yalálag Zapotec. However, I understood what had happened in Ana's case, since my work with Chatino languages has given me considerable experience in dealing with local authorities. While these authorities often support young people's projects, on other occasions they become uncooperative, for reasons grounded in the community dynamics of the particular location, and generally linked to religion or politics.

The other story focuses on Isaura de los Santos, who is from San Miguel Panixtlahuaca, a Chatino municipality that I know very well, as I have given workshops there. On one occasion, the town Commissioner for Education invited me to give a workshop in Panixtlahuaca, which I accepted, but I told them that I would teach it together with Isaura. In my email I sent a copy to Isaura, the Commissioner for Education, and the municipal President. The Commissioner responded, saying that I should please not copy Isaura in my emails, and that the President had been offended, principally because Isaura did not have any position in the municipality. I asked Isaura what to do and she said to go ahead with the workshop plan. When I went to Panixtlahuaca to teach it, the president was still offended and did not wish to receive us; only the education councilor did so. The headquarters of the municipality of Panixtlahuaca is housed in a large building, but for the workshop they assigned us the parking lot where they keep gasoline for their cars. We all managed to find chairs and clean the place so that we could spend the day studying Chatino.

My experience and the stories of Ana and Isaura compelled me to speak about the experiences of Indigenous people who do research in their own communities. So in 2019 I organized a panel, together with Ana, entitled "Existence is, non-existence is not: Debates on Indigenous ontology in fieldwork" (LASA 2019, *Nuestra América: Justice and Inclusion*). Five of the six authors contributing to this volume participated there. The remaining author, who did not give a talk but who attended the panel presentation, was Tsotsil researcher Margarita Martínez Pérez; she expressed her interest in discussing the subject and was invited to participate in this reflection. In that first meeting, we all shared our experiences, and a very enriching dialogue took place amongst ourselves and the audience. In light of this positive exchange, we resolved to continue our discussion of these issues. Thus this volume was born.

In their contributions, each participant was asked to reflect on their experiences as a researcher and, above all, to discuss their research practices in the field, in light of the challenges presented by conducting research in one's own community or in a neighboring community. In addition to myself and those mentioned above, the participants in this volume also include the Chatino researcher Hilaria Cruz Cruz and Jaime Pérez González, a Tseltal researcher who carries out fieldwork in the Mochó region, in Chiapas. The authors have aimed for a broader vision, drawing on the perspectives of Indigenous researchers to propose alternative methodologies, with an eye to the future of language documentation and anthropology as shaped by more collaborative and inclusive research.

The authors share several key reflections in their contributions. They stress the importance of reading about the experiences of Indigenous researchers from their own points of view. They emphasize that discussions about research practices must go beyond the dichotomy between the researcher and the researched, and that the work must be carried out with full respect for Indigenous peoples — a particular point of focus here. Accordingly, the articles suggest that the disciplines of linguistics and anthropology should consider alternative methodologies, beyond those used by academics who do not have a knowledge of and commitment to their communities of study from the beginning. They propose that more dialogue concerning the experiences of Indigenous people will provide Indigenous researchers with models for navigating complex situations that arise both in their community-based research and in their relationships with the academy.

I recognize that this is not the first time that these reflections have been made. A discussion has been underway for several decades now about the importance of modifying linguistic and anthropological research practices. However, as disciplines, there is still a long way to go to reach real inclusiveness. Each piece of writing presented here dialogues with the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, from New Zealand; hopefully, one day those from New Zealand will dialogue with the work of the Indigenous people of this continent. While some authors have opposed rethinking methodologies for language documentation and anthropology, in our opinion this task is indispensable, as much of the academic world continues to be exclusive, racist and classist. Although we may be academic researchers, the products of our work are distinct and are likely to be rejected within the academy. Yet we hope to have a lasting impact on the area of research that concerns Indigenous peoples and, above all, to be able to offer new generations a space of belonging among its multiple challenges. Therefore, ours is a call for a renewed focus within language documentation and among studies involving Indigenous peoples. However, by carefully articulating the distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in documentation and description, one runs the risk of reiterating prevailing academic distinctions that tend to hide or deny the contribution of the former. It is possible that this phenomenon prevails in the minds of many academics; that is, a person might think of him or herself as a Good Samaritan while nonetheless engaging in discrimination, unable to understand or defend Indigenous researchers when they are rejected by the academic establishment, with its bureaucracy and institutional idiosyncrasies.

Nevertheless, we hope that those who take an interest in these methodologies — which do not fit into those designed for the study of ‘the other’ — understand our perspective. Acknowledgment of our participation is likely to have a lasting impact, involving a reconsideration of the way we do research. This observation does not give us a license to ignore the contributions that non-Indigenous people make to research on Indigenous peoples; in fact, quite the opposite. As is true for all science, the social sciences involve a continuous process of learning, directed towards grad-

ually achieving a better understanding of the world in which we live and which we contribute to transform through human practice.

Finally, in this volume we seek a renewed focus on respect-based research, emphasizing collaboration with Indigenous knowledge and with the goal of producing useful results. This selection of works leads us to think more carefully about the contributions of Indigenous researchers in creating a framework of emerging knowledge. In twenty years' time, we hope that we may have had some influence, and that new generations have gone on to develop better methodologies and carry research forward, responding to particular questions involving Indigenous peoples by drawing on research done by them and in their languages. Thus the issues addressed in this volume represent a broad, multi-purpose, multi-experiential dialogue that continues to be relevant to researchers and Indigenous communities. These six articles provide not only references to where we have been, but also a sense of where academic research may be headed.

Sk'an jtsatsubtastik ko'ontontik: Dialogues, challenges, and complexities of being a Tsotsil researcher

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Translated from Spanish by Nora C. England, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

The article reflects on the experiences of a researcher of Tsotsil origin trained in the fields of linguistics and anthropological linguistics, who lives in the same territorial space of the study community. Specifically, it examines the implications and challenges of being a woman, a Tsotsil and a researcher, who, on the one hand, delves into the social and community spaces that are exclusive to men, and on the other, enters a field in which external researchers have been privileged.

The author starts from an epistemology that proposes the study of “we” in contrast to the research established in the study of “others”. It provides a series of methodologies for research “from within” that start from the need for knowledge of cultural resources, dialogue from the same linguistic code, the ecology of formulating questions, the practices of reciprocity, the preponderance of collective interests, empathy, as well as the awareness of living in community scrutiny. Finally, it proposes an approach to the study communities that is fundamentally humane, and not simply methodologically correct.

Key words: Tsotsil researcher, fieldwork experiences, linguistic documentation, nosotridad, reciprocity practices.

I. Introduction¹

Studies about ethnographic methods and the fieldwork experiences of researchers who are external to the communities, of Western origin, and with all of their economic privilege backed up by academic institutions, are abundant (Duranti 2000; Grinevald 2019; Macaulay 2004; Naggy 2000; Wilkins 2019, among others). However, studies about the problems that local investigators constantly confront, native anthropologists or “insiders” as they are denominated by Narayan (1993), with respect to the “outsider” anthropologists, are relatively recent and quite scarce, for example the works of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Maori researcher; and Antolín Diezmo (2012; 2016) who reflects about his role as a Tsotsil investigator and at the same time a member of the same community of study.

The present article reflects about the crossings passed through by a researcher of Tsotsil origin formed within the canons of linguistics and anthropological linguistics, who at the same time forms part of the community of study and finds herself under the constant scrutiny of her own people. Specifically, it examines the implications and challenges of being Tsotsil, a woman, and a researcher; of gaining access to the social and community spaces that are exclusively of the men, and whose field of study furthermore had been privileged previously for researchers external to the communities of study.

As a woman, a Tsotsil, an artist-activist, a researcher and interdisciplinary academic, I wish to emphasize the infinity of labels that are used to name my identity. Narayan (1993) names with diverse forms an internal investigator who belongs to a Mesoamerican community to distinguish them from foreign researchers, or simply researchers. The labels vary among “native”, “Indigenous”, “inside”, “internal” investigators. Now that it is stylish to use the term “original”, surely someone could use the label “original researcher”.

It should be emphasized that I don’t identify myself as an Indigenous researcher, nor as an Indigenous academic; such an expression is not only a term that is imposed

1 I want to thank Emiliana Cruz Cruz infinitely for inviting me to contribute with this offering, and also for her valuable comments, dialogues, and reflections during the development of the manuscript. I also would like to thank Hilaria Cruz Cruz and Ana del Conde who also contributed to the discussions, revisions, and comments of the first versions. Thanks to the external readers who provided feedback through their comments on the final version of the article. Thanks also to my friends and sisters of the heart Gabriela Eugenia Rodríguez-Ceja y Lorena Beatriz Rodas-Pineda who supported me in the discussion, revision, and processing of the final manuscript. And I also thank Marie A. Fulbert for inviting me to participate in the Mesa Redonda on “El compromiso Académico ante las problemáticas de las comunidades indígenas: Experiencias de Vinculación” at the end of 2017 in the Graduate Unit, UNAM, a space where I presented the first reflections and analyses of this work and exactly where the continuous discussion and self-reflection of it began, until the publishable version was achieved.

by the “others” to name us, but it also impresses me as a form of homogenizing the life experiences and histories of the people who are members of diverse linguistic communities. I have questioned the terms “native” and “original” from the first time I heard them; all of us are native or original occupants of some culture or territory. In the same way, expressions such as original languages or original communities still do not fit in my feeling-thinking; all of us are originally from some space or place where some language is spoken, not only the speakers of Mesoamerican languages.

From my perspective, starting from the label of an “inside” researcher, I could accept it as a correct description, but I would add a researcher who is internal to the communities, an investigator who pertains to the communities, an investigator of Tsotsil origins, a researcher of Tsotsil roots, or a local researcher. With “local” I refer to the fact that I am situated or anchored to a specific time-space-territory and mode of concrete life as a member of the Tsotsil linguistic community, but my knowledge and academic productions have the same value and quality as the work of an external academic. Thus, in this article I will use these denominations with the intention of differentiating the experiences of an investigator who studies his or her own language and culture, with respect to an investigator who studies the “other”, cultures and languages distinct from his or her own.

The reflections of the present article form part of the experiences lived for more than a decade as an “ethnographer”, documenting different linguistic and cultural practices, with a whole experience as a member of the Tsotsil linguistic community, starting from the base that the language is a marker of social, cultural, and political identity, both individual and collective (Franchetto 2007). Likewise, I underline that languages are not extractable objects nor are they encountered separated from their speakers (Davis 2017), as these aspects are crucial for the approach and deployment of human relations during the process of documentation of the social, linguistic, and cultural structure of a specific group (Grinevald 2019). Thus, this text tries to create openings of reflection from new epistemic postures about the differences of the work of a local researcher with respect to an external one during the performance of fieldwork.

2. Individual identity: Woman, Tsotsil, and researcher

In this section I cover the theme of my position as a woman and investigator in the Tsotsil context who realizes fieldwork within her own community of origin and residence. I reflect on the challenges, problematics, and advantages that one has upon forming part of the Tsotsil linguistic community of the Altos de Chiapas, Mexico.

Historically the women have always struggled for their family, their community, and their territory, and are those who have maintained cultural and linguistic prac-

tices. In fact, Gladys Tzul Tzul (2020) points out that the communities were always maintained by the women; it is they who have had the strategic capacity and active participation in the social and community structure.² Despite this, little has been said or written about the role of the Indigenous woman in the academic world and about her fieldwork experiences in research. It is not just that it hasn't been made visible, it is rather that many times it has been thought that the profile of Indigenous women in the communities is homogeneous, that all still continue making tortillas in their kitchens, cooking at the edge of the fire, marrying very young and having children. Even the majority of followers of hegemonic feminism, city academics and of western origin, have trouble seeing or still find it unlikely to imagine that there are many manners of being an Indigenous woman and that some of us have broken the normative structure, of which little is said, and when it is, it has been from a point of view of victimization or from a benevolent imperialism.

From my perspective, silence has been maintained around the academic Indigenous woman who breaks the community *status quo*. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2016) says, Indigenous voices have been silenced or “othered” in the process. From there lies the importance of opening this conversation, reflection, and dialogue.

2.1 Gender as identity and challenge

In this section I relate what I consider to be the most outstanding characteristics of the implications of being a woman in the Tsotsil context for the accomplishment of fieldwork as a researcher.

As a Tsotsil woman who belongs to community life, one should remain in spaces and activities restricted to women; that is to say, in private and family ambits, following certain social norms framed in the division of tasks and functions determined by gender. When I did fieldwork for the project “Between lexicography and ethnography: Linguistic documentation about the management of wool and weaving on a backstrap loom among the women of San Juan Chamula, Chiapas,” I did not have any major problems, the management of wool and the backstrap loom are assumed to be women's activities, and the importance of knowing everything related to this practice is understood, given that I am a woman, Tsotsil, and an embroiderer.

What was questionable was why I had to go from house to house with my work equipment (photographic camera and video camera), visiting one family and another, from community to community. Many times, the women of my own community

2 See <https://www.revistaamazonas.com/2020/04/03/gladys-tzul-tzul-las-mujeres-indigenas-reivindicamos-una-larga-memoria-de-lucha-por-la-tierra/>.

made comments and allusions about the “kindness” of my life companion to “permit me so much freedom”, when I know that it doesn’t have to do with an act of kindness, but rather an individual right that corresponds to me to exercise like all women; we have a right to liberty and autonomy.

So, too, other cultural norms exist that say that in their majority it is men who do the activities outside the home. It was in these aspects that my access to these spaces was not easy. In order to do so it was a requisite that I would be accompanied by my husband, in my situation of being married, or, when I was single, be accompanied by my father or mother. This was not because I was in danger, but rather because of comments that could be said about me, which could affect my family ties. In addition, when I have wanted to do the documentation of the festivities about the water ceremonies, I don’t have access to all the communicative events, given that spaces such as the waterholes exist where women cannot have access. Thus, my participation was centered in the elaboration of the food that is offered during this festival without being able to make the video record of all the activities of this event, as the members of the community of study value the involvement and active and direct collaboration in the accomplishment of the tasks of their own for the women. Likewise, it is complicated to participate as a woman in ritual activities related to the changes and appointments of traditional authorities, given that these are spaces controlled and directed by men, unless you are the assistant or direct helper of a female authority.

To have access to all the spaces and events as a Tsotsil and researcher is complex; it is important to respect social and cultural norms, and pre-established roles; the social and cultural pressures still continue being a constant reality. If they are respected, you are seen well and accepted by the community, to the contrary, you typify a badly-behaved woman, *chuvaj ants* “a crazy woman”, given that you are confronting and breaking these rules.

So, one cannot play curious and easily break these rules and norms or expected behavior, as an external researcher could do. In this sense, the dynamic of the intersectionality that the women researchers who belong to the linguistic communities live has been a daily reality. It is well-known that many women who are external researchers have been permitted to participate in spaces and events where normally the local researchers do not have access; I myself have been a witness to this in many contexts and events. The category of gender, as Butler indicates (1999), is performative, it changes according to different social and cultural contexts, and so the intersection of other factors such as age, class, and ethnicity are variables that have influence on access to certain spaces.

This is where it is a challenge for an internal investigator to be able to convince collaborating speakers to permit her to have access, participate, or at least make the audiovisual record as a direct observer of the activity. On the other hand, the same situation occurs if the internal researcher is male, as it is then problematic to enter the spaces and activities that belong to the women.

However, a female researcher should withstand the gossip, both of men and women, in order to break these culturally established rules. Geraldine Padilla (2018) highlights that being a woman and young is one of many challenges that she confronts in her experience in the field. She points out that if you are single there may be many marriage proposals that in the future affect social relations with regard to the process of the investigation. For her part, Macaulay (2004) emphasizes that a female researcher (local or external) always confronts more emotional problems such as fear, anger, confusion and in the present, great insecurity, as the statistics on femicides go up constantly, unlike what male researchers (internal or foreign) experience. Our attitudes, our acts as female investigators are judged more, misunderstood, and criticized by women and men, unlike male investigators and surely, this is due to cultural restrictions; the idea that the women should maintain themselves united to the activities that are merely of the family or care is still preserved.

It should be noted that this point is very important in order to generate more writing and exchange of experiences with regard to this reality. On the one hand, the vulnerabilities that women confront in fieldwork are much greater, due to the misinterpretations, but also because of those risks that are involved with being a woman. And, on the other hand, we are forced to not speak of this so as not to be branded as “bad researchers” who are still not capable or not prepared for this field. There is much to explore about the conditions of gender and other factors of intersectionality such as ethnicity in the experiences of fieldwork in the world of research.

Due to the above, the question of how to access the spaces and events that belong to men in order for a Tsotsil woman to direct the work of linguistic documentation in her own cultural context arises. A useful strategy for these cases is the active participation or participatory action of the collaborating speakers with previous technical training so that they are the ones who do the documentation of the linguistic and cultural practices that they consider pertinent. I have had this experience in various contexts during my ethnographic work, as I express in the following:

When I noted that spaces exist where the women should not be, well it was an attitude of the men, so my immediate resource was to speak with my life partner (husband) so that he would be the one who would do the record of the activities. Obviously, with the due permission of the people of the community. For this, a little training about technical questions for handling the video camera, the recorder, or the still camera was important. Different work tools were used depending on the type of activity such as the changes of authorities.³

3 Experience lived in the year 2010-2011 and 2017-2018.

In this sense, the support on the part of my life partner has been a great help in those contexts where it is not possible as a woman to walk among the men in the plaza or to go from house to house late at night or early in the morning. In this way, we did not transgress any community norm.

2.2 Investigating my own language and culture

Being a member of the community and conducting research in the same cultural context, linguistic barriers are almost overcome, since they dominate the rules of communicative and linguistic competence and which cultural elements are permitted and which are not tolerated inside the group. This is something very different from the linguistic and cultural challenges that the external researchers encounter, such as the case of Macaulay (2004) during her fieldwork with the Mixtecs of Chalcatongo, Oaxaca. Only being interested in the morphology and syntax of Mixtec, she really didn't have any interest in the culture of the place of study, which she points to as a cause of many problems in her fieldwork as a foreign researcher.

However, those of us who are researchers and at the same time belong to the linguistic community also confront other strong conflicts that the external investigators do not suffer from. It should be noted that I do not wish to set above or confront the lived experiences of a local researcher with those of an external one; each one possesses multiple identities, diverse hats to put on, different caps to use and different abilities to respond to these lived experiences (Grinevald 2019; Macaulay 2004 and Narayan 1993).

One of these aspects that doesn't always function like a researcher who is internal to the communities is to be questioning the people of your own cultural context about linguistic or cultural affairs; it begins with the supposition that you should dominate the knowledge associated with the life of the place. To the contrary, it is easy that commentaries are made such as that which my father made when I wished to inquire about the phonological aspects of Tsotsil, which is my own language:

Ovil chachanvun oi, k'alal chachanbatel vuni, xtoy xa batel achanvuni tseb, chasbolibtasot, ep no'ox k'usitik chajak', ana'oj xa jechuke, kalojbot k'ala bik'itot to, jchanubtasojot, xana' xa jechuke.

"Oh daughter, you are studying in vain, the more studies you have, the more you advance in your studies, the more foolish you become, each time we

converse you ask me things that I took charge of teaching you, all of this that you question, it is assumed that you already know.”⁴

My father took for granted that as a speaker of Tsotsil I did not have any reason to be recording minimal pairs, nor phonetic and phonological contrasts. Even when my father did not know the technical aspects of linguistics that a student of linguistics knows, what was clear to him were the competencies that a speaker of Tsotsil like me should manage. Unlike a foreign investigator, who can arrive and ask any aspect of reality because for him everything is new, a local researcher cannot use this same resource of access to the data; it is assumed that he should master these frameworks of knowledge and modes of life.

One of the resources that has been of great utility for me is to ask comparative or contrastive questions that respond to temporal or geographic data, or that begin from anecdotes and narratives about facts of the past. This permits the opening of the dialogue and conversation, for example:

- a. When my grandfather lived, I remember that he greeted people by kissing their hand and his expression of greeting was different, but now we young people greet each other in another way. Why has it changed or why do we not greet in the same way?
- b. The woman of X community wraps her tamales with bromeliad leaves. Why is it when we make tamales at home we do not use this same leaf?
- c. I visited X community and they celebrate a fiesta in one way. In our community we celebrate this festivity in another way. Has it changed or has it always been celebrated like this?

These comparative questions permit an opening to dialogue about different experiences of the people. Likewise, a useful practice for the researchers belonging to the communities is to get close to the grandfathers and grandmothers, that is to say, to the elders of the community as a first point of contact; they are considered to be the most respected and wise persons. Evidently there is much to talk about and learn from them because of all the experience accumulated along their years of life, which we the young people lack.

In this sense, the individual identity is not disassociated from the collective identity. The local investigators should have very clear, not only the specific and general intentions of the research project to maintain frank discussions with the mem-

4 A commentary that my father made during my first fieldwork in the autumn of 2005, when I began my studies in the master's program in Amerindian Linguistics.

bers of the collaborating communities, but also pay special attention to the cultural, political, and economic relations of the place. Tuhiwai Smith highlights “that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities” ([1999] 2016: 126).

For this reason, the next section focuses on the importance of interweaving the individual identity of the local researcher with the communal world lattice or the collective weaving of the collaborators of the study.

3. Collective Identity. Dialoguing among ourselves: the “we-ness”

In this section we dialogue and reflect about the implications of the study of the others; the “otherness” vs. the study of ourselves, of the “we-ness (*nosotridad*)”. The manner in which an investigator relates him or herself from inside, and lives in the community of origin and of study, should be a function of the collectivity and not from the individuality (Lenkersdorf 2008). Thus, I retake the value of the term *nosotrification* “where the I is not negated, but rather is integrated in the ourselves that is composed of the I’s whose obligations constitute the we” (Lenkersdorf 2008:123).⁵ In this sense, everything that shapes the “we” is the integration together with the local investigator and those speakers who collaborate in the study that shape the social weaving of a community.

Following the two categories posed by Mosel (2007) and for the purposes of this article, it is necessary to highlight two agents or actors central to this process of linguistic documentation for this dialogic path which is the we-ness. The first actor or agent is the role that is performed by the researcher, linguist and member of the community of study, who I call the local researcher or researcher internal to the communities. The other refers to the collaborators and actors, speakers of the languages to be studied and documented, who I call collaborating speakers, as illustrated in the following diagram:

5 “donde el yo no se niega, sino que está integrado en el nosotros que se compone de los yo’s cuyos compromisos constituyen el nosotros”

AGENTS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF LINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION



Illustration by the author

In this sense, the investigative path is constructed and developed starting from the dialogue with the “we,” as a collaborative team, with distinct skills and degrees of knowledge “trying to achieve almost common interests”, that is to say, the recording, documenting, maintenance, and linguistic and cultural strengthening or in the case of languages in danger, in the linguistic recuperation and revitalization. In order to understand, as speakers of the same language, the different communicative practices as a central component of the life of our group, it is fundamental to explore and peek into the world of ethnography from ourselves and not only from the perspective of the “others”.

All of the researchers, whether external or internal, go through the questioning of the objectivity and authenticity of their data, but a researcher who belongs to the community of study is harshly questioned in this aspect (Narayan 1993); part of the colonialist system still maintains academic racism toward the local researcher, due to the supposed lack of distance in the study of the “other” or of distinct cultures, as well as the necessity of starting from Eurocentric epistemic premises and the over-valuation of the use of positivist methodologies that are so proclaimed in scientific work.

Before this structural presence of racism, there is also a constant challenge about the classism within academic institutions, and with certain researchers, from their privileged positions, imposing excluding and absolutist glances in relation to the Eurocentric cognitive theories, in which we see a constant hierarchic representation

of knowledge, where the local is always reduced to a “community knowledge” or it is maintained in the status of “Indigenous knowledges and cosmovisions.”

It is thus that there is still a long way to go to achieve the dialogue and the construction of a “we-centered” knowledge in the investigative field and not continue assuming the western and colonialist posture of positioning oneself from the outside and take distance to study the otherness. Now is the moment to dialogue and study ourselves among ourselves as members of the different linguistic communities.

Thus, the mechanisms and strategies that the investigator belonging to the community should establish in order to approach the life, the experiences of the collaborating speakers, and their linguistic and cultural practices constituted from the collectivity, require a solid community participation and “horizontal” interaction between the local researcher and the collaborating speakers, through active participation or participative action.

In this sense, it is necessary to know the basic cultural resources for approaching collaborating speakers in order for the doors to open or so that they don’t close. These are key in this process in order to achieve a dialogic interaction during the collecting of a good database that is required in the field of linguistic documentation. Among the elements to consider are the following: to manage the cultural resources, to dialogue with the same linguistic code, to know the ecologies of the formulation of questions and the practices of reciprocity, to set above the collective interests and empathy, and to live under scrutiny.

1. Cultural resources

From the Maya Tsotsil context it is fundamental to be clear about the basic cultural resources of petition within the speech community. To approach the people to ask them to form part of the team of collaborators should have the same magnitude and formality as when the ties of *compadrazgo*⁶ are established. This includes approaching elders or people of respect and taking them the same gifts to seal the formality and the relationships, which are social more than labor relationships which should be amalgamated, as I share with the following experience:

When I began with the idea of the proposal of the project “Linguistic, historical, and ethnographic documentation about the tanchak: Discourse and verbal art among the Tsotsil dancers during the Huixtec carnaval,” first I spoke with my father, I posed the idea so that he would give me his advice about the feasibility and viability of the work of documentation. He told me that it was interesting, and that it would be

6 Ties of ritual kinship established between the godparents and the parents of the godchild.

important to speak with the collaborating speakers and social actors of the cultural practice; that is to say, with the dancers and musicians. So we went to speak with them, that day I took pox⁷, sodas, and rolls; it is important to take something in the hand (a symbolic act) when one visits another to ask a favor. Pox is the speech opener. I had to propose my petition, given that the person who had the interest in documenting was me as an “inside investigator” and I depended on them (collaborating speakers and social actors) if they accepted sharing this individual interest to form a collective interest. This was how the first approach was proposed, after this come diverse meetings of work, and agreements, which I will talk about later.⁸

With respect to this, Antolín Diezmo (2012; 2016) points out that the stay for fieldwork in his place of origin is called *vula'al* “visit”. He mentions that a *vula'al* occurs with the people you know; it doesn’t necessarily imply sharing experiences and things, but at times it helps to a consideration of *li buch ’u ta xvulaj lek yo’onton* whether the one who is visiting is of “good *o’ontonal* or is a good person” and to take or share something is what differentiates the *vula'al* from any talk.

In the communities and places that form the municipalities of the highlands of Chiapas, sodas and *pox* are a principal element of coexistence. Although sodas are not consumed daily,⁹ during the *vula'al* “visit” with the people, principally when I did fieldwork in the framework of my research,¹⁰ consuming sodas was constant with the people with whom I spoke directly and with their family members. Although I constantly let them see my opinion about the implications for health because of the excessive consumption of sodas, this drink has been incorporated into the cultural life of the Tsotsiles.

I agree with Diezmo (2012) in highlighting that upon making *vula'al* “visit”, the people share their lives with us, and questions are posed about what the community, the place was like, what infancy was like, and they also ask questions about what one thinks, what one does, in such a way that a coexistence is being established. This helps by not creating an uncomfortable distance right away (Narayan 1993). Sharing the territory of origin like *jchi’il jbatik* “we are companions,” that is, that we pertain

7 *Pox* is an alcoholic drink fermented from sugarcane. Before it was made from corn and squash, now it is only made from sugarcane. Generally, it is only taken the first time, given that it is the first formal meeting. *Pox* is the speech opener in formal, ritual, and ceremonial encounters.

8 Experience from February 2016.

9 Like Antolín Diezmo (see 2012).

10 “Documentación de los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje entre niños y adultos tsotsiles de San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, México (2010-2014)” y “Entre la etnografía y la lexicografía: Documentación lingüística sobre el proceso de la elaboración del textil basado en la lana de borrego entre las mujeres tsotsiles de San Juan Chamula, México (2014-2019).

to the same culture and we speak the same language, also creates other ecologies of connection and of relating; to not do it adequately can be very controversial among Tsotsiles.

2. To dialogue using the same linguistic code

From the field of linguistic documentation the importance of collaborative work and of creating new relations between investigators and speakers of endangered languages is spoken of; this relation and collaboration should always start from the management and control of the same linguistic code. The empathy manifested in the shared code, the value of the words and the verbal agreements among Tsotsiles contribute to a fluid interaction and interconnection. Otherwise many misunderstandings between the community and the researcher can be generated. Grinevald (2019) shares with us her long experience about the multiple cases that her student, other linguists, and she herself experienced when they were permitted access to the place, or the contrary, that they were run out of the community due to various problems, such as they didn't manage the language or for other issues of a social, political, or religious nature. Below I share the following:

From personal experience, to maintain the same linguistic code is very important for the people of the community of study. Principally the elders are very enthusiastic to know that being young and having studied outside the community or municipality, we are still speaking Tsotsil; there is no necessity to have recourse to Spanish, a code that scares the people of my community a lot. The people of my own community feel very grateful that we can dialogue about everything in Tsotsil; they have shown that they have a lot of security about what they say, or what they are asked, and both are sharing the same information, without wasting emotions or time. Even the grandmothers have told me that they feel more secure about what they say; their words and their voice are taken into account: Oy yich'el ti muk' ti jk'optike, ti ketik... "They have respect for our words and our voice..."¹¹

For this reason, it is crucial that, as researchers who are internal or external to the place, we should master the language of the community of study, not only because of the methodological implications of the investigation, but also because of the decodification of the data and to avoid a misinterpretation of the reality because of linguistic misunderstandings or misunderstood cultural conjectures.

11 Experience from March 2017 with the grandfathers and grandmothers of Huixtán, Chiapas, México.

3. Ecologies of formulating questions

To be a member of the same linguistic community permits one to formulate questions adequately or suitably according to the interests and cultural frameworks of the community itself. Once the *vula'al* “the visit” (Diezmo Ruíz 2016) of the researcher of Tsotsil origin is made with the collaborating speakers, it is important to be clear that the questions should not be formulated depending on the interest of the researcher, but rather depending on the interest of the collaborating speakers. To cite an example:

When my father or my mother visit in the home of my grandparents, of their compadres, or people visit the house, since it is a farming community where the planting of corn is a central activity, it is therefore important to begin the interaction (after the greetings and entering the house) with questions about how the sowing is going if it is the period of preparing the land; how the process of growth in the cornfield goes when it is the time of sowing; and if it is the time of the harvest, how has the gathering of corn gone.¹²

In this sense, little by little the interest of the researcher who pertains to the community is posed; the importance and contribution to the research for the strengthening of the language and culture is made known in order to allow a frank glimpse of the value of this documentation as a historic and patrimonial memory for the collaborating speakers.

4. Practices of reciprocity

Depending on the necessities of the investigation and on the opportunities for collaboration, sometimes, when it is necessary to form work groups, many previous meetings are required, as Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2016) emphasizes with regard to some Indigenous students having had to return one and another time until they won the confidence of an elder, and after all that, they not only have obtained what they were looking for, but also they gained a friend or a grandparent. In these cases, the number of meetings required by the collaborating speakers does not matter, since the most important effect of this process is that the researcher does not lose heart, nor the desire to do the work of linguistic documentation. In this way, collaborative work can be guaranteed that will require a lot of patience and many, many meetings until both groups arrive at an agreement and have clear which are the contributions and benefits that will be obtained on both sides.

12 Experience that I live and hear constantly as a member of the Tsotsil linguistic community.

Similarly, when one comes back from fieldwork with a family or several families or groups, it is important to repay the time of the people who dedicate themselves to attend you, who share their linguistic knowledge and cultural experiences. The practices of reciprocity can be multiple; the return and delivery of products obtained in fieldwork, such as video recordings or photographs for the historic and patrimonial memory of the community. But it can also be a contribution in kind: contribute to the pantry of the house; in medicine, in case this is needed in the family; if one has a car, help in giving people rides when necessary; during the celebration of a festivity or a ceremony one can contribute with the economic expenses; help in the interchange of experiences and knowledge, such as the techniques of embroidery and sewing in the case of interaction with women who are weavers.

To give is to receive, in order to receive it is necessary to give, thus reciprocity is translated and understood. The communities of the Tsotsil area and Maya in general function in this logic of contribution, cooperation, and initiative. Thus, one should not expect that the family or community ask for what they need, but rather one should always take the initiative as a researcher who belongs to the community. Likewise, it is important that this initiative be made with humility and that it be associated with the communal interests and by common agreement.

5. Putting collective interests first

Academic work and the necessities of the communities are found dissociated in many senses and levels. The temporal logics between the local or external researcher and the collaborating speaker do not always go in the same trajectory. That is to say, the major part of the time of the investigator is more accelerated with respect to those of the collaborating speakers.

When I was a student and went to do fieldwork, the timeline set by the academic council was limited with respect to the time-space required to approach the collaborators in the field (for similar experiences, see Leyva Solano 2019). Now, in my capacity as a “researcher internal to the communities,” this conflict with time has been maintained. The immediate academic necessities for the researcher are to be able to publish and generate materials according to the interest of the institutions. Many times the tasks for these ends are not tangible, such as the transcription of data, and for this reason they do not have the same value for the community. In fact, the community values more our very presence and our support in the ritual activities or daily activities than the products that are generated under the institutional interest. It is for this that, as an investigator of Tsotsil origin, one should subject oneself to the times and interests of the collaborating speakers as true generators of knowledge. Otherwise, the investigative and documentary walk will be affected during the process and it will be another work without co-participation. Additionally, it is important to have in mind that the experience that is generated with the collaborating

speakers will have an impact on the access of new researchers or the continuation of new collaborative and participative projects for the future.

6. Empathy

During classes in anthropological linguistics, we received the methodological and technical training to do fieldwork. However, in these classes we were not taught to be empathetic with the other, how to get closer to understand the other and not only yourself and your academic interests. Antolín Diezmo (2016: 66) mentions that “to recognize scientists as emotional persons led me to conclude that being a scientist not only implies an epistemological rupture, but also an ontological rupture.”¹³ Thus, to do research with an empathic sense permits you to open the road to create bonds of trust between people and bonds that are as horizontal as possible. However, this is an attitude that is little emphasized in the field of investigation, but to be empathic would assist a little to avoid the mistrust and antipathy of the communities because of not understanding the academic interests of the investigator due to the inaccessible character of the data (Wilkins 1992 [2019]).

7. Live under scrutiny

As was said before, the researcher from within who lives in the community constructs his form of being related as a function of the collectivity and not from the individuality (Lenkersdorf 2008). As Tomás Cruz (2018) points out, we cannot continue copying alien models without considering communal interests. An external researcher does not have to deal constantly with his collective relations, nor his individual interests, since when his objective of documentation is completed he can retire from the community without profoundly affecting his personal, family, or patrimonial life; including he can not return and nothing will happen. However, an investigator who belongs to community life is under the constant oversight and criticism of the people, not only toward his or her personal actions, but also with respect to the members of his or her family. On occasion we require a shield to withstand commentaries such as in the following example, which took place in a community of San Cristóbal de las Casas¹⁴ when I was trying to get informed consent about linguistic revitalization of a variant of Tsotsil being linguistically displaced. I was told the following:

¹³ Reconocer a los científicos como personas emocionales me condujo a concluir que el ser científico no sólo implica una ruptura epistemológica, sino una ruptura ontológica”

¹⁴ Some of these commentaries also were made by some collaborating families in the work of investigation that took place in 2005 in my own place of origin.

Surely you will take the video recordings to sell to the Gringos, or the Germans; you will get rich with this, surely there is a lot of money involved, for this reason such interest in teaching the children and taking down our language and our culture. Surely you will do the same as the foreigners and the kaxlanetik¹⁵ who only come to steal our knowledge, they leave here and sell it abroad.¹⁶

These commentaries generate division among the population, the work of documentation is not accomplished and it provokes much discouragement as an internal researcher, because it is your own people who don't support you. From my position as an academic of Tsotsil origin I perceive that the people continue living painful dynamics of exploitation and plundering; the people still remember how the investigators from outside have extracted data and knowledge from the communities and they are not returned to the places where the work of investigation was done. From there comes the importance of complying with the agreements made between the researcher and the community to avoid this mistrust and gradually erase the dissatisfied memories of the past.

In this sense, from experience as a researcher in the Maori context, Linda Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2016: 137) says that "every meeting, every activity, every visit to a home requires energy, commitment, and protocols of respect." If after multiple meetings, the community arrives at an agreement to not permit the development of linguistic documentation, it is important not to insist, as an act of respect. Perhaps in the future the mechanisms for its accomplishment will be given.

In the same way, it is inescapable that, as researchers internal to the communities, we must problematize our actions and think critically about our methodological processes, relations, and approaches with the true generators of knowledge, which are the linguistic communities. As well as the quality of the data and their analysis, we should also prioritize the return of the results of our investigative tasks to the community collaborators, given that we live with the consequence of our processes and actions, day to day.

Definitely, a Tsotsil, Tseltal, Zapotec, Chatino, Mazahua, Mixe, etc. investigator has a double or triple challenge: i) Deal with the western academic world about the classism and the racism toward the objectivity and authenticity of the data, because of being an investigator who belongs to the community of study; ii) Maintain community ties and social relations with collaborating speakers in order to build relational responsibilities with our communities (Pictou 2019); iii) If you are a woman,

¹⁵ Term used to name a person who is not of native origin, but is not a foreigner.

¹⁶ Commentaries of some of the members of the ejido (communal farmland) during a meeting with the ejido commissariat in April 2016 to obtain informed consent about the documentation of narratives and history with the grandparents, who were the last speakers of Tsotsil in the place.

follow cultural expectations and behavior about how to relate with the others so that your actions are not misinterpreted by other women and men of the community.

4. Final Reflections

The reflections expressed in this article come from my own experiences in the field, which I have lived along my way as a woman and a researcher of Tsotsil origin. Surely the male researchers who pertain to this cultural context have had other challenges some of which coincide and others which diverge from these experiences.

Independently of whether one is an investigator “from outside” or an investigator “internal to the Tsotsil community,” this dialogue about the complexities and challenges which are encountered during fieldwork is very interesting, as much in the area of linguistic documentation as in whatever other area of linguistics, social sciences, or humanities. No one is exempt from difficulties, nor from risks, and everyone can enjoy the magnificent experiences that are lived while doing fieldwork. However, it is clear that the local researcher is individually, familiarly, and socially engaged with the members of the community as generators and defenders of knowledge.

For this reason, it is necessary to take into account that which is pointed out by Linda Tahiwai Smith (1999: 15), that Indigenous methodologies tend to approach “cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology,” and as Pictou (2019) emphasizes, it is necessary to develop a *relational responsibility* toward the same community to which we belong and in which we do the research, just as to maintain the commitment with the academic institution under which the work is attached and supported. I should underline that as a researcher in the Tsotsil context I still do not achieve a balance between both commitments and responsibilities, nor have I totally achieved this relation of horizontality; I recognize my position as a Tsotsil academic. However, I exhort the companions who are researchers who belong to the different linguistic communities, to *sk'an jtsatsubastik ko'ontontik* “strengthen our hearts,” so that accomplished academic achievements are converted into tools of struggle in and with our communities for the defense of the language, of cultural practices, territory, nature, and ways of life that preserve our ancestors and the walking libraries that our grandmothers and grandfathers are.

The reflections in this article seek to generate new scenarios and epistemic constructs that had been ignored in all cases, and little considered by the academy. This dialogue incites and assists to rethink, reconsider fieldwork in and with communities that are not privileged (Wilkins 2019) in order to walk toward “new practices of the construction of knowledge in the context of the praxis” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015: 309)

and achieve an approach humanly significant and not only methodologically correct in order to close gradually the gaps of colonial asymmetry.

Fundamentally, I want to emphasize developing and maintaining the relations or create the conditions of reciprocity (give and receive) and not fall into intellectual, cognitive, or epistemic extraction, of which we have been criticized and indicated so much, the outside academics just as much as those from inside.

To conclude, it is important to mention that the identities that we assume are multiple and changeable. It is because of this that it is necessary to consider the posture of Narayan (1993) about the dialogues and disputes as much of a researcher “from outside” as “from a native.” The author signals that knowledge is situated, negotiated, and part of a continuous and dynamic process, which covers aspects that are personal, professional, and of domains. For this reason, it is important to recognize the hybrid, grafted, and positioned nature of our identities during the process of documentation and recuperation of languages; they are not isolated from their speakers, but rather are found situated within the multiple and complex human context.

Reflection on the translation

By Nora C. England and Margarita Martínez Pérez

The current article titled “Sk’an jtsatsubastik ko’ontontik: Dialogues, challenges, and complexities of being a Tsotsil researcher” is a version that was translated into English by Professor Nora England.

Thanks to the interest of Dr. Nora England, who is a native speaker of English with full control of Spanish, the dynamic of translation of this text consisted of a first version of a complete translation, which then was shared with the author for her revision. The author, speaker of Tsotsil with full control of Spanish and passive control of English, proceeded to the general revision of the text and then to the central and exact ideas which were then compared between the version in English and the original version in Spanish.

Once the translation was revised and approved by the author, it was sent to third and fourth readers for the general revision of the translation; Alejandro Curiel and Tony Woodbury contributed actively to this process. In general, the third reader said that the translation is faithful to the original document. The fourth reader and other students at the University of Texas made several observations about the translated text. Finally, the author reviewed some details, and the translator made the revision of the final version of the translated text. Thus, the process of dialogue about the translation was a fluid process of collective exchange.

The translator was pleased to work on a text that was readable, interesting, and well-written. She found, to her surprise, that what Colette Grinevald had said many years ago about being monolingual in three languages (French, English, and Spanish) was also true of the translator — she was monolingual in English and Spanish. What this meant was that, while she thoroughly understood and could fluently use many phrases in Spanish, she had no idea of what their proper translation was in English. Therefore, looking up these phrases online was crucial to the translation process. It also meant that she several times went down the rabbit hole of false cognates. Fortunately, Tony Woodbury caught them and their translations were changed.

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Between insiders and outsiders: When an Indigenous researcher conducts studies in her own community

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Abstract

This work presents the experiences of an Indigenous researcher carrying out linguistic and ethnographic studies within her own community. A growing number of Indigenous peoples are venturing into documentation, description and promotion of their languages of origin. As a field, linguistic documentation and linguistic description were created by and for members of academic institutions that were historically distant from collaborative work with the speakers of Indigenous languages. The author's place within the community, and thus the culture, gives her a profound insight into not only local linguistic research, but also its limitations and difficulties. There is a great need for resources and materials that address the complexities of a female native researcher's experiences in the field. These intricacies concern the paradoxical roles they play, as women, as members of complex intergenerational families, as community members and as members of educational institutions.

Key words: Indigenous identity, female researcher, Chatino, Indigenous languages of Mexico, local researchers, external researchers.

Introduction

In this article¹, I present the experiences, challenges, opportunities, advantages and disadvantages that female Indigenous researchers encounter while carrying out linguistic and ethnographic research within their own communities. I discuss this topic from my position as a female researcher, as a member of an extended and multi-generational family, and as a member of an Indigenous community.

Various aspects of this topic are illustrated with personal narratives and experiences. They reflect my perspective as a native female linguist and language activist engaged in language documentation, revitalization and promotion within my own community and within other Chatino communities since 2004 (H. Cruz 2014). I have carried out these activities individually and also as part of the Chatino language documentation team (E. Cruz and Woodbury 2014). My experience, like those experiences of other Indigenous academics, highlights the changes that have taken place across the discipline of language documentation, language description, and field linguistics as a whole.

The fields of linguistics and anthropology were created by intellectuals and religious figures of European origin. Two 16th century Catholic monks, Bernardino de Sahagún and Juan de Córdoba, became pioneers within these fields after performing the first anthropological and linguistic analyses of the New World. The former described Nahuatl culture and the latter published a dictionary of the Zapotec language and performed a detailed analysis of its grammar (1957 [1578]).

In the 20th century, Francisco Belmar (1901) set out to identify specific affiliations between multiple Indigenous languages of Oaxaca by collecting word lists from languages like Chatino (Sullivant 2016), Zapotec, Mixtec, and Huave. In 1940, during World War II, members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) arrived in Mexico with the goal of translating the Bible into several Indigenous languages. SIL members would serve as missionaries and (both professional and amateur) linguists living within the region. During their stay in the Chatino region, they published dictionaries, pedagogical primers, and documented various aspects of the grammar. Based

1 I would like to thank Sol Aréchiga Mantilla, Michael Peter Abramov, Emiliana Cruz, Ana D. Alonso Ortiz and Andrés Pérez Pérez for their support for this work. I would also like to thank two anonymous external reviewers and the participants in the discussion table “El Ser Es y El No-Ser No Es: debates sobre la ontología indígena en el trabajo de campo” (*Being Is and Not-Being Isn’t: debates about Indigenous ontology in fieldwork*) at the conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in Boston in 2019, for comments made on this document. I also thank Dr. Javier Flores Gómez for reviewing and editing the article. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Wood, who made this translation of the Spanish paper. Once her draft was completed, she submitted it to me along with questions she had about terms that were very specific to the context of the paper that are listed in the Cultural Glossary at the end of this volume, based on my clarifications. These terms included the words *compadres*, *comadres*, *castellanización*, and *mayordomía*.

on federal integrationist policies, the Mexican government abandoned Indigenous language research during the mid-20th century. As such, any published material we now have on the Chatino languages of Oaxaca from the period between the 1940's to the 1980's is limited to the documentation, analysis, and promotion carried out by members of SIL (Upson and Longacre 1965; Pride 1965 and 2004).

The primary objective of the Mexican government has been the integration of Indigenous people via a national project of *castellanización* ('Castillianization'). Political implementations of this have included heavily promoting state symbols, namely the Spanish language, the flag, and the national anthem. Students are often forced to stand for hours in the scorching sun, marching and saluting the Mexican flag, while singing the national anthem. These policies expedited the disappearance of the Indigenous languages of Mexico, with their effects still lingering today.

In the early 1980's, a number of linguists (Dorian 1981; Himmelmann 1998; Krauss 1992) began to warn the public about the accelerated loss of Indigenous languages throughout the world as a result of integrationist policies from colonial nations which imposed their languages, religions and cultures. This concern resulted in the creation of the field of language documentation, with the goal of recording these languages before the final native speakers passed away.

However, as language documentation originated in colonial states, like most areas of knowledge currently taught in schools, the theories, methods and practices were created from the perspective of the researchers. On July 20th 2020, Amy Dahlstrom, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Chicago, wrote on her Facebook page (Dahlstrom 2020) that after almost a century of linguists and anthropologists from that university analyzing and writing about Indigenous languages and cultures, only now had two Indigenous students, members of the communities that these academics had been studying, obtained PhDs in Linguistics from that institution. Therefore, the field experiences that have been documented up to this date are those of researchers from developed nations.

Currently there is an explosion of texts and publications considering best practices for researchers documenting and describing Indigenous languages. The majority of these practices, however, are designed by and for researchers who are external to the communities. These practices cover a wide range of language documentation activities, such as planning, execution, analysis, archiving, and data dissemination (Gippert *et al.* 2006; Bower 2008; Newman *et al.* 2001; Berez *et al.* 2010).

In addition to the practical suggestions that these texts offer on how to plan a field trip, and what preparations a researcher must make before leaving for the research site such as requesting funding for the trip and obtaining the technology required for collecting the data, these texts also discuss protocols that a researcher should follow when approaching the community. For example, Larry Hyman, a linguist who works within African communities, noted that the first time he did fieldwork there, he met his collaborators through a priest from the Catholic church (Hyman 2001).

Within these texts, academics also reveal their motivations behind conducting fieldwork in places that are foreign to them. Many mention personal goals such as their sense of adventure or their eagerness to be the first to “discover” unique, interesting and often strange aspects of a language, grammar, and culture.

These reflections show that external linguists unconsciously impose a cultural, linguistic, economic and educational hierarchy upon the speakers and communities with whom they carry out their research. For example, the most common referents these academics typically use for the speakers are “they” or “the others”. These phrases represent discursive patterns indicative of a hegemonic dominant European culture, which destructively enforces exclusionary practices against other peoples and languages on the basis of class, gender, race, and other socioeconomic factors.

Ulrike Mossel, for example, writes that “the relationship between a researcher and a speaker is difficult because aside from their interest in the community’s language, the two parties don’t share anything else in common in terms of background and objectives” (2006: 68). The distance that linguists from the “first world” feel towards the speakers of the languages that they study is problematic because it replicates the colonial, paternalist and exclusionary mindset that has characterized Western science.

If an academic feels foreign to what they study, they will lack the passion, pleasure and love necessary to do a good job. This disregard is most easily recognized in the scarce and hasty studies of Indigenous languages of Mexico in the early 20th century. One example is Franz Boas’ brief publication on the classification of Chatino languages (1913). Boas based his publication on a two-hour long encounter with two Chatinos that he met at a conference on Zapotec languages in Pochutla, Oaxaca in 1912. In this article, Boas names the two Chatino speakers that he worked with, but fails to mention the community of origin of these speakers. This is unfortunate because that information is of vital importance for the classification of the Chatino languages, and Chatino academics today have no choice but to speculate about the community of origin of this documentation.

The distance that academics have towards the languages and cultures that they study is also shown in their descriptions of their native speaker collaborators. Many external researchers call them: informants, consultants, collaborators, *compadres* or *comadres*². These Eurocentric ideologies are clearest when we examine the way in which these external academics handle the data collected in the field, such as recordings of wordlists. They often guard this data with jealousy, even from the speakers themselves, with the aim of publishing it first. In the worst case scenarios, many

2 The relationship between the godparents (*compadre* ‘male relation’/*comadre* ‘female relation’) and the parents of a child who was baptized in the Catholic Church.

of these materials end up in the researcher's closet and never seeing the light of day (H. Cruz 2019). If we truly wish to conserve Indigenous languages, we must integrate the perspectives of the speakers into every aspect of their documentation. This will aid in these languages receiving the attention that they deserve.

As previously stated, works which mention the experiences of local researchers are very scarce. Australian Indigenous linguist and language activist Jeanie Bell (2007) is one exception. Upon reflecting on her experiences working within her own community, she recounts similar events such as hearing people in her community saying that she is "selling the language to outsiders". She also urges native speakers to participate in the analysis of their languages and cultures.

Since the 1990's, the number of members of Indigenous communities who are engaged in linguistic and ethnographic research within their own communities has grown. In this article, I refer to these researchers as internal or local researchers, with researchers who do not belong to the communities of study referred to as external researchers.

The efforts to train Indigenous linguists in Latin America began with Mayan speakers in Guatemala through the *Grupos de Estudios Mayas* (Mayan Studies Groups). This group was comprised of Francisco Marroquín and the OKMA-*Asociación Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib'* (England 1992). Later, Nora England, Joel Sherzer and Anthony Woodbury designed and implemented a program at the University of Texas at Austin to train speakers of Indigenous languages from Latin America (Woodbury and England 2004). More recently, several Masters and Doctoral programs have emerged to train students who are speakers of Indigenous languages from Mexico, most notably at the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, CIESAS) and the Masters in Amerindian Studies and Bilingual Education at the *Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro* (Autonomous University of Querétaro, UAQ). In the context of Central America, a team of speakers of Mayangna languages at the *Universidad de Uraccan* (University of Uraccan) on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, together with Elena Benedicto and Elizabeth Salomón, have documented Mayangna language and culture incorporating the parameters of participant-action research (Benedicto *et al.* 2007).

This article emerged from a group project which was first presented at a discussion on the need to raise awareness to the experiences of Indigenous researchers in Mexico. This exchange took place at the conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in Boston in 2019. Many Indigenous linguists from Mexico participated, including Jaime Pérez, a native speaker of Tseltal; Ana D. Alonso Ortiz, a speaker of Zapotec from the Sierra Norte; and Isaura de los Santos, Emiliana Cruz and the author, speakers of Chatino from Panixtlahuaca and San Juan Quiahije, respectively. The participants related their experiences, challenges, and frustrations with the bureaucracy present through their multiple interactions with various institutions such as educational institutions, local authorities and members of the community.

Positive aspects of doing fieldwork within your own community

There is no doubt that researchers who carry out fieldwork within their own communities enjoy certain advantages over researchers who are not from the community. Local researchers benefit from working in an environment that is familiar to them, and in which they know the daily routines, cultural customs, and expectations of the community. It takes time for external researchers to acclimate to the food, culture and context of a new place. The local researcher's familiarity with the surrounding contexts, as well as the company, affection and support of their family, speed up and deepen their research.

While an external researcher tends to spend a lot of time and energy building relationships and gaining the trust of the community in order to carry out their fieldwork, a local researcher benefits from a wide network of connections that their family has had in place for many generations. This network of connections gives access to the language, culture, places and ceremonies that are often out of reach for external researchers.

Advantages can also be found from a local researcher's familiarity with the community's customs surrounding transmission of knowledge. In Indigenous cultures in Southern Mexico, for example, knowledge is passed down through the family, from grandparents to children and from children to grandchildren. For instance, Indigenous girls learn from their family members how to make tortillas, sow corn, clear the cornfield, and to hunt or fish. An external researcher must gain the trust of the experts (bakers, seamstress, musicians, and orators) if they desire to acquire any of this knowledge.

In the same way, the local researcher's existing relationships will help in reducing loneliness, isolation and the feeling of displacement that external researchers frequently experience upon finding themselves in a culture different from their own (Bowern 2008: 13).

In the upcoming sections, I will discuss several social and community factors that a local researcher encounters when they carry out research within their own community. These include issues related to the various roles that the female local researcher embodies as a woman, as a member of an extended intergenerational family, as a part of the community and as a member of academia. This article also concludes with a discussion of the role that healers play in the community and their collaboration with the researcher.

Female researcher

Agency, which is defined as a person's capacity to make decisions, is closely tied to the roles that women play with respect to kinship, relationships and the obligations that they have to their families and to the wider community. In San Juan Quiahije, it is expected that a woman should be calm, quiet and hardworking in order to find a partner and get married. In daily life, women are in charge of domestic tasks such as making tortillas, preparing food and taking care of the children. Men are only required to cook on holidays as the food containers are very heavy.

Across the political realm, offices within the civil-religious hierarchy of the local government are held by men, with the responsibility of patrolling the town's borders also falling to men. Up until 1970, women were able to participate in the monthly prayers with the council of elders and members of the authority alongside men to ask the spirits to protect the wellbeing of the community. However, now only men are allowed to participate in these monthly prayers (H. Cruz 2017).

The traditional work of women in San Juan Quiahije is contrary to the work that a researcher does within the community: recording and eliciting data, writing, teaching and visiting different people across the town. Researchers privilege this type of work over that which is traditionally done by Chatino women. However, female researchers may be seen as an oddity and perceived as lazy, as men, as licentious or as crazy. These perceptions can become a cause of shame for the extended family.

Because of this, despite the previously mentioned advantages, fieldwork is not easy for any female researcher, whether from the community or external to it. Local female researchers must have the resilience and agility to surpass the gender-based limitations imposed on them due to the nature of their work. They also have to deal with feelings of loneliness and displacement such as those mentioned by Bovern (2008), although these feelings are often caused by different factors than those underlying the experiences of external researchers. The anguish that local researchers often feel primarily emerges from the alienation they experience within the community, and often times within their own families when people do not understand the goal of their work. In many Indigenous societies, "work" equates to doing a physical activity such as preparing food (tortillas), taking care of children, fetching firewood, planting corn, clearing the cornfield, building a house, carrying water or putting out the fire. By this definition, the activities that a researcher does are not considered work and members of the community often see these activities as a hobby that one does in their free time.

Kwentu^K: gossip

Although the inhabitants of Cieneguilla and San Juan profess to hate gossip, many have a complicated relationship with this type of discourse. No one wants to be branded as a gossip or wander the town collecting and spreading gossip from one place to another. These same people are offended, however, when they feel that someone is withholding information from them. They feel that, in denying them the information, they are not being respected.

Gossiping is dangerous. There are records of people who have been murdered for being branded as a gossip or as a result of the gossip shared. This is another danger that the local researcher risks due to the nature of their work. The act of going about visiting people and recording audio and video with a large number of the community may be perceived as collecting and sharing gossip. This is even more problematic for female researchers, who are more often branded as gossips because of their gender. On one occasion I received an urgent call from my Aunt Mila, who told me that my Aunt Kaya had arrived at her home very troubled that my sister, Emiliana Cruz, was going to broadcast an interview that she had done with her on a public Mexican television channel. Mila said that Aunt Kaya was crying because she didn't want to be on television. I had to assure Mila that Emiliana had no plan to broadcast any of her interviews on television nor could she, for ethical reasons, broadcast them without Kaya's consent. This rumor went away and I never heard Kaya ask about her possible appearance on television again.

Researcher and member of a large multigenerational family

In an Indigenous area, family ties are the foundation, support and continuation of the community. As Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) notes, Indigenous families are composed of extended family units. Several generations of the same family usually live under the same roof in one main house. Traditionally, these houses consist of a kitchen, in Chaitino *neq^A qan^E kiq^I* 'the house of the fire', and a bedroom, *neq^A qan^E kjin^B* 'main room'.

Customarily, when the children of the nuclear family that live in the main house grow up, they move to a nearby place. My extended family lived in the house of my great-grandparents Alberto *Tu^C-ke^A* and Arnulfa *Tyku^E Kiqya^I*. Alberto and Arnulfa had six children, and for a period of time, we all lived in their house together. As each family member grew up, each son or daughter steadily began to move away with their respective families to a location near the main house. Each nuclear family worked their own land, as well as the lands of Alberto and Arnulfa, the oldest grandparents.

The fact that multiple generations share one roof strengthens their ties of affection, mutual assistance, collectivity and reciprocal commitment.

As Emiliana Cruz mentions in her article published in this volume, the vast majority of residents of the towns of Cieneguilla and San Juan are our relatives, especially because marriages in my community were traditionally endogamous. This is to say that, residents preferred to marry people from the same community. Relationships between the inhabitants of the town are very close. Within the same small community, I have some relatives that are related to me on both sides of my family. One example is my relationship with my cousin, Alma Cruz. Alma's father was Teobaldo Cruz, my mother's brother. Meanwhile Catalina Candelario, Alma's mother, is also a second cousin of my father. My blood ties with Alma, in other words, are on both my paternal and maternal sides.

Yweq^H (curse) and yqu^H (shame)

The family group exerts a strong pressure over each member (including the local researcher) to conform to what the family and community dictate. Anything that happens to a member of the family or anything that the family does must remain within the family. This means that no-one can divulge the problems of a family member to anyone outside the family. On one occasion my family hosted a Christmas party where they invited children from all over the town to break piñatas, get toys and have bread and coffee. I was about to comment that my uncle Arlo was drunk when a cousin standing beside me moved to cover my mouth with her hands to prevent me from speaking about my uncle Arlo in the presence of children from outside of the family.

Depending on the behavior of an individual, her actions, as mentioned above, may be cause for pride or shame for the extended family. Community members believe that the actions of an individual family member affect not only that person, but their family as well. If a family member is considered to be licentious, this causes shame for the extended family. Moreover, any commitments, contracts, debts or conflicts a person shares with other people in the town ultimately extends to the members of the extended family, including the researcher herself.

Similarly, when an individual commits an act that the community considers morally reprehensible, such as stealing, killing or coveting, the punishment falls not only on the perpetrator, but on the generations that follow. These behaviors may bring bad luck, disease, and even death to future generations. In Chatino, this is known as *yweq^H* (curse). My uncle Arlo, for example, says that many of his siblings, including my father, were murdered and or assassinated at a young age because my grandfather, Ignacio Cruz, was accused of stealing cows from others in the town as food for

himself and a band of young men who were fighting in the Mexican revolution when he was younger. Uncle Arlo thinks that our family still carries the *yweq*^H of the actions of my grandfather Ignacio.

Just as many families have cultivated ties of friendship with other families in the town, there are also hostilities, often grudges held for long periods of time. Very often, these conflicts result in violent confrontations and killings (Greenberg 1989), and for the local researcher, this means that people in the town who are rivals of her family, will refuse to collaborate with her on research projects.

Family obligations may cloud the objectivity that European research methods demand of a local researcher, who often finds herself in the middle of conflicting expectations. On the one hand, her family demands loyalty and support, while on the other hand, academia demands objectivity. Western research methodologies expect that researchers remain at the edges, neutral and objective, like a “fly on the wall”. In order for the researcher to climb the work ladder and “contribute to science”, academia requires her to publish articles with theoretical content that can only be understood by a select group.

Suppose that a linguist proposes to carry out a study on dialectal variation in her community. In order for the study to meet the research standards of linguistics, she must take a balanced and wide sample of the speakers in the community, which covers a range of genders, ages, geographic locations and social statuses. For a local researcher, these requirements may be in opposition to her obligations to her family, her community, and place of work. These divergent obligations often leave the researcher teetering with one foot in academia and the other in her community.

However, these family obligations are not always negative. Having family in the community also brings about many advantages, and the notion of the extended family has deeply influenced my research on the Chatino language. Familial relationships in the community have opened doors for me to document, revitalize and promote the Chatino language. While other people may have initially refused to work with me, my relatives were the first to agree to tell me their stories, prayers and customs, as well as the first students in the Chatino courses I taught. They were also the ones who listened to my commitment to preserving our language. One recording trip that I made to San José Ixtapan illustrates this point. In December 2008, my Aunt Mila and my cousin Zuri accompanied me to their *comadre*'s house in Ixtapan to record their local Chatino. At the request of my Aunt Mila, the *comadre* agreed to record a word list with me when she visited us in Cieneguilla. The *comadre* asked us to go to her house in Ixtapan, which is about 16 kilometers from Cieneguilla. Due to the land dispute that the inhabitants of Ixtapan have with the inhabitants of Quiahije (E. Cruz and Smith Aguilar 2020), we did not have permission from the Ixtapan authorities to record the language. In order to pass unnoticed, we left Cieneguilla when it was still dark. We arrived in Ixtapan at dawn. The *comadre* was very enthusiastic to see us and invited us in for breakfast. We had to make the recordings secretly inside of her house and after-

wards she gave us lunch and food to take with us. If I didn't have these family connections, I would never have had the opportunity to record the Chatino of Ixtapan.

Researcher and member of a community and ethnicity

Everyone who is born in the town is bestowed with lasting obligations and commitments to their family, community and land. These commitments endure throughout the lifetime of a person and change as they mature. Families in Quiahije have the obligation of maintaining the community's institutions, such as the local government, the church, the schools and the medical clinic. Each family has to serve one of these institutions without pay. In the community, from a young age (12 years old), men must work their way up through the various positions of the traditional government system. In addition, there are also voluntary service roles in the school committee, the medical clinic, and as sacristans and catechists within the parish. Some of these services include cooking for special events, making candles, collecting water from the thirteen springs for the town's prayers, advising the municipality and maintaining public buildings, roads and the cemetery. Men also have the obligation to patrol the territory limits of Quiahije each year.

As previously mentioned, a person's obligation to community service begins at birth. While individualism prevails above the common good in Western societies, Indigenous societies (including San Juan Quiahije) are governed by collectivism, reciprocity and a connection with the ancestors. These relationships are cemented through the prayers and supplications that accompany Chatinos' daily life and routines.

The prayers for newborns show the perpetual relationship that an individual has with their community, ancestors, and their place of birth. When a boy or girl is born in San Juan Quiahije, the family presents them to the spirits of the ancestors and offers their service to the municipality when they grow up (see lines 12-19 of the Request for the newborn, below). The inhabitants of Quiahije believe that for a person to be able to grow, mature and have a decent life, they need equal amounts of material sustenance (food, lodgings, clothing and shoes), spiritual practice (prayers and offerings of flowers, candles and water) and an intimate connection to the land (mountains, forests and rivers). In the requests that parents make for a newborn, they ask the spirits for their wellbeing so that they won't lack food, a roof or love (lines 1 to 11). They also ask that the child be successful, that they mature, find a partner, and have children. The prayer especially emphasizes that the newborn becomes a good citizen who serves their community and the mountains.

Prayers for newborn baby girls and boys are particularly important because of the marginalization and lack of medical services; the infant mortality rate in San Juan

Quiahije was and still is very high. The *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* (INEGI, National Institute of Statistics and Geography) reports that the infant mortality rate is 21% compared to the national rate of 12% and of 12% in the state of Oaxaca (INEGI 2016).

One of the primary functions of the prayer is to embed the individual in the land, culture and community. This means that a person who is born in this place is always closely tied to this ecosystem. Emiliana Cruz, for example, writes that within the ritual of prayer: “Planting the placenta implies having the protection of the ancestors and makes a person part of this place, therefore there is a close relationship between a ceremonial space and the feeling of belonging to the community” (*“Sembrar la placenta implica tener la protección de los ancestros y hace a la persona ser parte de este lugar, por lo tanto hay una estrecha relación entre un espacio ceremonial y el sentido de pertenencia a la comunidad”*) (in press p. 19).

A “request for the newborn” is shown as follows (Narration by Félix Agripino Baltazar, modified and translated to Spanish by Hilaria Cruz):

Chatino	Spanish	English
1. Kiquy ^E kla ^J ,	Ancianos,	Elder men,
2. Qan ^E kla ^J ,	Ancianas,	Elder women,
3. Qwen ^A qne ^J kqu ^E ,	Ustedes lo crecen,	You make grow,
4. Qwen ^A qne ^J tjoq ^E ,	Ustedes lo harán fuerte,	You will make strong,
5. Qwen ^A qne ^J tno ^G ,	Ustedes lo harán grande,	You will make big,
6. Qin ^I kwiq ^C no ^A ka ^J qya ^G ,	A este bebé que apenas bajó,	This baby who just came down,
7. No ^A ka ^J ntsu ^G ,	Al que apenas brotó,	Who just sprouted,
8. No ^A ka ^J yla ^E ,	Al que apenas llegó,	Who just arrived,
9. Sqwa ^H yaq ^E ,	Denle una mano,	Give him/her a hand,
10. Sqwa ^H skon ^E qin ^J ,	Denle un brazo,	Give him/her an arm,
11. Chaq ^F , ja ^E no ^E tyā ^J jyan ^A ,	Para que cuando llegue el año,	So that when the year arrives,

Chatino	Spanish	English
12. Tya ^l koq ^F ,	[Para] cuando llegue el mes,	When the month arrives,
13. Tya ^l kla ^A ,	[Para] cuando llegue el día,	When the day arrives,
14. Ka ^l tnya ^l ,	[Éste] será autoridad,	He/she will be authority,
15. Ka ^l kchin ^E ,	[Éste] será comunidad,	He/she will be community,
16. Sqwa ^B yaq ^K kiqya ^C ,	Le echará una mano a las montañas,	He/she will lend a hand to the mountains,
17. Sqwa ^B yaq ^K kchin ^A ,	Le echara una mano a la comunidad,	He/she will lend a hand to the community,
18. Tyon ^l lo ^I ,	Se parará enfrente,	He/she will stand before,
19. Tyon ^l chonq ^G .	Se parará atrás.	He/she will stand behind.

(For the orthographic conventions of Chatino, see Appendix 1).

This tight link between a researcher, their family, and community benefits the study of the social and linguistic systems of a community by allowing the researcher to carry out long-term projects that elevates the quality and depth of the analyses. In contrast, external researchers often come for a while and leave, with it very likely that the community never sees them again.

The notion of obligation has influenced my research in many ways. The community expects that a member who has achieved formal education assist the community in acquiring funds for projects and public work. A successful leader, in the eyes of the community, is one who manages to receive funds for public lighting, pavements, school computers, or other services from the state or federal government.

Community members often feel that local researchers do not contribute to the wellbeing of the community. People from my community, for example, have asked me how I support the community. Many feel that, because I have not built a school or hospital, or paved a road, my college education has not resulted in any material support for the community.

As I have already mentioned, the identities of local researchers are complex as they represent economic, educational and migratory differences as compared to

community members who have not had the same opportunities. In order for an Indigenous researcher to acquire the necessary training for language documentation, they have had to leave their community to study, while navigating a new language and culture, and contending with possible racism and economic hardships along the way.

Just as a family expects absolute loyalty from its members, the community demands the same. Similarly, just as a researcher must balance research with familial obligations, they must also balance research with community obligation. A community member must not divulge matters that concern the whole town and its relationship with neighboring towns. This is particularly important if the communities, such as Quiahije and Ixtapan, are engaged in land disputes over boundary issues (E. Cruz and Smith Aguilar 2020). The collection of materials that I have obtained in Quiahije includes a set of recordings that I obtained at the town's general assemblies. These recordings contain conversations about the territorial conflicts that Quiahije has had with neighboring towns. The conversations include plans and agreements about how to proceed in these conflicts. Given the nature of these recordings, they cannot be widely shared without explicit permission from the community. I am also convinced that the only reason the community agreed to my recording of those conversations is because I am a part of the community. It would have been very difficult for an external researcher to acquire this data.

Working with healers

Another problematic area for local researchers is their work with healers. Throughout the course of my research, I have worked closely with them, as they hold local knowledge concerning prayers, oratory, plants and sacred spaces. My work with healers has often caused misunderstandings with my family because, like other people in the community, they believe that it is dangerous to associate with these specialists.

Chatinos have a complicated relationship with healers. On the one hand, they go to them to consult on how to relieve diseases and afflictions, but on the other hand they believe that healers use their knowledge to bring bad luck, steal spirits, and spread diseases and death. When someone gets sick or dies, a healer is always named as the one who caused the death or illness.

Until the 1980s, there were no allopathic doctors in Quiahije, so residents depended on healers, herbalists and bonesetters to diagnose, cure, and aid them through both physical conditions (diarrhea, flu, back pain, pain when urinating, giving birth), and also mental conditions (the interpretation of dreams and lovesickness). They also consult healers in locating missing people, preventing harm from enemies or, more lately, to give them luck when crossing the border to the United States.

Despite the fact that there is access to allopathic medicine through the medical clinic of the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social* (IMSS, Mexican Institute of Social Security) and various doctors available in San Juan, many people in Quiahije still go to healers. People who follow these practices call themselves *nten^B kre^Knsya^B* or people of belief. In the next section, I will describe my work with a healer who I will call Lila.

Lila the healer, a micro-case study

From 2004 onwards, I have stayed at my grandfather's house whenever I return to Quiahije to do fieldwork. Once I am settled in, I go through the town looking for people to talk with and record our conversations. My family is always aware of where I go, who I talk to and who I am with. I have frequently worked with a healer in my town who I will call Lila to protect her identity. Many of the residents fear Lila because she has the reputation of using her spells to hurt people.

They say that when Lila visits someone's home, she carries plants, water or some spiritual item hidden in her clothes and discretely drops it somewhere in the house when the owners are distracted in order to bring about sickness or death to the inhabitants. When Lila goes to help at the annual sponsored fiestas (*fiestas de mayordomía*), she likes to sit next to the pots of food from which the guests are served. Lila likes this job, of serving food at the festivals, because it is a prestigious task in the hierarchy of helpers at the festivals. This task is generally assigned to elderly, wise, and respected women in the town. This causes a lot of stress among some of the hosts, however, because often the guests refuse to eat the food that Lila serves. These guests say that Lila likes to serve the food so that she can drop spiritual items into the food that she serves them.

As with other healers, the residents of Quiahije have a very strained relationship with Lila. Although in public they refuse to speak to her, in private they ask her to read tarot cards, diagnose diseases, interpret dreams and nightmares, or cast spells. In my experience working with Lila, I have always found her to be an intelligent person with an enormous talent in verbal art and Chatino oratory. She knows a lot about medicinal plants and has a great ability to recite prayers for any occasion, including prayers directed at plants, animals, sacred spaces or with the aim of forgetting a boyfriend or lover. Every time I visit her, she talks a lot about her life, the herbs that should be used to cure patients, and about the prayers that she recites. When I go to visit Lila, I try not to tell my family out of fear that they will tell me not to go. Sometimes when I return home and they realize that I have seen Lila, they tease me about sorcery and ask me about the visit. They ask me what we talked about and who came to the house when I was there. My grandfather is an introverted person and was the

only one, as far as I knew, who had no opinion of my work with Lila; at least that is what I thought.

However, one day during a rainy summer in 2008, when I returned home from working with Lila, I made plans to drive six hours away to the city of Oaxaca. I invited my grandfather to accompany me, he agreed, and we left the town early. When we were about an hour away from the city, my grandfather suddenly said: “Are you still working with Lila?” I answered yes, and then he said “You know she is a very bad person, right? She cast a spell on your uncle and because of it he almost died”.

According to my grandfather, when Lila learned that my uncle had blocked her path, she cast a spell on him so that he would hurt himself. My grandfather said: “I told your uncle, ‘You shouldn’t have blocked the path of that woman because she is very bad and will hurt you,’ and that is what happened”. According to my grandfather, the accident happened two days after he blocked Lila’s path. My grandfather continued: “It was that woman’s fault that your uncle almost died”. Indirectly, my grandfather was telling me that he did not agree with me working with Lila.

My grandfather was referring to a brain hemorrhage that my uncle had when he was hit on the head with a wooden post that he was using to fence a piece of land. My grandfather said that my uncle fenced in the path where Lila passed every day to go to her cornfield. To save my uncle’s life, they had to open up his skull to alleviate the pressure. The surgery almost killed him. My grandfather said that Lila had caused the accident with her spells because she was angry at my uncle. It was clear to me that my grandfather was telling me that he did not agree with me working with Lila. I listened to my grandfather, and affirmed that I was listening. But I didn’t say anything. I have told this story to show the complicated relationship that exists between Indigenous researchers and their relatives.

Conclusion

In this article, I have narrated my experience as an Indigenous female researcher who does fieldwork in her own community. I have discussed my paradoxical role as a woman navigating academia, family, and the community.

While many academics maintain that Indigenous researchers do not contribute sufficiently to linguistic theory, many community members feel that researchers do not contribute to the development of their community of origin in concrete and tangible ways such as maintaining public buildings, supplying economic resources or consulting how best to deal with the outside world or on problems with neighboring towns.

Furthermore, while in academic environments in developed countries women fight against sexual harassment, unequal pay and a lack of respect. In these spaces,

women of color also have to fight against a lack of support and institutional racism and classism. Members of the academic community often feel that Indigenous women are there, not because of their intellectual capacity, but due to affirmative action.

Contrastingly, what is demanded of women within their communities is meekness. Due to the nature of their job, local female researchers are often seen as licentious, dangerous, or as people who collect information about the language to sell it.

In light of this, the growing number of members of Indigenous communities who are carrying out documentation, revitalization and promotion work on their languages opens the field up to new experiences, as until now the majority of published field experiences, tools, and methodologies had come from external academics.

It is imperative to create spaces, both in academia and in the community, where local researchers can share experiences and create materials, methodologies and tools that will be useful for both contexts.

Without the equitable participation of Indigenous speakers in the research on their languages, most of these efforts will, sadly, continue to be inadequate and incomplete.

Therefore, I invite Indigenous researchers, present and future, to have the courage to speak and raise awareness of their work and their experiences, to open up spaces in which they can research, write and publish, and to participate in both community and academic discussions about diverse aspects of language, culture and politics.

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APPENDIX I ORTHOGRAPHIC CONVENTION

CONSONANTS

IPA	ORTHOGRAPHY
^m b	mb
ⁿ d	nd
ⁿ ḍ	ndy
ŋ	ng
h	j
k	k
kw	kw
ⁿ kw	nk ^w
ⁿ k	nk
ⁿ ḱ	nky
l	l
ɭ	ly
ɮ	ly
m	m
n	n
ṇ	ny
p	p
r	r
s	s
t	t
ⁿ t	nt
ṭ	ty
ⁿ ṭ	nty
w	w
ʃ	x
j	y
ʔ	q
tʃ	ch

VOWELS

	IPA	ORTHOGRAPHY
Oral vowels	a	a
	e	e
	i	i
	o	o
	u	u
Nasal vowels	ã	an
	ẽ	en
	ĩ	in
	õ	on

TONES

LEVEL	FALLING	RISING
K Super-high	J Mid-low	H Mid super-high
E High	B High-low	I Mid high
C Mid		G Low-high
A Low		F Low-mid

Activism and research for the promotion of literacy in Chatino: Experiences and reflections from fieldwork

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Abstract

In this article, as an insider researcher, I explore my experiences during fieldwork. I discuss personal emotions related to linguistic discrimination and internalization of speakers' negative attitudes toward their language. Also, I discuss the local power relations in the community social network to which my family belongs, and the violence I experience as a woman. As a local researcher I unveil the realities and adversities that I face doing research and working on collaborative projects in my own community with speakers, educators, and local government. Despite drawbacks and limitations in my role as researcher and literacy advocate in the community, I showcase ongoing activities that foster literacy and revitalization of the Chatino language.

Key words:

Chatino, fieldwork, language ideologies, collaboration, literacy.

Introduction¹

When a researcher does fieldwork in her own community, as I do, it is assumed that her relationship with the social environment there should be quite easy; but in reality this is not so. Problems of family, of town, and of local government have affected my emotional stability during fieldwork, as well as the progress of my research. In addition, the close interrelationship among the members of the community and the growing use of social media on the internet—including social media that facilitate the exchange of negative information—have come to complicate my life as a woman and researcher, to a point where I am led to (re)think the use of such media as tools in my research. I myself have come to consider collaborative work to be the perfect path to the beneficial development of one's research, above all, collaboration involving the direct inclusion and participation of speakers and linguists, teachers, and others, in reinforcing the language.

In this article I present my experiences as a Chatina² researcher working in my own community. I present both positive and negative experiences which I have confronted as a woman and as a Chatina researcher in the context of my community and of academia. The central themes are: 1) The internalization of negative ideas about their own language by Chatino speakers; 2) The policies of the municipal government toward Chatino; 3) Collaboration, and its limitations; 4) Gender violence; and 5) The achievements of all who participated in our collaborative projects.

In order to contextualize this article and to give a better picture of the advantages and the challenges that are described here, let me first say who I am and how I came to the study of linguistics. I am an Indigenous woman from a Chatino town called San Miguel Panixtlahuaca, located between the Sierra Sur and the south-facing Pacific Coast in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. In keeping with certain stereotypes in Mexico—framed by racism and diminished access to education for Indigenous people—it is believed that academia is not for everyone, and even less so for Indigenous women (Cruz 2019). In my case, I had the opportunity to complete my basic

1 This article was part of a panel at LASA 2019. I am grateful to Emiliana Cruz for taking the initiative to organize the panel and inviting me to share my fieldwork experience. I also am very grateful to the external reviewers for their observations and recommendations, which supported and strengthened this work. Likewise, I greatly appreciate the feedback provided by Emiliana Cruz, Ana Alonso, Jaime González, Hilaria Cruz, Claudia Morales, Alonso Rojas and Rosa Alejandra Medina. Of course, any errors that may arise here are my own responsibility and not theirs.

2 Translator's footnote: I follow the Spanish-language practice of analyzing the final o in *Chatino* (probably from Zacatepec Eastern Chatino [tʃätínɔ̃]) as the masculine singular thematic vowel, and then writing *Chatina* when the reference is to a woman.

and secondary education in my own community, and once I decided to go to college, I had to leave my community for the city.

I come from a family of subsistence farmers and migrant workers. My siblings and I grew up working in the fields, harvesting coffee, corn, and beans for our food. We are a big family with scanty economic resources. My mother was our economic support, and to give us stability, she undertook a small business selling seasonal fruit. Because of the lack of economic opportunity in the community, my father decided to go to the United States in search of better working conditions, but spent twenty years there without ever planning to return to Mexico.

My parents had no access to education. My mother told me that she had not wanted to go to school because she had been frightened by stories of violence suffered by other Indigenous children at the hands of teachers at the school. She told me that rural school teachers mistreated the children, and for that reason she decided to devote herself to working in the fields alongside her father. But even though she did not go to school herself, my mother always encouraged me to keep studying, and on my first day of classes she took me to school and then went right back to the fields to continue working to produce food for the house.

Being in school forced me to learn Spanish, because before that I had no need to try to understand the people who spoke it, given that at home and in the streets, people only spoke Chatino.³ From preschool on through the first four years of primary school, my voice was silent, with no ability to express what I felt in the classroom, and with much of the things the teachers said having no meaning to me. The children who spoke up more were those few Spanish monolinguals who shared the classroom with us Chatinos. This little group were the children of the teachers who were working in the community and of the mestizos already established in Panixtlahuaca. The teachers thought of these monolingual children as smart because they understood everything they were told. This forced immersion in oral and written Spanish caused many difficulties for my learning. I had to attend remedial classes in the afternoons of my first two years due to the difficulties I had learning to read and write. In the fifth year of elementary school, in spite of having already learned to read and write, still, I was not quite able to speak confidently with the teachers and other Spanish speakers. The teachers constantly would correct our mistakes when

3 Translator's footnote: As in the Spanish original of this article, the translations *Chatino* and *the Chatino language* may refer at several different levels. In this passage, *Chatino* refers to Panixtlahuaca Eastern Chatino, a highly distinctive variety of the Eastern Chatino language spoken only in Panixtlahuaca. At other times it may refer collectively to the 15 or so somewhat mutually-intelligible village varieties of Eastern Chatino; and at still others it may refer collectively to all three currently spoken, non-mutually intelligible Chatino languages: Eastern Chatino, Tataltepec Chatino, and Zenzontepec Chatino (see Campbell 2013).

we expressed ourselves in Spanish. For example, on one occasion my mother asked me to tell my brother's teacher that he would not be able to come to class because he had a fever. To do this, I took some time to think how to convey this information to the teacher. I decided to say, "Teacher, my brother is sick and can't come to class", but wasn't sure if I should use *enfermo* or *enferma*—that is, the masculine or the feminine singular form of 'sick' in Spanish. Finally I decided to use *enferma*, at which point the teacher immediately said "You say *enfermo*, girl, that is what studying is for!" The way they treated us when we made mistakes would just make us more unsure of ourselves in speaking and reading Spanish. I had this same insecurity when I went to high school and college in Mexico, especially when I had to give a presentation or write a paper. Some teachers and classmates just assumed I was supposed to speak and write Spanish as well as they did, and when they realized that that was not the case, they attributed it to a lack of intellectual inability on my part; then, whenever I did succeed in something, they figured it was just a matter of luck rather than a product of my own effort.

What the schools have done to our languages is really a kind of linguistic genocide, because from the time we are children, they force us to read and write only in Spanish, and as a result, negative linguistic ideologies arise that lead directly to the loss of our Chatino language (Cruz 2020; Ascencio 2009; Aguilar 2015). Likewise, according to the report of an expert group convened by UNESCO (2011), "external pressures, including military economic, religious, cultural, and educational subjugation, lead in turn to internal pressures, including negative attitudes on the part of a community toward its own language, that then push the speakers to abandon their language to avoid discrimination." I remember the racism I experienced, and it very often drove me to deny who I am, a woman coming from an Indigenous community. It is not easy for a young Indigenous person to emigrate to the city to study, because there are linguistic and economic challenges and one encounters a lot of discrimination: that was my own experience.

I studied for a bachelor's degree in business administration at the Instituto Tecnológico de Pinotepa, located in the town of Pinotepa in the southwest corner of the state of Oaxaca. There were students there of various backgrounds, including Indigenous Chatinos and Mixtecs, Afro-Mexicans, and Mestizos. As one of the Indigenous students at the university, I was the victim of bullying by a classmate. Once I received a text message in Spanish via Messenger that said: "You're never going to get anywhere, you provincial *India*."⁴ That wasn't the only instance of harassment by classmates, because other Indigenous students at the university experienced this type of discrimination as well. Several friends told me that on the bus going to school, some

4 Translator's footnote: *Indio/India* 'Indian' is used as a slur against Indigenous people in Mexican Spanish.

women from our own school shouted “uncivilized” at them for speaking in Chatino. In spite of the fact that in the university, the majority came from small communities, discrimination was a day-to-day presence.

Once I had earned my bachelor’s degree I took a few months off in my town while I was looking for work. Panixtlahuaca is a very small community where no person’s life passes unnoticed (Haviland 1977): anything that happens in the community is noticed, and once people became aware of my arrival they would ask me: “Will you be able to work in a bank now that you have finished your degree? How much are you going to earn? When are you going to have children?”

In those months in the village, I got interested in promoting the visibility and recognition of Chatino. So I got the idea of making posters, doing radio spots, and filling public spaces with messages, all in Chatino. Although at that time I did not know how to write Chatino, I tried to create messages like *Qa^A tkwen^I koa^C qne^A ten^I chaq^F ndykweq^G chaq^F tnya^A* ‘No one should forbid you from speaking Chatino’. It actually was a more difficult project than I had thought. Twice I went to the Municipal Hall to propose my ideas, but I had no success: they told me there were only limited resources for work on this type of project.

Just a few months later, the Panixtlahuaca municipal authorities directed me to a call by the (Oaxaca) State Institute for Adult Education (or IEEA, its initials in Spanish) looking for workers for a literacy project. This government program interested me because it focused on literacy in Chatino. However, once I was in this program, together with Chatino co-workers from other communities, we realized there were no trainers who knew how to read or write the languages and who could guide us in using the materials from the IEEA. So after a year of working without training, we received a call for participants in a tone workshop for speakers of Otomanguean languages:⁵ they were looking for native speakers working with different languages from this large Central and Southern Mexican language family to which Chatino belongs. Through this workshop, I had my first exposure to linguistics, and was able to work with specialists like Emiliana Cruz, Hilaria Cruz, Anthony Woodbury, John Kingston, and others. From 2012 to 2014 I received training in the documentation of Chatino languages, and, above all, training in how to pass on what I had learned to interested native speakers. The contribution of these linguists to our training was in keeping with one of the four key obligations for linguistic research set forth by Nora England (1992:34), based on her experience in fieldwork and training with speakers of Mayan languages in Guatemala: “Contributing to the training of linguists who are

5 This was the first Workshop on Tone for Speakers of Otomanguean Languages. It was organized by Dr. Emiliana Cruz with the support of the Alfredo Harp Helu Foundation and the (Mexican) National Institute for Indigenous Languages (or INALI, its initials in Spanish) in 2012, and held in the Foundation’s facilities at the San Pablo Academic and Cultural Center in Oaxaca City, Mexico.

speakers of [politically] subordinate languages, at every level from empirical to the theoretical”.

With this community-centered linguistic background, in 2016 I began my M.A. and Ph.D. studies in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and was able to focus on the learning of literacy in tonal languages such as the Chatino languages. In my doctoral research, I explore the reading skills (Tankersley 2003) of Panixtlahuaca Eastern Chatino speakers in a writing system in which tone is represented. This has allowed me to collaborate in the teaching of Chatino reading and writing to speakers in my community.

I. The internalization of negative ideas about their own language by Chatino speakers

As a researcher who is also a member of a community, scholarly references to ourselves have a special importance whereas outside researchers are in a position that is quite different. A visiting researcher may leave and return to the community, or even not return at all. In contrast to this, the local researcher is known for her life-long trajectory within the community, which can be used positively or negatively in relation to her work. Linda Tuhiwai describes it this way: “The issues for Indigenous researchers seeking to work within Indigenous contexts are framed somewhat differently. If they are ‘insiders’ they are frequently judged on insider criteria; their family background, status, politics, age, gender, religion, as well as on their perceived technical ability.” (Tuhiwai 1999: 10). Being part of the town of Panixtlahuaca implies being observed and judged according to what I or my family might do. In my case, most of my life has been spent in my town; people know who my family is, and everyone knows about their participation in *fiestas*, events, and community assemblies — a different situation from that of a foreign researcher (Macaulay 2014). The community can get to know the private life of each one of its members, including the problems within their families and how they relate to other families. Given such a context, when I do research in Panixtlahuaca, I need to be careful not to let these issues get mixed up with my project. This is not always easy since being from the community means being involved in local conflicts. Social relationships have sometimes affected my work, because having a very large family whose members are linked into different facets of the community has led me to cross paths with the various activities in which they are involved. For example, being involved in workshops or in research with speakers or family members who have ties to a political party can lead to misunderstandings about the purpose of the work. The taint of such external factors as political parties can fuel distrust on the part of speakers towards any project that

is carried out within the community. Therefore, knowing this context, I try to stay on the sidelines of such situations. It is important for me to make it very clear what the objective of the investigation is I am trying to carry out, and why it is important for Chatino speakers to collaborate in spite of any ideological differences. Even so, in my early days as an activist and researcher, I think I was wrong to attribute rejections solely to external ideologies, because at the same time, certain negative attitudes about the language itself were strongly affecting the process of including speakers in collaborative research projects.

After finishing the literacy work at IEEA but before studying abroad, I thought that the best way to collaborate with the speakers of my community was to work independently, without any ties to the local, state, or federal government. I began teaching Chatino language literacy on a voluntary basis, together with other Chatino speakers who had received linguistic training in the Otomanguan language workshops. The first local literacy workshops that we organized were carried out in two groups, one on the local community radio station 90.1, *Radio qin^E kchen^A* ('Radio of the town'), and the other at the home of a Chatino colleague. We each started offering workshops to a group of children 8 to 12 years old, and although we did not know that much about teaching Chatino literacy, we were very motivated to give the children of the town the opportunity to read texts in their own language. This initiative was our own idea, arising because we wished to share and apply what we had learned. As such, there were no restrictions imposed by the municipal government or by the speakers on how to organize the workshops. So, using the announcements on the community loudspeaker system, we publicly invited any children who spoke the language, and managed to gather around 20 participants in each of two groups. Once the classes started and the days went by, my group dwindled to seven students whose parents motivated them to continue attending. Alongside teaching writing, I included discussions about the importance of maintaining this language that for generations has been passed down to us by our ancestors. However, the parents of the seven did not actually agree with my ideology about the Chatino language. I realized that even though they sent their children to our workshops, they had a rather more negative view of Chatino and did not fully accept that Chatino was something important.

My hypothesis is that they sent their children to learn literacy in Chatino because in the preschool and primary schools of Panixtlahuaca, the children are assigned Chatino writing as homework, and so sometimes it was left to the parents to collect stories, legends, poems, and riddles without actually knowing how to write the language; and likewise the children themselves never were taught Chatino literacy in their classes.

So, the motivation for sending their children to the workshops was related to the obligation to do homework, and was not because they were proud of the language, or were intent on preserving or revitalizing it. In light of that, I decided to investigate how my own family viewed the importance of the language. I started by saying how

I felt about Chatino, its importance, and the advantages of knowing more than one single language. But to my surprise, in my own family circle I had the same experience that I had with the fathers and mothers of the children, because my family too had a negative reaction to Chatino, including those family members who had an academic background, and even those who were primary school teachers. One of the arguments that they used was that Chatino was headed for extinction and nothing could be done about it because the only language used in schools and government offices was Spanish, and although it was nice to speak and write it, it was just not relevant in the workplace. These discussions helped me clarify my ideas on how to communicate with speakers about the importance of Chatino, because I could not be insistent and oppose their way of thinking when this stigmatization exists, in the end, due to violence exerted from outside.

In the town of Panixtlahuaca there are some people, professionals and non-professionals alike, that have negative attitudes about projects for the promotion and revitalization of Chatino. The community always sees professional people as people who know what is important, so their attitude reinforces these negative impressions of the language. These individuals occupy a position of power in Panixtlahuaca and their opinions have an impact. If they do not consider language projects to be a part of community identity, or as having importance for new generations, then those attitudes become the model for the other people in the village.

This negativity comes about when there is a preference for a dominant language such as English or Spanish, and that in turn affects the value placed on the writing workshops being offered in the community. Here I also share some things I noticed during my first year studying abroad. In my first summer back in Panixtlahuaca, I realized that people in my close circle would ask me more about my fluency in English than about the work that I have been carrying out on Chatino, and at the same time they praised those among their acquaintances who spoke Spanish or English. And in keeping with the view that these dominant languages are better, my work is also underestimated when I try to invite them to the workshops, so for example, I heard members of a family of professionals say, “My daughters understand Chatino and they try to speak it, but things go better for them in school because they speak Spanish. So, should you teach English, do let me know!” On the other hand, the disinterest and lack of response on the part of my family toward using the language also generates criticism of my work. Since Panixtlahuaca is a small community, everyone knows about the projects in which I’m involved. This closeness among people leads to different perspectives about language activism projects. In my case, those who know me as a linguist expect that my family and I would set an example to follow when it comes to matters of language.

Over these eight years teaching and raising consciousness about the use of Chatino in both its written and oral forms has led to comments about my lack of ability to convince even those close to me to keep the language going, and this is because

my first cousins are the last generation in the family to speak Chatino: their own children are monolingual in Spanish. So even while my project is centered on reading Chatino, and I generally work with speakers who are themselves actively evaluating reading skills, more than once I have heard commentaries like: “You want these children to speak Chatino and yet the children of your own family only speak Spanish.” Usually these comments come from people not involved in the project, that is, from speakers who believe that I do not deserve to teach literacy because I cannot convince my first cousins to pass the language on to the next generation.

Certainly as researchers and activists we are not immune from such situations. A lack of consciousness can exist even among those close to us, and we cannot force anyone to teach the language to their children. After the experiences we went through with parents in the first workshops, we worked more with those in town who were interested in learning about and collaborating in various different projects benefiting the language. In the future, when proposing to work in a community-level revitalization project, it is necessary to involve more members of the community, such as parents, teachers, and municipal authorities; and in so doing, to arrive at an authentic reading of popular perceptions of language maintenance projects. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) indicate that to create a language program, it is necessary to evaluate the resources the community can rely on, one such resource being the status of the language itself, which affects the attitudes and interests of community members toward the project (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 160-161). Learning about these negative attitudes and lack of enthusiasm will allow us to address the misinformation that feeds the stigmatization of Chatino. For example, one of the myths that remains in force is that Spanish-Chatino bilingualism weakens the ability of children to speak the dominant language, Spanish. Another myth is that children who are monolingual in Spanish will be better students than children who learn Spanish as a second language. These are two of the many beliefs permeating all sectors of the population, from speakers to educators and municipal authorities.

As far as educators are concerned, Panixtlahuaca is frequently cited for the number of bilingual teachers who work in its primary and preschools. The great majority of these teachers are Chatino speakers working in the bilingual system.⁶ However, most, if not all, use Spanish as the language of instruction. The few teachers who know one of the Chatino writing systems, which will be discussed in detail later (see section 3), do not teach it in the classroom for a variety of reasons.

6 Translator’s footnote: In Oaxaca, schools in many Indigenous communities are designated (supposedly) as *Escuelas Bilingües* ‘bilingual schools’; they form a system parallel to schools not designated as ‘bilingual’.

In more pointed cases, they simply oppose the linguistic maintenance of Chatino. For example, while I was talking with a mother who I knew about the advantages of speaking more than one language, a local teacher told me to stop making comments to parents about what was best for their children, because they, the parents, should be the ones to decide what they want for their families. He added that I did not have the authority to speak about education because the only ones who know about it are the teachers who stand in the front of the classroom. At the end of the conversation the teacher commented that analyzing the sounds of a language is only useful for linguists, that linguistics does not contribute anything to the community, and he emphasized that the best way to help the children was by teaching them Spanish. After that incident, the mother took a very different position and went on to speak Spanish with her son, and each time I tried to take up the subject of Chatino with her, she was always on the defensive. It is clear that what a local teacher says has major repercussions and influence on language maintenance in an Indigenous community: the weight of his work as a teacher is stronger than the linguistic activism of an academic-in-training. Regardless of whether the teachers do or do not teach Chatino literacy or use Chatino as the language of instruction, the parents nevertheless value their work in teaching the hegemonic language.

This teacher later went on to assume an internship in education within the bilingual system. He went about doing fieldwork to collect stories and legends in Chatino. Unfortunately, cases like this can occur in either Indigenous or non-Indigenous schools, where the appearance of effort toward maintaining the language serves only to justify the notion that they are working on projects that are inclusive toward the children. Furthermore, they manufacture a kind of folklore around 'being Indigenous', for example it is common in the village preschools to see children costumed in traditional Chatino clothing, all while they are subject to *Castillianization* in their homes and classrooms (Cruz 2020).⁷ Most of the time, extracurricular activities are carried out in order to showcase pride in being Chatino, but this is merely symbolic (Cruz 2019). Thus the internalization of negative ideas towards our language is built directly into the bilingual system itself, and among the teachers who are supposed to be working to make the importance and use of Chatino something visible.

7 Translator's footnote: Beginning in the 1930s, the Mexican federal government inaugurated a long-standing and concerted program of *Castilianización* of Indigenous children, intended to root out or folklorize indigeneity while replacing it with Spanish language and Iberian culture.

2. The policies of the municipal government toward Chatino

Projects about language do not have the same level of public visibility that infrastructure projects have. In the time that I have been living in Panixtlahuaca I have known of no actions to promote the language. There is a Department of Culture and Recreation⁸ in the community, but the focus has always been on traditional dances, cuisine, crafts and the community museum. There has been talk of reinforcing the culture, but the Chatino language has been absent from any of the events that have been undertaken.

In celebration of International Day of the Mother Tongue, the municipal authorities hosted an event in conjunction with the various schools in the community for which the teachers prepared dances, poetry, songs, and parades. During this cultural event, the master of ceremonies conducted everything entirely in Spanish, and the children were asked to recite poetry and tell stories in Spanish, accompanied by translations into Chatino.

Many of these teachers still try to teach students about their Indigeneity through folklore, for example, having them dress in traditional Chatino clothing to sing the Mexican National Anthem in Chatino and salute the Mexican flag (Cruz 2020). Since this is an event whose purpose is entertainment, the municipal authorities participate and give support, whether monetary support or by participating directly in organizing the event. But this is not the case for a workshop to study Chatino: for that the authorities do not give support.

Based on my experience, the justification always given first is the lack of resources for hosting a workshop in the community. Even when few resources are needed to carry it out, the municipal authorities still refuse to offer space and furniture. To give a workshop using the facilities at the Municipal Hall is an involved process: there is a meeting with the members of the municipal government, and based on that they decide whether or not to give permission. So I, together with another person from the town, opted to give Chatino classes in our homes, because that way we would be able to determine our own content while not being under observation by the municipal authorities. To give an example, I describe my experiences organizing a workshop in my town. To be given permission to hold the workshop, the municipal council required that I meet certain conditions: they prohibited me from disseminating any publicity about the workshop, I was not allowed to say that I was going to

8 The Municipal Plan for Sustainable Development (Ayuntamiento Constitucional San Miguel Panixtlahuaca, Juquila, Oaxaca, 2011-2013) establishes “the responsibility to safeguard and promote the traditions, beliefs, customs and all other ancestral roots of the community” (29).

give it, and I could not invite people belonging to a political faction other than that of the current authorities. These I call 'bureaucratic filters' (De los Santos 2019: 161). From my perspective, this resistance to my projects about our mother tongue can be interpreted in several ways:

- a. In a context where it has mostly been men who have held the various municipal offices, it is difficult for them to take seriously a community project that is proposed by women. Even when women actively participate in community services, there are still limitations in taking their proposals into account; yet, the workshops offered by men have been promoted and supported by the municipal authorities, even if the workshop is offered by someone who does not belong to the community;
- b. The Chatino reading and writing workshops are something different, especially given that they were proposed without financial, political, or religious goals in mind. But what we bring to the community is often misunderstood as seeking some political or religious benefit beyond the linguistic matters at hand. For example, one of the times that I went to the Panixtlahuaca municipal authorities to present to them information about the tonal system of our language, the first thing I was asked was whether this documentation project with which I was involved in the community was based in religion and affiliated with SIL-International/Wycliffe Bible Translators. Once made aware that the project was something independent, they showed a better attitude and from there, everything went unremarked by the members of the council, who did not ask further questions. However, when a new administration took office as the members of the municipal authority, the reaction was different: they were more interested in keeping us as organizers from promoting the workshop, and in that way wanted to direct all of the recognition to themselves as the organizers;
- c. In following years, the projects have not been of much interest to most of the municipal councils that have taken office (each council holds office for three years), which is why there are no restrictions whatsoever when workshops are organized independently and privately.

Even though our experiences have not been favorable, the possibility always still remains of finding and working with a council interested in language projects. This depends on the attitude of each of the members of the council in turn, because at the end of the day they are speakers who also have a story to tell about their experience using the language in different contexts.

3. Collaboration, and its limitations

Ever since I started studying linguistics, I have been interested in working on topics that contribute to the revitalization of the Chatino language, like sociolinguistics, language documentation, language acquisition, bilingualism, literacy, and educational policy. The topics that I have begun to focus on are literacy and sociolinguistics, and in particular the exploration of the cognitive processes involved in the learning of reading skills, and its implications for a writing system in which tone is represented. At the same time, taking an ethnographic perspective, I also explore the use and the perception of Chatino speakers towards writing in general, as well as toward the specific writing systems being used for Chatino. From these two viewpoints, I invite the speakers of my community to learn to read and write in the Chatino language and at the same time to promote its use in different forums, including workshops, social media, printed text, and community radio.

The development of Chatino writing systems has resulted in different groups of speakers within the community adopting different ways of writing. The first of these systems was proposed by the linguists Kitty Pride and Leslie Pride of SIL-International/Wycliffe Bible Translators, in their Chatino-Spanish bilingual dictionary based on Panixtlahuaca Eastern Chatino (Pride & Pride 2010); the second was an orthography proposed for varieties of Eastern Chatino by bilingual education teachers belonging to the General Directorate for Indigenous Education (or DGEI, its acronym in Spanish); and finally a third was developed by linguists including Jeff Rasch (2002) for Yaitepec Eastern Chatino, Emiliana Cruz (2004; 2011) for San Juan Quiahije Eastern Chatino, and subsequently, the Chatino Language Documentation Project (CLDP) for Panixtlahuaca and other varieties of Eastern Chatino. It is to this third proposal that Chatino speakers from different communities have had the most access, due to the tone workshops for Otomanguean speakers and also the writing workshops organized by Chatino linguists Emiliana Cruz and Hilaria Cruz. In these workshops, the students also began to adapt the writing system to the Chatino languages and varieties spoken in our own communities and disseminate what we learned and discovered. There also were speakers who knew the writing systems proposed by the DGEI teachers or the Prides. However, most of these speakers do not write or read in Chatino; that is, they do not produce materials for themselves or for others. An exception is a speaker who has produced many written stories and legends, and has also completed a translation of the Bible collaboration with SIL-International/Wycliffe Bible Translators; however, these resources, although they do exist, have not been readily available to those looking for written material in Chatino. The use of the written language has been limited by the lack of forums to promote it and because young speakers interested in learning writing think that it is something very complex, and beyond their reach due to limited access to materials in Chatino. In Panixtlahuaca,

the only places where the written language is encountered are the entrance to the town and in the Municipal Hall; so for that reason, to make writing more visible, my collaborators and I began to promote Chatino literacy by regularly writing it in social media posts of various types, putting literacy videos on YouTube, and also posting Chatino translations of texts and short stories. Somehow we knew that the younger generations were seeking to write the language, just as in the beginning we ourselves had been. From these postings, many people in my community could actually see for themselves how we write Chatino; and on several occasions they asked me about the graphic representation of tones in our orthographic system, because that is a feature that does not exist in Spanish, nor has it been a part of other Chatino writing. The speakers were curious about the little superscript letters used in our system for representing the tone class of each word and wanted to know how they worked, as for example, in this sentence that I once posted on Facebook, *tqi^A nga^A qnya^H* ‘I feel sore’. To some speakers it seemed remarkable, and to this day I receive messages asking me to give translations of words and short sentences written in Chatino this way.

In my community it was uncommon to see written Chatino in social media — a situation that has changed with time, so it is now increasingly common to see postings and comments in the language. Now, posting in Chatino makes sense to me, since most of my contacts are Chatino and yet previously the only communication tool in social media posts had been Spanish. Using Chatino as a means of communication in social media gives me comfort and security to express my ideas and feelings, preserving their original formulation in Chatino without having to transport them into a Spanish translation. And like me, other Chatinos share this same feeling about using the written language on social media. Once the use of tone in our writing system became evident, some Chatino teachers — ones who had always been passive about the use and teaching of the written language — began to show an attitude of rejection toward our language activism. This rejection little by little began to reveal jealousy and competition, even though those same speakers had never shown much interest in promoting the written language. On various occasions I was hearing comments like: “She doesn’t write with the original Chatino writing, Chatino has to be written the way it sounds”, or “The letters she uses are from English, and we have to avoid having letters imposed on us from foreign languages”. At that time, these comments could be interpreted as a rejection of the Chatino linguists who had been academically trained abroad and who had contributed to the proposal for writing with tone. We as Chatino speakers, outside the teachers’ system, did not consider it an imposition, on the contrary, we felt included in the project due to the open call for participation in the Otomanguean workshops and the opportunity to study our own language. The term “original writing” was being attributed to the writing system that the teachers had learned in their workshops for their work in Indigenous education, as well as a spelling that has greater similarity to the Spanish orthographic system (Faudree 2015).

In this context, my work as a linguist and activist has consisted of advising my Chatino students not to enter into discussions about which writing system is better or worse, because the important thing is constant use, and the effectiveness of the representations for fluent reading. A lot of the time the difficulty with dialoguing with bilingual education teachers about writing tone boils down to a lack of awareness that a writing system is a graphic representation (or drawing) of each sound. Therefore, they defend the orthographic system they know as if their system were the best to be used in the community, but do so without actually teaching it to the children. What follows next is an example of such a rejection, one that I experienced in the Chatino region even before entering academia.

In a workshop of the (Oaxaca) State Institute for Adult Education (or IEEA, its initials in Spanish) held in Santiago Yaitepec in 2012, taught by a teacher who had been working with Chatino languages and had also created materials for Zenzontepec Chatino (another one of the three Chatino languages as classified in Campbell (2013)), our teacher realized that my fellow language-trainers and I had been using tones in our writing, and a few days after the workshop he accused us of not complying with the guidelines governing the IEEA. One of these guidelines said that we were not authorized to use any writing system other than that used in the materials prescribed for Chatino adults, and this was conveyed to us in a letter from the head of the IEEA's Department of Educational Services. This imposition from the IEEA—supported by a professor from the Chatino region—made us realize the seriousness of the situation, even apart from the fact that they expected the trainers to learn in a single day to write using the teachers' system. All that we had done at that time was to disseminate what we had learned and discovered in the tone workshops to the speakers who were volunteering as trainers in the adult literacy program. They, in turn, had unfortunately not received any type of writing training at all from the IEEA.

This lack of agreement, and the problems of power among those of us who work with Chatino languages means that our goal is achieved only slowly, very different than if we could join forces and work together. The idea, "my writing system is better than yours" still remains, even when 'my system' is neither shared nor promoted.

Today, most bilingual education teachers follow this same tack, many of them taking for granted that people do not need to study in order to be able to write the language: "I write it as I want, the important thing is that I understand it," I was told by a teacher when I asked him if his students were able to read a text he had written. His comment made me understand that they only would try to write Chatino when they had to provide evidence to show they were working with a Chatino language. In the same way, another teacher who was opposed to the writing that I use with my students said: "Writing Chatino is easy, it is no big deal, and you just complicate it further by adding in the tones." According to her point of view, it is not important to represent the tones in a practical writing system, even though she neither knew nor used any of the writing systems that had been proposed. She simply did not

agree with the inclusion of the tone class superscript in the writing system because such a thing does not exist in Spanish writing and thus cannot be taught using the methods used for Spanish. The limited flexibility of the teachers to talk about the different systems that exist for Panixtlahuaca Eastern Chatino is related to the deeply rooted idea that the writing system of Chatino should be just like that of Spanish. Unfortunately, there is very little interest in working together, and only in very few cases do the teachers show any willingness to continue learning about Chatino and its grammar in order to apply it in the classrooms (Cruz, Soriano and De los Santos, 2020).

4. Gender violence

Being a woman and doing fieldwork in my community and in other Chatino communities means being exposed to experiencing gender violence, which puts both my mental and my physical stability in peril. The violence I have experienced has come in different forms, from text message to physical bullying. Well before my immersion in the linguistic world I knew that, if I visit another community, one way to protect myself is to present myself as married; in that way, anyone intending to approach me would know that there was someone who “protects me”. But that does not always work. As a local researcher, what is most worrying is the personal information to which they have access, like where I live, who else lives in my house, and who my relatives are. Based on this information, some men claim to want to have a serious discussion with me and claim to show interest in my research and linguistic activism.

For example, in my community, a preschool teacher contacted me on Facebook. First he started with a casual conversation, telling me that he knew about me from the work I do with Chatino, and asking me about my brother and the rest of the family. Then he gives me his contact information so that I could “get to know” him.

Teacher: Very interesting

Author: I also make teaching materials

Teacher: One of these days maybe you could share with me one of those books of yours

Teacher: Or materials in Chatino

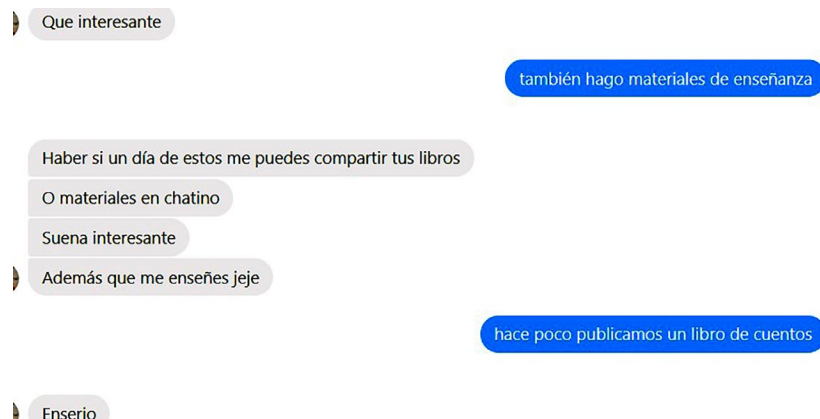
Teacher: Sounds interesting

Teacher: Or any other way that you could teach me, lol

Author: Just recently, we published a book of stories

Teacher: No kidding

FIGURE I



I thought that he really wanted to know more about my work on Chatino, so I told him that I was not present in the community, but if he wanted the material he could go by my mother's house to pick it up.

With my less-than-successful experience working with bilingual teachers in mind, I thought that maybe this teacher, who does not speak Chatino, had good intentions in inviting me to his place of work to tell stories to the children. At first I suggested that he invite speakers in town who know stories and legends in the language, but he showed no interest in that. When we exchanged contact information I gave him my phone number. So far, our discussions had just been about setting a date for a meeting at the school. Three days after that conversation I received a message from him saying that he wanted to talk to me on the phone, and, because I was busy, I proposed a time to talk. Then just when I realized I had missed the call, he wrote to me on the social media platform *Facebook Messenger*: "I phoned you. Are you busy? Or are you with your boyfriend? (Laugh). I ask so as not to bother you." I made it clear I was married and asked him what the purpose of his call was, but he did not respond. Then he contacted me again on *Messenger*, writing this:

Teacher: You don't like me

Teacher: You don't want to get to know me

Author: 🙄

Teacher: Just tell me no

Teacher: And never ...

Teacher: Will I bother you again

Author: I thought that you were interested in the work that I do in linguistics

Teacher: What interests me is you

Teacher: But if you tell me

Teacher: That you never want to see me

Teacher: I'll back off

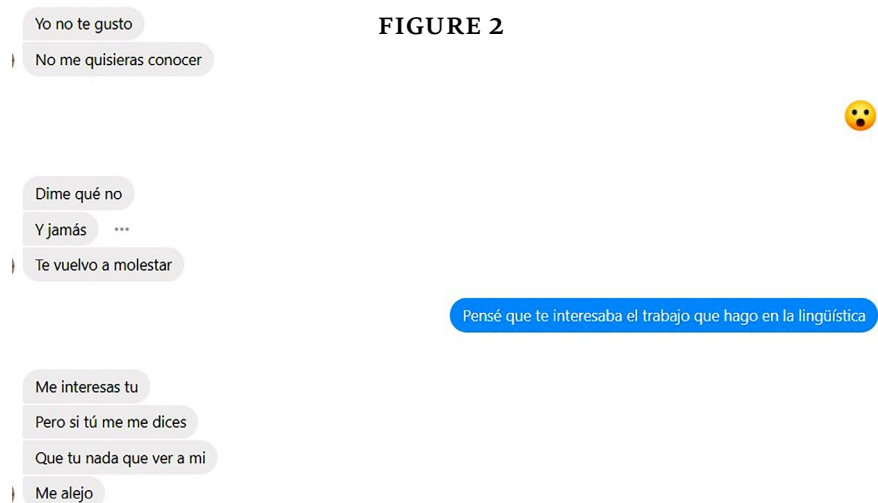


FIGURE 2

Although I did not answer his messages, he continued to write to me every day. I had to remind him that my intention was to have a contact at the school and that I never expected him to harass me. His response was:

Teacher: A school

Teacher: For work

Teacher: It's there for you whenever you wish ...

Teacher: I am not a contact

Teacher: Nor should you compare me

Teacher: With that

Teacher: Please

Teacher: LOL

Teacher: I'm not the contact of anyone in any way

Teacher: And in linguistics

Teacher: You're not going to succeed

26/11/18 19:48

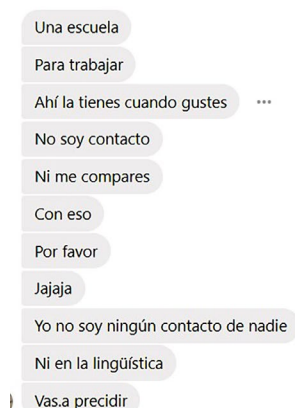


FIGURE 3

The psychological harassment to which he subjected me, with his posturing as a person sensitive to rejection, involved him passing from harasser to victim, at which point he tried to minimize my work. Days later he sent me messages as if nothing had happened, and when he did not get any response, he began to ask me for stories in Chatino with drawings for a digital library. This time I did not answer him again and I opted to remove him from my contact list. This is to cite just one case among many that I have experienced on social media for being a woman.

I have also received death threats. In the summer of 2019, I went to do fieldwork in my community. At the end of August, a relative warned me that on the social media platform *WhatsApp*, an audio clip was circulating with threats against my person. The message had been recorded in Chatino using an application called *My Tommy Talk*,⁹ an application for altering the voice to sound like the voice of a cat. I asked a family member to share the audio clip with me. The *My Tommy Talk* clip was in Chatino, and it concerned my father, saying that if I did not resolve a debt of his, they would rape me. Listening to that audio clip affected me greatly. I did not know what to do, so I ended up trying to file a complaint with the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Santa Catarina Juquila. But it was not accepted, because, they said, a complaint of threat can only be brought if the person alleged to be responsible for the threat is known. Instead, the first option I was given was for the police to trace the origin of the audio clip by questioning the people who had received it; but for that to work, I had to be in constant communication with the Prosecutor's office. Somehow they knew that this option would be emotionally exhausting for me, as it meant constantly having to receive information about the situation. Those I spoke to began to make comments such as: "You don't have to worry, people just talk" and "We are in a place where this type of crime does not occur". In the end, only a record of fact was drawn up as background in case anything happened to me.

The experiences of women in the field are so difficult that many times we do not know how to face them, that is why we have to be prepared for any possible scenario. But despite how difficult it has been, I have also had good experiences. In what follows I will describe my collaborative work with young people, women, and children.

9 <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.outfit7.mytalkingtomfree&hl=en>

5. The achievements of all who participated in our collaborative projects

The collaborative projects that have been developed in the community of San Miguel Panixtlahuaca have been carried out outside of official institutional structures. This has made it possible to form a group of speakers interested in projects on writing and reading. Official disinterest has contributed to the freedom to write the language using the system that we consider most pertinent.

Right now, I collaborate with a group of 15 speakers from the community of Panixtlahuaca. Most are teens and young adults between the ages of 12 and 30. Although this group is small, all have an interest in contributing to the teaching and development of reading materials for children and adults. Of these speakers, nine are located in the community and every summer we organize writing and translation workshops. The other six are outside the community and we maintain communication using the internet platforms *Zoom* and *Skype*. Of the six, most are professionals who have the option of taking classes online.

As the group of speakers who use the written language grows, the visibility of Chatino in social media such as *Facebook* is more evident, and with this, more speakers are encouraged to join this movement. Those interested in learning how to represent Chatino languages orthographically have different motivations for doing so: some are committed to using it in translations of the Bible, others for writing stories, legends and informational texts from the community, and a very small group wants to use the written language in social media to distinguish themselves from others. So, to put the written language to use, and at the same time to create reading comprehension exercises, I post open questions on *Facebook* so that the speakers can answer them, and in the *Zoom* sessions we read the answers offered in the postings.

This type of activity has received a good response on *Facebook* because the majority of Chatinos use the platform. Previously, I used the social media platform *Twitter* to post in Chatino and connect with other speakers, but it is not widely used by Chatinos, and so my posts had little visibility. Despite this, I could see that speakers of other languages such as Zapotec, with the support of the project *Voces del Valle*,¹⁰ were using the same strategy on *Twitter* with positive results. Happily, these venues are there to promote interaction and motivate speakers to write in their own language. Currently, all these speakers are participating in the research I am carrying

¹⁰ Brook Danielle Lillehaugen indicates that “*Voces del Valle* is a project that encourages speakers of the Oaxacan languages, in particular Zapotec and Chatino, to write their language. The project uses *Twitter* as the medium for writing and as a means of support” (2016: 358).

FIGURE 4



out on the learning of literacy in Chatino, specifically when it involves the written representation of tone. Their participation has been very positive in my project, and in keeping with the principle of reciprocity that Austin (2019) articulates, namely that “the researcher must contribute to the community in some way, in exchange for the contributions that the members of the same community carry out the research project” (Austin 2019: 171).

The purpose of this research is to learn both the advantages and the disadvantages to learners and users of the present Chatino writing system, and then make proposals for reinforcing users’ reading skills.

One way of learning about the effectiveness of writing in a language is by looking at people’s use of texts: without texts, there is nothing for the speakers to actually read. Only work that is collaborative will allow for the quick production of texts. One of the projects these speakers are interested in is the translation of short stories for children, specifically on the *Storyweaver* platform; others have proposed to work on documenting the history of Panixtlahuaca. It is also worth mentioning that contests and prizes like the *Premios CaSa*¹¹ motivate Chatino speakers to write in their own language, though their broad scope and the fact that works written in Chatino can be

11 *Premios CaSa* is a literary competition sponsored by the Oaxaca State government, aimed at speakers of eight Indigenous language groups the state: Chatino, Mazatec, Chinantec, Huave, Triqui, Mixtec, Mixe and Zapotec. The categories are: poetry, fiction (short story or novel), song, literature for children, and texts based on oral tradition.

taken into account and recognized. On the other hand, Gesche (2019) has argued that having an alphabet in a language without also having a written tradition does not ensure that speakers will use it in their daily lives, because there is no motivation to do so comparable to the motivation that they can find in the dominant language (Gesche 2019: 233). Consequently, reading and writing a language without a written tradition needs to be promoted explicitly by creating new domains for its use (Aguilar 2014), because every day, speakers of Indigenous languages are in contact with digital media and platforms that deal in written text. Putting Indigenous language text into these new forms makes it more visible and at the same time, permits speakers to interact using the written form of their own languages. The more speakers read and write their languages, the more materials are needed. This is what we propose for the Chatino writing classes: generating written materials from many different genres.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me highlight the main points raised in this work regarding the different situations that I have faced as an Indigenous woman and researcher doing fieldwork in my community of origin.

Because my focus has been the exploration of the learning of literacy while seeking to be part of the collaborative revitalization of the Eastern Chatino language, it is very important for me to work with different members of society, including speakers, teachers and municipal authorities. Each of these groups has had different responses to activities supporting the language that have been undertaken in the community. These responses are linked to their attitudes towards Chatino. Unfortunately, many myths and beliefs that stigmatize the language still persist, fueling this negative attitude. As stated by the UNESCO group of experts: “If the community sees its language as an obstacle to economic mobility and integration into the dominant society, it can develop negative attitudes towards it” (UNESCO 2011: 32). Educators, professionals and municipal authorities are not exempt from showing this attitude. This tells us that it is essential to work on the issue of linguistic ideology and consciousness when proposing a community language project.

On the other hand, as a researcher, criticism towards my work arises from my position as a known member of the community. People are aware of what is happening around them and have enough information to identify me in terms of my family and its problems as well as its participation in *fiestas* and community assemblies. Depending on the situation, this can be favorable or unfavorable for me as a member of a small community. People having access to my personal information can pose a threat to me as a woman. The misuse of social media like *WhatsApp* or *Facebook* can

lead to the dissemination of information linking me with matters that have arisen in my family, and that in turn can lead to violations of my person and my safety.

Furthermore, this availability of information can also be used to undermine the goals of my work. My research and community work go hand in hand, since they not only include teaching literacy but also promoting and raising consciousness about Chatino in the community. The speakers, realizing that my family members do not contribute to the vitality of the language, come to use that as an excuse for attacking my work. As already noted throughout this article, the negative attitude persists in every corner of the community. In the last eight years I have worked with many speakers who seem to have become convinced of the importance of transmitting the Chatino language to the next generation, but demonstrate quite the opposite by using only the dominant language with their children. The effort made to share information about the language is by itself not enough to reverse this situation. There is still a long way to go to make this work truly collaborative. Above all, it is important to keep involving those of the younger generations in language documentation workshops and projects. Finally, it should be mentioned that the use of available venues like social and other digital media also represent new ways of involving speakers and creating new spaces for the use of the written language.

Reflection on the translation

By Anthony C. Woodbury

It was my privilege to undertake this translation and to revise it with the help of the author, Isaura de los Santos. I have known Isaura since 2012, when she joined our Workshop on Tone for Speakers of Otomanguan Languages; and I've followed her work and career since then, through subsequent workshops and on to graduate school in the US; through visits with her to San Miguel Panixtlahuaca; from meeting and getting to know members of her family and community; and from getting an awareness of Panixtlahuaca Eastern Chatino. My acquaintance with Isaura and her community as an (albeit outsider) linguist gave me a degree of confidence for making this translation—many parts of the story I could picture, for some parts I was even present, and I knew some of the events. As a teacher—especially when, as here, teaching includes collaboration beyond the classroom—you can feel you know your students pretty well. So the full impact of Isaura's account took me by surprise; not so much specific events, but the power, persistence, and relentlessness of the obstacles she felt and faced; and her fortitude in pursuing her vision nonetheless. Going to her classes or meeting with local officials or visiting community members, I would sense brightness and positivity all round; but perhaps some of it she projected into situations through sheer force of personality, in spite of the obstacles and adversity. And so as a translator, what at first seemed easily familiar became a challenge to try to get right; and

as a teacher and fieldworker, it made me realize how important it is to be willing to let go of what you think you know.

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"And what are you getting out of this?" Experiencing fieldwork in your community of origin: From reflection into emotional healing

Ana D. Alonso Ortiz

UMass-AMHERST

Translated by Megan J. Crowhurst and May Helena Plumb

Abstract

In this essay I share my fieldwork experience as a Zapotec researcher trained in anthropological and linguistic methodologies. I suggest that fieldwork is experienced differently by colleagues of non-Indigenous origin based on ethical, political and internal relationships that cross my academic projects and my personal life.

Keywords: Fieldwork, Yalálag, Zapotec researchers, dialogues, emotions.

I. Introduction^I

The lines that follow are the fruit of discussions with Indigenous academic colleagues and of my own internal reflections on my experience of fieldwork, both as a Zapotec woman studying her own language, and as a researcher trained in the theories and methodologies of anthropology and linguistics. Here, I reflect on my experience of the field in my community of origin, Villa Hidalgo Yalálag, a Zapotec community in the Sierra Norte mountains of Oaxaca.

This text is grounded in discussions of decolonizing methodologies associated with the New Zealand Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who proposes that to decolonize ourselves is to recognize and challenge the oppressive political and social dimensions that underpin our research. This process is necessary to establish the basis for exchanges that enable us to access alternative ways of explaining, understanding and doing (Smith 2012).

The objective of this essay, therefore, is precisely to contribute to discussions of decolonization by reflecting on my experience as a Zapotec researcher conducting fieldwork in my native community. The reflections expressed in this essay, which are similar to those of other Indigenous investigators (for example, in contributions to this volume), which have received only cursory consideration in the halls of our institutions and in academic fora, in contrast to the fieldwork experiences of nonIndigenous researchers.

In my view, sharing our experiences contributes to dismantling certain assumptions, such as that an Indigenous anthropologist or linguist has no difficulty gaining the trust of the people; or in providing descriptions of situations and conflicts that occur within a community; or in documenting and explaining the grammar of a language.

As noted by Godina (2003: 474), today it is possible to speak of different types of anthropological fieldwork, with their respective scenarios and agents. For example:

- I. A site where field research on a non-European society is conducted by an anthropologist from West Europe, or

I These lines are written in thanks to all who made this essay possible. I would like to begin with my fellow contributors to this volume, for sharing field experiences from their different places of origin. I continue with my friends Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, Emiliana Cruz Cruz, Tajëw Díaz Robles, Yunitza Vásquez Vásquez, Olivia Chiñas Gómez and my sister Erendira F. Ortiz for helping me to pin down my ideas and for motivating me – despite the challenge – to follow through with this piece, which ultimately has given expression to something very personal. Thank you to all for keeping the controversial debate alive. Many thanks to the people who visited our table: *El Ser Es y El No-Ser No Es: debates sobre la ontología indígena en el trabajo de campo de LASA 2019 Nuestra América: Justice and inclusion*. I extend my thanks to Regina Martínez Casas and to the reviewers who commented on this work. Finally, any errors in this essay are my responsibility alone.

2. A site where field research on a non-European society is conducted by a native anthropologist, or
3. A site where field research is conducted on a western European society, and the researcher is a West European anthropologist.

In the first scenario, we find a classic fieldwork situation in which a foreign investigator works in a community (culture) that is not their own. Work in this scenario has produced classic studies such as Malinowski (1984) in anthropology; in linguistic anthropology, Sherzer (1983); and the recent studies of Campbell (2014) in linguistics. This “classic” fieldwork model is well-documented and supported by manuals (for example, Taylor and Bodgan, 1987) and reports (for example, Grinevald 2003; Macaulay 2004) written for non-native researchers. It was the writings of non-native researchers that were assigned as readings in my formative courses in anthropology and linguistics.

Scenario two, at least in Mexico, is emergent and still evolving: an Indigenous researcher who conducts fieldwork in their own community. On this topic, we have the essays in the current volume, which was inaugurated as a space for discussions relating to the decolonizing methodologies of Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Therefore, I discuss the idea that the research space, conceived within academia as a site visited in the summer or during some other season of the year, cannot be understood and experienced as such by an Indigenous researcher who is a member of the community.² Below, I expound on the interlacing relations of ethics, politics and internal polarization that pervade my academic projects and my personal life.

1.1. “Preparing oneself” to do fieldwork

The plan of studies for the Licenciatura in Anthropology that I completed incorporated periods of fieldwork beginning in the first year, and as the educational process progressed, courses in field methodology and technical methods for conducting research. In these courses we were assigned classic readings, such as ethnographies and fieldwork manuals, in anthropology and my area of specialization, linguistics. In these courses we reviewed how to make connections with people, community organizations and institutions; how to ensure a productive field season by employing

2 Additional note (MJC): the researcher conducting fieldwork in the home community is not able to compartmentalize the research space, as it has so many other important functions relating to personal identity and community membership. AAO comments that as an Indigenous researcher, she visits the research site often, and as the research space is her community of origin, is responsible for complying with community obligations and expectations.

“field strategies”³; participant observation; and the importance of *rapprochement*⁴; field methods (interviews, biographies, oral and photographic records); field diaries; how to use tape recorders and metadata, among the various essential tools with which we were equipped.

From the beginning, I noticed that our training was intended for an audience that was unfamiliar with the place of research. It assumed that the researcher had never been in the community and had no contact or relationship with its members, or was unfamiliar with the areas and topics of interest for the research. This was not the case for three of the 19 students in my cohort, who belonged to or identified as members of an Indigenous people. Doing fieldwork in our own communities confronted us with the way in which we were being prepared and guided in our courses. Personally, the training I was receiving often led me to rethink whether I wanted to be a linguistic anthropologist, whether I could see myself doing fieldwork in the community in the future. There were many times when I questioned my position and relationships in the community, along with my plans for research.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith reports a similar experience in her fieldwork in New Zealand:

I had found little help in the standard methodological guidebooks for the issues I would confront when I was a Maori carrying out research with other Maori. Very little in the discussions of cross-cultural issues was useful because I was not working cross-culturally. Much of the cross-cultural literature assumed that the researcher belonged to the dominant cultural group and was ‘doing’ research to, for, and sometimes with, a minority group (Smith 2012: 196).

It happened that one of the first lessons learned in my first days of fieldwork, one that I later kept constantly in mind, was knowing that there was a dissociation between how students are taught and prepared *versus* the reality of what they encounter in the field. There is no space in our curricula for training students in the practical aspects of conducting fieldwork (Macaulay 2004: 203). What they were teaching wasn’t working for me. I wouldn’t be surprised if my fellow students may have had similar experiences; we didn’t have opportunities to share our field experiences, precisely because educational institutions reproduce systems of knowledge which don’t build on the experiences of students.

Once in the community, the challenges⁵ were concentrated in a) the approach to and communication with the people, and b) the ethical compromise from the academ-

3 Behave naively; be in the right place at the right time; “informants” shouldn’t know exactly what we are studying. For more information, see Taylor and Bogdan (1987, 65-69).

4 See Taylor and Bogdan (1987: 55) for definitions.

5 Of course, certain things facilitate my fieldwork; for example, being a speaker of the language and familiarity with aspects of the daily life of the community and its people.

ic perspective, and the moral commitment inherent in doing research in one's place of origin. Although it might be assumed that, as a member of the community, I and my project would be received positively, compared to my nonIndigenous colleagues, this was not the case for me. My acceptance as a native of the village who knows the linguistic and cultural code was one thing; the treatment I received as a student and later as an investigator with linguistic projects underway was quite another.

To provide an example, navigating the geographical space of the village, visiting people, interviewing them and recording conversations between parents and their children provoked a certain curiosity and uncertainty, because my behavior doesn't fit the picture one has of a product that can be commercialized, or of a public servant who does, let's say, a topographic survey for a specific purpose. The reason for my actions isn't obvious, at least not to everyone. With school teachers and principals, and with parents, I have conversations about what I do every day, and I share and discuss with them the things I observe. For everyone else who sees me speaking and playing with children in the patios of their homes, what I do may still provoke curiosity, even now.

For me, choosing my community of origin as my field location led me to notice two things. First, fellow students in my cohort who don't belong to an Indigenous community could arrive, do their research and leave without major consequences. Meanwhile, in my personal experience, fieldwork involved intense scrutiny of my family history and a requirement to make my work tangible. Second, methodological texts and reports of field experiences used in university courses present a way forward from the perspective of foreigners who have no sociohistorical and emotional ties to the community they visit. Moreover, these texts promote practices that benefit the individual, practices that in the end we — that is, Indigenous academics — also replicate.

These are experiences which are not discussed in academic spaces, whether with Indigenous or with nonIndigenous colleagues. Field methods courses, up to the present moment in my studies, do not discuss the experiences of Indigenous researchers. For example, I came to know the work of Linda Tuhiwai in a course on decolonization theory. It is also possible that the experiences of Indigenous researchers are due to the positivist nature of our disciplines, in which what gets reported is data that confirm some theory or contribute to a new theoretical paradigm. In the following sections, I wish to share various things which, as an Indigenous Zapotec researcher, I have encountered in my community of origin. Then, in a final section, I will share some practices that have helped me to remake the way I operate in the field.

2. Fieldwork in the community of origin

Doing fieldwork in our own spaces requires us to be conscious of local issues and the position of the community with respect to these issues. At the same time, as academics we must recognize that we are in a position of privilege, and we must come to terms with the fact that in the course of our research we may cause discomfort or create conflicts by questioning shared cultural and linguistic practices. In addition to being an academic, I have a further privilege: as a person with undergraduate and graduate degrees, living abroad with passport and visa in hand, I can be in Yalálag one day and in Los Angeles the next, a feat impossible for hundreds of Yalalteco migrants living in that city in the United States.

Doing research and fieldwork in my home community places my identity as a member of that community under a spotlight; my ancestry and the sociopolitical position of my family can lead to both positive and negative reactions towards my research. The aspects of my identity that come under scrutiny in my home community are different, for example, from those reported by Macaulay (2004) in the Oaxacan Mixteca, namely her physical traits, eating habits, and marital status. As I carry out my work, it is not such details of my person that are relevant, but rather details of my family. As Smith (2012: 5) says:

Many Indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other Indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side.

I have a similar experience: I teeter between two worlds that have different expectations of me and that evaluate me in different ways. For example, the following considerations come into play in my research projects.

1. *Gwzun*, or mutual aid

The community of Yalálag, like other Zapotec communities, supports the organization of social and religious activities through a system of mutual aid: *gwzun* in Yalálag Zapotec, also known as *guelaguetza* in the Zapotec communities of the Valley of Oaxaca. This system has been defined as “cooperation and voluntary service given from one member of a community to another; however, it is not a one-sided inter-

action but carries an understanding of reciprocity...”⁶ (Lizama Quijano 2006: 210). Mutual aid can take the form of monetary payment or voluntary work. *Wen txhen*, contribution of social labor that supports events, is decided based on the previous participation of the family hosting the event. When invited to an event, a person will reflect on whether the family that invited them (or, in the case of a funeral, the person who has passed away) has been generous in supporting other celebrations. If the memories are positive, the invited guest will decide positively on attending the party, participating in a funeral vigil, or supporting the event in some other way. In this way, mutual aid is a community principle that shapes and weaves relationships within the community.

2. *Llin la'o*, or community service

The second principle that influences community status is community service, and, relatedly, the question of accountability. All pueblo residents are obligated to provide *tequio* (voluntary labor) in order to support community programs (Maldonado Alvarado 2015: 157). Annual *cargos* (public works positions, such as constable or president) in service to the pueblo are part of one’s community *tequio*; those who neglect their position, fail to complete their assignment, or fall into corruption face penalties in the form of jail time, fines, or expulsion from the pueblo. In recent years, there has been an increasing lack of transparency in the use of the community funds, and while sanctions have been created to discourage those that participate in this type of mismanagement, there is a growing sense of distrust in the community. An outcome of this distrust is that any person proposing a project is subject to scrutiny by the *cabildo* (town council), the town assembly, and the committee that reviews pueblo finances.

In addition to the lack of transparency in the use of funds, there is also community concern surrounding the lack of transparency in the management of information, and specifically the extraction of knowledge. There is a sense in the community that photos, videos, language classes, and research in general ultimately lead to an extraction of data which generates economic benefit for whoever led that project. This in particular led to the following anecdote, which inspired the title of this article.

In the summer of 2017, I traveled through the community interviewing people about attitudes and linguistic factors that contributed to the transmission (or lack thereof) of our language. On many occasions, they asked me how much I would earn from asking questions and recording this information. There was a widespread be-

6 Our translation of: “cooperación y servicio que se da entre los miembros de una comunidad; sin embargo, no es un acto unilateral sino que lleva consigo la idea de reciprocidad...”

lief in the community that the language and some facts about our culture, when presented outside of our community context, would generate economic gains for the researcher (or for some other entity). As a result, both in conversation and in passing remarks, I often heard phrases such as *that person is selling the dance* or *those people are selling the language*.

3. *Yo' lhall luelljake'*

This third factor is derived from an internal political conflict within the community, beginning in the 1990s, which fractured the community and affected almost everyone — both those living locally and those abroad, as documented in Gutiérrez Nájera (2009). This problem, steeped in politics, has disrupted the lives of recent generations and for a long time has jeopardized the unity of the community. Family bonds have been fractured, as have important facets of work and community life in the pueblo.

This has directly affected my work and that of my colleagues in the Colectivo *Dill Yelnbán*, with whom I collaborate on projects related to Zapotec language and culture. At the end of the 1990s, when this polarizing political conflict arose, I was 10 years old and I did not play a direct part; however, I experienced the “collateral damage” caused by the Mexican military, which searched my home and caused confusion for many years of my childhood. This issue has since been resolved, but some people in the community still judge me based on my family members’ “biased” affiliation or based on the places or people with which I am connected. This scrutiny is directed not only at my person, but also my projects. As to the effects on colleagues with whom I collaborated, this scrutiny put an end to the Programa de Acciones Culturales Multilingües y Comunitarias (PACMYC) 2017 project, which was chosen as a finalist at a state competition and which was supposed to be audited by a group of individuals chosen by the local authorities.

One of the requirements of this government program was that we have a letter of guarantee from the Yalálag community, and we obtained such a letter from the municipal authorities in 2016. However, a year later, in 2017, when we requested endorsement of the project and authentication from the new municipal authorities, they denied the request. The argument that we were given after the fact was that some members of the cabildo believed that my colleagues intended to keep the money for ourselves, and would not use it for the project that we had originally proposed in our community; furthermore, some of my colleagues were flagged for “not being speakers of the language”. Finally, one member of the cabildo explicitly mentioned that for us

7 “To hold a grudge”. Literally, “to live within the community without forgetting.”

to initiate a project related to our language did not make sense, as we did not have authority to make decisions on such matters, and for this reason she did not support endorsement of the letter. After many hours of negotiation between different members of the municipal cabildo, the representatives from the state Secretaría de Cultura (Ministry of Culture) and some of my colleagues asked me, as a representative of our collective, to sign a letter declining the funding before the state agency and the municipal cabildo. I had worried about such an outcome before, and I still fear similar results every time I undertake a new project. Beyond the simple loss of funding, this event caused my colleagues and me a lot of frustration and discouragement, knowing that we could not count on the support of our community representatives. When people become entangled and absorbed in problems of the past, and use this as a basis to judge the younger generation, future members of the community will become apathetic towards local issues. This, in my opinion, is a symptom of the fracture that occurred in the community in the nineties, and it is one of the present-day concerns in Yalálag that I have testified to as a member of the community. I made my complaint to the cabildo directly on that day that they obliged me to give up the project. It was a complaint borne of frustration that I had never thought to express to our community authorities, and it was therefore a very intense experience for me as a young yalalteca who had been taught that the municipal authorities, as the fathers and mothers of the pueblo (*xus xnha yell*), were public figures deserving great respect.

The incident caused me a lot of self-doubt, as a yalalteca and as a researcher. On the one hand, I began to doubt the road that I had chosen — linguistics — and later I doubted my work and its value with regards to language revitalization. On the other hand, I did not want to accept or give in to the multitude of warnings that my family had made to me about not involving myself in the pueblo by starting community projects, because all those who had done so had ended up being criticized for whatever reason and driven out of the community. However, ultimately this event caused me to reaffirm that I had chosen the correct road, and that we must make the change we want to see, even if it takes us many years. That was the choice made some time ago by the family members, compadres, and friends who began what I call a fight for community life and in particular for language, for which reason I began on this path. They inspired my journey through linguistics and anthropology; I consider myself only the sprout of that which they planted long ago. For example, my access to education — the ability to grow up bilingual and now multilingual — is the fruit of many battles won by those who preceded me, fighting for educational centers in the community and fiercely defending our right to speak our language. In the words of Smith (2012: 5): “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions”.

To come back to the question of what it means to do fieldwork in one's home community, in this particular case it involved an evaluation of family history in the

terms described above. Support for research projects and permission to visit institutions of education, for example, were predicated on an inspection of my family, their community participation, and furthermore their political beliefs. My fieldwork also involved emotional, one-on-one confrontations with members of my home community. Thus, doing research in the community meant submitting for judgment my social connections, my family's beliefs, and myself as an individual. My work as a researcher — any given project — could sometimes end in rejection, a veto from the community, or a roadblock that affected both the public and private sides of my life. Because of this, when a student sets out to complete some work or use a particular research protocol, it is necessary to recognize that the timelines and formal procedures put forth by educational institutions will not always accomplish the desired effect in the student's home community.

Fieldwork and the issues that come up in an Indigenous researcher's home community require not only a reconsideration of methodology training, but also the emotional preparation to confront situations unique to these contexts (Macaulay 2004). In this sense, the fieldwork carried out by researchers belonging to an Indigenous community requires that field methods classes include new ways of knowing and new ways of doing things, and that we foster an open dialogue to rethink fieldwork as an enterprise. In both anthropology and linguistics, such classes must adapt in response to these new researchers and scenarios. One proposal outlined in Vasilachis de Gialdino (2013):

During the course of a research project it is necessary to create a set of principles which are continually modified, polished, perfected during the research process. These principles are inexorably linked to the researcher — their biography, their research trajectory, their previous agreements, their obligations, their affiliations, their interests, their political and ideological stances, among many other factors. Furthermore, the researcher themselves is situated in a social and historical context which further impacts these decisions and which, in many cases, determines the direction and/or disrupts the course of these decisions.⁸

In the eyes of the academy, and in the eyes of certain members of our home community, it seems impossible to imagine that those of us who choose an academic

8 Our translation of: "Durante el proceso de investigación es necesario tomar un conjunto de decisiones que se van modificando, afinando, perfeccionando durante ese proceso y que se vinculan profundamente con las investigadoras y los investigadores, sus biografías, sus trayectorias, sus compromisos, sus obligaciones, sus afiliaciones, sus intereses, sus preferencias políticas e ideológicas, entre otras. Además, quien investiga está ubicado en un contexto social e histórico que condiciona esas decisiones y que, muchas veces, determina el sentido y/o trastoca las orientaciones de esas decisiones."

career and later take on local issues could be motivated by community principles, an essential part of the community to which we belong. Many continue to believe that Zapotec topics are not something that could be taught or discussed in universities; this is a result of a historical process of internalization that judges anything that is “Indigenous” to be without value. The academy, for its part, makes it difficult to discuss personal interests motivated by local issues. In this way, academic work and the needs of the community become separated. The humanities and the social sciences fail to create a dialogue around these realities when training their students. On the contrary, the academy absorbs us, makes us uproot ourselves from our home communities, and encourages us to recreate the individualist practices that directly benefit the researcher and the academic community.

In order to understand our situation as researchers and as people who, although we may not always be physically present, still belong to a community — and in order to avoid replicating the colonial practices of our academic disciplines — I suggest we start by asking ourselves: What place do we occupy in the community? What does the community ask of us? What do we need, or want, to do? In my case, I spent many years away from my community, starting when I began my secondary education; however, I never stopped going to the pueblo, and I lived there even when I was not conducting research.

As a member of a community, I participated in community practices, such as mutual aid and, importantly, community *tequio*. While I currently reside in Oaxaca City, my family and I are registered as Yalaltecos in Oaxaca, and we participate in the cooperative networks that support festivities and public works both in Oaxaca and Yalálag; as such, our names may be seen in public records and pueblo announcements recognizing our contribution. On the personal level, the space that Yalálag occupies in my life is not strictly speaking that of a “field site”, as it is for a foreign researcher; Yalálag is a geographic space in which I participate in community activities such as celebrations and rituals — activities which shape public opinion towards me as an individual.

The community is not a place where I “spend my summers”. It is a place of celebrations, of work, of compadres, of family, and of social-emotional bonds. A place in which the other inhabitants recognize me as a member of the collective. Because of this, there is an ethical and moral contract that prevents me from separating my projects from the local affairs of my pueblo. I cannot go, interview, and never return. To create knowledge for personal benefit would go against our community principles, because my community functions as a collective, and I am part of it. My education has been the fruit of many *tequios* and collective efforts (Díaz *et al.* 2007), from the preschool that I attended to the doctoral studies that I am now concluding. Therefore, to conduct research and share the results of that research is a part of the system of community principles in which I have been raised as a Zapotec person.

3. Chitglhenllon, or how to wrestle with a challenge

Around noon on the first day of January, the officials elected for the new year assume their community cargo positions. At the moment when the members of the cabildo enter the physical space that they will occupy, musicians ‘set free’⁹ a unique sound known in Zapotec as *ba ke da seko*. My grandmother, upon hearing this sound, has the custom of saying *ba lliagakeba* (‘now they are mounted’), drawing a comparison to riders that manage to tame a bull. Following this phrase, she says *du yiz chitglhenhaken* (‘for the whole year, they will wrestle with it’), referencing how in their year of service they will encounter many projects and problems which they must respond to for the common good. I have borrowed *chitglhenllon*, or how to wrestle with a challenge, to encapsulate how I have articulated my work with the community, how I have attempted to detach myself from individualist practices, and in their place share the hard-won knowledge from my years of training with the children, youth, and adults of my community.

I do not have a magic recipe to cope with the diverse situations that we might encounter in different fieldwork scenarios and in research in general; it has been difficult for me to establish a collaborative relationship with adults from my community, unlike with the immigrant community. My research focuses on factors within the nuclear family that support language transmission and I work with bilingual acquisition in children, but while this project in particular is of great interest to parents, we have not been able to sit together and discuss the topic in depth with our authorities and consider the subject in light of the alarming decline of young speakers in the community.

In spite of this, my work with teachers and their students has made progress. Teachers in the community recognize that the school contributes to linguisticide, and further acknowledge the situation of monolingual Spanish that currently prevails in the classroom; each time that I presented on this topic, we discussed actions that could be taken in collaboration with the parents and that could be implemented within the schools. Although there is never sufficient time for the activities that they have in their charge, the school has been an ally for me during my projects.

In another area, I have joined with other young people and partners both in the community and in the larger region doing collaborative *tequio*. Those of us who make up the collective *Dill Yelnbán* perform community work, and supported by this background in community service we have been able to create materials and workshops that accomplish specific objectives within the community, which has, after more than five years of work, garnered positive responses in the pueblo.

9 Expression translated from Zapotec, *tsell=ake*, *set.free=3PL.RES.*

Despite this, we continue to face challenges, one of which is the lack of interest in projects that involve the Zapotec language. The language attitudes held by speakers and by the municipal authorities, continue to be one of the greatest general and personal challenges. When it is someone close to the community who wants to carry out a project, there is a negative sentiment on the part of the residents; but they maintain a positive attitude when they find themselves before a researcher or other curious party who is external to the language. During years of working in the community as a member of the community, comments in response to workshops and projects related to language revitalization have revealed little interest. This lack of interest seems motivated by sociohistorical factors, and also by causes related to political beliefs and family histories. For Smith (2012: 10):

the issues for Indigenous researchers seeking to work within Indigenous contexts are framed somewhat differently. If they are 'insiders' they are frequently judged on insider criteria; their family background, status, politics, age, gender, religion, as well as on their perceived technical ability. What is frustrating for some Indigenous researchers is that, even when their own communities have access to an Indigenous researcher, they will still select or prefer a non-Indigenous researcher over an Indigenous researcher. There are a number of reasons this happens, sometimes based on a deeply held view that Indigenous people will never be good enough, or that Indigenous researchers may divulge confidences within their own community, or that the researcher may have some hidden agenda.

Recently, particular support has come from collaboration with the immigrant speakers of the language and from youth who do not speak the language. These two groups, motivated by support of initiatives that preserve cultural activities in the community, have become an active source of support for various projects in which *Dill Yelnbán* promoted language revitalization, for example.

There is no single answer here; in some projects, organization with the schools has been successful, in others, organization with parents, and in some others, organization with individuals and collectives. My research efforts, for example, tend to be supported by the mutual aid that I receive from family and friends in the pueblo. The work with my colleagues in the *Dill Yelnbán* Collective relies on the *tequio* of anthropologists, designers, teachers, linguists, historians, and many other people who value *tequio* as a workforce principle.

Conclusions

In concluding this essay, I would like to discuss two points. First, I have often found myself to be conflicted between my academic requirements and my personal interests as a Zapotec woman. As my journey has progressed, I have learned to carry out, at times simultaneously and at other times alternately, projects that satisfy community obligations on the one hand, and those which serve academic goals on the other. All the while, I have conversations with people and listen to their concerns. In these talks, we discuss possible projects. An example of a project deriving from this process is a linguistic census whose goal is to understand the situation of the Zapotec language and other languages in the community, a project now sponsored by the *asamblea comunitaria*.¹⁰ This effort has been paired with the production of oral and written materials aimed at strengthening the Zapotec language or giving it a space in homes and schools, work that is now in progress. We have the further objective of positioning the language in emergent contexts such as the internet, alongside the reading and writing workshops and Zapotec classes in which I constantly collaborate.

The community has regularly posed problems that called for prompt solutions that, for the most part, weren't addressed by university course work. This type of situation required us to consider the community's needs and work out a solution collectively. In this regard, I reconsider a suggestion made by the Triqui linguist Fidel Hernández (2010: 10):

For this, one needs to bring together community proposals for the revitalization, strengthening and development of our Indigenous languages instead of relying on institutional policies. In this case, it is important to consider the training of "Indigenous leaders" (if we may call them that), understanding them as people who are engaged with their own communities, cultures, and languages, and are committed to this kind of work and not so much to the training of "Indigenous academics", who in many cases perpetuate the same institutional and academic mistakes that have existed in relation to our Indigenous languages.¹¹

10 *Asamblea comunitaria* refers to the collective, the *body politic* generally, as well as to specific "town hall" style meetings which would be called by the mayor for the purpose of discussing and addressing community issues and projects, and making collective decisions.

11 Our translation of: "Para ello se debe buscar la consolidación de propuestas comunitarias de revitalización, fortalecimiento y desarrollo de nuestras lenguas indígenas más que confiar en políticas institucionales. Aquí cabe buscar la formación de "líderes indígenas" (por llamarlos así), entendiéndolos como personas comprometidas con su comunidad, con su cultura y con su lengua, que coadyuven a este trabajo y no tanto en la formación de "indígenas académicos" que en muchos de los casos repiten los mismos errores institucionales y académicos que han existido hacia nuestra lenguas indígenas."

I consider it to be of the utmost importance that our research is responsive to local needs and that we have an open discussion about other ways to conduct field research and how to find alternative ways of conducting our research. As Zapotec, Chatino, Maya, Tsotsil, etc. investigators, we need to share our field experiences, to exchange how we mediate and resolve conflicts; and in sharing these experiences, to heal our emotional wounds caused by the selfsame experience of the field. Beyond creating a dialogue, the intent of this statement has been to heal the emotional wound created by fieldwork and to inspire a discussion on this topic. I say “heal” because dealing with the two worlds in which we operate as agents both of academia and of the community also leads to emotional wounds. In personal discussions with my fellow contributors to this volume I became aware that conducting fieldwork in my community caused me to feel perpetually insecure about my own work as the result of my own community’s rejection and distrust. Writing and sharing this experience has provided a way to let go of these feelings and to lay out the need to discuss fieldwork practices which, for many of us, represent a dichotomy relating to the “methods” that we should use. Our experiences, geographies, and mode of acting in and with our communities incite the creation of new epistemologies, ones in which we can connect and discuss our academic and fieldwork practices with and for our communities and their realities.

Lastly, the intention of this essay has been to share what it means to do fieldwork in a personal space, and in that way demystify the belief that we Indigenous academics have more rewarding, easier experiences than academics who are not Indigenous. My viewpoint is that being a Zapotec conducting fieldwork in my own community doesn’t make my work easier or harder. I find myself continually learning and unlearning. More than being simply a friendly, personal conversation, this is a confrontational discussion in which I attempt to interrogate the worlds in which I operate. Maintaining a sustained dialogue with my Indigenous and nonIndigenous colleagues has no doubt enhanced my professional development; however, I consider the support of my peers and freedom to choose research topics according to my own personal needs and interests to have been of great worth.

To conclude, it is in my opinion essential to take into account not only procedural skills, but also the human facets of the field experience in teaching courses on field methods. That is, reports from the field should emphasize not only what was done, but also the emotions such as fear and frustration that we commonly experience. At university, I have frequently found that professors are not interested in the emotional experience of doing research, only in the part concerned with hard facts.

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Between the academy and the community: The trickster who dances at the party and shows her tongue

Emiliana Cruz Cruz

**CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES Y ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES EN
ANTROPOLOGÍA SOCIAL (CIESAS-CDMX)**

Translated from Spanish by Sofia G. Pierson, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

Explored here are the complexities and challenges that arise from my experience as an Indigenous researcher. As a linguist and anthropologist, I move between both academic and community spaces. During the last two decades, a good part of my research has focused on the documentation and revitalization of Indigenous languages, in particular the Chatino languages. This article addresses my experience as an Indigenous researcher navigating these two spaces with the aim of sharing the reality of my position with academia and Chatino communities.

Key words: Chatino, collaboration, language documentation, academia, insider-outsider

Introduction^{1,2}

For over two decades, there has been much discussion of the experience of Indigenous anthropologists carrying out research in their own communities. Some argue that Indigenous anthropologists come to belong to two communities—academia³ and their own community—thereby becoming halfies/natives (Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1996; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Narayan 1993; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Ryangse 2005). Halfie identities vary among researchers according to their experiences, such as migration, level of education, and the social group to which they belong (Abu-Lughod 1991: 137; Narayan 1993). In the context of this conversation about the work of Indigenous people in academia as well as in their communities, the term halfies is useful because we each have our own life experiences, which are often reflected in what we do and create.

The discussion of the advantages and difficulties associated with being an Indigenous researcher is of current relevance: on the one hand, there is little information available about the experiences of Indigenous researchers, and on the other, there are simply few Indigenous members of academia. Some authors have argued that native anthropologists are at a greater advantage studying their own cultures because they are able to analyze them more intimately, which would be difficult for an outsider to that culture to accomplish (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 584).⁴ There has also been much consideration of the role that Indigenous anthropologists play in leveling the power differentials that exist in academia. According to Ohnuki-Tierney, Hernández, Hutchings, Noble, and others, power dynamics are more equitable when the research is carried out by native/Indigenous scholars than they are when the researcher is not a member of the community of study (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Cruz and Woodbury 2014; Hernández, Hutchings, Noble 2019). Some have further suggested that such projects yield better results. Similarly, Kirin Narayan questions our very understanding of the role of native people in academia, asking how *native* a “native” anthropologist truly is (1993). According to Narayan, familiarity with the colonial origins of anthropology is necessary to understand the polarization of “native” and “real” anthropologists or the dichotomy between “observer” and “observed”

1 I would like to thank Gladys Tzul Tzul, Isaura de los Santos, Aida Hernández Castillo, and Anthony C. Woodbury for their support in realizing this project. I also extend gratitude to Jonathan Rosa for motivating me to write this article and, in particular, for having saved the comments in his email that I had received from the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, which I reference in this article. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Javier Flores Gómez for reviewing and editing this text.

2 Translator's note: During translation, some edits have been made to the original in conversation with Cruz.

3 We use *academia* and *the academy* here interchangeably.

4 The word “native” tends to be used in the academy in the United States. In this article, the author will use the term “Indigenous.”

(Narayan 1993). To assume that native anthropologists would be “experts” on their cultures is problematic, Narayan argues, without recognizing the complexity of their life stories (1993: 677). In this article, I join this discussion about the experience of *native* and *halfie* researchers as I present my experience as a Chatina researcher who finds myself divided between two worlds, academia and my community (Smith 2016).

In this contribution to the conversation about the role of Indigenous people as researchers in the academy and in their communities of origin, the methodology I have chosen to use is autoethnography (Kacperczyk 2014; Adams 2014). 20 years ago, Robertson criticized what I refer to here as autoethnography, arguing that “egocentrism is one of the pitfalls to avoid in exercising reflexivity,” which suggests that writing about oneself is somehow easy (Robertson 2002: 786). However, I have found my use of autoethnography in this article to be an emotionally challenging exercise, as I have discovered that I have tolerated many injustices and have come to perceive the contrasts between “prestige zones” and “low-prestige zones” (Appadurai 1986: 357) in the academic sphere. Furthermore, autoethnographic work, like a personal journal, runs the risk of being considered an account lacking in objectivity (Robertson 2002) or being considered non-academic because it is “missing” a theoretical framework or hypothesis. This is particularly true from the perspective of anthropology, which has traditionally upheld rigorous standards for academic writing and has tended to be accessible to a limited audience (Hernández 2019). I recognize these critiques of autoethnography, but I have decided to write about myself because I find that it is a way to illustrate aspects of academia that would otherwise be more impersonal. Here I will describe my relationship with academia, a space largely comprising *transparent cultures* (Ryang 2005), which, in many cases, conspire to reinforce the power relations (Appadurai 1986) that exist in the academy. I also demonstrate how I am perceived in my place of origin. My intention is not to fall into romanticizing my experience, rather I am interested in demonstrating that the work of a researcher is full of challenges and that we need to continue this conversation to foster just and collaborative research (Perry and Rappaport 2013; Hernández, Hutchings, Noble 2019).

In the pages that follow, I will address four central points: 1) My life story; 2) My experience in the academy; 3) How I am perceived in my community; and 4) My collaborative projects within and outside of my community. My discussion is motivated by the following questions: How different is the experience of foreign researchers from the experience of those who carry out research within their own communities? In what respect do the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics differ? What is expected of each of these researchers, according to their positionality? What does the Chatino community expect of me, and how do they perceive my research? What are the possibilities for and challenges to fostering collaboration in my own community? According to Narayan, anthropology, in the general sense, is the study of “others,” whereby anthropologists are trained to carry out the meticulous study of other cultures (Narayan 1993). Given Narayan’s position, we “native,” “Indigenous,” or “insider” an-

thropologists who carry out research about our own cultures in which we are integrated and active participants might ask ourselves whether our form of research is, in fact, more intimate at all. We will see. Documentary linguistics is methodologically similar to anthropology, but it is centered on the study of language. Foreign academics study the local language, and academics who are native speakers of Indigenous languages study their own languages. It is clear that each position in this dichotomy presents its own challenges; for example, the experience of a foreigner studying a language and a culture that are not his or her own is very complex (Macaulay 2011). However, studying in one's own community as an Indigenous researcher also has its own advantages and disadvantages, which are apparent in the experiences described in this volume.

1. My life story

I belong to an Indigenous group that calls itself *neq^AJnya^E* 'Chatino people.' As a child, when my family had migrated out of our village, I learned from them that I should uphold my connection with the territory of San Juan Quiahije (hereafter Quiahije). They brought me up to believe that Quiahije was my "home," "my land." My family and I lived in Oaxaca City, but we always went to the village over vacation. To my family, Quiahije was my village because I was born there and because all of our family was there. Nevertheless, I had left at a very early age. I remember that I always felt like I was split in two, and I missed my village very much, especially the landscape: a place full of mountains that become enveloped by mist every evening, the land that accompanied me in my travels, the land that was in my dreams. I always wanted to return. I am very lucky that my mother never stopped speaking to me in Chatino. That is why I never forgot it; that I owe to my mother. We were the first family who emigrated to the city of Oaxaca, and then to the United States of America. I was also the first Chatina woman to receive a doctorate.

1.1 My academic training

My situation is an unusual one among Indigenous academics. I had access to education, albeit through a process that was anything but easy, given that I grew up in a family that had limited resources and was at one time the victim of violence: my father was murdered when I was young. This I mention in order to offer a broad perspective on the obstacles to gaining access to education, which I achieved as a result of my own hard work, as well as the support of my family and others I met along the way. Like many Indigenous people from Mexico, I immigrated to the United States to seek better opportunities. I had imagined that I would go for a few years to work and that with the

money I saved I would return to Mexico for my undergraduate studies. When I arrived in the United States, I was undocumented and did not speak English. I worked in the morning and studied English in the afternoon. I managed to learn the language, and I was accepted to Evergreen State College in Washington, where I studied anthropology. From a very early age, I had wanted to study my language, Chatino, but I had never had the opportunity because the entirety of my educational training in Mexico was in Spanish. It was not until graduate school that I had the opportunity to study Chatino. In 2002 I started my masters and doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). The program at UT was an excellent fit for my academic interests, since I had long been looking for a program where I could study Chatino. My goal in entering this program was to acquire linguistic and anthropological tools to share with Chatino people.⁵

2. My experience in the academy

When I began my graduate study, I was not familiar with the academic “business,” but as soon as I arrived, I had to compete with my peers for scholarships. Very quickly, divisions arose between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Not until later, when I had become an academic professional, did it come into focus that there is little space in academia for Indigenous people.

Furthermore, I had no idea what challenges awaited me in anthropology and linguistics. As I did fieldwork in my village, I came to produce an ethnography in which I was at once the participant and the “other.” The first time I met a researcher was when I was a girl. Some linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Translators) arrived in my village. One of them gifted us with plastic toys; I took one, and when my hand touched the hand of that tall, bearded man, I began to cry.⁶

5 A graduate program based on the inclusion of Indigenous students from Latin America was revolutionary, particularly considering how well-equipped the anthropology and linguistics program at UT was to carry out research devoted to serving Indigenous communities. Many valuable resources have come out of this program, such as the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA; www.ailla.utexas.org) and the Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA).

6 The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)/Wycliffe Bible Translators is an organization of evangelical Christians who study Indigenous languages to translate the bible and proselytize. These two faces of the organization have been the source of much controversy in academia as well as in Indigenous communities. For further reading on the activities of the SIL in Mexico, see the report published in 1979 by the Colegio de Etnólogos y Antropólogos (CEAS). This year the meeting of the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics has been canceled. (<https://archive.org/details/CEASDominacionIdeologica1979/mode/2up>)



Manuela Jiménez and the author. Photograph courtesy of Gibrán Morales Carranza

Fieldwork was a necessary part of my research, evidently to familiarize myself with the unfamiliar. In other words, I was supposed to gather data to collect information, with which I would produce an analysis of uncharted territory, but in my case, I would be studying what was already familiar. I should clarify that I did not know, nor do I know, everything. There is always more to learn. For example, elders in Quiahije have extensive knowledge of the ecosystem of their land: they know how to survive, they can grow their food, they know which plants are edible, medicinal, and poisonous.

2.1 *neq^A ktyi^H neq^A kta^E* ‘Outsiders and insiders’

I have been very conscious of my position as an Indigenous academic in my community. I understand the limitations to what I can offer. As Beatrice Medicine (2001) writes, Indigenous researchers can be dangerous in their dual roles as insider and outsider. As Indigenous people, we have access to intimate information about our cultures. For that reason, although we are “one of them,” the communities we come from distrust us as researchers, since we can expose things that people do not want to share with the outside world or do not want other people to know (Medicine 2001: 5).

I agree with Medicine that we Indigenous researchers are in a precarious position, considering our close relationship with the subject matter. This is particularly

true when we study aspects of the culture that may be private for the community, such as ceremonies. Foreign researchers, nevertheless, are subject to less questioning for this kind of investigation and often do it with minimal knowledge of the language of study. They become experts in a wide range of subjects that Indigenous researchers often have reservations about studying. The work of Vine Deloria Jr.⁷ and the Colectivo Mixe⁸ is very useful for understanding some of the power dynamics that prevail in Indigenous studies. Deloria (1997) argues that in academia, there are “experts” on Indigenous peoples who become authorities due to the information that is offered to them by the people they work with. Deloria’s argument about the power wielded in academia is of utmost importance, particularly because it reveals the tendency to ignore the academic contributions of Indigenous researchers, which are contradicted and corrected by non-Indigenous “experts” (Deloria, Biolsi, and Zimmerman 1997). Current efforts by some Indigenous researchers to transform academia have been going to great lengths to foster collaborative relationships with their communities (Hernández and Hutchings 2017; and Brian Noble 2019; Thieberger 2016; England in press; Woodbury and England 2004).

As Suzi Hutchings (2019) says, “Indigenous anthropologists are stuck in the middle,” and we are under constant scrutiny in our own communities as well as in academia; furthermore, we are on double duty, participating in both contexts. Being split down the middle is not ideal; it is a tiring position to be in. The ideal scenario would be that the academy understood the importance of the collaborative projects that Indigenous researchers are engaged in, but this is not the reality. In academic evaluations, these research projects are often questioned and at times are deemed to be merely “service.”

Much of the research produced by Indigenous scholars is not cited if it lacks support from the academy. Academics cite each other, or as Deloria says, the “experts” are those who have studied Indigenous people and who don’t bother to consider the work done by Indigenous researchers. The experts are those who have positions in academia and are recognized for those positions by other academics. Meanwhile, Indigenous researchers have to cite them to give their own research validity. Although many of the key critical thinkers of Indigenous communities conduct valuable academic research, they are not cited, for it is only the important

7 Vine Deloria Jr. (1933-2005) was a Native American academic who theorized about the power dynamics in academia with regard to Indigenous subject matter.

8 For a recent initiative to interrogate the role of non-Indigenous scholars of Indigenous studies, see “Entrevista al entrevistador,” a recent series of interviews by the Colectivo Mixe with akäts (non-Mixe) researchers who have carried out their research in the Mixe region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhWIN-HkaVs>

“experts” who are supposed to appear in articles. To illustrate Deloria’s argument about experts, when Indigenous people write, we receive racist and classist reviews, as in the following text.

Comments to the Author:

This is neither a scholarly paper nor a Native narrative. It is written by a Mexican Chatino women [sic] (she clearly identifies herself in the text) who was invited to a programme for Indians at the University of Texas to work as informants and be trained as linguists. She then stayed in Texas as an academic and works back in Mexico.

The text includes too many unsustained personal opinions about researchers in Mexico (INALI) and elsewhere and makes simplistic judgements about Mexican Indigenous education without a single reference to the rich and differentiated literature existing on the topic. I found the paper much too biased against most Mexican institutions and too uncritically admiring of US institutions and programmes for Latin American Indians. This is not suitable for a scholarly article in this journal. The article is also not a scholarly one that is grounded in the literature about any of the topics that are addressed.

I also found the ethnographic, contextual and linguistic information lacking. For example, the author mentions several workshops on different topics that she organised over time, but does not provide critical information. She mentions a three-year-project to produce a pedagogical grammar of her language, but does not explain what the difference is between such a grammar and a descriptive grammar, provide an outline/structure of that grammar or a single example. There are also no language samples, figures, tables or any other scientific information in the text.

In sum, this text is neither an academic nor an Indigenous narrative and in my view, does a lot of damage to the cause of Native empowerment, academic development of human capital, and the fight for minority rights.

I cannot recommend publication.

This is the evaluation of an “expert” who refused to approve my text for publication in a specialized journal because it did not conform to academic standards. There is much to be said about the language used in this review, particularly with respect to the way the article is evaluated. For example, the review neglects to recognize the contributions of my research, such as the data and unpublished analysis of an academically understudied language, while calling particular attention to the lack of bibliographic references and “scientific” frameworks. Moreover, the way in which this “academic expert” discredits my academic training is astonishing, as the reviewer criticizes the anthropology and linguistics program at UT, from which I graduated. As if that weren’t enough, the reviewer places me in the category of the “informant.” With the above example, I wish to demonstrate the power that these “experts” have:

they are not interested in supporting and constructively criticizing the work of those who wish to publish; rather they appear to be more interested in eliminating players from the academic game, leaving room in this world only for the “experts.”

I will now turn to the physical spaces of academia, as they are experienced by people of color in the United States and their equivalents in the Mexican context, which is marked by a *mestizophilic* nationalism that does not recognize and even rejects its Indigenous origins. Despite many calls to diversify the academy, the number of professor-researchers of color nonetheless remains low (Colon-Aguirre 2019; Stigliani 2020). Non-white academics have produced countless descriptions of their experiences navigating these spaces, concerning matters of race, social class, ethnicity, and gender. In this section, I intend to add to the many voices who have described their lived experiences. The primary goal of describing my experience is to consider the importance of instigating change in favor of a more diverse space in academia.

I will begin by addressing labor. My first position was in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I was hired because I fit the profile of their job announcement, which called for someone who was involved in collaborative research, what they referred to as *engaged anthropology*. It was my first time in this region of the United States. I did not know where to live or where to buy food. I arrived with hopes of meeting a cohort of people with whom I could work, collaborate, and begin to make new friends. I remember that a friend gave me various pieces of advice when I left for my new job: “when you arrive there, you will gain weight, the tradition is that all of your colleagues will take you out to eat.” I arrived, and for one month, I had to live in a hotel. I taught classes and returned to the hotel; none of my friends knew this, and moreover, nobody invited me over to eat, everyone kept their doors closed. Later, when I began the tenure process, all of my colleagues were busy with their academic lives, continuing to be well-known experts, including those professors who considered themselves people of color. Nobody asked me how I was doing or concerned themselves with what I was going through. The department selected one person who would direct my tenure process, a person who also struggled to understand the nature of my research. In the end, I decided to abandon the process because I was offered a position at CIESAS-CDMX (Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, Mexico City).

I always intended to return to Mexico. Since graduate school, my dream had been to return for personal as well as academic reasons, but in Mexico there are few positions open to researchers. When I was notified that I had been offered the position, I could not believe it. I presented my resignation to UMass and packed my belongings, and within two weeks I was in Mexico. My arrival to CIESAS was traumatic. I had applied for a position in Education, which is a focus of my research, but for some reason the members of the Department of Education at CIESAS considered my project to fall outside of the realm of education, which led them

to reject me from the beginning. Shortly after my arrival, I received a copy of the following letter (in part):⁹

To all concerned

In this communication, the members of Area X “History, politics, and culture, 16th-20th century” wish to bring to the attention of the Technical Advisory Council that after having reviewed, discussed, and carefully considered the academic profile of Dr. Cruz, we have unanimously resolved to deny her inclusion into our Area, considering that there is no correspondence between her areas of specialization and academic work and those established in the profile we called for in our search for applicants in 2017 to strengthen our research in Education. Dr. Cruz applied for and was awarded this position in 2017.

Consequently, we hereby declare our objection to the assignment made by the Academic Search Committee to the position we sought to fill. We observed the established internal search process and requirements of CIESAS and furthermore anticipated the consent of the Plenary of Researchers of CIESAS Mexico City. The solicitation in question, to fill a position of Full Professor-Researcher, was framed as a thematic search: Education, food sovereignty, and ethno-political reclamation in Indigenous contexts (Anthropology of Education).

What does one do in that situation? For a new hire without tenure, it is a vulnerable position to be in. I had left another position to come to CIESAS, my decision to return to Mexico had already been made, I had no way to change it. What I did was persevere and continue with my plan, but it was not easy to work in a space where you know that an entire group of your colleagues had signed on to demonstrate their disapproval of you. This was a community of academic researchers who marginalize and

9 Original communication: “Presentes

Por este conducto, los integrantes del Área X “Procesos históricos, políticos y culturales, siglos XVI-XX” nos dirigimos al Consejo Técnico Consultivo para hacer de su conocimiento que luego de haber revisado, discutido y ponderado cuidadosamente el perfil académico de la Dra. XXX, resolvimos de manera unánime denegar su incorporación a nuestra Área por considerar que no existe afinidad entre sus líneas de especialización y trabajo académicos y los establecidos en el perfil de ingreso que solicitamos en 2017 para reforzar nuestra línea de Educación, y con el cual fue concursada la plaza de ingreso por evaluación curricular que fue otorgada en octubre del mismo año a la Dra. XXX.

En consecuencia, manifestamos nuestra inconformidad con la asignación de la Comisión Académica Dictaminadora (CAD) de la plaza que solicitamos y para la cual cumplimos con el procedimiento y los requisitos establecidos en la convocatoria interna del CIESAS, y que además contó con el consentimiento del Pleno de Investigadores del CIESAS Ciudad de México. La convocatoria respectiva, para ocupar la plaza de Profesor-Investigador Titular A, establecía como línea temática de adscripción: Educación, soberanía alimentaria y reivindicaciones étnico-políticas en contextos indígenas (Antropología de la Educación).

exclude, in this case using the argument that my research is not about education. So I have to wonder, what have I been doing these past years? I have given workshops for speakers of Otomanguan languages since 2012; is my work with local schools of the municipality of Quiahije not education? If it is not, what is education? Academics reproduce the society we live in, where there is classism and racism. I decided to answer the rejection letter; I felt that I owed it to myself (in part):¹⁰

In this communication, I would like to express my profound disappointment upon hearing of the resolution issued by the members of Area X “History, politics, and culture, 16th-20th century” with regard to my inclusion in said area of specialization.

In their letter from the May 25 of this year, the members of Area X openly expressed their refusal to work with me, despite my genuine desire to work with them, which has been documented in various e-mails. My primary academic interest at this time is to continue my research on local knowledge of territory and the land, as well as local education systems and the transmission of knowledge through language, with a focus on San Juan Quiahije and the Chatino region. I should confess that I was very much looking forward to collaborating and sharing experiences and perspectives with a team of people focused on the anthropology of education. However, I sadly have perceived the rejection of my work from early on, as well as the lack of a spirit of collaboration and interdisciplinary work, which I consider necessary for the scientific production of knowledge.

I decided instead to join area A,¹¹ where I was accepted. My academic assignment is now in Cultural Diversity, Power, and Justice, where I have been able to find support and collaboration.

10 Original communication: “Por este conducto, quisiera expresar mi profunda desilusión al enterarme de la resolución emitida por los integrantes del Área X “Procesos históricos, políticos y culturales, siglos XVI-XX” respecto a mi incorporación a dicho grupo de trabajo.

A través de su carta del 25 de mayo del presente, los integrantes del Área X expresaron abiertamente su rechazo a colaborar conmigo, a pesar de mi genuino deseo de trabajar con ellos, el cual ha quedado documentado en varios correos electrónicos. Mi principal interés académico en este momento es continuar mi investigación sobre conocimiento local del territorio y el paisaje y sobre procesos locales de educación y transmisión de conocimiento a través de la lengua, centrándome en San Juan Quiahije y la región chatina. Debo confesar que tenía gran ilusión de colaborar y compartir experiencias y perspectivas con un equipo de trabajo enfocado en la antropología de la educación. Sin embargo, con tristeza he notado desde un inicio rechazo hacia mi trabajo y la falta de un espíritu de colaboración e interdisciplina que yo considero necesarios para la producción científica de conocimiento.”

11 The Mexico City branch of CIESAS is home to the largest number of researchers, who are grouped into five areas, four of which are thematic: A) Medical, legal, and gender anthropology; B) Ethnohistory, ethnic and social relations; C) History, politics, and culture, 16th-20th century; D) Sociocultural change; while the fifth groups researchers without a specific theme.

The way in which the academy views collaborative work is often contradictory when protecting academic territory is concerned. This has an impact on the dialogue that we Indigenous academics should have with non-Indigenous academics. The model of academia that excludes Indigenous people stems from the colonial history in which the discipline of anthropology was formed (Narayan 1993). Academia is an exclusionary society, and there are many factors that contribute to how it operates against Indigenous people. In my case, I am an Indigenous, brown woman who speaks Spanish with an “accent;” that is how I am, and there is nothing that I can do to change that.

A colleague told me that I had only gotten a position as a professor at a United States university because I had had a hard life, or because I am Indigenous, but not for my competency as a researcher and academic. As a joke, another colleague said, “now even wetbacks are getting doctorates.” It goes to show how fractured academia and academics are: they outwardly claim to support diversity, yet in their actions they are more loyal to the rules and to their institutions and are not prepared to support something that is different from what they know. Here I will provide an example of linguistic discrimination that occurred at UMass but is by no means unique to this university. The person who questioned me most about my work and the type of students I took on was a faculty member with a role in the university’s upper administration, a linguist who presumably values diverse ways of speaking. The biggest problem he had with me was that he believed I accepted students who “did not speak good English,” so much so that he would send messages saying that those students would not progress in their research because they were not fluent in English. In Mexico, the equivalent would be that students “do not speak good Spanish.”

The academy, with its liberal projects of “inclusion,” with its projects that purportedly work in favor of diversity, has much to lose in a case like UMass, which is dotted with flags proclaiming that “*diversity matters*,” yet which takes a step back when it comes to including researchers of color and which will continue on as a homogeneously white institution. In the case of CIESAS, there is no affirmative action policy in the hiring process like the system in place to support cultural diversity among the student body. I do not yet consider it safe to speak up about racism and exclusion, although the institution claims to work in support of Indigenous peoples; nevertheless, the number of Indigenous academics is extremely low. We Indigenous people have a lot of knowledge that we can contribute to the enrichment of research, but we so often find ourselves opposite closed doors. For this reason, I have asked myself with no clear answer, is it even worth trying to change the academy? Furthermore, is it the responsibility of those who have been excluded to change the academy? Yes, we should bring this conversation about exclusion to the table, but it is not solely our responsibility. Everyone must reflect on his or her role in this capitalist world of academia.

3. How I am perceived in my community

While I was writing this article, I came across the work of Zuni artist Phil Hughte, who drew anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing, a researcher who studied the Zuni community (Hughte 1994).¹² It was very striking to see his drawings mingled with Cushing's words. In the present text, at times I have felt like Cushing and others like Hughte, which I attribute to the complexity of my position as a researcher in my own community.

I will begin by explaining the predicaments of our research. The perennial quandary of our research lies in the differences between a researcher from outside of the community and one who has ties to the community. When those who are not from the community finish their research, they may not know whether they will return, particularly because people have personal lives apart from their academic projects. On the other hand, those who are from the community must return because that is where their family is. Many Indigenous researchers are preoccupied with doing their research properly and engage with the decolonial methodologies proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012). According to Tuhiwai Smith, an Indigenous educator from New Zealand, research that stems exclusively from epistemically Eurocentric premises and positivist methodologies reproduces a colonialist strategy that silences local expertise and imposes hierarchies of knowledge. She further suggests that if we do not take into consideration our position as researchers, we may in some cases rekindle painful memories of colonialism with our work (Smith 2012). This is true of course, but how conscious am I really of my position of privilege as an anthropological researcher?

My identity as a Chatina woman affords me certain epistemological and methodological advantages, yet at once has certain disadvantages that are important to recognize. Working at home, I do not encounter problems like those that Macaulay discusses in her article 'Training Linguistics Students for the Realities of Fieldwork' (Macaulay 2004). She points to the difficulties of doing fieldwork as an outsider to the community, from food to relationships with locals (Macaulay 2004). My problems, compared to Macaulay's, are different. For example, I can work with anyone, but if people do not want to collaborate, I can record audio or video of my family members, given that half of the village is my family. And if for some reason I cannot record anyone from the village, I can record myself.

12 Zuni people are Native Americans who live in the Central-Eastern region of New Mexico, on the border with Arizona.



Perfecta Cristóbal Lorenzo and the author. Photograph courtesy of Gibrán Morales Carranza

Furthermore, being a speaker of Chatino allows me not only to communicate fluently with no need for interpretation, it also affords me the opportunity to foster intimate connections with people and local knowledge in a way that an outsider anthropologist could not do. Similarly, the networks of family and friends that my family and I have forged in the community generate (dis)trust or (dis)interest in participating in my research projects. In my dual position as a researcher and a Chatina person, I can ensure that the collaborative project I propose considers community interests and develops research strategies in permanent dialogue with the community.

On the other hand, working in my community calls for constant prudence: if I make a mistake, I can be held accountable as any other person from the village would be, even in such a way that might affect my family. It is important to reflect on what members of the community think of researchers: of their reality, as well as what they expect of them. On the one hand, community members offer up their homes, their knowledge, and their friendship. In my case, I have to return home to visit my family, and if I do anything unethical, it will affect my relationship with the community. Even having relatives that protect me as a researcher does not preclude the possibility that the assembly or the local authorities could tell me that I cannot carry out research. Because people consider me an “expert” in what I do, they expect me to support local projects, but if I make a mistake in my research, I cannot simply leave and not return, as outsider researchers do; I have to confront the community for my actions. For ex-

ample, on one occasion I published the photo of a cousin's funeral flowers on my Facebook page, which the authority of my village did not consider appropriate to do, particularly out of respect to the family. The community police went to my house to find me so they could put me in jail, but luckily I was not there because I had gone to the city early that morning. I could not go to my village for three months; I had to wait until that administration's term had ended. I returned when the new village authority had begun his term and went to seek the forgiveness of the family.

Gossip is also a daily phenomenon in many Mexican villages that likewise affects my fieldwork. Given that everyone in the village knows what I do, people talk about me. Gossip is a political action that affects private and public life when people try to influence the distribution of power (Besnier 2009). During my fieldwork, people have said many fascinating things about me and the work I do.

Here I offer two short stories about people who gossip about me to demonstrate how local politics and research become intertwined in the field, along with the complexities and challenges of being a (re)source (of data) and a researcher. One time when I was recording in Cieneguilla (my village), I asked my cousin Juana if she would come to my house to help me with some sentences in Chatino. She came at night and we worked until very late. I asked if she would say some sentences in Chatino so I could listen for tone changes in the language. Some of the sentences were absurd, such as *yku^A qya^A yja^A jla^{A13}* 'the eagle ate an old tortilla,' among others. When we finished, Juana told me that she had been afraid to come record because someone had told another woman, señora Petra, that Juana had told me the story of when Petra had confronted someone from the village. In this account, she told me that Petra had gone to confront someone who had stolen her turkey. Rumor had it in the village that Juana had told me the story in Chatino and that I had recorded it to later put on Facebook so that everyone in the municipality could hear the story. Juana was not sure if I was guilty or not, arguing that "maybe someone else told you the story and you put it on Facebook." I realized then that Juana had come to my house at night because she did not want people from the village to see her come over; that is, she did not want to be perceived as someone who gossiped about people from the community.

On another occasion, I went to record two women, a mother and daughter. I asked them to tell me how to prepare food for the Day of the Dead. We were having a nice time chatting, when the electricity went out. It had not surprised us because losing electricity is a common occurrence in the village, and the daughter went to see what had happened and fixed it. A few moments later, a woman arrived, the daughter of one of the women I was speaking with. The woman came up to us and said to me,

13 The original text read *yky^A qya^A yja^A jla^A*. This has been edited for the present version following direct communication with the author.

“I’ll bet you’re making a lot of money with that information.” For a moment I thought that she was kidding, but I later realized that she was serious. The two women I was talking to and recording grew very uncomfortable. It was then that I realized that the light hadn’t gone out because we had lost electricity, but because this woman had turned off the outlet so that I would stop recording. I decided to leave. When I got home, I told my mother the story of what had happened, and she said, “She’s upset because she thinks that you make a lot of money recording people.” I told her that if that were the case, anybody from the village could sell Chatino, not just me.

I am also treated like someone from outside the community, and I have opened doors to outsiders who come to do research in Chatino villages. Because I have a doctorate from a US university and because I have come to the village with foreign linguists, people perceive me as a wealthy person. Moreover, I have a visa to go to the United States of America, and most people from this municipality immigrate to the United States without documentation. There is a lot of conversation about my immigration status; it interests people to know how much money I earn, and they think that I do it by selling Chatino. I am aware that I have an economic and legal situation in the United States that they do not have, inequalities that can cause tension and complicate the process of carrying out research in my own community. They are right to think that it is unjust for foreign people to come to these villages while Chatino people do not have visas to go to the United States. This structural discrimination hampers a more just exchange. Sure, I am a privileged person, but what Chatino people do not know is that I also have to fight to secure my place in the academic world. I think that I have not been able to communicate that to them, and I suppose that this is the case because it is not easy to talk about the reality of my experience in academia. They do not know that I often feel I have to demonstrate my competence in ways that should not be necessary for academics to take me seriously. For many academics, my success as an Indigenous woman echoes the stereotypical story of a person who has overcome challenges and in so doing has won over people’s hearts; my intellect often does not factor into the picture.

Finally, it would be very interesting to know how people from Quiahije perceive me as a researcher. It would be very interesting to do the exercise that Hugte did when he observed Cushing. I imagine their illustrations would be somewhere between amusing and serious, but it will be up to other people from the community to judge and describe me, in my yellow sweatshirt and sneakers with a recorder in my hand (see photo on page 114).

4. On my collaborative projects inside and outside of my community

I have had many great opportunities to carry out projects to document and promote the use of Chatino languages from the southeast of Oaxaca (Cruz and Woodbury 2014; 2017). This has been possible for various reasons, one of which is my own linguistic capacity: I speak Chatino. I also belong to a community in the region, and I am the daughter of Tomás Cruz Lorenzo, who was a Chatino leader. The discipline of linguistics has its problems of power and exclusion, yet there are few reflections on linguistic documentation practices in communities where linguistic research takes place. For example, Leonard argues that current practices of linguistic documentation are informed by a deeply colonial history and often do not take into consideration what the needs and cultural values of the speech communities (Leonard 2018). In the following section, I demonstrate how I led a project for the documentation of Chatino languages in such a way that follows Leonard's practices. I sought to structure the project in a way I thought would be less colonialist, trying to ensure that the research could support the needs of Chatino communities and, as Leonard says, give scientific value to linguistic documentation realized in collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Leonard 2018).

4.1 The Chatino Language Documentation Project (CLDP)

I founded the Chatino Language Documentation Project (CLDP) with Professor Anthony Woodbury and Hilaria Cruz. The CLDP involved many people, including Woodbury and various graduate students, as well as two academics who were not from UT. Over the course of 13 years, our group of 11 researchers initiated the study of many Chatino languages. Each student chose a different Chatino village variety to study; Hilaria Cruz and I studied all of the Chatino languages, but we focused on the Eastern San Juan Quiahije variety, which is the language that we speak.¹⁴

Each person concentrated on his or her subjects of interest: Hilaria Cruz studied verbal art of Quiahije; Stephanie Villard investigated the San Marcos Zacatepec variety of Eastern Chatino; Eric Campbell worked on Zenzontepec Chatino; Justin McIntosh worked on the Santa María Teotepec variety of Eastern Chatino; Ryan Sullivant stud-

14 The members of the CLDP have published a series of academic articles as well as pedagogical materials. For more information about the publications of the CLDP, see: <https://sites.google.com/site/len-guachatino/>.

ied Tataltepec Chatino; Jeffrey Rasch wrote a dissertation on the Santiago Yaitepec variety of Eastern Chatino; and I continued to work on Quahije. As the project began to involve investigation of the linguistic relationship between Zapotec and Chatino, Thomas Smith Stark joined the CLDP. Smith Stark was familiar with Zapotec languages, relatives of the Chatino language family. The final two graduate students to join the project were Katherine Mesh and Lynn Hou, who studied Quiahije Sign Language.

Before the CLDP, collaboration between linguists and speakers of Chatino languages was limited. Linguists Leslie† and Kitty Pride†, who worked for the Summer Institute of Linguistics, lived in the communities of Tataltepec de Valdés, Santiago Yaitepec, and San Miguel Panixtlahuaca for many years beginning in 1975. They authored various books, among them “Solid Food is for Adults: a pioneering venture with Wycliffe in mountainous South-West Mexico” (Pride and Pride 2007); “*Vocabulario chatino de Tataltepec: castellano-chatino, chatino-castellano*” (Pride and Pride 1970); and “*Diccionario chatino de la zona alta: Panixtlahuaca, Oaxaca y otros pueblos*” (Pride and Pride 2004). They also published various articles about Chatino grammar. Additionally, the Prides trained youth to write in Chatino, including youth from San Miguel Panixtlahuaca and Tataltepec. Many adults from those villages still remember them and say that they spoke Chatino very well.

The CLDP has contributed to the study of Chatino languages; it is because of this research that we now have a greater understanding of these languages. It can be said that the project was very successful and a model for collaborative work between academics and speakers of Indigenous languages. In addition to the enthusiasm and strong training of the researchers who studied Chatino languages, another point to highlight is that Hilaria and I speak Chatino and are the daughters of Tomás Cruz Lorenzo, who was a Chatino leader. Tomás fought for the autonomy and linguistic rights of Chatino villages. His work was crucial in attaining unity among these villages. In a sense, being the daughters of an important figure in the region helped us to be able to carry out research in various Chatino villages. Having a father like him also helped very much because we were familiar with and knew how to travel around that mountainous region, and we understood the local politics of each community. The advantage we had was that my father was very well known throughout the region and had a very good reputation. My father’s political legacy was an important factor in allowing for a research project so broad and complex, seeing as people always welcomed us in the villages.

To avoid falling into false modesty, I should mention, with much pride, that the CLDP was largely successful because my sister and I carried it out with the support of my father’s reputation, but each of the researchers of the CLDP is the architect of his or her own research project. Hilaria and I made a great effort to find Chatino villages where UT students could work. We accompanied each linguist to his or her field site; we were the first to introduce ourselves; we described and explained the project to local authorities, which included conversation about the importance of linguistic preservation and documentation. After the initial introduction, they almost always

asked us, You are the daughters of Mr. Tomás Cruz Lorenzo? When we told them that we were, the authorities gained more enthusiastic interest in the project. Hilaria and I were therefore able to place linguists in Santa Lucía Teotepec, San Marcos Zacatepec, Santa Cruz Zenzontepec, Tataltepec de Valdés, and San Juan Quiahije.

The members of the CLDP made an effort to write in Spanish and English, but the majority of our theses are in English. Despite the commitment of this project to strengthening the Chatino language, we have wound up reproducing many of the colonial practices of traditional anthropology by having the majority of its results published in English and not prioritizing the accessible communication of these results to Chatino communities. We have made an effort, but there remains much to be done to make this work accessible to the public, which is why we have created a website where people can download any material produced by the members of the CLDP.¹⁵ The CLDP is indebted to the significant support of the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Documentation Project (ELDP),¹⁶ a research grant for graduate students from the National Science Foundation (NSF), and a Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement award from the National Science Foundation. The CLDP produced a corpus of over 90 hours of naturalistic spoken texts of various genres from different Chatino communities. The majority of these texts are kept in the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) and the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA).¹⁷

4.2 Youth training

Following the projects with CLDP, I continue to work actively in Chatino villages. I have a passion for Chatino languages, and I enjoy sharing what I know with other Chatino people. During these years, I have been interested in working in Chatino communities in addition to my own. I perceive a great necessity for transmitting the knowledge about the language family that I have acquired over the years. For example, I have managed to establish a project with Chatino youth in various communities. From 2012 to 2014, I traveled to various Chatino villages with a group of high school students. We spent 10 days in each place, studying the varieties of Eastern Chatino. Over the course of three years, we visited 10 villages, where we established a practical orthography for each one and supported Chatino youth who wanted to write their language. This project had three primary goals: 1) document and analyze

¹⁵ <https://sites.google.com/site/lenguachatino/>

¹⁶ [MDP0153]

¹⁷ <http://www.elar-archive.org/index.php>; <http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/welcome.html>

the tone systems of those varieties; 2) train Chatino youth to be able to study their own language; and 3) develop and expand on methodologies to study tone languages. Some of the questions motivating our study were:

- a. Does the language have processes of tone sandhi (context-based tonal change)? If so, is it possible to design linguistic diagnostics to facilitate the categorization of the tones?
- b. How does tone work in verb paradigms?
- c. What tones do loanwords from Spanish take?

We learned a lot about the 15 varieties of Eastern Chatino. The data we collected on those trips demonstrated the tonal correspondences between those communities. With this new material, we were also able to improve the writing system for Eastern Chatino, as it became possible to develop a practical orthography that included tone. As a result, this endeavor has made it easier for teachers and linguists to create a writing system to make pedagogical materials for the promotion and revitalization of Chatino. Most importantly, however, the project fostered an interest among Chatino youth to continue studying, not necessarily linguistics, but enough for the majority of them to be able to write their Chatino language with tones. The results were tremendous, from my point of view.

I am drawn to documentation projects that are based on collaboration (Lima Silva and Riestenberg 2020; Cruz and Woodbury 2014) and which take a critical look at linguistic documentation (Leonard 2018). Currently, I continue to work on projects with youth in Quiahije, where they are more and more interested in studying Chatino. These students do everything they can to help with language maintenance. Returning to Mexico has allowed me to be present more consistently in Quiahije, which has been instrumental in fostering a growing interest among youth to write in and describe their language; they do it because they consider it part of their Chatino identity. The important thing is that these students are motivated and willing to work all day to learn about their language and discuss their interests as Chatino youth. We have produced videos of language in different contexts, such as hikes, and we have translated academic texts, songs, and short stories to Chatino. Furthermore, in 2019 I edited the book *evitemos que nuetsro futuro nos escape de las manos: tomás cruz lorenzo y la nueva generación chatina* (let us prevent our future from slipping through our fingers: tomás cruz lorenzo and the new Chatino generation) (Cruz 2019). This book is a compilation of twelve pieces of writing by Chatino people. The book has promoted dialogue between Chatino people from different Eastern Chatino villages and has been presented in Chatino in each of the author's villages. This project offered the authors the opportunity to share their personal narratives and to reflect on the future of their language and culture.

The projects I have described here constitute a sample of the ones that motivate me to keep working with Chatino speakers.

Conclusion

In this article I have presented my own experience, and I hope that it is not read as something universal that happens to all Indigenous academics. I have brought to the table discussion about the dearth of Indigenous people in the academy, a discussion that I find essential to make the study of Indigenous peoples more inclusive and diverse. I have also used my own narrative to illustrate how power and exclusion are exercised in these spaces. Despite the multitude of calls to diversify linguistics and anthropology programs, there is nonetheless a considerable amount of work left to be done in including the voices of Indigenous researchers, which continue to be largely absent from these disciplines.

I have also addressed my collaborative projects that have incorporated the interests of Chatino people, as I have worked with municipal authorities, different social groups, and native speakers who have been interested in learning about their language. Over the years, the successes and limitations of my collaborative projects have been shaped by local, state, and national politics, by language politics in Mexico, by the educational system that is imposed on Indigenous people in Mexico, and by the discriminatory practices of the academic world, but they have also been positively influenced by youth who are finding new ways to strengthen their Chatino identity. These youth from Quiahije offer an innovative perspective on what it means to be Chatino; they seek a sense of belonging as citizens of this territory. In this context, I illustrate the importance of fostering more dialogue between Indigenous academics to continue carrying out engaged anthropological investigation that includes Indigenous voices.

A lively debate persists about the role of Indigenous academics in the academy and in our own communities. A model of linguistic documentation that includes foreigners as well as native speakers of Indigenous languages may be very successful, but it also presents many challenges. I do not have a formula for confronting these challenges, but based on my experience with the CLDP and working in Chatino villages, I have come to understand that good collaboration yields a better product. Indigenous people want to learn about their languages, and they also want to have tools to safeguard them. Nevertheless, their access to education and support for their linguistic projects is limited. I have witnessed the possibilities for what the next generations can do for their languages when they are given the opportunity to participate in the process of documentation and revitalization. To ensure that this happens, linguists must be open to the needs of the speakers. I have great admiration for speakers who can sit for hours and days to learn about linguistics and create something useful for their communities. I also appreciate the time and energy that researchers have for the commitment to collaboration with speakers, including when those speakers may not have prior experience with linguistics or anthropology. Therefore, as they

say, we have to “get the show on the road” in this moment in particular. We should use this approach to promote the training of Indigenous linguists.

As I have mentioned in this article, my Chatino identity does not make collaborative work any easier nor any harder, but the results of this work are greater. England has argued that linguistics programs in the United States are inadequate because they do not meet the needs of speakers of Indigenous languages; anthropology programs are no better, given that there tends to be only one linguist (or none) in those programs (England 1996). I should mention that UT afforded me the opportunity of acquiring the tools I have used over the years in my workshops as I have taught and trained speakers of Indigenous languages in Oaxaca. Although those projects are small, I have had great success. We still have a long way to go. England made her observation 20 years ago, and there have since been very few educational opportunities for Indigenous people in Mexico and the United States. In this article I advocate for the importance of providing Indigenous students with tools to benefit the preservation of their languages. In my own research, I hope to make use of a framework that native speakers and their communities may shape and reshape to fit their own interests and needs.

Finally, I should mention that there are still great obstacles in academia, in cases where non-Indigenous academics continue to exercise their colonial power, and we Indigenous academics continue to challenge this dynamic from various positions in order to overcome the contradictions of this academic enterprise.

Reflection on the translation

By Sofia G. Pierson and Emiliana Cruz Cruz

Sophie: *Popular culture likes to talk about the untranslatable. The words or concepts in foreign languages that simply do not yield themselves to translation: schadenfreude, hygge, l'esprit de l'escalier. These words are thought somehow to capture the singular essence of a language in such a way that renders it impossible to convey the sentiment in any other manner. What we tend to say in linguistics is that anything is in fact translatable but that the genius of one language might preclude a one-to-one mapping of form to meaning in another. For me, the pleasure of translation stems from doing the impossible.*

Emiliana: *I have always admired the work of translators and how they can transform an idea from one language into another. I like reading. I have read a few books that were originally written in a different language, for instance Japanese into English (*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* — ねじまき鳥クロニクル *Nejimakidori Kuronikuru* by Haruki Murakami) and Turkish into Spanish (*Me Llamó Rojo* — *Benim Adım Kırmızı* by Orhan Pamuk). In these books I have enjoyed observing the work of the translators. In particular, I am*

fascinated by the way the translators understand the story in the original language and admire their capacity to move from one language into another. I have to say that I haven't had any formal training in translation. I have just taken a few informal workshops on translation, primarily because I create pedagogical materials for Chatino speakers.

Sophie: *What I find so special about our translation of Emiliana's work in this volume is the collaborative space out of which the final product arose. Once I had completed the first draft of my translation, we worked together every step of the way.*

Emiliana: *First, I got the first draft of the article from Sophie and compared the original Spanish version with the English one, making some comments to share with her later. The next step was to meet and decide the approach that we would take. I am an extrovert. I like to express my ideas orally. Luckily for me, Sophie was willing to listen. We decided to meet periodically to work on the translation, reading the piece out loud paragraph by paragraph so that we could both hear the rhythm of the translation and compare it to the Spanish version. With this approach it was very easy to notice when something was unclear or if I was trying to say something that Sophie had interpreted differently. She would make simple changes right then and there, but on the more elaborate ones she took notes to work on later. Once we read the whole article out loud, Sophie worked on the final version to make sure everything was in shape. I then read the final version and approved it. This approach was very useful and practical for me. The most important part of this process was that we got to know each other as we worked together.*

Sophie: *I think that there are two misconceptions about translation that this collaboration throws into question. First, I think people assume—myself included—that translation is solitary work. The translator works in her own space to interpret the original through a new lens, perhaps consulting a dictionary but certainly not the author of the original piece. However, I also think that if the audience sees any solitary architect behind a translated piece, it will paradoxically be the original author. People seem to see straight through the translation and imagine that they are reading a carbon copy of the original; there seems to be a mysterious process whereby the translator becomes invisible. I have been made particularly aware of this invisibilization since Ann Goldstein has emerged as the brilliant translator of Elena Ferrante's oeuvre—it is telling that in this case, because Ferrante carefully maintains her privacy behind a pen name, there is no other identity to latch onto. In my work with Emiliana, it was our thoroughly collaborative model that made it possible to create a product that was faithful to Emiliana's original intended message while at once making it legible to a linguistically—and culturally—different audience.*

Emiliana: *As I mentioned earlier, I admire people who can translate, and Sophie is one of those people. Her knowledge in both languages made the English version of my article more coherent.*

Sophie: *I think the linguistic acrobatics behind a translation are all the more beautiful when two minds are at work together. It is a very special process when both author and translator are proficient in both languages, like Emiliana and me, but I believe this framework is still applicable in cases where the original author is not a speaker of the language of translation. In linguistic work, in particular, I find this deeply collaborative model essential not just for translating from language to language but also for reaching the kind of mutual understanding that Emiliana mentions above.*

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Ethical principles in linguistic fieldwork methodologies—According to whom?

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Translated from Spanish by James B. Tandy and Paige Erin Wheeler

Abstract

This article seeks to establish a dialogue between the methodological proposals that have been put forward for linguistic fieldwork and the growing experiences of Indigenous linguists. It is well known that the theorizing of the methodologies that dictate linguists' interactions in their communities of study is carried out from a perspective foreign to both the language and the community. These methodologies are designed for and guided by non-Indigenous academics, predominantly academics from different countries than those of the language and its speakers. This paper argues that the challenges faced by insider and insider-outsider linguists are not the same challenges as those faced by outsider linguists. Thus, this article contributes to a reevaluation of the universality of ethical methodological principles of fieldwork behavior in contemporary linguistics and promotes a local, Indigenous perspective that implies the decolonization of fieldwork methodologies designed by and for foreigners and uncritically adopted by insider and insider-outsider linguists.

Keywords:

linguistic fieldwork, outsider linguist, insider linguist, insider-outsider linguist, community, methodologies.

1. Fieldwork in linguistics¹

Within linguistics, as with the social sciences in general, the recommended “fieldwork” methodologies have been designed from a perspective foreign to the language and community of study (Himmelfmann 1998; Newman and Ratliff 2001; Woodbury 2003; Bower 2008; Sakel and Everett 2012; among others). This framing begins as a need to define the work of those who study minority languages in the context in which the target language is spoken. It is assumed, then, that fieldwork is carried out by someone who spends a field season (short or long) in the community where the language of study is spoken, thus also presupposing that fieldwork is carried out by linguists who are not from that community. Consequently, the methodologies considered to be good practice in the field are designed from the same outsider perspective.

In the following sections, I aim to make it clear that we, as Indigenous people working in our own communities, are also conducting fieldwork, and that the field methods put forward in linguistics to date do not represent us with respect to the ethical principles within our own communities. To demonstrate this, I have divided the text into the following sections. In §2, I highlight what I do not address in this text. In §3, I speak briefly about the emergence of Indigenous linguists in Mexico and Guatemala. In §4, I mention some reasons why, in my own experience, it is important to discuss field methods. In §5, I discuss the role of speakers and communities in language documentation projects. In §6, I speak about the lack of true inclusion of Indigenous linguists in theorizing the development of linguistic field methods. In §7, I question the existence of field methods for Indigenous linguists. In §8, I discuss some specific ethical considerations. Finally, §9, concludes.

2. Notes about what is said here

As a caveat, I present only some of what is needed for rethinking what “fieldwork” is from the Indigenous perspective and what this process implies. I do not mention each and every one of the practices that have been suggested as prototypical within the field of linguistic documentation (Himmelfmann 1998; Bower 2008), but the points

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Emiliana Cruz Cruz for inspiring and motivating me to write this article and for her valuable comments. I also wish to thank Dr. Néstor Hernández-Green and two anonymous readers who gave me important suggestions for improvement of this article. However, as the author of this article, I am solely responsible for any remaining errors in the content or its presentation.

touched on in this text have to do with these ethical principles and their effects within communities. This paper does not cover all possible viewpoints nor all possible ways of proceeding in all community environments, nor does it make a generalization about each linguist working in their own community and/or in other Indigenous communities. Each community makes its own rules that govern its internal interactions, and often these rules determine our best methodological practices in our work as linguists.

I do not discuss the challenges that some Indigenous linguists face in getting a quality education and having the same opportunities as their colleagues of another ethnic origin. Neither do I discuss the challenges with respect to ability, resources, motivation, infrastructure, and community leadership and involvement in the process of linguistic fieldwork. It is necessary to mention these factors because they could directly interfere with the workflow that each one implements when going to the field.

What I present here is directly related to the experience I have had during my training in linguistics at universities in Mexico and at a university in the United States of America (USA), as well as my experience as an insider and insider-outsider² linguist working on Tseltal and Mocho³ respectively. I hope that my perspective is shared at least by my Indigenous colleagues in Mexico and perhaps in other parts of the world. But I also hope that, with this article as a point of departure, other Indigenous linguists can offer their perspectives about field methods in linguistics.

3. The emergence of Indigenous linguists

Linguistic training of native speakers began alongside the first efforts to include minority languages in linguistic research. Since the 1970s, in many parts of the world a new era has begun in modern linguistics with respect to linguistic documentation

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- 2 *Outsider* linguists are those who do not belong to the community in which they conduct their studies and who do not speak the language, nor do they belong to any other community that speaks a minority language. An outsider linguist in the majority of cases speaks the language of the dominant group. *Insider* linguists are researchers who study the minority language that they speak and who conduct their research in their own communities. In some cases they do not speak the language because it is only spoken by elderly people in the community. A third group of linguists is what I call here *insider-outsiders*. This group includes linguists who come from a marginalized group that speaks a language different from the minority language that they study and who are generally citizens of the same country or region so that they identify strongly with the group they study and share many of the same local problems. For more detail, see Meakins et al. (2018).
 - 3 Tseltal and Mocho' are Mayan languages of the large Western branch. Tseltal belongs to the Cholan-Tseltalan subgroup and Mocho,' to the Q'anjob'alan subgroup. Tseltal has approximately half a million speakers in central, south, and northeast Chiapas. Mocho' has approximately 50 speakers and is spoken in Tuzantán and Motozintla, border towns in Chiapas on the Guatemala-Mexico border.

and description, namely, linguistic training of native speakers in order to achieve better results in data collection projects. These native speakers could be merely informants or, in the best of cases, could themselves be the ones carrying out the description of their own languages.

For example, in Guatemala⁴ training of speakers of Mayan languages was carried out, some of whom were later academically trained as linguists. This generation of Indigenous linguists in Guatemala was the precursor to certain demands that have not only influenced linguistic work in that country but have also achieved prominence within linguistics in general. England (1992) summarizes the proposals of Cojti Cuxil (1990), a Maya activist and linguist, who explicitly and implicitly presents a set of standards and obligations that outsider linguists should respect when studying Guatemalan minority languages. Today, several of these participants of a Maya background occupy positions which promote the study of and research on Mayan languages in Guatemala and Mexico. Another example is Mexico, where, through the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (CIESAS)⁵ which was created in Mexico in 1973, a substantial number of Indigenous linguists have received training. One of the prerequisites for attending this institution is that the participant speak the language of study, and one of the primary requirements for graduation is to produce a language documentation corpus as the basis for their linguistic study, which results in a master's and/or doctoral thesis. Many of these graduates are dedicated to Indigenous bilingual education, and some have recently entered governmental positions concerned with Indigenous languages, while some others have research positions. Many of the students who came from Guatemala and Mexico in the generation of the 1980s have been accepted to foreign universities to pursue a doctorate in linguistics. The University of Texas at Austin, for example, has trained some of these students since 2001.

In the USA, besides the University of Texas, universities such as MIT and the University of Arizona have trained speakers of Indigenous North American languages as linguists. Beyond this, the Institute on Collaborative Language Research's (CoLang) mission includes the participation of Indigenous teachers in their summer workshops, which is resulting in an increase in the participation of Indigenous people in the academic life of the U.S. and Canada (Rosenblum and Berez-Kroeker 2018; Fitzgerald 2018). The growing phenomenon of Indigenous linguists is also seen in other parts of the world. Among the most representative, I can mention India (Chelliah

4 *The Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín* (PLFM) was founded in 1962 by foreign linguists and local Indigenous linguists from Guatemala. One of the objectives of the PLFM is the teaching of Mayan languages and Spanish as second and third languages (plfm.org).

5 Before 1980, CIESAS was known as the *Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (CISINAH) (<https://bit.ly/3f8GwVO>).

2018), East Indonesia (Sawaki and Arka 2018), Australia (Singer 2018), and Ghana⁶ (Areka 2018).

These linguists who belong to the speech community of the language they study are normally called “trained professional community members,” “insiders,” “native linguists,” or “Indigenous linguists.” With which of these titles should one identify?

In this article, I consider a broader definition of “Indigenous linguists.” In Mexico, the term “Indigenous linguist” contrasts with both non-Indigenous Mexican linguists as well as foreign linguists. I include in this concept both insider and insider-outsider linguists, that is, linguists who speak a minority language and who work with either their own language or another minority language from some part of the world⁷. I also include those who claim a minority language community by blood that do not speak their ancestors’ language but who work on it or another minority language. Outside of these cases, all other linguists belong to the group that is called “outsider linguists.”

4. Reasons to discuss field methods from an Indigenous academic perspective

Until now, Indigenous linguists have not clearly described the need to rethink ways of teaching field methods from the perspective of their own languages and communities. In, for example, Woodbury and England (2004) and England (2018), one can see a methodological shift in the actions of Indigenous linguists who have been trained at foreign universities. However, this change has not resulted from theorizing about field methods within academia but rather from linguistic activism. England (2018:16) states that “[b]eing speakers of beleaguered minority or endangered languages leads directly to language activism,” but I want to clarify that this tendency does not manifest in the same way for all speakers of Indigenous languages. Those of us who do activist work do so not by choice, nor due to academic requirements, but to honor our language, our ancestors, and ultimately our own existence on the earth.

6 Ameka (2018) mentions that in the early 1970s, work began to be carried out by linguists who were native to the communities of study and that recently linguists from other minority groups have been working in communities other than their own. The first of these worked primarily by introspection, and since 2016, some have begun documentary fieldwork.

7 Detailed description of the characteristics of these classifications is not the main goal of this article. However, I do want to emphasize that in my experience working as an insider and an insider-outsider linguist, I have observed a change in linguistic attitude in the community of speakers based on my ethnic identification.

In this sense, I believe that we as Indigenous linguists have a need and a right to open this dialogue and to present the pros and cons of the methods that govern modern linguistic fieldwork. In other areas of social science, there has already been a clear demand for decolonizing methodologies, beginning with Tuhiwai Smith (1999: 15):

Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behavior as an integral part of methodology. They are ‘factors’ to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood.

Many outsider linguists partially practice what Tuhiwai Smith suggests, while many others do not practice it at all. I say “partially” because, in contrast to Indigenous linguists, many outsider linguists design their field projects for a set period of time, which is to say one or several field seasons, but almost never as a lifelong connection. These projects are evaluated by advisors outside the communities where the project takes place.

The examples we see of fieldwork show us many of the bad experiences (and very few of the good experiences) of outsider linguists, and students are taught how to avoid or not make the same mistakes (Bower 2008; Macaulay 2004; etc.). Many outsider linguists who advise students, ethical oversight committees, or even funding agencies for linguistic fieldwork, advise students based on this outsider vision. This clearly shows that they have not yet come to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon or what challenges a linguist who belongs to the community or region of study may face in the community of study, their own or another. For this reason, I want to share some of the personal stories that have motivated me to write this article.

My first motivation is related to the need to be linguists and only linguists in our fieldwork. Books about linguistic field methods suggest things such as “be honest about why you’re in the community. It’s not ethical to go for one reason but say you’re going for another. [...] If you’re going there as a linguist, be a linguist” (Bower 2008: 162). Going to our own communities often means returning home before going to do linguistic fieldwork. Coming as a linguist without first being a member of the community, and therefore not following cultural protocols, would in itself be unethical from the community’s perspective and could violate the customs and norms of interaction in one’s own community. For an Indigenous linguist, being a member of the community and being a linguist cannot be separated. Therefore, outside standards of ethical behavior are only partially applicable in my experience and surely also for many other Indigenous linguists. Being dishonest in our own communities is not something we could even consider, as it could lead to grave consequences for ourselves as community members and for our families (examples in §8).

The second reason is that during my training as a linguist, it was very common to hear things such as “if it goes badly for you in one community, go to the next community over” or “if you weren’t born to do fieldwork, don’t go back to the community, just choose another thesis topic.” Indeed, there have been outsider linguists who keep jumping between communities with no negative consequences, at least not for them, because once they finish their studies they have the option never to return. After they finish their thesis or scientific work, they return to their home or they find another comfort zone and try to forget the good or bad experiences they had in their fieldwork. For an insider linguist, leaving the community could be easy, if the reasons for doing so are not directly related to problems caused by the research itself. But if the change happens because the researcher conducted themselves badly in their own community during the study, certainly more than one community would know what happened, and the researcher could be banned not only from that community but also from neighboring communities that speak the same language. This would also entail very grave consequences in the life of the researcher and could even compromise their cultural identity (see §8).

The third reason, no less important, and in fact the most important, is linguistic activism. As I mentioned above, activism is not something that we choose but part of our duty as members of these communities. For my part, promoting the language in all social spheres exercises a right that has been denied to our ancestors, contributing to a world that is more whole, in which our cultural identities are not seen as mere roadblocks to civilization nor as objects which have no understanding or knowledge. On one occasion, I openly contradicted a professor who said that their role as a linguist was not to convince the community they worked with about the scientific difference between the concept of a dialect (*dialecto*) and a language (*lengua*).⁸ If the community assumed and stated that they spoke a *dialecto* and not a *lengua*, then this should be respected. Forcing them to understand the difference could indicate a lack of respect toward them. From this professor’s standpoint, I understand and respect this point of view. I could even say that the fact that the community uses the word *dialecto* to refer to their speech may not be, in itself, proof that they themselves undervalue their speech; it may simply be because it is the term they learned. Nevertheless, accepting that they speak a “dialect” carries with it a history of linguistic contempt for their language which manifests in their apparent linguistic attitudes, like the fact that they prefer their children to learn Spanish and not their “dialect.” Acting in my own community, it would not be appropriate to let others speak highly of me for speaking the language of white people while they continue to believe that

8 *Dialecto* is a derogatory term referring to a minority language. [Translator’s note: “dialect” is also often used in a derogatory sense in English; this is even more the case in Spanish.]

their “dialect” is inferior and useless. To accept that they speak a dialect would be to reproduce the discrimination and racism that I myself have been subjected to all my life. If, after this, someone today says that it is not important, that even with this history one can be objective in social-scientific questions with our communities, this obviously goes against our convictions grounded in our community, our identity, and our humanity. Manuals on linguistic fieldwork say that as a linguist, one should try to stay at the edge of community problems, and they further suggest that one stay impartial and not become a “blinker advocate for the community” (Bower 2008: 161). But again, how could someone go unnoticed in their own community and keep from noticing the problems that have threatened their own humanity? This question could even extend to research done on any language, not only research related to minority languages.

Cojtí Cuxil (1990: 19) has said of Guatemala, “in this country, the linguist who works on Mayan languages has only two options: active complicity with the prevailing colonialism and assimilationist linguistics, or activism in favor of a new linguistic order in which the equality rights for all languages are concretely established, which also implies the same rights for nationalities and communities.”⁹

5. Speakers and communities in documentation projects

In the 1970s, when linguistic training of native speakers began for the first time, a debate began about the role of speakers and communities of the language of study. At first, it was suggested that, since linguistics is an objective science, we should not be responsible for the wishes of communities or their speakers when developing ethical principles of how to proceed in linguistic research, and that ultimately this relationship should best be considered as “a matter of personal decision” (Samarin 1967: 17). This of course has been subject to recent criticism about the relationship that should exist between the researcher and community of study. Czaykowska-Higgins (2018: 111–112), for example, argues against Samarin (1967), saying that the work of linguistic documentation inevitably has social consequences, because the linguist is almost always working with small communities, many of which are Indigenous and have been marginalized (whether economically or through other types of oppression and colonization). Because of this, documentary linguists’ accountability

9 Cited in England (1992: 31), from notes from the 11th Mayan Linguistics Workshop that took place in 1989 in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

to the community and its speakers should not be simply a “personal decision,” and moreover, it is not sufficient to assume that linguistics will always and only be an “objective science” when working with humans.

Himmelman’s (1998) proposal to consider language documentation a subfield of linguistics generated a need to theorize about the methods that linguists should follow in their fieldwork. These proposals consciously reference to the need to include native speakers, often linguistically trained speakers, in linguistic documentation projects. This reformulation unites two key points: (1) ethical considerations in linguistic fieldwork are essential for improving scientific output, and (2) the fieldwork of a documentary linguist should be founded in principles of community collaboration (McDonnell et al. 2018, which contains 31 articles about linguistic documentation).

In these discussions about ethical principles of work in linguistic documentation, it is clear that there is already discussion about the involvement of communities and their speakers in these projects. Nevertheless, Indigenous linguists are not discussed except to mention the advantages that result from a partnership between an outside researcher and a professionally trained insider or insider-outsider speaker in documentation projects, or in cases of a project conducted by an insider linguist.¹⁰ Ameka (2018: 231) is the only author to date to suggest that the methods and techniques that are currently being developed in Africa by professionally trained community members should also feed into the global discourse about fieldwork in documentary linguistics.

6. Fieldwork as an inclusive practice

The definition of fieldwork from the perspective of mainstream linguistics excludes any way of obtaining data that does not follow its dogmatic prescriptions. Sakel and Everett (2012: 5) say, for example, that fieldwork is “the activity of a researcher systematically analyzing parts of a language, usually other than one’s native language and usually within a community of speakers of that language.” However, there are those

¹⁰ In the following quote, we see again that the practice of a symmetrical relationship is still not the most preferred one in linguistic documentation: “we attempt to unmask the ideological bias inherent in influential conceptions of the methods, motivations and practices of Endangered Language Documentation Research (ELDR) by addressing the unequal exchange that frequently characterizes the relationship between the linguistic researcher, on the one hand, and the language community and, in some cases, local researchers, on the other” (Grinevald and Sinha 2016: 25).

who take a slightly more inclusive view of fieldwork. In this view, fieldwork can also include gathering data in cities. Thus, linguists such as William Labov (1972), who gathered his sociolinguistic data about varieties of American English in cities such as New York and Philadelphia, are considered fieldworkers. On that subject, Meakins et al. (2018: 7) say that, if these types of studies carried out in cities can be considered part of a fieldwork project, then it would be possible for this notion of fieldwork to include linguistic research based on any primary sources, or even studies based on introspection in which researchers themselves make judgments for tests of grammaticality or meaning. Of course, this type of fieldwork is not viewed positively by those who travel to remote areas in the middle of nowhere. In a more inclusive position we have Chelliah and de Reuse (2011: 10–11), who suggest that fieldwork involves “the collection or gathering of linguistic data through a variety of methods and techniques, with a focus on reliability, representativity, and archivability.”

Indigenous linguists can fall at one extreme or the other. On one hand, there are those of us who work in our own communities, which are also our homes. But on the other hand, we, most of the time, do not live permanently in our communities, creating some similarities to insider-outsider linguists. This leads us to reflect about what “doing fieldwork” means from a more inclusive perspective that does not try to create discrete categories, but rather a continuum which many of us Indigenous linguists find ourselves in the middle of. Following Chelliah and de Reuse (2011), if we gather documentary data, elicitation, experimental data, or introspection, whether within our families, in our own communities, or in other communities, we are also doing fieldwork. If what is important is that the data be reliable, representative, and archivable, then the methods and techniques implemented in the process of compiling or gathering data to support scientific linguistic work can vary based on the positionality of the researcher without devaluing the ethical principles of conduct already established within the discipline. When necessary, this type of work can propose other ethical principles that complement and improve those already put forward in the discipline. The intent is not only to improve the result of a linguistic project carried out *in situ* but also to improve the interaction between science and its object, as well as those who carry it out, who are, after all, human. In this way, linguistic science can go in a direction that some outsider linguists have already come to consider necessary: “re-humanizing” science, and “building relationships across difference” (Dobrin and Berson 2011: 207; Czaykowska-Higgins 2018).

7. What fieldwork methods do we “Indigenous people” follow?

As already seen, despite the growing wave of Indigenous linguists, they are not only absent from the reflections of documentary linguists but in general there is very little involvement of Indigenous linguists in the development of theory. Many linguists who theorize about field methods in linguistics have already realized this. Newman and Ratliff (2001), in their reflections on fieldwork in linguistics, note that in their book and their discussions about field methods they constrain themselves and focus on practices developed primarily by outsider linguists from North America, Australia, and Western Europe. Recently, Ameka (2018: 225) shows that the prototypical idea of “fieldwork” does not take insider linguists into account, and as a consequence, they are not considered “fieldworkers.” He mentions that “it is a paradox in the era of documentary linguistics for “outsider” fieldwork to be considered the norm” (Ameka 2018: 230).

In fact, this article has taken shape due to this paradox. If there are Indigenous academics working in linguistic description, linguistic documentation, formal linguistics, or any other subfield of linguistics as a science, following the principles of ethics and collaborative work that they surely practice, then there are Indigenous linguists practicing so-called “fieldwork.” However, if field methods are conceptualized by and for outsider linguists, what are the ethical principles that govern the actions of insider and insider-outsider linguists? This and other questions should be on the table for debate when proposing a fieldwork project that bridges community participation and scientific work, but up to this point this has not been seen nor greatly discussed.

Given the wide range of documentary linguists, I have already mentioned the need to be inclusive, but there has not been much involvement from Indigenous linguists themselves. Here I try to open a dialogue from a personal perspective as an Indigenous linguist from Mexico, in order to discuss the methods that we insider and insider-outsider linguists follow, as well as the local perspective from the communities of study. I propose that Indigenous researchers who conduct fieldwork in their own or in other communities do not necessarily have to follow the ethical methodological principles that are standard for linguistic fieldwork. By contrast, I suggest that Indigenous academics doing fieldwork in their own communities have to take certain ethical measures that are not discussed in existing writing about linguistic field methods.

8. Some ethical considerations

Ethics. What does ethics mean, and for whom? Ethical concepts are seen differently depending on the specific perspective from which one approaches the topic. One way to define ethics in linguistic fieldwork is “a way of working that you, the research community and the language community think is appropriate” (Bown 2008: 148). Universities in the U.S. generally have ethics committees that determine what is “ethical,” or not, during fieldwork. These committees regulate things such as what can and cannot be studied; ownership of the products of fieldwork; what can or cannot be recorded, archived, and shared; types of compensation; permission to work with children; citation and recognition of the contributions of collaborators; the use of data in secondary work; etc. Nevertheless, as Bown (2008: 150) has rightly pointed out, “Ethics are strongly a function of culture, and what may be considered ethical in one community would be unethical in another.” Therefore, there is no single ethical way to behave when doing research, nor is there only one system that one should satisfy.

In many countries, the ethical principles for how to conduct linguistic fieldwork are not clear, nor is there systematization on the part of outsider linguists. Pérez Báez (2018: 336) observes that in Mexico, there are inconsistencies on the part of both institutions and linguists in the process of obtaining the consent of collaborators in fieldwork projects. This is so even though there are national and international academics doing research on Indigenous communities in Mexico. Moreover, the principles that govern ethical standards for doing research in these communities, when they exist, are evaluated by institutional review boards outside of Mexico. This obviously makes us question how appropriate and practical these principles are.

As a local researcher one must take into account the community’s standards and stick to them. How severe would the consequences of inadequate fieldwork practices be for an insider linguist? Here I wish to cite the example of an Indigenous filmmaker from Chiapas so that readers see clearly what the greatest cost of non-conformity with our communities may be.

I was just informed that in my community [...] in assembly [...] a few groups came together to agree that they will not allow me to film and produce works having to do with culture, because they say I sell the videos and cultural products to the government and to foreigners, especially to foreigners. [...] This is not the first time they have done this; some time ago Brother Aurelio asked me to document the arrival of the bishop, which I did happily, because I like to do so—I like to take photos and videos because I think it is good to have memory of our history as a community. Years ago, the foreigners came and robbed us, so I understand that there is mistrust, but we are not the same... I have never sold a photo, I have never sold a video, I have not earned millions, I have nothing, I

receive nothing from the government because I don't believe in them either. I only ask that they do not affect my family, that they do not hurt them any more with their words; whatever doubt or frustration, it is better that they say it to me, it is better that we start a dialogue, and if even after that it is not clear, what else can I do, they do not want me near my community either, I don't know what to think. Some time ago, my brother Manuel also went through this, he left and never again returned and never will return because recently he passed away (Saul Kak¹¹, 2 March 2019).

Books about field methods in linguistics warn about the “awkwardness” and “confusion” that foreign researchers can have in an unknown context (Bower 2008; Macaulay 2004), or they talk about the “psychological well-being” of outsider linguists (Wengle 1988: 91), but they do not talk about the social, and community, disruptions that Indigenous linguists may experience due to the fact that they belong to an Indigenous group. As can be seen, there is much to do with respect to our ethical practices before we really have field methods in linguistics that are complete and inclusive, not only of the collaborator but of the community itself. I suggest, from personal experience, that one's social conscience and the collection of linguistic data in minority languages should be inseparable actions in which teaching should be mutual and collaborative, not only with respect to collaborators but with respect to the community as a whole.

The decision to work with a minority language. We as linguists do fieldwork for various reasons. What is clear is that we do linguistic fieldwork for some personal and intellectual satisfaction. For outsider linguists, there is a whole background that often leads them to work with certain languages, and there are often cases of wanting to be an Indiana Jones in the middle of the jungle or a Robin Hood acting as a hero for minority languages. Many other times, it is because they really want to contribute to understanding the complexity of linguistic science and to try resolving complex problems. In some cases, linguists are adopted by the community they work in, and they are given recognition for their insight and knowledge about the language. This, in turn, leads linguists to involve themselves in activities that are not related to linguistics but rather are community-focused. In other cases, there may not be a direct relationship between the linguist and the community, only between the linguist and a few speakers (Macaulay 2004). This leads to the linguist not having any involvement in the community beyond their relationship to the people they work with.

11 Saul Kak (Facebook), (Saul Kak, Zoque visual artist from Rayón, Chiapas; co-director of the documentary “La Selva Negra”) Marzo 2, 2019.

Why do we as Indigenous people do fieldwork on our own languages? In many cases, it is because we have been part of a documentation project and have ourselves been informants or because we are involved in Indigenous bilingual teaching and we simply want to understand how our language works. At first, I wanted to do fieldwork so that I could understand the idea of emotions in Tseltal through the lexicon, which is to say, to understand the neurolinguistic processing of emotions. This interest came about because of conceptual distinctions in Spanish that do not exist in Tseltal, and vice versa. I wanted to understand our way of envisioning the world that my non-Tseltal friends did not understand well. When I decided to do fieldwork on another minority language as an insider-outsider linguist, it was because I had written an essay about Mocho', but I did not have any counterexamples for my hypothesis. The idea began as a merely academic interest. When I did pilot fieldwork in Motozintla, where Mocho' is spoken, I learned more about the language and people, and my interest in describing the language began there. Indigenous people who work on their own languages do not have to worry about choosing what language to study; they will automatically work on their own language if there is insufficient description of its grammar or culture. On occasion, working on genetically related languages also becomes an option. One wants to contribute to the understanding of a section of the grammar or the social life of the less-studied language. Indigenous insider-outsider linguists might have other reasons for their choice and could be more like outsider linguists in this sense.

As I said before, for an insider linguist, doing fieldwork often means returning home. The idea that outsider and insider-outsider linguists have of going to a new, unknown, and interesting place, often exotic to others, does not cross the mind of an insider researcher. A native researcher is not going to read about their own culture to understand how their people behave, they are not going to contact the Ejidal Commissariat or the Municipal Council to see if they will grant permission to come and stay for a time in the community. They do not need to consider where they will stay or who will feed them. They do not think about what they are going to eat or about what the people eat there. The Indigenous linguist as a person does not have to worry about "asking permission" to be in their community, but as a researcher they do have to report what activities they will be conducting, because some of their research activities will be unusual. The insider linguist already knows their officially recognized customs and traditions. For an insider linguist, doing linguistic fieldwork should be seen as mediation between what they already know about their language and culture and the possible dissemination of new information, without violating their cultural practices and, very importantly, they should follow as far as possible the local norms of interaction in order to maintain harmony between their research project and the community. And from there, they should share the results with the local as well as the scientific community.

Demands of home and of fieldwork. As James Crippen (2009), a Tlingit linguist from British Columbia, points out, the fact that “home” and “field” are one and the same can involve many more demands than those placed on an outsider linguist. Indeed, returning to one’s home and community has many consequences. One role cannot be separated from the other.

Among the demands (to mention only one) that returning to the community can involve are community service duties (see *Cargo system* in the Cultural Glossary at the end of this volume). For example, having access to an official education¹² outside the community and knowing Spanish better than any other community member (and knowing English, which is much more prestigious) can serve as a basis for the community naming one an administrative and bureaucratic representative before the State because this would benefit the community. Many communities appoint these representatives based on customs and traditions, and turning down a position of this kind could lead to negative repercussions within the community such as: being excluded from local projects, not being considered for future positions as a representative, and even worse, marginalizing the family members of the researcher who is excluded due to a lack of community engagement, a stigma that can even pass on to future generations.

Among the activities that are not strictly mandatory but are required to survive in our communities are visiting family, working in the fields to produce food, and attending community town hall meetings, among other things. If someone does not participate in required communal work while in town (e.g., maintaining the community water tank, fixing and cleaning roads, etc.), for example, this could create suspicion that they are disinterested in the community. It is even worse if one offers to pay for recordings of the language or culture without participating in the community practices. These and other attitudes can serve as examples of why, in our fieldwork, being a linguist is more than simply being a linguist and why there are certain constraints placed upon us that are not always explicitly stated by a president or community member. For an outsider linguist, the situation is completely different: they have the option to participate in local activities and may be seen as something “exotic” by community members, but these activities are not required of them given their condition and position within the community.

These factors are not discussed when people talk about field methods; it is assumed only that going home while going to the field makes one’s scientific work

12 By “official education” here, I mean education offered by governments or private institutions that require the student to speak the dominant language. There are no official institutions of this kind in which one can receive an education in their own language and community. Veracruz University in Mexico offers a master’s degree in Nahuatl Language and Culture which was launched in 2020 (<https://www.uv.mx/mlcn/>).

much more productive. It is taken for granted that an insider linguist is like any other outsider linguist doing field research, but reality tells us that it is not that simple.

“Informant” and “researcher”. To what extent are these concepts constructed under the assumption that the researcher is not an informant/consultant? That is, for the community, it is atypical for someone to show up asking how to say this or that phrase in the language. Ameka (2018) mentions that an insider linguist can seem foolish for asking others how to say things, because the community knows that the linguist speaks the language. At first glance, this would not have any repercussions for an insider linguist, but if they do not sufficiently communicate their purpose, other speakers may start to doubt the insider linguist’s proficiency as a speaker of their own language. The fact of studying or having studied in a city or outside of our communities creates doubt in the speech community. For them, many of those who study elsewhere are “contaminated”¹³ by Western or *mestizo* culture. This, when combined with field practices that treat the speaker as just an object of study, endangers our status as speakers.

I want to mention here my first experiences as a linguist (most of the time, accompanied by another Tseltal speaker or a non-Tseltal linguist) working for the Dialectological Atlas of the Tseltal Documentation Project (hosted by CIESAS-Sureste). On more than one occasion, speakers refused to repeat the same phrases three times on a phonological and morphological questionnaire that we were conducting. I, in my role as the scientist, did not want to interact more than necessary so as not to “contaminate the investigation” and, of course, because I was the employee of a project and they were paying me to work. In their refusal, they argued that, if I wanted them to repeat something more than once, then I should record myself, since I spoke the language. What I want to underscore here is that people without linguistics training, Indigenous or not, do not understand the nature of linguistic science. Even professionals from other disciplines do not fully understand what linguists do. It is well known that in these communities, access to formal education is very limited, and illiteracy is a problem. For this reason, it is very important to educate them about what we do and to explain verbally, in detail, and in their own language, why we do what we do. To accomplish this communicative act, there is a whole procedure that follows local norms, and someone who is local should know those norms. This process is carried out in the dominant language by insider-outsider and outsider linguists in trying to explain the concept of the project, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. Having this sense for communication according to

13 We mix our language with Spanish, we do not wear traditional clothing, we introduce new behaviors, etc. These things create the idea of not being “pure.”

cultural norms is obviously much harder for someone who does not share the same practices, much less the language.

Many times, we fall into the error of underestimating the role of the people who collaborate with us in our fieldwork. In more than one instance, we surely owe the understanding of the structure of their language to them, rather than the reverse. Outsider and insider-outsider linguists could not do fieldwork at all without people who speak the language, much less understand its structure and function. Using terms like informant, consultant, or investigator in front of community members (or in an academic publication) can sound arrogant and ambitious, and the asymmetry that it creates in our relationships permeates the interaction in future work. In my experience as an insider-outsider researcher working with speakers of Mocho', I have realized that for them, the concepts of "informant," "consultant," or even "collaborator," are degrading. For them, this is another way of perpetuating discrimination and contempt toward their language. At the beginning of my research in the area, speakers had a very negative attitude toward sharing their language, and they said that nobody in the community would be willing to do so (for historical reasons and because of researchers who had worked there previously). Understanding and processing someone's experience as a human is the first step in understanding the reasons for certain behaviors. One cannot overlook the implications of being an outsider in an unknown context. And, if someone takes this risk in spite of X or Y situation, overlooking the process of assimilation and mutual understanding with the community is not the best way to begin a field project.

Activism and reclamation. The need for "quality of life" in the communities where we work is often unfortunately confused with quality of life in terms of material things. In Tseltal-Tsotsil cosmovision,¹⁴ quality of life goes beyond having a good house, good clinic, schooling, or accumulated wealth. Quality of life has to do with being well with oneself and with one's neighbors, fulfilling one's responsibilities as a human being and as a good citizen (Schlitter Álvarez 2012). Frustrated linguists who have been in third-world or "fourth-world" communities (Bown 2008) in minority areas with endangered languages lament their powerlessness to improve the "quality of life" of the communities, and further, about not even trying to defend themselves

14 "Good living" in Tseltal-Tsotsil is *lekil kuxlejal* "a Tsotsil and Tseltal cultural concept that names certain practices and ways of understanding, creating and recreating the world, that have to do with a relationship of respect with others and with the earth, and a search for harmony with it and with the vital cycles that compose it; that understands and respects the sacred dimension of the earth and life, and seeks the common good between us, and with it. In this sense, the term also presents a conception of what is a type of well-being, or of what is necessary in order to have an honorable and just life" (Schlitter Álvarez 2012: 15-16).

against the prejudiced things racist people say about their work with these minority languages. Nevertheless, empowering speakers to know their language is a way to both do linguistics and improve their quality of life.

In my experience, improving quality of life and empowering minority languages are part of the same process. To illustrate this point, I here share an anecdote about Mocho'. First, I should make clear that there is very little grammatical description of the Mocho' language, and what exists is not a detailed or finished analysis. Ever since I began working on the Mocho' language in 2015, I have been sharing the knowledge that I have gained about the language with Mr. Teodoso Ortíz Ramírez, a 71-year-old Mocho' speaker. He has been my teacher and my guide during my training in Mocho'. He did not know how to read or write in Spanish, much less Mocho', but through his commitment to the arduous work of teaching himself, he has mastered reading and writing in both languages. Now, Mr. Teodoso teaches Mocho' language classes at the Casa de la Cultura de Motozintla de Mendoza, Chiapas, Mexico. One day, he told me that a man came to observe his class, introducing himself as an elementary-level bilingual Spanish-Mocho' teacher (which does not exist; there is no teachers who are fluent in Mocho', so there are no teachers at any level who teach in both Spanish and Mocho', according to the same "bilingual" teachers). The Mocho' speakers of Motozintla all know each other, and this man was not someone known in the town, but upon mentioning the name of his father (who is a speaker) he was identified. While Mr. Teodoso was teaching his class, the visitor interrupted to tell him that what he was writing was wrong; why was he writing a double vowel when no such thing existed in Mocho'? Mr. Teodoso very kindly showed him a minimal pair in which the contrast between a short and long vowel changed the meaning. Even then, the visitor very angrily told him that he was teaching lies, casting doubt on Mr. Teodoso's knowledge, and proceeded to leave the class. This has been common practice in the "Indigenous bilingual" system in this part of Motozintla. People are disparaged for not having attained any level of education in the official system, despite their native knowledge of the language. What I want to highlight here is Mr. Teodoso's reaction. If this had happened on any other occasion, perhaps the speaker would have just hung their head and conceded the visitor's expertise in the language, as I have witnessed several times before with other speakers. Mr. Teodoso obviously knows that his status as a native speaker does not, by itself, automatically make him a "bilingual teacher," but he also knows that what we have learned together is not an invention or something that we pulled out of thin air. Now, he has no fear of saying that he speaks the language and that he knows how to write it. Mr. Teodoso's empowerment¹⁵ is part

15 The tension about "who teaches the language best" is unfortunately a problem that I have seen in Motozintla and which generally happens with learners of the language who call themselves "Mo-

of what an Indigenous linguist also seeks: not just adequate description and data collection in a moribund language but also cultural and linguistic reclamation of what had almost been lost in Motozintla.

Monetary compensation. In documentary linguistics projects whose budget includes compensation for project collaborators, this money should be spent for them and with them. Many times, researchers think that by giving the speaker a bag of bread or a box of groceries, everyone will be happy. This often happens in fieldwork, based on the advice of some outsider linguists, to avoid being seen as distributors of money. What I want to ask is, how much of the money budgeted for consultants is really ending up with them? In my experience, this can be avoided. If there is a funded project, it is possible to explain the objective of the project and then invite community members to work in a collaborative way. It is necessary to explain who can collaborate and who cannot, based on the objective of the project. In this way, the participants and the community will understand where the funds come from and what they are for. I say this because on occasion, I have been complicit in seeing, as a salaried worker, that there are stingy and greedy linguists who want to obtain information without any economic compensation. When we work with our own communities and people, by virtue of being family or acquaintance they will settle for what we give them for their time and work. The ethical goal of Indigenous linguists is to change these practices and to ensure that they receive what they deserve. As an insider and insider-outsider linguist, moreover, one understands the needs and the shortages in our communities. Many times, we ourselves have gone hungry to get to where we are, and compared to our communities, we are now in a privileged position. In many projects, one has to make explicit how much is spent on travel, equipment, supplies, and other things, aside from the amount budgeted for compensating speakers. Therefore, personally, I suggest that the money budgeted for compensating speakers should be given entirely to collaborators who actively participate in the project. This holds us accountable to total honesty with them and with ourselves. It is an ethical principle that we should all follow regardless of our situation.

cho'-Spanish bilingual teachers." According to don Teodoso and my other Mocho' teachers, these "Mocho'-Spanish bilingual teachers" know lists of vocabulary but do not actually speak the language. Personally, I have not gotten to know them well because several of them have refused to work collaboratively. The empowerment of speakers can also create tension in a dominant group for political reasons, but it is necessary to find a way to reconcile these differences, which I do not discuss here.

9. Conclusion

In this article I have shown, first, that those of us Indigenous researchers who work with our own languages, in our own communities or in other communities, are of course doing fieldwork, and second, that the field methods that are the most developed, published, and disseminated do not always take into account the ethical perspective of Indigenous linguists.

I have shown that not all the ethical principles in contemporary linguistic fieldwork are applicable for Indigenous linguists. Undoubtedly there are Indigenous linguists who are already aware of this; now, we must continue to share our experiences and lay the foundation for new field methods in linguistics. Understanding the challenges that we face as Indigenous linguists will serve not only to develop field methods that are more diverse and inclusive but will also provide guidelines so that outsider linguists may also know what their Indigenous teachers and collaborators could face when they are involved in documentary linguistics projects.

Indigenous linguists have a duty to contribute to scientific theory, but we also have the duty to strengthen our languages in all social spheres. There are many ways to be an activist linguist, and I have shown here that empowering our linguistic identity is one of the most important ways of doing so. Being an Indigenous linguist can create a social consciousness about the linguistic situation and about working collaboratively with the community in a harmonious environment. However, if we make a false step, not only could we lose credibility in our work as social scientists among our people but also, in the worst case, we could be expelled for life from our communities. This would bring a loss of linguistic identity that would contribute to instability in the community and to gradual loss of the language. Because of this, before adopting outsider methods, our first priority must be our own community's norms.

It is reasonable that universities, professors, and institutions that finance documentary linguistics projects generally dictate how one must proceed in academia. This is understandable and acceptable; one has to be a scientist and produce what one's peers produce in academia. What is unacceptable is that outsider linguists dictate how an Indigenous researcher from the community of study must proceed in their own community. Diverse field methods will not mean (at least not in linguistics) that the object of study and the results of linguistic fieldwork are put in doubt if the data speaks for itself.

What this article urges is that, as Dobrin and Berson (2011: 207) and Czaykowska-Higgins (2018) have said, we must re-humanize linguistics in order to build relationships across differences. At least in linguistic field methods, this will allow the vision of Indigenous linguists working in their own trenches, as Ameka (2018) has said, to be recognized and considered in a global discussion about field methods. In addition, this article also provides the perspective of a local Indigenous linguist who

seeks to decolonize field methods designed by foreigners and uncritically adopted by insider and insider-outsider linguists.

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Cultural glossary for the translations

Agency (*Agencia*). (See Municipality.)

Assembly. Town hall meeting.

***Cabildo*.** The municipal or local council, generally appointed to serve on New Year's day for a term of from one to three years; often referred to as the local 'authorities' (*autoridades*). It is headed by the *Presidente* (mayor). (See also Cargo system).

Cargo system. The system of local public offices and responsibilities that is universal throughout indigenous southern Mexico (*cargos públicos* in Spanish, with analogs in each indigenous language, e.g., Yalálag Zapotec *Llin la'o*; San Juan Quiahije Eastern Chatino *nten^B nka^B jnya^F*). These are responsibilities that community members—traditionally men, but increasingly women—are assigned and are obliged to accept over the courses of their lives, beginning with service as *topiles*, or community errand-runners, and leading up to service on the *cabildo* (municipal council), or on the land council; or service as *Presidente* (Mayor) or as *mayordomo* for the annual community festival.

***Castellanización/Castillianization*.** A public policy implemented by the Mexican government built around teaching Spanish (often referred to as *castellano* 'Castilian') to indigenous people in Mexico, and along with it, Iberian norms and customs, with the intention of rooting out or folklorizing indigeneity.

***Chuvaj ants*.** Tsotsil 'Crazy woman'. A woman who breaks the norm, a woman who performs activities not often found in traditional daily life, for example as a professional, as a researcher.

Community assembly (*Asemblea comunitaria*). A local assembly where members of the community make decisions. The term refers to the collective, the body politic generally, as well as to specific ‘town hall’ style gatherings which would be called by the mayor or *Presidente* for the purpose of discussing and addressing community issues and projects, and making collective decisions.

Compadre/Comadre. Literally, ‘co-father’/‘co-mother’. A relationship of support—generically called *compadrazco*—between godparents and the parents of a child, most typically established when baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, but also on other propitious occasions later in life.

Curandero/curandera. Healer.

District. (See Municipality.)

Escuelas bilingües. ‘Bilingual schools’ that form a system in southern Mexico parallel to schools not designated as ‘bilingual’ and staffed by *maestros bilingües* ‘bilingual teachers’ who are bilingual in Spanish and an indigenous language, but, often enough, not the indigenous language or variety that is spoken in the community where they teach.

Gwzun. (See *Tequio*.)

Jchi’il jbatik. Tsotsil ‘we are partners’. Those of us who belong to the same culture, speak the same language and shared territory.

Live under scrutiny. To live within the community, being under constant observation about your actions and your ways of relating within the community where you live.

Local researcher. The person who researches and studies their own language and culture, who is located and anchored to a certain time-space-territory and a specific way of life as a member of the linguistic community and also the place where they conduct their research.

Mayordomía. A role of stewardship within the cargo system in which a person, the *mayordomo*, is responsible for financing and carrying out the annual community fiesta that is celebrated on the day of the year honoring the community’s Roman Catholic patron saint.

Mestizo/Mestiza. In Mexico, a person who identifies as being of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry but also usually as linguistically Hispanophone. It is sometimes contrasted with a fully Indigenous identity, which may also go along with loyalty to an Indigenous language. The notion of *Mestizaje* ('mixing', taken as the basis of a proper noun) is often made a focus or emblem of Mexican national ideology, but such a focus is often contested when it is seen as leading to the overlooking or erasure of cultural and linguistic Indigeneity in Mexican society.

Municipality. (Municipio). The basic local political unit in southern Mexico, most similar to Counties in the United States, but varying widely in size and population. Each southern Mexican state is divided into Districts (*Distritos*); each district into Municipalities; and—often—each Municipality may contain multiple settlements or hamlets, called Agencies (*Agencias*) if they have a local governing council (*Cabildo*), or Settlements (*Rancherías*) if they are smaller concentrations, typically belonging to an extended family. Informally, Municipalities are often referred to as *pueblos*, which we have variously translated as *villages* or *towns* following the authors' preferences, acknowledging, at the same time, that each English term might carry its own, not necessarily desired, connotations.

Paisanos. Fellow citizens, countrymen/country women.

Presidente. The head of the *Cabildo* and equivalent to the mayor or chief executive of the *Municipio* or *Agencia*. It is a one to three year community service office within the cargo system.

Pueblo. (See **Municipality.**)

Reciprocity practices. To give and take. To generate a mutual exchange, a two-way exchange, and not just from one of the parties.

Sk'an jtsatsubtastik ko'ontontik. Tsotsil 'Let us strengthen our hearts'. Acquire strength not to underestimate the work and actions a person does.

Settlement. (Ranchería). (See **Municipality.**)

Sorcery, witchcraft. Spanish *hechicería* 'sorcery, casting of spells' from *hechizo* 'spell'. These are not necessarily malevolent, as the terms in English may sometimes imply.

Tequio. From Classical Nahuatl *tequitl* 'tribute; work'. A general community duty of all citizens, e.g., service on a crew to fix potholes in community roads. *Tequio* stands apart from the cargo system, which involves service in community offices and roles.

It is translated into Yalálag Zapotec as *gwzun*, meaning “mutual aid or cooperation and voluntary service given from one member of a community to another. However, it is not a one-sided interaction but carries an understanding of reciprocity...”¹

Ulo’. Tsotsil ‘visitor’. A person who is no longer regularly in the family or community or simply does not belong to that family or place.

Vula’al. Tsotsil ‘to visit’. To arrive at someone’s house to talk or discuss something; to visit with them.

We-ness/Nosotrificación. From Spanish *nosotros* ‘we, us’. To research one’s own community, one’s own language and culture. The ‘we’ is the joint integration between the local researcher and the collaborating speakers of the study that compose a linguistic community.

Wen txhen. Yalálag Zapotec. A sign of reciprocity and social companionship based on a person or family’s previous participation in hosting an event such as a community festival. (See also *Mayordomía*).

1 Translation by May Helena Plumb from Lizama Quijano 2006: 210 (see bibliographic references in the article by Alonso Ortiz).

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Emiliana Cruz was born in Cieneguilla, San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca, Mexico, and is a native speaker of San Juan Quiahije Eastern Chatino. She is a linguistic anthropologist, earning her PhD in Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin in 2011, and now is Professor-Researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City. Her research trajectories are diverse and interdisciplinary, emphasizing education, linguistic rights, territory, documentation and linguistic revitalization. She has received the Distinguished Community Engagement Award from the University of Massachusetts for her Chatino Language Documentation Project. Cruz's extensive experience with community collaboration is the hallmark of her work. She is a founding member of the collective, Dialogues among Indigenous Academics. Her more recent publications include *Evitemos que nuestro futuro se nos escape de las manos: tomás cruz lorenzo y la nueva generación chatina*, a product of collaboration among Chatinos.

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