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The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language: The Persistence of Memory, Discrimination,
and Social Hierarchies of Power

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Elizabeth Perry

Committee in charge:

Professor Robert R. Alvarez, Chair
Professor Nancy G. Postero
Professor Wayne A. Cornelius

2009

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

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PREFACE

As a participant in the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies' Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP) during the 2007-2008 academic year, I conducted qualitative and quantitative research in San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca and in San Diego County, California as part of a bi-national collaborative research team. My focus within this larger project was to investigate the relationship between ethnicity, civic participation, and migration. Drawing on the team's collective survey data and in-depth interviews, I co-authored a chapter for a publication titled "Migration from the Mexican Mixteca: A Transnational Community in Oaxaca and California" (Cornelius et al., 2009). This research experience and preliminary work informed the development and foundation for this independent research.

From late July through August 2008, I conducted five weeks of field research in Oaxaca, Mexico. I selected two neighboring towns in the Mixteca Baja Region, San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, located ten kilometers apart, in which to conduct interviews and engage in participant observation. I selected these towns because of their similar socio-demographic profiles,¹ my own prior fieldwork and that of other scholars, and the towns' notably different levels of indigenous language use. I hoped their similar profiles yet disparate rates of indigenous language use would facilitate comparative analysis and illuminate the factors of influence in the declining use of the Mixtec language.

Interviews were semi-structured and guiding questions were designed to facilitate personal narratives regarding memories, experiences, and observations of the use and devaluation of the Mixtec language in various sites, including the local community,

¹ See Chapter 1 for overview of research sites.

surrounding urban areas, and migrant destinations. Furthermore, interviews were also geared toward addressing the knowledge and perceptions about current grassroots, state, national, and binational efforts to restore indigenous language use in Mixtec communities in Oaxaca and in Mixtec migrant communities. While many respondents lacked familiarity with the agendas and programs established by these various programs, their perspectives on the prospect of such projects was nonetheless insightful.

Formal interviews were conducted with both female and males over the age of eighteen. However, my research focus required that interviews be conducted with respondents whose memories and life experiences address the transition from *indigenismo* (1920-1980) to neoliberal multiculturalism (1980-present) and thus, the average age of an in-depth interviewee was 62 (see Appendix 1). All interviews were conducted in Spanish and were therefore limited to bilingual speakers (Mixtec/Spanish or Spanish/English) and monolingual speakers of Spanish, with the exception of one interview conducted partially in Mixteco with the assistance of a non-professional translator. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling, originating with contacts established during previous research. In addition to formal and informal interviews, I engaged in participant observation during various community activities, such as religious ceremonies and cultural events. For example, I attended the Patron Saint celebration in Ixpantepec Nieves on August 5th, 2008 and family-sponsored events, such as a wedding, in San Miguel Tlacotepec.

Upon my return to the United States in September of 2008, I conducted informal interviews with Mixtec migrants currently residing in California. In addition, I drew on in-depth interviews conducted during the MMFRP field study of 2008 with Tlacotepenses residing in the United States to analyze migrant perspectives on and efforts

to preserve the use of the Mixtec language. Thousands of Mixtec migrants have created thriving “satellite,” or “daughter communities,” in areas such as northern San Diego County, which has been a major site of Mixtec activism and bi-national organization (Velasco Ortiz, 2003; Stephen, 2007; Cornelius et. al (eds.), 2009). The interests of many Mixtec activists and organizations include replicating, cultivating, and revitalizing cultural and linguistic practices on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

In addition, in the fall of 2008 I began Mixtec language instruction at San Diego State University and volunteered at the Bayside Community Center in Linda Vista, San Diego, which hosts a Mixtec cultural exchange program. While I did not conduct formal interviews during these activities, they have nonetheless been instructive and have connected me to a greater range of experiences and perspectives on the use of the Mixtec language and language revitalization efforts among Mixtec migrants. I also attended cultural events in San Diego County, such as Tlacotepec’s annual Patron Saint festival on September 29th, which brought me closer to the experiences of Mixtec migrants residing in the United States.

The role of the Mexican state was documented primarily through analysis of state policies and programs. A colleague from Oaxaca City, Lic. Julio Ricardo Méndez García, who assisted me during the first week of field research, attended a gathering of the Special Commission for the Reform of the State of Oaxaca regarding the “Legislation Proposal to Create an Indigenous Languages Institute in the State of Oaxaca,” held in Oaxaca City on August 8th, 2008. Documents he collected and research on the federal and state position on indigenous language use, as represented in their policies and programmatic agendas, have informed my analysis on the state’s multicultural stance on

the inclusion of and rights granted to indigenous peoples within a neoliberal multicultural framework. Oaxacan newspaper coverage also provided insights into projected and current engagements of the state in various matters relating to Oaxaca's indigenous peoples.

In conducting this research, I took heed of the suggestions and examples set by various progressive and influential scholars, such as my committee members, Robert Alvarez, Nancy Postero, and Wayne Cornelius, as well as Nicolas de Genova and Charles Hale, who make considerable effort to acknowledge their own positions and biases as researchers and who have meticulously tried to avoid many of the extractive and abusive ethnographic practices.

Research regarding memory of discrimination required me to ask interviewees about sensitive experiences and emotionally charged topics such as race and ethnicity. I attempted to approach these topics with tremendous care and appreciate the time, energy, and personal contribution made by each participant. Though almost all interview respondents expressed consent for their proper names to be used within this written report, I have changed the names of participants in accordance with the policies of the University of California, San Diego's Human Research Protections Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research could not have been completed without the support and participation of numerous people, who I thank wholeheartedly for their assistance, time, and contributions. To begin, I am grateful for the opportunity to conduct this study, which was made possible by the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies, the Latino Studies Research Initiative, and the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies' Mexican Migration Field Research Program at the University of California, San Diego. Though it must be noted, that without the support of Municipal Authorities in San Miguel Tlacotepec, Ixpantepec Nieves, and San Martin Sabinillo and the gracious participation of interview respondents from these towns, this research would truly not have been possible. I am grateful for their warm welcome, interest in this project, and willing participation. I hope in some way this study is of use to them, and that I have been able to satisfactorily represent and incorporate their experiences and perspectives.

As a Master of Arts student in Latin America Studies, I counted on the guidance of numerous professors in designing and coordinating this research project. Though not an exhaustive list, I would like to acknowledge Professors David Fitzgerald, David Gutierrez, Misha Kokotovic, Jorge Hernández-Díaz, and Tomás Jimenez, who were all gracious with their time and supportive in various stages of this project's development. In addition, I would like to thank Angelina Lopez Trujillo, my Mixtec language instructor at San Diego State University, for the invaluable experience of being in her class. She has truly been a pleasure to learn from and work with.

In particular, I would like thank and acknowledge Professors Robert R. Alvarez, Nancy G. Postero, and Wayne A. Cornelius for serving on my committee, for their generosity, the support they have provided in accomplishing this research, and for their patience and time in the production phase. All three have been extraordinary mentors and have my highest admiration for their dedication to students and social justice issues and for applying their incredible talent to making the world a better place. I hope someday to inspire, support, and challenge students to grow as they have done for me.

In addition, I am grateful for the support of my colleagues at the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies who tried to remind me not to take my self too seriously, while at the same time providing me with encouragement and support in reaching my academic goals. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my colleague Meghan Edwards for taking the time to peer review my work and provide helpful feedback during the production phase, as well as for her emotional support, comic relief, and patience lessons in pronouncing French names. I wish them all the best of luck in their future endeavors.

A special thanks goes to Julio Ricardo Mendez Garcia for his assistance in the first week of field research in Oaxaca, and his ongoing support during the production of this research project. As well, I would like to thank Arcángel, Isabel, Yesi, Fani, Amilcar, and Jaciel who made me feel right at home in San Miguel Tlacotepec during my field research in August of 2008. Of course, my incredibly supportive family and partner, James, have been integral throughout this process and my gratitude and love for them is tremendous. Thank you.

This thesis, in full, is being prepared for publication in the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Working Paper Series as “The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language among Oaxacan Migrants and Stay-at-Homes: The Persistence of Memory, Discrimination, and Social Hierarchies of Power.” The thesis author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language: The Persistence of Memory, Discrimination,
and Social Hierarchies of Power

by

Elizabeth Perry

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Robert R. Alvarez, Chair

Drawing on binational ethnographic research regarding Mixtec “social memory” of language discrimination and Mixtec perspectives on recent efforts to preserve and revitalize indigenous language use, this study suggests that language discrimination, in both its overt and increasingly concealed forms, has significantly curtailed the use of the Mixtec language. For centuries, the Spanish and Spanish-speaking *mestizo* (mixed blood) elite oppressed the Mixtec People and their linguistic and cultural practices. These oppressive practices were experienced in Mixtec communities and surrounding urban areas, as well as in domestic and international migrant destinations. In the 1980s, a significant transition occurred in Mexico from *indigenismo* to a neoliberal multicultural framework. In this transition, discriminatory practices have become increasingly “symbolic,” referring to their assertion in everyday social practices rather than through overt force, obscuring both the perpetrator and the illegitimacy of resulting social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1991). Through the use of symbolic violence, the dominant class

cleans its hands and history of discriminatory practices based on race, ethnic, or cultural “difference,” while at the same time justifying increasing inequality on the outcome of “unbiased” market forces. Continuing to experience and perceive discrimination, many Mixtec language speakers are employing silence as a social strategy, in which Mixtecs forgo using, teaching, and learning the Mixtec language in order to create distance between themselves (or children) and stigmatized practices, such as indigenous language use. The use of silence as a strategy does not signify that Mixtecs devalue or find no meaning in the Mixtec language. Rather, it suggests that silence is perceived to be an available and increasingly attractive social strategy in contemporary contexts.

Chapter 1

Language Discrimination, Social Hierarchies of Power & The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language

Regarding all of this, it's true that Mixtec speakers were devalued. I went to school in Huajuapán and the older people; I heard them say "the indios from Nieves." This, perhaps, was a bit denigrating. I felt I had to prove that I knew how to speak Spanish - that I don't speak Mixteco. There are times that not even our Spanish is good; nonetheless, we don't want to speak Mixteco. Perhaps because it was little denigrating, perhaps this was a little bit humiliating, that they said we spoke Mixteco. That's it, yes, that was the mentality. – Doña Adriana Romero, age 54, Ixpantepec Nieves

They think [the youth] that they don't need it. For this reason, Mixteco is under appreciated. Because they think, why do we need Mixteco? What they are trying to do is speak Spanish and to leave for over there [the US] and there they are learning to speak English. They don't speak it well but little bit-by-bit they start to understand it. – Don Alejandro Mendez, age 85, Ixpantepec Nieves

According to Harrison (2007), a linguist who has traveled the world documenting the disappearance of less-commonly spoken languages, "at the current pace, we [the world] stand to lose a language about every 10 days for the foreseeable future" (p. 5). As Harrison suggests, the disappearance of non-majority languages² is not an isolated occurrence but rather an increasing global phenomenon. Such is the case in Oaxaca, Mexico, where the State's sixteen indigenous languages, each with numerous internal

² Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), note the "somewhat problematic and dichotomizing terms 'minority' and 'majority', not to draw attention to numerical size of particular groups, but to refer to situational differences in power, rights and privileges" (p. 4). The term is applied here with the same understanding. Dominant and non-dominant are other ways of expressing this relationship and are the principal terms in this study to refer to Spanish and Mixteco, respectively.

variations, face uncertain futures. According to Rivas (2009, February 17), just days before the International Maternal Languages Day³ in 2009, two of Oaxaca's indigenous languages faced imminent extinction. Furthermore, Rivas states that despite reports from nineteen municipalities in Oaxaca that the use of indigenous languages increased by ten percent or more between 2000 and 2005, 390 municipalities⁴ reported experiencing a decline. What factors are driving the declining use of the Mixtec language?

Drawing on binational ethnographic research regarding Mixtec "social memory" of language discrimination⁵ and Mixtec perspectives on recent efforts to preserve and revitalize indigenous language use, this study suggests that language discrimination, in both its overt and increasingly concealed forms, has significantly curtailed the use of the Mixtec language. For centuries, the Spanish and Spanish-speaking *Mestizo* (mixed blood) elite oppressed the Mixtec People and their linguistic and cultural practices. These oppressive practices were experienced in Mixtec rural communities and surrounding urban areas, as well as in domestic and international migrant destinations.

³ The International Maternal Languages is a celebration initiated by UNESCO in 1999, which is celebrated each year on February 21st.

⁴ There are 570 municipalities in total in Oaxaca. Therefore, 390 municipalities represent roughly 68% of total municipalities.

⁵ This research expands the narrowest definitions of both violence and racism. Violence is used in this study to signify any act of aggression, whether physical or exerted through the misuse of power, with the intention of causing pain, unless otherwise indicated by use of a modifier. Violence, therefore, can refer to physical, verbal, or non-verbal actions that cause physical, emotional, or psychological pain. Acts of discrimination are therein considered in this study to be acts of violence, and the two terms are at times used interchangeably. Acts of violence can be self-inflicted, interpersonal (between two or more individuals), or organizational/systematic (UNESCO.org). Furthermore, racism, is the belief that one race is inherently superior. However, racism can also refer to acts of racial discrimination based on this belief. Though racism has widely been discredited and disavowed in both interpersonal interactions and relationships between different groups, discrimination based on race and ethnicity is central to this study. Because of the evolution from discrimination based on race to ethnicity and the challenge in disentangling the two, this study employs the term racism to preserve its use by other scholars or when referring more directly to discrimination based more specifically on race.

In the 1980s, a significant transition occurred in Mexico from *indigenismo* to a neoliberal multicultural framework. This study argues that in this transition, discriminatory practices have become increasingly “symbolic,” referring to their assertion in everyday social practices rather than through overt force (Bourdieu, 1991). These indirect manifestations of violence obscure both the perpetrator and the illegitimacy of resulting social hierarchies. Furthermore, they influence the decisions Mixtecs make, and perceptions they hold, regarding the use of the Mixtec language.

Moreover, the 1980s brought escalating rates of out migration of Mixtecs, which has increased Mixtecs’ exposure to Mexican cities as well as international migrant destinations. In these sites long-held social hierarchies of power, in which indigenous peoples and languages are positioned as inferior, or “non-dominant,” in comparison to the “dominant” Spanish-speaking group, are reinforced. In addition, new hierarchies are created, in which the Mixtec language is positioned as inferior not only to Spanish, but also to English, as in the case of Mixtec migrants residing in the United States. Language in these sites maintains its function as a mechanism through which relationships of power are asserted and maintained.

In illuminating the factors driving the declining use of the Mixtec language, this study calls critical attention to the history and persistence of discrimination against non-dominant language speakers in Mexico and resulting inequalities. According to Hale (2004), “far from eliminating racial inequity, as the rhetoric of multiculturalism seems to promise, these forms reconstitute racial hierarchies in new forms” (p. 16). Using language as a lens to examine both historical and contemporary experiences of discrimination and the products of discriminatory practices, this study aims to provide

tangible examples that call to attention the ways in which both old and new social hierarchies of power are created and maintained, influencing use of the Mixtec language well into to the neoliberal multicultural era.

Furthermore, this study illustrates how Mixtecs are employing multiple strategies for increasing social opportunities and advancing their rights in contemporary contexts. The local and bi-national efforts of Mixtec activists to preserve and revitalize cultural and linguistic practices, both as a political tool and cultural body of knowledge, have been widely noted (Velasco Ortiz, 2005; Fox & Rivera Salgado, 2004; Stephen, 2007; Perry, E., Doshi, N., Hicken, J., & Méndez García, J. R., 2009). While this study calls attention to these assertions, it principally looks at the use of silence as a social strategy, in which Mixtecs forgo using, teaching, and learning the Mixtec language in order to create distance between themselves (or their children) and stigmatized practices, such as indigenous language use.

Using silence as a strategy demonstrates Mixtec agency, as Mixtecs work within and against the contemporary social framework to advance their opportunities and rights in contemporary contexts. However, using silence as a strategy also signals that Mixtecs continue to perceive and experience discrimination and its byproducts despite recent decrees, programs, and policies to revalorize, preserve, and revitalize the use of indigenous languages. Before elaborating upon these various components of the research, I will provide a brief introduction to the sites in which the fieldwork was conducted.

San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves

San Miguel Tlacotepec is a small town located approximately twelve miles from the district capital of Santiago Juchitán in the Lower Mixteca region of Oaxaca,

Mexico. The Mixteca refers to a socio-cultural region that expands beyond the borders of Oaxaca into the states of Puebla to the north and Guerrero to the west. The Mixteca is also the name of one of Oaxaca's eight socio-cultural regions, which is divided into three subsections, the Upper, Lower, and Costal Mixteca (see Map 1.1). The present study focuses on the Lower Mixteca of Oaxaca, which consists of four districts: Huajuapán de León, Teposcolula, Silacayoapan, and Juxtlahuaca (Velasco Ortiz, 2005). Its designation as the Lower Mixteca refers to its lower elevation in comparison to the Upper Mixteca, though both sections are characterized by their mountainous landscapes.

Map 1.1: Oaxaca, Mexico and the Oaxaca's seven socio-cultural regions



Source: Original modifications made from map of Mexico from Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. (2007) and Map of Oaxaca's Regions from the Encyclopedia of Mexican Municipalities (2005), National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development, Oaxaca State Government.

In 2005, Mexico's National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO)) counted 1,696 residents in the town of San Miguel Tlacotepec and a total municipal population of 3,307. The Municipality is made of up the *cabecera* (municipal seat), also called San Miguel Tlacotepec, and five *agencias*, or dependencies, including

San Martin Sabinillo, Guadalupe Nucate, Santiago Nuxaño, Yosandalla, and Xinitioco.⁶ According to survey data collected during the Mexican Migration Field Research Program in 2007, 33 percent of the *cabecera*'s economically active population work in agricultural activities, 31 percent are employed in the service sector (such as electricians and plumbers), 20 percent are small-business owners (which includes very small scale artisan producers), 10 percent work in construction, and 6 percent in other sectors (Cota-Cabrera et al., 2009).

Driving from San Miguel Tlacotepec to Ixpantepec Nieves takes about twenty minutes, as the road twists and turns around the hillsides that separate the two towns. As the crow flies, however, the towns are only separated by less than six miles, a distance that used to be walked by those enjoying the neighboring town's festivities or when traveling to exchange goods. Ixpantepec Nieves is located approximately three miles off of the roadway that connects Huajuapán de León to Santiago Juxtlahuaca, which directly passes by San Miguel Tlacotepec (see Map 1.2). Despite their proximity, Ixpantepec Nieves belongs to Juxtlahuaca's neighboring district, Silacayoapan. The district capital, which goes by the same name, is located approximately ten miles west of Ixpantepec Nieves. Nonetheless, many Ixpantepenses travel into Juxtlahuaca on Fridays to

⁶ Two formal and two informal interviews were conducted in San Martin Sabinillo, an *agencia* of San Miguel Tlacotepec, geographically located between San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves. San Martin Sabinillo differs from Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec in size, status as an agency rather than *cabecera*, and also in that its kindergarten and primary school are part of the Indigenous, rather than the "formal," school system. In Oaxaca two systems of education, both run by the Secretaría de Educación Pública, function simultaneously. According to Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses, which school falls into which system is determined by a socio-economic analysis conducted by the state government, in which the most marginalized communities received bilingual teachers. The two formal interviews conducted in this town were with teachers living in Sabinillo who work in the bilingual education system. These interviews were conducted primarily to understand the role, or potential role of schools, in preserving and revitalizing Indigenous language use.

participate in the *tiangis*, a weekly open-air market, in order to purchase food products and other basic goods.

Map 1.2: San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves



Source: Original Modifications from Maps-of-Mexico.com

Ixpantepec Nieves serves as the *cabecera* of the Municipality of Ixpantepec Nieves, in which there are two *agencias*, Santa María Natividad and Santa María Asunción, three *barríos* (smaller than an *agencia*), Barrio Guadalupe, Santa Cruz, and San Juan, and an additional small locality, Llano Gordo (Velasco, 2004). In 2005, the municipal population of Ixpantepec Nieves was recorded at 1,696, of which 701 residents reported living in the *cabecera* (CONAPO, 2005). Therefore, by 2005, the population of the town of Ixpantepec Nieves was just under half that of San Miguel Tlacotepec.⁷

⁷ According to the Information System regarding Oaxacan Migration (SIMO), between 1995-2004, 712 migrants left San Miguel Tlacotepec, 21 percent of the recorded population in 2005. In Ixpantepec Nieves, 45 percent of the population recorded in 2005 had emigrated from the town during the same time frame.

Both Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec are governed by *Usos y Costumbres*, a legally recognized alternative to the State-sponsored political party system based on community practices of governance and social organization. Of the 570 municipalities in Oaxaca, 418 are governed by the *Usos y Costumbres* system. The recognition of this system is unique to Oaxaca and in essence, is unique to each community in which it is observed. According to Hernandez Díaz (2007), “it would be erroneous to represent these various expressions as a homogenous system, given that they are characterized precisely by their heterogeneity and dynamism” (p. 41).⁸ In practice, this equates to 418 unique systems of governance and social organization that have and continue to undergo modification under different administrations and as community practices evolve.

Like many towns in this region, Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec are classified as highly marginalized in socio-economic terms (Sistema de Información sobre Migración Oaxaqueña (SIMO)). This marginality results in fewer services and opportunities, such as education, for local residents. For example, in San Miguel Tlacotepec, the average number of school years completed, 6.7, falls below the national average of 8.1, and the rate of primary school completion trails even further behind (Sawyer, A., Keyes, D., Velásquez, C., Lima, G., & Bautista, M. M., 2009). Though services have increased over the last century, particularly after 1948 when a roadway was constructed from Huajuapán de León to Santiago Juxtlahuaca allowing for a greater

Migration, therefore, may skew this comparison, in that higher overall outbound migration in Ixpantepec Nieves over this five year period prior to the 2005 National Population Count, may make the population seem larger than are the towns' relative sizes.

⁸ Translation taken from Perry, E. et al. (2009).

influx of goods and services, both Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec remain well below the national and even state averages in many indices of socio-economic and human development.⁹

The establishment and expansion of local schools is of particular significance for declining use of the Mixtec language in both San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves. Though official dates of inauguration for local schools were not obtained, memories of Mixtecs date the arrival of the first state-issued teachers to the period between years of 1920-1940.¹⁰ According to Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, during these initial years, only one teacher was assigned to each town and was responsible for teaching a handful of lower-level grades. Since then, systems of education have expanded in both towns. However, as students reach higher-grade levels many continue to leave their home towns to attend high school in Santiago Juxtlahuaca or Huajuapán de León and universities in larger cities or leave school and migrate in search of employment.

Since the late nineteenth century, indigenous peoples in Mexico have been counted in the National Census according to their use of an indigenous language.¹¹ In San Miguel Tlacotepec, the use of the Mixtec language has declined rapidly starting around the mid-20th century. According to the census data, in 2005, 545 residents in the Municipality of San Miguel Tlacotepec reported speaking an indigenous language (16.48% of overall population). In the Municipality of Ixpantepec Nieves, the use of

⁹ See CONAPO-INI, *Indicadores socioeconómicos de los pueblos Indígenas de México*, 2002. INEGI (2005), *Mujeres y hombres en Oaxaca*. CONAPO, *Indice de marginación por Municipio*. CDI, *Indicadores Sociodemográficos de la Población Indígena 2000-2005*.

¹⁰ As illustrated in greater detail further in this study, this time frame corresponds to the nationalist campaign that began after the Mexican Revolution. This campaign included the expansion of the state-led education system into many rural areas, such as the Mixteca.

¹¹ There are two exceptions to this case, one in 1921, just following the Revolution, and the other in the 2000 census. The 2000 census include the option for self definition, language use, or both.

indigenous languages remains much higher, with over 959 people (69.95% of overall population) who reported use of an indigenous language in 2005 (Instituto Nacional Para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal (INAFED)).¹² These numbers reflect overall indigenous language use at the municipal level, and thus, it can be assumed that within the *cabecera* itself use of the Mixtec language falls below these averages.¹³

In addition, both Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec have a long history of out-migration. From the early to mid-twentieth century, migration from these two towns was characterized as seasonal and primarily domestic. In 1942, with the initiation of the Bracero Program, a temporary labor-contracting program between the United States and Mexico, some of the first Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses traveled to the United States to work in agriculture for short periods of time. Often Bracero workers would renew their contract, but in order to do so they were required to return to Mexico. The Program lasted until 1964, by which time many Mixtec migrants had become familiar with traveling to and working in the United States. When the Bracero Program ended, Mixtecs, drawn to higher wages in the United States and pushed by the lack of local employment opportunities and a series of economic crises in Mexico, continued to

¹² Though I had hoped that comparative analysis would help to illuminate the factors driving declining use of the Mixtec language due to the significant variance in rates of use between San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, no clear factor emerged. However, I speculate that the location of Ixpantepec Nieves three miles off the roadway connecting Huajuapán de León and JuxtlaHuaca, limited, for a longer period of time, the social exchange between Ixpantepenses and vendors and other passersby. Furthermore, as suggested in a handful of interviews, it is possible that internal social hierarchies were less poignant in Ixpantepec Nieves than in San Miguel Tlacotepec. Ixpantepenses less frequently talked about their experiences of discrimination within their own community, though they were still relevant, rather, perceptions of “difference” or “otherness” Ixpantepenses more often encountered upon leaving the community. More in-depth historical analysis of local hierarchies of power would be helpful for supporting or negating this speculation.

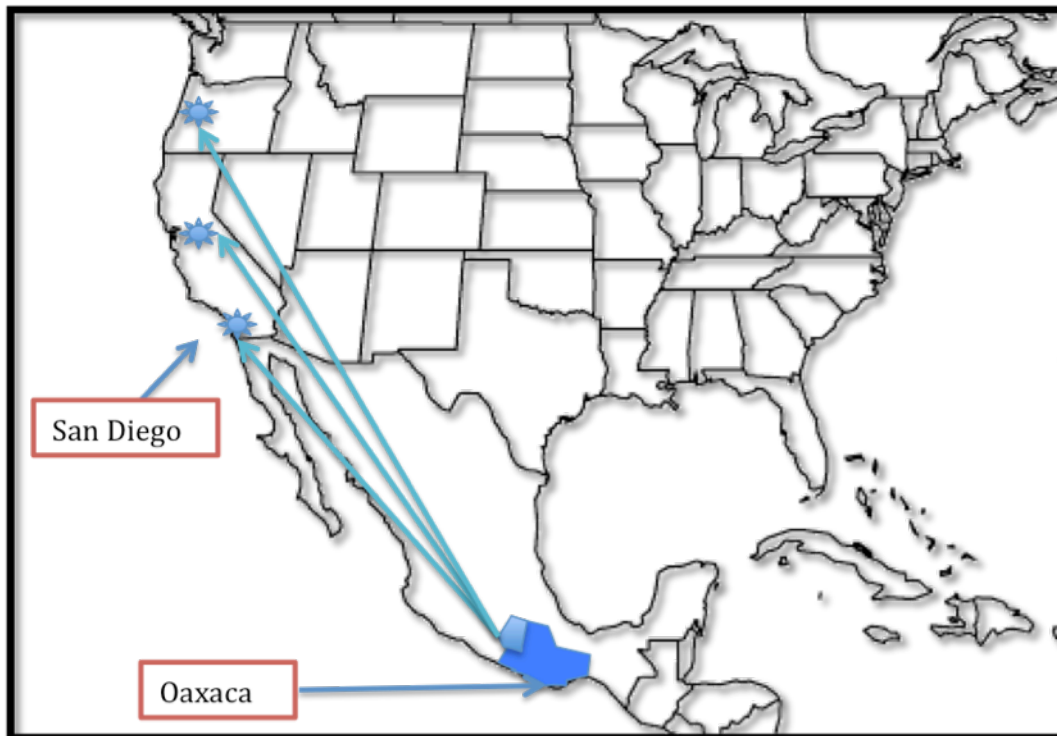
¹³ As illustrated in Chapter Three, the MMFRP research team found that 11% of Tlacotepenses speak some Mixteco, this number could be a more accurate reflection of language use within the community itself, rather than use at the municipal level.

migrate temporarily to the United States. Since the 1970s, migration from the Mixteca region to the United States has increased and circular migration has declined. Since the early 1990s, and intensifying after September 11th, 2001, U.S. border enforcement strategies have heightened the danger and cost of clandestine border crossing, creating a “bottling up effect,” which has contributed to the formation of “well-established social networks,” in areas such as San Diego County, California (Appleby, C. J., Moreno, N., & Smith, A, 2009).

San Diego County, California

According to Velasco Ortiz (2005), in 2000 there were approximately 200,000 indigenous Oaxacans in California and Baja California, Mexico, many of whom came from the districts of Huajuapán de León, Silacayoapan, and Juxtlahuaca. High rates of migration from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca have led to the formation of satellite communities in northern Mexico and in the United States. In these regions, Mixtec migrants have created mature transnational social networks, connecting sending and receiving communities not only by increasing communications technology but also through the organization and mobilization of Mixtecs across community, state, and national boundaries. In addition to San Diego County, clusters of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepense migrants have settled in more northern regions of California, such as Fresno and Moreno, and increasingly near the Willamette Valley in Oregon (See Map 1.3).

Map 1.3: Primary Tlacoatepecense and Ixpantepense Migrant Destinations in the United States



Source: Original modification from <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/naoutl.gif>

Discrimination and the devalued status of indigenous peoples and linguistic practices shape migration and U.S. settlement experiences (Kearney, 2000; Stephen, 2007; Lopez & Runsten, 2003). As described by Mixtecs, overt and “symbolic” experiences of discrimination have been encountered both within and outside of their native communities, including in the United States. However, due to increasing migration over the past quarter century, many Mixtecs have experienced a diversification of social contexts in which their language is stigmatized and used against them as a tool of oppression. It is therefore, in recent years, that interaction in social contexts outside of the community of origin is playing a larger role in shaping perspectives and behaviors relating to indigenous language use.

Discrimination Against Mixtec Language Speakers

In Oaxaca, the second most commonly spoken indigenous language is Mixteco, falling just behind speakers of Zapotec, with 242,049 speakers ages five and older counted in the 2005 National Population Count (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía (INEGI)).¹⁴ According to INEGI, between 2000 and 2005, the percentage of the population in Oaxaca that speaks an indigenous language dropped by 1.9 per cent. While out-migration accounts for part of this decline, this study finds that many Mixtecs are choosing to forgo use of the Mixtec language. This study finds that discrimination against Mixtec language speakers has been, and continues to be, a fundamental factor in the declining use of the Mixtec language (see Appendix 1).¹⁵ The following sections will introduce the principal themes advanced in this study and present a schematic outline for subsequent chapters.

For centuries, oppression of indigenous peoples and practices in Mexico, both under colonial rule and in the post-Independence period, was justified first by religious and later by racial doctrines, which defended the inferior position of indigenous peoples and “excused” their mistreatment. “Social memory,” memory created and sustained through social processes, underlies the historical narratives of Mixtecs and reflects how discrimination has informed the decisions that Mixtecs have made regarding how they represent themselves linguistically both within and outside of their native communities.

¹⁴ According to Mexico’s National Census (2000, INEGI) there were 444,479 Mixtec Speakers in Mexico. This is due both to the fact that the Mixteca, as a cultural and geographic region spans into the states of Guerrero and Puebla. In addition this is a reflection of massive emigration from the Oaxacan Mixteca to other states in Mexico over the past century.

¹⁵ This research also draws on survey data and interviews conducted during the Mexican Migration Field Research Program in 2007-2008. A total of 821 standardized surveys and 225 unstructured-life history interviews were conducted in that study.

Such discriminatory practices have been manifested both overtly, through physical or verbal force, as well as indirectly, such as through non-verbal cues and institutional exclusion. As evidenced by Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, discrimination has been encountered in a variety of social contexts and sites, such as in the local community, in surrounding urban areas, and in migrant destinations in the United States.

Through the recurrence of discriminatory practices, hierarchies of power are incorporated into the “habitus,” a term employed by Bourdieu (1991) to refer to a learned set of dispositions that reflect the social conditions in which they are created. These dispositions, according to Bourdieu, become imprinted on the body and in language, what Bourdieu calls the “corporeal hexis.” It is through these corporeal manifestations that each social interaction can serve as a platform for the reinforcement of existing social hierarchies. Thus, social memory serves as both a repository of these experiences, as they are created and sustained through social exchange, and a means by which beliefs and perceptions are transmitted. Furthermore, Mixtec social memory of language discrimination makes clear the consequences of these discriminatory practices, namely social, economic, and political exclusion that leads to inequality and the creation of enduring social hierarchies of power paralleling ethnic or racial categorizations.

This research argues that through the implementation and intensification of a neoliberal multicultural agenda in Mexico, practices of “symbolic violence” -- an “invisible” or “silent” violence that manifests in social practices and institutions, sustaining and “normalizing” social hierarchies without easily observable force -- have become more entrenched and exacerbate the curtailment of indigenous language use (Bourdieu, 1991). Through the use of symbolic violence, the dominant class washes its

hands of discriminatory practices based on race, ethnic, or cultural “difference,” while at the same time justifying increasing inequality on the outcome of “unbiased” market forces. While many Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses noted a decline in overt discrimination in recent years, the manifestation of symbolic violence is evident in the contemporary views of Mixtecs on the use of the Mixtec language. Despite increasing formal recognition of rights associated with indigenous language use, Mixtecs continue to associate inferior social status and limited economic opportunities associated with indigenous language use, in comparison to Spanish and increasingly English, in the case of Mixtec migrants living in the United States.

Theoretically, neoliberalism is a set of economic principles that hold that an unfettered and deregulated market with little government intervention best advances social welfare (Harvey, 2005). Policies associated with neoliberalism include the abolition of tariffs and other barriers to trade, the elimination of market subsidies, privatization, the decentralization of government, reduced government-sponsored social welfare policies and programs, and the individualization of responsibility for socio-economic well-being. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is a socio-political ideology that encourages the recognition and celebration of diversity as a means of promoting social cohesion. Across Latin America, these two paradigms developed in tandem, beginning in the early 1980s; the implementation of sweeping economic reforms with tremendous socio-economic implications and formal recognition (at times with associated rights) of the citizenry’s pluriethnic composition. It is the syncretistic application of these frameworks, what Postero (2007) and Hale (2006) call “neoliberal multiculturalism,” that shape the contemporary contexts in which language use is declining.

Hale (2002) warns that state-led multiculturalism actually acts as a “menace” to the promotion equal rights for indigenous peoples. Rather than ameliorating previously maintained hierarchies of power, he argues, the embrace of state-led multiculturalism serves “proponents of the neoliberal doctrine ... as a means to resolve their own problems and advance their own political agendas” (p. 487). While indigenous rights movements have gained increasing influence and made notable gains in promoting particular rights, the state continues to limit the range of possibilities. Postero and Zamosc (2004) argue that although in some cases indigenous activists play a central role in determining the political agenda regarding indigenous rights, in others “their role is subordinated to that of other sectors, or subsumed within a hegemonic project which helps the dominant sector accomplish what Gramsci called *aggiornamento* – ‘updating’ its political system to appear modern and liberal, while gaining political support for its policies” (p. 8). Speed (2005) finds this scenario is relevant to Mexico, in which “there is a clear government reticence to institute anything more than the most limited reforms” (p. 39).

In Mexico, the implementation of a neoliberal multicultural framework has not resulted in improved socio-economic opportunities for Mexico’s indigenous peoples nor has it equated to marked improvements in reducing inequality. In fact, over the ten years (1994-2004) designated by the United Nations as the International Decade of the World’s indigenous peoples, Hall and Patrinos (2004) find that among indigenous peoples of Latin America there were few improvements in income and poverty reduction. indigenous peoples still had a higher probability of being poor, continued to have considerably fewer years of schools, and lower earnings than non-indigenous people with the same level of education. Moreover, they report that indigenous earnings in Mexico

fell from one-third compared to that of non-indigenous people in 1989 to one-quarter by 2002. These social realities perpetuate the association of indigeneity with inferior opportunity and provide little incentive for indigenous language speakers to adhere to their maternal language, as these languages serve as stigmatized markers of belonging. Mixtecs demonstrate that these contemporary realities influence their use of, and perceptions of indigenous language use. Thus, in spite of increasing cultural and legal-political recognition, the use of the Mixtec language has declined rapidly within the neoliberal multicultural framework.

The state has maintained an influential role in shaping the political agenda for the recognition of indigenous rights. While mobilization around the rights of indigenous ethnic groups has gained increasing momentum and attention, Wilson and Donnan (1998) warn, “post-modern political analyses often fail to query the degree to which the state sustains its historically dominant role as an arbiter of control, violence, order and organization for those whose identities are being transformed by world forces” (p. 2). While recognizing the advances made through indigenous social mobilization in Latin America centered on ethnicity and associated cultural practices, many remain skeptical of the state’s role in advancing multiculturalism (Hale, 2002; Hernandez Castillo, 2004; Speed, 2005; Postero, 2007). Hale argues that such changes are made preemptively to “cede carefully chosen ground in order to more effectively fend off more far-reaching demands, and even more important, to pro-actively shape the terrain on which future negotiations of cultural rights takes place” (488). Thus, according to Hale (2004), neoliberalism includes a “culturally seductive project,” in which only particular cultural

behaviors that do not disrupt the power of the State are “permitted,” while all others are sanctioned through market forces (p. 17).

Conceptualizing and Contextualizing the Declining Use of the Mixtec Language

Chapter Two establishes a framework for understanding the relationship between language, memory, and social relationships of power utilizing the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu demonstrates how symbolic violence and its linguistic mechanizations create and reinforce social hierarchies through everyday practices. Such symbolic acts are then incorporated into the “habitus,” a learned set of dispositions that inform social actions that reflect the social conditions in which they were created. Language, as illustrated by Bourdieu, can be used as a powerful tool of oppression, as it can serve as an indicator of belonging to one group or to another, and as such has been used, not only in the case of Oaxaca, but also throughout the colonial and post-colonial world to establish hierarchies of power.

Chapter Two also examines the multi-faceted meanings of memory and outlines how social memory is useful for understanding the ways in which past experiences of discrimination against Mixtec language speakers shape present day perceptions and behaviors regarding language use. Memory studies is a somewhat nebulous field of study. The numerous meanings and applications of memory and lack of a cohesive and uniform set of theoretical concepts present challenges for scholars. Limiting the meaning of memory, however, to a particular function or site renders the term more useful for particular applications. This study focuses on social memory of language discrimination, as remembered by individuals and created and sustained through social interaction. Social memory not only provides a means by which to explore past experiences of language

discrimination, but also to understand how those experiences shape present-day beliefs and behaviors.

Cubitt (2007) eloquently explores the association between history and social memory, elaborating on two different schemas to explain their relationship. In the first, he contends, “the relationship is understood to be cumulative and causal: the past is everything that precedes the present, and that is deemed, through an infinitely complex set of connections and interactions, to have contributed to making the present what it is – making it this present rather than another” (p. 27). Thus, in this first model, the linear culmination of the past events gives rise to the present. In this historical schema, the past and present are perceived as separate from each other, only connected by a sequence of events. The present is considered to be but a “vantage point” from which to reflect on the past (Cubitt, 2007, p. 27).

In the second model, the relationship is inverted and the past is understood as a product of the present. “The past,” Cubitt (2007) states, “in this understanding is not the totality of all past happenings – for this is a totality we can never hope to apprehend – but the past that we have a ‘sense’ of, that past as it exists in current awareness, a past constructed through the complex mixture of reflection and recollection, research and imaginative representation, that allows us the feeling of conscious retrospection” (p. 27). Thus, the past, real or perceived, is actively created in the present through processes of memory. Rather than declaring the superiority of one schema over the other, Cubitt calls for the gap between these two schemas to be bridged.

Chapter Three attempts to do this by first looking at three phases of history in Mexico from the colonial to the contemporary period. I then draw upon in-depth

ethnographic and informal interviews as well as participant observation to operationalize the second of Cubitt's schemas, in which the past is not considered separate from the present but rather as an active and continuous construction. Interviews with Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses help to flesh out how past experiences of discrimination influence contemporary beliefs and behaviors related to indigenous language use.

Interviews and participant observation conducted by the Mexican Migration Field Research Program in 2007 suggested that historically high levels of discrimination against indigenous language speakers continue to shape perceptions about the "value" of the Mixtec language in comparison to Spanish, as well as English in the case of Mixtec migrants. This has resulted in a precipitous drop in the rate of indigenous language use over a short period. Interviews with Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses provide insight into the various sites, including the local community, "official" spaces, and domestic and international migrant destinations, and the means by which, such as verbal denigration and exclusion, the Mixtec language and Mixtec language speakers have been devalued in social contexts.

Mixtec social memory of language discrimination offers an alternative history, a lived history not often represented in the official history books. Cubitt (2007) states, "the discourse of memory haunts and shadows the discourse of history, now offering to complete it and reinforce it, to expose its inadequacies and fragile pretensions" (p. 30). It is in the combination of history and memory that a more complete picture emerges. History serves to illustrate the patterns and shifts in how indigenous peoples have been oppressed and defined as inferior over an extended period of time, whereas memory

reflects how lived, recounted, and perceived experiences continue to shape contemporary beliefs and behaviors associated with indigenous language use.

Chapter Four explores how language is used within contemporary contexts to sustain and create new social hierarchies of power. This study argues that symbolic violence has become more entrenched and “misrecognized” within the neoliberal multicultural framework while distancing the state and dominant group’s overt racist policies and practices (Bourdieu, 1991). While the neoliberal, multicultural framework has arguably opened space for indigenous rights movements to advance the rights granted to indigenous peoples, scholars such as Hale (2006) argue, “far from opening spaces for generalized empowerment of indigenous peoples, these [neoliberal multicultural] reforms tend to empower some while marginalizing the majority” (p.16). As such, the state serves to maintain social hierarchies of power through the implementation of the neoliberal multicultural framework, which obscures discriminatory practices and displaces the responsibility for social well-being and the amelioration of social inequality on the “unbiased” forces of the neoliberal market.

In the final chapter, I offer some conclusions about what declining use of the Mixtec language suggests, speculate on the future prospect of its continued use, and suggest directions for future research. The declining use of the Mixtec language in this study is analyzed through the narratives of Mixtecs, which provide a subaltern account of historical and contemporary injustices through the lens of language. According to Dean and Levi (2003) “humanizing the plight of indigenous peoples is a constructive step toward wresting moral authority away from dominant groups who have all too often failed to protect the rights of indigenous peoples as ethnic minorities” (p. 30). The goal of

this study is to do just that, calling attention to the historical consequences and persistence of discriminatory practices in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism.

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Chapter 2

Conceptualizing Social Memory and Symbolic Violence

Well, in reality, Mixteco is ending. It ends because we thought that, well that it was damaging to us – Salvador Garcia, age 62, San Miguel Tlacotepec

What happens is that there are times one will say, ‘it embarrasses me that my parents speak it [Mixteco]. What will people say?’ That is what gets into one’s head, because really what they want is to disengage themselves from it in order to speak Spanish. That is what happens – Fernando Salazar, age 43, San Miguel Tlacotepec

What are symbolic violence and social memory and what relationship do they have to the use of the Mixtec language? Both memory and violence have a wide range of meaning and their application requires careful elaboration. This chapter first outlines the connection between language, violence, and social relationships of power as illustrated by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1991) calls attention to the association between language, its speakers, and the social contexts in which linguistic exchanges occur and illuminates how language is linked to everyday practices that perpetuate and “normalize” social inequality.

Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power and its linguistic mechanizations provide a foundation for understanding how violence, both overt and increasingly “symbolic” in nature, associated with language use creates and maintains unequal relationships of power. In the case of Mixtec language speakers, this translates into the designation of the Mixtec language and its speakers as “non-dominant” or “dominated,” in comparison to

the “dominant” Spanish language (Bourdieu, 1991). As languages themselves are imbued with particular levels of power, they become not only a means by which discrimination is exerted, but also a symbol of power, or lack thereof, which can be used to oppress particular speakers while empowering others.

Secondly, this chapter introduces the field of memory studies, particularly the concept of social memory, which refers to memories created and sustained through social interaction that inform present-day beliefs and behaviors. Halbwachs, a French sociologist and philosopher in the early to mid-twentieth century, is commonly referred to as the pioneer in the study of “collective memory,” a term often used interchangeably with social memory, in reference to the creation and maintenance of memory through social processes. Among Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, social memory of language discrimination, experienced in various contexts of social interaction, reflects how language serves as a persuasive means by which historical and contemporary relationships of power have been constructed and maintained. Furthermore, Mixtec social memory of language discrimination illustrates that the devalued status of indigenous languages and corresponding social, economic, and political subordination have informed the decisions of Mixtecs to forgo the use of the Mixtec language. This study utilizes these two frameworks to illuminate how language discrimination has shaped the contemporary use of and perspectives on the Mixtec language and fashioned enduring social hierarchies of power.

Pierre Bourdieu: Language and Power

In the mid-twentieth century, Bourdieu (1991) critiqued his contemporaries whose linguistic analyses fell short of drawing connections between language and social

relationships of power. Linguistic exchanges, Bourdieu argues, are intimately related to social inequalities and reflect the processes by which one language, and thus one social group, is designated and recognized as “legitimate” and all others as illegitimate or inferior. According to Thompson (1991), Bourdieu illuminates how “linguistic theories have tended to neglect the social-historical conditions underlying the formation of the language which they take, in an idealized form, as their object domain, so too others have tended to analyze linguistic expression in isolation from the specific social condition in which they are used” (p. 7). Conversely, Bourdieu pays particular attention to the ways in which language serves as a mechanism for defining and sustaining social hierarchies of power. For Mixtecs, unequal relationships of power and their association to language use are evident from the colonial period to present day.

According to Bourdieu (1991), social relationships of power are legitimized through repeated acts of symbolic violence, a surreptitious form of disempowerment, which occurs as non-dominant social practices are delegitimized in comparison to their dominant counterpart through everyday practices. Differing from overt manifestations of violence, symbolic violence is embedded in social institutions, which refer “not necessarily [to] a particular organization – this or that family or factory, for instance” but rather, to “any relatively durable set of social relations which endows individuals with power, status, and resources of various kinds” (Thompson, 1991, p. 8). In doing so, symbolic violence obscures the irrational construction of social hierarchies and thus makes it difficult to challenge their existence and alleged legitimacy. While violent acts have also been exerted against Mixtecs through more overt means, it is in large part a

result of these shrouded acts of violence and their impact on social memory that the use of the Mixtec language is drastically declining.

“By virtue of the languages spoken, the speakers who use them and the groups defined by possession of the corresponding competence,” Bourdieu (1991) claims, “the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered)” (p. 67). Language, according to Bourdieu, functions as a mechanism through which power relations are ascribed and reinforced in everyday interactions, elevating one social group to a higher position of power and status than others. As these practices are enacted and reenacted, relationships of power become normalized and reproduced without conscious action. They become part of the “habitus,” a set of learned dispositions that inform, but do not necessarily determine, an individual’s actions as they “generate practices, perceptions, and attitudes which are ‘regular’ without being consciously coordinated or governed by any rule” (Thompson, 1991, p. 12). Thus, one could consider the habitus as the repository of social memory, in which past perceptions or experiences, in this case of language discrimination, inform and shape individual and collective meaning and interpretation. These meanings and interpretations, in turn, fundamentally shape the processes of identity construction. This is not to say that Mixtec ethnic identity is merely constructed in response to social experiences of discrimination, but rather draws attention to the factors of influence that shape how Mixtecs self-define and are defined by others and the contexts in which these processes occur.

Employing Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic violence and the habitus, this study examines how the use of the Mixtec language in various sites of social interaction, such as communities of origin, schools, public offices, and migrant destinations, influence

language use and reflect sustained and mutating imbalances of power. As illustrated by the experiences of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses, these processes have served to reinforce relationships of power by “denigrating” and “humiliating” Mixtec speakers, whose “ugly” way of speaking, both in Mixteco and in “tongue-twisted” Spanish, serves as a tool of oppression.¹⁶ Mixtecs substantiate the existence and effects of these processes, which provide a lens through which to explore discrimination and the contemporary social hierarchies of power. It is necessary to explain the various ways in which language use can be used to establish and maintain social hierarchies of power before turning to concrete examples of these processes.

Discrediting Non-Dominant Practices

How did Spanish become defined as the “legitimate” language in Mexican society? “Earlier modes of production” or “regionalisms,” such as indigenous languages in Oaxaca, have to be discredited and replaced, at least in theory, by the dominant form of production. Bourdieu (1991) states, “the process of unification of both the production and the circulation of economic and cultural goods entails the progressive obsolescence of the earlier mode of production of the habitus and its products” (p. 50). As illustrated in Chapter Three, for centuries indigenous languages in Oaxaca were discredited and deemed inferior to the Spanish language. These processes of devaluation occurred within local communities, in surrounding urban areas and migrant destinations, and in “official” spaces, such as state-run institutions and offices. At these sites of interaction, the Mixtec language and Mixtec language speakers were “discredited,” and in turn, devalued in comparison to the Spanish language and Spanish language speakers.

¹⁶ Words placed in quotes are taken from interviews conducted for this study.

In Mexico, at conquest the Spanish language was designated as the *de facto* “official” language, and has thereby become the dominant medium of expression and transaction of various forms of capital (i.e. economic, social, cultural, and symbolic). As illustrated by Thompson (1991), Bourdieu demonstrates how “the policy of linguistic unification, would favour those who already possessed the official language as part of their linguistic competence, while those who knew only a local dialect would become part of a political and linguistic unit in which their traditional competence was subordinate and devalued” (p. 6). Once established as the “official” practice, each social interaction functions to reassert the power of the dominant group. Furthermore, members of the dominant group become monitors of acceptable usage of the Spanish language, and thus gatekeepers of power. These gatekeepers use correction to discredit and sustain hierarchies of power when Mixtec language speakers acquire Spanish.

Symbolic Violence

According to Thompson (1991) “power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of *legitimacy* that it would not otherwise have” (p. 23). While physical violence has certainly been used against indigenous peoples across Latin America, the enduring wounds resulting from discriminatory practices against indigenous language speakers, held in social memory, act as invisible reinforcers of the social order. According to Bourdieu (1991) legitimacy of the dominant language is,

Inscribed, in a practical state, in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition, by the sanctions of the linguistic market, and which are therefore adjusted, without any cynical calculation or consciously experienced constraint, to the changes of material and symbolic profit which the laws of price

formation characteristic of a given market objectively offer to the holders of a given linguistic capital (p. 51).

As relationships of power become embedded in institutions and are reinscribed through practices, such as linguistic exchange, the need for direct subjugation diminishes. “The relation between two people,” according to Bourdieu, “may be such that one of them has only to appear in order to impose the other, without even having to want to, let alone formulate any command, a definition of the situation and of himself (as intimidated, for example), which is all the more absolute and undisputed for not having to be stated” (p. 52). It is therefore through a long history of discrimination, such as discrimination against indigenous language speakers in the case of Oaxaca, that discriminatory practices can become less overt and perpetuated through seemingly “natural” or harmless encounters.

This is similar to what Hale (2006) notes in Guatemala, where Ladinos, the dominant social group, embrace “egalitarian sensibilities,” but without requiring “Ladinos fully to acknowledge ongoing relations of racial dominance, much less to dismantle them” (p. 19). Hale calls these disparate beliefs “racial ambivalence,” in which Ladinos “repudiate racism, express support for the ideals of cultural equality, and view themselves as practicing these ideals” all the while, maintaining “a strong psychic investment in their dominance and privilege in relation to Indians” (p. 19).¹⁷ As in the

¹⁷ While this study primarily uses language as a lens to explore social relationships of power as related to language use (more commonly associated with cultural practices of an ethnic group), the concept of racism is occasionally employed when referring to the works of other authors. Hale (2006) is particularly careful to acknowledge the contradictions or pitfalls in selecting an adequate definition of race and ethnicity. Hale, interestingly, opts for the use of the word race when referring to relations between indigenous people in Guatemala and Ladinos, a term used for self-identification by some, but not all, Guatemaltecos of Spanish/Amerindian heritage. His use of race is predicated on the notion that ethnicity emerged as part of the nationalization project, in which ethnic groups were targeted for partial assimilation, or whitening, while racial groups were neglected from participation altogether. He objects to the use of ethnic theory “precisely because it is predicated on the strict dichotomy between cultural and biological reasoning” (p.

case of Mixtecs, the Guatemalan case reflects how through symbolic violence, overt expressions of superiority or inferiority can diminish, even be replaced with statements of support for equality, while at the same time serving to reinforce perceptions and patterns of behavior that maintain the status quo. These positions of power and the practices that inscribe them become “misrecognized,” or grow “silent,” and the association of the dominant practice with power and prestige serves to reinforce it as the legitimate practice (Bourdieu, 1991).

Transferring Capital, Consolidating Power

Bourdieu’s illustration of how language functions as a mechanism for establishing and consolidating power is useful for understanding how indigenous languages in Mexico, such as Mixteco, have been designated as inferior in relation to the dominant Spanish language and used to ascribe and maintain positions of power. “Linguistic capital,” or the ability to speak the dominant language with authority, according to Bourdieu, translates into other forms of capital, be it cultural, economic, or political, which serve to position indigenous language speakers as inferior in all social “fields” (p. 56, 57). Bourdieu conceives of “fields” as the context or the location in which particular individuals, endowed with different levels of power are situated. Thompson (1991) observes that, “one of the most important properties of fields is the way in which they allow one form of capital to be converted into another – in the way, for example, that

210). Thus, in solidarity with African diaspora scholars, Hale uses the term race to refrain from complicity perpetuating the oppression of racialized populations and the constructed difference in subordination. Thus, when referring to Hale’s work, the term race is applied. Likewise Omi and Winant (1994), point out that “substantial criticism has been directed at the ethnicity school for its treatment of racially defined minorities as ethnically defined minorities, and for its consequent neglect of race per se,” which they see as highly problematic (p. 20).

certain educational qualifications can be cashed in for lucrative jobs” (p. 14). The ability to transfer one type of capital for another ultimately results in the consolidation of power by a defined group in all social fields and the limitation of access to all others. “In other words,” Bourdieu states, “utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, the *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed” (p. 66). It is often; therefore, that use of a particular language corresponds to a socio-economic or political class endowed with a certain degree of power.

Throughout Latin America, class and ethnic categories often appear as “two sides of the same coin,” and wealth and authority are often perceived to be attributes of the white, urban, Spanish-speaking populations (Postero and Zamosc, 2004, p. 12). Consider, for example, the Ixpantepense title for the Mixtec language *tu'un davi*, which literally translates to ‘poor words’ and for the Spanish language, *tu'un ja'a*, ‘rich words’. The association of one language with wealth and the other with poverty is corroborated in the Mixtec case, in which socio-economic inequities tend to mirror ethnic and linguistic categorizations. For example, in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, when speaking of historical social relations, Mixtecs often used Spanish-speaking interchangeably with “los ricos” (the wealthy) and “los de razón” (those of reason), referring to the social and economic power associated with the use of the Spanish language.

Spanish in ‘Official’ Spaces

In addition, the *de facto* use of Spanish in “official” matters, such as voting and registration in government social programs, in Mexico has led to the devaluing of other

languages in “official” spaces. “Obligatory on official occasions and in official places (schools, public administrations, political institutions, etc.),” Bourdieu (1991) argues, “this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured” (p. 45). For Mixtec language speakers, the use of Spanish in formal public institutions and practices isolated or challenged their engagement in official matters. Due to the predominant use of Spanish in “official” spaces, Mixtecs in San Miguel Tlacotepec, particularly older Mixtec speakers, shared that at times they felt high levels of trepidation when called upon to go the local municipal offices or to nearby municipalities for matters such as requesting and processing state-issued documentation.

According to Bourdieu (1991), “the official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language” (p. 45). In the history of Mexico, transitions in state rule, such as the transition from colonial rule to independence in the mid-nineteenth century and from pre- to post-revolution in the early twentieth century, resulted in struggles by elites to maintain their positions of power. Once (re)established, the national, or “official” narrative was (re)scripted to reflect the legitimacy of the “newly” established authority. Institutions, such as governmental organizations and state-run education systems, reflect these values and serve as reinforcing sites of the social order.

Learning the Legitimacy of the Spanish Language

Bourdieu (1991) pays strong attention to the function of education as a socializing factor, in which symbolic violence reinforces social hierarchies through practices that favor those who already possess dominant forms of capital. Schools normalize social

inequalities by masking the systematic biases that perpetuate the accumulation of capital by a particular group endowed with certain characteristics. According to Bourdieu,

The educational market is strictly dominated by the linguistic products of the dominant class and tends to sanction the pre-existing differences in capital. The combined effect of low cultural capital and the associated low propensity to increase it through educational investment condemns the least favoured classes to the negative sanctions of the scholastic market, i.e. exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success. The initial disparities therefore tend to be reproduced since the length of inculcation tends to vary with its efficiency: those least inclined and least able to accept and adopt the language of the school are also those exposed for the shortest time to this language and to educational monitoring, correction and sanction (p. 62).

Beyond the maintenance of inequalities, according to Thompson (1991) these mechanisms “provide a practical justification of the established order,” which “enables those who benefit most from the system to convince themselves of their own intrinsic worthiness while preventing those who benefit least from grasping the basis of their own deprivation” (p. 25). In the Mixteca, Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses pointed frequently to the role of schools in devaluing and contributing to the declining use of the Mixtec language. Teachers were sent to indigenous communities by the state to *Castellanizar* (teach Spanish) beginning in the 1920s, where indigenous language speaking students were either forced to speak Spanish (at times ridiculed or corporeally punished for not doing so) or excluded, self or otherwise, from the education system. Bourdieu states,

Measured *de facto* against the single standard of the ‘common’ language, they are found wanting and cast into the outer darkness of regionalisms, the ‘corrupt expressions and mispronunciations’ which school masters decry. Reduced to the status of quaint or vulgar jargons, in either case unsuitable for formal occasions, popular uses of the official language undergo a systematic devaluation (p. 54).

Official sites, such as schools and government offices, are among the fields in which

Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses reported experiencing discrimination targeting language use. As Bourdieu's statement insinuates, one of the ways in which power is asserted is through the devaluation of indigenous languages themselves as unintelligible or nonsensical.

Speaking Gibberish

As identified by Bourdieu (1991), discriminatory practices included the devaluation of the Mixtec language to a status below that of a respectable means of communication. Bourdieu claims, "the educational system, whose scale of operation grew in extent and intensity throughout the nineteenth century, no doubt directly helped to devalue popular modes of expression, dismissing them as 'slang' and 'gibberish'" (p. 49). When asked about the use of the Mixtec language, Julian Castillo, a 47-year-old, native of Ixpantepec Nieves, responded, "we speak Mixteco and some, yes, some make fun of it. They say 'why *widdywiddy*?'. They don't understand me they say. You should speak Spanish, they say." Reduced to the category of an "unrefined" language, "gibberish" or even a "dialect," the formal title used for indigenous languages in Mexico for centuries, the Mixtec language was devalued to a status below that of a language.

Nonetheless, when learning to speak Spanish or even when possessing near fluency, Mixtecs were criticized for their improper pronunciation and use of the Spanish language. Many Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses used adjectives such as "broken," "poorly," "tongue-twisted," and "incorrect," when referring to their ability to speak Spanish, criticisms internalized through exchanges with native Spanish-speakers. According to Bourdieu (1991), "it follows that the legitimate language is a semi-artificial language which has to be sustained by a permanent effort of correction, a task which falls

both to institutions specifically designed for this purpose and to individual speakers” (p. 60). Thus, for many Mixtec speakers, relative fluency in Spanish is insufficient, for when it is detected, “broken” Spanish can equally serve as a tool of oppression.

Dora Chavez grew up in Ixpantepec Nieves speaking both Spanish and Mixteco. It was not until the fourth grade that for the first time Dora was told by her teacher that the Spanish language was more valuable than Mixteco. After elementary school, Dora moved to Silacayoapam to finish her schooling, where she encountered increasing criticism and “correction” by non-indigenous language speakers. At school in Silacayoapam, she found that non-indigenous students ridiculed indigenous students for not speaking Spanish “correctly.” These encounters were formative for Dora, who remembers for the first time experiencing the feelings of “otherness” and disempowerment. Feeling belittled by these experiences, Dora began to reject the Mixtec language.

Despite the fact that Dora was bilingual, the correction of her Spanish served to reinstate social positions of power. Bourdieu (1991) states,

The recognition extorted by this invisible, silent violence is expressed in explicit statements ... it is never more manifest than in all the corrections, whether ad hoc or permanent, to which dominated speakers, as they strive desperately for correctness, consciously or unconsciously subject the stigmatized aspect of their pronunciation, their diction (involving various forms of euphemism) and their syntax, or in the disarray which leaves them ‘speechless’, ‘tongue-tied’, ‘at a loss for words’, as if they were suddenly dispossessed of their own language (p. 52).

When the dominant capital is acquired, correction serves the function for the dominant group to maintain power. Acquisition of the dominant capital does not suffice, as Dora’s

story reflects, but rather one must become “dispossessed” of non-dominant practices in order to pass without detection.

Symbolic Violence and the Corporeal Hexis

Symbolic violence serves to delegitimize non-dominant languages, pressuring non-indigenous language speakers to distance themselves from the use of their native tongue, and in so doing reinforces the legitimacy of the Spanish language and the corresponding social order. The experiences of devaluation of Mixtec speakers in various sites have contributed to the decreasing use of the Mixtec language, as both consciously and subconsciously, grandparents, parents, and children have determined that it is to their best advantage to abandon the use of the Mixtec language. These “fields” include, “official sites,” such as schools, government offices, as well as individual interactions in and outside of communities, where Mixteco and the “improper” or “inadequate” use of Spanish is sanctioned. Furthermore, as one type of capital is transferable to another, the access barriers to various dominant forms of capital create a perpetual cycle of inequality.

Experiences of symbolic violence and resulting perspectives and beliefs, according to Bourdieu (1991), become incorporated into the habitus and are contained in and on the body. Thompson (1991), states,

The body is the site of incorporated history. The practical schemes through which the body is organized are the product of history and, at the same time, the source of practices and perceptions, which reproduce that history. The continuing process of production and reproduction, of history incorporated and incorporation actualized, is a process that can take place without ever becoming the object of a specific institutional practice, explicitly articulated in language (p. 13).

It is through these corporeal depositories of history that this Chapter turns the focus to social memory. How does the body become a site of incorporated history and historical

reproduction? Thompson speaks of history as if it were both a completed and a continuous act, a force that is based in past events but which also informs present actions, both a recognizable (remembered) force and one that through years of “slow accumulation” becomes unrecognizable (forgotten).

Particular histories are maintained in the habitus through processes of social memory, and that Mixtec social memories of language discrimination, as reflected by Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses point to underlying factors in the declining use of the Mixtec language. This is not to say that memories are the causal factor of declining language use, but rather, it is the experiences, beliefs, and values inculcated through language discrimination, for which social memory serves as a repository and mode of social expression that lead to declines in indigenous language use. The following section introduces the field of memory studies and aims to illustrate how social memory helps to draw connections between past experiences, such as language discrimination, and present social realities.

Memory Studies

Psychologists and philosophers have a long record of engaging in memory studies, from Aristotle’s *Memory and Reminiscence* written in 350 B.C.E. to Sigmund Freud’s famous analyses of memory and repression (Hoskins, Barnier, Kansteiner & Sutton, 2008). Increasing cross-disciplinary attention to the study of memory is widely noted in the late twentieth century (Cubitt, 2007; Cattell & Climo, 2002). Though particular trends can be traced within disciplines, the overall cross-disciplinary embrace of the application of memory in scholarship signals its growing recognition as a viable and meaningful field of study (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008). What is memory and what

can be drawn from the application of memory to the study of Mixtec language in contemporary contexts?

Cattell and Climo (2002), find “social memory is deeply implicated in important contemporary issues: the truth of memory, history, and culture, and who owns them, and their roles in identity, nation building, hegemonic relationships, and other situations” (p. 5). Thus, social memory can serve as a medium through which to examine these contemporary issues. As the late twentieth and early twenty-first century ushered in major political, economic, and social transformations across the world, social memory has emerged as a relevant framework with which to analyze the relationship between the past and the present. The intersections and overlapping of past and present realities draws attention to what of the past continues to inform and shape collective understandings and experiences.

This study explores Mixtec social memory of language discrimination and perspectives on the use of the Mixtec language. Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses reflect how language discrimination, created, sustained, and reenacted in various social fields, shapes social perspectives and behaviors related to language use. While the memories of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses reflect varying degrees of emphasis and particularities, they are nonetheless created, informed by, sustained through social interactions. In addition, individual narratives are complemented by participant observation, in which social interactions reflect the performance and transmission of collective meaning. It is therefore necessary to first clearly articulate how memory is defined and used in this study, in order to illuminate the connection between memory, language use, and enduring social inequalities.

Despite the notable increase in attention to memory in contemporary scholarship, the nascent field of memory studies is far from being comprehensive and theoretically consistent, leading critics to question whether memory is a too broad and illusive to be a constructive and meaningful framework (Radstone, 2008; also see Cubitt, 2007). The term memory has a plethora of meanings. Memory can refer, for example, to the capacity of living creatures to recall information, the storage capacity of a computer, to cellular and brain function, first-hand experience or imparted knowledge, conscious or subconscious processes, the recollected or the forgotten, the individual or collective experience, to the past or to the present. With such an extensive range of meanings, restricting the word helps to narrow its meaning for use in particular contexts. Cubitt (2007) states, “a word may be allowed to mean many things, but it is usually unwise to allow it to mean all of them simultaneously” (p. 6). Given as much, how have scholars of social memory created and engaged frameworks derived from memory studies?

Roediger and Wertsch (2008) note that memory is “most useful when accompanied by a modifier,” recognizing that the word memory, a singular noun, seems to suggest it has only one meaning (p.10). In the social sciences, scholarship is replete with terms such as “historical memory,” “collective memory,” “social memory,” “official memory,” and “local memory,” some of which are laboriously distinguished from their counterparts while others are often used interchangeably. Each modifier represents a particular element of memory, a site, factor of influence, or production of memorial processes, and by refining the term, yields a more manageable and constructive definition for particular applications. In attempting to clearly define how memory is applied to the study of language discrimination and the contemporary perspectives on Mixtec language

use, the following sections examine some of the recurrent points of attention and discord in the application of social memory in scholarship.

The Individual Versus the Collective

One of the first clear divisions in the field of memory studies is the emphasis on the individual or collective. Philosophical and psychological approaches to memory focus more attention on the individual processes of brain function, such as the ability to process, store, and recall information and on individual psychological experiences that shape perceptions or interpretations of past events. In contrast, social scientists have recently centered their studies of memory around the collective, arguing that individual experiences are by and large enmeshed in and products of social processes. Maurice Halbwachs ([1950] 1980) is commonly referred to as the pioneer of “collective memory,” a term often used interchangeably with social memory. His approach to the study of memory as a collective phenomenon has created a common vocabulary and framework for contemporary scholars to engage memory as it is created and sustained through social processes.

Social memory refers to the entangled connection between individual and social experience and the processes of remembering and forgetting that occur through interaction with others. Memory, according to Halbwachs ([1950] 1980), is dependent upon these processes of social interaction, for if separated from the group, the exchanges that promote memory recall are absent and memories begin to fade. “In reality,” Halbwachs states, “we are never alone. Other men need to be physically present, since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons” (p. 23). According to

Halbwachs, it is through social interaction and in social institutions that memories are constructed and reconstituted, transmitted and interpreted, remembered or forgotten.

However, as Cattell and Climo (2002) note, “a persistent challenge in using life stories as social and cultural exemplars is sorting out individuals’ typicality and uniqueness” (p. 23). If each individual has unique experiences and perceptions, how do individual memories reflect shared experiences, values, and beliefs? Halbwachs ([1950] 1980) acknowledges that individuals have distinctive memories, which he terms “autobiographical memory,” and argues that while memory is social in nature, ultimately “it is individuals as group members who remember,” which they do so with varying degrees of intensity (p. 48). Nonetheless, he argues, individual memories reflect the collective processes of remembering, as individuals are enmeshed in social groups, be they families, communities, ethnic groups, or nations, which reinforce particular memories through practice while allowing others to fade. Furthermore, it must be considered that certain types of experiences, such as language discrimination against Mixtec speakers in Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec, are often common occurrences, not isolated to a small minority of community residents. Rather, Mixtec language speakers were faced with common and on-going experiences of discrimination, which served to reinforce and sustain social memory.

It is not, however, the mere sum of individual experiences, particular or common, that result in the creation of social memory, but also the social contexts or structures in which they are created and by which they are maintained. Cubitt (2007) argues,

The ways in which individuals, as participant members of societies, formulate and articulate memories of their own experience are a vital ingredient in the processes that produce knowledge and awareness of the

past within those societies. They are not, however, the only things that contribute to those social processes, and social memory is therefore not, in my understanding of it, reducible to a kind of sum total or cumulative effect of individual memory. Rather, processes of social memory are ones which characteristically also involve the operation of a wide variety of cultural devices, and of elements of institutional or social structure, whose effect is often to loosen the connections that given bodies of data may have to specific contexts of individual recollection (p. 15).

It is in this vein that contemporary scholars recognize the importance and variance of individual memories while grasping that the memories of individuals are created and enmeshed in social processes and situated within particular social contexts. It is through social interactions and social structures, as illustrated by Bourdieu, that experiences of symbolic violence and its mechanizations in language are incorporated into, transmitted, and sustained through social memory. Thus social memory calls to attention the influence of past experiences of discrimination and their persistence as well as the social conditions in which those perspectives are created and maintained, which shape decisions regard Mixtec language use and the strategies employed by Mixtecs in the contemporary contexts to advance their rights and opportunities.

Certainly one danger of approaching memory in the collective is assuming that there is little variance within a particular social group and that individuals have an equal influence over what and how gets remembered and forgotten. Cattell and Climo (2002) state, “whether individual or collective, [memory] is constructed and reconstructed by the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, shaped by semantic and interpretive frames, and subject to a panoply of distortions” (p. 1). If the collective and individual processes of memory are intertwined, it is certain that particular individuals and social groups with

greater access to resources and power have more control over which memories are sustained and what meaning they carry. Cattell and Climo (2002) state,

Collective or social memories are shaped by social, economic, and political circumstances, by beliefs and values; by opposition and resistance. They involve cultural norms and issues of authenticity, identity, and power. They are implicated in ideologies. Social memories are associated with or belong to particular categories or groups so they can be, and often are the focus of conflict and contestation. They can be discussed and negotiated, accepted or rejected (p. 4).

These processes occur both within and between particular groups. For example, in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves there are internal hierarchies of power, in which particular individuals or sub-groups wield greater power than others and in turn, often have different social experiences and interpretations. Though certain fluid factors unify the collective, these differences must be noted. On a more macroscale, social memory is created (and contested) between dominant and non-dominant social groups, such as the state and Mixtecs respectively, in which the dominant group has greater resources and power at its disposal for disseminating and legitimizing particular memories over those of others.

However, memory and its meaning are not exclusive constructs of the dominant group, and ethnography helps to shed light upon these various voices and interpretations. “Struggles over identity, political power, and legitimacy,” according to Cattell and Climo, “often revolve around memory sites and practices,” such as language use (p. 30). Through ethnography and the use of language as a lens, employs social memory as a means of understanding past experiences of discrimination and their influence on the present.

Finding Memory and Its Meaning: Linking Past and Present

As Cubitt (2007) highlights, a second point of contention in the study of memory is the relationship between history and memory. “When we consider the conceptual fluidity and variability of definition with which both ‘history’ and ‘memory’ have been invested,” Cubitt states “we can see them as conceptual terms that have constantly interacted with each other, moving in and out of each other, circling each other warily and amorously, sometimes embracing, sometimes separating, sometimes jostling for position on the discursive terrain that is their common habitat (p. 5). If history and memory are intertwined and share a common habitat, in what ways do they differ and what value do they have in illuminating how historical and contemporary discrimination against Mixtec language-speakers shape language use?”

Returning to Halbwachs ([1950] 1980), one finds early attempts to theorize the connections between history and memory. He defines history as the “dead” past linked only chronologically in time to current events. In contrast, collective memory, he argues, is defined as the “active” past, in that it continues to shape present day beliefs and behaviors. While dates and particular events fade from collective consciousness, according to Halbwachs, “what becomes fixed in his memory are not just facts, but attitudes and ways of thinking from the past” (p. 64). While memory recall may well be attached to a particular date or incidence, it is the meaning and interpretation that is transmitted through social memory. The accuracy of any particular interpretation is not essential. Rather as Cattell and Climo (2002) argue, what is important is not memory’s factually accuracy, but whether it is personally true. It is what is believed to be true, what is believed to have happened, rather than what is verifiable, that shapes individual and

collective meaning. What is true for the collective, therefore, is what members of the collective perceive as important and relevant in their present day lives.

Social memory of Mixtec language speakers provides insight into what of the past continues to shape present day beliefs and behaviors regarding use of the Mixtec language and illuminates how social hierarchies of power have and continue to be created and maintained through social processes. In the exploration of social memory and history, this research probes subaltern historical perspectives, often overshadowed by the dominant discourse and critically examines the factors of influence shaping language use in contemporary contexts and the persistence of old and creation of new social hierarchies in which language serves as a mechanism by which power is ascribed or denied.

Concepts to Context: Memory, Symbolic Violence, and the Mixtec Language

Symbolic violence and social memory serve as conceptual frameworks for exploring the declining use of the Mixtec language. These concepts provide a clearer picture of the relationship between memory, language, and social relationships of power; relationships that characterize the current decline in the use of the Mixtec language. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence, particularly its linguistic mechanizations, serve to illuminate how hierarchies of social power are created and maintained through the devaluation of non-dominant practices, in this case the Mixtec language and subsequently Mixtec language-speakers. In the following chapters, the use of both overt and symbolic violence against Mixtec language speakers will be contextualized through the experiences and perceptions of Ixpantepenses and

Tlacotepenses regarding the Mixtec language, which reflect common and prolonged experiences of language discrimination.

Social memory then serves as the means through which these perceptions are created, maintained, and transmitted through social processes, illustrating the connections between past experiences and present beliefs and behaviors. Language serves as both a site of memory and means by which memory is transmitted. Cattell and Climo (2002) state, “it [language] encodes everyday memories and is the usual medium of rehearsing and expressing those memories, ranking perhaps with food and bodily practices as an emotionally evocative, person-centered (or endogenous) triumvirate of memory sites” (p. 19).

Mixtec social memory of language discrimination reflects a long history of social devaluation, in which language has served as an identifier of social belonging and mechanism of oppression. While many Mixtec speakers value their language, its association with social, economic and political inferiority challenges its continued use. As these associations persist in contemporary contexts, Mixtec language speakers are increasingly incentivized to forgo its use. If languages and linguistic exchange serve as memorial triggers of social inequality and humiliation, individuals may try to rid themselves of these memories, to forget, or to disassociate with the stigmatized practice.

In subsequent chapters in-depth interviews and participant observation in the Mixteca and San Diego County, California are used to examine language use and social relationships of power. Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses illustrate both the ways and contexts in which violence has been experienced and what impact these experiences have on behaviors and perceptions associated with language use. Dynamics of power, at the

local, state, national, and international levels, and Mixtec agency are at the core of this analysis.

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Chapter 3

Mixtec Social Memory of Language Discrimination

Before, yes, there were people who spoke Mixteco. 'No, those bastard Indios'. They would look at him with disgust, well badly, because he spoke Mixteco. He talked that way because our people spoke Mixteco. "No, those bastard Indios', they said to us, no? According to them, they were 'de razón', they lived here in 'el centro'. - Salvador Garcia, age 63, San Miguel Tlacotepec

*Although it goes unsaid, it has not been erased. It is a wound that persists
– Santiago Molina, age 55, San Miguel Tlacotepec.*

Traveling to the Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca in August of 2008, I was struck by the thick blanket of green covering the hillsides and valleys that shape the landscape of this region. On a previous trip made in December of 2007, the harvest season had recently ended and the rain had not yet arrived, giving the land a dry and lifeless appearance. This impression was only intensified by the number of vacant and half constructed houses in towns like San Miguel Tlacotepec, which I studied in 2007 as part of a binational team of researchers to investigate the “culture of migration” that currently characterizes the vast majority of towns in this region (Cohen, 2004). Now, I returned to San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, a neighboring town, to conduct research on the influence of social memory of language discrimination and perspectives on use of the Mixtec languages in contemporary contexts.

In 2007, we found that in San Miguel Tlacotepec, the use of Mixteco had declined precipitously over the second half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first

century. Surrounding towns, as we observed, maintained varying levels of indigenous language use but declines were widespread. What factors have led to the decreasing use of the Mixtec language? According to Rivas, (2009, Feb. 19) Cipriano Flores Cruz, the director of the State Institution of Adult Education (IEEA) in Oaxaca, believes the disappearance of maternal languages can be attributed to a low level of interest in such languages, a claim substantiated by a number of Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses. However, it is important to unearth what drives low levels of interest in order to understand both what has shaped and what continues to shape the use of and perspectives on the Mixtec language.

This chapter examines the influential factors in the declining use of the Mixtec language through social memory of Mixtecs, whose experiences regarding and perspectives on language use indicate that high levels of discrimination, both overtly expressed and exerted through symbolic violence, have influenced Mixtecs' decisions regarding language use. These acts of violence include physical abuse, humiliation, ridicule, name-calling, institutional exclusion, and devaluation in everyday social exchange. This chapter suggests that past experiences of language discrimination, incorporated into the habitus and sustained and transmitted through social memory, have and continue to inform the decisions of Mixtecs to forgo speaking, teaching, and learning the Mixtec language.

To begin, this Chapter will provide a brief introduction to three historical periods: the colonial period (1519-1821), Independence to the Mexican Revolution (1821-1910), and post-Revolution to neoliberal multiculturalism (1910-1980). This historical review will help to contextualize Mixtec memory, as oppressive practices against indigenous

peoples in Mexico have a very long history. This Chapter also attends more specifically to Mixtec social memory of language discrimination, in both its overt and symbolic forms, and provides concrete examples of the various sites and forms of social exchange in which Mixtecs perceived their language, and often times themselves, to be devalued.

Historical Context

Histories of violence, exclusion and forced assimilation characterize the experience of Mexico's indigenous peoples from the period of colonization, beginning in the 1500s, through the post-Revolution era of nation-building. These historical foundations are crucial to consider, since they fashioned enduring racial and ethnic hierarchies that positioned indigenous peoples to among the lowest social, political, and economic levels. Stephen (2007) notes that "within Mexico, indigenous peoples are incorporated into a colonially inherited system of merged racial/ethnic classification in which they are ranked below Mestizos (a constructed category of "mixed race") and White Spaniards, who supposedly have preserved their Spanish heritage over five hundred years" (p. 209). The constructed justification for and legitimacy of racial/ethnic hierarchies, referred to in this study as social hierarchies, have evolved over time.¹⁸

During the colonial period, ethnocentric and religiously vehement Spanish colonizers, influenced by the Reconquest of Spain and the Spanish Inquisition, used both social and religious doctrines as justification to violently oppress Mexico's indigenous peoples. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, the new *Mestizo* (mixed blood)

¹⁸ I use the term social hierarchy in this study due to the frequent conflation of race, ethnicity, and cultural practices (sometimes associated with an ethnic or racial group, and other times not) as the basis of discrimination. In the case of Mixtecs, race, ethnicity, and language use have all been used objectively to define Mixtecs, employed as categories used to oppress Mixtec peoples, and used to create and justify unequal relationships of power.

elite eschewed the primacy of the Catholic Church, and rather embraced principals of the Enlightenment and Social Darwinism, founded on biological assumptions of racial superiority. Such assumptions served as a justification for racist practices largely until the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), when the post-Revolutionary government began an energetic process of nation-building. During this period order and progress were considered to be contingent upon the creation of a unified national identity and culture, and indigenous peoples were reclassified as ethnic rather than racial groups. These three periods will be briefly discussed before turning to Mixtec social memory of language discrimination.

Colonial Period

During the Colonial Period, indigenous peoples were brutally oppressed, marginalized, and decimated due to poor labor conditions, violent conflicts, and particularly the introduction of new disease. According to Brysk (2000), in Latin America, “the arrival of the Spanish, war, slavery and attendant epidemics brought about demographic disaster: depending on the region 50-90 percent of the pre-Colombian population died within a century” (p. 11). During the colonial period in Mexico, indigenous peoples were often incorporated into the *encomienda* system, a type of trusteeship in which indigenous peoples performed labor for *encomenderos*, the trustee, in return for protection and care (Mayer & Sherman, 1991). However, as Mayer and Sherman point out,

What happened in practice was quite another matter, as the system, subjected to every imaginable abuse kept the Indians in a state of serfdom and led to all sorts of horrors. Indians were overworked, separated from their families, cheated, and physically maltreated. The *encomienda* in early decades was responsible for demeaning the native race and creating

economic and social tragedies that persist in one guise or another into modern times (p. 131).

Social humiliation was an essential tool for establishing and maintaining irrational social hierarchies imposed during the colonial period. As found by Postero (2007) in the case of Bolivia, “the resulting need to humiliate in order to control, made into habit and routine by those who exercised control, was one of the constitutive elements of colonial rule” (p. 29). Such humiliation included the devaluation and attempted elimination of indigenous practices, such as indigenous language use. “Language,” according to Brice Heath (1992), “is the perfect tool of Empire” (p. 25), as it serves to extend the authority, domain, and ideals of the imperial power.

Post-Independence

Following Mexican Independence in 1821, indigenous peoples took on a new role in the national narrative, though they maintained an inferior status and continued to experience violent treatment on the part of the new *mestizo* (mixed-blood) elite. According to Brysk (2000), “in general, Latin American independence brought little benefit for Indian communities and sometimes destroyed the last vestiges of traditional protection provided by Church and Crown” (p. 8). A new national narrative was scripted during this time period to attract foreign investment and European immigration, in an effort to “whiten” the national population (Vaughan and Lewis, 2006). According to Munck (2008), under the post-Independence government,

Progress was essentially defined as following in the footsteps of the European nations inspired by the achievements of the Enlightenment. Civilization was thus inextricably linked with the European model and the recalcitrant American reality (and its indigenous peoples) was deemed the ‘barbarism’ that needed to be defeated. At best the local level would be

seen as 'folklore', which would could later be incorporated into the making of the national mythology as quaint 'ethnic backdrop' (p. 27).

During what Vaughan and Lewis (2006) refer to as the "heyday of evolutionary theories," the White race was designated as biologically superior to the non-White population (p. 9). Indigenous peoples, deemed to be biologically inferior, came to be associated with "backwardness," which was determined to be a detriment to national progress. It was not until the later years of the *Porfiriato* (the rule of Gen. Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1880 and 1884 to 1911) that biological racism began to undergo scrutiny.

The end of the Mexican Revolution in 1921 signaled the beginning of a new era in the history of Mexico, in which the "degeneration" of indigenous peoples was reframed as an issue of "cultural and economic factors rather than racial factors" (Lewis, 2006, p. 178). This period is associated with inward looking socio-economic policies of Import Substitution Industrialization and a fervent nationalist campaign. The reframing of the "Indian problem" during this nationalist period, as a cultural and economic issue rather than an issue of race, initiated the creation of policies and programs aimed toward assimilating Mexico's indigenous peoples into a new Spanish-speaking, "Cosmic Race," a term coined by José Vasconcelos, the first Minister of the Secretary of Public Education in Mexico. According to Vasconcelos, the new "Cosmic Race" would emerge from the processes of *mestizaje*, or cultural mixing, and would result in a new and unified cultural identity for all Mexicans, in which indigenous peoples and practices would serve as glorified relics of the past. Policies and programs of the state geared toward assimilating indigenous peoples into the newly forming national identity, included state-led

institutions and organizations, such as education, which aimed to indoctrinate¹⁹ and gradually incorporate, indigenous peoples into the newly forming national identity.

The post-Revolution era was centered on two principal social concepts: *mestizaje* (the mixing of races) and *indigenismo* (the valorization of Mexico's indigenous culture).

According to Vaughan and Lewis (2006), reformers were not a homogenous group,

But whether they embraced the new ideologies of *indigenismo*, linking Mexico's essence to indigenous culture, or *mestizaje*, celebrating racial and cultural mixture, reformers did not abandon the language or the evolutionary approach of nineteenth-century racist theory: they would transform a 'backward, degenerate, diseased' people into healthy, scientific patriots mobilized for development (p. 10).

Lewis (2006), refers to this process as a "kinder, gentler, more flexible school of eugenic thought," in essence a form of "social engineering" through the mixing (improvement) of cultures" (p. 179, 191). Though incorporating indigenous peoples into the national fabric was a fundamental component to *indigenismo*, it entailed the oppression of indigenous practices, such as language use.

Language was one of the principal tools for unifying Mexico's diverse population into singular national culture (Brice Heath, 1992). From the early Colonial period to present day, language has represented one of the essential tools for the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies, in which indigenous peoples and their languages have been devalued in comparison to the Spanish language and oppressed, either forcefully or

¹⁹ Education was one of the fundamental tools of indoctrination. In 1921, José Vasconcelos became the Minister of the new *Secretaría de Educación Pública* and began a fervent campaign to promote national culture through education and cultural works, such as art, literature, and scholarship. According to Vaughn (2006), "the crusade integrated intellectuals from the capital, Mexico's regions, and towns... it marked the beginning of one of the most consistent state commitments to the creation of a national culture and the expansion of public education in the twentieth century" (p. 157). For more information see Vaughn, M. K. and Lewis, S. E. (2006) *The eagle and the virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

through social campaigns. Marginalized, silenced, and pressured to assimilate most indigenous communities across Latin America, including Mixtecs in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, share these violent histories.

Mixtec Social Memory of Language Discrimination

Ignacio Vega remembers that when he was a child, almost the whole town of San Miguel Tlacotepec spoke Mixteco. Now at age 66, Ignacio senses that the Mixtec language will be wiped out in a matter of years. “When I was a child,” he says, “the entire world spoke in Mixteco, men, women, and children of my age. So I have spoken Mixteco for many years. But, now we do not really use it, we don’t speak it anymore.” Currently, Ignacio only speaks Mixteco when absolutely necessary, e.g., in social encounters with monolingual Mixtec speakers, of which very few remain in San Miguel Tlacotepec. But in his home, his place of work, and during his migration experiences, he finds the Mixtec language to be of little use.

When Ignacio was a child, his parents preferred that he and his siblings learn Spanish, a similar preference he shared when raising children of his own. “We didn’t value it,” he said, “the problem was that the people who speak a *dialect*, they aren’t taken into account; they are devalued. They say, ‘they [Mixtecos] are people who don’t know how to speak,’ That is how they are treated and for that reason many people began not wanting to speak Mixteco, because they are discriminated against ... for this reason everyone was forced to leave Mixteco behind.” Ignacio’s experience resonates with many Tlacotepenses, whose social encounters of language discrimination in and outside of the community shaped their parents’ and their own perceptions about indigenous language

use, leading to the determination that speaking Spanish, even if spoken “incorrectly,” was becoming increasingly necessary.

In San Miguel Tlacotepec, the number of Mixtec speakers declined precipitously over the last half century. According to survey data collected by the MMFRP research team between December 2007 and February, 2008, of 819 Tlacotepenses interviewed, only 11.9 percent reported speaking some Mixteco, of which 5.5 percent reported speaking it well (Cota-Cabrera, Hildreth, Rodríguez & Zárata, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, the data show that Mixtec speakers in Tlacotepec are concentrated among older generations (See Figure 3.1). With the passing of these generations, Ignacio believes Mixteco will completely fall out of use. “Nobody speaks it anymore, it is ending,” he expressed, “when the older people pass, Mixteco ends, because among the youth, around 10-12 years old, nobody speaks the *dialect*.” Other respondents expressed hope that this trend could be reversed, but to many, it seemed the future was clear – Spanish will entirely replace the use of Mixteco in Tlacotepec in the years to come.

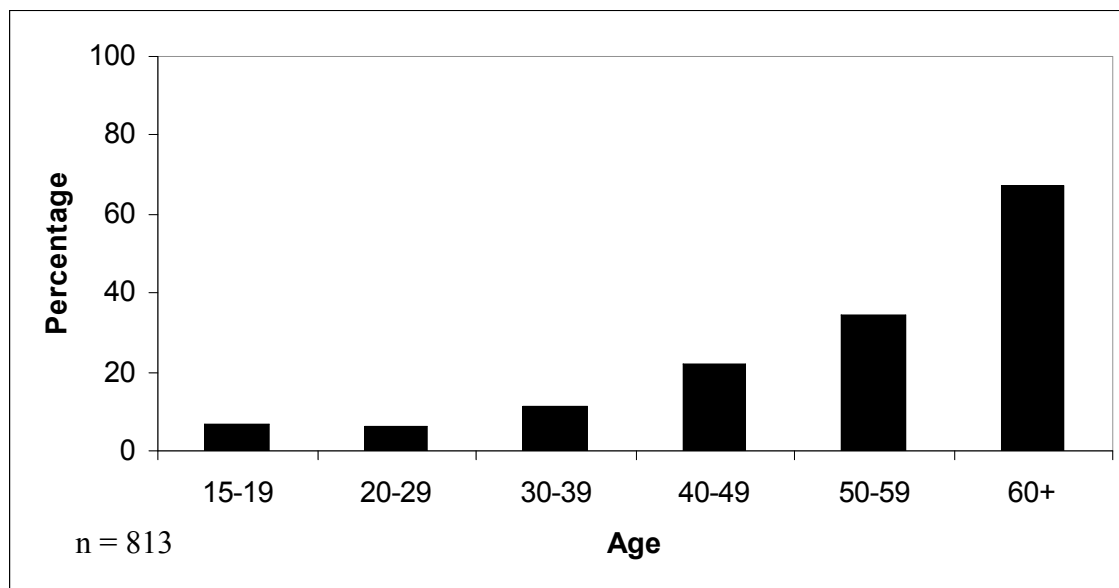


Figure 3.1: Percentage of Tlacotepenses Who Speak Some Mixtec, by Age

Source: Cornelius, W., Fitzgerald, D., Hernandez-Diaz, J., and Borger, S., Eds. (2009). *Migration from the Mexican Mixteca: A transnational community in Oaxaca and California*. La Jolla, CA: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego.

In Ixpantepec Nieves, the Mixtec language continues to be spoken by a higher percentage of the population. According to the Encyclopedia of Mexico's Municipalities 69.9 percent of residents five years and older in the Municipality of Ixpantepec Nieves speak an indigenous language (INAFED, 2005).²⁰ Passersby greet one another 'chaa,' an informal salutation in Mixteco. Taxi drivers and passengers in route to or from Ixpantepec Nieves are often found conversing in Mixteco. Even in the Municipal Palace, one finds a majority of conversations taking place in the Mixtec language. The use of the Mixtec language in Nieves is surprising compared to that of neighboring San Miguel Tlacotepec, despite the fact that they share very similar socio-demographic profiles (see Chapter 1). Lacking precise dates, such as the construction of roads, founding of local

²⁰ The municipio-level data include smaller towns that fall under the administration of the municipal seat. In these smaller, even more rural localities, the incidence of Mixtec speakers is higher than in the cabecera.

schools, and preliminary departure dates of migrants, makes it difficult to determine what accounts for this difference. However, Ixpantepenses suggest is that the difference is only a matter of time. The same factors driving the decline in the use of the Mixtec language in San Miguel Tlacotepec are also at work in Ixpantepec Nieves. Ixpantepenses pointed out that increasingly parents have elected not to teach their children Mixteco. Likewise, they observe that young people are “choosing” not to learn the language, making Mixtec language competence less and less common among Ixpantepense youth.

Mixtec Social Memory of Language Discrimination

As was introduced in Chapter Two, symbolic violence and its linguistic mechanizations, perpetrated via the devaluation of non-dominant practices and thereby non-dominant groups, serves to reinforce and obscure the irrational legitimacy of social hierarchies of power (Bourdieu, 1991). Through the recurrence of discriminatory practices, the use of over force, more prevalent in the early memories of older Mixtec language speakers, grows less and less necessary. Possessing “linguistic capital,” referring to the ability to speak the dominant language with fluency and authority, can then be transferred for other types of capital, creating social, political, and economic barriers to capital accumulation for speakers of non-dominant languages (Bourdieu, 1991). Among Mixtecs, these processes have been occurring within and outside of their native communities for centuries, only to be intensified by the implementation of state-sponsored schools and increasing social encounters with dominant language speakers in surrounding areas and U.S. migrant destinations.

Padre Pedro, age 44, has been the resident Catholic priest for the parochial district encompassing both San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves for nine years.

Originally from Santiago Cacoloxtepec, Huajuapán de León, a two-hour drive from where we sat in his office adjoining the Catholic Church in San Miguel Tlacotepec. Padre Pedro speaks both Mixteco and Spanish and has faced various struggles throughout his lifetime as a Mixtec speaker, including experiences of discrimination that have influenced his own processes of identity formation. Recounting his experiences of traveling to the city of Huajuapán de León to pursue his studies, Padre Pedro said:

The Mixtec language and the Mixtec people have been treated as inferior, as if they were of a lower culture. They have been devalued, and they have been humiliated. I arrived in Huajuapán speaking Mixteco and I had to butt heads with the Huajuapeños who would call us *indios*. They said we were *pata rajadas* [slashed feet - referring to rough and calloused feet due to walking barefoot]; they said we were people of low culture.

According to Padre Pedro these experiences of discrimination as a child were very powerful and influential in shaping his early perceptions of indigenosity, an identity from which he struggled to distance himself from for years. “When I arrived at seminary,” he recalled,

I didn’t want to speak Mixteco. I went to university and was in school to be a doctor before a priest. Once in the university, I felt I was at a different level – no longer from Cacaloxtepec. I had in mind to be a doctor and later a specialist and then to climb the ladder, with the intention of leaving behind what I was. I left behind my shame. Perhaps I didn’t say it, but I felt it, and that is the worst.

Once in seminary, Padre Pedro was told that he should claim and be proud of his indigenous identity.²¹ However, feeling that he had already begun to purge himself of stigmatized practices associated with “being” indigenous, it was challenging for Padre Pedro to reclaim and value his indigenous heritage. Now, he is among the few local

²¹ According to Padre Pedro, the Roman Catholic church has supported indigenous cultural and language practices in recent years. Therefore, when he entered seminary he was encouraged to embrace his indigenous heritage.

advocates for the revalorization and revitalization of the Mixtec language. Similar experiences of discrimination, Padre Pedro believes, are central to the rapidly decreasing rates of indigenous language use in the Mixteca.

Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses reported that experiences of discrimination against Mixtec language speakers are encountered in a wide range of social settings and institutions, both formal and informal, which transfer power, status, and legitimacy to Spanish speakers. According to Antonio Ramos, a 49-year-old native of Ixpantepec Nieves and the current Municipal President, “There is discrimination in the city. There is discrimination in the schools, on every street corner, including here. For that reason, if you encounter a youngster on the street, it embarrasses him to speak Mixteco.” Embedded in social institutions and encountered in various sites, including markets, schools, and local, regional, and state governmental offices, past experiences of discrimination reinforce social hierarchies and provide lasting incentives for Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses to abandon use of the Mixtec language.

The Power in a Name

Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses often referred to the use of pejorative terms to demean and oppress indigenous language speakers. Price (2005) states, “Prejudice is embedded in the language; to call someone an *indio* (Indian) is an insult in Mexico” (p. 37). Power is not inherently embedded in a word or title rather; “whatever power or force speech acts possess is a power or force ascribed to them by the social institution of which the utterance of the speech act is a part” (Thompson, 1991, p. 10). Thus, a seemingly benign statement or title can be radically altered in significance, depending upon the social context in which it is used.

According to Mixtecs, “Mixteco,” “Indio,” “Indito,” “Naturalito” and “Cacaleño,” were all titles that when used in particular social contexts are highly pejorative and insinuate the inferiority of the individual or group named. “Los Cacaleños,” Padre Pedro expressed, “was a discriminatory and humiliating title... everything Cacaleño is inferior, he who is, I guess, a little bit backwards.” As particular words become imbued with power, their use serves to reinforce social hierarchies and the inferior status of the “named” group and its practices. Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses locate the use of these titles both inside and outside of their home communities. Padre Pedro has the idea that “a Mexican is devalued more by other Mexicans than by non-Mexicans, and here [in the Mixteca] we are devalued more by other Mixtecos... by people who by not speaking the language no longer feel part of the culture. Rather they feel they are of a different level.” According to Padre Pedro, it is often non-indigenous language speakers, including Mixtecos, who “take it upon themselves to rub it in -- *indio, indígena, retrasdo* [backwards], *pata rajada* -- and they are of our same race.”

Among Tlacotepenses, two sets of paired terms emerged frequently in conversation when discussing the history of local hierarchies of power. The first refers to the centrality of one’s home within the community. Individuals with high status typically spoke the Spanish language and resided close to the center of town, called *los del centro*, while Mixtec speakers typically have been associated with poverty and residence on the outskirts of town, called *los de la orilla*.²² Juan Vargas, a 64-year-old, native of San

²² This type of segregation of communities, resulting in the centralization of Spanish-speaking elite and the marginalization of indigenous people on the periphery, is not unique to San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, but rather is a product of colonization found in various parts of Mexico. In George M. Foster’s mid-twentieth century study of the town of Tzintuzuntan located in the State of Michoacán, he

Miguel Tlacotepec, lives on the south end of town on the other side of a small concrete bridge used often as a physical reference point indicating where many Mixtec speakers in Tlacotepec reside (see Figure 3.2)

Image 3.1: Bridge in San Miguel Tlacotepec



Source: Photos taken by Elizabeth Perry (08/2008)

When asked about this segregation, Juan commented: “Beforehand, those that spoke Mixteco, or rather those that spoke Spanish, we would call them *los del centro*, they lived over there [pointing to the center of town]. On the outskirts of town, or over in this part [indicating the neighborhood in which Juan lived], here we are *indios*, you see.” *Los del centro* referred to the wealthy, Spanish speakers in the community, whose physical centrality was in and of itself a statement of power and status carried over from the colonial period.

finds a similar population distribution in the town and the use of similar titles to distinguish between Indigenous peoples (*los naturales*) and Mestizos (*los de razón*). Foster (1948) states “the economic condition also plays an important part in the classification: the *gente de razón* lives close to the center of town, it is more probable that they are *tenderos*, that they have straw floors in their homes, and that perhaps some even have windows made of glass. The *gente de razón* never dresses in “calzones” or “telares” of the Indigenous women” (self-translation from Spanish to English, p. 63). As is indicated by Foster’s study, these categorizations are not static, but rather fluid and depend on both on ancestry and marriage, in which marriage into a particular family can serve to elevate or diminish one’s social status.

According to Dora Chavez, a 40-year-old-native of Ixpantepec Nieves, this physical segregation existed in Nieves as well. Individuals with greater resources and of higher social status, corresponding to use of the Spanish language, were concentrated in the center of town and indigenous language-speakers on the periphery. Thus status, wealth, and speaking Spanish have served as markers of belonging to the local elite and possession of one type of capital -- be it linguistic, economic, social, or political -- which typically signified possession or access to the others.²³

Alicia Rodriguez, a 73-year-old widow and native of San Miguel Tlacotepec, is from *la orilla*, but worked in *el centro* when she was a young woman, cleaning and cooking for a family with greater financial resources than her own. When asked about the differences in the financial well-being between certain families in the community, she responded: “There were people called *los ricos* (the rich people) because, you see, only they spoke Spanish. They were the only ones that dressed nicely; that had shoes. We didn’t. We grew up with calloused feet. We didn’t have anything, that is how we grew up.” For Alicia, there was a clear distinction between those from *el centro* and those from *la orilla* that corresponded not only to wealth and status, but also to language.

The second set of paired terms, used well into the Twentieth Century, harkens back to the use of biological justifications for the subordination of indigenous peoples found most often during period between Independence and the Mexican Revolution. In

²³ While these categories were rigid, they were not entirely static. As Santiago Molina pointed out in the case of San Miguel Tlacotepec, some Mixtec speakers were considered wealthy, and they possessed a greater range of social mobility between the two groups. Marrying into an “elite” family, was also a means by which an individual could move from one social category to another. Santiago states “If you were related to one of a few families, you passed as part of the group; although having money also made you part of the group with mestizos. There were Indians with a lot of money and they obviously joined the circle and there were poor mestizos, but nonetheless they were in the mestizo group”

both San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, Mixtecs refer to use of the title *naturales* (naturals) or *naturalitos* (diminutive) to refer to indigenous peoples and *los de razón* (those of reason) in reference to the Spanish-speaking elite. Santiago Molina, a 55-year-old Tlacotepense, recalled: “They called them *naturales* or Indians. The other people were those of reason.” These titles reflect the construction of difference within the community based on the superior “reason” or intelligence of the Spanish-speaking elite in comparison to Mixtec speakers.

These social divisions also manifested in social engagements, as maintaining one’s privilege and status was considered to be contingent on maintaining a non-indigenous profile. According to Felipe Ortega, a teacher and former Municipal President in San Miguel Tlacotepec,

What happens is that all of those that speak Mixteco congregate more. Why? Because those who spoke in Spanish, they didn’t like to get together with those that spoke Mixteco. There was a very distinct differentiation due to language ... [Mixtec speakers] were rejected most of all in regard to gatherings. Say there is a baptism, we are going to invite this group of people that speak Spanish, or that are *de razón*, we are not going to invite *los indios*. All forms of gatherings like weddings, including when someone wanted to get married, if they were from the two groups there was a very evident opposition to prohibit that *los de razón* engaged in matrimony with *los indios*. At times it was motive of disputes and violence. There were many cases of this.

Over time, these boundaries between indigenous language speakers and the Spanish-speaking elite have blurred, as intermarriage and increasing use of the Spanish language have made it challenging to determine one’s social status merely by physical appearance or language use. Nonetheless, social hierarchies are still palpable, and indigenous language use continues to serve as a stigmatized indicator of difference. According to Santiago Molina, “here,” in San Miguel Tlacotepec, “there remains this weight associated

with being *indio* or being *de razón*...although it goes unsaid, it is not yet erased, it is a wound that persists.”

These processes have been at play for a long time within the local community and have shaped the decisions of Mixtecs regarding indigenous language use. Padre Pedro reflects: “Therefore, our own people have taken it upon themselves to destroy the rest of us that continue to use the language [Mixteco], saying that we are of lower status, a lower level culturally speaking. Or, that we have moved beyond Mixteco – that it is already a thing of the past.” For centuries, these processes largely played out in local Mixtec communities, in which particular families, associated with wealth, centrality, and speaking Spanish, used language as a mechanism to assert and maintain power and control over Mixtec language speakers.

“Ugly” speak: Discrediting and Correction as Tools of Power

As explained in Chapter Two, Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes that in addition to the devaluation of non-dominant languages as a mechanism for defining and maintaining power, these processes also occur through correction once the non-dominant group has acquired use of the dominant capital. Bilingual Mixtec speakers, or Mixtec speakers learning Spanish, expressed that they are discouragingly stuck in limbo; sanctioned for speaking Mixteco, yet unable to speak Spanish correctly enough to pass undetected in various social milieus. According to Fernando Salazar, a native of San Miguel Tlacotepec, “really, sometimes we have certain people with different vocabularies, in the sense that I speak *ugly*, or I speak *well*, or they don’t understand my words. Therefore, I think that we all have a defect, the defect of saying ‘why do I speak it [Mixteco], if they want for me to speak Spanish.” Fernando touches on a common vein in a number of

Mixtec narratives. Mixtec speakers were told that their “dialect” was “ugly” and that it left them “tongue-tied” and unable to speak in an intelligible way. However, even having acquired a working knowledge or level of fluency in the Spanish language, Mixtec language speakers have found that they continue to be devalued through processes of correction.

When asked if his parents taught him Mixteco, Ignacio Vega responded, “no, they didn’t like it. They didn’t like that we spoke Mixteco because they had the idea that by speaking Mixteco we wouldn’t speak Spanish correctly. Rather, what they wanted was for us to speak Spanish well, even though we wouldn’t speak Mixteco. That is what would happen if you spoke Mixteco and Spanish, you would get ‘tongue-tied.’” The message sent to Ignacio by his parents was reflected in his own parenting decisions. In a conversation with Marisa, Ignacio’s wife and mother of their five children, she stated,

It was my husband who didn’t like that I taught my children [Mixteco]. Because when I was raising my first son, I said to him ‘come to eat’ in Mixteco. My husband didn’t like it. ‘Don’t say it that way, because when he is older my son won’t be able to pronounce Spanish or Mixteco well. So don’t talk to him in Mixteco, better to talk to him in Spanish.’ For that reason, I stopped teaching my son Mixteco.

To speak Spanish well means, as Ignacio and Marisa’s history reflects, speaking without an accent or without indication of “being” indigenous. Only in this way, Ignacio believes, can a Mixtec “pass” into the Spanish-speaking world.

It is not only the ability to speak Spanish, but rather the ability to speak it “well,” to speak it “correctly,” that many Mixtec strive for and hope for their children. In speaking with Juan Vargas, from San Miguel Tlacotepec, he explained that due to his lack of schooling, he speaks Spanish improperly. He states, “I only went to the school for

a little and I learned a little bit of Spanish, that's why I don't speak correctly – like it should be spoken.” Other interview respondents referred to their Spanish as “broken,” “mocha,” “tongue-twisted,” and “incorrect.” It is through these processes of correction, according to Bourdieu (1991), that dominant language speakers continue to use language in order to maintain positions of power. However, it also allows Spanish-speakers, as in the case of Oaxaca, to act as gatekeepers of power by using correction to establish power and control over individuals whose accents are detected.

These aforementioned practices of discrimination refer to situations of interpersonal communication, in which language serves both as a mechanism for asserting control and as a social indicator used to differentiate between those who possess power and those who do not. Furthermore, as illustrated in the case of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses, these processes occur both within and outside of the group in which internal and external hierarchies of power are established through the devaluation of Mixtec language speakers. However, as Bourdieu (1991) argues, discriminatory practices are often obscured and exerted through more subtle manifestations or in their incorporation in institutions and “official” spaces. For Mixtecs, institutions such as schools and “official” public offices have served as powerful sites of oppression, in which indigenous language use is devalued.

Officializing Spanish-dominance: Legitimizing power

The legitimatization of the dominant language and the subsequent consolidation of power into the hands of the dominant Spanish-speaking elite, have, in large part, been intensified with the designation of Spanish as the *de facto* “official” language in

Mexico.²⁴ Spoken in local, regional, and national “official” places, including in schools and state-run agencies, the use of Spanish both terrified and restricted the engagement of Mixtec speakers. Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses called upon to engage in official matters, such as go to the Municipal Office in San Miguel Tlacotepec or to Huajuapán de León to request official documents, expressed feeling great trepidation and embarrassment due to language barriers and the association of indigenous language use with backwardness and social inferiority.

One early afternoon, Juan Vargas, a 64-year-old native of San Miguel Tlacotepec, sat inside of his home facing a small altar constructed recently in commemoration of his uncle, who had passed away just days before. Juan shared with me a story about a woman who entered one of the Municipal offices in San Miguel Tlacotepec to request help in sending a letter. The woman, Juan recounted, addressed the office attendant in Mixteco, to which he responded, ‘what is wrong with you? Why don’t you speak? Speak well because I don’t understand you.’ The office attendant signaled to Juan and asked him to translate. ‘What is this woman saying,’ the office attendant bemoaned. Juan explained to the attendant that the woman had come to the office to request assistance in sending a letter. In response, the attendant turned to the woman and proclaimed ‘Indio, you don’t speak well.’ Encounters such as this, Juan informed me, have generated a sense of shame and embarrassment associated with the use of the Mixtec language.

²⁴ On the 14th of January, 2008, the Mexican government officially recognized 364 languages as national languages, incorporating the various indigenous languages found across Mexico. This is reflective of state-led multicultural reforms that began in the last 20th century and continuing to present day. However, formerly in practice and carrying over to present day, Spanish serves as the de facto official language across Mexico (Paul and Norandi, 2008, January 15).

Ignacio's parents had similar experiences within San Miguel Tlacotepec and when traveling to surrounding areas. When asked about his parents' language preferences Ignacio stated,

They preferred to speak Spanish and finish with Mixteco... because they suffered a great deal. They suffered because, for example, they [Municipal authorities] sent for them to come to the Municipal office and they didn't know how to speak Spanish, and the people here they speak Spanish. Or they would go to shop in Juxtlahuaca or in whatever store and they didn't know how to ask for something, because everything was in Spanish. It is for this reason that they thought it better that their children learn Spanish and began to leave Mixteco behind. This was the cause and the motive.

Likewise, Ignacio's decisions not to teach his own children were based the perception that use of the Mixtec language is not valued in social encounters, such as those of his parents. In Ignacio's perspective, there is no point in speaking Mixteco. He stated, "I go to Huajuapán and nobody – all of the offices, everyone speaks Spanish – in the ecclesiastical offices, government offices, everywhere. Mixteco does not work." In many public places and "official" spaces Spanish reigns with a heavy hand.

During the period of nationalization in the twentieth century, in which the government sought to incorporate indigenous peoples and communities into a new unified national culture through assimilatory programs and policies, exchanges such as those of Ignacio's parents, increased. One of the principal mechanisms was through the extension of the state-sponsored system of education into previously disregarded areas, such as San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves. According to Lewis (2006), the "Spanish-only national schoolhouse," served as one of the primary mechanisms for the "indigenous incorporation" during the early years of nationalist period (p. 179). When asked when the use of Spanish increased within the community, Tlacotepenses and

Ixpantepenses frequently cited the arrival of the first State issued teachers and the expansion of formal schooling as primary factors of influence.

Teaching Difference

Carlos Flores, a native of San Miguel Tlacotepec, believes the first school was opened around the 1920s, just after the end of the Mexican Revolution, when one teacher was sent by the State to the community to teach first through fourth grade. Prior to this point, Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses reported that there was very little use of the Spanish language within the community, with the exception of a handful of powerful, wealthy families residing in the center of town. The arrival of the first teachers and the expansion of the education system have played a crucial role in devaluing the use of the Mixtec language and establishing Spanish as the legitimate mode of communication.

Schools served as one of the most powerful sites of discrimination and perpetration of symbolic violence, whereby the use of the dominant Spanish language in schools accelerated the declining use of the Mixtec language and served as an instrument for maintaining social hierarchies of power. According to Alejandro Mendez, an 85-year-old Ixpantepense, “when the teachers arrived, they started to tell the children ‘don’t speak Mixteco because it disadvantages you a lot – it tongue-ties you. Then you can’t speak Spanish and you are left with it [Mixteco].” As students, Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses expressed experiences of both direct physical and verbal maltreatment for speaking the Mixtec language at school, whereas, others who did not experience direct mistreatment expressed their recognition that Mixteco had no place within the formal school house.

According to Emilia Garza, a 47-year old resident of San Martin Sabinillo, an *agencia* of San Miguel Tlacotepec, and a teacher in the bilingual education system, part of the reason the Mixtec language is disappearing is due to the programs of *Castellanización* carried out during the period of nationalist fervor. *Castellanización* refers to dissemination of the Spanish language through education, derived from a former title, *Castellano*, for what is now referred to as Spanish language. Under this program of *Castellanización*, teachers were trained and assigned to particular communities to teach, above all, the Spanish language and curriculum based on the new nationalist narrative. Prior to working in bilingual education system, Emilia was employed as a *Castellanizadora*. “The teachers,” according to Emilia, “well, they demanded forcefully that you speak Spanish. The youth that spoke Mixteco they were punished.” Mixtec speaking students were sanctioned physically, verbally, and psychologically for not speaking Spanish in school.

Many Mixtec speakers shared unpleasant experiences in schools during this time frame, either relating to physical abuse, exclusion, or isolation due to language use. Ana Reyes’ experience attending school in Ixpantepec Nieves was so unpleasant, she said, she decided not to attend. “They would come with a stick and hit us,” she said laughing as she reflected, “and for the reason I told my dad that I’m not going.” For many students this resulted in a lack of interest in school and trust of teachers. For others, language barriers served as a means of exclusion, leading youth to fall behind or leave school altogether. As the influence of schools within Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec increased, years of education became another means by which power was asserted and ascribed.

During the initial years of operation, school attendance was primarily male and both females and males were often withheld from school in order to work around the house or in the fields. Eventually, however, school attendance and total years of completion came to be associated with greater opportunity and the ability to “improve” one’s social status, and more and more students began to attend regularly. Isabel, a 89-year-old, native of Ixpantepec Nieves showed me an old black and white photograph of her grandmother hanging on the wall of her one-room home near the center of town. Her grandmother, a short, slender woman was dressed in white cloth, her head wrapped with a *reboso*, a type of shawl introduced to indigenous women during the colonial period. Her grandmother, Isabel informed me, was indigenous and had insisted that her son, Isabel’s father, attend school. “They were naturalitos you see,” she told me, “for that reason she wanted her son to study,” and that is how he became a teacher. The insistence that Isabel’s father attend school, she informed me, was so that he could have greater economic and social possibilities.

As higher levels of formal education became associated with the wealth, status, power, and the Spanish-language, education emerged as means by which one could ascend in the social hierarchy and begin to acquire the various forms of capital. However, as illustrated by Bourdieu, given that years of schooling tend to vary in “duration and intensity...in proportion to inherited cultural capital, it follows that social mechanisms of cultural transmission tend to reproduce the structural disparity between the very unequal knowledge of the legitimate language and the much more uniform recognition of this language” (p. 62). Thus, the schoolhouse served to reproduce pre-established hierarchies of power, in which particular groups were given systematic advantage, while more

widely disseminating the message of the superior value of Spanish in comparison to the Mixtec language.

What is produced by the devaluation of the Mixtec language and its speakers?

The following sections suggest that both discrimination and resulting social hierarchies of power have led parents to forgo using and teaching the Mixtec language to their children. These decisions are based on the perception that by forgoing the use of the Mixtec language (and discouraging children's acquisition of the language) will help to reduce or eliminate associated hardship, social exclusion, and resulting lack of socio-economic opportunity. Furthermore, the ability of youth to perceive the devalued status ascribed to the Mixtec language have led youth to abstain from learning the Mixtec language.

Nonetheless, many Mixtec language speakers, particularly among the older generations, presently express ambivalence about the declining use of the Mixtec language and expressed interest in teaching their grandchildren. This ambivalence is evident in the narratives that follow. Though individual experiences and levels of Spanish acquisition need to be considered, I speculate that in large part this ambivalence is in due to the way in which choice and agency are understood. While Mixtecs demonstrate agency in choosing not to use the Mixtec language and ultimately make and act upon decisions regarding language use, they are largely influenced and constrained by the social contexts in which these decisions are made. These pressures very well could create a sense of loss and nostalgia associated with the meaning Mixtecs ascribe to the language, despite its declining use.

Parental Control: Not My Children

Experiences of language discrimination in these various sites and social interactions have led many Mixtec speakers to forgo the use and transference of the Mixtec language to younger generations. In both San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, the decision of parents to not teach their children the Mixtec language was common. Felipe's parents, for example, did not want to teach him or his siblings in order to spare them experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. According to Felipe,

There was a very clear division ... they would call the Mixtecos *indios* and those that spoke Spanish were called *de razón*, that was how they classified the social standards. Therefore, my parents didn't teach us Mixteco because they didn't want others to discriminate against us. They wanted for others not to reject us in groups, for us to be socially integrated – in schools, so they wouldn't reject us, so they wouldn't marginalize us. That is why they didn't teach us Mixteco.

Mixtec language speakers shared that they often made a deliberate choice not to pass on the Mixtec language to their children.

I sat on one of two beds inside the home of Victoria Gomez, a 63-year-old widow from San Miguel Tlacotepec. Her mother, a frail older woman, walked slowly back and forth from the kitchen to the patio as we carried on in conversation. Victoria's mother speaks a limited amount of Spanish, so Victoria spoke Mixteco predominately as a child. Victoria came to learn Spanish only through interacting with other children from the community and during her brief attendance in the local school. When Victoria and her husband had their first child, Pedro, they made a decision not to teach their children Mixteco. "We did not think Mixteco was good, for that reason we didn't teach it to them. I thought that they were going to learn it if we kept speaking it," she said, and so she and her husband ceased to use the Mixtec language in their home.

Toward the end of the conversation, Cesar, Victoria's youngest of thirteen total grandchildren, stumbled into the room with a leaky ice cream cone. His grandmother called him over to help him clean up the mess and informed me that she was actually teaching him a bit of Mixteco. "He already knows how to say water, he knows tortilla, and he knows hurry up," she says. However, Victoria feels that Mixteco is being lost because the youth are not speaking it. She states me that what has happened is that she didn't teach her children and they are not teaching theirs. Such is the case for many Tlacotepense families, in which older generations felt pressured to leave Mixteco behind, but feel a sense of loss or nostalgia. Many hope that younger generations will be able to speak both Spanish and Mixteco and have taken it upon themselves to try and teach their grandchildren.

Many adults, like Victoria, who now expressed hope about the possibility of language revitalization lamented that they had not taught their children Mixteco. This ambivalence between ideology and practice, suggest that while the incentives for forgoing the use of the Mixtec language are overwhelming, it retains value for many Mixtec speakers. In Ixpantepec Nieves, Doña Adriana is saddened by the loss of Mixteco and hopes that the revitalization efforts are not already too late. Doña Adriana is a grandmother of two young children who live in the same home with her, her husband, son, and daughter-in-law. When Doña Adriana was a child, she and her siblings spoke primarily in Mixteco. Doña Adriana's father was the first formal teacher in Ixpantepec Nieves, a job that was viewed as a position of status within the community. Doña Adriana reported, one day her father came home from teaching one day and made a surprising announcement. "My father" she shared, "said to my brothers and sisters, 'you

know what, I don't want to hear you speaking Mixteco – you have to speak in Spanish.” According to Doña Adriana, “from this day forward, they [her siblings] almost didn't speak because they were already accustomed to speaking in Mixteco.”

Doña Adriana continues to speak Mixteco and was willing to spend some time during our conversation to teach me basic words. However, when her children were born, she and her husband did not pass the Mixtec language on to their children. Doña Adriana lamented, “unfortunately, to address my children, I do it all in Spanish. Therefore, with me it should have started, this speaking Mixteco.” She regrets not having the “patience” and “fortitude” to insist that her children recognize the value of Mixteco, but hopes that with her grandchildren she will. What this ambivalence reflects is not a disregard for the value of one's own culture or the internal impetus to abandon a body of knowledge, such as that of language, but rather the product of discrimination based on language and the resulting hardship it entails. Having obtained a sufficient level of Spanish and passing the Spanish language on to their children, perhaps, Doña Adriana and Doña Victoria are able to revalorize their language in retrospection. The devalued status of the Mixtec language and experienced and perceived repercussions associated with its use, are, according to Tlactotepenses and Ixpantepenses palpable for youth, who have in many cases made both passive and active efforts to create distance between themselves and the language.

Inherited Beliefs: Mixteco and Youth Culture

Social memory of discrimination is both transmitted to younger generations and created through social exchanges and come to shape the value judgments youth make about the use of the Mixtec language. According to Cattell and Climo (2002), “social memory is the means by which information is transmitted among individuals and groups

from one generation to another. Not necessarily aware that they are doing so, individuals pass on their behaviors and attitudes to others in various contexts but especially through emotional and practical ties and in relationships among generations” (p. 39). The transmission of memory, in which the use of Mixtec language is perceived to be stigmatized, is among the factors that have disrupted the transmission of the Mixtec language to younger generations. According to Harrison (2007),

Many factors can interrupt successful language transmission, but it is rarely the result of free will. The decision tends to be made by the very youngest speakers, 6- and 7-year-olds, under duress or social pressure, and these children will influence the speech behavior of adults in the community. These youngest speakers – acting as tiny social barometers – are acutely sensitive to the disfavored status of their elders language and may choose to speak the more dominant tongue. One this happens, the decision tends to be irreversible (p. 8).

As younger generations forgo the process of learning their elders’ language the cycle is repeated and intensified, leading to greater language loss and the further legitimization of the dominant language. Respondents overwhelmingly noted the indifference or more direct rejection of the Mixtec language by youth. While a handful of interested youth join the ranks of adults interested in the preservation of the Mixtec language, the perception is that most youth are choosing to forgo the process.

Roberto Rivas, a 65-year-old native of Ixpantepec Nieves is among respondents that feel youth’s indifference or outright rejection of the Mixtec language is at the root of its declining use. When talking about the declining use of Mixteco among local youth, I asked Roberto if the decline is more a factor of parents deciding not to teach their children or the decision of children themselves to forgo learning and using the language. Roberto responded, “the youth.” “There are parents that speak Mixteco,” he informed me,

“but the children don’t take it into account they don’t want to speak it. There are some that speak it a bit, perhaps they understand it but don’t speak and then there are others that just don’t want to. They want to change.”

When queried about the changes youth wanted to make, Roberto frankly stated, “they want to put Mixteco to the side, which is to say that it isn’t worth anything. That is what the youth realize, that pure Spanish is better.” Many Mixtec youth, according to Roberto and appearing frequently in the narratives of Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, is that youth have concluded that there is little advantage attached to speaking Mixteco – rather, they perceive through the transmission of memory and their own experiences that the use of the Mixtec language is disadvantageous.

In fact, in order to differentiate themselves from the use of the Mixtec language, in particular cases Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses youth were reported to have themselves devalued Mixtec speakers within their family, the community, or surrounding areas. Within the household, for example, Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses relayed experiences of parent-child exchanges in which youth actively protested their parents’ use of, or attempts to teach, the Mixtec language. Doña Adriana, from Ixpantepec Nieves, said she tried to teach her children Mixteco but was often discouraged by her daughter who was embarrassed by her use of Mixteco. Doña Adriana recalled: “I spoke to my daughter and she would get angry. ‘Don’t talk to me that way’, she would say. So, certainly – I would have to work hard to demonstrate the beauty and the importance of Mixteco.”

Fernando Salazar from San Miguel Tlacotepec reported a similar experience. When asking his mother why she did not teach him the Mixtec language, he was told that

she didn't teach him because "your [his] brother would get mad." Fernando is the oldest child, but it was his younger brother who would lash out at his mother for speaking Mixteco. According to Fernando, his mother said: "Your brother would be ashamed; he would get embarrassed that I spoke Mixteco." These experiences illustrate youth, acting as little social barometers perceive, participate in the devaluation of the Mixtec language. Rather than vilifying youth as the perpetrators of abuse, these remarks illustrate how youth perceive and act upon the devalued status of indigenous languages in various contexts.

Youth perceptions regarding the value of the Mixtec language are also manifested in community life, such as in interactions between youth and elders. According to Julian Castillo from Nieves: "The youth today, they are disrespectful. There is no respect and when the older community members talk, those that speak Mixteco, they start to make fun of them and belittle them." These social interactions, according to Padre Pedro, have been damaging to the Mixtec language. Referring to the behavior of young people, Padre Pedro stated,

Youth have already done damage saying that Mixteco isn't worth anything or in saying 'why do you speak it? Are you retarded, shut up already', or 'speak well'. They say little things that continue reducing the value... I know young men and where they are from, but they say they are not from there. For example, people from Sabinillo who say that they are not from Sabinillo, but rather from Juxtlahuaca, or people from here [Tlacotepec], who say they are not from here but rather they are from Putla because, because those are communities where they no longer use *la lengua*. So, accepting that one is a native of an indigenous community is embarrassing to them.

Such perceptions and personal experiences of devaluation provide incentives for youth to distance themselves from the stigmatized use of the Mixtec language.

Past Experiences and Present Constructions

Mixtec social memory of language discrimination suggests that past experiences of discrimination have and continue to shape decisions about language use. Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses relate how language has been used in the community, surrounding urban areas, and in other public and “official” places, to establish and maintain hierarchies of power through the use of both overt and symbolic violence. The voices of Mixtecs illustrate the consequences of such experiences, namely the oppression of the Mixtec people and language, the consolidation of power and various forms of capital into the hands of the Spanish-speaking elite, and the declining use of the Mixtec language. Language discrimination has influenced both the decisions of older Mixtec-language speakers and younger generations to forgo the use of the Mixtec language in favor of Spanish to avoid the perceived and experienced repercussions and social stigma associated with use of the Mixtec language.

The shift to neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1980s, marks a significant turning point in the course of Mexican history, in which indigenous peoples and their cultural and linguistic practices are formally recognized as legitimate by the State and increasingly protected and promoted through state and national policies and programs. The following chapter examines the persistence of discriminatory practices in contemporary contexts, particularly the increasing use of “symbolic violence,” in which discrimination and its byproducts are obscured as outcomes of “unbiased” market forces. Furthermore, the implementation of neoliberal reforms has increased the push factors driving high rates of out-migration from the Mixteca region. In migrant destinations, Mixtecs encounter both

old and new social hierarchies of power in which language continues to be used as a tool of oppression against Mixtec language speakers.

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Chapter 4

Mixtec Language Use and Symbolic Violence in the Context of Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Each time political practice becomes more corrupt. There is distrust on behalf of the people toward the government. Most politicians are illegitimate, or are not legitimated, lets say. They are not legitimated by the people but rather by law, and they know that they didn't win with votes transparently. Now, holding the position they are rejected by the majority of people and it occurs to them to advocate things that could be of interest to communities, such as in the case of Mixtecos. 'We will rescue Mixteco!'. Of course the people receive this proposal well, but really, they are political declarations and that is all – Felipe Ortega, age 41, San Miguel Tlacotepec

In the early 1980s, facing near economic collapse, the Mexican State began a radical transition from an inward-looking project of nation-building, which included social policies of *indigenismo*, to a neoliberal multicultural framework. This chapter explains neoliberal multiculturalism and its application in Mexico. Then, it explores what neoliberal multiculturalism produces, particularly social and socio-economic realities as they apply to Mixtecs and how they influence the Mixtec language. These realities include the intensification of symbolic violence, in which hierarchies of power are maintained through the supposedly “unbiased” forces of the neoliberal market. Neoliberalism in Mexico has increased levels of socio-economic inequality, maintaining old and creating new factors of influence that lead to the declining use of the Mixtec language. In addition, neoliberal policy implementation has intensified push factors that

contribute to high rates of out-bound migration from the Mixtec region. In route to and established in migrant communities, Mixtecs are faced with both old social hierarchies, in which Spanish-speakers use language as a means by which to assert their power and control, and new social hierarchies, particularly in the United States, where the English language serves as the dominant mode of communication and means for capital accumulation.

The worldwide proliferation of neoliberal economic policies beginning in the 1980s corresponds in time to increasing global mobilization around the plight of the World's indigenous peoples. International non-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organization, began demanding that states recognize and grant equal rights to indigenous citizens. In Latin America, indigenous rights movements emerged promoting similar agendas; demanding that indigenous peoples and practices, which have long been oppressed and devalued, be recognized and protected by the state (Dean & Levi, 2000; Postero & Zamosc, 2004; Yashar, 2005; etc).

While demands of indigenous rights movements in Latin America vary, language rights, and the means by which to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages, are often central to their demands (Postero & Zamosc, 2004). Likewise, various Latin American states have ratified constitutional amendments and implemented official policies and state-led programs centered on the preservation of indigenous language use. Such is the case in Mexico, where indigenous languages were formally recognized by the Mexican Constitution in 1991 and are promoted by a growing number of state-led organizations, programs, and policies. Notwithstanding, the use of the Mixtec language has continued to decline precipitously over the last quarter century. Why has use declined despite both

state and grassroots efforts to revalorize, preserve, and revitalize indigenous language use?

As described in Chapter Three, both overt and symbolic forms of language discrimination have dissuaded Mixtecs from using and passing on the Mixtec language to their children. Social memory of language discrimination remains vivid for many Mixtec speakers and continues to shape Mixtec perspectives on, and adherence to the use of, the Mixtec language. This Chapter argues that beyond the enduring social memory of past experiences of discrimination, Mixtecs are faced with new social realities and contexts in which the devaluation of, and inferior socio-economic opportunity associated with, the Mixtec language persist. However, contemporary discriminatory practices are increasingly symbolic, making both the aggressors and the particular practices of discrimination harder to identify and thus, more challenging to condemn.

This study argues that under a neoliberal multicultural framework, the Mexican state denounces discriminatory practices based on race, culture and language by adopting multicultural reforms and thereby disarticulates itself as an oppressive social actor. The repudiation of direct discriminatory practices bleeds into other social institutions and sites, including Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec, where Mixtecs perceive a general shift away from blatant discriminatory practices in recent years. Furthermore, the state relinquishes its responsibility for ameliorating the socio-economic inequality tied to discriminatory practices by embracing the tenants of neoliberal theory, in which the market presumably functions as an unbiased social arbiter. What is not acknowledged, either intentionally or inadvertently, is that preexisting social hierarchies are not erased through neoliberal reforms, resulting in asymmetric market conditions. In addition, there

are often discrepancies between the theory and the application of neoliberalism, which can serve to grant particular privileges to certain groups while denying them to others. In turn, these asymmetric market conditions place pressure on many Mixtecs to leave their communities of origin in search of employment. In turn, outbound migration increases the interaction of Mixtecs in sites, such as urban areas and domestic and international migrant destinations, largely inhospitable to non-dominant languages. Before examining how these factors influence use of the Mixtec language, it is important to define neoliberal multiculturalism and what has been produced by its application in Mexico.

Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Oaxaca, Mexico

The 1980s in Mexico are frequently referred to as the lost decade, due to a severe economic crisis that peaked in 1982. The aftermath of this crisis resulted in the radical restructuring of the Mexican economy. In exchange for a World Bank loan in 1984 and debt forgiveness in 1989, the Mexican state was forced to implement austere neoliberal reforms, including privatization, reducing barriers to free trade, and cut backs in state spending, particularly on certain subsidies and social services (Harvey, 2005). This restructuring came at a high social cost, particularly for Mexico's poorest, whose social safety nets and greatly needed subsidies have progressively been stripped away.

Theoretically, neoliberalism is an extension of liberal economic theory originating in the 18th century, which alleges that less government intervention in the economy yields greater economic prosperity and social equality. Though couched in different terms, it has widely been noted that the neoliberal model differs from its predecessor in that it implies the "financialization of everything," meaning the extension of liberal market values as the governing principal of all institutions and social actions (Harvey, 2005, p. 33). Even the

state is governed by market values. The role and legitimacy of the neoliberal state is defined by its ability to protect the market, rather than to provide for the welfare of its citizens. Harvey (2005) argues, “according to theory, the neoliberal state should favour strong individual property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade” (p. 64). Theoretically, the neoliberal state should not act as a social protectorate. As the economy grows, according to the theory, prosperity will trickle down and provide indiscriminately for all social groups.

However, there are often notable divergences between neoliberal theory and its actual applications. Ong (2006b) calls attention to two scenarios in which neoliberalism is only partially applied. In the first, certain neoliberal policies are the exception, meaning that a limited number of neoliberal concepts are applied to an alternative economic model, such as communism in the case of China. In the second scenario, exceptions are made to neoliberal theory, in which the state’s economy is principally guided by neoliberalism but with particular exceptions.

Like most capitalist countries, Mexico fits into the second of these scenarios, in which the neoliberal model is applied but with important exceptions. For example, various Mexican states offer tax-incentives to attract multinational *maquilas* (assembly plants) to stimulate growth, while cutting subsidies for subsistence agricultural producers (SourceMex, 2003, October 22). Ong (2006b) argues that attention must be paid to these disruptions from theory, as they “can be deployed to include as well as to exclude,” and which can in turn set apart “some citizen-subjects ... that enjoy extraordinary political benefits and economic gain” (p. 5). Such exceptions, as Ong (2006a) suggests, can result in the creation of a hierarchy of citizenship, meaning that particular individuals or groups

are granted freedoms and privileges not available to others. In addition, neoliberal reforms in Mexico were implemented in a society already marked by high levels of inequality, giving advantage to individuals and social groups with pre-established positions of power. Before turning to what is produced by neoliberalism in Mexico, it is necessary to call attention to the interrelation between neoliberalism and multiculturalism.

In addition to neoliberal policy reforms, a number of Latin American governments began embracing state-led multicultural policies and programs, a term that generally refers to the recognition and celebration of racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Assies (2000) states, “in theory, the formal recognition of multiethnicity and pluriculturalism in the constitutions of Latin American states marks a rupture with the past of subordinated segregation characteristic of colonial times, the forced integration of early republican liberalism and the later assimilationist policies of *indigenismo*” (p. 4). Multiculturalism has both been heralded as a sign of progress for indigenous rights and democratic inclusion across Latin America (Kymlicka, 1994; Brysk, 2000), as well as, sharply criticized as ambiguous and as a palliative for the harsh consequences of neoliberal reform. (Hale, 2006; Postero, 2006; Ong, 2006b and Speed, 2005).

First, it is important to note that multiculturalism can mean many things. Speed (2005) emphasizes that the meaning of multiculturalism depends greatly on how and by whom the term is employed. For example, when utilized by indigenous rights movements the term “can reflect a progressive, empowering, and emancipatory politics,” whereas, if employed by the State it can imply “regressive politics, disempowerment, and regulation” (Speed, p. 30). Likewise, Postero (2007) argues that analysis must unpack terms such as

multiculturalism to unearth their complex meaning, which is often tied up in the context in which they are used. This Chapter will engage multiculturalism as it is employed by the Mexican state and in its relationship to neoliberalism. Neoliberal multiculturalism is the context in which language diversity in Mexico is increasingly recognized by the state while simultaneously declining in practice.

If the neoliberal state's fundamental objective is to assure the conditions for the smooth and proper functioning of the market, multiculturalism may appear to be a strange bedfellow. However, critics of neoliberal multiculturalism draw attention to the ways in which state-led multiculturalism may actually grease the wheels of a neoliberal economy, by serving as a "palliative for larger structural adjustment," as well as, a tool for reinforcing particular behaviors while discouraging others (Postero, 2007, p. 15). Hale (2006) argues that neoliberalism actually endorses a "carefully designed package of cultural rights," which includes the "affirmation of cultural difference and the vigorous critique of classic racism, and the explicit encouragement of indigenous political participation" (p. 219). State-led multiculturalism can actually serve to strengthen the neoliberal framework rather than stand in opposition to it, such that only particular rights are recognized that coincide with neoliberal market values (Hale, 2006).

Two simultaneous changes to the Mexican Constitution, approved in 1991 and implemented in January of 1992, mark a significant shift toward neoliberal multiculturalism in Mexico. The first reform, a paragraph added to Chapter One, Article Four, provides for the legal recognition of indigenous peoples and the preservation and

promotion of indigenous practices.²⁵ The second major change was in Article 27, which articulates the legally recognized basis for land tenure (Ortiz Elizondo, 1996). This Article, which formerly protected communal lands granted to ‘peasant’ groups, known as *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*, were reclassified, and over 50 percent of Mexico’s land designated as non-private was privatized (Cornelius & Myhre, 1998; Stephen, 2007).²⁶ Land reform and the opening of the Mexican market, are among several factors that have decreased the viability of subsistence agriculture on communal land, as a means of survival (de la Peña, 2005). Thus, at the same time that indigenous peoples were formally recognized in the Mexican Constitution, their right to own and farm land collectively was challenged.

The revision of Article 27 radically transformed the Mexican countryside, including agricultural practices in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves.²⁷ Prior to 2007, the last time Santiago Molina returned to San Miguel Tlacotepec was in 1985. On this earlier return trips, he remembers, everyone was farming along the hillsides that surround the town. “Now,” he says pointing to the surrounding areas, “as you can see the fields are barren.” Corn is now brought from other areas and is purchased with money

²⁵ The added text states, “The Mexican state has a pluricultural composition founded originally upon its indigenous *pueblos*. The law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, ways, customs, resources and particular forms of social organization and will guarantee its members effective access to the jurisdiction of the state. In trials and agricultural procedures in which they are a part, it will be taken into account their juridical practices and customs in terms established by the law” (Author’s translation from Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution). For more information on the factors leading up to this transition, see Aragón Andrade, O. (2007). *Indigenismo, movimientos y derechos indígenas en México*. Morelia, Michoacán, México: División de Estudios Posgrado de la Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas.

²⁶ According to As Cornelius and Myhre (1998), the essence of this reform was “to permit and even to encourage – but not compel – the privatization of previously inalienable, communally held ejido land” (p. 1).

²⁷ This change in land tenure possibilities has served as one central factor for increasing mobilization around Indigenous rights, including the uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army on January 1, 2004.

people earn elsewhere. The time and money invested in farming, according to Aljimi, is just not worth it. Fox and Rivera Salgado (2005) argue “the future projected by Mexico’s dominant economic model [neoliberalism] has little place for indigenous workers other than joining the urban and agro-export workforce” (p. 3). As will later be discussed, many Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses have therefore left their communities in search of employment.

This transition away from local agricultural production has progressed with the intensification of neoliberal reform. The inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a tri-lateral agreement between Mexico, Canada and the United States, on January 1, 2004, entailed severe cutbacks and the eventual elimination of state subsidies to subsistence agricultural workers in Mexico. Comprehensively, the effects of these reforms were particularly devastating on rural *campesinos* (small-scale agricultural workers) in Mexico. According to Stephen (2007), the elimination of subsidies for Mexico’s corn farmers resulted in a 70 percent drop in real corn prices between 1995 and 2001, signifying that in 2001 corn farmers could depend on one-third of the salary that they earned before the implementation of NAFTA. While not all Mixtecos from Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec fall into the category of *campesino*, until the early 1980s, agricultural practices were a staple activity for basic survival.

Gaspar Medina, age 71, began working as the *Mayor de las Llaves*, the general overseer of the Municipal Palace grounds, in San Miguel Tlacotepec in 2005. Previously, Gaspar worked as a day laborer, either harvesting crops or doing small jobs around the community, and in 1976 he began to travel to the United States in search of work. Gaspar

shared his view about changes in the community, particularly how the livelihoods of his parents compared to that of his own and of his two sons:

My parents farmed -- nothing else. Only a few people worked in something else, but generally people have been very poor. For that reason, people have suffered a lot. Now it appears that things are a little bit better, no? Because people have left for the United States, because in reality those that are in the United States come and they build their house and they now do other jobs. It is certainly different.

Like Gaspar, his children and many of his neighbors have shifted away from farming as a principal livelihood. Walking through the community, only a small number of visible cornfields remain, in addition to small plots that grow alongside houses closer to the center of town.

Increasing out-bound migration from indigenous communities has multiplied the challenges of continued Mixtec language use for both migrants in destinations where Spanish and English serve as the dominant means of communication and capital accumulation and for youth who perceive they will have little option but to make the journey north themselves. Before returning to the topic of migration as a new social context in which use of the Mixtec language is stigmatized and used as a tool of oppression, it is important to note the results of a neoliberal multicultural framework in Mexico. These products include more entrenched forms of symbolic violence and increasing inequality along racial and ethnic lines, in which indigenous language continues to be perceived as disadvantageous.

Consolidating Power, Obscuring its Source

Under a neoliberal multicultural framework, practices of discrimination against indigenous peoples and correlated socio-economic inequality persist. As summarized by Jackson & Warren (2005),

Strum (2004) argues that neoliberalism offers a thinly veiled racism of a new variety. Neoliberal ideology's emphasis on culture, class individualism, and choice, she argues, denies the persistence of economic marginalization and structural racism, as well as the meaningfulness of race at all. Neoliberalism's professed multicultural neutrality allows unique historical and political forms of oppression to be glossed over. An illusion of a level playing field is created, and issues of race, power, and privilege are obscured (p. 553).

Though a number of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses reported that blatant discriminatory expressions and behaviors have subsided since the 1980s, social exclusion, marginalization, and the socio-economic inequality paralleling racial and ethnic categories linger.

As Hale (2006) illustrates neoliberal multiculturalism implies a shift away from "classic racism," that being direct racist expressions and practices, toward "new cultural racism," in which racial hierarchies are maintained through more concealed discriminatory practices. "This new racism," Hale asserts, "comes embedded in a central and ubiquitous disavowal: those who preceded us were true racists, while we have overcome these problems...whereby racism only exists when we can identify an individual agent who espouses and acts on the assertion that people who belong to a given social category are inherently inferior" (p. 210). Hale's notion of new cultural racism, in essence, alludes to the preservation of social hierarchies of power through the increasing use of symbolic violence, which dampens the need for the use of obvious force.

As Hale (2006) demonstrates, the fusion of neoliberalism and multiculturalism serves to obscure the agents responsible for, and the means by which, racial hierarchies are maintained. Likewise, in everyday practice, by disavowing classic racism, dominant groups can clean their hands and histories of oppressive and discriminatory practices. Rather, the neoliberal market is deemed to play the role of the “unbiased” social arbiter, in which inequality results from self-exclusion from the market or behavior incongruent with market principals.²⁸ In essence, this produces, “the routinized reproduction of social inequality organized along racial lines” (Hale, 2006, p. 210). For Mixtecs, such inequality is both experienced and perceived and shapes the decisions and strategies Mixtecs make regarding indigenous language use.

“The rich are richer, the poor poorer”

In the last 25 years, inequality across Latin America has increased. According to Munck (2008), “today Latin America is the most unequal region in the world, where the richest 10 per cent of the population have more than 30 times the income earned by the poorest 10 per cent” (p. 108). Mexico is not exempt from this trend. In 2008, for example, Carlos Slim, a Mexican telecommunications tycoon and owner of various international retail conglomerates, was named by Forbes Magazine as the second wealthiest individual the world with a net worth of over \$60 billion. The World Bank estimated fifty percent of the Mexican population lived in poverty (World Bank, 2002). In San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, these social and economic realities are

²⁸ The emphasis on individualism under the neoliberal framework seeks to create “subjects who govern themselves,” which in turn places the responsibility on the individual for their well-being (Hale, 2006, 220). Ong (2006a) examines individual, finding individual rights are placed above those of social rights and individuals are rewarded for behaviors that reflect “rational” free-market values.

palpable for many community members. According to Doña Adriana of Ixpantepec Nieves in recent years “the rich are richer, and the poor poorer.” Though increasing inequality affects peoples of non-indigenous origin, higher rates of poverty are found to disproportionately affect indigenous peoples.

As illustrated by various indices that compare indigenous and non-indigenous populations, poverty and low levels of human development²⁹ continue to be more prevalent among indigenous peoples in Mexico than in the general population. According to a report published by the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Communities in Mexico,

On average, Indigenous peoples are poorer than the other Mexicans and their salaries, when they have them, are lower. Similarly, they have less education than everyone else, more men, and particularly more indigenous women are illiterate and have less access to health services. Also, there is a higher number of Indigenous households without electricity, potable water, and sewage systems. In sum, in almost all indexes of well-being and human development, Indigenous peoples are below the rest of the population (Navarrete Linares, 2008, p. 96).³⁰

Rising inequality along ethnic and racial lines signals that the current socio-economic model not only maintains high levels of inequality, it intensifies them.

According to Patrinos (2008), in Mexico,

²⁹ As used by Navarrete Linares (2008) “In order to measure human development of peoples, the United Nations Program for Development (PNUD) generated an index to measure the basic capacities of people stemming from three components: health, education, and income. The concept of human development, incorporated by PNUD, is defined as the generation of abilities and opportunities so that people can achieve the type of live that they most value and desire. Said understanding underlines the importance of social progress, political freedoms, and the social links as constitutive pillars of population well-being and, for that reason, other determining factors of development. . The Human Development Index (IDH) emerges from the premise that there exist certain basic and common abilities in all societies and at all times, which are essential so that people have the right to chose the kind of life that they most value. For more information, see el *Informe sobre desarrollo humano de los pueblos indígenas de México* 2006, que publicó la CDI y el PNUD” (Navarrete Linares, 2008). Translated by author.

³⁰ Translated by author.

The stagnating poverty rate and gap between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples has remained despite significant progress in other areas. For example, while there is still a gap, differences in years of schooling attained between indigenous and non-indigenous people have been narrowing over time and will soon reach parity. Yet the increased schooling of indigenous peoples has not translated into less poverty, as many would have hoped and expected given the strong links between investment in schooling, subsequent productivity, and income changes (p. 16).

As shown in Figure 4.1, poverty rates for indigenous peoples in Mexico between 1992 and 2002 have basically remained the same; whereas, for the non-indigenous population, poverty rates are far lower and have in fact declined slightly during the same period of time.

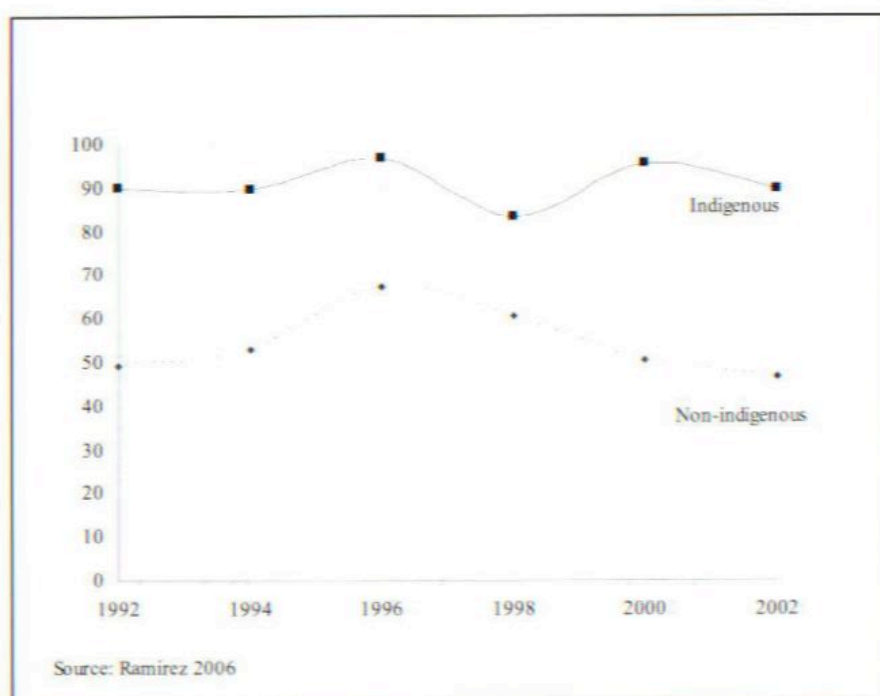


Figure 4.1: Evolution of Poverty Rates in Mexico, 1992-2002

Source: Patrinos, H. A. (2008). Educational Access and Inequality: Data on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico. *LASAFORUM*. 39(3): 16-21.

Rising inequality provides little incentive for youth to use or learn Mixteco, especially since many consider that the lack of local employment opportunity ensures that many will migrate to nearby urban areas or to the United States in search of work. Locally, few businesses thrive, and as subsistence agriculture has become less viable, Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses are turning elsewhere to make ends meet.

Mixtec Migration and Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Internal and international migration of Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses is not a new phenomenon; rather, both towns could be characterized as mature communities of migration. Beginning in the 1920s, San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves experienced an initial exodus of seasonal migrants. Drawn to higher paying jobs Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses sought work in domestic economic sectors needing manual labor, above all in the agricultural sector. Initially, Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses traveled to surrounding states such as Veracruz (to cut sugar cane) and Chiapas (to work on cotton farms). Later migrants were drawn into urban industrial centers, such as Oaxaca and Mexico City, to participate as construction workers in infrastructure development, and further north to the agricultural zones of Sinaloa and Baja California.

According to Velasco Ortiz (2005), by the 1980s, migration to the United States emerged as “path to survival for the inhabitants of the Mixteca” (p. 38). Mixtec migration prior to the 1980s was principally temporary, as Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses would leave their communities of origin after the local harvesting season to work in neighboring states with different crops and harvesting seasons. Migration patterns later expanded to include the United States, beginning with the Bracero Program.

In the 1980s, migration patterns continued to evolve, influenced by changes in U.S. immigration law, two severe economic crises in Mexico, increasing demand for labor in the United States, and the decreasing viability of subsistence farming practices in rural Mexico. Since the mid-1990s and increasingly significantly after World Trade Tower attacks on September 11th, 2001, tighter U.S. border enforcement has led U.S.-bound migrants to stay there longer, due to the rising physical and financial cost of unauthorized border crossings. Male-dominated, temporary migration has increasingly been replaced by whole-family migration of a permanent character (Cornelius, 2001; Fox & Rivera Salgado, 2005) As will later be discussed, migration accelerates the decline in the use of the Mixtec language by increasing the exposure of Mixtecs to social contexts where Spanish and English serve as the dominant means of communication.

Increasing out-migration is unquestionably associated with the strengthening of the neoliberal policy framework (Fox & Rivera Salgado, 2004, Ong, 2006; Varsayni & Nevins, 2007; Stephen, 2007).³¹ According to Varsayni and Nevins (2007), neoliberalism produces more migrants “by among other means, disrupting socio-economic networks that undermine the ability of people to realize their livelihoods at ‘home,’ and providing powerful employment magnets that attract migrants to go elsewhere” (p. 225). This is not to say that Mixtecs from Ixpantepec Nieves and San Miguel Tlacotepec are merely pawns of the neoliberal market, however, they make choices that are largely shaped by contemporary socio-economic realities, and in so doing many choose to leave home in search of wage-labor opportunities.

³¹ Neoliberalism, as is widely noted, thrives on a highly mobile and flexible pool of labor (sources), and the pressures of neoliberalization on many of Mixtecs encourage out-bound migration.

Neoliberal reforms in Mexico, including the aforementioned privatization of communal lands and termination of subsidies, have intensified the push factors that drive high rates of outbound migration from Mexico's rural, indigenous communities. Stephen (2007) argues,

Mexico's "structural adjustment" and "open economy" had a tremendous impact on agriculture. The new model reduced government support for peasant agriculture in order to encourage peasants to migrate to high-wage regions. Supposedly, salaries would rise in the areas of peasant production as those seeking employment migrated elsewhere, while migrant remittances would also flow back into peasant zones to provide them with productive capital. Meanwhile, the migrant agricultural force would "contribute" to zones of agricultural export production by providing low-cost labor. The result was massive mobilization of migrant workers from the traditionally peasant regions of the country such as Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, Morelos, Estado de Mexico, and Hidalgo, mostly states with a high proportion of indigenous population" (p. 122).

According to Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), "because the majority of Mexico's indigenous population depends on agriculture, their livelihood prospects are highly sensitive to governmental policies toward that sector" (p. 3). They argue that the Mexican government's rural development strategies have largely been based on the assumption that neoliberal policies, such as the implementation of NAFTA, would drive a large proportion of Mexico's rural poor into urban areas and to the United States.

No Opportunities Here

Very few non-agricultural opportunities for employment exist in San Miguel Tlacotepec. Doña Adriana and her husband exemplify this lack of opportunities. On August 18th, 2008, I sat with Doña Adriana's at her long kitchen table in Ixpantepec Nieves to discuss her employment experiences and her use of, and perspectives on, the Mixtec language. The front room of her house serves as a small convenient store and a

frequent stop for shoppers, vendors, and passersby who stop to greet Doña Adriana and her mother. This store was the first to open in Ixpantepec Nieves, but it is now one of many and according to Doña Adriana, it hardly gets enough business to survive. Doña Adriana's daughter-in-law and two small granddaughters shuffled in and out of the kitchen during the conversation. The oldest granddaughter, standing just high enough to reach the kitchen table, quickly drank the heavily sweetened cup of coffee Doña Adriana had prepared for herself. Standing intermittently to stir a warming pot of soup resting on a small gas stove, Doña Adriana graciously shared many of her experiences living and working both in and outside of Ixpantepec Nieves.

In recent years, Doña Adriana has stayed in Ixpantepec Nieves to work on various local development projects, such as a reforestation and the creation of local markets. Previously, she and her husband traveled both domestically and to the United States for work, but now they both prefer to stay in Ixpantepec Nieves. Nonetheless, Doña Adriana's husband is likely to return to the United States in the near future, and it is possible that she will go as well. The problem in Ixpantepec Nieves, she repeated, is that there simply are no employment opportunities. Moreover, in her experience, funds promised by the government for local development projects do not arrive. Doña Adriana would like to stay and work locally, but she is growing more and more discouraged. Felipe from San Miguel Tlacotepec believes that "if there were sources of employment, local development would follow," meanwhile, migration to the U.S. serves as a temporary solution.

The lack of local employment opportunities in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves is particularly discouraging for local youth, who finish school only to

find they must leave in order to find work. Doña Adriana recognizes that job creation must go hand-in-hand with education; though despite increasing levels of educational attainment, local employment opportunities are few and far between. Doña Adriana notes that a university is being built in the nearby city of Santiago Juxtlahuaca; however, the lack of adequate jobs in the region “makes universities practically centers of expulsion for youth” who can’t find work after they graduate. For example, an acquaintance of Doña Adriana lives and works in Huajuapán de León, an urban center located an hour-and-a-half from Ixpantepec Nieves, and has a university degree; however, she makes only 100 pesos a day (approximately \$10 U.S.), roughly what a settled migrant worker in the United States makes in one hour (Appleby et. al, 2009). Perceiving that there is little opportunity to remain in their communities of origin, many youth and young adults feel it is increasingly necessary to have flawless Spanish and to begin developing their ability to speak English.

Don Alejandro, an 85-year-old, native of Ixpantepec Nieves, finds that the youth no longer feel like they need to learn Mixteco. “They think they don’t need it,” he said. “For this reason, Mixteco is undervalued, because they think, ‘why do we want to speak Mixteco?’ What they are trying to speak is Spanish and to leave for over there [the US] and there they are learning English. They don’t speak it well, but bit by bit they start to understand it.” Don Alejandro’s statement is replete with indicators about pressures that youth in these communities face. These pressures signal that Spanish and increasingly English is essential for success in the neoliberal job market. Among the factors increasing outbound migration from the Mixteca beginning in the 1980s, are the lack of opportunity in local Mixtec communities and the rising inequality in Mexico along ethnic and racial

lines, in which language use continues to serve as a stigmatized marker of belonging and tool of oppression used against Mixtec language speakers.

Mixtec Migration: Social Challenges and Economic Prospects

While neoliberal policy implementation and associated rising socio-economic inequality intensify to the push factors for U.S.-bound migration of Mixtecs, it must be noted that Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses frequently note that migration presents them with both social challenges and socio-economic opportunities. On the one hand, Mixtec and Spanish-language speakers are faced with both old and new social hierarchies of power, in which indigenous language use is not only situated as substandard in comparison to the Spanish language, as is the case in Mexico, but to both Spanish and English in the context of the United States.

On the other hand, migration is also seen as a vehicle for socio-economic mobility. Both remittances and the shared experiences of community members as migrants, regardless of their social status, have helped to blur pre-existing social hierarchies of power within the local community. In the towns of San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves, migrant remittances are view as the means by which a new point of socio-economic equilibrium has been reached. Felipe Ortega, age 41, is a teacher and former Municipal Presdient in San Miguel Tlacotepec. “In my years of life, which is to say in the last 40 years, things have changed tremendously,” he observed. When asked if these changes have overall been good or bad for the community, he replied: “Obviously there are good and bad sides, because migration also yields an economic, political, and social balance.” This balance, according to Felipe, is reached as migrants remittances

help to support Mixtec families and sometimes to support local economic development in Oaxaca. Non-migrants in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves often rely heavily on the remittances that their U.S.-based family members send for household subsistence or home renovations or construction. Felipe cites the introduction of basic services, such as water, electricity, and telephone lines, as positive changes in the community supported in part by migrant contributions.

At the same time, migration presents social challenges, including intensifying the factors driving the declining use of the Mixtec language. As argued by Stephen (2007), Mixtec migrants encounter both new and old social hierarchies of power, in which indigenous migrants face greater structural limitations to capital accumulation of various sorts. These racial and ethnic classification systems generate “new kinds of racism and discrimination as indigenous migrants come to occupy increasingly visible places both in larger Mexican communities in the United States and outside of these communities” (Stephen, 2007, p. 28). Among the key factors in the creation and maintenance of both old and new social hierarchies is language (Lopez & Runsten, 2003). Mixtec language speakers are faced with increasing incentives to forgo the use of the Mixtec language. Rather, they are encouraged, often through the use symbolic violence, to speak either Spanish or English, or both.

Contemporary Contexts: Old and New Social Hierarchies of Power

Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004) find that indigenous migrants work in “ethnically segmented labor markets that relegate them to the bottom rungs” (p. 4). Migrant destinations, both in Mexico and in the United States serve as sites of discrimination in which indigenous language use maintains its stigma. In Mexican cities and in the United

States, indigenous language use continues to serve as a marker of “otherness” for Spanish-speakers, replicating old hierarchies of power encountered within and around the local community.

In the United States, indigenous Mexican migrants are also faced with discrimination by English-language speakers, who target language use, both Spanish and indigenous languages, to establish and maintain dominant positions of power. Thus, migration is tied to economic policies that leave little alternative for Mixtecs to remain in their community of origin, arguably a form of structural violence in and of itself, which in turn increases the insertion of Mixtecs in social contexts largely inhospitable to non-dominant languages. In these sites Mixtec respond to incentives to forgo use of the Mixtec language and, rather, to work toward fluency in both Spanish and English.

In the United States, Mixtecs are faced not only with the persistence of discrimination by non-indigenous Mexicans or Mexican Americans, but also go through what de Genova (2005) calls “reracialization,” in which they are placed “in a racial location between whiteness and Blackness” (p. 188). Reracialized according to their “Mexicanness,” Mexican migrants in the United States are often characterized or portrayed as belonging to a homogeneous Mexican racial category of “illegals,” whether it be that they have authorization to live and work in the United States or not. According to Stephen (2007), “whereas so called ethnic distinctions are the primary markers of difference in Mexico, particularly in terms of the degree to which people embrace an indigenous identity built on place, language, and ethnic autonomy, once Mexican migrants cross into the United States, what was their national identity, that is, their ‘Mexicanness,’ is treated as a racial identity” (Stephen, 2007, p. 211). Within these

various hierarchies language use maintains its function as a means by which to categorize and in many cases oppress.

According to survey data collected by the MMFRP in 2007, 85.6 percent of Tlacotepenses believe that there exists “a lot” or “some” discrimination against Mexicans in the United States. Among Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, use of Spanish or minimal use of English is a primary concern. Lopez and Runsten (2003) find “indigenous migrants arrive in the United States with greater disadvantages: some are monolingual in their indigenous language or speak Spanish poorly, often their economic conditions are more difficult and they are subject to racism by both Mexicans and Americans” (p. 2). Doña Adriana’s experience working in the United States serves as one example.

Doña Adriana’s work experience in the United States reflects the continued use of humiliation and correction by English-language speakers as a means of devaluation. According to Doña Adriana, in a small sandwich shop in Encinitas, California, she found herself speaking minimally at work, ashamed and having been judged for her limited use of the English language. While some of her English-speaking co-workers were kind to her, she shared, other English-speaking employees made fun of her limited English. Including, at one point she was locked in the walk-in refrigerator by a co-worker, an act she perceived as violent. “My jobs that I have had in the United States have been really difficult. As long as one doesn’t speak fluent English, well, we are simply going to have harder jobs,” she said. Doña Adriana, therefore, associates language use with both humiliation and barriers to opportunity in the United States.

Before migrating to the U.S., Doña Adriana’s hoped that she would find her *paisanos* (countrymen) living in better conditions than those prevailing in Ixpantepec

Nieves and surrounding communities. However, she found that many were living in conditions similar to those found in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca. Where the “white people live,” she observed, the houses are big and clean and they all have impeccable gardens. “Where my *paisanos* are,” she stated, “the houses are old,” and many live in conditions equal to those in Ixpantepec Nieves. Doña Adriana found there was a stark difference in the standard of living between her *paisanos* and where the “white people live.”

On the other hand, Doña Adriana feels that competition in the U.S. labor market often pits migrants against other migrants, as each strives to obtain or maintain employment. Lopez and Runsten (2003) find, “in California, the incorporation of indigenous people into the agricultural labor market puts them in direct competition with the more established Mexican *mestizo* workers” (p. 9). Doña Adriana informed me that workers would forgo using the bathroom or taking breaks in order to avoid losing their job to another migrant. Furthermore, as many workplace overseers and managers speak Spanish in these places of employment, language barriers fuel the feeling job insecurity.³²

Conclusion

For Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, the transition to neoliberal multiculturalism has not ameliorated the factors driving the declining use of the Mixtec language, namely discrimination and associated inequality. Rather, this chapter illustrates how, under the neoliberal multicultural framework, the decline has persisted and intensified through the increasing use of symbolic violence. Despite the waning use of blatant discrimination,

³² However, there is some evidence that in the U.S. language discrimination against indigenous migrants is not uniformly present in the workplace. This is reflected in the newest survey data from the MMFRP collected in Tunkas, Mexico in 2009.

Mixtecs continue to perceive social and economic disadvantages associated with “being” indigenous.

Furthermore, despite the state’s recognition of indigenous cultural and linguistic practices, neoliberal policy implementation has increased factors that are unfavorable to the preservation and revitalization of the Mixtec language. These factors include increasing inequality and out-migration. In Mexican destinations, such as Oaxaca City and Mexico City indigenous language speakers more frequently face interactions with dominant Spanish-speakers. International Mixtec migration to areas such as San Diego County, California, introduces Mixtec migrants to new hierarchies of power, in which English serves as the dominant language. Thus, indigenous language use is not only situated as substandard in comparison to the dominant Spanish language, as is the case in urban Mexico, but to both Spanish and English in the context of the United States.

This thesis, in full, is being prepared for publication in the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Working Paper Series as “The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language Among Oaxacan Migrants and Stay-at-Homes: The Persistence of Memory, Discrimination, and Social Hierarchies of Power.” The thesis author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 5

Mixtec Language Use and Social Hierarchies of Power: Meanings and Future Directions

Including, I know youth and where they are from, but they don't say they are from there. For example, people from Sabinillo that say they are not from Sabinillo; that they are from Santiago Juxtlahuaca. Or people from here [San Miguel Tlacotepec] that don't say they aren't from here, that they are from Putla, because they are communities where now they don't speak the language [Mixteco] – Padre Pedro Gutierrez, age 44, San Miguel Tlacotepec

In August of 2008, the Governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruíz Ortiz, called a meeting in Oaxaca City to present a legislative initiative to create an Indigenous Languages Institute in Oaxaca with the mandate to preserve and revitalize Oaxaca's numerous indigenous languages. The presiding Municipal President of Ixpantepec Nieves, Antonio Ramos, was among those called upon to participate as a representative of the Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca and to read aloud in Mixteco a statement regarding the importance of the Institute for preserving the Mixtec language. When I talked to the President about the Institute, he expressed hope that beyond the preservation of indigenous languages, the creation of the Institute would help to decrease discrimination against indigenous language speakers. These state-led efforts and the engagement of Mixtec social and political activists follows suit with multicultural reforms in Mexico and in other Latin American countries and demonstrates the syncretism between the state and non-state entities to carry forth projects of this nature.

Similar to these state-led initiatives, for many indigenous rights activists and organizations at the local, state, national and international levels language preservation and revitalization efforts are central to their efforts. The product of these endeavors includes the foundation of a Mixtec Language Academy, *Ve'e Tuun Savi*, in Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca and the creation of a bilingual (Mixtec/Spanish) radio program broadcast in the United States and throughout Mexico. What do these various efforts represent and what influence might they have on the preservation and revitalization of the Mixtec language? More broadly, what impact might these endeavors have on dismantling social hierarchies, disrupting discrimination, and curtailing their byproducts? After summarizing the historical and contemporary factors influencing the declining use of the Mixtec language, this Chapter will present suggestions for future research and speculate upon future of the Mixtec language.

Previous chapters have drawn attention to the factors driving the declining use of the Mixtec language among Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses residing both in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca and in Mixtec migrant communities in San Diego County, California. What I have argued is that Mixtec language use is declining rapidly due to the historical and contemporary experiences of both overt and symbolic violence exerted against Mixtec language speakers. These experiences and their byproducts, namely humiliation, social exclusion, marginalization, and socio-economic inequality along racial and ethnic lines, have shaped the decisions that Mixtecs have made regarding language use.

In recent years, the accelerating decline in the use of the Mixtec language suggests that in neoliberal multicultural Mexico discriminatory practices and their

byproducts persist. However, the Mexican state's embrace of a neoliberal multicultural framework disarticulates the state as an oppressive social actor, effectively cleaning its hands and history of discriminatory practices based on race and ethnicity by obscuring the cause of and recoiling from the responsibility for ameliorating resulting inequalities. Rather, the "unbiased" forces of the neoliberal market assume both the role of social arbiter and protectorate. However, despite the state's adoption of multicultural reforms, Mixtecs continue to experience and perceive the devalued status of the Mixtec language and associated repercussions stemming from its use. Both Mixtec social memory of language discrimination and the on-going experiences and perceptions of discrimination in contemporary contexts are at the root of declining Mixtec language use in everyday practice.

In addition, neoliberal policy implementation has increased the push factors driving high rates of out-migration from the Mixteca region. Migration has increased the insertion of Mixtec language speakers into sites in which old social hierarchies of power are intensified and new hierarchies created. Thus, within the local community, surrounding urban areas, and particularly in migrant destinations, Mixtecs are faced with both old and new pressures to forgo the use of the Mixtec language. In the United States in particular, Mixtec migrants go through a process of "reracialization," in which they are (re)positioned in new social hierarchies of power on the basis of their "Mexicanness" and assumed "illegality," but are also subject to old social hierarchies of power in which Spanish-speakers continue to use language as a tool for oppressing indigenous Mexican migrants in various social fields (de Genova, 2005).

The declining use of the Mixtec language calls critical attention to the history and persistence of discrimination against Mixtec language speakers. In so doing, this study serves as an “ethnographic disruption” that aims to interrupt the “general story-line” and to infuse the structures that perpetuate discrimination and inequality through the experiences and perceptions of Mixtecs themselves (Hale, 2006, p. 209). Furthermore, by calling attention to these discriminatory practices and what they produce, this study pinpoints the factors leading to the “disinterest” of Mixtecs in the Mixtec language. These factors are useful for speculating upon what will need to be done in order to ensure preservation and revitalization efforts have effect. What conclusions can be drawn from the declining use of the Mixtec language?

Simultaneous Strategies

The decision of Mixtecs to forgo the use of the Mixtec language and transferring the language to their children suggests that Mixtecs are employing silence as a strategy for shaping their own social realities in contemporary contexts. Contemporary scholarship has paid close attention to the significance of indigenous languages as a political tool and axis of social mobilization for indigenous rights activists and organizations (Velasco Ortiz, 2005; Fox & Rivera Salgado, 2005; Brysk, 2000; Warren, year; Rappaport, 2005; Yashar, 2005; and Fischer, 2001). According to Jackson and Warren (2005),

The politics being pursued by pueblos – demanding and attaining national and international recognition of their identity and the legitimacy of their claims – has shown that adopting an overall strategy of cultural and historical recovery and revival is often the best route for achieving a degree of autonomy and self-determination, as well as convincing funders and legislators of the reasonableness of other kinds of claims, such as titling a traditional collective land tenure system (p. 553).

Language revitalization efforts have proven to be a powerful tool of negotiation with the state, leading to the creation of various state-led and collaborative programs and policies to support such efforts.

However, the declining use of the Mixtec language signals that many Mixtecs are employing silence as a social strategy, referring to the disassociation with the Mixtec language in everyday practice in order to circumvent the consequences corresponding to its use. The use of silence, as exemplified by Ixpantepenses and Tlacotepenses, suggests that Mixtec's perceive that distancing oneself from the use of the Mixtec language serves as a means by which to dampen discriminatory practices and circumvent their byproducts. Though seemingly opposed, both efforts reflect Mixtec agency, demonstrating how Mixtecs employ various strategies to shape their own social realities in various contemporary contexts. The use of silence as a strategy does not signify that Mixtecs devalue or find no meaning in the Mixtec language. Rather, it suggests that silence is perceived to be an available and increasingly attractive social strategy. As Mixtecs perceive that distancing oneself from the Mixtec language equates with greater social and economic opportunity, Mixtec language speakers are incentivized to disengage from its use.

Though a number of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses feel that revitalization efforts are either invaluable or too late, others expressed hope that language revalorization and revitalization would not only stimulate the use of the Mixtec language, but also that such efforts may as well have a lasting impact on how Mixtecs are valued in society. Even individuals who decided to leave the Mixtec language behind and not to

teach it to their children, expressed they were beginning to develop a renewed sense of value in the language. This ambivalence, I speculate, reflects that the use of silence as a strategy is largely influenced by historical and contemporary social structures. Without determining their actions, these structures limit the options available to Mixtec language speakers by encouraging particular practices and discouraging others (Velasco Ortiz, 2005). If language use continues to decline, what role will language take on in the construction of contemporary processes of identity construction? How might this trend be reversed? What future challenges or future possibilities face the Mixtec language and its speakers?

Contemporary Mixtec Ethnic Identity

One point of interest and call for future research is the way in which declining language use influences the contemporary construction of Mixtec ethnic identity. For centuries, indigenous language use has been used as both an objective and subjective marker of belonging to one group or another. If use of indigenous languages is discouraged by historical and contemporary social structures, influencing Mixtecs to employ silence as a social strategy, what does declining use of the Mixtec language signify about the contemporary construction of Mixtec ethnic identity? Recently, topics of indigenous rights, ethnicity, and identity abound in academia and the media, and inform the complex negotiations between indigenous peoples, indigenous rights activists, and neoliberal multicultural nation-states (see Assies et. al, 2000; Bennett, 1998; Bowen, 2000; Brysk, 2000; Dean & Levi, 2003; de la Peña, 2005; and Yashar, 2005).

The persistence of ethnic identity in recent decades debunks assimilation hypotheses (Gordon, 1964; Park & Burgess, 1924), which purported ethnic identities

would wane in social importance over time. Ethnicity remains an important source of cohesion for groups, a form of classification used to define self and other, a powerful political and social strategy, and often a source of profound personal meaning. The endurance of ethnicity and ethnic groups provoke a number of questions about the nature of ethnicity, the practices that define and give it meaning, and how ethnicity shapes and is shaped by local and global processes.

Enormous and increasing heterogeneity complicates simple categorizations of racial and ethnic groups and generalizations risk discounting the diverse ways in which people experience, react to, employ, and contest these categories. According to Cornell and Hartman (2007), race and ethnicity “have to do with fundamental group processes: how human beings come to see themselves and others in particular ways, how they come to act on those perceptions, and how their understandings and actions are shaped by social and historical forces” (p. 13). Like Barth (1969), Cornell and Hartman recognize that the cultural practices associated with an ethnic group can decline or change, without diminishing the “sense of ethnic distinctiveness” (p. 18). Thus, if language use continues to decline, how will language use be incorporated or unincorporated in the contemporary construction of Mixtec ethnic identity? How will the state continue or discontinue the use language in ethnic categorizations? How will contemporary constructions of Mixtec ethnic identity reflect the persistence of or modifications in relationships of power?

Despite the meaningful advances Indigenous rights activists and organizations have made, Hernandez Castillo (2004) contends that the State has maintained a strong influence on how and by whom ethnic identities are defined. “By means of its institutions, its political organizations, its ritual practices, its repressive measures, or its

conciliatory spaces,” she states, “the Mexican state has contributed to the creation of new collective identities” (p. 237). This is illustrated by the ways in which state-led neoliberal multiculturalism in Mexico limits the strategic options of indigenous peoples in asserting their own identities, as well as intensifies the repercussions of engaging in particular practices, such as the use of the Mixtec language. Language, in this case, is of particular interest. It illuminates the paradox in which the State recognizes and grants rights associated with a particular practice, while denying the means and structurally limiting the ability to exercise those rights. In this scenario, what strategies will prove effective for wresting power away from the state? Are language revitalization efforts an effective means for beginning?

Language Survival: Revitalization Efforts

As predicted by Harrison (2007), in coming years many of the world’s non-majority languages are at risk of disappearing. Will the Mixtec language be among those that fall entirely out of use? If not, what will prove effective to preserve and revitalize its use? As mentioned above, many efforts are being undertaken at the grassroots, state, and international levels to call attention to the “disappearance” of non-majority, or non-dominant, languages and to preserve and revitalize their use. However, as argued in Chapter Four, state-led multiculturalism, paired with a neoliberal framework is often a “menace” to Indigenous rights (Hale, 2006). However, as Speed (2005) argues, it is important to call to attention to how, and by whom, multiculturalism is employed. Can multicultural projects arising from within Mixtec communities be effective in revalorizing and revitalizing Mixtec language use, turning the language into both a social and political resource for Mixtecs themselves?

Certainly, spaces exist in which Mixtecs and more broadly indigenous rights activists and organizations are both engaging with the state and acting independently to advance the rights of indigenous peoples and to preserve and revitalize particular cultural and linguistic practices. Various language preservation and revitalization efforts are currently underway and merit attention, as many, particularly those led by Mixtec speakers and activists themselves, serve not only to catalog and disseminate the Mixtec language, but also to reclaim its meaning and importance.

One such example is the Mixtec Cultural Exchange Program hosted in San Diego, California. This program provides various levels of language instruction in English, Spanish, and Mixteco for predominately Mixtec migrants residing in the area. Beyond language instruction, the Program draws attention to the value of the Mixtec language and Mixtec language speakers, fostering a sense of worth stemming from the use of the Mixtec language. I argue programs such as this merit on-going attention, as they exhibit the ways in which Mixtecs themselves are reclaiming and revalorizing their own language. As Harrison (2007) suggests, “if people feel their knowledge is worth keeping, they will do so. If they are told, or come to believe, that it is useless in the modern world, they may well abandon it” (p. 15). The challenge presented, therefore, is to draw attention to and to foster a sense of worth associated with the use of the Mixtec language. A greater obstacle, however, will be to challenge discrimination and resulting social hierarchies of power, which devalue Mixtec language use through both overt and symbolic violence.

At a more macro-level, there is little evidence that the use of language as a tool of oppression against indigenous language speakers is subsiding. Use of the Mixtec language in everyday practice continues to be associated with “backwardness,”

humiliation, social exclusion, and inferior socio-economic opportunity. If larger structural and ideological changes do not accompany language preservation and revitalization efforts, these endeavors very well may be unsuccessful. In essence, what may be necessary for the success of language revalorization and revitalization is the dismantling of social hierarchies of power. At the same time, the efforts of Mixtecs to promote language revalorization and revitalization may be one of the means by which to begin.

Migration and Language Revitalization: Challenges and Prospects

In addition, the influence of migration on the use of the Mixtec language warrants greater attention. Two primary questions are suggested by the increasing rate of outbound migration and lengthening of migrant stays in the United States. According to Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), “as thousands of indigenous immigrant families settle for the long term, the rising number of their children born and raised in the United States poses a risk of losing the indigenous languages” (p. 24). Youth of Mixtec origin, born in the United States, grow up in contexts where Mixtec language use may only be encountered in their homes, if at all, while youth in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves have a greater chance of encountering the language in everyday use. How will young Mixtecos in the United States connect to the Mixtec language?

At the same time, the organizational efforts of Mixtecs in the United States present opportunities for revalorization perhaps not readily available in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Ixpantepec Nieves. Migrants in the United States may have greater opportunity and greater resources with which to revalorize and reclaim the Mixtec language. Both the organizational capacity and availability of funding for grassroots

efforts may prove to be essential for revalorization. The Mixtec Cultural Exchange Program is among spaces where these efforts seem to be making headway.

Conclusion

In examining Mixtec social memory of language discrimination and the contemporary perspectives of Tlacotepenses and Ixpantepenses regarding the use, and possible revitalization of, the Mixtec language, this research calls to attention subaltern perspectives, often overshadowed by the dominant discourse. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004),

In multilingual settings, language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relationships of power, language ideologies, and interlocutor's views of their own and other's identities. Ongoing social, economic and political changes affect these constellations, modifying identity options offered to individuals at a particular moment in history and ideologies that legitimize and value particular identities more than others (p. 1-2).

Examining the use of the Mixtec language through in-depth interviews and participant observation draws attention to language use and its meaning in everyday social interactions, in which beliefs and behaviors are shaped, constructed, and reconstructed in various social contexts. It is at this level of interaction, according to Bourdieu (1991), that hierarchies of power are created and preserved.

According to Harrison (2007), “the accelerating extinction of languages on a global scale has no precedent in human history. And while it is not exactly equivalent to biological extinction of endangered species, it is happening much faster, making species extinction rates look trivial in comparison.” (p. 7). The potential loss of the Mixtec language is troubling not only because it implies the loss of a meaningful cultural body of

knowledge and a unique worldview, but also because it signals the persistence, and even intensification, of social injustice for Mixtecs at home and abroad.

The continued obsolescence of non-dominant practices, such as the Mixtec language, and their habitus is a strong indication that social hierarchies of power have not been dismantled and that Mixtec language use continues to serve as a stigmatized marker of “difference” in contemporary contexts. Illustrating how past and present experiences and perceptions of violence against Mixtec language speakers continue to influence decisions about language use provides new perspective on the neoliberal multicultural framework and its purported impartiality. “The fact that languages – and language ideologies – are anything but neutral,” Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) note, “is especially visible in multilingual societies where some languages and identity options are, in unforgettable Orwellian words, ‘more equal than others’” (p. 3).

This thesis, in full, is being prepared for publication in the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Working Paper Series as “The Declining Use of the Mixtec Language Among Oaxacan Migrants and Stay-at-Homes: The Persistence of Memory, Discrimination, and Social Hierarchies of Power.” The thesis author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Appendix

Interviews Conducted During Field Research in Oaxaca, August 2008

This grid only reflects interviews that were conducted in Oaxaca in August of 2008. This research also draws on in-depth interviews and survey data collected during the MMFRP from December 2007-February 2008, as well as informal interviews and participant observation conducted in Oaxaca, Mexico and San Diego County, California from August – December 2008.

Interview Number	Gender	Age	Native Community	First Language*	Second Language
1	Male	64	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
2	Female	63	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
3	Male	55	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
4	Male	67	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
5	Male	65	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
6	Female	85	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
7	Male	44	Cacoloxtepec	Mixteco	Spanish
8	Male	47	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
9	Male	85	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
10	Male	74	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
11	Male	41	SMT	Spanish	None
12	Male	49	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
13	Female	67	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
14	Female	54	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
15	Female	89	Nieves	Mixteco	Spanish
16	Male	80	Sabinillo	Mixteco	Spanish
17	Female	73	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
18	Female	47	Sabinillo	Spanish	Mixteco
19	Female	46	Sabinillo	Mixteco	Spanish
20	Female	70	SMT	Spanish	None
21	Male	45	SMT	Spanish	None
22	Male	43	SMT	Spanish	None
23	Male	66	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
24	Male	63	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
25	Female	65	SMT	Mixteco	Spanish
26	Male	71	SMT	Spanish	Mixteco

* Primary language refers to the first language learned, rather than primary language spoken in contemporary contexts. Some individuals learned Mixteco first, speaking it predominately as children, but now speak Spanish more regularly.

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