

Indigenous Language Preservation in Mexican Education

The Need for Mexico to Act on its Commitment to Preserving
Indigenous Languages

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Introduction

The importance of being bilingual in today's world cannot be underestimated. Cross cultural communications continually create global business agreements, encourage international exchanges and foster foreign cooperation. As access to the "globe" becomes ever more in reach to the average individual, the value of knowing a common world language, such as English, Spanish, French or Chinese becomes increasingly important. As knowledge of a world language becomes necessary, especially in terms of the job market, the preservation of less common languages, such as those spoken by indigenous communities, becomes more difficult. In the 21st century, many languages are at risk of dying out.

According to Matthias Brenzinger, a specialist in endangered languages, "[the] few thousand languages currently spoken are remaining relics of a once much richer pool of languages, and the shrinking of language diversity has accelerated during the last few thousand years."¹ It is amazing to think that today's 6,000 languages, a seemingly large quantity, are just a fraction of those that once existed. Importantly, in a globalized world, the trend of losing languages will likely accelerate.

Mexico is a case where language loss is a real threat due to the dominance of the Spanish language over increasingly vulnerable indigenous languages within the state. Mexico, the country with the most Spanish speakers on earth, has no official language. However, Spanish is the de-facto official language, spoken by 92.7% of the population.² Beyond that, the people of Mexico speak many other languages, left from cultures that

¹ Brenzinger ix

² CIA - The World Factbook - Mexico

existed long before the Spaniards arrived in the New World. According to the *Catalogue of Indigenous Languages* published by Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI, in Spanish) there are 11 linguistic families, 68 linguistic groups and 364 linguistic variants spoken within Mexico.³ It is assumed that literacy, via education, is a valuable tool in preserving and protecting a language. The question arises as to whether indigenous identities, as expressed through languages in Mexico, are being threatened by the country's education system. This question is explored in the remainder of this paper.

Official Mexican policies guarantee the right to use indigenous languages in the public sphere and to indigenous language education – specifically, Mexico describes its teaching as “intercultural bilingual education.”⁴ Various national institutions strive to uphold the rights of the native communities. Although Mexico has policies in place to promote indigenous languages, they are not sufficient enough to preserve them. The education system in Mexico needs to be more proactive in its approach to indigenous language preservation to ensure that the identity of people who have been traditionally underrepresented is not lost. Specifically, instead of just presenting the idea, the curriculum in Mexico should implement and support indigenous language literacy and learning alongside the learning of Spanish in order to maintain the diverse identities that currently exist. If Mexico only focuses on national identity with a homogenous mindset, the country risks losing many of the native cultures that are an integral part of its history.

To understand the importance of preserving indigenous languages, it is important to consider the historical background and demographics related to indigenous

³ INALI – Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas – Catálogo 8

⁴ Hamel Bilingual Education 320

communities in Mexico. This is followed by a brief overview of education in the Latin American country. Then, it is important to understand why language preservation is even worthwhile. I provide a review of academic research addressing why languages, culture and ultimately identity are important and why education is the best way to preserve such things. And through the presentation of case studies, research done on indigenous language education in Mexico, insight is gained on Mexican efforts to preserve native tongues. Finally, I provide suggestions for improvement and examples of other countries with similar indigenous populations to highlight their success in preserving native languages, and thus native identities.

I conclude my paper believing that Mexico has the responsibility ensure that the quality of its bilingual education so that the indigenous people can become prosperous people in greater society while the country maintains its invaluable cultural traditions.

I. Background on Mexico, the Indigenous and Education

Mexico, despite its geographic proximity to the United States, contains both advanced and developing societies. In terms of its indigenous society, poverty is common, money is tight and opportunity for life advancement is often scarce. The indigenous people in Mexico have lived with a marginalized status for many years due to exploitation and discrimination following the conquest.

The Constitution of the United Mexican States was adopted on February 5, 1917. It has been amended over the last century, most recently on November 13, 2007.⁵ Article 2 states that Mexico is “one” – *única* – and indivisible:

⁵ Political Constitution of the United Mexican States

*The Nation has a multicultural composition which has its roots in its indigenous peoples, comprising those who have descended from the people who inhabited the present territory of the country at the beginning of the colonization and who have preserved at least partially their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions.*⁶

In the most crucial document to its status as a democratic federal republic, Mexico recognizes its vast indigenous roots. What is indigenous society in Mexico like today?

i. The Indigenous Populations and Languages

Mexico is a country of 111.2 million people.⁷ According to the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI, in Spanish), there are 9,854,301 members of the indigenous population. This represents almost 10% of the population. There are nearly 6 million speakers of indigenous languages, 5 million of whom are bilingual. 25.4% of the total Mexican population over the age of 15 is illiterate, and 8.4% do not attend school between the ages of 6 and 14.⁸ It is a safe bet that many of those in the last two categories are indigenous.

Estimates are that 113 languages have disappeared in Mexico since the 12th century and that all indigenous languages, even those that are still widely used, are endangered or under threat of language shifts.⁹ Some of the major indigenous languages spoken today are Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotecan, Mixteca, which maintain a large contingent of speakers. According to the 2000 census, Nahuatl (the language that descended from the Aztecs) has 1,448,936 speakers, Zapotec has 452,887, Mixteca has 444,498 and five Mayan languages have more than 1.5 million speakers. However, 22 languages have less than 1,000 speakers remaining, and 6 have less than 100. For instance, the Mayan

⁶ Political Constitution of the United Mexican States

⁷ CIA - The World Factbook – Mexico: July 2009 estimate

⁸ CDI – Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas – Los Pueblos Indígenas de México 9: 2005 estimates

⁹ Grinevald 60

language of Awakateco only had 21 remaining speakers in a 2005 count of people over the age of 5.¹⁰ In 2000, there were 40 remaining speakers of Lacandon, 78% of who were over the age of 40.¹¹

An interesting example of language endangerment occurred in 2007 when the BBC published a story with the sub-header, “An indigenous language in southern Mexico is in danger of disappearing because its last two speakers have stopped talking to one another.”¹² According to Fernando Nava, the head of INALI, those last remaining speakers of the Zoque language did not wish to speak to one another for personal reasons. Nava used the occurrence to get people thinking about trying to increase the usage of languages that are otherwise on the verge of extinction.¹³ A significant amount of work is being done in the form of linguistic recording and study in Mexico, but documentation and discussion alone cannot prevent a language from becoming extinct. Many indigenous languages have no written form, making it difficult for them to be taught, especially in a formal educational setting.

Although the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas are where the most indigenous people are concentrated, with 1,575,736 and 1,261,752 respective inhabitants, indigenous communities can be found in all 31 Mexican states and the Federal District. Yucatán, Veracruz and Puebla are other states with nearly 1 million indigenous inhabitants each.¹⁴ A factor related to education that presents difficulties for indigenous societies is that their communities are generally more rural, making it more difficult for the location to be reached by teachers and other educational resources, let alone for

¹⁰ INALI Programa de Revitalización 9-11

¹¹ Hidalgo 140

¹² BBC NEWS Split imperils Mexican language

¹³ BBC NEWS Split imperils Mexican language

¹⁴ CDI Los Pueblos Indígenas de México 23

children to get to school. Also, generally lower economic status often means that families need their children to work and not to sit in school.

ii. Mexican Indigenous History

The indigenous people in Mexico today are descendent of societies that lived on the land long before the Spaniard's arrived. The founding event in the history of modern Mexico is its invasion, the conquest, in the 16th century, led by Hernán Cortes. The conquest lasted for many years, destroying much of the Aztec, Mayan and other indigenous culture and society that existed and thrived until then. The conquest marks the beginning of native customs being overtaken by Spanish language and culture. By the 1800s, after decades of both enslavement and cross-cultural interaction, the prototypical Mexican identity had become one of the *mestizo*, the mixture of European and indigenous blood. The indigenous communities that most contributed to the birth of the *mestizo* race were the Aztecs and Mayas, the most prominent indigenous groups at the time. Interestingly, the languages of the Mayans and the Aztecs (Nahuatl) are the two indigenous languages most spoken today.

After the War of Independence of 1810, many Mexican indigenous communities became integrated with Mexican-born Europeans, causing purely indigenous cultures to become the minority and their proportion in the population began to decrease. Statistics from the 19th century show this trend of the threat the declining indigenous population. The CDI reports that indigenous people comprised of 60% of the Mexican population according to the census of 1808, 38% in 1885 and 29% in 1921.¹⁵ We now know that this percentage hovers at just under 10%. Indigenous society in Mexico was devastated

¹⁵ CDI Los Pueblos Indígenas de México 39

in the century after the revolution – their communities were severely reduced amidst the dominance of the Spanish presence.

Strong desires for homogeneity with the rising *mestizo* majority brought out a national ideology that was strengthened by the Mexican Revolution in 1910. According to Dr. Rainer Enrique Hamel, of the Department of Anthropology at Mexico City's Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, the revolution allowed Mexico to identify three key traits in their complicated multinational identity. The three contributing factors, according to Hamel, were being of the Americas, being speakers of Spanish and descending from “the mystical indigenous identity founded in the high pre-Colombian indigenous civilizations.”¹⁶ Together, these three identity traits distinguished the rising state of Mexico. But the categorical unification of multiple indigenous identities and the perceived supremacy of Spanish did not help preserve native language and culture.

Mexico took few positive steps towards indigenous rights and representation until the 1990s. Sylvia Marcos, a Mexican scholar and indigenous rights activist, writes that “[being] Indian, showing signs of this identity (that is, speaking an indigenous language and acting following Indian customs) was – and to a large extent still is – a sign of ‘backwardness’ and ‘ignorance’ and a reason for shame.”¹⁷ Respect was finally demanded in 1994. In this year, rebels from the Zapatista National Liberation Army violently took over five municipalities in Chiapas. This event marked a new road for indigenous rights, causing many individuals in Mexico to no longer view minorities as inferior people.¹⁸ In the same year, Carlos Monsivais published an article called “*Todos somos indios*” – We are all Indians – and the feelings of shame previously held by

¹⁶ Hamel Indigenous Language Policy 303

¹⁷ Marcos 97

¹⁸ Ryan 17

indigenous community members began to be replaced by feelings of pride. Carlos Fuentes, another influential author of the time, wrote “[the] Challenge for mestizo Mexico after Chiapas is to come to grips with this multicultural and multiethnic reality.”¹⁹ Therefore, since the mid 1990s, the indigenous people of Mexico have been intent on making their presence known and valuing their heritage and identity.

As indigenous peoples in Mexico have worked their way into the greater society of Mexico, one last development which is important to note is the passing of the General Law of Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2003, marking a new area for language policy in the country. Article 9 of this law says that “All Mexicans have the right to communicate in their mother tongue, without restrictions, in public or in private, written or spoken, in all social, economic, political, cultural, religious or any other kind of activity.”²⁰ Overall, legislation in Mexico has moved “from a fairly weak tolerance orientation to a more specific and overt promotion orientation regarding the role of indigenous languages.”²¹ It is encouraging that changes are being made in Mexican laws to grant rights to indigenous, but it is not enough to just have these laws written – they also must be followed.

iii. The Education System

A review of the Mexican education system shows progress, but also historical favoritism. Article 3 of Mexico’s constitution is about education. It provides:

¹⁹ Fuentes (1994) ctd. in Chorba i

²⁰ Mexico – Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas – Translation by Kelsey Cambronne. Original Version: “Artículo 9: Es derecho de todo mexicano comunicarse en la lengua de la que sea hablante, sin restricciones en el ámbito público o privado, en forma oral o escrita, en todas sus actividades sociales, económicas, políticas, culturales, religiosas y cualesquiera otras.”

²¹ Hamel Indigenous Language Policy 307

*The education imparted by the Federal State shall be designed to develop harmoniously all the faculties of the human being and shall foster in him at the same time a love of country and a consciousness of international solidarity, in independence and justice ... It shall be democratic, considering democracy not only a judicial structure and a political arrangement but also a system of life based on the constant economic, social, and cultural improvement of the people.*²²

Article 3 guarantees access to a secular and free public education for all Mexican citizens, but it says nothing about indigenous language usage. However, note that the article's opening sentence prescribes a certain ideology to Mexican education – the ideology of the *mestizo*.

Unfortunately, not every school in Mexico is a success story. Latin American Studies Professor from Tulane University, John Huck, writes: “Although the Mexican government has made impressive strides in providing basic education to nearly all of its citizens, class, ethnicity and locale still condition the quality of education and the ability of Mexicans to take advantage of educational opportunities.”²³ Making adequate education available to all Mexicans is easier said than done. Most Mexicans are able to achieve functioning literacy, but a significant amount do not complete the six years of primary education required by the state.²⁴ Education in Mexico is now technically available for everyone, but the reality is different.

According to Aurora Loyo Brambila, a social researcher following educational trends at the Mexican Universidad Nacional Autónoma, a notable tendency in early 20th century Mexican education is “the continuous and intentional backwardness of rural and

²² Political Constitution of the United Mexican States

²³ Huck 294

²⁴ Huck 293

native education.”²⁵ Until recent decades, rural communities in Mexico lacked educational resources due to regional instability caused by political and military events and social inequalities born of colonization. Native communities also remained excluded from education due to scarce public resources and prejudice held against indigenous people. Since city life was deemed more important, it was thought that rudimentary Spanish and basic knowledge was more than sufficient for low class societies.²⁶ In the founding of modern education, indigenous languages were not an official or a high priority.

The educational situation did not get better with the Mexican Revolution, when the mestizo culture increased its racial, ideological and linguistic superiority. Assimilationist education was actually implemented to ensure that Spanish was taught in indigenous dominated areas.²⁷ Mexican education in the 20th century underwent many alterations, with no interest in indigenous issues. In 1958, Secretary of Education Jaime Torres Bodet under President Adolfo López Mateos committed the government to an eleven year plan to make the constitutional guarantee of compulsory education a reality. He also formed a program that provided free textbooks for all primary schools. Schools and their enrollment grew dramatically in the 1960s, but so did the number of illiterate children due to the simultaneously growing population. In the early 1970s President Luis Echeverría and his Secretary of Education Víctor Bravo Ahuja updated the free textbooks and increased education for teachers – their enrollment went from 56,000 in 1970 to 136,000 in 1976. Unfortunately, during this expansion, educational quality was

²⁵ Loyo Brambila 207. Note that this is the second time a scholar has been quoted using the word “backward” to describe the indigenous experience.

²⁶ Loyo Brambila 208

²⁷ Hamel Indigenous Language Policies 303

sacrificed for quantity.²⁸ When teachers are of low quality, the chance that they know how to teach specialized subjects is slim.

What happened to indigenous communities and schools during these changes? Educational reforms in the mid-20th century mostly involved presidents attempting to advance their own political platforms, and they probably did not have intercultural or linguistic goals in mind. In fact, schools that were designed to act as nation-builders did not display any concern for indigenous communities. “The emphasis on nation-building through acculturation and assimilation that has been evident in modern education programs has historically raised concerns for indigenous cultures and practices,” says Leanne Reinke, who holds a PhD related to education within indigenous communities.²⁹ As early as the 1970s, scholars note that education in indigenous areas was used as a tool to assimilate indigenous communities to the dominant culture, causing local schools to be mixed blessings. Though it was an achievement to even have a modern school in indigenous areas, the education was totally controlled by centralized institutions seeking to create national allegiances. Another problem was that the less experienced teachers were sent to indigenous communities (before then getting jobs in the city), including places where they did not know the language before they could be promoted to city jobs. It was also difficult to find a balance between the bureaucratically-driven government teachers and the collectivist nature of the indigenous society.³⁰ Indigenous people see school as a crucial element to the community and are much less hard-line when it comes to education. The quality of education was inferior in rural indigenous areas. With all

²⁸ Loyo Brambila 214-216

²⁹ Reinke 486

³⁰ Reinke 485-486

education being conducted in a Spanish-central manner, the indigenous identities of children received little care and support.

A step in the right direction in terms of indigenous education came in the presidential term following that of Echevarría. President José López Portillo and his Secretary of Education, Fernando Solana, took important steps towards decentralizing the Mexican Education system in order to better accommodate its size and socioeconomic discrepancies. In 1992, the National Agreement for the Modernization in Basic Education (ANMEB, in Spanish) was written to improve the qualities of education.³¹ The Federal government was placed in charge of overall planning and educational evaluation while states received control of their teachers' salaries and material unique to the region. This division of powers still stands today, although some states remain more dependent on federal financial and technological assistance than others. Most recently President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) mandated an additional 3 years of study for all children, creating the current compulsory 12 years of education. This effort, however, will take time to implement.³²

The Mexican Education System remains intent on creating a sense of national identity among Mexican students and their diverse backgrounds. The federally established curriculum promotes crossing class and ethnic divides, and students are taught to celebrate unity as Mexicans of both indigenous and European descent. The Secretary of Public Education, currently Josefina Eugenia Vazquez Mata, is still in charge of formulating a curriculum applied to all public schools that teaches civic allegiance. The overall curriculum is meant to foster a sense of connection for the

³¹ Note: Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica, in Spanish

³² Loyo Brambila 216-219

indigenous community to the larger *mestizo* culture. All Mexican students are encouraged to view and accept indigenous peers as full Mexican citizens. However, since the non-indigenous majority made the national education policies, they are not created in an accurate reflection of the entire voice of the Mexican state.³³

Political and intellectual institutions alike “agree on the importance of education as an instrument to carry the Mexican population to a more satisfying level in all the dimensions of their indigenous and collective lives.”³⁴ The education system in Mexico has not always favored all individuals and groups equally. But now we have reached a time when Mexico does incorporate multilingual and multicultural policies in its schools. Before reviewing case studies to get a glimpse of indigenous language education today, a review of theoretical background is necessary. The meanings and the importance of terms such as identity and culture are key to understanding the future of the Mexican education system.

II. Why do Identity, Culture and Language Matter?

What exactly classifies a person or group as indigenous? The term indigenous refers to a group of people who are politically non-dominant, are partially or not at all integrated into the formal nation state, and who tend to be associated with traditional ways of being.³⁵ According to linguist Stephen May, many indigenous groups are faced with disadvantages within the modern states established on their historic territories. This situation presents negative outcomes for indigenous communities, such as “the expropriation of land, and the destruction, or near destruction, of their language(s) and

³³ Huck 296

³⁴ Loyo Brambila 222

³⁵ May 84

traditional social, economic and political practices – not to mention the very groups themselves.”³⁶ Indigenous identity, culture and language are all intertwined and important, and their value is recognized on a global scale.

i. Identity and Culture

The Encarta Dictionary describes identity as “essential self: the set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as belonging uniquely to himself or herself and constituting his or her individual personality for life.”³⁷ A person’s identity is understood via the many factors from the environment which he came from. Factors of identity can be the place where one grew up, the career one undertakes, the way one looks, and definitely the language which one speaks. According to May, language is not the most crucial factor to either ethnic or national identity, but it is intrinsically valuable; though it is not a primordial factor, it strongly relates to the development of identity.³⁸

Likewise, an individual’s culture is “a set of material and symbolic codes that provide a group of people, including children, with the means for practical action and communicative interaction.”³⁹ The “codes” can be anything from language, beliefs, experiences, and “intuitive” understanding of gestures. Walter Feinberg, professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Illinois, writes that “[our] culture or cultures therefore have much to do with (how we become) the person or persons we are. They provide both the scaffold for our development and the initial conditions – the other who is the same as us – for self-recognition.”⁴⁰ If indigenous cultures are not introduced to

³⁶ May 84

³⁷ Dictionary - MSN Encarta

³⁸ May 129

³⁹ Feinberg 145

⁴⁰ Feinberg 145

Mexicans at a young age, the chance that the lifestyle will become a part of the person's future life and identity are slim.

Phyllis Ryan, a professor in the Linguistics department at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, writes that “[one’s] identity is formed through the process of socialization and continues to develop depending on one’s experiences in many social settings.”⁴¹ People in Mexico have unique, multifaceted identities, born of an old mixture of two general cultures. Ryan argues that states such as Mexico that have diverse populations need to get over the “convenient but false” myth of being a homogeneous nation-state and embrace a sense of learning that can address complex identities and lead to “citizenship education,” education that serves the citizen and not just the state.⁴² This claim follows her definition of identity because education is a crucial process of socialization for all children and the perfect place for the diverse children of Mexico to learn and form their identities. Ideally, indigenous students in Mexico would embrace native heritages that preserve diversity, but also the *mestizo* culture in order to increase their sense of belongingness opportunity to succeed in the overall Mexican state.

ii. Language

When a language disappears or becomes endangered, the culture and thus identity of the people who descended from speakers of that language will change. “Languages are formed by and reflect the most basic human experiences...the decline of [languages] will result in the irrecoverable loss of unique knowledge that is based on specific cultural and historical experience. Furthermore, the speech communities themselves will often suffer from the loss of their heritage language as a crucial setback of ethnic and cultural

⁴¹ Ryan 19

⁴² Ryan 11

identity.”⁴³ Language is the way by which people express themselves and communicate their ideas in the broader world.

The conservation of indigenous tradition is not only important so there can be another alternative in the melting pot or salad bowl, but because there is benefit in personal development for those who belong to that culture. Language is the best example. Though humans are capable of learning multiple languages, “only one of these will become the child’s first and primary language...and on this language the child’s future growth and development will depend, including the growth and development of second and third languages,” according to Feinberg.⁴⁴ Therefore, a child’s success in his indigenous language would greatly aid his or her academic future.

When a language is almost lost, its speakers lose the ability to be understood by greater society when communicating their thoughts and emotions. An example of this comes from Ryan, who interviewed a Zapotec woman by the name of Siblina. Siblina lives in Mexico City and holds two jobs. She deeply values her roots in the mountains where she was raised, but also respects the way exposure to city life has expanded her view of the world. One of Siblina’s biggest regrets is not passing on the indigenous language Zapotec to her children by not speaking it to them when they were young. Her children also regret this fact. Only one daughter, who has learned the language the best, still feels ties to the area where the Zapotec village in which her mother was raised is located.⁴⁵ Language has the ability to connect a person to their historical roots or to a community from which he or she might otherwise be isolated.

⁴³ Brenzinger xi

⁴⁴ Feinberg 144

⁴⁵ Ryan 14

It should be clear that identity, culture and language have interplaying roles in the lives of individuals and groups. Identity and culture are the factors that allow a person to define their life. Identity is greatly impacted by education and the cultural factors presented in academic socialization. Language is also crucial to identity, and the loss of a specific language can really change the way a person relates to their surroundings. Mexico is not the only country in the world that faces the need to accommodate diverse populations – on a global level, there is concurrence of the need to protect global diversity and support taking measures to do so.

iii. International Advocacy

Mexico became a member of the United Nations (UN) on November 7, 1945. About a year later, on November 4, 1946, Mexico joined United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Mexico, therefore, has the responsibility to adhere to the decrees and declarations set forth by such institutions. The following examples are just a selection of international documents that serve to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

- ❖ Article 4 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities from 1992 states that minorities should have adequate opportunities to learn and be instructed in their mother tongue and that states should encourage education regarding the history, knowledge of and language of minorities. Minorities also have the right to gain knowledge of the entire society, and

states should encourage their participation in the economic development of the country.⁴⁶

- ❖ A resolution adopted by UNESCO in 1999 to proclaim the annual International Mother Language Day recommends that member states:
 - 1) create social, intellectual and media conditions that are conducive to linguistic pluralism, 2) promote democratic access to all citizens via multilingual education to promote linguistic pluralism (the resolution suggests strategies by which to do this), and 3) encourage the study of all languages and promote a literary education.⁴⁷
- ❖ UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity from November 2, 2001, explains the global importance of cultural diversity. Article 1 reads that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity, Article 2 says that cultural diversity leads to cultural pluralism and Article 3 expresses that cultural diversity is a factor in development. These articles respectively explain that diversity is a normal and positive characteristic in societies, that harmonious interactions of various groups bring social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace, and that cultural diversity can lead to economic, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual development.⁴⁸
- ❖ Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted on the 13th of September, 2007, states that Indigenous peoples can “establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing

⁴⁶ Ctd. in Jackson Preece 194

⁴⁷ UNESCO International Mother Language Day

⁴⁸ UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

education in their own language” in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” and that States shall take effective measures to provide indigenous individuals, even those living outside their communities and to “education in their own culture and provided in their own language.”⁴⁹

There are advocates across the globe promoting the conservation of minority, and thus indigenous, culture and language. It may seem unrealistic to think that a single state could successfully implement all the provisions on education, language and indigenous rights on top of already busy agendas. We know that Mexico has goals to help its minorities, but must examine specific studies from Mexico to see if indigenous languages are helped or threatened within the state’s education system.

III. Case Studies in Mexico Today

By now, we have reviewed the status of indigenous people in Mexico, the history of the country’s education system and the importance of preserving linguistic and cultural identity. This study now considers literature and research on the status of indigenous languages in Mexican schools in order to analyze their status within the system.

i. Methods of Study

When thinking about how to analyze a study on indigenous language education in Mexico, there are several options to consider. First, what are the indigenous languages to be studied? As we know, the two most widely used are Nahuatl and Mayan. However the indigenous communities of Oaxaca and Chiapas are the most densely populated, so their languages important as well. My purpose is not to present a study on one specific

⁴⁹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

language, but rather to present an overall study of what is going on the country. While arguing in defense of indigenous languages in general, I did not want to categorize the preservation of one language as being more important than another.

Another criterion is the types of education being analyzed. I see three overall situations, and there are surely more. The three educational situations are: 1) children who are native indigenous language speakers who learn Spanish and while continuing to develop their native tongue, 2) children of indigenous heritage who speak Spanish and are being taught the indigenous language for sake of cultural preservation, and 3) children who speak Spanish and are not classified as indigenous, but who learn the language for the sake of learning. An articulate study of the types of education would require a background in pedagogical knowledge and educational theory. I focus on education of students who identify as indigenous and the way they learn both Spanish and their native languages.

ii. Case studies:

These case studies present a variety of lenses through which to examine indigenous languages in Mexican education.

MOSTLY MESTIZO

Phyllis Ryan, previously referenced in the discussion of identity, wrote an article about Intercultural Education in Mexico. She describes the shift of Mexico's education of indigenous children: what began in the 1930s as 'Bilingual Education' – teaching Spanish to indigenous groups to integrate them into mainstream society – is now 'Intercultural Education,' aimed at the right to be diverse and the need to have a

multicultural and multilingual approach in learning.⁵⁰ Ryan interviews three people connected to Mexican indigenous identity. The third interviewee, Harold, is an applied linguist who has worked with indigenous groups in Mexico for 30 years, and who identifies as being from a minority in Mexico. Harold advocates intercultural and bilingual education because that is how “to help [students] be aware of the different cultures they have, however many they happen to have.”⁵¹

However, Harold notes that the education system is more comfortable with people who are integrated into the majority culture and that the “educational system is not comfortable with or for linguistic minorities.”⁵² He describes conflicts of agendas between educational authorities and indigenous teachers: Harold cannot report some of his observations from indigenous schools due to teachers’ fear of interference by educational authorities – the *mestizos*.⁵³ The fact that indigenous schools express concern of authority interference means that there is no consensus on the way indigenous education should happen. This proves that there is still a struggle for equality in education and that bias exists in favor of the *mestizo* majority, who still do not know how to completely integrate indigenous language learning into the curriculum.

REPLACING NAHUATL

Nahuatl is the most widely spoken indigenous language of Mexico. Kellie Rolstad, of Arizona State University, wrote an article entitled “Language Death in Central Mexico: the Decline of Nahuatl and the New Bilingual Maintenance Programs.” In it, she argues that Nahuatl is “at risk of replacement by Spanish, the language of

⁵⁰ Ryan 12

⁵¹ Ryan 18

⁵² Ryan 19

⁵³ Ryan 19

greater economic power, education and social prestige.”⁵⁴ Spanish proficiency is important for indigenous people especially to promote societal opportunity and avoid discrimination. However, Spanish should not completely undermine native languages either. Rolstad goes on; “Nahuatl speakers explain that they are ashamed to speak Nahuatl outside of their community, and that they believe it is important that they speak Spanish to their children...in order to provide them with the language of power that will afford them the greatest opportunities for success in the mainstream culture.”⁵⁵ If Nahuatl is not valued in general society, it cannot be good for the language’s educational promotion.

Rolstad met with a group of six school children, all age nine, all of whose parents spoke Nahuatl. Two children entered school as Nahuatl monolinguals and the rest were bilingual. However, none of the children were able to engage in a Nahuatl conversation, even though they were eager to try. The children stated that they “could easily respond in Spanish, and that was better than speaking ‘dialecto’ anyway.”⁵⁶ In her analysis, Rolstad shows how while numbers of Nahuatl speakers increased between 1970 and 1990, the number of individuals who only spoke Nahuatl concurrently dropped from 227,757 to 179,370.⁵⁷ This means that Spanish-Nahuatl bilingualism grew. As fewer younger people use Nahuatl as their primary tongue, the life of the language will gradually disappear. Rolstad believes that successful educational programs are a critical first step in the struggle to revitalize dying languages.⁵⁸ However, “[if] steps are not taken to

⁵⁴ Rolstad 3

⁵⁵ Rolstad 5

⁵⁶ Rolstad 11. ‘Dialecto:’ means dialogue, and Rolstad asserts that it means that “it is some inferior mode of communication, not a true language (5).

⁵⁷ Rolstad 8

⁵⁸ Rolstad 15

ensure the continued transmission of Nahuatl to children and Nahuatl literacy programs are not successfully implemented, the language is in danger of ... [being used] primarily by the older generation and eventually [dying out].”⁵⁹ Rolstad concludes by saying “Even though the [Mexican bilingual maintenance program] is well designed and will have some positive effect, it is not sufficient to turn the tide of language shift for Nahuatl communities.”⁶⁰ Rolstad’s study clearly demonstrates that even the dominant indigenous languages face eventual risk of endangerment if young generations fail to learn the language at a proficient level.

INITIATIVES IN CHIAPAS

The formerly mentioned Leanne Reinke is a researcher at the Globalism Institute at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. Her doctoral thesis focused on the impact of technology in indigenous community education. In her 2004 article “Globalisation and Local Indigenous Education in Mexico,” Reinke argues against the common belief that capital-led globalization threatens local languages and cultures, and instead believes that the cultivation of linguistic identity and rights can coexist with the process of globalization.⁶¹ She is optimistic that indigenous languages can survive, but she notes that “While, in theory, a bilingual and bicultural program has been operating within the formalised education system in Mexico, in practice this is rarely the case.”⁶²

Reinke describes dissatisfaction with federal education in Chiapas, a state in Mexico with many indigenous people. Because of their discontent, indigenous communities have begun to take education into their own hands. Fed up with the biased

⁵⁹ Rolstad 11

⁶⁰ Rolstad 16

⁶¹ Reinke 485

⁶² Reinke 486

nature of Mexican education, people in the area decided to do whatever possible to provide bilingual education to their students with their own means. The Union of Teachers for a New Education (UNEM, in Spanish) is a movement of indigenous teachers who came together because global technology facilitated their meeting. They stress making education relevant to indigenous life and supporting indigenous aspirations for higher education.⁶³ The Schools for Chiapas Project, founded in the late 1990s, is internationally supported. It builds schools, trains local indigenous teachers, and values bilingualism. The project is internationally funded – in the age of globalization, a network of solidarity grew on the internet and pedagogical support came from around the globe.⁶⁴ This situation is positive for indigenous languages, because receive global support. Though the \ did not implement these programs, indigenous communities on their own “are demonstrating the desire to develop modern skills within the framework of local practices, recognizing the value of a coexistence of both the traditional and the modern.”⁶⁵

A PAST CASE: FORGETTING TZELTAL

An older study in Chiapas was done by McCaa and Mills to see if Spanish- only education was destroying indigenous languages in the area. The answer was “yes.” From a census in 1990, McCaa and Mills studied a seemingly typical family 6, in which the parents speak Tzeltal and Spanish, though uneducated and illiterate. The 7 and 9 year old sons are bilingual, attend school and are literate. The 10 and 13 year old daughters are literate, attend school but do not speak the native language of Tzeltal.⁶⁶ Since this

⁶³ Reinke 489

⁶⁴ Reinke 492

⁶⁵ Reinke 494

⁶⁶ McCaa and Mills

data came from the census, there is no saying why the older daughters cannot speak the language, but it can be assumed that Spanish-only education at the time (early 1990s) attributed to their inability to speak Tzeltal. The scholars also believe that 10,000 children experienced similar languages loss from 1970 to 1990. McCaa and Mills argue that bilingual education is the only way to preserve indigenous languages.⁶⁷ This case shows that Spanish-only education in the past caused children to lose their native language, and we can infer that the same could still happen today. Steps must be taken quickly to ensure that linguistic diversity is preserved.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE CITY

The Hñähñö are an indigenous group in Mexico City studied by Nicanor Rebolledo Recendiz. Specifically, Rebolledo studied the challenges that indigenous migrant groups like the Hñähñö face in the city schools. Rebolledo finds that 95.7% of indigenous students in the area between 5 and 14 years of age attend bilingual school, and he acknowledges the national policies designed to help group education rights. However, “in spite of the good will on the part of the authorities, Indian schooling continues to be the Achilles heel of Mexico City education.”⁶⁸ Mexico City finds it difficult to deal with their indigenous populations for many reasons including inadequate records (many indigenous languages speaking students do not identify as indigenous) and absenteeism (indigenous students often miss extended periods of school to return indigenous towns for traditional festivals).⁶⁹ Factors from both individuals and the system contribute to the weakness of indigenous schooling.

⁶⁷ McCaa and Mills

⁶⁸ Rebolledo 103

⁶⁹ Rebolledo 102-103

The Hñähñö people present challenges for the education system in Mexico City. First, they often do not appreciate the education they receive because they cannot forget that it was created for cultural homogeneity, and second, there is cultural resistance to Mexican education because people are afraid of being assimilated. With problems in the schools, language preservation is mostly outside of the classroom. Rebolledo is pleased that the Hñähñö language is reinforced with family and community use, “encouraging feelings of identity by involving the children in the daily use of the language and in the values the older people construct around their mother tongue.”⁷⁰ But things are not so great in the schools. At Alberto Correa School in Mexico City, 80.8% of students are Hñähñö/Spanish bilingual. In the 13 member staff, no one understands, speaks or writes the language.⁷¹ Indigenous communities must settle to uphold their languages outside of the classroom, for they receive little formal support.

Another problem particularly faced by Mexico City is that the Hñähñö are not the only indigenous group to take care of. The majority of schools in the city “have registered up to 8 different Indian languages, and in very few can one find strictly bilingual and bicultural patterns.”⁷² Reality is that indigenous speakers of a particular language do not all magically settle around the same school during urbanization. Urban schools, like in any immigrant-receiving-city, must accommodate multiple languages. While it is understandable that a single school cannot adequately teach eight indigenous languages, this situation shows how a large amount of minorities almost inevitably leads to the easy solution of using just Spanish as the dominant medium of teaching. With

⁷⁰ Rebolledo 102-104

⁷¹ Rebolledo 110

⁷² Rebolledo 103

such a difficult situation, it is clear that unique languages, especially those only spoken by a few, will not receive adequate support in city schools.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

A paper by Hamel and Francis entitled “The Teaching of Spanish as a Second Language in an Indigenous Bilingual Intercultural Curriculum” discusses efforts in rural San Isidro and Uringuitiro in the state of Michoacán to make two local elementary schools bilingual. Originally, local indigenous teachers were tired of the then Spanish-only curriculum, especially in a region where the native language P’urhepecha remains widely used. The researchers, now studying the reintegration of Spanish into the curriculum, approach their study asking what kind of program could increase language development, revitalize academic achievement in the indigenous language and teach Spanish? In rural areas like this, children’s only contact with the state and Spanish might be in their schools.⁷³ The schools only taught Spanish when the state was in charge, but the initiatives of local teacher allowed indigenous languages to be introduced to academics.

Perhaps the best reason for academic usage of indigenous languages such as P’urhepecha is to enhance scholarly potential in the native language. By introducing indigenous language to academics, the language will have a future use in more sophisticated fields. Hamel and Francis believe that schools that historically caused language erosion are becoming better at language revitalization.⁷⁴ This case is different from others in this paper because the researchers studied the reestablishment of Spanish education once the community had already introduced indigenous language education.

⁷³ Hamel and Francis 172

⁷⁴ Hamel and Francis 178

By analyzing the success of programs like this one, the P'urhepecha in Michoacán, other schools could begin to implement similar language revitalizing programs.

With indigenous language education, the schools in Michoacán increased academic achievement from the previous Spanish-only program and were able to teach solely in P'urhepecha in all subject matters, even math.⁷⁵ This proved to be positive, because “the strong development of discourse abilities, information processing mechanisms, and metalinguistic awareness helps to leverage [Spanish] learning.”⁷⁶ The new challenge researchers see is that secondary schools must now “assume the responsibility or reckoning with the reality of multilingualism...in the classroom.”⁷⁷ Since the community has shown the initiative and successful way to teach indigenous language while still fostering Spanish due to a heightened underlying proficiency, maybe the government can follow these footsteps to promote successful bilingual programs in higher education.

iii. Indigenous Languages in Mexican Education

From these case studies, a couple of prominent themes appear. First, indigenous people do have access to education. One Latin American scholar argues that “nowadays concern is centered not on the educational rights of the Indian people – that they be the main actors in their own education – but rather on means of bettering and guaranteeing the quality of the education aimed at Indian sectors.”⁷⁸ This means that education is at least available to students, but that the curriculum may not yet be ideal.

⁷⁵ Hamel and Francis 171

⁷⁶ Hamel and Francis 177

⁷⁷ Hamel and Francis 185

⁷⁸ Rebolledo 103

Also, many bilingual schools exist in Mexico to ensure that indigenous students have the opportunity for societal advancement by knowing Spanish. Some teachers in Mexico City view indigenous language speakers as “problems” – “[being] bilingual is viewed as an obstacle for learning, and, as such, teachers attempt to erase it by imposing ‘correct ways of speaking Spanish.’”⁷⁹ However, it is important to remember that being bilingual involves being competent in *both* languages. As true as it is that Spanish will most likely be the language in which people communicate in the job market, indigenous languages must cease to be viewed as problems to avoid further disgraces to languages.

There are some cases where bilingual schools make valiant efforts to teach and encourage the usage of indigenous languages, but, in my research, I never saw a case where indigenous language usage increased due to government-sponsored education. A fault in my argument may be that some of the case studies are almost a decade old, due to a lack of extensively published research. Perhaps in 2009 language revitalization has become more of a reality in Mexico, but, it also seems as if scholars generally agree that indigenous languages are threatened. Hamel claims that no advances in indigenous language or Spanish as a second language education were achieved from 2000-2006, and that “the central questions of indigenous education remain largely unsolved in Mexico. The global dimension of the construction of a new, pluricultural and pluriethnic nation state advanced significantly on a political, conceptual and legal level, but little change has occurred on the grass root level of bilingual education in the classroom.”⁸⁰ For reasons in this summary, I believe indigenous languages are being threatened by the education system in Mexico.

⁷⁹ Rebolledo 104

⁸⁰ Hamel Bilingual Education 319

IV. Preserving Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages in Mexico are not thriving. Due to societal stigmas and the lack of adequate teaching programs, indigenous languages are not preserved in schools as they should be. There are some positive trends emerging in Mexican education, but more change is needed before language maintenance and revival can be guaranteed.

i. The Positives and Negatives

From the analysis of many cases in Mexican education, we see that ideas are in place for successful language preservation even though languages are not necessarily flourishing under the current conditions. The bilingual maintenance programs introduced to Mexico in the mid 1990s are significant advancements on the timeline of indigenous education. Though these policies may still take years to implement, Rolstad describes how the attainment of both Spanish indigenous language competency and the re-diffusion of indigenous language in public spheres are just two of the end goals for currently evolving educational programs.⁸¹

Another bright factor in Mexican education is that people and groups are beginning to take their own action. For instance, Rebolledo, from the Hñähñö case study, introduced a proposal to federal education authorities in 2003 to extend the use of Hñähñö in schools by teaching the language to non-indigenous teachers and introducing it to both academic and civic activities. Teachers initially reacted negatively to the thought of learning the Hñähñö language, especially considering that native speakers themselves place little value on the tongue. However, they know the difficulty of reaching their Hñähñö students, and “understand that if they maintain separation from the Hñähñö language it will be difficult for them to advance pupils in other academic areas

⁸¹ Rolstad 14

and thus improve upon the low academic performance which has so affected [their schools].”⁸² Though there are difficulties in implementation, people in Mexico are at least considering curricular changes that will support the academic use of indigenous languages. Teachers, though aware of the difficulties, also recognize the importance of reaching students who are otherwise at an extreme disadvantage.

Unfortunately, *mestizo-ism* is still the greatest factor hindering true multicultural and multilingual education. In her book, *Mexico, From Mestizo to Multicultural*, Carrie Chorba reflects on recent events in Mexican education history. Chorba describes how at the end of the 20th century, many Mexicans were truly acknowledging Mexico’s pluriculture, but “the government and the nation as a whole had failed to generate policies that would give that acknowledgement meaning in real concrete terms.”⁸³ A vivid example of a policy that does not immediately change a sentiment is the Civil Rights movement in the United States – though segregation and racial discrimination became illegal, racist sentiment did not concurrently disappear. So it is with indigenous identity – it will take time for the Mexican society to view indigenous minorities as full members.

The uprisings in 1994 proved that ascription to the *mestizo* identity would no longer work for indigenous peoples. President Vicente Fox, elected in 2000, faced the challenge of pleasing the many people who in recent years had expressed their disappointment with the national identity suggested by the state. However, nor did Fox make popular changes to education, especially in terms of indigenous identity. Fox cut required high school history from three years to one, meaning that the learning of history

⁸² Rebolledo 111

⁸³ Chorba 172

would start at the 15th century, completely eliminating the study of pre-Hispanic society.⁸⁴ Understandably, there was public outcry. Many were critical of Fox's and his Secretary for Public Education, Reyes Tamez Guerra's decision. A historian Miguel León Portilla wrote that "We Mexicans have constructed our identity on a rich, dual cultural legacy...To be unaware of this legacy is to be disconnected from the millenary roots that give life to the country's being."⁸⁵ While this example does not directly entail language, it provokes thought – if Mexico cuts indigenous history from its curriculum, will it be able to preserve the languages that still survive from its oldest people?

ii. Suggestions for Improvement

Spanish education in Mexico is still superior to any indigenous language education. Education is still governed from federal bureaucracies, who restructure school governance in order to keep central rule and deter local powers.⁸⁶ None of this is good for indigenous education, but Mexico can change. In their proclamation for International Mother Language Day, UNESCO outlines various steps a country can take to better protect indigenous languages. These include to:

- Encourage students to learn a second language as early as possible, in kindergarten or nursery school.
- Require that both Spanish and indigenous languages be used during the major periods of knowledge acquisition all the way to university level education.
- Introduce a third, modern language in high school to give students a working knowledge of three languages, a practical linguistic set for the 21st century.
- Foster greater learning opportunities for teachers, including international exchanges, the use of technology and specialized subject learning.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Chorba 174

⁸⁵ Ctd. in Chorba 174

⁸⁶ Reinke 486

⁸⁷ UNESCO International Mother Language Day

By gradually implementing curricular changes that will ultimately better the status of indigenous languages, schools can have a major impact in avoiding any further disappearance of an indigenous language.

Also, education is not the only means by which to preserve indigenous languages. Though schools are perhaps the best way to formally preserve languages, Mexico can also play a role by increasing societal use of indigenous languages, which will further break down the obstacles that define indigenous languages as inferior. Mexico can create jobs requiring the knowledge of an indigenous language or promote the provide government publications in such tongues. Overall, it will take an active effort and the will of the people to demand that the mandates put forth by the state are ultimately but into practice.

Grassroots efforts are also extremely important – if indigenous people are unsatisfied with their learning opportunities, they may not be able to afford waiting for the Mexican education system to make things better before their language becomes endangered. Luckily, these efforts are already happening in places like Chiapas, for example. “The role of the community in local education programs has proven critical for the success of education in Mexico. The input of the community has been essential in achieving the integration of traditional forms into contemporary pedagogical practices making education relevant to the community.”⁸⁸ A community can come together, delegate resources, and devise their own plans to promote indigenous languages. Such action will aid the elimination of the homogenous identity that never existed in Mexico.

⁸⁸ Reinke 488

iii. Taking Advice from Others

“In contrast with the efforts of some education systems in Europe to work with intercultural communicative competence, intercultural education and intercultural citizenship in foreign language education, Mexico is only just initiating efforts to structure an intercultural education that will meet its needs,” writes Ryan.⁸⁹ Mexico has a long way to go before it can achieve its desire for successful multicultural and multilingual education system. However, there are multiple examples from which to learn of other countries with indigenous groups and their successful efforts to preserve their language and culture.

Teresa McCarty wrote “Language Education Planning and Policies by and for Indigenous Peoples,” with the purpose of emphasizing positive examples of how indigenous people have been able to engage in “language revival, revitalization, maintenance and reversal of language shift.”⁹⁰ McCarty presents a series of countries that have successfully preserved native languages through societal policies. For instance the Māori language in New Zealand has co-official status with English, and Guaraní in Paraguay is also co-official and is more widely used than Spanish. South Africa and Norway (with the Sámis) are other examples that prove that state sponsorship and official language recognition are excellent tools by which to revitalize a language.⁹¹

McCarty explains that two native languages that have seen a major comeback after severe reduction in numbers are Māori and Hawaiian. In terms of education, a language can be taught as a single course, a bilingual program or full-on language immersion. New Zealand and Hawaii implemented immersion pre-schools, “nests,” to

⁸⁹ Ryan 11

⁹⁰ McCarty 138

⁹¹ McCarty 144

create an environment where the language and culture can be taught to young children in order to develop a high level of proficiency in the language. Language immersion programs are successful in their ability to produce new, high achieving, child speakers and a stage for the expression of minority language rights.⁹² For the success of countries such as New Zealand and Norway and the state of Hawaii, it should be clear that proactive effort to change education can have extremely positive benefits for indigenous languages.

And lastly, the Cherokees, a well known indigenous group of the United States, strongly believe in linguistic preservation. Thomas Belt, native speaker and Cherokee language teacher, and Margaret Bender, a linguistic consultant, argue that “language is an essential component of sovereignty...[and sovereignty] is a right to do the things that make one who one is.”⁹³ The Cherokees believe in maintaining their languages because things are different for a reason. Just as each finger has a unique role in the work of the human hand,

*So it is with languages. Each community of speakers has its own language. That language would not exist if it did not serve a purpose, not only for that particular group, but for humanity as a whole...All languages, like people, embody unique gifts that others can and should learn from. This dynamic implies that we should not only respect and support the languages of others but also that we have a responsibility to use and maintain our own.*⁹⁴

iv. A Different Perspective

As Mexico works towards its goals of truly promoting intercultural bilingual education, more research can be done. Most important will be the day when the question “are indigenous languages being threatened by the Mexican education system?” can be

⁹² McCarty 144-145

⁹³ Belt and Bender 187

⁹⁴ Belt and Bender 187

answered “no.” An extremely interesting extension of this research would be to study the case of Mexico to the case of another education system with an influx of minorities, such as the United States. How does indigenous education in Mexico compare to immigrant (specifically, Hispanic immigrant) education in U.S. public schools? From personal experience volunteering in a school with a high percentage of immigrant children, I see many similar trends among indigenous students in Mexico and immigrant children in the United States, both being new-language learners. Does the United States have the same responsibility to preserve immigrant languages as a country does for its indigenous languages?

A major debate in the U.S. education system is how to provide bilingual education to the many Hispanic immigrants in the country. Immigrant children often speak Spanish at home. Should they learn only the official language of the United States in the classroom, or is one English course sufficient? If Hispanic immigrants, who are in large part from Mexico, were to insist on the availability of Spanish-only education, would Mexico need to first prove its willingness to uphold its own minority languages? The United States has a potential leadership role in enacting and upholding exceptional minority language education programs, and this could be very positive for countries that need encouragement in the same goals.

Conclusion

When there is an adequate judicial framework of protection for Indian languages, a political field propitious to linguistic and educational development, a scholastic environment sufficiently attractive and stable and where practitioners are conscious of the advantages of using the student's mother tongue academically as well as using Spanish, the only thing that remains is to outline the path by which to guide the curricular changes.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Rebolledo 112-113

Mexico has many of the right tools to protect its remaining 364 linguistic variants. Official policies exist for indigenous language preservation and all that is needed now is the right implementation to ensure that the goals can be met. Educational improvement will take time and will not be easy, but the prevalence of the country's diversity will make the effort worthwhile in the long run. Mexico, like many countries in the world, was founded through conquest and colonization. Thus, it is the responsibility of the ensuing government to take care of its aboriginal people. It is the responsibility of Mexico's education system to protect the identities of their many indigenous people by providing the arena for their cultures and languages to be learned and shared:

*The policies which nation-states, and their societal majorities, apply to their ethnic and linguistic minorities have become a touchstone to evaluate the quality of democracy, pluricultural commitment and the construction of modern states in almost any part of the world. Therefore, educational and language policies for the minorities can no longer be dismissed as marginal components of state policy that may be dealt with outside the domains of mainstream power relations and the state.*⁹⁶

Education and language policies should not be treated as soft issues within the state of Mexico. Mexico, in text, pledges intercultural bilingual education, but the practice does not yet exist. Mexico needs to take real action to move beyond its former desire for a unified national identity. Now is the time to embrace its multiculturalism. Creating communities of thriving cultures via the preservation of indigenous languages is a step that Mexico can take to preserve its unique mosaic and build a sense of solidarity among the people of Mexico. Educational programs that value indigenous traditions and foster indigenous languages will show the world that the unique identities of indigenous people are important to Mexico.

⁹⁶ Hamel Indigenous Language Policy 301

Appendix

1. Political Map of Mexico



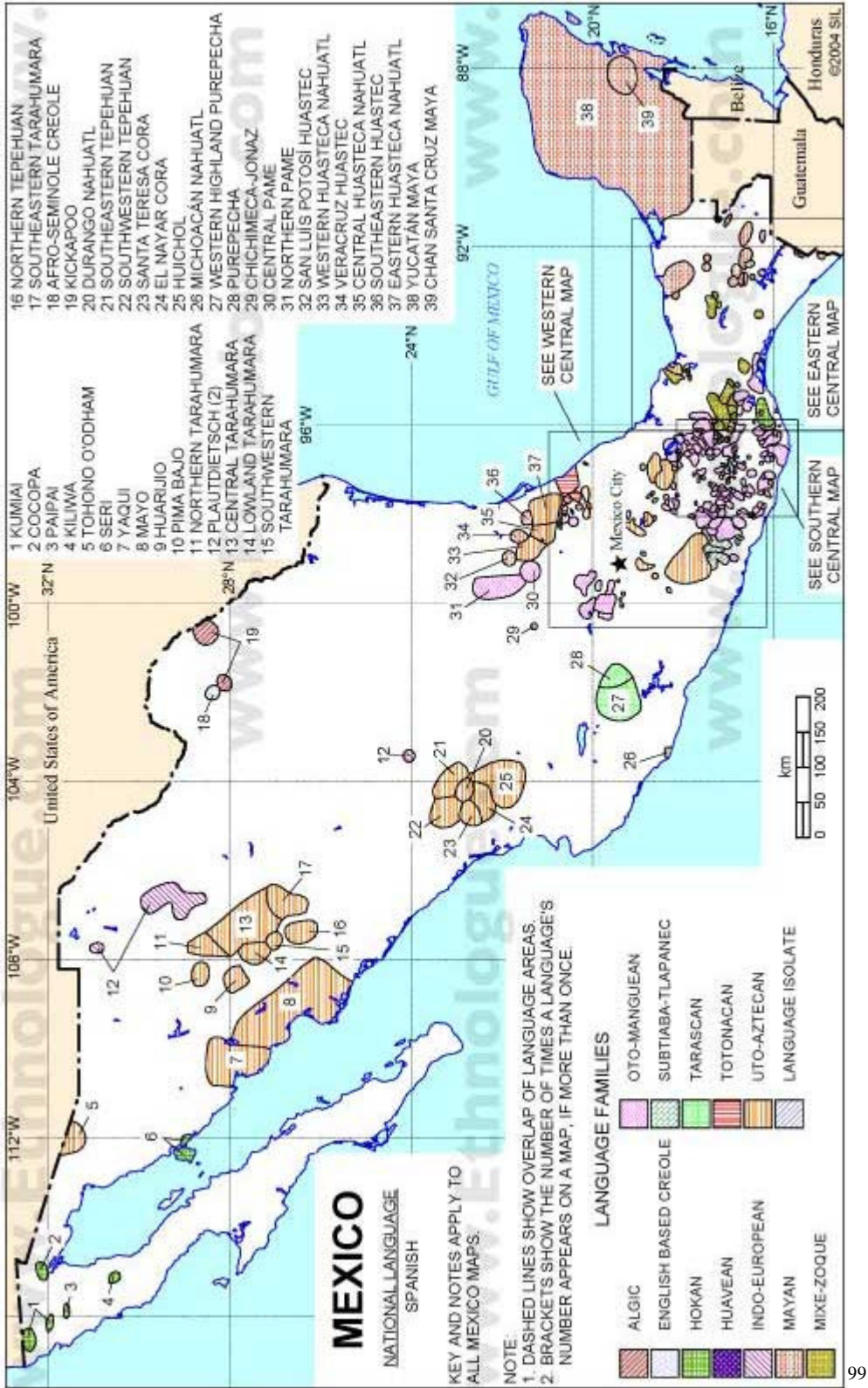
2. Map of Indigenous Population



⁹⁷ "Political Map of Mexico"

⁹⁸ Burton "Major Indigenous Groups"

3. Map of Indigenous Languages



⁹⁹ Gordon “Map: Languages of Mexico”

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