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The multilingual realities of language reclamation: Working with language contact, diversity, and change in endangered language education

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Abstract

Purist ideologies of language and culture – fostered and encouraged by nation-states and formal schooling in the interest of homogenisation – have become deeply embedded in language-related disciplines, including documentary linguistics, applied linguistics, and education. As a result, dialect variation, multilingual repertoires, and intergenerational change are often viewed as problems by linguists and educators, who promote an elusive monolingual speaker norm which risks excluding learners and multilingual speakers. This paper draws on an ethnographic study of Isthmus Zapotec education in Oaxaca, Mexico, to illustrate strategies for collaborative, context-appropriate endangered language education, as exemplified in the practices of two Zapotec teachers. Reclamation efforts in Oaxaca, as elsewhere in the world, are challenged by the persistence of colonial-origin ideologies that devalue Indigenous languages, view multilingualism as a handicap, and assume that languages should be autonomous and standardised. These teachers respond by prioritising the creation of an affirming and flexible learning community that recognises multilingualism and facilitates negotiation of social tensions around language contact, change, and value.

Keywords: language education, monolingual bias, multilingualism, teacher practice, Mexico, Isthmus Zapotec

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1. Introduction

Lenia: *Nuestros papás no, no dejaban que habláramos el zapoteco porque decían que nos íbamos a enredar con el español y así. Pero con mis abuelos era más hablar en zapoteco. Entonces conforme fui creciendo fui aprendiendo más zapoteco. Pero fue más con mis abuelos que con mis papás.*

Haley: *Entonces como niña no hablabas pero luego como [adolescente?]*

Lenia: *[Hablaba] pero poquito, lo básico.*

[...]

Haley: *Ujum. Y ahora… este… ¿usas zapoteco con tus abuelos o con-- ¿en qué partes de tu vida ahora estás ocupando el [zapoteco?]*

Lenia: *[Pues] con mis papás ahora sí… como quien dice, hablamos en zapoteco. O sea, aunque jugando, jugando de repente no, pues cuando vemos ya estamos hablando el zapoteco. Dejamos el español a un lado y ya es más zapoteco, zapoteco. Y con los abuelos todavía. Incluso con algunos amigos que hablan el zapoteco, pues es más…[...] Estamos hablando español y de repente ya terminamos hablando zapoteco.*

Lenia: Our parents didn't let us speak Zapotec because they said that we would get confused with Spanish and such. But with my grandparents it was more speaking in Zapotec. So as I grew up I learned more Zapotec. But it was more with my grandparents than with my parents.

Haley: So as a child you didn't speak [[Zapotec]], but later as an [adolescent]?

Lenia: [I spoke] but [[only]] a little, the basics.

[...]

Haley: Umm. And now... uh... Do you use Zapotec with your grandparents or with-- In which parts of your life now are you using [Zapotec]?

> Lenia: [Well] with my parents now, yes... so to speak, we speak in Zapotec. That is, although playing, playing suddenly no, well when we notice, we're already speaking Zapotec. We leave Spanish to one side and then it's more Zapotec, Zapotec. And with the grandparents still. Including with some friends who speak Zapotec, well it's more...[...] we're speaking Spanish and suddenly we wind up speaking Zapotec.
>
> (Interview, 14 May 2014)[1]

The experience described by Lenia, a woman in her 20s, is common among young and middle-aged people in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. The Indigenous language, *Diidxazá* or Isthmus Zapotec, is spoken in many homes and social spaces (in this paper I use the abbreviation IZ interchangeably with the terms Zapotec/*Zapoteco* and the autodenomination *Diidxazá*, which are commonly used by speakers when referring to this language). The colonial language, Spanish, dominates in a growing number of domains, as described further in section 2. Many parents, like Lenia's, are choosing not to use *Diidxazá* with their children in the hopes of sparing them from the discrimination that they experienced in school and society. The fear that speaking an Indigenous language will be a handicap is common in this region, feeding an ideological bias in favor of monolingualism and Spanish. This bias comes into conflict with the realities of plurilingual practices in daily life, such as the fluid blending of languages in interactions where people 'suddenly […] wind up speaking Zapotec', as described by Lenia.

This conflict is present in many social contexts; however, it is amplified in education where ideals about language use are brought to the fore and formally transmitted. Schools have played a significant role in colonisation, the displacement of Indigenous languages, and in establishing a monolingual norm; efforts to promote endangered languages in education thus require

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[1] The interview excerpts quoted in this paper occurred in Spanish; all translations are mine. Transcription conventions:

- [Single brackets] are used to indicate overlapping speech between interviewer and interviewee.
- …Three dots are used to indicate a pause.
- --Dashes are used to indicate interrupted speech.
- […] Brackets with three dots are used to indicate an omission of the original transcript.
- [[Two sets of brackets]] are used to indicate an editorial or translation insertion, such as a word that is implied but not actually present in the transcript.

I use a mix of pseudonyms and real names in this paper, according to individuals' preferences.

significant changes to existing practices and ideologies (Hornberger 2008; López Gopar 2007; McCarty 2003). Numerous scholars and educators have argued the need to establish a decolonial and/or critical approach to education in order to contest the dominance of one group, one canon of knowledge, and one language over others (Cajete 1994; Pennycook 2001; Tuck & Yang 2012). While conflicting norms and priorities within education settings continue to make this a challenging endeavour, members of the IZ community who want to combat shift towards Spanish and to promote – or in local terms *rescatar* – Isthmus Zapotec, see the use of IZ in education as an important strategy. In light of the significance and problematic nature of education in processes of language shift, in this paper I wish to look at the wider impacts which language education norms and practices may have in an endangered language community. I join with other authors in this volume to examine the power dynamics within an endangered language promotion initiative, and to consider how *Diidxazá* educators are bringing their own priorities to the fore and creating alternatives to colonial-origin education norms. In addition to being a mechanism to transmit language skills, *Diidxazá* education is a potential form of language reclamation, examined throughout this volume as a 'larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives (Leonard 2012:359; see also Leonard 2017). Beyond the transmission of language itself, it is important to consider the ideologies and practices within endangered language education initiatives, and in what ways such initiatives are (or are not) supporting the priorities and well-being of the language community.

My examination of this context is based on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork (2013-2014) and short follow-up visits in 2015, 2016, and 2017 during which I observed the use of IZ in formal and non-formal education settings in multiple locations across the Isthmus. My data collection consisted of field notes, audio recordings, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and linguistic landscape documentation. Settings ranged from formal primary schools and universities, to non-formal literacy workshops and ad-hoc cultural events. As a white American I was an outsider in the IZ community, although the presence of other foreign researchers in the past was remembered positively and my presence was not considered surprising by most people I interacted with. My interest in IZ language was generally met with approval, and many teachers, administrators and students generously made time to participate in interviews or focus groups. Whenever possible I participated as a student in the settings I observed, acquiring basic IZ competence over the course of my study. The majority of the settings I observed were Spanish-dominant, and I conducted my interviews and interacted largely in Spanish, with some use of IZ. One of the settings where I conducted extensive observations was the *Universidad Autónoma Beníto Juárez de Oaxaca* (UABJO), the public state university of Oaxaca, where IZ began to be taught in 2013. In this paper I focus on the practices and perspectives of two teachers

at the UABJO, drawing on field notes and audio recordings of their classes, as well as interviews with them and some of their students. I additionally include interview and observation excerpts collected in a variety of other locations in order to describe the presence and impact of monolingual ideologies in the broader social context within which these teachers work.

I begin with an overview of some of the historical and political factors that have shaped the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and current educational initiatives (section 2). I then analyze the monolingual bias or ideology in this context, illustrating several key components of this ideology which are present in commentary and practices around education, including purism, categorisation, and external expertise (section 3). Subsequently I focus on the practices of two teachers who are characterised by an inclusive ideological orientation which validates multilingualism, dialect diversity, and generational change (section 4). I argue that creating alternatives to the well-established ideologies of language purism and monolingualism, as these teachers and their students do, is a crucial contribution to reclaiming and reaffirming Zapotec language practices within their current context of evolving multilingualism.

2. Language, education and change in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca has long been a multilingual region, with five Indigenous language families, numerous languages and dialects within each family, and enduring influences of the Nahuatl language brought through Aztec colonisation in the fifteenth century (Barabas & Bartolomé 1999). The use of Spanish, and to a lesser degree other immigrant languages, followed European colonisation in the sixteenth century (Miano Borruso 2002). Isthmus Zapotec is one of the 62 variants that make up the Zapotec language group (Pérez Báez 2011), and is spoken by an estimated 100,000 people on the Pacific coast of the Isthmus (*Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas* (INALI) 2008) containing four recognised dialect variants across the region. Five languages are present in the Isthmus, hailing from four different families: Ayuuk/Mixe and Zoque (both from the Mixe-Zoque family), Zapotec (Otomanguean family), Ombeayuits/Huave (isolate), and Chontal (isolate).[2]

The status of Zapotec has changed multiple times and continues to shift. For centuries it was the language of a wealthy and hierarchical empire governing

[2] I attempt to use auto-determinations of Indigenous groups in addition to the names used in Spanish as much as possible, although I acknowledge that preferences for these names can vary within each group. Here I use the auto-determinations which I have heard used most frequently.

much of what is now Oaxaca state from around 500 BCE to 900 CE, and was used in syllabic and pictographic writing (de la Cruz 2008, Romero Frizzi 2003). The Spanish colonisers who invaded in 1519 viewed IZ and other Indigenous languages as supposedly inferior *dialectos* spoken by *Indios* or Indigenous peasants (Maldonado Alvarado 2002). In the late 19th century a few Isthmus Zapotec intellectuals began writing and documenting their language, and there has been an active *Diidxazá* literary movement since the 1930s (de la Cruz 2013). There is also a large body of popular Zapotec-language music including a burgeoning Hip Hop scene. Zapotec has an increasingly positive profile on the national level, due in part to the passing of a 2003 law which recognises Indigenous languages as national languages of Mexico alongside Spanish (*Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de Los Pueblos Indígenas* 2003) and the efforts of the National Institute for Indigenous Languages (INALI) which promotes the standardisation and use of Indigenous languages (see De Korne 2017a for discussion of IZ writing and standardisation). Despite the visibility and relatively positive status of *Diidxazá* on the local level through events such as poetry readings, public concerts, and literary prizes, many parents continue to privilege Spanish in communication with their children. Studies of child socialisation in the largest city in the Isthmus, Juchitán, have found a steady shift towards Spanish, with wealthier families in the northern regions of the city leading the way (Augsburger 2004; McComsey 2015). Although language practices vary from town to town across the region, the percentage of the population that speaks IZ is declining, with few children now learning the language at home, as I observed on many occasions.

Many current parents and grandparents note that they struggled to learn Spanish in school, and were punished for speaking Zapotec there. As a result they hope to spare their children this difficulty by speaking to them in Spanish, the dominant language of schooling. Indigenous languages have been a part of public schooling since the mid-20th century when Indigenous or 'Bilingual' schools were established in some parts of Mexico as a parallel form of primary schooling which would serve children speaking Indigenous languages. These schools have not supported bilingualism, however, but rather a transition towards Spanish, with the majority of teaching occurring in Spanish in line with the centralised national curriculum (Coronado Suzán 1992; Rebolledo 2010). Following the 2003 law there has been increased hope that 'Bilingual' schools can revise their practices in order to support bilingualism; however, this goal remains elusive due to multiple factors at national and local levels (Hamel 2008; García & Velasco 2012).

There is a growing population of youth and adults in the Isthmus who do not speak IZ and who are interested in learning it (De Korne 2016). These learners turn to occasional community-based or church-based workshops, and/or to an IZ class for adult learners which was established in the regional and central branches of the UABJO in 2013. The use of Indigenous languages in higher education has been characterised by the examination of these

languages as objects, rather than their use for communicative purposes (Hornberger, De Korne & Weinberg 2016), making this IZ class a novel endeavour in a setting previously dedicated to the teaching English and other colonial-origin languages, and a potential site of language reclamation and decolonial education. Among the students in the class are people who have acquired comprehension abilities growing up in the Isthmus, and want to become confident speaking, as well as people who have migrated to the Isthmus for work and have little prior exposure to the language. Additionally, students come from different dialect regions within the Isthmus, and may or may not express a preference for one dialect over another. There are numerous challenges which face the teachers in this programme, not least of which is the persistence of a monolingual ideology in society and in schools, as examined in section 3. The teachers' determination and creativity in bringing IZ into a new educational space, and including a varied community of learners within that space, is explored further in section 4 below.

3. The monolingual bias: A paradigm of external categorisation and control

Multilingualism is historically and currently more common than monolingualism; however, it has often been viewed as a problem due to the monolingual bias or ideology that permeates nation-state societies and schools (García 2009; Ruíz 1984; Tollefson & Tsui 2004). Language ideologies, or beliefs and expectations about language, have a significant influence on social practices (Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity 1998). In endangered language settings there are often conflicting ideologies which influence the choices made by members of a language community, sometimes in favor and sometimes against use of a local language (Kroskrity & Field 2009; Messing 2007). Ideals about language use, what constitutes 'good' or 'authentic' language, and who is a legitimate speaker, are often debated as communities experience language displacement and engage in reclamation efforts (Gal & Woolard 1995; Guerrettaz 2015; Weinberg & De Korne 2015). Endangered language communities are often characterised by what Hill & Hill (1986), in their examination of Nahuatl communities in central Mexico, termed a 'syncretic' way of speaking, in which different languages are used in tandem (see also Flores Farfán 2000). Recently the term 'translanguaging' has also been used to describe the constructive combination of multiple languages and registers in speaking or writing (Canagarajah 2013; García 2009). As Hill & Hill (1986), Dorian (1994), and other scholars have discussed, expectations for a so-called pure or monolingual way of speaking are widespread both within and beyond endangered language communities despite the syncretic or translingual nature of much communication. The monolingual ideology promoted by nation-states in an effort to forge a homogenous citizenry has been impactful, leaving parents

concerned that multilinguals are illegitimate and handicapped, despite the fact that many studies show the opposite (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994).

The transmission and teaching of endangered languages always occurs in a multilingual (or at least bilingual) environment. In the case of *Diidxazá*, this includes other Indigenous languages, the established colonial language Spanish, and a language that has arrived through more recent unequal economic and political relations, English. While no parents would raise their children monolingual in IZ in the current socio-economic context of the Isthmus, some are interested in developing IZ as part of their children's linguistic repertoire alongside Spanish and other languages. Others remain wary and choose, as Lenia's parents did, to attempt to raise their children through Spanish only. In this section I aim to explore how several elements weave together in support of the persistent monolingual bias or ideology in the Isthmus; these include how 'language' is understood (3.1), how speakers are judged (3.2), what linguistic norms and categories are adopted (3.3), and who claims linguistic authority (3.4). While these elements are significant and familiar in all forms of language politics, initiatives aimed at language reclamation are especially vulnerable to their potential negative effects. The categorisation and control of 'language' by outside experts (from linguists, to politicians, to pedagogues) may undermine local reclamation attempts in significant ways (see also Leonard's and Davis' papers in this volume), as examined below in the context of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

3.1. Language purism: 'Language' is a fixed and autonomous object

> A young man who has grown up largely outside of the region and wants to improve his limited Zapotec abilities expresses concern with how many Spanish words are borrowed into Zapotec. He calls everyday use of the language '*Zapochueco*', or broken Zapotec, because it incorporates many Spanish loans.
>
> (Field notes, 14 May 2014)

The comments by this young man are representative of the critiques of current language use and the interest in an idealised pure or pre-colonial variety of Zapotec that often arise in talk and practices around *Diidxazá*. Saussure's (2011 [1916]) *langue*/*parole* dichotomy, Chomsky's (1965) competence/performance dichotomy, and the discipline of Linguistics all tell us that we should be concerned with 'language' as an autonomous and rule-governed system that can be separated from its environment and from its historical context. Makoni & Pennycook (2007) have discussed the need to deconstruct this popular perception of language, pointing out that

communicative practices are heterogeneous and draw on an ever-evolving range of codes and meanings. After centuries of evolution, including unequal contact with Spanish, it is not surprising that *Diidxazá* has changed in countless ways. Efforts to promote so-called pure or authentic versions of marginalised and endangered languages ultimately undermine reclamation movements as they lead to conflicts, divisions, and create new forms of exclusion (Eira & Stebbins 2008; Whaley 2011). For example, like many youth in the Isthmus the young man who critiques his and others' speech as '*Zapochueco*' has been exposed to many messages promoting Spanish monolingualism in Mexican national society, as well as derision from some IZ speakers who criticise his emergent IZ abilities. For him to continue developing as a confident speaker of *Diidxazá* he will have to negotiate these purist ideologies, and claim the right to speak both languages.

3.2. Speaker purism: Everyone should speak like a monolingual

> Enrique: *En la escuela aprendí el español porque hasta los siete u ocho años, yo nomás hablaba en zapoteco. Mi mundo era mi casa, mis amigos de la… del rumbo. Mis amigos cercanos del barrio, la escuela, en la tarde a cuidar mis chivos que iban a pastar al río y todo era en zapoteco. Y ya en la escuela fue que empecé a aprender español y hasta hoy a veces se me atraviesan unas con otras por ahí, pero… y finalmente y lo peor del asunto es que ni hablo bien el español ni hablo bien el zapoteco.*
>
> Haley: *[Risas] ¿Cómo, por qué dices eso?*
>
> Enrique: *Porque si tú has observado bien, escuchas bien, el zapoteco de nosotros, nuestro diidxazá ya no es totalmente auténtico, original. Ya lleva por ahí-- entre diez palabras que decimos hay una por lo menos que es en español--*
>
> Enrique: In school I learned Spanish because until 7 or 8 years old, I only spoke in Zapotec. My world was my house, my friends from the... the area. My close friends from the neighborhood, the school, in the afternoon taking care of my goats that I took to graze by the river, and everything was in Zapotec. And it was in school that I started to learn Spanish, and up til today sometimes some [[words]] trip me up, but... and finally and the worst part is that I speak neither Spanish nor Zapotec well.
>
> Haley: [laughs] How, why do you say that?

> Enrique: Because if you have observed well, listen well, our Zapotec, our Diidxazá, now isn't totally authentic, original, now it has there-- among ten words that we say, there's one at least that is in Spanish--
>
> (Interview, 25 September 2014)

Many *Diidxazá*-Spanish bilinguals, including Enrique, a highly literate education administrator in his 60s, devalue their own language abilities and ascribe to an ideology that good speakers are monolinguals, or 'parallel monolinguals' (Heller 1999) who do not mix their languages. European nation-states began promoting a monolingual norm and an essentialised relationship between language, identity, and social belonging in the process of consolidating political control at home and in their colonies. Often termed the one nation-one language-one identity ideology, this regime of language has been used to disempower speech communities and delegitimise multilinguals (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Gal 2006; Tollefson 1991). The monolingual ideology in nation-building and schools is a key cause of language marginalisation around the world, as students are socialised away from local language practices and towards an imposed norm (May 2001; McCarty 2003).

Numerous scholars have critiqued the parallel monolingual paradigm that demeans speakers who do not perform like idealised 'native' or 'L1' speakers, and assumes that languages should be kept separate in schooling and society (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Cummins 2005; Heller 2007). Devaluing the way that actual speakers use *Diidxazá* or other marginalised languages can lead to further discrimination and weakening of a speech community, causing lack of confidence among bilinguals, as well as exclusion of emergent or potential members of the language community (Meek 2010; Muehlmann 2008). Assimilation to standardised Spanish, or *castellanización*, has been a key goal of Mexican public schooling, as discussed in section 2. The education administrator quoted here struggled through this Spanish-only schooling, eventually succeeding professionally, yet still viewing his syncretic language practices as illegitimate because he does not conform to a monolingual norm.

3.3. Categorising and standardising languages and speakers

> A retired teacher from one of the smaller Isthmus Zapotec dialect communities complains to me that the teachers who are teaching Zapotec in schools in his community are using the dialect of the largest community, Juchitán. They think that the dialect with a larger population is more correct than theirs, and so should be used in schools.
>
> (Interview, 10 July 2014)

Closely interwoven with the monolingual speaker paradigm is the assumed superiority of a standard or universalised language variety that erases the diversity within language communities. Categorizing forms of communication as separate languages and dialects (and their speakers as separate ethnic groups) has been a tool of colonialism, creating hierarchies and promoting ultimate assimilation (Calvet 1974; Errington 2001). This paradigm is upheld in formal schooling, where the dominant language ideology is prescriptivist or essentialist, imposing language forms and functions that are considerably narrower than those which exist across human language behaviour in general. School language practices typically privilege those in centers of international, national – or in this case regional – power (Bourdieu 1991). In this light, ongoing efforts by the Mexican National Institute of Indigenous Languages to create an official standard for IZ are viewed by some members of the language community as a potential improvement in status and recognition, while others fear that it will create a new hierarchy within the community (De Korne 2017a). At present there is no authority policing the use of *Diidxazá* in schools in the Isthmus, and yet some teachers follow an underlying prescriptivist paradigm even without the presence of an official standard. Forms of marginalisation do not just occur between languages, but also within language communities, where they may be more subtle, yet equally harmful (Leonard 2012).

3.4. External expertise and control over language planning and teaching

> A researcher visiting from central Mexico is giving a workshop on 'Teaching Indigenous languages as Second Languages' to a group of IZ-speaking university students in the Isthmus. The workshop is taught in Spanish, but frequently uses terminology and quotes in English from the canon of Applied Linguistics literature. The researcher defines what constitutes a second language class (official language, commonly used in the context of teaching) in contrast to a foreign language class (non-official, with few opportunities for use in the context of teaching), telling the students that you have to know what kind of class you are teaching before you can proceed to plan your methodology and activities. He asks the students which term they would use for a hypothetical IZ class they might teach in the city where the workshop is being held:

Estudiantes: *(juntos) Segunda lengua.*

Investigador: *¿Por qué?*

Estudiantes: *(superpuestos) Es oficial; Se habla; Hay hablantes.*

Estudiante 1: *Puede ser, puede ser una lengua extranjera.*

Estudiantes: *(superpuestos) Sí; Sí, puede ser una lengua extranjera.*

Estudiante 1: *Porque, por ejemplo, en donde hay más oportunidades de zapoteco es en San Blas, entonces puede entrar como una lengua extranjero porque aquí, aquí casi no--*

Investigador: *--Claro, es importante lo que dice--*

Estudiante 1: *--Aquí no se habla tanto. Sí hay gente que lo habla, pero…*

Students: (in chorus) A second language.

Researcher: Why?

Students: (overlapping) It's official; it's spoken; there are speakers.

Student 1: It could be, it could be a foreign language.

Students: (overlapping) Yes; yes, it could be a foreign language.

Student 1: Because, for example, where there are more opportunities [[to speak]] Zapotec is in San Blas [[a nearby neighborhood]], so it could come in as a foreign language because here [[in the center]], here almost no--

Researcher: --Of course, what he's saying is important--

Student 1: --Here it's not spoken much. Yes there are people who speak it, but…

(Audio recording and field notes, 9 December 2013)

Here young IZ speakers were told that if they want to teach their language they must first classify it in relation to official criteria and terminology originating in the Anglophone world – that it must be either a second language or a foreign language. While the goal to develop a contextually appropriate class which motivated the discussion is important, the nuanced knowledge that these speakers have about the complexities of local communication practices – such as where IZ is spoken, and by whom – was all but erased by the binary categories of second or foreign language that were imposed on them. Ironically, this attempt to contextualise an education initiative risked undermining the knowledge of the local participants in favor of categories

brought from elsewhere. Later in the class a similarly problematic discussion arose in relation to what constitutes 'authentic' language learning materials, with the researcher asserting that IZ texts are not authentic if they are produced for educational purposes (a debated concept which has nonetheless become established in Anglophone language education scholarship (see, e.g., Gilmore 2007)), while students were confused and defended the authenticity of IZ writing for any purpose.

Who decides how a language should be learned? Who determines what counts as a language and who is recognised as a speaker? In this workshop and other language promotion contexts, the disciplines of Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, and pedagogical models are often looked to as unquestioned authorities over such concerns, obscuring the political realities of language reclamation behind a facade of expertise and neutral problem-solving. Multiple scholars have critiqued the hierarchies of knowledge and power created by the paradigm of linguistic and language teaching expertise, noting that this subordinates the agency of teachers and local practitioners to the theories and fads of international experts (Kumaravadivelu 1994; Pennycook 1989). Mainstream language pedagogy based on linear and monolingual conceptions of language (L1, L2, and so forth) and the association of one language with one territory (foreign/second language dichotomy) is markedly incongruous with contexts of heritage or Indigenous language education (Cope & Penfield 2011; King 2016; Valdés 2005), which are often multilingual and politically fraught. And yet endangered language promoters seeking to support teaching efforts look to these disciplines and may marginalise their own knowledge, giving priority to outside expertise.

The ideological threads of purism, categorisation, and external control discussed above combine to create a monolingual bias that undermines the current multilingual reality of Isthmus Zapotec speakers. This ideology promotes a monolingual, standard language as a superior form of communication, and implies that for *Diidxazá* to be an equally valued language and to be used successfully in education it should be autonomous, pure, and taught through expert-approved methods. While this ideology is widespread and manifests in the comments and actions of many education participants as shown here, there are also other perspectives and priorities which are present in IZ education initiatives. The following section illustrates ideologies created by educators who challenge aspects of the monolingual bias in order to reclaim prestige and social use for *Diidxazá* within their classroom communities and beyond.

4. Overcoming the monolingual bias through ideologies of collaboration and inclusion

The use of IZ in formal education represents an important opportunity for shifting the power balances that have devalued Indigenous speakers for generations, as discussed in sections 1 and 2. However, due to the purist and monolingual ideologies through which languages have traditionally been approached in formal schooling, it also represents a possible threat and source of conflict in *Diidxazá* reclamation. I will briefly outline some practices of two Zapotec teachers, Kiara Rios Rios and Vidal Ramírez Pineda, who create collaborative and inclusionary ideologies in IZ classes in a public university, arguing that this alternative paradigm may help to counter the persistent presence of monolingual ideologies in language reclamation initiatives. I participated in their classrooms as a student and observer between 2013-2015, audio recording classroom interaction and taking filed notes and photos with the permission of the teachers and students. The small numbers, dispersed locations, and different institutional and geographic contexts of IZ education initiatives makes it difficult to generalise across settings. While I have observed some similar approaches among other IZ teachers, I do not claim that the practices of these teachers are representative of a wider movement. My goal in describing these two teachers is rather to examine their personal approaches to IZ education, and to highlight what I observed to be an ideology which resists the monolingual bias and results in positive outcomes for students and for the broader aim of *Diidxazá* reclamation.

4.1. *Zapotequización* of communicative practices

> Kiara: *Sí les dije; la verdad este de, yo hablo pero nunca he estudiado como escribirlo [...] entonces, y les soy sincera y les digo; no todas las palabras en español están en zapoteco, y algunas cosas del español ya se han traído al zapoteco, y se han zapotequizado. Y esa palabra fue muy famosa, y 'ya se zapotequizó', y todo eso. Y entonces, fui sincera [...] para que, bueno yo misma, por mi seguridad lo hice yo creo, este para que no me preguntaran tal vez si 'por qué no hay' [...] entonces y mostré mucha seguridad también y entonces, cuando [[una autoridad universitaria]] dijo que iba dar clase de zapoteco pues para mí ya no era motivo de pena, sino que al contrario...*
>
> ---
>
> Kiara: Yes I told them; truthfully um, I speak but I've never studied how to write it [...] So, I'm sincere with them and I tell them: Not all the words in Spanish are in Zapotec, and some things from Spanish have now been brought to Zapotec, and they've been zapotec-ised. And that word was really famous, 'Now it's been zapotec-ised', and

> all that. And so, I was sincere [...] so that, well I myself, for my security I did it I think, um so that they wouldn't ask me maybe if 'why there isn't...' [...] So and I showed a lot of security too and so when [[a university authority]] said I would give Zapotec classes, well then it wasn't a cause of shame for me, rather the opposite...
>
> (Kiara Rios Rios, Interview, 30 December 2013)

In an interview Kiara Rios Rios describes how she has claimed the right to be a teacher of IZ and how she approaches teaching through '*zapotequización*' (Zapotecisation), a term which sums up her pro-active, inclusionary pedagogical approach. Rios Rios is in her 20s and comes from one of the smaller villages in the Isthmus. While studying at the UABJO to be an English teacher she was invited to teach *Diidxazá*, the language that she grew up with but had never used in any formal settings. After observing a sample of her classes over three semesters, conducting one semi-structured interview (all direct quotes excerpted from interview conducted 30 December 2013) and numerous conversations with her, and several interviews with her students, I observed that her approach to teaching IZ is pluralist and participatory in many ways. Here I aim to illustrate her pedagogical practices and the ideological positions which accompany them.

Rios Rios' goal is for her students to be able to communicate, and thus she focuses on how people actually speak and not on an idealised or pure norm of the language, adopting an open attitude to the close contact between IZ and Spanish. Discussing how she teaches her students to say 'I'm good', she comments:

> Kiara: *...nua bien, nua galán, nua bien, es lo mismo… ajá! […] Estoy bien pues. Entonces, digo no hay problema porque van a escuchar personas les digo si van para allá […]van escuchar a personas platicando 'bien' y entonces es como, es aceptado pues, y está hablando el zapoteco, mjú!*
>
> ---
>
> Kiara: ...*nua* good, *nua galán, nua* good, it's the same... uhuh! [...] 'I'm good'. So I say there's no problem because they're going to hear people, I tell them if they go there [...] they'll hear people saying 'good' and so it's like, it's accepted, they're speaking Zapotec, uhuh![3]

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[3] My translation attempts to follow the intent of the phrase, where the Spanish word 'bien' has been translated to English 'good', while the word 'galán' that is widely viewed as a Zapotec word meaning 'good' remains original. (*Galán* is actually an older Spanish loan from the word *galante* or *galán*, which has been relexicalised to mean 'good' in current Zapotec use.)

This syncretic language or translanguaging, where words identified as Spanish (in this case '*bien*') are used in what is otherwise considered a Zapotec utterance, is often censured as incorrect speech, as discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2. In contrast, Rios Rios takes current communication practices as her point of reference rather than a monolingual ideal, commenting that if her students go to a Zapotec community they will hear this, and therefore it is acceptable and counts as 'speaking Zapotec'. She also adopts a flexible approach to spelling, having students write how the words sound to them in order to aid their memory (for discussion of IZ orthography and spelling norms see De Korne 2017a; Pérez Báez, Cata & Bueno Holle 2015). Despite her flexible attitude to spelling and translanguaging with her students, she herself is very interested in improving her knowledge of *Diidxazá* writing and vocabulary, taking up opportunities to attend literary events and to consult with older speakers. Literacy and formal language study have not been a pre-requisite for the development of her successful classes, however.

Students respond well to this flexible attitude and are active participators and producers of language in class. Typical class activities include games, songs, role-plays, and competitions between students. A second semester student described her experience in the class, saying, '*Y pues... mi experiencia en la clase de zapoteco-- me he divertido mucho. Mucho, mucho. Y siento que he aprendido bastante hasta ahorita*' (And well… my experience in the Zapotec class-- I've enjoyed myself a lot. A lot, a lot. And I feel that I've learned quite a bit up til now) (Interview, 8 May 2014). When asked about the learning materials used in the class, the student noted;

> *Todo es improvisado. Porque realmente no hay recursos así que ya estén para aprender zapoteco. Entonces, ella... ella va haciendo este... ya viste esas-- las canciones que pone para aprendernos las partes del cuerpo. [...] Las canciones de inglés las pasa a zapoteco.*
>
> --
>
> Everything is improvised. Because really there aren't resources that already exist to learn Zapotec. So she...she [[Kiara]] is making um... You already saw those-- the songs she uses so we'll learn body parts. [...] The songs in English, she puts them in Zapotec.
>
> (Interview, 8 May 2014)

In addition to creating her own materials, Rios Rios regularly has students create materials that are shared with the rest of the class, including flashcards and PowerPoint presentations as described in the following vignette, summarised from field notes:

> In their final presentations 1st semester students give an oral presentation describing themselves and their families in IZ, accompanied by PowerPoint slides with text and relevant pictures. Many students include Spanish words here and there for words they haven't learned or haven't been able to find. A few include English words instead of Spanish. Kiara sits in the audience, gives one or two pronunciation corrections, but largely leaves the floor to her students.
>
> (Field notes, 20 January 2014)

Through a pedagogical approach that encourages students to play and communicate through IZ, and an ideological approach that validates the language of current multilingual speakers and learners, Rios Rios creates an inclusive learning environment for her students.

4.2. Legitimacy of local diversity

> Kiara: *Entonces yo pues sí intento decir, no pues así se habla en Juchitán, y así se habla en mi pueblo, [...] yo intento decirlo como se diría de las dos formas, pero no, entonces este de, no sé si estoy mal pero se universaliza el zapoteco de aquí de Juchitán… pero no todos hablamos así…*
>
> --
>
> Kiara: So I try to say [[to my students]], no well, that's how they speak in Juchitán, and that's how they speak in my village. [...] I try to say it how it's spoken in both forms, but no, so, I don't know if I'm wrong, but the Zapotec from Juchitán is being universalised… but we don't all speak that way...

Another goal that Rios Rios has for her students is awareness and acceptance of the dialect diversity within Isthmus Zapotec. Despite the fact that most published materials are in the dialect of Juchitán and she notes that there is a bias towards that dialect in society, she confidently chooses to teach the dialect of her village (the *Binni Guiati'*), one of the three other recognised dialects. It is important to her that the ways people speak across the Isthmus are all valued by learners. Rios Rios goes on to critique the traditional categorisation of Isthmus Zapotec as one language with no attention to internal diversity, saying '*la variante del Istmo dicen siempre, y podrían decir, pues la variante de los Binni Guiati', la variante de los Tecos también podrían decir también, porque en el mismo Istmo no se conoce eso…*' (...they always say the 'variant of the Isthmus', and they could say, well the variant of

the Binni Guiati', the variant of the Tecos they could say also, because right in the Isthmus that's not known...).[4]

As a young member of one of the smaller dialect communities, it is perhaps not surprising that Rios Rios notices and resists the power imbalances that exist among these groups. However, she is not alone in promoting equality of dialects across the region. Vidal Ramírez Pineda is in his 60s, a speaker of the dominant Juchitán dialect who works as the director of a prominent cultural center. He began to teach *Diidxazá* at the invitation of the UABJO without any teacher training or experience, and like Rios Rios, thinks learning to speak is the most important goal for his students. Observations of a sample of his classes across four semesters, two semi-structured interviews (12 September 2013, 1 September 2014), and numerous conversations illustrate that although Ramírez Pineda's teaching style is quite different from Rios Rios', his classes are also based on a strong paradigm of pluralism and valuing local practices, as discussed further below.

4.3. Participating in language change

Vidal Ramírez Pineda has an extensive knowledge of IZ etymology and has been involved in committees that are creating neologisms for words that are not in the IZ lexicon. He often mentions words that are no longer in use, or going out of use, and discusses issues of language shift over time with his students. Rather than imposing a purist norm in his classes (including the neologisms and archaic terms that are being put forward in literary circles), he always discusses what terms are actually in use today so that students will understand the changes that have taken place and have the option to use pre-colonisation (and/or newly-coined) words if they choose. He makes it clear that the heritage and continuity of the language is of interest and of value, and that he would like some of these terms to achieve wider use, but he knows it can only occur collaboratively, as illustrated by his teaching practices:

> A student asks Vidal how to name the days of the week and months. He discusses how various traditional festival names have come to be used as time markers in some cases. He teaches '*beu*" (month or moon) and '*biza*' (year), commenting that these terms are still in strong use. '*Beu'*

[4] *Binni Guiati'* is the name for people who speak the Isthmus Zapotec variety associated with the municipality of Asunción Ixtaltepec, including the villages of La Mata and Ixtaltepec. *Tecos* (*Juchitecos, Juchitecas*) is a common slang term for residents of Juchitán and its dependent villages, where the largest population of IZ speakers reside.

> *biza cubi* [[month year new]] could be January. But we're castellanised, in practice people just say October, November, December, and that's fine', he tells students. He pulls out the dictionary of Zapotec complied by Fray Juan de Córdova in 1578 and has a student check what's there for 'Wednesday', while explaining that this is mainly a resource for researchers and teachers. 'If you want to speak in original, ancient, elegant Zapotec' this is a resource, he tells them, but it's not how people speak today. Later in the same class he suggests a neologism for the word 'blue' ('*naguiba*", sky colored). 'It doesn't exist [[in common use]], but why don't we create it ourselves?'
>
> (Field notes and audio recording, 14 September 2013)

Discussions of culture, history and tradition are common in Ramírez Pineda's classes, and many students (of both Zapotec and non-Zapotec backgrounds) enroll in *Diidxazá* classes with interest and expectations to learn these elements. Often letting himself be guided by students' questions and the things they are interested in saying in IZ, Ramírez Pineda draws on his personal knowledge, historical sources as well as participation and creativity in order to respond to students' interests. Typical class activities include dialogue and stories in response to students' questions, information displayed on the blackboard through text and drawings, and working with available texts.

Despite holding a position that would easily allow him to take an authoritative stance on *Diidxazá*, he does not critique or devalue younger speakers, or speakers of other dialects, and often uses both the Juchitán variety and other varieties if he knows the variation. In relation to an initiative to have young speakers from several communities and with varying degrees of competence teach IZ classes together, he commented:

> Vidal: *Pues este… pues yo creo que ellos conocen su lengua… posiblemente no, no la conozcan en toda la… eh, porque están jóvenes, este porque todo esto es de aprendizaje, es de leer, es de investigar también. Este… es de preguntar a los ancianos, este a las personas adultas, [...] pues ellos están en ese proceso pero me da gusto porque son jóvenes y se puede sacar un buen material de ahí, sí. [...] Y, y este-- una palabra, dos palabras, tres palabras que se aprendan, van enriqueciendo su vocabulario, su léxico. Sí, sobre todo que se da en las dos variantes, de Tehuantepec y Juchitán.*
>
> ---

> Vidal: Well um... well I believe that they know their language... possibly not, they don't know it in all the... um because they're young, because all of this is learning, it's reading, it's researching too. Um… it's asking the elders, um the mature people [...] Well they're in this process, but it pleases me because they're young and you can get a good material from there, yes. [...] And, and um-- one word, two words, three words that they learn, is enriching their vocabulary, their lexicon. Yes, above all that [[classes]] are given in the two variants, of Tehuantepec and Juchitán.
>
> (Interview, 1 September 2014)

His positive attitude towards younger speakers and variation is also present in his classroom practices. For example, on one occasion when the younger teachers gave a translation that was different from his he backed them up, saying he'd heard that variation, it's correct also (Field notes, 18 October 2014).

In the language education paradigm that Ramírez Pineda creates, choices about language use should be founded on knowledge and research, but not imposed or standardised. Speakers of varying abilities and learners are all welcome members of the speech community, and enjoy learning the language, as well as cultural and historical information. Most students as well as the younger teachers are participating in formal instruction in *Diidxazá* for the first time, and look to him for guidance. Although not all students may fully take on the ideological positions which Ramírez Pineda and Rios Rios promote, being exposed to an alternative to the monolingual bias which surrounds them in other education contexts is arguably an achievement towards IZ reclamation (see De Korne 2017b for more discussion of IZ learners' perspectives). IZ education remains an innovative practice, breaking with the tradition of Spanish dominance and creating a new, evolving element of the speech community, as exemplified in the following vignette excerpted from field notes:

> A wide-ranging discussion about history, politics and language use erupts after students have watched a documentary in class. Vidal Ramírez Pineda and one of the young teachers comment on some of the difficulties of teaching Zapotec, an undertaking that is still quite new to everyone. Ramírez Pineda says 'We're [[teachers]] making history, and you [[students]] are too'.
>
> (Field notes and audio, 27 September 2014)

5. Conclusion: Collaborative self-definition dismantles external categories and controls

As Kiara Rios Rios, Vidal Ramírez Pineda, and their students define collaboratively what *Diidxazá* is and how they want to use it communicatively today, they are winning a small, yet significant victory over the colonial and post-colonial systems that have devalued their agency and their speech for centuries. By choosing to define what Zapotec is, who can speak it, and how to use it together, they are practicing language reclamation as a process of self-definition and community affirmation that goes beyond attempts to acquire language forms or increase the number of speakers in a community. They are able to negotiate the inevitable contact between IZ, Spanish and other languages, not by adhering to an isolated, idealised, monolingual norm, but rather by basing themselves in current language practices as a way of validating the IZ speech community and welcoming new members into it. This includes acknowledging and including the diversity that exists within the contemporary IZ speech community. While recognizing that traditional culture, history, and unique concepts are important parts of learning *Diidxazá*, the teachers also choose to keep language learning firmly rooted in the present through projects and themes that are chosen by students and/or are relevant to their lives. By encouraging their students to invest their energy in speaking rather than learning writing norms, they are stepping away from traditional schooling practices and putting their own priorities at the heart of their pedagogical choices. These teachers and learners are charting a path towards recognising and valuing the current *Diidxazá* speech community as a dynamic and participatory group, rather than a colonially-defined or essentialised norm.

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