

## Maya Linguists, Linguistics, and the Politics of Identity<sup>1</sup>

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Mayas in Guatemala have been involved in a cultural reaffirmation movement that seeks both to promote cultural values and open political space that has been closed to them since Spanish contact. Language has played a central role in the definition of Maya identity and in the demands, both implicit and explicit, for Maya cultural and political autonomy. Mayas who are linguists offer expertise to the Maya movement in at least three areas: 1) in the construction and implementation of the political platform of the movement with respect to language, 2) in the formulation and modification of language ideologies, and 3) in the practice of linguistics and its applications to language preservation and the education of Maya children.

Guatemala is one of the few American states with a near majority indigenous population. Estimates place the Maya population variously between 40 and 60 percent of the total, or conservatively at over five million people. Twenty-one Mayan languages are spoken in Guatemala. The largest, K'ichee', has over a million speakers, while the smallest, Itzaj, has only a few dozen fluent speakers. Most of the languages are robust in population, but all show at least some signs of language shift, especially in the last twenty-five years. The majority of all Mayas still speak a Mayan language as their first language and most of the languages are being actively learned by children, although in some areas the number of children learning a Mayan language is decreasing. The language family has over 4,000 years of time depth and six major separate branches, of which five are represented by languages of Guatemala.

Since the arrival of the Spanish in 1524, Guatemalan Mayas have suffered brutal subordination to first a Spanish colony and then a Ladino state. They have been politically, socially, economically, and linguistically marginalized, but have never, in the almost 500 years of colonial history, lost their sense of nationhood and community cohesion, nor indeed, their languages. Most recently, between 1978 and 1984, Mayas were the principal targets of a genocidal war waged by the government of Guatemala against its own citizens, as the culmination of a long conflict that began in 1954, with the

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this paper were previously delivered in a paper titled "Contributions of Maya Linguists to Identity Politics and Linguistics", given at the University of Iowa in 1996 in the conference "Language Communities, States, and Global Culture: The Discourse of Identity in the Americas". Similar issues have also been discussed in England 1995, 1996, 1998 and 2001.

overthrow of the elected Guatemalan government by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In the immediate aftermath of the Violence, as the 78-84 war was called, the Maya Movement emerged as a strong voice in Guatemala, and at the same time Mayas became publicly concerned about the fate of their languages.

### **1. The Maya Movement**

The Maya Movement for cultural reaffirmation has sought to widen Maya access to political and socioeconomic power, taken very broadly, at the same time supporting and strengthening Maya identity as a culturally, socially, and historically distinct group from Ladinos, the non-Maya population. It began, roughly, in the 1970s and gained momentum in the latter part of the 1980s, after the end of the Violence. It is not the only political movement that represents Mayas; the Popular Movement is a grass-roots political movement that represents poor people and the oppressed in Guatemala, whether Ladino or Maya. The two movements have some goals in common, but differ significantly in that the Maya Movement is led entirely by Mayas, while the Popular Movement has had a mixed but mostly Ladino leadership, and in that the Maya Movement is explicitly interested in cultural reaffirmation as Mayas, while the Popular Movement is not. While in some ways much more broadly conceived than the Popular Movement, the Maya Movement is much smaller in terms of its ability to mobilize people. It has taken some care to remain on the fringes of ordinary political action in order to avoid reprisals, and it generally speaks with and for a Maya leadership rather than the general population. For that leadership, however, and at least some portion of the general population, it is a movement that has powerfully mobilized people to enter a debate about the position of Mayas in Guatemalan society, and about the value of Mayan cultural practices.

While the Maya Movement has not been directly represented in national political action such as party politics or as participants in the framing of the 1996 Peace Accords, it has been indirectly represented in three ways: 1) the 1995 Agreement on Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Communities took its language almost directly from language proposed elsewhere by Dr. Demetrio Cojtí, the foremost intellectual leader of the Maya Movement (Cojtí, 1994; Herrera, 1995), 2) the commissions charged with working out legal means to implement the 1996 Peace Accords included a number of leaders from the Maya Movement, and 3) the government of Alfonso Portillo includes one Maya Movement leader in a cabinet level position (Otilia Lux as Minister of Culture), two as Vice Ministers (Virgilio Alvarado for Culture and Demetrio Cojtí for Education), and another (Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez) as the Director of the National Bilingual Education Program. Furthermore, several Maya Movement leaders have at one time or another become regular op-ed columnists in different national newspapers (for instance, Demetrio Cojtí, Enrique Sam, Victor Montejo). Such less direct representations have resulted in a certain foregrounding of issues considered to be important by the Movement.

Language has been the focal point for Maya cultural reaffirmation (England, 1996), and as such has received significant attention within the Maya Movement. Mayan languages, in addition to still being spoken by a majority of the Mayan population, are important symbols of Maya identity and, unlike many other cultural symbols, have an unarguably American origin. While their domains of use have been eroded over time, they are still the principal means through which Mayan philosophy and worldview are transmitted to the majority of Mayas. The Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala, established in 1990, was the first governmentally approved and financed organization that is entirely managed by Mayas, a number of Mayan non-governmental development

organizations are wholly or partially oriented toward language, and Mayan political demands include considerable attention to the position of Mayan languages. The lead-in quote of the Academy's first publication of the law by which it was established, attributed to José Enrique Rodó, expresses Mayan sentiment regarding the position of language (Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, 1991):

A community that neglects its language, like a community that neglects its history, is not far from losing its sense of self and letting its personality dissolve and become void.<sup>2</sup>

Mayan languages have not up to now enjoyed any political recognition in the modern Republic of Guatemala. It is only in the last three decades that they have been used at all in the schools, and then until very recently only to facilitate the learning of Spanish. Few non-Mayas learn a Mayan language, so the entire burden of acting as cultural and political interpreters has fallen to bilingual Mayas.

In 1994 Demetrio Cojtí analyzed these facts as the legacy of internal colonialism in Guatemala. Mayan languages, he stated, have been conceptualized as folklore, as has Mayan culture (Cojtí, 1994:14). Furthermore, the Ladino program of Guatemalan national unity has required that there be only one language (16). He then went on to list immediate demands made by the community of Mayan nations to the Guatemalan State. With regard to language, these included (Cojtí, 1994:51ff): 1) the officialization or co-officialization of the Mayan languages, 2) the development and promotion of Mayan languages by the State, 3) emergency programs to rescue Mayan languages in danger of extinction, 4) the use of Mayan languages in education, 5) the use of Mayan languages in State offices serving the public, 6) the use of Mayan languages in the courts, 7) guaranteed access to using Mayan languages in mass media, and 8) the cancellation of activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Most of these demands were included in the 1995 Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Communities (Herrera, 1995), signed by the Guatemalan government and the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Guatemalteca).<sup>3</sup> After the Peace Accords were signed in 1996, various commissions to translate the accords into constitutional and legal reform were established, and in 1999 a popular referendum was held on the proposed constitutional measures. They were all defeated, in a voting pattern that closely mirrored the ethnic distribution of Guatemala, with most of the departments with a majority Maya population voting for the reforms and most of the departments with a majority Ladino population voting against the reforms (for further analysis of the referendum, see Warren

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<sup>2</sup> All translations are mine. The original text reads: Un pueblo que descuida su lengua como un pueblo que descuida su historia, no están tan distantes de perder el sentimiento de sí mismos y dejar disolverse y anularse su personalidad.

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the Agreement included that the government would: 1) promote a constitutional reform that would list the Mayan languages which the government must recognize, respect, and promote, 2) promote the use of Mayan languages in education, 3) promote the use of Mayan languages in the delivery of social services at the community level, 4) inform members of indigenous communities about their rights, obligations, and opportunities, 5) promote training programs for bilingual judges and legal interpreters, 6) support the positive valuing of indigenous languages and open new spaces for them in the social media of communication and cultural transmission, and 7) promote the officialization of the indigenous languages (Herrera, 1995).

and Jackson, 2002). Despite the defeat, however, many of the suggested measures are being implemented or are being prepared for.

In particular, the bilingual education program in Guatemala is attempting to institute bilingual education that has as a goal the education of children in Mayan languages for their own sake and not merely as a transition to Spanish. The designation as Vice Minister of Education of Demetrio Cojtí, one of the principal authors of the plan for educational reform after the Peace Accords, enabled educational reform to be begun, and the further designation as Director of Bilingual Education of Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez, a principal voice in the commission for officialization of the Mayan languages, permitted educational reform to be implemented. Additionally, several universities, especially the Universidad Rafael Landívar, have instituted programs to prepare bilingual teachers and legal interpreters. Maya linguists are playing significant roles in these programs, as well as continuing to play roles in other on-going programs.

In a somewhat unusual and interesting development, partly due to the importance language has for Mayan cultural revitalization, probably more Guatemalan Mayas have university degrees in linguistics than in any other field in the social sciences. In addition, many have had significant training and research experience in linguistics through Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA) or the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM), non-governmental linguistics research institutions. Linguists trained in the universities and/or OKMA or the PLFM have participated in the formulation of the political platform of the Maya Movement through the Academy of Mayan Languages, where they have held positions both on the board and in the technical division, through participation in the language officialization commission established to carry out the Peace Accords, and through less formal meeting and discussion with other Maya Movement leaders. They have been involved in the de facto implementation of language reforms through the bilingual education program, where they have been on the central staff and have also consulted or been subcontracted for in-service teacher training; and through participation as teachers as well as students in the linguistics, bilingual education, and legal interpreter programs in the universities. An important additional venue for de facto language reform has been in the numerous non-State "Maya schools", which have in several instances had linguists who have contributed to curriculum and materials development. Linguists have also contributed to the preparation for language reforms through their work in the Academy, OKMA, or the PLFM, where they have both created essential materials such as dictionaries and grammars of the Mayan languages, and have also done the research and begun to make proposals for standardized forms of the languages.

## **2. The Formation and Modification of Language Ideologies**

The sources for ideologies held by Mayas regarding language in general and their own languages in particular are various. I have discussed a number of these elsewhere (England, 2001), pointing out that they may be partial and contradictory. Here I will examine two aspects of language ideology that have been generated or promoted by outsiders and discuss the extent to which these have been incorporated or rejected by Mayas themselves. Maya linguists have explicitly addressed some of these ideas and have been instrumental in modifying or promoting them. An analysis of these ideologies helps in understanding the dynamics of the interactions between linguists and speakers, and between speakers and non-speakers, in the contemporary sociolinguistic context in which Mayan languages are used.

Probably the most obvious outside idea that has been promoted regarding Mayan languages is that they are inferior to Spanish. This is an idea that almost all Mayas have had to contend with at some point in their lives, most usually as small children if they go to school. It is a widespread popular idea, expressed in innumerable ways in the media and by private individuals, as well as by school teachers and other figures of authority. It is also an idea that has been taken as a fundamental fact in academic social science literature produced by Ladinos. As an example, I quote from Severo Martínez Peláez, the author of *La Patria del Criollo*, the foundation of leftist social science in Guatemala. Martínez' book was first published in 1970; the quote is from the eighth edition, published in 1987, and the book has been required reading in most social science classes in the national university, profoundly influencing all of social science in Guatemala for three decades.

Monolingualism. . . was a serious factor of weakness for the Indian. . . because the use of less developed languages resulted in a decisive inferiority of conceptual resources; . . . (599-600)<sup>4</sup>

Martínez Peláez goes on to explain, in a note, what he means by "less developed languages":

We start from scientific proof of a general nature, according to which the language of a society reflects a level of development of which it is a product. A more advanced technology always supposes a more developed language, in vocabulary and in expressive possibilities. It is known that the indigenous languages, as they are spoken today, are plagued by hispanisms that have no translation. (768)<sup>5</sup>

The idea of linguistic inferiority has been partially incorporated by Mayas, especially in terms of what might be called their psychological reactions to language and language use. It has been observed, for instance, that it is rare for Mayas to speak a Mayan language at a normal conversational volume when on the street in an urban area or in other public spaces where there are likely to be non-Mayas (Cojtí Cuxil, 1988). Instead, they speak very softly, and are in fact embarrassed to speak loudly, or sometimes to speak at all in a Mayan language in the presence of non-speakers. In common with speakers of other subordinated languages, Mayas speak Spanish (if they can) if there is one monolingual Spanish speaker in a group, even if there are many monolingual speakers of a Mayan language. Today, an increasing number of Mayan parents speak to their children in Spanish, in a firm belief that Spanish is a more useful language than the home language. Attitudes of language inferiority have been well-documented in a number of Mayan towns (Brown, 1991; French, 2001).

The entire linguistics enterprise by Mayas combats this aspect of language ideology, both explicitly and implicitly. Mayas are writing grammars of their own languages for the

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<sup>4</sup> El monolingüismo. . . era un grave factor de debilidad para el indio. . . porque el uso de idiomas menos desarrollados determinaba una decisiva inferioridad de recursos conceptuales; . . .

<sup>5</sup> Partimos de la comprobación científica de carácter general, según la cual la lengua de una sociedad refleja un grado de desarrollo del cual es fruto. Una tecnología más avanzada supone siempre un idioma más desarrollado, en vocabulario y en posibilidades expresivos. Es cosa sabida que las lenguas indígenas, tal como se hablan hoy, están plagadas de vocablos castizos que no tienen traducción.

express purpose of not only showing that these languages have grammars, but also in order to document the specific details of their grammars. Most linguists say that one of the things that specifically drew their attention to linguistics and satisfies them in the practice of linguistics is learning and analyzing the structures of their own languages, because before engaging in these studies they had always been told that their languages had no grammar. The sense of satisfaction and of enlightenment that they feel is so strong that they personally usually overcome the psychological barriers that many Mayas feel about using Mayan languages publicly. In addition to the basic message of grammatical equality that linguistic studies convey, linguistics and the language-centered aspects of the Maya movement have promoted extending the use of Mayan languages to spheres where they have not been used regularly for a long time, with some success. Several national and regional newspapers have published sections or columns in Mayan languages in the last few years; signs, business names, posters and even a few advertisements have been appearing with increasing regularity in Mayan languages; more radio programs in Mayan languages are being produced; more public meetings at a regional or national level are being conducted in Mayan languages.

However, a new source of ideas about language inferiority may be generated by linguistics when it is applied to the problem of standardization. One aspect of standardization is to characterize certain regional and dialect-internal variation as incorrect, in order to promote single, or fewer, forms. The speech of those who use those forms may be stigmatized. This process is not yet well-developed, although it has begun. However, there has been considerable resistance to even the idea of standardization among Mayas, who perceive quite readily that the process disadvantages some dialects. Many hold that all Mayan languages, and all dialects of each language, should be treated equally, while others promote standardization as a means of achieving a valuable unification, even at the expense of some dialects.

Another idea that has affected Mayan language ideology is the idea of purity. Whether this is an indigenous notion or not is difficult to ascertain; that it has been promoted by non-Mayas is certain, usually in the negative sense of claims that Mayan languages are inferior because they have words that come from other languages, principally Spanish. The last line of the quote from Martínez Peláez illustrates this attitude, and fits in with the general leftist stance, now also embraced by the right as well, that "Mayas" do not exist and that the "Indians" of Guatemala are a product of the conquest. The evidence that is called upon to support this idea is principally that Mayas have incorporated many cultural elements that are not Mayan in origin; therefore they are not Maya.<sup>6</sup> Since language is the one cultural possession of Mayas that is without doubt of American origin, it is very useful to the argument to claim that it is, none the less, tainted by impurity. The same argument is not, however, applied to Spanish, which has very large numbers of loanwords from, for instance, Arabic, Náhuatl, and English.

Mayas have incorporated the notion of language purity into their language ideology. It is expressed principally through a widespread public stance against using Spanish loanwords in Mayan languages, although few speakers actually eliminate them from their daily conversations. A major concern of the Academy of Mayan Languages and many of

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<sup>6</sup> An extreme example of this idea was expressed by the columnist Mario Roberto Morales in the Primer Congreso de Estudios Mayas, in August of 1995, where he claimed that Rigoberta Menchú, who identifies herself as a Maya, is neither a Maya nor even an Indian, but instead a Mestiza, because she speaks Spanish.

its constituent linguistic communities is to modernize Mayan languages through the creation of neologisms that can replace Spanish loanwords. Another aspect to the acceptance of the desirability of language purity is that speakers themselves often feel that their command of language is somehow inadequate if they use many Spanish loanwords. Although Mayas in general are reluctant to classify the speech of any town but their own as “better”, the speakers of some areas will admit to those of other towns being better speakers, almost always on the basis that they use fewer borrowed words.

Maya linguists have usually been fairly ardent promoters of the idea of language purity. They contribute considerable technical expertise to the projects to create neologisms, and they have become concerned with other areas of influence from Spanish in the grammars of their languages. If there are alternate ways of speaking in which one option shows influence from Spanish, they almost always characterize that option as incorrect in prescriptive grammars. There is not all that much grammatical influence from Spanish in Mayan languages, but there is some, principally in word order. There is a tendency to jump to conclusions about Spanish influence when the grammars of Mayan languages and Spanish seem to converge, and in fact to attribute any language change, broadly, to influence from Spanish. Processes of standardization tend to eliminate naturally occurring morphological variation, and some of this is due to the idea that variation is somehow a result of Spanish influence, although other factors such as historical conservatism enter as well.

### **3. The Use of Linguistics by Mayas**

While Mayas individually may be fascinated with the purely scientific aspects of linguistics, Mayas collectively are far more concerned with linguistics as a bridge between language structure and language politics. That collective interest in turn informs the interest in and use of linguistics by Maya linguists. All of them, without exception, are first and most enduringly interested in the ways that linguistics can be applied to the practical and theoretical aspects of language promotion and preservation. All Maya linguists speak a minority language with no official status, all of them are involved in the promotion of Mayan cultural values, and all of them recognize the value of linguistics for satisfying a very real personal as well as community need to enhance the status of Mayan languages and to extend their spheres of use.

The very first consequence of studying linguistics for Maya linguists is learning to read and write fluently in their own languages, and learning in addition that it is easy. The psychological and symbolic importance of literacy in a Mayan language is obviously so far greater than its practical importance, and is a considerably empowering experience. Similarly, discovering the grammatical structures of their languages, and participating in that discovery, seem to be very valuable to Mayas as a form of intellectual empowerment. It gives them an arsenal of arguments about why their languages are not inferior. Linguistics simply does not have these values for most academic linguists. For most of the rest of us, our languages are not in a situation which could lead to language death, they are not devalued by the wider society, we are literate in them from an early age, and we have always known they have grammar; usually as something everyone else hated to study in school. The immediate context for studying linguistics is therefore different for Mayas.

Mayas do linguistics from a politically positioned stance. They are explicitly interested in the continued use of their languages, in the possibility of choosing to use their own languages, in the expansion of the domains of usage to the schools and to written communication, and in the granting of some sort of official status to those languages.

They hold that all linguistics is politically positioned, that the idea of impartial science is a myth, and that those who argue that linguistics is not political have simply failed to recognize their unavoidable political involvement. Demetrio Cojtí has stated the argument most lucidly (Cojtí, 1990:19):

It is difficult, above all in Guatemala, where Ladino colonialism reigns and where the very political constitution assigns informal functions to Mayan languages, for linguists to define themselves as neutral or apolitical, since they work on languages that are sentenced to death and officially demoted. In this country, the linguist who works on Mayan languages only has two options: either active complicity in the prevailing colonialism and linguistic assimilationism, or activism in favor of a new linguistic order in which equality in the rights of all languages is made concrete. . .<sup>7</sup>

Maya linguists are clear that they are in fact activists in favor of a new linguistic order. As such, they believe that they owe service to their communities in terms of using their knowledge of the structure of their languages to solve practical problems, especially in the areas of standardization, literacy, and education. And in case they should be inclined to forget this obligation, their communities generally do not allow them to do so. Maya linguists are constantly called on by various community groups to lend a hand – in teaching, in participating in language planning, in helping with the production of educational materials, in translation, etc.

While many academic linguists are inclined to accept the argument that our work is politically positioned, not all are. Norman McQuown, a Mayan linguist of great renown, called Demetrio Cojtí to task quite forcibly for his statement regarding the political position of linguistics (McQuown, 1990):

. . . it would be recommendable. . . to exercise extreme caution in order not to fall into the same universal traps that human group after human group has fallen into in its own efforts to increase the political, social, and cultural status of its own communities and its own languages: (1) confuse science with ideology, (2) identify descriptive methodology with political orientation. . .<sup>8</sup>

Specific examples of the kinds of linguistic practices or analyses that Mayas have pointed to as having political content or consequences include work on dialectology and language identification, the use of certain kinds of examples, and the former restriction of the domain of linguistics to non-speakers. With regard to dialectology and language identification, Mayas have made it quite clear that, since language is an important aspect

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<sup>7</sup> Es difícil pues, sobre todo en Guatemala, donde impera el colonialismo ladino y donde la misma Constitución Política asigna funciones informales a las lenguas Mayas, que el lingüista se defina como neutro y apolítico ya que trabaja sobre idiomas sentenciados a muerte y oficialmente degradados. En este país, el lingüista que trabaja sobre idiomas Mayas sólo tiene dos opciones: o la complicidad activa con el colonialismo y asimilismo lingüísticos vigentes, o el activismo a favor de un nuevo ordenamiento lingüístico en el cual se concrete la igualdad de derechos para todos los idiomas. . .

<sup>8</sup> . . . sería de recomendarse. . . el ejercer suma cautela para no caer en las mismas trampas universales en las que han caído grupo tras grupo humano en sus propios esfuerzos por ensalzar el status político, social y cultural de sus propias comunidades y de sus propias lenguas: (1) confundir ciencia con ideología, (2) identificar metodología descriptiva con orientación política. . .



of Maya identity, the discussion of dialects and language varieties is essentially political. They have criticized linguists in some instances for being “splitters” and contributing to the fragmentation of Mayan communities by identifying language varieties as separate languages instead of dialectal variations, and in other instances have criticized linguists as failing to recognize the speech of some politically separate community as a different language. Arguments about language and dialect identification are now almost entirely in the hands of Maya linguists, who have, as linguists who are at the same time members of a linguistic community, been somewhat more responsive to the political issues surrounding language identity.

In meetings in 1985 and 1989, Mayas called for foreign linguists to pay more attention to descriptive adequacy by monitoring their example sentences for negative cultural messages, perhaps unintended, and by trying to reduce the number of Spanish borrowings in the examples (cf. England, 1992, 1995). While many have responded to these suggestions, some reacted indignantly. At a meeting in 1989 of linguists who work on Mayan languages, several defended the position that to tamper with examples would be highly unscientific because it would essentially change data. There are pitfalls to both positions. However, while linguists obviously need to be careful not to make up data that is in fact inaccurate, much of the monitoring that Mayas request can be handled through greater sensitivity in the elicitation sessions. Changes can be checked with native speakers, or even suggested by them if the problems are explained. Where it is important to cite data exactly as received, explanations of potentially objectionable text can be added.

Finally, with regard to the restriction of the domain of linguistics to non-speakers, this is no longer the case. University programs in Guatemala in linguistics have opened the possibility of formal linguistic study to Mayas, some basic linguistic material has been published in Spanish (although not enough), and some Mayas have been able quite recently to study linguistics abroad. To the extent, however, that Maya participation in linguistic research has been or continues to be restricted, Mayas hold that it is another consequence of the internal colonialism to which Demetrio Cojtí refers.

The principal practical problem that Maya linguists work on is standardization. A lengthy quote from a prescriptive grammar explains why they are interested in doing so (Rodríguez Guaján, 1994:73-75):

All languages undergo change, with time, some more than others. These changes depend greatly on the political and economic situation of the community that creates and uses the language. . . A community with favorable economic and political conditions develops its language, but a community in poor economic conditions and without political autonomy weakens its language. In Guatemala the Mayan languages are suffering displacement; their use is domestic-rural. . .

Under these conditions, we cannot expect that Mayan languages will achieve development; they are rather in a state of subsistence. Until now little is being done to promote their use and less to study them, to report on them, teach them, or modernize them (creating neologisms), and even less to promote a standard at the written level. . .

Kaqchikel presents a series of regional differences (dialects), and social differences (sociolects by age), of diverse types: phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic and pragmatic differences. With this

diversity of variation at the oral level, we should promote a standard at the written level. . .

In this manual the standardization of the writing of Kaqchikel is proposed, but with the aim of unifying and developing the language in its totality and not at the dialect level. . .<sup>9</sup>

Noteworthy here is that the situation of language loss is attributed to the sociopolitical situation, and that standardization is viewed as the principal means to promote an expansion of the use of Mayan languages. It is furthermore viewed as an explicitly unifying device.

Once standardization progresses beyond the alphabet, the problem becomes quite complex. Mayas find that historical and comparative linguistics is very useful for the insights it offers into language history and development. They use historical arguments to justify suggesting one form rather than another for the standard (England, 1996, 2001). They are also concerned with discovering the details of similarities and differences among languages, both to discover where standardization is necessary and to promote language unification by choosing standard forms that are similar from language to language, where possible. They are not particularly interested in reconstructing the proto-language, except in so far as it gives them insights about which forms are older, and they are not particularly interested in defining dialects, but rather in knowing the details of similarity and divergence among dialects. They find previous comparative studies of Mayan languages inadequate (even though this is an area that has been well-studied) because they do not contain the detail necessary for the purposes of standardization.

While Mayas recognize that standardization is in part a political process, and that the acceptance of a standard language depends on nonlinguistic factors, Maya linguists are quite convinced that linguistics can aid in making rational suggestions about standardization. I have previously argued (England, 1996) that historical arguments for standardization, which involve suggesting an older form when choosing between two forms, have particular force for Mayas because they are essentially internal. They go back to older forms of the same languages for resolving a difficulty of variation, rather

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<sup>9</sup> Todo idioma sufre cambios, en el tiempo, unos más que otros. Estos cambios dependen en gran medida de la situación económica y política del Pueblo creador y usuario del mismo. . . Un Pueblo con condiciones económicas y políticas favorables desarrolla su idioma, pero un Pueblo que está en pésimas condiciones económicas y sin autonomía política, se debilita su idioma. En Guatemala los idiomas mayas están sufriendo desplazamiento, su uso es doméstico-rural. . .

Es estas condiciones, no podemos esperar que los idiomas mayas logran su desarrollo; más bien, están en estado de subsistencia. Hasta el momento muy poco se está haciendo para promover su uso y menos para estudiarlos, divulgarlos, enseñarlos, actualizarlos (creando neologismos), y mucho menos para promover un estandar en el nivel escrito. . .

El Kaqchikel presenta una serie de variantes regionales (dialectales), y variantes sociales (sociolectos por edad), de diversos tipos: variantes fonéticas, fonológicas, morfológicas, sintácticas, lexicales, semánticas y pragmáticas. Ante esta diversidad de variantes en el nivel oral, debemos promover un estándar en el nivel escrito. . .

En este manual se pretende normar la escritura del Kaqchikel, pero con el propósito de unificar y desarrollar el idioma en su totalidad y no a nivel de variante. . .

than relying on arguments from outside Mayan languages themselves. They also appear to avoid favoring one contemporary variety over another, or at least base such favoritism on some logical principle that does not predict which variety will be favored. Historical arguments, although not in all instances the “best” arguments for choosing a standard variety, are almost the only arguments so far that are able to convince speakers to give up their local speech loyalties.

The second principal problem that Maya linguists have begun to work on is the application of linguistics to education for Maya children. In general, education in Guatemala, both publicly and privately, is in the hands of educators, but linguists have begun to work with educators specifically in the area of bilingual education. The national bilingual education program has almost always had some linguists on its staff working in materials production, and has very recently begun to call on linguists to work with educators in trying to ensure that bilingual teachers are in fact literate in a Mayan language and otherwise prepared to teach bilingually. This alliance is still somewhat uneasy, as the roles and areas of expertise of linguists and educators are being worked out. Maya linguists are, however, almost universally quite interested in contributing to bilingual education, where they see immediate practical applications for their work that is useful to their own communities and their own children.

Finally, Maya linguists have contributed a considerable amount to the description and analysis of Mayan languages. Right now most of the descriptive material that is being published on Mayan languages is being written by Mayas. This includes, in the last few years, at least thirteen grammatical sketches, five pedagogical grammars aimed at an intermediate level, at least ten bilingual dictionaries, a number of linguistic articles in various sources, an introductory book on Mayan languages, several dozen *licenciatura* theses, one master's thesis, one doctoral dissertation, five reference grammars, one monolingual dictionary, and six dialect analyses. In recent scholarly meetings held in Guatemala, Mayas have given half or more of the papers on linguistics.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Maya movement, as a cultural reaffirmation movement with political as well as cultural aspirations, has taken language to be a central issue in the promotion of Mayan political and economic position without loss of cultural identity. Mayas regard language as the principal symbol of their identity, as well as the principal means through which identity is transmitted. One result has been the development of a substantial group of Mayas with linguistic training, most of whom are active in cultural and linguistic promotion, and who have also been very productive in descriptive and analytical linguistics.

While Maya linguists are perhaps not responsible for the centrality of language in the Maya Movement, they are being called on to be responsible for the results. They have begun to work on the codification and modernization of Mayan languages, anticipating a time when their officialization will become a political reality.

Their role, however, is considerably more than merely technical. In the formation and modification of language ideologies, Maya linguists play an active philosophical role that is both reactive and innovative. It is likely that their perceptions of which aspects of language ideology should be incorporated and which should be rejected will have some effect on Mayan language ideology in general and on language change in particular.

Since they are also directly involved with standardization, which is where the technical aspects of linguistics are relied on most heavily, their potential for directly affecting processes of language change is relatively great. Language ideologies both inform approaches to standardization and therefore change, and are also influenced by the experiences of Maya linguists in putting their expertise into practice. Certain long-held aspects of language ideology are being explicitly rejected and modified by Maya linguists; others are being incorporated in their programs for applying linguistics to the promotion and preservation of Mayan languages.

Mayas use linguistics primarily for the promotion and preservation of their languages. To this end, they view all linguistics as politically positioned and as a tool for either furthering these interests or subverting them. Their interests, which only partially agree with the interests of academic linguistics, imply a critique of academic linguistics that is worth noting. To what extent can, and should, our linguistic programs prepare Mayas and other speakers of subordinated languages for the roles that they are called on to play, and to what extent can our programs benefit from incorporating more of their interests in the applications of linguistics to problems of immediate urgency for their languages. It is probable that an interactive relationship between academic linguistics and linguistics as practiced by speakers of subordinated languages can result in richer analysis, richer theory, and more integration between linguistics and its applications.

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