

The Maya Movement and Modernity: Local Kaqchikel Linguistic Ideologies and the Problem of Progress

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Linguistic ideologies of Mayan languages are sites of heated political and social debate in contemporary Guatemala. From the early nationalist era in the mid 1800s to the late twentieth century, the State has regarded Mayan languages as constitutive of “Indianness,” an identity antithetical to Guatemalan national identity. Under the influence of this essentialist language ideology, the State has employed various policies and practices to eradicate Mayan languages and promote the spread of Spanish among Maya populations. Maya scholars and activists involved in the Maya Movement embrace this nationalist language ideology—but appropriate it for counter-hegemonic purposes. They use the linking of language with peoplehood strategically, as the basis for Maya people to exist as a collectivity and to have cultural autonomy within the Guatemalan state.

In the context of these nationalist language ideologies, I investigate the grass-roots language ideologies of a group of bilingual urban Maya-Kaqchikels from the Department of Chimaltenango to assess: 1) to what extent language shift from Kaqchikel to Spanish in the area (Powell 1989; England 1998; Garzon 1998) can be understood as a rejection of collective Maya identity, and 2) what impact Maya scholars and activists, and their valorization of the link between language and ethnic identity, may have had on ordinary Maya citizens. Through an analysis of the metalinguistic speech of urban Kaqchikel-Mayas from the Department of Chimaltenango, I argue that the “discourse of progress” that associates Kaqchikel with the “traditional” past is the most salient grass-roots language ideology fueling language shift from Mayan languages to Spanish in the area. A detailed analysis of the “discourse of progress” shows that, for this group of Kaqchikel-Mayas, the loss of Kaqchikel does not necessarily negate one’s indigenous identity.

1. The Discourse of Progress: “Traditional” Past and “Modern” Present

What emerges from ordinary Mayas’ metalinguistic talk about Mayan languages and Spanish is a collective notion about progress—an agreement about the way things seem to have changed for the better in the lives of Kaqchikel-Mayas. The “discourse of progress” is made up of two interrelated discourses, the discourse of the “traditional” past and the

discourse of the “modern” present, themselves made up of clusters of reoccurring themes. Linking the past with Kaqchikel, the discourse of the “traditional” past is constituted by the themes of 1) parochialism; 2) lack of formal education; 3) isolated living conditions; 4) poverty. Linking the present with Spanish, the discourse of the “modern” present is characterized by 1) worldliness; 2) formal education; 3) travel and migration; 4) economic opportunity. The two discourses about progress, and their constituent themes, emerged repeatedly in the metalinguistic data from 128 participants. To be sure, not every person mentioned all of the themes, nor were these themes always connected in as coherent a manner as I represent them here. Nevertheless, a majority (over 70) of the respondents discussed constituent elements of both discourses.¹

As in Hill’s (1998) analysis of language ideologies and nostalgia among Mexicano speakers, the “discourse of progress” and its associated language ideologies among these Kaqchikel-Mayas can be said to form a discursive system whose coherence becomes discernible through metalinguistic talk. Indeed, the “discourse of progress” and its constituent parts emerged, in the context of explicit talk about languages, in the following patterned ways. First, the discourses of the “traditional” past and the “modern” present are syntagmatically chained in speakers’ talk about Spanish and Mayan languages. Second, there is a relational contrast between the “traditional” past and the “modern” present, often projected onto a contrast between Kaqchikel and Spanish. Third, talk about Spanish and Mayan languages functions as a “multiplex sign,” which Hill defines by drawing on the work of Briggs (1989), as “elements that not only refer to, but call up indexically an entire social order” (1998: 71).² Much like a discursive system, the “discourse of progress” invokes, in metalinguistic talk about Spanish and Mayan languages, ideas about the “traditional” past and the “modern” present that can be considered as parts of the “practical consciousness” (Williams 1977) of the Maya interviewees.

2. Language Ideologies and “Modern” Personhood

The Maya citizens of Chimaltenango identify themselves as actors in a “modern” present within which life is perceived to be materially, economically, and socially better than it had been in the past. Their language ideologies link Kaqchikel with undesirable, old ways of living, and Spanish with modern, desirable ways of life. Such linking seems to encourage assimilation and to expedite language shift. Indeed, the argument has been advanced that, as Mayas become integrated into a capitalist economy and the “modern” nation-state, the languages and cultures of the Maya peoples will gradually disappear. Severo Martínez Peláez articulates a similar position when he discusses the oncoming transformations in the “Indian” cultural complex due to economic “liberation:”

Spontaneously the languages will be abandoned when the “Indians,” put in the predicament of conquest or to consolidate a more advantageous economic and social

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¹ Maya women between the ages of 30 and 55 elaborated most explicitly on the discourses of the “traditional” past/“modern” present, although men around the same age also participated extensively in the production of these discourses. Generally, older people and younger people mentioned fewer of the constituent themes and their associated language ideologies.

² For a complete discussion of the “discourse of progress,” see French 2001.

position, will experience the urgent necessity to equip their intellect with the indispensable elements of knowledge in the system and will verify, in the course of events, that it is absurd to hope that said knowledge will be translated into 20 narrow languages with very little diffusion. . . . All of the modern developments, including those which we cannot predict, demand the idiomatic unification of the Indians (1970: 608-9).

The popular claim, by Peláez and others, that “Indian” identity will be gradually erased as “Indians” become “modern” Guatemalans is, however, not supported by the data.

While the Mayas of Chimaltenango explicitly produced language ideologies that promote linguistic assimilation to monolingualism in Spanish, the idea of a collective indigenous identity persists. Regardless of their status as bilingual in Spanish and Kaqchikel or as monolingual in Spanish, several of the participants understood themselves as having some kind of collective identity that is opposed to Ladino identity. This is a significant point because both state and Pan-Maya discourses have configured the relationship between language and collective identity in essential terms. References to a Maya collectivity, marked with the indexical shifter “we” (Silverstein 1976), often emerged in participants’ metalinguistic speech. A 73 year-old bilingual man from Comalapa living in Chimaltenango explained the following about Spanish:

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|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1) “Fíjese Ud. si solo los Ladinos van | “Listen, if only the Ladinos get |
| 2) por arriba, no sirve. Hay que. . . | ahead, it’s no good. We have |
| 3) levantarse a mismos nosotros. | to get up there ourselves. |
| 4) Por eso es que ha superado | That’s why Guatemala has improved |
| 5) Guatemala. Porque ahora hablan | Because now many people speak |
| 6) español, muchos. . . Muchos | Spanish a lot of |
| 7) estudios.” | studying.” |

For some people like this old man, the collective “we” of the indigenous Mayas, referenced by the plural pronoun “ourselves” (line 3), is representative of a collectivity that can be maintained without speaking Mayan languages. Here the collective “we” stands in opposition to “Ladinos” (line 1). From this perspective, embracing Spanish should not be conflated with a desire to change one’s ethnic identity, from indigenous to non-indigenous. Rather a shift to Spanish indicates a desire to access an instrument of hegemony, a tool that Mayas must come to possess and learn to use, if they are to make an entrance into the “modern” present where a better way of life presumably awaits them. The person quoted above metaphorically speaks of progress as “*van por arriba*” “getting ahead” (lines 1- 2), and attributes improvements in Guatemala to the many people who learned to speak Spanish—educated, modern people in the present (lines 4-8). Using Spanish as a ladder to climb upward to the vistas of progress often means perceiving Mayan languages as that which must be left behind, at the bottom of the ladder. Yet leaving Mayan languages behind does not necessarily mean relinquishing Maya identity.

The indigenous people who participated in this research favor Spanish over Mayan languages because they are much more concerned with *being modern* than they are with *not being “Indian.”* All of the respondents acknowledged that Mayan languages were in their familial or individual backgrounds and, therefore, were not interested in “passing as

Ladinos.”³ Furthermore, all of the women represented in the data were wearing some indigenous clothing.⁴ This suggests that a preference for Spanish at the expense of Kaqchikel (and other Mayan languages) should not be equated with a categorical negation of indigenous identity, particularly since these women publicly marked themselves as Maya women.⁵ Rather, the disuse of Kaqchikel can be understood as a way of *distancing* oneself from a particular manner of living associated with the language. The way of life that Kaqchikel indexes is an economically, materially, and educationally difficult one. For Mayas living/working in the Chimaltenango area, Kaqchikel indexes ways of living that belong to the remote past, or remote places where people still “live that way” in the present. The act of distancing oneself from Kaqchikel is intimately tied to the modernist “discourse of progress” in which the “modern” present, in contrast to the “traditional” past, is understood as entailing economic opportunities, formal education, and cosmopolitanism.

The “discourse of progress” situates Guatemalan Mayas not so much in relation to “Indian” or “non-Indian” identity, as it situates them in relation to a “modern” or “traditional” people. As such, it consolidates their identities around the desire to live as “modern” people with access to all the perceived benefits of a modern way of living. Language ideologies that link Spanish with the “modern” present provide the basis for this collective identification. I now turn to discuss how the “discourse of progress” is frequently disrupted by the supplementary “discourse of culture.”

3. Towards a Supplementary Discourse on Mayan Languages

While the “discourse of progress” is a hegemonic and dominant discourse among this particular group of Maya-Kaqchikels, it is not a seamless discourse. In our interviews, another discourse about Mayan languages emerged alongside the “discourse of progress”—an alternative or supplementary discourse, which I call the “discourse of culture.”⁶ As I argue, this supplementary “discourse of culture” disrupts the binary associations of Kaqchikel with a negative past and Spanish with a positive present/future. In effect, the “discourse of culture” invests Kaqchikel with associations of a familial heritage in the past and a cultural identity in the present. Through these positive valuations of Kaqchikel in the past and in the present, the “discourse of culture” disrupts the dominant ideological associations of Kaqchikel in talk about culture.⁷ As I will show, some of the disruption of the “discourse of progress” by the “discourse of culture” can be

³ People who actively want to identify themselves as Ladinos disavow themselves of anything associated with “Indians.”

⁴ Some women wore *corte* (skirts of woven cloth) with t-shirts and *blusas* (embroidered blouses), and others wore it with *huipiles* (shirts of woven cloth).

⁵ Part of the reason for the distinction between Mayan language and Maya clothing may lie in the expense of wearing Maya clothes. Given that Maya clothes are generally much more expensive than Western clothes, to dress well in Maya clothes publicly demonstrates one's superior economic status.

⁶ I consider this discourse to be supplementary to the “discourse of progress” and to function in the way that Bhabha (1992) claims marginalized discourses do: “The strategy [of minority discourses] is what parliamentary procedure recognizes as a supplementary question. It is a question that is supplementary to what is put down on the order paper, but by being “after” the original, or in “addition to,” it gives the advantage of introducing a sense of “secondariness” or belatedness into the structure of the original. The supplementary strategy suggests that adding “to” need not “add up” but may disturb the calculation” (305).

⁷ Talk about “culture” as an objectified ontological thing was incipient in the early years of the Maya Movement and has proliferated since the signing of the Peace Accords.

directly attributed to the work of Pan-Maya activists and scholars. While the constituent themes of the “discourse of culture” occur less frequently than the themes of the “discourse of progress,” the former recur in the data and reflect the Pan-Maya rhetoric of linguistic and cultural revitalization. The process of discerning elements of the “discourse of culture,” therefore, may be key to identifying the effects that Pan-Maya activists might have had on the language ideologies of ordinary Maya citizens in the urban highland areas of Chimaltenango.

The supplementary “discourse of culture” is produced by the same people who produced the “discourse of progress” in their metalinguistic talk about Spanish and Mayan languages. The simultaneous production of both discourses, along with the ambivalence that such simultaneity creates for Maya-Kaqchikels, evidences an on-going contestation of language ideologies in contemporary Guatemala. In contrast to nationalist language ideologies, the grass-roots ideologies of language in the “discourse of culture” do not promote an essential relationship between language and identity. Indeed, the “discourse of culture” challenges the equation of Mayan languages with Maya identity, precisely because it sees Spanish as a fundamental part of one’s identity as a modern person. Far from essentializing identities as “Mayas” or as “Indians” based on the use/disuse of Mayan languages, the supplementary “discourse of culture” links speakers of Kaqchikel to a specific culture and a unique heritage. By highlighting the importance of culture, it reconfigures Mayan languages as sites for forming cultural identities in the modern present.

The “discourse of culture” and the language ideologies it promotes emerge in three recurring themes in metalinguistic talk: 1) familial and ancestral use of Kaqchikel; 2) the historical perseverance of the Kaqchikel language; 3) contemporary Maya cultural revitalization. Together these three elements link Mayan languages with a unique cultural identity.

The first theme, familial and ancestral use of the Kaqchikel language, was present in the majority of the data. For example, a 20 year old bilingual maid from Chimaltenango respectfully discussed those people who still speak Kaqchikel well:

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| 8) “Los gentes ya, más grandes que, | “The people who are older, |
| 9) ellos hablan más, que tienen | they speak more, they have |
| 10) experiencia de las palabras de | experience with the words |
| 11) antes que ya tienen ellos.” | from before, that they still have.” |

This woman speaks of the “older people,” “*gentes más grandes*” (line 8), who have a knowledge and experience of the old ways of speaking (“*las palabras de antes*,” lines 10-11). It is a knowledge that younger people apparently lack, expressed in the comparative “más” (more) in line 8. In addition to “*gentes más grandes*,” there are a variety of terms that the majority of respondents used in reference to Kaqchikel speakers:

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|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 12) “Los viejitos” | “The old people” |
| 13) “Gente de nosotros” | “Our people” |
| 14) “Nuestros abuelos” | “Our grandparents” |
| 15) “La gente anciana” | “The elderly people” |
| 16) “Nuestros papás” | “Our parents” |
| 17) “Los antepasados” | “The ancestors” |

These phrases, always linked indexically to Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages, are kin and generation terms that reflect speakers' affect for family members. "*Los viejitos*" (the little old people, line 12) and "*la gente anciana*" (the elderly people, line 15) affectionately and respectfully refer to very old living people, while terms like "*los antepasados*" (the ancestors, line 17) refer to more temporally distant kin who have passed on. Uses of these terms situate Kaqchikel as the language of old people, both living and dead, who belong to the families of the respondents.

Kin and generation terms are used in conjunction with first person plural pronouns to articulate explicitly a sense of collective distinctiveness and to engender a continuity of self-expressed familial identifications, implying a shared collective history of Kaqchikel. For example, oftentimes these terms are marked with the plural possessive "our," which in this case functions to include the speaker and the referent in the same social group. In this way, plural possession of phrases like "our parents" (*nuestros papás*, line 16) and "our grandparents" (*nuestros abuelos*, line 14) identify the speaker with older people who speak/spoke Kaqchikel. The collective "we" of a family of Kaqchikel speakers is further expanded into a collective group of Kaqchikels, marked by a reference to "our people" (*gente de nosotros*, line 13). This use of "our people" often functions as a gloss of the Kaqchikel term, "*qawinaq*" and is a direct reference to a collective group of Kaqchikel speakers that stands in opposition to Ladinos and foreigners.

The ancient historical roots of the Kaqchikel language is another subtle recurring theme in the supplementary "discourse of culture" and its associated language ideologies of Mayan languages. The history of Kaqchikel, along with its collective cultural heritage, is visible in the words of another bilingual, 30 year-old woman working as a marketer. She assessed the importance of speaking Kaqchikel in the following way:

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 18) "Es algo que viene desde | "It is something that comes from |
| 19) el principio con mi cultura. | the beginning with my culture. |
| 20) En segundo lugar que, es un | In the second place it is a |
| 21) privilegio de hablarlo." | Privilege to speak it." |

This woman understood Kaqchikel as coming to her and other speakers from "the beginning," "*es algo que viene desde el principio*" (lines 18-19). She goes on to situate Kaqchikel explicitly with the beginning of her culture (line 19).

The importance of Mayan languages as part of Maya cultural revitalization is the third theme in the supplementary "discourse of culture." Its presence is evidenced in explicit "revitalization talk" by some (roughly 25 percent) of the people who participated in the study. For example, a 35 year-old monolingual market woman described the new importance of Kaqchikel and other Mayan languages as follows:

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| 22) "Mi papa quería que | "My father wanted |
| 23) nosotros aprendiéramos bien | us to learn |
| 24) el castellano porque así nos puede | Spanish very well because with it we |
| 25) desenvolver mejor. Pero ahora | could manage better. But now |
| 26) me doy cuenta que el kaqchikel | I realize that Kaqchikel |
| 27) es muy importante. Bueno | Is very important. Well, |
| 28) ahora pues, es muy | now it is very |
| 29) importante aprender un | important to learn a |
| 30) idioma, cualquier idioma | language, whatever language, |

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 31) sea kaqchikel, el k'iche', | be it Kaqchikel, K'iche', |
| 32) el q'eqchi' porque ahora están, | Q'eqchi, because now they are, |
| 33) como le diría, hay | how will I say it, there |
| 34) muchas instituciones que | are many institutions that |
| 35) están promoviendo el kaqchikel, | are promoting Kaqchikel, |
| 36) así como las asociaciones mayas." | like the Maya associations." |

Reporting that her father wanted her and her siblings "to learn Spanish very well," the woman suggests that in her family, as in many other families, this meant learning Spanish at the expense of Kaqchikel—as evidenced by her monolingualism in Spanish. While she implies at first her agreement with her father's decision, she quickly contrasts her presumed earlier belief (*pero*, line 25) with the way she feels at present (*ahora*, line 28). She expresses a new consciousness (*me doy cuenta que el kaqchikel es muy importante*, lines 26-27) about the importance of Mayan languages, which she articulates in terms of a Maya collective identity that transcends ethnolinguistic boundaries. To her, the important thing is to learn a Mayan language, be it Kaqchikel, K'iche', or Q'eqchi' (lines 31-32). Her new perception of the importance of learning any Mayan language is defended by an explicit reference to the work done by Maya organizations involved in revitalization efforts, the institutions "like Maya associations" (line 36).

A similar consciousness of the importance of Mayan languages and cultural revitalization is echoed in the words of a 40 year-old bilingual Kaqchikel-Maya woman. Unlike many of the other respondents, she is a highly educated woman and works as a professional at the private Rafael Landívar University. Like many of our other respondents, she was originally from a *municipio* of Chimaltenango, Patzún, and had migrated to the department capital. She too discussed the importance of Mayan languages for cultural revitalization in her metalinguistic speech:

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| 37) "También se están trabajando, | "Also they are working, |
| 38) pero, para la recuperación del | though, for the recuperation of |
| 39) idioma. Pero si hay muchas | the language. But, there are |
| 40) instituciones. Por ejemplo, la | many institutions. For example, the |
| 41) Universidad Rafael Landívar | Rafael Landívar University |
| 42) está haciendo mucho en esta área | Is doing a lot in this area to. . . |
| 43) para. . . Ahora, claro se pierde | Now, certainly a lot is lost, |
| 44) mucho que para poder hacer un | but to give it a good push |
| 45) buen adelante, de que como | ahead, because it is |
| 46) es nuestro idioma, pues. | our language. |
| 47) Estaba algo, pues, abandonado y | It was something, well, abandoned and |
| 48) ahora que están retomando no | now that they are reclaiming |
| 49) se puede decir que si está | it . . . you can't say that it is |
| 50) haciéndolo pues. Porque | happening. Because |
| 51) el idioma lleva la cultura, | language carries the culture, |
| 52) si queremos ser | if we want to be |
| 53) personas realizadas tenemos | people who realize our potential, |
| 54) que también tener nuestra cultura | we have to also have our culture |
| 55) y el idioma es parte | and language is a fundamental part |
| 56) fundamental de la cultura." | of the culture." |

She articulates the theme of Maya cultural revitalization (lines 39-41), as she acknowledges the institutions working for Mayan language recuperation. In addition to

this explicit revitalization talk, she offers her own realization of the connection between Mayan languages and Maya cultural identity. Considering the connection between language and culture to be inextricable, she notes that it is language that “carries the culture,” that “if we want to be people who realize our potential, we have to also have our culture” and, finally, that “language is a fundamental part of the culture” (lines 51-56). By locating culture in language, she invests Mayan languages with the agency of cultural transmission for Maya peoples. In this conceptualization, a return to Mayan languages is understood not as a return to the past, but rather as an integral part of modernity. This explains why she describes revitalization efforts as “a good push ahead” (*para poder hacer un buen adelante*, lines 44-45), in other words, in the same linear terms that modernist progress is often described. In her metalinguistic speech, the domain of culture becomes an important aspect of life in the “modern” present.

The supplementary “discourse of culture” coexists with the “discourse of progress” in the consciousness even of people who have stopped speaking Kaqchikel. At times, there is personal identification with efforts to save Mayan languages even among speakers who have rejected the use of Kaqchikel in their daily lives. For example, the same 43 year-old bilingual man who articulated many elements of the “discourse of progress,” and who explained “change of life” and change of language as inevitable outcomes of modernity (French 2001), had this to say about Pan-Maya revitalization efforts:

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|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 57) “Entonces, ahora hay | “So, now there are |
| 58) instituciones que están tratando, | institutions that are trying |
| 59) o ya se trató de hacer directamente | or already have tried to directly make |
| 60) con todo los contextos de un | a syllabary in all contexts. And |
| 61) silabario. Y tenemos ahora. Estas | now we have one. These |
| 62) instituciones están ahora dando | institutions are now giving |
| 63) clases a las niñas, a la gente | classes to the girls, to the people |
| 64) netamente indígena, para, para, | who are truly indigenous, to, to, |
| 65) para sobresalir. Estoy | to improve themselves. I'm |
| 66) enterando directamente | finding out directly |
| 67) por la prensa. La prensa ahora está | through the press. The press now is |
| 68) tirando de que todo que están | putting out the word that all people |
| 69) interesado a perfeccionar su, su | who are interested in perfecting, their, |
| 70) lenguaje, el kaqchikel. Entonces | their language, Kaqchikel. So |
| 71) ellos pueden asistir a estos | they can attend these |
| 72) cursos. . . Ahora ya empezamos, o | courses. . . Now we have started, |
| 73) empezaron algunas | or they have started, some |
| 74) instituciones donde dan enfoques, | institutions, where they give emphasis, |
| 75) por ejemplo con la “k” poniendo | for example, with the “k” putting |
| 76) apóstrofes, ya poniendo eso | apostrophes now putting that |
| 77) para donde enfoque lo que es | to show where the emphasis is in |
| 78) la palabra para para modificar | the word, to, to modify |
| 79) estas palabras.” | these words.” |

Although this man provided one of the most elaborate versions of the “discourse of progress,” and presented it as justification for not speaking Kaqchikel anymore, he also speaks enthusiastically about Maya cultural revitalization above. He expresses awareness of and endorsement for the creation of grammatical material (a syllabary, line 61), language classes for indigenous girls (lines 62-64), and writing systems for Mayan languages like Kaqchikel (lines 74-79). While explicitly disassociating himself from

speaking Kaqchikel and the entire way of life associated with it, he simultaneously identifies with Maya cultural revitalization efforts. His ambivalence is illustrated in his shifting use of “we” in the transcript above. In line 61 he claims, “we have” (*tenemos*) a syllabary, meaning, “we” speakers of Kaqchikel. He includes himself in—and then excludes himself from—revitalization efforts such as modifying the writing system of Kaqchikel to express its phonetics more adequately. “Now we have started,” he says, and then, correcting himself, adds, “or they have started” (lines 72-73). His metalinguistic talk embodies the shifting identifications that occur as “the discourse of progress” momentarily gets interrupted by the “discourse of culture.”

Another bilingual man working as a bookkeeper, who migrated from Tecpan to Chimaltenango, emphasized the new importance of Mayan languages in Guatemalan politics. He commented on recent efforts to officialize Mayan languages as follows:

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 80) “Pues, la verdad es necesario. | “Well, the truth is it is necessary. |
| 81) Yo pienso que deberían | I think that they should |
| 82) de hacerlo y posiblemente, con lo | do it and maybe they will, with all |
| 83) mucho que están haciendo | that they are doing, |
| 84) como, nos, ya nos están dando un | like, us, now, they are giving us |
| 85) poco de. . . de lugar así en | a little of, place in |
| 86) la política...Considero que es | politics. . . I consider it |
| 87) un orgullo que lo oficialicen.” | an honor that they may officialize it.” |

Once again, a reference to Maya people as a collectivity is made through the use of “us” (line 84) in the context of talk about officializing Mayan languages. The man notes the political changes occurring in Guatemala at present and situates revalorization of Mayan languages directly within the present. In this man’s consciousness, Mayan languages momentarily become an asset, something one can be proud of (line 87) rather than something one must disassociate oneself from in order to reach out for material, economic, and social opportunities in the “modern present.”

The supplementary discourse of culture is produced simultaneously in the metalinguistic speech of this group of Maya-Kaqchikels. By inserting culture—as a significant aspect of life—in the modern present, the “discourse of culture” disrupts the language ideologies whose relational binaries associate Kaqchikel with an undesirable way of life in the “traditional” past and Spanish with desirable ways of living in the “modern” present. Through these disruptions, Kaqchikel weaves in and out of the “discourse of progress” as a valued marker of one’s culture. Kaqchikel and Mayan languages are positively evaluated as part of a cultural, yet not essential, collective distinctiveness of Maya peoples of Guatemala.

4. Implications and Possibilities

This research has shown that Pan-Maya scholars and activists are beginning to have an impact upon the language ideologies of Mayas outside the Maya Movement. The supplementary “discourse of culture” exists in the practical consciousness of Maya citizens of Chimaltenango. This is particularly important because Chimaltenango is an area where language shift from Mayan languages to Spanish is already well underway, in part due to ideologies that link Spanish with the “modern.” The precise extent of the impact and its long-term implications are difficult to determine as changes, contradictions, and contestations continue to unfold. Ultimately, much will depend on the ways that

individuals and institutions will further negotiate the meanings of “culture” and “modernity.” Errington and Gewertz (1996) argue that many social aggregates are becoming increasingly self-conscious about “culture” in various parts of the post-colonial world. As they show in their own study, as Chambri people “were, both individually and collectively, trying to ascertain what traditions to preserve, transform, or abandon, the meanings of both modernity and tradition/culture as major and explicitly reference points were themselves being negotiated” (1996: 114). Like the Chambri, various social actors, and especially Mayas, are bound to become increasingly more self-conscious about indigenous languages because of language ideologies linking language and culture.

Given the positive turn that language ideologies of Mayan languages are taking, I see two distinct possibilities. Perhaps the symbolic value of Kaqchikel will be elevated even as the use of Kaqchikel will continue to diminish. Brown's (1998) discussion of Kaqchikel literacy classes in San Juan Comalapa (a *municipio* of Chimaltenango) provides a telling example. Brown reports that a Kaqchikel-Maya man discussed his enthusiasm about the success of the local literacy classes in the following way: “After classes, we would leave, all of us speaking Kaqchikel.” The literacy class, in other words, resulted in a new value of Kaqchikel for the entire group. The same man continues, equally enthusiastically: “And to this day, we still greet each other in Kaqchikel” (164). Brown's report illustrates that even as the symbolic value of Mayan languages may increase, Spanish may very well remain the unmarked language of quotidian life that one uses to “get ahead” in the “modern” world.

Along these same lines, Légaré's (1995) analysis of indigenous Canadians' efforts to create a multicultural nation demonstrates how the objectification of language can have unforeseen consequences. She argues that “specific traits are characterized as traditional culture, usually foods, clothing, music, material objects, and language. These aspects of culture are viewed as relics from an individual's or group's ethnic roots, and the past is clearly distinguished from the individual's contemporary membership in the (modern) Canadian nation” (1995: 352). Thus, even as language is valorized as a piece of objectified culture, it can become a reified relic, distanced from daily life in the nation-state.

Another possibility is that the “discourse of culture” may gradually replace the “discourse of progress” and its associated language ideologies. The possibility exists, in other words, that Mayas might successfully reverse language shift and preserve their distinct cultural identity, while still participating in “modern” life. A pattern of such a reversal is already discernible in the Poqom community of Palín. According to Benito Pérez (2000), Pan-Maya efforts seem to have reversed the process of language shift in Palín, where Mayan languages are increasingly valued as a fundamental part of Maya culture. This reversal is largely due to changes in the educational system, as Mayas are opening “*escuelas mayas*” (Maya schools). Certainly Maya scholars' access to and use of the “science” of linguistics would help expedite this process, since “science” is a legitimating force in modernity. Needless to say, a more complete reversal is most likely to occur when it becomes economically advantageous to speak Mayan languages in the “modern world.” As more jobs are created demanding proficiency in Mayan languages—teaching positions, court translators, research positions, community-based professional occupations, etc.—Mayan languages may very well become necessary for living in the “modern” Guatemalan nation.

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