Preserving the Languages in Mexico

By Diego Diaz

When many Americans think of Mexico, they picture Mexico City or Cancún. These places are beautiful, but I want to ask a simple question: what language do you hear when you're there? Most people would immediately say Spanish. And yes, because of Spanish colonization in 1521, Spanish became the dominant and official language of Mexico. But it's not the only one. According to The Language House, "Mexico is home to 68 recognized Indigenous languages" ("How Mexican Indigenous Languages").

Even with ongoing efforts to preserve them, many of these languages are now endangered. In this paper, I want to explore how we can protect these languages, some other languages that have gone extinct, and what keeping them alive means for both you and me.

So, to preserve these languages in Mexico, we first have to ask: how do we actually do that? Can these languages even be preserved? The answer is yes, but the process is more complex than it seems. As Ajani notes, "Digital media technology plays a pivotal role in supporting the preservation, documentation, and revitalization of indigenous languages."(Ajani 37). In other words, technology is one of our most powerful tools.

With modern technology, we can preserve pronunciation, document vocabulary, and maybe sometimes how the words sounded in the past. One language that is close to home for me is the language called Purépecha, also known as Tarascan. Spoken mainly in Michoacán, has an interesting history. This language is an isolated language created by the Purépechan people, and they were mainly isolated due to the people of the time having forged weapons

A a	B b	Ch ch	Ch' ch'	D d	E e	G g	I i
[ɑ]	[b]	[tʃ]	[tʃʰ]	[d]	[e]	[g]	[i/j]
Ï ï	J j	K k	K' k'	ku	k'u	M m	N n
[ɨ]	[x]	[k]	[kʰ]	[kʷ]	[kʷʰ]	[m]	[n]
Nh nh	O o	P p	P' p'	R r	Rh rh	S s	T t
[ŋ]	[o]	[p]	[pʰ]	[r]	[ɽ]	[s]	[t]
T' t'	Ts ts	Ts' ts'	U u	X x			
[tʰ]	[ts]	[tsʰ]	[u/w]	[ʃ]			

Purépecha alphabet from the Omniglot Website

of bronze and copper tools. Whereas other native people didn't ("The Purépecha Nation"). This isolation shaped their language into what linguists now consider a language isolate. Today, Purépecha is spoken by about 175,000 people ("Purépecha"). While that may sound like a large number, it is small compared to Mexico's population of over 132 million, which puts the language at risk.

Websites like Omniglot help spark curiosity by offering basic vocabulary and pronunciation guides, but preservation requires more than a single website. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram also play a role, allowing speakers to share their language with wider audiences and inspire others to learn.

Some Indigenous languages already have structured learning programs. For example, Náhuatl —
the main language of the Aztec Empire — is taught through courses for both children and adults.
Similar efforts are emerging for Purépecha as well. Now that we've looked at how technology
can help preserve living Indigenous languages, we also need to consider the languages in Mexico
that have already gone extinct — and what it might take to revive them.

Now, of course, there are far more than 68 Indigenous languages in Mexico. The number 68
refers only to the languages officially recognized by the government: "México cuenta con 69
lenguas nacionales — 68 indígenas y el español" ("Sabías que en México"). If these are the
languages still spoken today, then what happened to the others? Simply put, many Indigenous
languages in Mexico have gone extinct, meaning that no living speakers remain. This is not only
tragic for cultural reasons, but it also limits our ability to understand parts of Mexico's history.

For example, the ancient city of Teotihuacan remains one of the greatest mysteries in the
Americas. Because the original language of its inhabitants has been lost, researchers must rely on
Nahuatl—the language of the Aztecs, who discovered the city long after it was abandoned—to
interpret its history (Jiménez). Some scholars believe the original language may have been
related to Nahuatl or other regional languages, but without surviving speakers or records, we
cannot know for certain. The loss of these languages means the loss of answers to questions we
may never solve.

However, there are emerging efforts to revive extinct Indigenous languages, and some of these
efforts involve artificial intelligence. As Dianala M. Bernard explains, AI can support "the
recovery, revitalization, and reclamation" of Indigenous languages (Bernard 104). While AI is

often controversial, in this context, it can be used for good. If researchers can locate even limited documentation—such as colonial-era word lists, early dictionaries, or recorded pronunciations—AI models can analyze patterns and help reconstruct missing vocabulary or grammatical structures.

The challenge, as Bernard notes, is that "many Indigenous languages lack comprehensive documentation, particularly extinct languages such as Muisca, where primary sources are limited to colonial texts and lexicons compiled by early European observers" (Bernard 106). Without sufficient records, full revival may be impossible. But for languages with at least some documentation, AI tools have shown promising results. Even if reconstructed words are not perfect, these models offer a new way to bring partially lost languages back into the world.

Although Bernard's study focuses on Latin America as a whole, the implications apply directly to Mexico. With the help of technology and careful linguistic research, some extinct languages may one day be partially revived. This brings me to my next point: why preserving these languages—both living and lost—matters for all of us.

Languages — whether ancient, modern, or even extinct — shape the way we understand the world. Even right now, you and I are connected through English. We understand each other because we share a language, and with that language comes culture, practices, perspectives, and the environment we come from ("Preserving Voices"). Every language carries this kind of meaning.

Like people, languages have origins. If we look at English, all we have to do is go back to the time of William the Conqueror. Before his arrival, people in England spoke Anglo-Saxon, a blend of Germanic languages. After the Norman invasion, French influence reshaped the language into what eventually became modern English. Each stage of that evolution tells us something about the culture, history, and worldview of the people who spoke it.

Now imagine being able to do that with every Indigenous language. Reviving or preserving these languages would unlock histories we have never fully understood. It would help us learn from past societies, reconnect with our ancestors, and recover traditions that might otherwise disappear. Indigenous languages — whether still spoken or long extinct — hold pieces of identity, memory, and heritage that connect us to where we come from.

In conclusion, we have seen that there are ongoing efforts to preserve the Indigenous languages that still exist in Mexico, and that emerging technologies like AI may even help revive some extinct languages when documentation is available. Most importantly, preserving a language means preserving the culture, history, and stories of the people who spoke it. When we protect these languages, we protect the knowledge and identity of entire communities.

<center>Work Cited</center>

Ajani, Yusuf Ayodeji, et al. "Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems via Digital

Media Technologies for Sustainability of Indigenous Languages." *De Gruyter Brill*, De

Gruyter Saur, 1 Apr. 2024,

www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/pdtc-2023-0051/html. Accessed 12 Jan.

2026.

This scholarly paper will be used to show us that using technology these days is very important

to help us speak them and even preserve all these native languages around the world. This will be

used in my paper because it tells us to use technology to help people who are interested in

languages, as using technology can help preserve them and even aid in their learning.

Bernard, Dianala M., and Maren A. Benn. "REVITALIZATION OR RECLAMATION?

REFRAMING THE RECOVERY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN LATIN

AMERICA: A HISTORICAL AND AIDRIVEN APPROACH." *International Journal of

Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, Jan. 2025,

ijlllc.org/uploads2025/LLLC_04_103..pdf. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

This scholarly source tells us all the information about how some indigenous languages in

Mexico are still under threat and how AI can help us even revive these extinct languages. This

will work perfectly in my paper because i will be talking about ways to revive these old

languages and also give reasons some of these languages have gone extinct.

Jiménez, Maya. "Teotihuacan." *Smarthistory*, smarthistory.org/teotihuacan-2/. Accessed 13

Jan. 2026.

Lenguas, La Casa de las. "How Mexican Indigenous Languages Are Defying Extinction:

Innovation, Culture, and Survival." *The Language House*, 5 Oct. 2024,

www.thelanguagehouse.org/post/how-mexican-indigenous-languages-are-defying-extincti

on-innovation-culture-and-survival. Accessed 12 Jan. 2026.

This article was made to tell people some facts about all the other languages that exist in Mexico,

and how some ways, the government is trying to preserve those languages. This will be used at

the beginning of the paper to show people that there are more languages in Mexico, and we need

to preserve all of them.

"Preserving Voices: Indigenous Languages of Mexico and the Worlds within Them."

Psydeh, 24 Sept. 2024,

psydeh.org/news/preserving-voices-indigenous-languages-of-mexico-and-the-worlds-withi

n-them/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

This article talks about the reason we need to protect all these indigenous languages. This will

work perfectly for the section in my paper talking about why we need to preserve these

languages.

"The Purpecha Nation." *The Purepecha of Michoacan - Purepecha - Mexico Guru*,

www.mexicoguru.com/articles/purepecha.php#:~:text=Craftsmen%20belonged%20to%20

guilds,%20and%20each%20had%20its,were%20apparently%20at%20the%20top%20rung

s%20of%20society. Accessed 12 Jan. 2026.

This paper was used to show people how the Purepechan people might have lived, with all the

limited information that we have, from being some of the few people who found bronze, and

some of their ideas from back in the day. This will be used nicely in my paper because I will be adding a small section on the Purepechan people, and this will be used to establish why their language is more isolated using some common sense.

"Purépecha (p'urhépecha)." *Purépecha Language, Alphabet and Pronunciation*,

www.omniglot.com/writing/purepecha.htm. Accessed 12 Jan. 2026.

This website is a way to explain the basic history that we know, tells us how many people speak the languages, and also gives the user some samples of the language. This website will be used nicely in the paper because i will use an image and also a quote on the number of people who speak the language, in this example, it will be Purpacha.

"¿Sabías Que En México Hay 68 Lenguas Indígenas, ..." *Gobierno de Mexico*,

www.gob.mx/cultura/articulos/lenguas-indigenas?idiom=es. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

This page comes from the Mexican Government telling users and even its citizens that there are more than 1 language in Mexico. This will be used due to I have a confirmation section of the languages in Mexico is indeed 68.