NORA C. ENGLAND

Mayan Language Revival and Revitalization Politics: Linguists and Linguistic Ideologies

ABSTRACT Although spoken by a relatively large population, Mayan languages show signs of language shift and loss because the children in some of the speech communities are no longer learning the language. At the same time, Mayas are participating in a movement of cultural reaffirmation, a principle focus of which is language. Maya linguists are central in formulating and reshaping language ideologies to further the goals of revitalization, and they play a significant role in cultural/linguistic activism. This article shows the extent of the contribution of linguistics to Mayan language vitality through an analysis of language ideologies and how they have been reformulated by Maya linguists, and by a review of an apparently successful attempt at reversing language loss that has arisen through an integrated community-based program of cultural revitalization that centers, to a large extent, on language and makes specific use of linguistics. [Keywords: language shift, language ideologies, language revitalization, Mayan languages, Maya movement]

THE MAYAN LANGUAGES ARE A FAMILY of approximately thirty languages, all descended from a common ancestral language that was spoken more than 4,000 years ago. They are currently spoken by about five million people in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, and Honduras. The family is, compared to most other American language families, quite robust, both in terms of the number of speakers and the vitality of the languages that comprise it. However, all of the languages in this family show signs of language loss, principally because of the fact that children in at least some of the communities in which each language is spoken are no longer learning the language. Several of the languages are quite small and seem to be in the last stages of language disappearance or "death," as they are replaced by Spanish. For example, Mocho', which is spoken in Mexico, has fewer than 150 speakers; Itzaj, which is spoken in Guatemala, is estimated to have thirty fluent speakers. Moreover, in both cases, the only remaining speakers are elderly. Other languages are quite large: K'ichee' and Yukatek Maya have close to a million speakers each; Mam, Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi' are estimated to have between a half-million and a million speakers; and Q'anjob'al is estimated to have 100,000 speakers (Richards 2003:44–88). But even in the larger speech communities, some children are not learning the language—which is the beginning of language death.

Furthermore, the number of people who are fluent in both a Mayan language and Spanish has grown enormously in the last 25 years, surely as a result of the increasing interconnectedness that is one of the consequences of what is known as "globalization." In many cases, this bilingualism seems to be the first step toward language loss. According to the latest estimates (Richards 2003:44–88), if the Maya population of Guatemala is estimated to be around half of the total population, then only 50–60 percent are actually speakers of the Mayan languages. In addition, literacy among Mayas is increasing, as it is in the entire country[1] but varies widely between 15 percent in some areas and 92 percent in others (Richards 2003:129). What is especially telling, however, is that literacy in Mayan communities is inversely related to language retention. Those townships with the highest literacy have suffered the greatest language loss, while those with the lowest literacy have suffered the least language loss (Richards 2003:128–129). Thus, both the preconditions and the conditions for language loss are readily observable in Mayan communities.

At the same time that these conditions are becoming apparent, however, Guatemalan Mayas are engaged in a significant movement of cultural reaffirmation (Bastos and Camus 1995, 1996; Cojtí Cuxil 1997; Fischer and Brown 1996; Warren 1998) in which language is a central theme (Brown 1996; England 1996, 1998; Maxwell 1996; Rodríguez Guaján 1996) and that may be addressing issues of language loss prevention. The fact that Mayas have taken language to be the first and most important focus for cultural activism has meant that: (1) language has received attention since the emergence in the mid-1980s of what is

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generally called the "Maya movement"; (2) linguists and linguistics have played an important role in cultural revitalization; (3) a significant group of Maya linguists (linguists who are native speakers of a Mayan language) has been established; (4) Maya linguists have contributed both technical expertise and language ideological positions to the Maya movement; and (5) some reversal of language loss may have taken place as part of an integrated program of cultural revitalization.

The principal actors in the Maya movement and in language revitalization are Mayas from different language groups who, by and large, have received a fair amount of formal education. Most have completed secondary school, and an increasingly large proportion have attended a university. Although the majority are the children of ordinary subsistence farmers, they have, through one means or another, broken out of that mold through education and may not themselves be farmers at all. Some, of course, come from families who either became part of a tiny Maya middle class in previous generations or were so land poor that they engaged in economic activities other than subsistence farming (e.g., agricultural labor, petty commercial enterprises). However, the most common pattern is that they grew up in rural villages or rural town centers in farming families. It is probably the case that most of them were not from the poorest of such families, or their parents would not have been able to spare their labor long enough for them to complete school. From among these individuals, who number in the thousands, several hundred have received some education or training in linguistics. These include over 100 trained in the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM); over 50 trained by Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA) (NGOs dedicated to linguistic research); several hundred who have studied in the *licenciatura* programs in linguistics in the Universidad Rafael Landívar or the Universidad Mariano Gálvez (private universities); and several hundred more who have received some training from, and worked for, either the Bilingual Education arm of the Ministry of Education, or the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (state institutions). There is, of course, some overlap in several of these categories.

The Maya movement in Guatemala has long antecedents but emerged as a small but quite vocal force after the civil war of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is separate from, but overlapping and in some respects converging with, the popular political movement, which includes both Mayas and non-Mayas and has much greater political presence and force. The Maya movement, however, has taken the lead in speaking to specific ethnic issues, such as language rights. It has no formal political representation, such as a political party or congressional delegates elected on a Maya movement platform, but current leaders of the movement (2003) occupy several key politically appointed positions, including the minister of culture, a vice minister of culture, a vice minister of education, a vice minister of agriculture, and the director of bilingual education. The fact that the Maya movement emerged after the civil war as a "cultural" rather than specifically "political" movement can be linked to the severe repression that political leaders suffered during the war. By concentrating their energies on the seemingly more benign cultural aspects of political action, groups and leaders were able to escape repressive notice at first. "Culture," in the eyes of the military and other national political figures, was akin to "folklore" and, therefore, not the threat that the organization of political parties or unions would have represented. The fact that a movement for cultural revitalization and recognition was in essence a political movement became apparent only gradually, and the fact that the movement had little power for political mobilization (unlike the popular political movement) continued to protect its leaders from repression.

The Maya movement is beginning to have influence in the national political arena and has been noticeably influential in all levels of civil society below the very top. In spite of the facts that the Maya movement's formal political influence is weak, that its connection to a popular base is weak, and that it is viewed by many Mayas as politically ineffective, the ideas that are generated by Maya intellectual leaders have become quite generalized among the Maya population. Such ideas include a revalorization of Maya culture and language, a demand for public education that better serves Mayan communities and takes indigenous languages into account, access to public services in local languages, access to more equitable economic and political opportunities, and notions of political autonomy that are still fairly unspecific and undeveloped. Several ideas that emerged from the Maya movement have had significant influence on the more formally organized popular movement. For instance, the part of the 1996 Peace Accords between the government of Guatemala and the coalition of guerilla forces that deals with indigenous rights is taken in large part, including some of the specific wording of the legislation, from an earlier publication by Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (1994), widely regarded as the principal intellectual voice of the Maya movement. Many of the Maya movement ideas, with significant popular support among Mayas, are becoming de facto operating principles for governmental agencies, or at least are being taken into consideration. With regard to language, the idea of officializing or co-officializing Mayan languages was introduced in the 1996 Peace Accords but was turned down in 1999 in the referendum on constitutional changes designed to fulfill the Peace Accords. However, as recently as May 2003, Congress passed the "Law of National Languages" that, while stating that Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, at the same time recognizes indigenous languages as essential parts of national identity which must be promoted. This law[2] also recognizes the right of all people to receive public services in their own languages. This is a considerable change from the Guatemalan Constitution, which only recognizes indigenous languages as a part of the "national patrimony."

The non-Maya population has also responded to ideas that come from the Maya movement (many of which have been hotly debated in opinion page columns in several different national newspapers). The segment of the Guatemalan society that has responded the least to these ideas has been the real political and economic power center, still in the hands of a very small percentage of the population. In general, however, the Maya movement, with significant support from international groups, has been quite effective in forcing national society to recognize the Maya population of Guatemala as part of that society, rather than, as in the past, ignoring it entirely or at best considering it to be a "problem" that must be resolved.

Mayan languages are still actively spoken by the majority of people in most of the Mayan communities in Guatemala (by 51–100 percent of the population of 61 percent of the townships with indigenous population [Richards 2003:99–106]). They are widely considered to be the single most important symbol of Mayan identity, both because they are still spoken by a majority of the population and because they are unequivocally "authentic." They are furthermore the principle means through which Mayan worldview and cultural practices are transmitted. As a consequence, in the initial stages of recent cultural revitalization, Maya leaders often remarked that the first thing to concentrate on was language; after that it would be possible to pay attention to other things. Similarly, many Mayas find it difficult to conceive of people who are Maya but do not speak the language (despite the fact that more and more children are not speakers of a Mayan language). In some communities children who do not speak the language are regarded as anomalies: They are not quite Maya but not quite Ladino (non-Maya) either. Adults who do not speak a Mayan language are frequently characterized by other Mayas as "half-Ladino," "becoming Ladino," or as people who, somewhat vaguely, "have other ideas"—which is to say, they are "not one of us." These evaluations, like all evaluations of identity, are fluid and situational. Identity as either Maya or Ladino is still largely clear to all actors, and the inability to speak a Mayan language does not invalidate membership in a Mayan community. Rather, the inability to speak results in more ambiguity in the identity of members of a Mayan community from a community-internal perspective, and the recognition that heterogeneity is increasing with regard to language ability and choices. However, the evaluations that distinguish between Maya and Ladino suggest that many Mayas disdain people who no longer speak the Mayan languages, despite the fact that the practice of speaking a Mayan language is decreasing in many communities.

Mayas have taken a number of actions that are intended, in part, to address the problem of language status and language shift. These include: (1) the establishment of the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala as an autonomous state institution directed by Mayas; (2) the Academia's establishment of linguistic communities corresponding to the 21 Guatemalan Mayan languages; (3) the founding of several NGOs that are devoted to linguistic research by Mayas; (4) the establishment of at least one foundation to address community language promotion; (5) the incrementing of the numbers of Mayas who are involved in the Ministry of Education bilingual education programs; (6) the establishment of private "Maya schools" that are intended to deliver appropriate education for Maya children in response to deficits in the national educational system; (7) the organization of nongovernmental associations to support those schools; and (8) the establishment of several Maya presses that promote publication in and about Mayan languages as well as other issues of concern. Many of these initiatives have included linguists and linguistics.

The prominence of Mayas with some preparation in linguistics in many of these institutions is because, in part, of the establishment of the PLFM as an NGO dedicated to linguistic research in 1971 (under the linguistic supervision of Terrence Kaufman) and the later establishment of OKMA, also dedicated to linguistic research, in 1990 (under my linguistic supervision). Both Martín Chacach, who was the technical director and later the general director of the PLFM, and his predecessor as general director, Narciso Cojtí Cuxil, can be credited with considerable vision regarding the role of linguistics and Mayan languages in the Maya movement. Cojtí Cuxil was instrumental in the early work toward establishing the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, and Chacach was instrumental in extending the training role of the PLFM. The original members of OKMA received their first courses in linguistics at the PLFM. Since its establishment, OKMA has produced highly sophisticated basic linguistic materials, principally grammars of several different kinds and has continued the training role first assumed by the PLFM. Several members of OKMA have extended that role to the university programs in linguistics, where they have been teachers for a number of years.

The importance that language has assumed in the Maya movement is largely a reflection of its importance in Mayan life and communities. However, that Mayas were prepared intellectually to give immediate attention to language stems from the fact that there were linguists who were native speakers of several of the languages when the Maya movement began to gain strength after the civil war. The change in the intellectual environment regarding language has been substantial over the last 30 years. When the PLFM began its first training program in 1972 (in which I participated), no one in Guatemala except the people involved in the program cared about it, or even was aware of it, and there were no employment options for the people who participated in the program except in the PLFM itself. In 1985, right after the civil war, a sudden increased awareness of language issues among Mayas was marked by the participation, for the first time, of several dozen Mayas who were not associated with the PLFM in the Mayan language workshops that had been held since

1975. Subsequent courses given in the PLFM or in OKMA have received considerable attention and have produced many individuals who have been working directly on their languages in a number of different institutions, both private and public.

The principle contributions of Maya linguists to linguistic revitalization come in three forms. First, linguists contribute to the creation of technical materials, such as grammars and dictionaries, which are necessary both for linguistic pride and for significant literacy. Second, linguists provide the technical assistance necessary for the establishment of standard languages, which are critical for literacy and education in Mayan languages. Third, these linguists act as critics and protagonists in the establishment and diffusion of language ideologies that foster language retention.

The technical contributions of Maya linguists are then in two areas: basic materials and standard language codification. Both contribute principally to literacy, a domain that Mayas believe they must retake for their languages to enjoy a prestige and utility that will ensure their survival. Mayas have had at least two periods of substantial literacy and literary production in the past: the 16th century when the classics of Maya literature such as the *Popol Wuuj*, the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, or the *Books of Chilam B'alam* were first written down in a Roman alphabet; and the Classic period, when innumerable texts were written hieroglyphically. However, literacy essentially died out after the 16th century, and it was not until the late 20th century that efforts have been made to revive it. Meanwhile, the agreements about standard form, written form, and written convention that must have existed in the earlier periods also died out, and the situation that Mayas face today in promoting a revival of literacy is one characterized by marked dialect differentiation within the majority of the languages, marked local loyalty, and little popular grasp of the unifying principles of literacy.

In addition to basic language description, which Maya linguists have undertaken and which has resulted in the production of some of the grammars and dictionaries that are needed, standardization has been the focus of considerable linguistic work. It is still in the beginning stages in most languages, and in a number of cases has been bogged down in alphabet decisions. However, the linguistic communities established by the academia have begun to work on other problems of standardization and codification, such as standardizing the lexicon and morphological variations, and creating neologisms to use instead of borrowed words. In addition, the linguists of OKMA have proposed standard grammars for seven Mayan languages, after completing extensive dialect studies in those languages that serve as the database for the proposals. They have developed a set of criteria for choosing among competing forms for the standard, several of which are linguistically quite interesting. Some of these are as follows (Oxlajuuj Keej 1993:124; also cited in England 1996:187; examples and discussion are added):

1. *Where different terms for the same concept are found in different places, all of them can be taken to be synonyms and they can be taught as such in the places where they are not used.*

This criterion addresses regional vocabulary differences. The idea is to expand the vocabulary on the basis of regional differences rather than to reduce those differences to one standard form. Part of standardization, then, is to tolerate certain kinds of differences. For instance, Mam has regionally mutually exclusive terms for a number of common vocabulary items, such as:

xiinaq ~ iichan	*man*
xu'j ~ qya	*woman*
pich' ~ ch'it	*bird*
ab'j ~ xaq	*stone*

Because different terms for the same referent are unknown outside the region where they are used, they impede mutual intelligibility. The hope is that by teaching such terms as synonyms, everyone will learn and recognize them, even if they continue to use only the regionally specific term.

2. *Where variation in the form of the same term (or rule) exists in different places, it is important to select the forms that give more information and that are more readily understood by the majority. This generally means writing the more complete and more basic forms, and at times it also means writing the more original and conservative forms.*

Historical "authenticity" has become a criterion of substantial weight. For instance, showing that one form is "older" than another may be enough to guarantee its acceptance. An example from K'ichee' involves the representation of long vowels. Many K'ichee' speakers do not write long vowels, or do not do so consistently. This can lead to confusion of meaning, such as with the form (England 1996:188):

katik ri	ab'ix
PLANT	THE CORNFIELD

you plant the cornfield OR *the cornfield is planted*

A discussion of this form between two K'ichee' linguists led to the observation that each of them distinguished the two meanings phonologically, but *differently*:

	you plant the cornfield	*the cornfield is planted*
speaker 1:	kaatik ri ab'iix	katik ri ab'iix
speaker 2:	katik ri ab'iix	katiik ri ab'iix

Analysis of the forms resulted in the identification of the long **aa** in *you plant the cornfield* as the more conservative form of the second person singular prefix, and the identification of the long **ii** in *the cornfield is planted* as the more conservative form of the passive. Therefore, the two analysts agreed to maintain the two long vowels, even though each only had one in her dialect:

standard:	kaatik ri ab'iix	katiik ri ab'iix
analysis:	k-aa-tik	ka-Ø-tiik
	aspect-2sing.	aspect-3sing.
	-PLANT	-BE PLANTED

The application of principles of historical primacy and morphological completeness sometimes has resulted in the initial selection of forms that are not especially felicitous synchronically. For instance, Mayan languages have a number of relational nouns that indicate case and location and function like prepositions, except that they are inflected for person in agreement with their complements. In Kaqchikel, many of these are preceded by real prepositions (which are not inflected for person) and in many dialects the combination of preposition and relational noun is increasingly being grammaticalized as a single lexical item where the vowel of the preposition is deleted and, in third person singular, the person agreement inflection is also deleted. Thus,

chi *preposition* + r-e *3sing.-relational noun* results in
che *to him/her/it (dative/benefactive)*

The whole paradigm is:

chwe	< chi + w-e	*to me*
chawe	< chi + aw-e	*to you*
che	< chi + r-e	*to him/her/it*
chqe	< chi + q-e	*to us*
chiwe	< chi + iw-e	*to you (pl)*
chke	< chi + k-e	*to them*

In a first attempt to standardize Kaqchikel published in 1994 (Rodríguez Guájan 1994), these forms were labeled "incorrect" and the "correct" forms were given as follows, preserving all the details of the source for these words:

chi we	*to me*
chi awe	*to you*
chi re	*to him/her/it*
chi qe	*to us*
chi iwe	*to you (pl.)*
chi ke	*to them*

There are at least a half dozen relational nouns that undergo similar grammaticalizations. In a grammar published in 1997 (García Matzar and Rodríguez Guaján 1997) the relational nouns were described as they are actually pronounced, and the standardization project in Oxlajuuj Keej has been reconsidering the whole issue of how to represent these forms correctly.

3. *It is important to avoid localisms; that is, the forms that are restricted to one local variety and that are not found in other varieties.*

An example from Kaqchikel comes from the morphological structure of a verb that has an incorporated element of movement. In almost all dialects of Kaqchikel and in fact in many other Mayan languages, such morphemes—which usually indicate *go and do X*, *come and do X*, or *pass by doing X*—occur between the object marker and the subject marker before the verb stem. In at least one dialect of Kaqchikel, however, incorporated movement occurs between the subject marker and the stem (García Matzar and Rodríguez Guaján 1997:191):

usual order: x-*oj*-b'e-*ru*-tz'et-a'
aspect-*object*-movement-*subject*-SEE-status suffix
he/she went to see us

other order: x-*oj*-*ru*-b'e-tz'et-a'
aspect-*object*-*subject*-movement-SEE-status suffix
he/she went to see us

In this case the standard would permit the first form, but not the second, since it is a markedly local and restricted form.

4. *When a decision demonstrates the similarity between one language and another that is closely related to it, it is good, because there are a number of Mayan languages that are mutually intelligible.*

This criterion is designed to capitalize on the similarity of related languages in order to make written materials as widely useful as possible, even to speakers of other languages. For example, Poqomam and some dialects of Poqomchii' have a glottalized *w'* or *m'* where other Mayan languages have the glottalized *b'*. These pronunciations are written with a glottalized *b'* in agreement with other Mayan languages:

	Poqomam	written:	K'ichee'	Kaqchikel
road	[w'e:]	b'ee	b'ee	b'ey
stone	[ʔaw'ax]	ab'aj	ab'aj	ab'äj
rain	[xam']	jab'	jab'	jöb'

5. *It is important to include in the standard form all the possibilities for expression that exist in the language and not reduce it to an incomplete or less rich form.*

This criterion is meant to preserve morphological and syntactic variety. A good example comes from word order in K'ichee' and Kaqchikel. Basic word order is analyzed as verb–object–subject (VOS), but all orders are possible for different pragmatic purposes. Examples are as follows (K'ichee' from López Ixcoy 1997:345–349, except VSO from England 1994:62–63; Kaqchikel from García Matzar and Rodríguez Guaján 1997:333, 341):

VOS: Kaqchikel: neutral order, nothing highlighted, definite subject:

Xutz'ët	jun tz'i'	ri a Ajpu.
V	O	S
SAW	A DOG	AJPU

(Ajpu saw a dog.)

SVO: K'ichee': subject highlighted, topicalized, or noncontrastively emphasized (16th-century example from Carmack and Mondloch 1989:37, realphabetized by López Ixcoy 1997):

B'alam K'ichee', B'alam Aq'ab', Majukutaaj, Iiq' B'alam		
S		
IN THEIR CITY		
xkib'an	k'oxtun chuwi' kitinamiit.	
V	O	
BUILT	TEMPLE	

(B'alam K'ichee', B'alam Aq'ab', Majukutaaj, Iiq' B'alam built temples in their city.)

OVS: K'ichee': object topicalized or focused:

K'i	chee'	k'oo	chi rii.	Ri kaqachee'	xkichoy	ri ajawaab'.
				O	V	S
MANY	TREE	EXIST	THERE	THE RED. TREE	CUT	THE LORDS.

(There were many trees there. The lords cut the red tree. [As for the red tree, the lords cut it.])

SOV: K'ichee': Genealogies; topicalized subject and object with noncontrastive emphasis:

Ri tata' Pakal B'alam,	ri a Koot Pakal	xuk'ajolaaj.
S	O	V
PAKAL B'ALAM	KOOT PAKAL	ENGENDERED

(Pakal B'alam engendered Koot Pakal.)

OSV: Kaqchikel: Genealogies; topicalized object and subject with noncontrastive emphasis:

Ri a Kot Pakal,	ja ri ma Pakal B'alam	xuk'ajolaj.
O	S	V
KOT PAKAL	PAKAL B'ALAM	ENGENDERED

(Pakal B'alam engendered Kot Pakal.)

VSO: K'ichee': for some speakers, both subject and object definite and animate:

Xuq'aluj	le ala	le achi.
V	S	O
HUGGED	THE YOUTH	THE MAN

(The youth hugged the man. [The man hugged the youth.])

In many school texts produced by the national bilingual education program, however, all the possible orders are reduced to one, SVO, which in addition to being more like Spanish is also the most frequently used order in K'ichee' and Kaqchikel for sentences in isolation. This practice has been heavily criticized by OKMA linguists, on the basis that it reduces the expressive power of the language significantly, since each order is used pragmatically in a different context.

The above examples are a very brief sampling of the kinds of decisions that must be made when a language that essentially lacks a tradition of literacy is standardized. Some of them are fairly straightforward, but others require quite a bit of specific grammatical information and knowledge for the results to be workable, satisfactory, and convincing. Maya linguists believe they have an important role to play in standardization.

In addition to the sort of technical contribution I have just described and that is absolutely critical to the standardization process, Maya linguists have been active in both the analysis and critique of language ideologies. Papers given by Maya linguists at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Meetings in March 2000 (Benito Pérez, Jiménez Sánchez, Mateo Toledo, Sis Iboy), provide good examples of how their work combines analysis with proposals that imply modifying or selecting among current language ideologies. These, it should be stressed at the outset, do not come in neat packages. They are partial, contradictory, reactive, proactive, historical, contemporary, all at the same time. The language ideologies that are currently especially prominent among Mayas can be divided into two categories: (1) those that address the position of Mayan languages in relation to Spanish and (2) those that have to do with situations and identities that are internal to the Mayan language communities.

With regard to the position of Mayan languages in relation to Spanish, Ajb'ee Odilio Jiménez Sánchez (2000) indicates quite clearly that the lack of equality that is encountered between Mayan languages and Spanish has resulted from a history in which the political projects for the construction of a Guatemalan State, always carried out by Criollos or Ladinos (non-Mayas), have never taken Mayan languages into account. José Gonzalo Benito Pérez (2000) also states that the state has always ignored Mayan languages as means of communication. This situation results from an ideology held by the dominant society that devalues everything related to indigenous culture, including language.

This ideology of devaluing Mayan languages has been converted into an internal ideology in Mayan communities, according to Brigittine French (2000), Nikte' Juliana Sis Iboy (2000), and Jiménez Sánchez (2000). Within this ideology, Mayan languages are associated with the negative values of the "traditional"—such as ignorance, lack of education, isolation, poverty, and so on—while Spanish is associated with the positive values of the "modern"—such as sophistication, education, opportunities to migrate, economic advancement, and so on. French (2000), especially, analyzes the association of Mayan languages with negative values as key to the initial stages of Mayan language loss in favor of Spanish. All of the individuals and institutions that are working on Mayan languages are attempting to combat this ideology, one way or another. Jiménez Sánchez (2000) in particular uses his analysis of the historical context in which it has arisen to strongly criticize it.

While this negative evaluation of Mayan languages vis-à-vis Spanish is by now quite widespread and has resulted in the growth of bilingualism that tends to be transitional toward a language shift into Spanish, at the same time there are ideologies that resist or contradict this view of Mayan languages. There are some Mayan communities

that have been able to maintain a high degree of bilingualism for more than a century (Brown 1998) and in which individuals customarily take pride in being able to speak both languages well (Reynolds 2000), thus distinguishing themselves from their less accomplished neighbors. There are also communities, one of which I will discuss later, that have apparently been able to halt or, perhaps, even reverse language shift, by equating the ability to speak a Mayan language with being Maya and taking pride in both.

As Sis Iboy (2000) states, connecting language and identity is not only the result of recent revitalization efforts but is also a much older ideology among Mayas. The elders in many communities explicitly confront attitudes of embarrassment connected with speaking a Mayan language by saying "it is not possible to lose the heritage of our grandparents, change allegiance, identify ourselves with others who are not of our family, who are not our own" (Sis Iboy 2000). For the most part, the elders have been guided by this ideology, in that they have usually maintained the Mayan language among themselves and with their children. In fact, the idea of equating nation with language is widely held by Mayas. On the one hand, it has long provided, and continues to provide, one of the reasons why Mayas have been tenaciously loyal to their own languages. It is also cited as a major reason why language is critical to cultural revitalization (cf. Cojtí Cuxil 1991). On the other hand, the idea of the language/nation equivalence has played a major role in language ideological debates that concern the status of Mayan languages in relation to each other, or to what I have called their internal situation and identities.

With regard to this internal situation, it is possible to identify two strong currents in opposition to each other: the localist and the unifying. The debates that have resulted among proponents of these different language ideologies have been most notable in the discussion about the status of Achi (López Ixcoy and Sis Iboy 1991; Sis Iboy 2000; Sis Iboy and López Ixcoy 1989). Achi is the recently coined name of the Rabinal political community and its language. This community, located in Baja Verapaz and known originally as the "Rab'inaleeb'," broke off from the K'ichee' kingdom in approximately 1300 (Carmack 1979: 63) and was independent at the time of the Conquest. The language spoken by the Rab'inaleeb' at the time was certainly K'ichee' and still is, by any linguistic measure. However, and in spite of the fact that the Spanish Conquest destroyed any political autonomy that different Mayan communities may have enjoyed, the political identity of the Rab'inaleeb' has remained quite distinct from that of the K'ichee'. When the Academia de Lenguas Mayas began operating in 1987, it recognized "Achi" as a separate language; most linguists, however, including myself, still regarded it as a dialect of K'ichee'. Nikte' Sis Iboy (2000) recounts the strong negative reaction to hearing that her language was something other than she believed it to be. It is as if, she says, someone comes and tells you "you aren't what you believe you are; you're something else" (Sis Iboy 2000).

However, as she learned more and more linguistics and immersed herself in the study of her language and other varieties of K'ichee', Sis Iboy gradually came to the conclusion that Achi was, indeed, a dialect of K'ichee.' Furthermore, and much more importantly, she also came to believe that it is necessary to unify Mayan languages as much as possible if they are to be adequate modern means of communication that can hold their own against Spanish. By unification she and other Maya linguists mean three things: (1) halting the fragmentation of Mayan languages in ever more dialects and separate languages; (2) halting the tendency to *identify* dialects of these languages as radically different forms or as separate languages, thus contributing to the fragmentation by giving strength to local identities that may not otherwise have been as strong; and (3) working to find a common ground among all the dialects of a particular language for establishing a single standard form of that language.

As a consequence, Sis Iboy then took the public position that Achi, as a dialect of K'ichee,' should be unified with it. Sis Iboy began writing linguistic analyses of K'ichee' that took into account data from Achi as well as other dialects. The ongoing debate between Sis Iboy, whom other Mayas who work in linguistics have supported, and the Achi linguistic community has been heated. Other Rab'inaleeb' have accused Sis Iboy and her linguistic colleagues on a number of occasions of trying to "destroy their identity." Recently Sis Iboy came to the conclusion that for political reasons it was now impossible to unite Achi with K'ichee' and gave a paper to that effect at an academic meeting in 1999, effectively abandoning her unification principles. However, she also suggested changing the name of the language back to its original name, Rab'inalchii' (language of the Rab'inaleeb'). By sheer bad luck, the only other speaker of the language in the audience was from Cubulco, the town with the most divergent dialect of Achi. He took violent exception to the suggested name change, on the grounds that it privileged the people and dialect of Rabinal, the principal seat of the Rab'inaleeb' community.

Here again the localist ideology came into conflict with even an attenuated form of the unification ideology. Sis Iboy, in opting to support the identification of Achi or Rab'inalchii' as a separate language from K'ichee', still supported the unification of Achi itself and the creation of a standard form of that language. To at least one spokesman from Cubulco, however, the unification of Achi was unacceptable because of fears that it would disadvantage his variety of the language. In fact, there is now a strong movement in Cubulco to gain recognition of the local form of speech as a separate language (Sis Iboy, personal communication with author, 2003).

A similar debate has been more recently engaged in regard to the status of two languages known as Q'anjob'al and Akateko (Mateo Toledo 2000). These languages, unlike

Achi and K'ichee', have always been considered by their speakers to be varieties of the same language spoken by the same political community, the Q'anjob'al community. However, Akateko was identified by Terrence Kaufman, a linguist, as separate from, although very closely related to, Q'anjob'al. That classification has been followed by most linguists working on the languages. Akateko was recognized as a separate linguistic community by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas in 1987 but was never organized as such because the members of the community insisted that they were Q'anjob'al. B'alam Eladio Mateo Toledo, who is Q'anjob'al, wrote a thesis (1999) making a detailed comparison of the grammars of the Akateko and Q'anjob'al forms of speech and concluded that they were dialects of the same language. However, his work has been rejected by at least some Akateko leaders on the grounds that because they and their way of speaking have been ignored by members of the other Q'anjob'al communities, they now want to be considered to be Akateko. They have also finally classified the Akateko linguistic community separately from the Q'anjob'al linguistic community. It seems that the tide may have turned in the Q'anob'al/Akateko region. That is, it has moved away from unification and toward localism.

These two cases are symptomatic of the increasingly common debates centering on localist and unification ideologies. The localist position has been strengthened by international indigenous rights declarations that hold that indigenous communities have a right to their own language. While Mayas use this position to defend Mayan languages against Spanish, different communities within Mayan-speaking language groups also use it to defend their rights to their own local variety of a language, and in some cases to insist on their own language name, their own language materials, and their own language identity as opposed to that of any other community. The most extreme example of this can be found in the only town where the Mayan language Awakateko is spoken. Part of the population there has been pushing for the recognition of its slightly different dialect as a separate language, Chalchiteko. The Guatemalan Congress has recognized this demand, presumably because it sees this action as part of a relatively cost-free way of recognizing the rights of local communities.

Jiménez Sánchez (2000) roundly criticizes what he considers to be the extreme localist positions that have become more and more common. He argues that localist ideologies result in part from postconquest history, in which administrative divisions were established by the Criollo and Ladino State that favored the development of local rivalries that resulted increasingly in dialect divergence. Jiménez Sánchez characterizes this divergence not as normal linguistic change but, rather, as an abnormal phenomenon provoked by the Criollo and Ladino policies toward Mayan communities. He goes on to say that the existing dialect differences must be regarded as different ways of expressing the same identity, rather than as ways of expressing different identities. He thus comes back to the language and identity issue but argues that identity based on language must be understood in a broad and regional "whole language" sense, rather than a narrow and local "my dialect" sense.

The analyses and arguments made by Benito Pérez, Jiménez Sánchez, Mateo Toledo, and Sis Iboy at LASA 2000 constitute part of the ongoing debate among Mayas regarding the status of their own languages, and at the same time are instrumental in the construction and diffusion of language ideologies, especially so given that the authors are principal actors in the Maya movement of cultural and linguistic revitalization. The positions taken by Jiménez Sánchez, Sis Iboy, and Mateo Toledo with respect to their own languages are all unifying rather than localist. In general, Maya linguists have led the unification side of the debate. In doing so, they enter directly and personally into these debates. They have also almost universally taken the position that Mayan languages are essential to Mayan identity and should, therefore, be preserved and defended against prevailing attitudes and practices that accord them secondary status with respect to Spanish.

There are indications that some of the efforts on the part of linguists and language-based institutions are resulting in at least limited success in the promotion of Mayan languages. For example, the establishment of the linguistic communities by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas has resulted, in some areas, in a much more conscious awareness of language issues within the communities, and a greater willingness both to speak and be identified as a speaker of a Mayan language. The recent signing of the Peace Accords in Guatemala (1996) placed on the table the possibility of recognizing Mayan languages as official or co-official with Spanish, and the even more recent "Law of National Languages" (2003) brought that possibility closer to actuality. Other initiatives seem to have resulted in the slowing of language loss and even in a possible growth in Mayan language acquisition.

The recent history of Palín, for instance, is instructive as an example of how language revitalization is closely connected to cultural revitalization (Benito Pérez 2000). Palín, located 40 kilometers south of Guatemala City, has a population of about twenty thousand, of whom 65 percent are Poqomam and the rest are Ladino. The Maya population is quite isolated, since there are no other Poqomam-speaking towns nearby. Furthermore, Palín is situated on a major highway that connects Guatemala City with the Pacific Coast, which has resulted in constant contact with urban elements, both desirable and undesirable. In 1991, the Guatemalan linguist Guillermina Herrera Peña wrote about the "last generation" of Poqomam speakers in Palín, characterizing the community as being on the verge of language death (Herrera Peña 1991:14–15). However, the language has not yet died, and there are signs that the trend toward disappearance may have been reversed. Michael Richards (2003:110) places Palín today in a category

of "moderate risk of language loss," midway down the list of his five categories of loss.

Benito Pérez describes language revitalization in Palín as having its roots in the 1970s, with activities of the Palín Indigenous Fraternity, which was in charge of electing the indigenous queen for the town's patron saint festival. In the 1980s, the name of the group was changed to the Poqomam Cultural Committee, and it began to promote indigenous theater, handicrafts, art, and music at the national level as well as play a part in the town festival. The members, all quite young, consciously began to use Poqomam in their activities. In 1988 the Committee abandoned the festival in order to concentrate on the rescue and promotion of Poqomam cultural activities, especially language, dress, music, and education. To further their goals with regard to language, they sent two members to learn linguistics. A year later, the group changed its name again, this time to the Poqomam Cultural Association Qawinaqel, and the group began to look for concrete ways to accomplish its goals of cultural promotion. With the idea that cultural promotion must concentrate on children, at the end of 1989 they surveyed the Poqomam population in order to find out whether there would be any interest in establishing a Poqomam school. The interest was sufficient that in 1990 they decided to fund and establish the school, but plans were accelerated when a number of the parents who had been surveyed turned up in January to register their children in the school that did not yet exist. Deciding that it had to respond to such spontaneous community interest, Qawinaqel levied an internal tribute on its members and otherwise begged and borrowed enough to open the school with 40 pupils. By 2000 the school had grown to 435 pupils between kindergarten and ninth grade.

The establishment of the Qawinaqel school, which is devoted to the promotion of Poqomam cultural values including language, has had a fairly dramatic effect on Palín. Each year more and more parents are willing to pay to send their children to the school, and in the last few years even Ladino parents have expressed an interest in sending their children to Qawinaqel to learn Poqomam. And children in the school are speaking Poqomam, some because they are from families in which the language has been preserved, some because their families are now interested in preserving the language, and some because they learn it in school. Whether these efforts are enough to ensure the survival of the language is still not clear, but as Benito Pérez says, the most important thing is that "the so-called last generation would not be the last; instead the breeding ground for the work to move forward has now been sown" (2000).

The historical progression in Qawinaqel from electing indigenous queens, to the promotion of folkloric cultural activities, to the promotion of aspects of cultural identity such as language, to the establishment of a school, to the success of the school in language and cultural retention, is instructive. It shows that language retention and rescue comes from the community and can proceed as part of an integrated program based on the acceptance and promotion of cultural values. In this process, positive language ideologies such as equating the Mayan language with a positive cultural identity become more prominent than negative ideologies such as equating the Mayan language (and culture) with backwardness.

In achieving some measure of success in language rescue, Palinecos have made use of many of the formal organizations that Mayas have established to combat language loss and promote cultural and linguistic revitalization. They have established their own culture and language association, Qawinaqel. They have also used the services of the Academia de Lenguas Mayas, of Mayas in the state educational system, of the support institutions for Maya schools, and of institutions devoted to language issues. At least six community members have gone to these institutions to learn linguistics, with the clear idea that this would be of benefit to the community and the school. Those linguists have been useful for language rescue. They have been responsible for codifying Poqomam for use in writing, they have produced basic educational materials such as primers and grammars, and they have taught the language in the school or the community. Further, those linguists have influenced local language ideologies and have provided models of language retention for the community because their own children are fluent speakers of Poqomam.

The contributions of linguists in the Palín case are considerable. It is quite likely that linguistic revival would not have been as successful without them. However, it is equally clear that linguistics alone is not enough to ensure language retention. In Palín, the application of linguistic knowledge to the problem of language retention grew out of a general cultural revitalization movement and proceeded as an integral part of that movement. Linguists have, however, participated there in all of the ways that I have outlined: (1) They have produced materials for the schools and the community; (2) they have analyzed the language for the purposes of standardization; and (3) they have promoted certain language ideologies with the intention of reversing language loss. Language retention is always, ultimately, in the hands of the community. However, when linguists are members of a community that speaks an endangered language, and when they have both a personal stake in the future of that language and a native ability to speak it, their potential for contributing to the reversal of language loss is great. They can be quite effective in consciously drawing that community's attention to the issues of language loss and retention and can then be instrumental in implementing measures to counteract loss.

It is difficult to say with any certainty whether the apparent shift in the pattern of language loss that has been occurring in Palín will be long-lasting enough to guarantee the survival of the language and difficult to say how many other Palíns there are. Little has been written about reversing language shift in Mayan communities. However,

it is quite clear that the activities of the linguistic communities organized by the Academia have resulted in a much greater consciousness about language issues among community members, and the increasing concern of the ministry of education with bilingual education has had a direct impact on many communities. Both of these institutions have had an effect on the general population, not just on their leaders. In addition, there are certainly some families where language shift has been reversed, that is, where younger siblings may actually speak a Mayan language more fluently than their older siblings, as a direct result of a change in language consciousness on the part of their parents. At the same time, however, the forces toward language shift are quite strong, so these efforts may be insufficient to halt or reverse language shift.

The fact that Mayas themselves are debating language ideologies suggests that Mayas are not taking an entirely passive role with regard to language shift. The guiding spirit of the PLFM when it was founded in the 1970s was that linguists, instead of merely using speakers of Mayan languages as informants about their languages, could (and should) teach linguistics to Mayas so that they could use it for whatever purposes they choose. Maya linguists have chosen to address the issues of language vitality and language standardization, among others, in the hopes that they can promote the use and prolong the lives of their own languages. In doing so, they have also gone through an informational shift from being largely unaware of what outsiders had to say about their languages, to listening to what outsiders had to say, to debating with outsiders, to debating among themselves about language issues. They have also gone through a positional shift within linguistics, from being informants, to being apprentices, to being independent researchers and authorities on their languages.

Brief mention was made at the start of this article of the connection between globalization and increasing bilingualism. Globalization, indeed, has had several effects on processes described here. First of all, the fact that language retention among Mayas is being threatened at an unprecedented rate (as is the case with many other language communities worldwide) at roughly the same time that the globalization phenomenon has been developing is surely not a coincidence. Mayan languages have been lost in some communities in previous periods: For example, at least one Mayan language disappeared in the early 20th century; residents of one Mam-speaking community stopped using the language because of a presidential decree in the first half of the 20th century; and significant language loss in Quetzaltenango, the largest Mayan city in Guatemala, is at least three generations old. Nevertheless, it is only in the last two or three decades that language loss has been detectable in almost all Mayan communities. At the same time, however, the reaction to language loss on the part of Mayas owes something at least to the increased communication and connectedness that globalization has brought to all communities. Mayas are more aware of developments in other Mayan communities, and indeed in the world, than they were several generations ago; they are in more constant discussion with other Mayas and even other non-Mayan communities that face the same issues; they have more access to higher education and literature of all sorts than they did a quarter of a century ago; and they are more subject to global influences that have a direct positive, as well as negative, effect on their communities and languages, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN, or the widespread concern in the 1990s with the preservation of indigenous communities. They have certainly begun to take advantage of the technological revolution for their own purposes and have been applying higher education to problems in their own communities. Whether the pressures toward culture change and language loss will ultimately and inevitably outweigh the countervailing efforts toward cultural and linguistic revitalization is still an open question.

Nora C. England Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712-1196

NOTES

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1. Compare overall literacy in Guatemala in 1989 at 72.6 percent with that in 2003 at 80.6 percent (UNESCO 2003).
2. Ley de Idiomas Nacionales, Decreto 19-2003.

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