

Snapshots of Yucatec Maya Language Practices: Language Policy and Planning Activities in the Yucatán Peninsula

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Metaphors, although many times more poetic than political, have been instrumental in understanding the complexity of language policy and planning (LPP). In this paper, I refer to and compare photographic processing to current LPP activities in Quintana Roo, the newest Mexican state. Based on corpus analyses of policy texts and ethnographic snapshots, this paper investigates how sectors such as health, social development, human rights, and justice employ Indigenous languages in ways that complement but also contradict LPP activities at the national, regional, and state levels. Overall, this research widens the LPP lens by inviting educational researchers to tell more stories behind the pictures, bring the blurred and missing people into the main frame, and redistribute the lighting in more just ways.

Metaphors have been a crucial element in the description, prediction, and problematizing of language policy and planning (LPP) processes (see, e.g., Haugen, 1972; Mühlhäusler, 2000; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). These analogies, although many times more poetic than political, have been instrumental in understanding the complexity of LPP, and the heuristics created by them are still of great value. Inspired by the play of colored mirrors in Heller's (2006) kaleidoscope, where each resulting pattern represents a facet of a story, in this paper I refer to and compare photographic processing to current LPP activities in the Yucatán Peninsula, where policy texts—as single pictures or facets—try to depict the complex linguistic ecology of Indigenous languages, but stop short of capturing the whole story.

Conventionally, a photograph is no more than a fractional coordination of encounters between contexts, lights, film, a camera, and agents, whether these are people that will appear in the picture, or the person who is taking it. Just like a single photograph is not sufficient to explain the experiences behind it, explanations about social processes, such as Indigenous languages revitalization efforts, cannot be understood solely by any single policy document that deliberately addresses these issues. Johnson (2015), referring to the methods used in the field of LPP, alludes to the complexity of the LPP activities and the way they are arrayed in multiple domains, contexts, levels, layers, and scales. This article is a snapshot of this complexity in the Yucatán Peninsula. It is a moment in time that tries to capture some of the different domains, contexts, layers, and levels that affect the deployment of languages in Quintana Roo, a region that not so long ago was

considered a marginal territory, that was incorporated as a state in 1974, and that is nowadays the number one attraction for domestic and international tourists in Mexico (Secretaria de Turismo, 2015).

The overarching goal of this manuscript is to illustrate some of the discourses reflected in government-produced texts about Yucatec Maya¹ and investigate the “complex dispositions towards language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society” (Ruíz, 1984, p. 16). Although I am aware of the agency of different stakeholders in the molding and morphing of LPP (see, e.g., Menken & García, 2010), this manuscript primarily draws from texts produced by the state and national governments, which impact in complex ways the ideological and implementational spaces of Maya (Hornberger, 2005). However, when relevant, snapshots of my own ethnographic work in Tihosuco, a small town in Quintana Roo, will be included as entry points to describe and analyze some of the government efforts “*encamina [dos] hacia el rescate y la preservación de este [viz. Maya] legado cultural*”² (Secretaria de Desarrollo Social e Indígena [SEDESI], 2011, p. 22). All in all, with the triumvirate of document collection and ethnographic snapshots composed of participant observation and interviews (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011), I make sense of “the multiple and potentially conflicting meanings, voices, and styles in the [policy] texts” (Johnson, 2015, p. 156). It is through this methodological triumvirate, strongly leaning towards policy-text analyses, that Maya is revealed as a fundamental aspect that needs to be taken into account in the manifold dimensions of the LPP activities in multiple domains.

I begin with a conceptual framing of the field of LPP in terms of the unpredictable directions that it takes, then briefly describe the methods employed in this research, as well as the situation of Maya within the Mexican context. Next, I locate Quintana Roo in terms of its language and education planning and policy situations respectively. In order to show the complexity of the LPP activities beyond education, I then describe the deployment of languages and how these language dispositions interweave in the health sector in the Yucatán Peninsula, showing how the languages complement, contradict, and challenge some of the educational LPP processes at the national and regional level. I conclude with specific observations on the policy travelling process (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) in LPP in the state of Quintana Roo, share some reflections on the advantages of a multifocal conception of LPP in light of an ecological orientation (Haugen, 1972), and offer some methodological directions inspired by the very useful LPP onion metaphor put forward by Ricento and Hornberger (1996), sliced by Hornberger and Johnson (2007), and stirred by García and Menken (2010).

Language Policy and Planning: Looking Beyond the Lamp-post

It has been widely accepted that LPP activities follow undefined, and many times unpredictable, directions (e.g., Hult, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Lane, 2015; Shohamy, 2006). Moreover, education, unpredictable in itself, has been used as one of the contexts par excellence for the development and reflection of LPP. As Spolsky (2007) states, “The study of language education policy is thus perhaps the

¹ Throughout the paper, I will use Yucatec Maya and Maya interchangeably, the latter being the most commonly used term to refer to the language in the Yucatán Peninsula.

² to rescue and preserve this (i.e., Maya) cultural legacy; translations of all policy documents are my own.

most difficult and challenging field of all, and deserves... thorough attention" (p. 11). However, many times this thorough attention on formal education settings has left out other arenas where LPP is not only developed and enacted, but simultaneously influencing education practices. Research on these other domains is slowly emerging, for example, in families and immigration (King & Haboud, 2011), health (Ramanathan, 2010), media (Blommaert et al., 2009), and justice (Deutch, 2005). However, the tendency to focus on formal education as a safe space to conduct LPP research is still overwhelming (Johnson & Ricento, 2013; see also Bourgois, 1996).

In her discussion on language policy and endangered languages, Romaine (2007) invites us to not just focus on the relationship between official language policies and educational settings as the only places where LPP activities happen, but to approach the field of LPP with an ecological perspective:

Looking to schools and declarations of official status to assist endangered languages is much like looking for one's lost keys under the lamp-post because that is where the most light appears to shine rather than because that is where they have been lost. Just as it is easier to see under the lamp-post, it is far easier to establish schools and declare a language official... (p. 195)

Along these lines, in her reflections on the role of schools in saving Indigenous languages, Hornberger (2008) recognizes how LPP in Indigenous contexts occurs in "domains and social fields such as employment, religion, government, cultural life, media, and others" (p. 1). For Shohamy (2006), language policy refers to laws, documents, and regulations that specifically legitimize the languages used in specific contexts. However, she also extends the idea of language policy to "a variety of devices... used to perpetuate language practices, often in covert and implicit ways" (p. 46). Hence, thorough analyses of LPP activities must explore how agents, institutions, ideologies, documents, and any other processes in the layers of the LPP activities interact with each other in varying degrees (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). If not an impossible task, it is definitely a very difficult one.

Returning to my initial photographic metaphor, a single snapshot would not be sufficient to understand the complexity and depth of the LPP domains. What would be needed is a set of diverse cameras, each one of them with multiple apertures to capture multiple moments of LPP and with a high enough resolution to show the fine-grained facets and patterns of language policy. As in any film reel, the negatives superpose each other, complicate the images, and quickly develop. Thus, this picture does not fully represent the whole of LPP activities, but it at least shows a segment of its intricacies. In that way, showing some of the different instances where these overt (i.e., explicit, formalized) and covert (i.e., implicit, informal, unstated, latent) LPP activities happen can hopefully allow us to understand the multiplicity of language planning domains that affect the use of languages in Quintana Roo. The methods used to develop this complex LPP film and analyze the language snapshots presented in this paper are described in the following section, after which I will present analyses of particular cultural, justice, health, and educational LPP activities as they are currently documented in Quintana Roo's language reel.

Methods

This paper is the result of an extensive corpus analysis (Fitzsimmons-Doolan, 2015) of more than 80 laws, legal codes, and websites from the ministries of tourism, education, health, economy, finance, urban development, ecology, rural development, and infrastructure and transportation from the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Corpus analysis was chosen as an approach to see how Maya is described in official policy texts vis-à-vis ethnographic data and vis-à-vis media coverage on Indigenous and linguistic issues in the Yucatán Peninsula. Additionally, corpus analysis was utilized as a lens to identify the ideologies encoded in official texts and media. Although extensive in its scope, I particularly looked for instances where the words *lengua*, *idioma*, *dialecto*, *lenguaje*, *maya*, *español*, *castellano*, and *Indígena*³ were mentioned in the documents. Analysis was focused on laws and policy texts that are either currently effective in Quintana Roo or were under discussion in April 2016.

In addition to the corpus analysis of official texts, the ethnographic snapshots used in this paper come from the ethnographic participatory action research I have conducted since 2015 in Tihosuco, a small Maya town in Quintana Roo. This research is part of a partnership between Tihosuco's Caste War Museum and the University of Pennsylvania. Furthermore, this partnership has been materialized as the Tihosuco Heritage and Preservation Community Project (THCP) (Leventhal, Chan Espinosa, Moo Pat, & Poot Cahun, 2014), where, besides working on Yucatec Maya strengthening and promotion, it also highlights a Maya view of history and the past through community engagement in public archaeology projects.

For the last two years (May–August, 2015; January, 2016; May–July, 2016), I have collaborated with the Caste War Museum in the development of workshops and materials to encourage schools to think and act on the ways Yucatec Maya could be promoted and strengthened amongst families in the town. Participatory observations, as well as semi-structured interviews with several community stakeholders (e.g., families, teachers, elders, cultural promoters) conducted throughout the project, are used to complement, when appropriate, the corpus analyses presented in this paper. In this way, though not an ethnography of LPP in nature, this research is ethnographically inspired to view LPP as a human and cultural process and to look for the intricacies of humanness and culture in documents and ethnographic snapshots (McCarty, 2015).

Yucatec Maya: A Convoluting Linguistic Picture

Mexico is a plurilingual country that paradoxically has looked for its national identity in a common language (Bonfil, 1996). Moreover, much has been written on the LPP processes from the pre-colonial period to the current state of policies that promote multilingualism (e.g., Flores Farfán, 2009; Heath, 1972; Villanueva Barriga & Martín Butragueño, 2010a, 2010b, 2014). However, since the nineteenth century, Spanish has been considered the *de facto* national language and the vehicle to modernize the country (Villanueva Barriga, 1995).

Despite the fact that the constitution currently recognizes Mexico as a pluricultural and multilingual nation (Andrade, 2013), Spanish homogenization is still prevalent (Briceño Chel, 2008). Thus, Maya and Spanish do not share the same status either at the regional or national level. A linguistically convoluted territory,

³ *tongue, idiom, dialect, language, Maya, Spanish, Castilian and Indigenous*

with at least 68 Indigenous *de jure* languages but with Spanish as the *de facto* language for education, health, media, human rights, and justice, Mexico is an example of the multiple domains, contexts, levels, layers, and scales of LPP activity (Johnson, 2015).

Maya, with over 785,000 speakers, is the second most spoken Indigenous language in Mexico and the most spoken Indigenous language in the Yucatán Peninsula (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2011). Although growing in terms of speakers, Maya is undergoing persistent and alarming language shift (England, 1998; Terborg, García Landa, & Moore, 2006). For instance, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Populations⁴ (CDI) has detected 22 Indigenous languages that, independently of the number of speakers, are at risk of disappearing. Of the four major Indigenous languages in Mexico,⁵ Maya is the only one undergoing language shift (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas [CDI], 2010), which implies not just a rapid displacement of a language per se, but also the loss of contextual agricultural practices (Mühlhäusler, 2000), environmental information, and local systems of knowledge (Nettle & Romaine, 2000), as well as challenges in intrafamilial communication (Romero-Little et al., 2007).

Overall, Yucatec Maya, as most Indigenous languages, is at a complex linguistic crossroads in Mexico. Global trends, such as tourism and migration, are the daily bread of the Yucatán Peninsula. This is especially true for the state of Quintana Roo, which is home to Cancún, the most touristic and camera-ready destination in Mexico. These trends are the foreground images for the next section.

Quintana Roo: Language as a Moving Target

The Mexican Yucatán Peninsula, located in the southeastern part of the country, is composed of three states: Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo. According to the last national censuses, Quintana Roo has over 1.5 million inhabitants; 16.6% of the population aged three years and older speak an Indigenous language, 7.5% do not speak one but understand an Indigenous language, and 68.7% consider themselves Indigenous but do not understand any Indigenous language (INEGI, 2015). Furthermore, 90% of the people that speak an Indigenous language speak Yucatec Maya (INEGI, 2011). The second most spoken Indigenous language, Tseltal, also from the Maya linguistic family, is represented by 2% of speakers and the rest of the Indigenous languages spoken (e.g., Tsotsil, Ch'ol, and Q'anjob'al) are represented by less than 2% of speakers (INEGI, 2010).

Regardless of the Indigenous language one speaks in Quintana Roo, immigration, tourism, and socioeconomic and educational marginalization in its rural areas are factors that have contributed to language shift to Spanish (Acuña & Medina, 2017; INEGI, 2015; Pfeiler, 2014). Pi-Sunyer and Thomas (2015), in their longitudinal ethnography of two decades in what is now called the Riviera Maya, describe how since the 1990s, Mayan communities that were dependent on an agricultural economy have started to move to a cash-dependent one. This shift brought circular migratory waves from rural to urban areas, a phenomenon that was perceived by many as a “mixed blessing” (p. 90), since outside community employment carried with it wage labor, but also a fear for cultural and linguistic loss.

⁴ Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas

⁵ Nahuatl, Maya, Mixteco, and Zapoteco

For example, Tihosuco, located in the western part of the state of Quintana Roo and near the border of the state of Yucatán, is accessible through a very well maintained road that connects it to Valladolid, in Yucatán, and Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Tihosuco's municipal center in Quintana Roo. Moreover, it is three hours away from Cancún, and almost three hours away from Merida, the largest city on the Yucatán Peninsula (see Figure 1). The well-maintained roads, as well as the closeness to Cancún, have allowed grand resorts to pick up workers in Tihosuco early in the morning, bring them to the hotels to provide services as launderers, kitchen staff, and general maintenance, among others, and take them back to Tihosuco at night. Economic remittances, construction ideas, and linguistic ideologies, such as the importance of English, are some of the forms of capital that are transported in these three-hour daily trips (Fieldnotes, July, 2016).



Figure 1. Tihosuco in scale to Mexico.⁶

Thus, the mixed blessing is a reality in the language ecology of Tihosuco. For instance, for some families, migrant returnees are impacting Maya usage in the town with long-lasting implications:

Los niños no hablan mucha maya...la gente emigra, los papas emigran; la gente que regresa le habla más a los niños en español. De niño sí hablaba más maya en comparación a [mis] hermanitos. De joven aprendí maya en la secundaria, donde antes se enseñaba por una hora. [Me] gustaba... aprendí a escribir, pero había compañeros que no le ponían mucha atención o no les interesaba, sobre todo a los que eran muy relajistas.⁷

Interview with father of a school-aged child (Fieldnotes, May 7, 2015)

⁶ Adapted from a Google Maps snapshot of the Yucatán Peninsula, by Google, n.d. (<https://goo.gl/maps/Ex8dybt25aF2>). Copyright 2017 by Google, INEGI.

⁷ Children do not speak too much Maya... people migrate, fathers migrate; the people that come back speak to their children in Spanish. As a child, I spoke more Maya when compared to my little brothers. In middle school I learned Maya, where they used to teach it for an hour. I liked it... I learned to write, but there were some schoolmates who did not pay much attention or were not interested, especially those who goofed off a lot.

In this way, we can see how globalization, as well as voluntary and forced migration, pushes men and women to arrive in spaces where their Indigenous languages are rarely spoken. Many times these phenomena drive their languages into oblivion, even to the point of diminishing the practices of the languages back in their places of origin (Hinton & Hale, 2001). Globalization and its effects are also present in Quintana Roo's language policy-texts. In the document *Mayan Culture and Language Preservation*,⁸ published in 2015, the state's Ministry of Indigenous and Social Development⁹ (SEDESI) identifies tourism and immigration as factors that have pushed Quintana Roo to be immersed in a transculturation process, importantly diminishing the presence of Indigenous languages and transforming their traditional culture. This document also states that "*el legado maya está en riesgo, debido al reducido número de hablantes en ciertas zonas geográficas, sumándole el impacto de la globalización en el territorio quintanarroense que ha afectado hasta el más recóndito lugar del Estado*"¹⁰ (p. 8).

This concern can also be seen in the neighboring state of Yucatán. In her study on the perceptions of the implementation of language policies amongst Maya and Spanish speakers, Montemayor Gracia (2015) found that even though now there are more governmental mechanisms at the national and peninsular level that support the development of Maya, Yucatec inhabitants perceive a decline in the number of Maya speakers when compared to recent decades. Through her interviews, she found that global trends and migration are reported as the primary factors:

*Sí, sí ha habido un cambio, porque pues si vamos diez años atrás mucha gente hablaba maya. Al paso de los años esa... esa cadena de personas que hablaba maya precisamente ha abandonado este mundo.*¹¹ (Montemayor Gracia, 2015, p. 992)

Bringing together these concerns about the impact of migration, tourism, and globalization trends on Indigenous languages, in 2011 the SEDESI designed the *Special Program for Social Solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples*,¹² which states that

*Es de interés público y social que la sabiduría de nuestros pueblos indígenas no se pierda ni deprede por causa de la indiferencia o la discriminación; antes bien, esa sabiduría debe enriquecernos, darnos orgullo y obligarnos a respetar y rescatar lenguas, tradiciones, formas de ser y de mirar la vida y todo cuanto hoy nos hace una sociedad diversa, plural y multiétnica.*¹³ (p. 2)

In this same spirit, Quintana Roo's government has adopted at least 87 federal programs that are designed to have an impact on the development of the Indigenous communities in terms of infrastructure, taxation systems, justice and

⁸ *Preservación de la Cultura y Lengua Maya*

⁹ *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social e Indígena*

¹⁰ the Mayan legacy is at risk, because of the reduced number of speakers in specific geographic areas, as well as globalization, which is having an impact in the most recondite places in the State

¹¹ Yes, there has been a change, because ten years ago a lot of people spoke Maya. As time goes by, precisely that chain of people has abandoned this world.

¹² *Programa Especial de Solidaridad Social para los Pueblos Indígenas*

¹³ It is of public and social interest that the wisdom of our Indigenous peoples should not to be lost nor dilapidated by indifference or discrimination; this wisdom should enrich us, make us proud and oblige us to respect and rescue our languages, traditions, ways of being and seeing life, all that makes us a diverse, plural and multiethnic society.

law enforcement, health, education, and language issues. The state government has recognized the limitations of revitalizing Maya just through education and has tried to incorporate Indigenous languages in agriculture, migration, justice systems, tourism, and general infrastructure matters. Of the 87 programs adopted by the state, 18 are specifically education programs, and of those, one (the Basic Education Program for Rural and Indigenous Populations) explicitly attends to Indigenous populations (SEDESI, 2011).

Language is a moving target, and the language ecologies in Quintana Roo are not exceptions. Maya, Spanish, and even English are all part of these movements, dependent on migration, tourism, and economic trends. Nonetheless, policies such as the one cited above are evidence of the government's disposition to understand these movements and cater to the languages in less favorable positions. The educational picture discussed in the next section is an example of the policies and institutions that are trying to respond to these minoritized positions.

Education Portraits of Language Policy and Planning in Quintana Roo

The government at the national level has strong institutional and bureaucratic paraphernalia to oversee the maintenance and development of Indigenous languages as well as access to the Spanish language (Anzures Tapia, 2015; Gustafson, Julca Guerrero, & Jiménez, 2016). However, Flores Farfán (2010) has pointed out the glotophagic effect of Spanish (p. 77), stating that even if policies and institutions exist to develop Indigenous languages, their use and promotion have shrunk, fostering and reflecting a monolingual and monocultural ideology in Mexico. This Indigenous institutionalism, characterized by the rush to create programs and institutions that cater to the Indigenous (Bertely, 2002; Hamel, 2001; see also Villoro, 1979), stands out at the national and the state level.

In Quintana Roo, the National Council of Education Promotion¹⁴ (CONAFE), which is in charge of serving children in socioeconomically and geographically marginalized regions, is currently implementing three programs: the Itinerant Pedagogical Advisor, which aims for better learning in disadvantageously positioned rural schools through itinerant pedagogical advisors and trains children as translators for monolingual parents; the National Crusade Against Hunger, which tries to eradicate acute malnutrition in children; and the Initial Education Program, which brings support to pregnant women and families in regards to their childrearing practices for children under four years old (Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo [CONAFE], 2014).

The General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education¹⁵ (CGEIB) oversees the Public Education Secretariat¹⁶ (SEP) in topics on equity and intercultural development. At the state level, Quintana Roo is required to adopt and adapt the CGEIB mandates in order to (a) strengthen the cultural and linguistic relevance of its basic and higher education through an intercultural stance, (b) strengthen cultural and linguistic relevance to better address the needs of Indigenous peoples and those of African descent, (c) promote interculturality in non-formal education spaces, and (d) establish mechanisms that assure the revitalization, promotion,

¹⁴ Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo

¹⁵ Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe

¹⁶ Secretaría de Educación Pública

development, and strengthening of Indigenous languages within the state (Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 2014c).

The National Institute of Indigenous Languages¹⁷ (INALI) oversees how Indigenous languages are respected in all political and administrative arenas in Mexico, including the education sector. In 2014, the INALI helped to establish the “Maya Writing Norm” which consists of an inventory that determines the rules and grammar conventions for Maya written production. According to the INALI, the norm contributes to the promotion, strengthening, preservation, and development of Maya. Additionally, the INALI promotes the use of Maya in public spaces and social media, and it is in charge of training and providing translators and interpreters when Indigenous people need assistance during judicial processes (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas [INALI], 2012, 2014).

The General Office for Indigenous Education¹⁸ (DGEI) at the national and state level is concerned with proposing, updating, and overseeing that the Indigenous education’s pedagogical norms, contents, programs, methods, and assessments are relevant and contextualized for Indigenous populations, taking into account an intercultural and bilingual approach (Hamel, 2008a; SEP, 2014c). Current programs and policies supported at the state level are the Curricular Framework for Preschool and Migrant Populations’ Education¹⁹ and the Basic Education Program for the Children of Migrant Agricultural Laborer Families²⁰ (SEP, 2009, 2014a).

The CDI supervises international and national laws, such as the General Law for the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2010). In regards to its state level policies, the CDI countersigned the *Indigenous Infrastructure Coordination Agreement*.²¹ This agreement will help to build roads and provide electricity and water to different Indigenous communities in the state (CDI, 2016). At first glance, this agreement does not appear to directly impact the language practices in the region. However, while it is true that the introduction of roads to the communities allows greater access to education and health services, it may also promote shifts in the language and cultural practices, ultimately responding to the touristic markets of the coast rather than the communities’ needs (Daltabuit Godás, 2000). Table 1 outlines the abovementioned Indigenous education institutions, as well as the policies they are currently promoting.

The greater connectivity to the urban world and the implementation of policies by these institutions tell a different story at the ground level than originally intended. Parents of school-aged children in Tihosuco have mentioned that the introduction of preschools in the town has impacted the way children deploy their languages:

*En parte es por la preescolar, antes no había, ahora sí, entonces ellos ya hablan en español. [Además yo] también [les] hablo más en español, aunque con [mi] esposo también en maya.*²²

Interview with mother of a school-aged child (Fieldnotes, May 8, 2015)

¹⁷ Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas

¹⁸ Dirección General de Educación Indígena

¹⁹ Marco Curricular de la Educación Preescolar Indígena y de la Población Migrante

²⁰ El Programa de Educación Básica para Niños y Niñas de Familias Jornaleras Agrícolas Migrantes

²¹ Convenio de Coordinación de Infraestructura Indígena

²² In part it is because of the preschool, before there were none, now there are, thus, my children now speak in Spanish. I also speak to them more in Spanish, although I also speak Maya with my husband.

Table 1

Overview of Specific Policies Impacting Indigenous Education in Quintana Roo

Institution at the National Level	Recent Policies Adopted in Quintana Roo
National Council of Education Promotion (CONAFE)	Itinerant Pedagogical Adviser National Crusade Against Hunger Initial Education Program
General Office for Indigenous Education (DGEI)	Curricular Framework for Preschool and Migrant Populations' Education Basic Education Program for the Children of Migrant Agricultural Laborer Families
General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education (CGIEB)	Special Program for Intercultural Program
National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Population (CDI)	Indigenous Infrastructure Coordination Agreement
National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI)	Maya Writing Norm Translators and Interpreters Agreement with the Office of the General Prosecutor

Source: Self-compilation based on CDI, 2016; CONAFE, 2014; INALI, 2012, 2014; SEP, 2014a, 2014b; Secretaría de Gobernación [SEGOB], 2014.

This interview excerpt reflects how government attempts to alleviate societal inequalities have had inadvertent effects on language in the region. According to the National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Information²³ (INEGI) (2011), 71% of the population in Tihosuco lives under the poverty line, and 24% of those live in extreme poverty. Coupled with the fact that Tihosuco has been described by the Ministry of Indigenous and Social Development as a town in the municipality with the most Mayan monolingual speakers (SEDESI, 2010), this mirrors the historic trend of exclusion and poverty conditions of Indigenous communities in Mexico and throughout Latin America. The introduction of early childhood education in the community is one of the government efforts undertaken to reverse this poverty trend—a global policy that has been branded as a societal equalizer—but it has inadvertently led to more rapid language shift within Indigenous communities (Penn, 2011). Zooming in for a closer look into this shift within the education of Indigenous communities in Quintana Roo is the focus of the next section.

Indigenous formal education in Quintana Roo

In Quintana Roo, formal education is free and compulsory from preschool to tertiary level. There are different modalities in each level, however, from preschool to middle school; generally speaking, schools can work under the *Indigenous modality* or the *general modality* (Ley de Educación del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2014). The Indigenous modality schools purposefully adapt the national curriculum to the cultural and linguistic practices of the Indigenous communities, while the general modality ones follow the state and national policies with no cultural or linguistic accommodations (Dirección General de Educación Indígena

²³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática

[DGEI], 2010). Amongst the most prevalent challenges within the Indigenous modality are: (a) the multigrade organization of the classrooms; (b) the shortage of pedagogically trained teachers; (c) the inadequacy of books and methodologies; (d) the poor condition of the schools' infrastructure; and (e) the scarcity of teachers who speak Maya (Flores Farfán, 2010; Lizama Quijano, 2008).

Quintana Roo currently has 77 Indigenous schools that serve 3000 students (SEDESI, 2011), each one of them supposedly receiving free textbooks designed by the SEP. During the 2016–2017 school year, 39,156 Indigenous textbooks were designed and delivered to the different Indigenous schools in Quintana Roo (Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos, 2016). Nonetheless it is *vox populi* and has also been reported in different research (e.g., García & Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2008b; Pineda, Alcocer, & Xool, 2008), that Indigenous textbooks in Mexico are designed to teach the language based on Spanish learning models and are not contextually adapted to the Indigenous populations. For example, through observations and interviews conducted by the THCP, it has been reported that teachers do not use the official textbooks and do not teach in Maya because (a) families are opposed to their children being taught in Maya, (b) teachers feel they are not proficient enough in the language, and (c) the materials describe Indigenous realities that are not theirs (e.g., they show Indigenous groups from central Mexico and not from the Peninsula).

In regards to the state's general school attendance rate and the state's literacy data, 97% of the population between 6 and 14 years old attends school. Almost 4% of the population 15 years and older does not know how to write in Maya and Spanish, and the average years of schooling is 9.6 (INEGI, 2015). These figures dramatically drop when we just consider the Indigenous populations, who on average attend school for 5.6 years (SEDESI, 2010) and where, according to Javier Novelo, director of the State's Institute for Adult Education, 35,000 Indigenous people are illiterate, in other words, they do not know how to write or read in Spanish or Maya (Aguilera, 2016).

Overall, Maya has been gradually limited to the family level, and the bilingualism that is generally experienced in the communities is a societal one (Fishman, 1967), where Spanish is used for official and important events, and Maya is relegated to interpersonal encounters (Lizama Quijano, 2008). Even though sociolinguists (e.g., Hinton, 2013) and the CGEIB have highlighted the importance of familial caring environments as last resorts for language strengthening and eventual reversal of language and cultural shift, the CGEIB is still concerned with strengthening the cultural and linguistic relevance and intercultural practices in the basic and higher education schooling system (SEP, 2014c). This challenge has been widely debated, but has not resulted in concrete solutions by the CGEIB (Schmelkes, 2004). On the contrary, it has paid lip service to communities and created so-called solutions that seemed to further entrench the challenges.

Let's put this complex educational picture in perspective at the local level. According to the census in 2010, Tihosuco had almost 5000 inhabitants. Almost 33% of its population had not completed elementary education, and approximately 11% of the population under the age of 15 was illiterate as reported by the census (INEGI, 2010). Currently, Tihosuco has five preschools, four offering Indigenous modality and one offering general modality; two elementary schools offering general modality; one vocational secondary school and one high school (SEP,

2017). Through the ethnographic work done by the THCP, examples of the above-mentioned challenges have been noted (Fieldnotes, May, 2016). For instance, the THCP noticed that (a) teachers use Spanish rather than Maya in the much of their instruction (see also Guerrettaz, 2015); and (b) teachers reported that for the last 5 to 10 years, they have noticed a change in the way their students speak Maya, mentioning that students speak “*chistoso*” (“funny”), “*lo hablan raro*” (“weird”), or “*no saben hablarlo*” (“do not know how to speak it”) (Fieldnotes, May 20, 2013). Also, (c) classroom participation in Maya was limited to the students that already speak Maya, and (d) for some teachers, Maya was very difficult to write and they needed support from books. All in all, the reality in schools as documented by the THCP shows an asymmetry between the intercultural promise the government is trying to promote and the reality of intercultural and bilingual education at the local level.

Language Policy and Planning in the Health Sector: A Feeble Picture

The promising language policies and institutions described in the above sections, although oriented towards the promotion of the languages at the status and acquisition policy planning levels (Cooper, 1989; Kloss, 1968), have inconsistent implementation procedures (cf. Gustafson, Julca Guerrero, & Jiménez, 2016). For example, the INALI, which signed an agreement to train Maya translators and interpreters in order for them to intervene in health, justice, and education matters, has failed to fulfill its promise (SEDESI, 2010, 2011). The INALI’s *National Register for Interpreters and Translators*²⁴ lists only 36 official Maya translators for Quintana Roo. This situation affects the Indigenous population in both legal and health related matters since many speakers cannot receive care because the health clinics do not have interpreters (Flores Farfán, 2010; Murphy, 2013). This leads to a covert language policy where Spanish provides the service, but Maya provides the wait. Unfortunately, these cases are not just true for Quintana Roo, but for the Yucatán Peninsula as a whole.

For example, although not treated as a language question, on January 25, 2014 a Mayan woman died in the community of Peto, Yucatán, because of inadequate medical attention (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, 2014, p. 2). The National Human Rights Commission²⁵ followed the case and treated it as a discriminatory practice based on the woman’s Indigenous origin, which is a valid premise, but omitted the lack of competence on behalf of the medical, administration and nursery staff, all relevant language policy agents in that context. Furthermore, on December 29, 2015, after analyzing 22 cases where 26 women and 22 newborns were affected between 2005 and 2015, the Yucatán’s Human Rights Commission²⁶ issued a human rights recommendation directed to the state’s health ministry. Five of the 26 women and nine of the 22 newborns died because of the inadequate service offered by the ministry. In this case, the state’s human rights commission, when compared to the national one, issued the recommendation based not just on lack of professional competency, but also on

²⁴ *Padrón Nacional de Intérpretes y Traductores en Lenguas Indígenas*

²⁵ *Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos*

²⁶ *Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Yucatán*

*la falta de conocimiento de la lengua maya por parte del personal administrativo, médico y de enfermería, mismo que reconoció que hasta un 95% de las y los usuarios de sus servicios son mayahablantes. Un resultado al que hay que prestar particular atención es el número de centros de salud que brindan servicios a personas mayahablantes, es decir, el 95% de estas instituciones. Sin embargo, el 60% de los centros de salud no cuenta con personal capacitado mayahablante.*²⁷
(Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Yucatán, 2015, p. 17)

This human rights recommendation also states cases where, whenever there were no bilingual health professionals, the translations were done by the housekeeping staff, who most of the time are fluent in Maya, but do not have medical expertise. Even though the General Law for the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous People recognizes that Spanish and Maya have the same status in any education, justice, or health processes (Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2010), these types of laws are, unfortunately, mere tokens that speak to the inclusivity of services, contextual relevance of practices, and linguistic adaptations on behalf of the different governmental institutions and stakeholders (Shohamy, 2006). However, at the implementation level, these laws tell another story.

Another example is what happened to El Cima Atte, an important local rapper and active promoter of Mayan language. Before he died in a Yucatec Hospital, he denounced the lack of overall support for Indigenous communities even though educational and health programs existed at the policy level (Caamal Itzá, 2014). Sousa Santos (2012), talking about Indigenous justice, acknowledges that inclusivity, contextual relevance, or adaptations do not just rely on technical issues, such as laws, institutions, or infrastructure. For him, Indigenous justice is an attitudinal matter that moves beyond laws and languages; it is an active exercise of inclusivity, existence and presence, not lip service (Sousa Santos, 2009).

In this respect, the SEDESI in its 2011 *Special Program for Social Solidarity for the Indigenous Peoples*²⁸ states that it is of public and social interest that the “*sabiduría*” (“wisdom”) of our Indigenous peoples should not be lost by indifference or discrimination; this wisdom should oblige us to respect and rescue our languages, traditions, ways of being and seeing life (SEDESI, 2011, p. 2). However, in its 2015 document, *Mayan Culture and Language Preservation*,²⁹ it states that besides the fact that many people in Indigenous communities do not know how to read or write and therefore cannot communicate with the doctors in the health centers, it is also important to pinpoint how cultural aspects prevent Indigenous peoples from attending the health centers, since many times they prefer to attend the town’s “*curandero*” (“medicine man, curing man”) instead of the doctor (p. 10). Even if the ministry shares a spirit of respect and understanding, the documents contain this type of inconsistencies, which also contradict the laws at the national constitutional level, and reify discourses where Mayas are represented as ignorant and passive recipients with no agency (see also Guerretaz, 2015).

²⁷ the lack of Maya knowledge on behalf of the administrative, medical and nursing staff, who recognized that 95% of the people that uses the services are Maya speakers. Furthermore, 95% of the health institutions in the state attend Maya speakers too. However, 60% of these health centers do not have properly trained Maya speakers in their staff.

²⁸ Programa Especial de Solidaridad Social para los Pueblos Indígenas

²⁹ Preservación de la Cultura y Lengua Maya

With respect to this national constitutional contradiction, Article II guarantees Indigenous peoples free determination and free autonomy, from political representation and internal traditions (i.e., taking advantage of traditional medicine) to the right to have translators or any other mechanism that could promote equal opportunities and eliminate any discriminatory practice (SEGOB, 2017). However, even though this article was reformed more than 15 years ago, the practices of discrimination and unequal opportunities abound, not just in the education, but also in the health and justice sectors, and not just in Quintana Roo, but in Mexico in general.

The relationship between health and language can certainly awaken some panic (e.g., Hinton & Hale, 2001), and, unfortunately, decades of research on language endangerment validate this reaction. For example, previous research (e.g., Nettle & Romaine, 2000) has already shown us that languages are dying, and this is not a metaphor, but a reality where the poorest, most frequently the Indigenous, are served with the poorest health and educational services (Muñoz, 2010). Also, many languages shift or disappear as a consequence of an uncountable number of viruses (e.g., Zika in the Yucatán Peninsula) or epidemics (Mühlhäusler, 2000), and many other times the number of speakers can drop below a certain critical threshold and have no chance of survival (Nettle, 1999). Thus, as Mühlhäusler (2000) has elegantly stated, “the health of a language depends on the health of the speakers—which in turn depends on the health of the natural environment” (p. 332). The implementation, evaluation, and analyses of language policies that consider aspects beyond the formal educational level are thus necessary for minoritized languages, such as Maya, to have better opportunities to thrive in language ecologies where hegemonic languages such as English and Spanish are prevalent. An adjustment to the camera and all its multiple apertures is needed if better and more inclusive pictures are to be taken.

Reflections on the LPP Activities in Quintana Roo

Photographic processing transforms fractions of experience into images that can then be seen on paper or a screen. It is many times the final product, the image, the one that we see and judge, and we often forget that the image is the result of coordinated arrangements of people, light, places, moods, and instruments that come together in a click. A photograph is ultimately more complex than the final image; it is a story of decisions. Investigating some of these decisions in Quintana Roo’s LPP reel was the main aim of this paper.

By analyzing more than 80 laws, legal codes, and websites from the ministries of tourism, education, health, economy, finance, urban development, ecology, rural development, and infrastructure and transportation, it was unsurprising to find that, in terms of language issues, these laws are calques, using almost identical terminology and similar sentence structure. Three topics regularly emerged: (a) laws should protect and not discriminate any person who speaks a language different from Spanish; (b) laws should be translated to Maya; and (c) translators and interpreters should be provided in order for Indigenous people to be processed under the specific law. Overall, the laws and legal codes of the different ministries reflected a discourse of non-discrimination, but not of language promotion or revitalization. However, three laws were particularly distinct from the rest:

- Girls, Boys and Adolescents in the State of Quintana Roo Law (Ley de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2015): This law specifically mentions how children and adolescents should have the right to “*disfrutar libremente de su lengua, cultura, usos, costumbres, prácticas culturales, religión, recursos y formas específicas de organización social y todos los elementos que constituyan su identidad cultural*”³⁰ (art. 52) as well as “*el empleo de su propio idioma y el acceso a los conocimientos generados por su propio grupo étnico*”³¹ (art. 98);
- Quintana Roo Women’s Institute Law (Ley del Instituto Quintanarroense de la Mujer, 2008): This law states that no women should be discriminated against based on their idiom, language or dialect,³² culture, or social condition (art. 3); and
- Quintana Roo State’s Victims Law (Ley de Víctimas del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2014): This law considers that “*cuando las víctimas no se expresen en el idioma castellano o presenten alguna discapacidad, se dispondrá de la presencia de traductores o intérpretes durante todo el proceso*”³³ (art. 12).

These laws are especially interesting in two aspects: (a) they are targeting the needs of three traditionally minoritized populations in Mexico: women, children, and victims overall; and, although not reflected in these three cases, (b) the corpus of these laws is very similar in terms of not drawing a line between languages and idioms (e.g., in the Quintana Roo Women’s Institute Law) or Spanish and Castilian³⁴ (e.g., in the Quintana Roo State’s Victims Law). Furthermore, following Fishman’s (1991) cautionary tale, “there are few, if any culturally innocent physical and demographic arrangements [and how] physical and demographic arrangements have cultural (and, therefore, language-in-culture) consequences” (p. 58); Quintana Roo State’s Victim Law pairs people who do not speak Spanish with people with disabilities, a syntactic arrangement that Fishman would probably not have seen as a neutral move.

An Ecological Perspective on LPP: Does it Always Have to Be Overwhelming?

LPP photographers such as Heath (1972), Haugen (1972), and Hornberger (1988) have invited us to understand language deployments from an ecological orientation. Although it is theoretically desirable, it is a methodological challenge to adopt this orientation and ever to feel that it is enough, that the film reel is over, and that you need another one. To even recognize the different dimensions of the LPP activities is a challenging task. The role of children as official translators (CONAFE, 2014), the blameless move of building roads (CDI, 2016; Daltabuit Godás, 2000), or the role of hospital housekeepers (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Yucatán, 2015) are all part of the stories behind the pictures that traditionally compose the LPP activities.

³⁰ enjoy freely their language, culture, uses, customs, cultural practices, religion, resources and specific ways of organizing, which constitute their cultural identity

³¹ use their own language and access the knowledges generated by their ethnic group

³² *idiom* understood as a language, *language* as a system of symbols, and *dialect* as an Indigenous language

³³ when victims do not express themselves in Castilian language or if they present any difficulty, translators or interpreters should be available during the entire process

³⁴ Castilian is the variety of Spanish spoken in Castilla, Spain.

Hult (2010) reminds us that “studying a social system ecologically, though, does not necessarily imply that one must examine every nook and cranny” (p. 20), but to understand that LPP is a social, ergo dynamic and not bounded, process. To address this dynamic process, Hornberger and Johnson (2007) have proposed the ethnography of language policy and planning as a methodological and theoretical response that could illuminate the ecologies of LPP activities. For Johnson (2009), “the goal of the ethnography of language policy is to re-conceptualize language policy as an interconnected process generated and negotiated through policy texts and discourse” (p. 156), an underlying intention throughout this paper. In this sense, the very useful LPP onion metaphor put forward by Ricento and Hornberger (1996), ethnographically sliced by Hornberger and Johnson (2007), and stirred by García and Menken (2010) could be subtly pluralized, and understood as onions with connected layers that are sliced, stirred and cooked (see Figure 2).

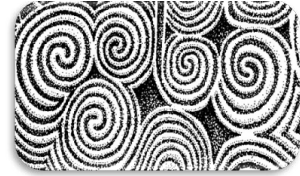


Figure 2. Fractal onions.³⁵

Following this ethnographic fractal approach to understanding how Maya and Spanish as well as other languages co-exist and affect each other in Quintana Roo might provide new paths in the revitalization of Maya and other Indigenous languages that are in even more disadvantageous situations in the region. Moreover, putting forward the idea of slicing many onions at the same time is not just a strategy for deconstructing the LPP onion;³⁶ it is a deliberate effort to offer alternatives for ethnographers of education to avoid becoming blinded by the lamp-posts of formal education as the only place where LPP activities happen (Karam, 1974; Romaine, 2007). The fractal LPP onions are a meta-metaphor of the multiple cameras with multiple apertures. Overall these fractional LPP onions are reminders that people constantly engage in LPP activities, mostly in unorganized spaces, and mostly in parallel times (Bourgois, 1996). It is then the task and obligation of the ethnographer of LPP to investigate the complex dispositions and dimensions in which languages are deployed in society, their role, as well as the ways in which the LPP photographs taken by the researchers can tell the stories behind the pictures, bring the blurred and missing people to the main frame, and redistribute the lighting in more just ways.

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³⁵ Adapted from “Fig. 5: Spiral Designs at New Grange, Ireland,” in *The Pagan Origin of Fairs* (1932), by T.F.G. Dexter. Republished by M. Behrend, 2010 (http://www.cantab.net/users/michael.behrend/repubs/dexter_pof/images/fig_05.png).

³⁶ See McCarty (2011) for a thorough reflection on the role of the onion metaphor as a seed, sprout, and root of other metaphors and forward thinking in LPP. The parallel pluralization or fractal onions that I propose is another metaphor (in a field that is full of them) and tool to understand the complexity of LPP processes that Hornberger (2008) and Johnson (2015), amongst others, have pointed out.

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