

Taller 2. Estudios de casos de revitalización y estandarización lingüística.  
**The Role of Literacy in Language Revitalisation”**

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In this paper, ongoing efforts in favor of language revitalisation for Tlahuica (Ocuilteco/Atzinca)<sup>1</sup>, an Otopamean language spoken by few speakers (less than 500, according to the 2000 census) in Central Mexico, are described. An alphabet and orthography designed within the last decade are currently being evaluated by members of the community with varying degrees of proficiency in the native language. The role of literacy within the language revitalisation process is discussed.

### **Introduction**

The first years I studied Tlahuica it didn't occur to me that I could do anything to help stop language displacement. Later I believed I needed to be asked explicitly by the community to do something. Finally, Elpidia Reynoso, a bilingual teacher and friend from San Juan Atzingo, and I decided to design a five day workshop on language and culture to be held during the summer vacation in July 1998, to promote awareness. On several occasions we got together to decide what topics, activities and materials we would work with. The general topics were Family, Community, Natural Environment, Traditions and Identity.

Our first step was to evaluate the needs of the language community. In the case of Pjiekakjo, where everything needed to be done, we decided oral language use needed to be promoted. But we also believed that native literacy was an important step.

The role of literacy in language revitalisation was a concern when we began planning revitalisation workshops for Tlahuica, spoken south of Mexico City, near the Lagunas de Zempoala and Chalma, in the state of Mexico. As a teacher, Elpidia emphasised the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ocuilteco* is a Nahuatl name given to the language and its speakers by the Aztecs because of its close geographical location to Ocuilan, the municipal government's headquarters. Speakers identify themselves as being from San Juan Atzingo or one of the other three communities where this Otopamean language is spoken and reject *Ocuilteco* as an imposed name having nothing to do with them. Jacques Soustelle called the language *Atzinca* because of its location and because its closest linguistic relative is *Matlatzinca*. In the 1970s, members of the group began to participate in national Indian events and started calling themselves *Tlahuica*, the name of a Nahuatl-speaking group from the nearby state of Morelos, with whom they historically have had commercial and social contact. *Pjiekakjo*, loosely meaning "our speech, what we speak", is being used more recently to avoid the confusion caused by the name Tlahuica. "Ocuilteco" cannot be banished completely because all previous historical and linguistic references to this language and its speakers use this name. *Tlahuica* is the preferred name with the widest use.

In a recent article, B'alam Mateo-Toledo (2003: 151-153) says, "Mayas in Guatemala have established official names and spellings for their languages. While the decision to use these names by academics is a matter of personal choice, ...such decisions have political effects and an impact on issues of social and linguistic legitimacy in minority communities...To conclude, (he)...points out that the use of the official names for languages fall within a more general question about how academics and organisations reshape and support identities and ideologies in favor of or against minority communities, even when their research is not explicitly designed for this purposes." His final words are, "Indeed, as a native speaker of one of these languages, I find it disrespectful that some scholars and organisations do not observe the way we define ourselves and how we wish to name our languages."

importance of designing an alphabet and learning to write the language. As a linguist, my concern was working toward communicative competence and spoken language that would be orally transmitted from generation to generation.. The importance of literacy in language revitalisation situations is still a matter of debate in my mind.

### **Background**

Until recently, Tlahuica was an unwritten language. Currently there is a vocabulary (Reynoso, E., 1998, 2002), a couple of stories (González, 2001, Reynoso, G., 1997), and some linguistic analysis (Muntzel) published. Children are no longer learning to speak the language and the only speakers are middle-aged or older. Many of the middle-aged speakers are semi-speakers; lacking control of tone, vowel pronunciation and some grammatical structures, and use a reduced vocabulary. Some young adults have a passive knowledge of the language but do not speak it and are not potentially a generation that will transmit the traditional language of the community. Spanish is now the main language spoken in all domains. Originally a ritual speech, *tlahtol* (from Nahuatl) was widespread for many important occasions. It is also being displaced, although last year a young man apprenticed himself to a *tlatolero* with the purpose of learning to “*tlahtolear*.”

### **Tlahuica alphabet and Vocabulary (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions)**

Elpida Reynoso began by writing lists of words according to her own interpretation of how the language should be written. I use the International Phonetic Alphabet, whose symbols are less effective for “teaching literacy” than an orthography based on the system used for Spanish, but allows greater detail in describing the sound system. During the workshops, when people wanted to know how to write we would tell them not to worry, to write whatever they thought the letter should be for each sound. The important thing is that they understand what they have written, and that learning to write is a process.

Elpidia teaches the alphabet and orthography that she designed based on the alphabet proposed by the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena* (General Direction of Indian Education) in 1982, for the Tlahuica Vocabulary (1998) consisting of 1500. words. The second edition of the Vocabulary (2002) was evaluated and refined by a small group of teachers and speakers of differing proficiencies in Tlahuica. Several modifications were made, as well as including a greater number of vocabulary items (2200). The long-term goal is a much larger dictionary.

### **Revitalisation efforts on behalf of tlahuica: Workshops**

Unfortunately, due to other commitments we were unable to dedicate full-time to these efforts so we hoped to involve the community in their own language revitalisation programs, by making it clear that language loss is not inevitable and something can be done. The following workshops were held:

*The Language and Culture workshop*, held for children and adults (July 20-24, 1998)  
Activities were organised around five themes:

1. the FAMILY
2. the COMMUNITY

3. the NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
4. CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS
5. ETHNIC IDENTITY

Saturday Workshops for children (October 10 –December 13, 1998) requested by the Colegio de Lenguas y Literatura Indígena and CEPIPIEM.

Activities during these sessions were:

- Greetings, Questions and Dialogues,
- Day of the Dead customs and specialized vocabulary,
- Ritual speech (Tlatol) and the Day of the Dead altar,
- Contest/competition related to the community's Natural Environment,
- Games related to Body Parts and Demands (Imperative requests) using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method,
- playing "Break the Piñata" (Romper la Piñata, in Pjiekakjo),
- presentation of a play with puppets based on the Pjiekakjo story "La Sirena",
- the organization and presentation of a special program for the children's parents at the end of the workshop.

The Pjiekakjo Language and Song workshop (July 19-24, 1999) held at the Primary school in San Juan Atzingo., during summer vacation.

The purpose of this workshop was to create more opportunities for verbal language practice through song, an activity that all the children can participate in at the same time. Most of the songs were translated by Elpida from Spanish to Pjiekakjo: The songs the children learned were the National Anthem, Jondobikilikj, La Rueda de San Miguel, la Canción Mixteca, La Macarena, etc.

The Linguistic Awareness workshop (September 18-22, 2000)

This was a workshop carried out at the secondary school Escuela Secundaria Agropecuaria in San Juan Atzingo, for students and teachers. The purpose was to dispel myths about indigenous languages, particularly Tlahuica, by learning about linguistic structure and diversity. The topics were dealt with through activities and exercises:

- Monday: Mexican Indian Languages  
Indian languages of the state of Mexico
- Tuesday: Analysis of the sound system of any language (International Phonetics Alphabet (IPA), phonetics and phonology), the phonetics and phonological system of Pjiekakjo.
- Wednesday: Viewing and discussion of two films: Talking with Fish and Birds: The Zapara of the Ecuadoran Amazon (1999) , El Tlacuache/ Tlawakwatsin

The purpose was to see that language loss is occurring all over the world (e.g. Ecuador) and to see an indigenous language used in an animated culturally-relevant video (El Tlacuache).

Thursday and Friday:

Morphology and Syntax of any language ( through analysis of different languages), and  
Morphology, syntax and grammar of Pjiekakjo (Tlahuica/ Ocuilteco) through examples and exercises using- the number system, place-names, the pronominal system, nominal classification, etc.)

Literacy workshop held by Elpidia Reynoso (five weeks, summer 2003)

One-day Place-names workshop held at the elementary school (March, 2004)

Students of the afternoon session of the elementary school in San Juan Atzingo participated in this workshop. They divided into groups according to the barrios where they live and drew the streets, houses and main features of their neighborhood on large sheets of paper. They were told to ask their parents and elders the Tlahuica names of streets, hills and mountains, rivers and streams, even flora and fauna found in different parts of the town and region. They were encouraged to ask: What happened here? What is important about this place? As a way to share an historical memory of the cultural, linguistic and geographical region that they live in and where the traditional ethnic group is located.

All of the workshops had a written component, like it or not. In the first workshop, language was used to learn about culture and environment and to promote positive attitudes toward Tlahuica. The children wrote down vocabulary and conversations so they could practice and remember them. The adults did the same with the conversations they invented, with verb conjugations that they insisted on learning (they were not included in our original plan), and naming and mapping place-names in the community.

We know that to learn to speak and acquire language the best way is through immersion: speaking all the time and basically no writing. But people wanted to write down what they were learning and to learn to write in Tlahuica.

### **Work being done at this time and future plans**

Weekly (or twice weekly) workshops with varying attendance are being held for children in three of the four communities where the language is spoken, supported by the Colegio de Lenguas y Literatura Indígena del Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura (College of languages and Indigenous Literature of the Mexican Institute of Culture) and the Consejo Estatal para el Desarrollo Integral de los Pueblos Indígenas del Estado de México (CEDIPIEM, State Council for the Integral Development of the Indian Peoples of the state of Mexico) Plans for a workshop in the Colonia Doctor Gustavo Baz , the fourth community, are underway.

Elpidia Reynoso is finishing up el Libro de Aproximación a la Lectura y Escritura en lengua Tlahuica, a Teacher's guide (Guía para la Educadora) and Student manual for Learning to Read and Write at the three pre-school levels, which is to be published for the next school year by the Secretaría de Educación Pública's (SEP, Secretary of Public Education) series of free textbooks. She worked with a group of teachers from the SEP on guidelines and content, used a computer program from the DGEI (Dirección General de Educación Indígena, General Direction of Indigenous Education) with the vowel graphemes (barred vowels like the barred **i**) needed for writing Tlahuica. Each level presents material and contains exercises (first year contains 30 pages; second year, 45 pages, third year, 60 pages) building on each section by increasing the difficulty of the information and activities presented. There are also Appendixes with additional materials for all three levels. Some of the activities are: Greetings, Lottery, Domino, Games, Colors, etcetera.

Currently, I'm doing linguistic analysis of a syntax questionnaire and collecting toponyms, photographing and mapping the area in and around San Juan Atzingo. I would like to give a workshop on Indigenous literature, (one for students and for teacher training) and organise a community mapping and naming project on Pjiekakjo Placenames and the natural environment.

The process described here started with an idea and with absolutely no financial support. Present-day workshops continue with very little or no support for the individuals who give them. So you don't need lots of money to start language revitalisation. You don't need an official program with lots of participants either. To get started you just need some interested and willing individuals.

By no means can the ongoing Tlahuica experience be called a huge success but it has been positive in several aspects: isolated individual efforts have led to greater interest by community members and outside governmental and educational agencies and institutions. The community has become aware of the imminent loss of their language and many traditional cultural values related to language use. Along with the awareness is also the awareness that something can be done and individuals have power to contribute to the process.

The beginning of work toward Tlahuica literacy in the form of Elpidia's Tlahuica vocabulary proves that the language can be written down, and in response to community demand and with support from CEDUPIEM, she gave a month long literacy workshop in San Juan Atzingo in 2003. The different workshops have shown that Tlahuica is a complex important language like any other, not just an "Indian dialect".

*What is needed for Tlahuica language revitalisation?*

The two most difficult hurdles in this case are language attitudes (in many cases, apathy or disinterest) and actual language use in communicative contexts. The children can learn vocabulary, greetings and other daily formulas but to become speakers able to carry on conversations and to transmit language, they need many opportunities to speak

and communicate to cross the line into the area of language/mind creativity- when the language of the speaker begins to take on a life of its own- to be viable, to develop and grow.

Everyone should get involved. *Everyone is a specialist* of some kind or another and all can “make the road by walking”, as Myles Horton and Paulo Freire<sup>2</sup> (1990) described their work in education and social change in the United States and Brazil. Efforts that have the greatest chance for success are based on a group approach by motivating the community to participate.

### **The relationship of written and oral language to each other**

Written and oral language should reinforce each other. It is true, a revitalisation program focused on literacy without a strong verbal component may even contribute to language shift. by ignoring the fundamental importance of oral transmission to the next generation of speakers. Ideally written materials should have a taped or videotaped version and a fluent speaker available to guide learning and verbal interaction in the native tongue. Ideally teachers should be fluent speakers but often semi-speakers or non-speakers are the first ones motivated to take action in language revitalisation situations. So whenever possible, teacher training in language and good communicative teaching methods should be a component of a revitalisation project..

### **Literacy as social practice and acts of creation**

Literacy should be a social practice and the beginning of acts of creation for the individual and the group. (For instance, being able to read and write is required to vote and gain political power.) Literacy as social practice means building on oral and written language’s domains of use, and creating new ones, related to culture and group identity. Who we are is not static, we constantly recreate ourselves through our language and our acts.

Literacy itself is not the answer, it is a strong symbol of prestige and can contribute to changing attitudes toward an endangered language. It can support the language maintenance or revitalisation process: the results of which will depend on each particular group’s history, present-day situation, identity, and the role that literacy plays or will play.

Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley ( 1998:32-37), believe “The role of literacy in language endangerment is one of the more controversial issues today. On the one hand, many linguists see literacy as a crucial step in ensuring a particular language’s continued use ...The strong view argues that literacy is essential to nationalism (Gellner 1983) and

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<sup>2</sup> I’d like to thank Clay Slate, an inspirational language and culture activist, for recommending *We Make the Road by Walking, Conversations on Education and Social Change* , by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

language survival in the modern world. On the other hand, others (e.g. Mülhäusler 1990) argue that literacy actually facilitates language loss.

David Crystal (2000:130) considers written language to be one of six significant factors/prerequisites for progress towards the goal of language being used in the home and neighborhood as a tool of intergenerational communication:

1. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community.
2. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their wealth relative to the dominant community.
3. An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community
4. An endangered language will progress if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system
5. An endangered language will progress if its speakers can write their language down
6. An endangered language will progress if its speakers can make use of electronic technology

(Crystal 2000:130-141)

Grenoble and Whaley argue that while literacy can be expected to have a certain effect at a macro-level, its effect on language vitality is primarily the result of micro-variables, which are in turn assessable only within the larger macro-situation. (see the chart below)

Literacy involves more than simply whether or not a community has access to and utilises a written form of language. Rather, literacy occurs in a social context and is best defined as a set of socially organised practices. This may be obscured by the fact that in many cases literacy is implemented at a macro-level, with a federal or regional government determining the nature of language-planning programs, and allocating financial resources for education and publishing materials in the indigenous language.

They present several examples: the role of literacy in Nigeria, in CELIAC, Oaxaca, Mexico, and in an Alaskan village, to show that the interplay between literacy and language viability is a rather complex matter. They discuss some key issues relating to the impact of literacy on endangered languages.

### **Literacy in Nigeria**

Nigeria exemplifies the need to define different interpretations of literacy at different geographic levels (Okedara and Okedara,1992). Nigeria has approximately 413 languages; 198 of these have no existing orthography. Only 4.5 percent of known Nigerian languages are official literacy languages, taught in the schools ... English remains the lingua franca for the entire country. Since literacy in these languages is sufficient for participating in education, politics, and regional economics, there exists little practical incentive for the development of literacy using the languages of smaller communities. (Grenoble and Whaley 1998:32-33).

This is similar to the Mexican situation where Spanish is the lingua franca in a multilingual country with more than 62 indigenous languages.

### **CELIAC, Oaxaca, Mexico**

Another example is a literacy project in Oaxaca, Mexico, called CELIAC. According to Bernard (1992), the basis of CELIAC's (Centro Editorial en Lenguas Indígenas, AC, or Indian Language Publishing Center) program, is using a group's knowledge of the non-indigenous language (Spanish) in order to hasten acquisition of literacy in the native language. As of 1992, a total of 52 people had been trained in 12 different Mexican languages. Working largely through their existing knowledge of Spanish and using computers to create the necessary characters, bilingual trainees were able to quickly implement writing systems for their own indigenous languages. The result has been the relatively rapid and inexpensive production of texts and dictionaries in such languages as Mixe, Zapotec, and Chinantec.

In this case, literacy in a regional or national language has been instrumental to developing literacy in minority languages. To determine whether national language literacy as a bridge is favorable to maintenance of traditional languages or not, the full set of consequences must be measured on a case-by-case basis. With regard to literacy Grenoble and Whaley (1998:33) believe "Clearly, though, the differing impacts of literacy on a society stem from its social functions within the individual community, or what is referred to as its *social meaning*."

They discuss the relationship of literacy to language endangerment in the following quotes:

"The majority of endangered languages come from oral cultures, where converting the language to a written form poses certain consequences for the continued use of these languages. It is often argued that any change from an oral to a literate society creates major changes in that society. ... At the same time, communities with long-standing written traditions may be in a stronger position to hold on to a language despite reduced numbers of speakers, and certainly are in a stronger position for revitalising a language which may in part need to be reconstructed on the basis of written records.

"At the level of macro-variables, the attitude towards multilingualism, multiliteracy, and multiculturalism which is held by a regionally dominant culture is crucial for minority-language survival. Strong pressures to assimilate to the majority culture may be difficult for minority communities to oppose, especially when their own children aspire to conform to the majority norm. Moreover, majority cultures tend to control financial resources needed for mass publication of materials, and tend to control policy issues, such as determining the language of education, the ratification and enforcement of laws which permit or restrict access to the indigenous language, and often control access to the press. For these reasons, it is not just the social meaning of literacy within a speech community which determines its success or failure, but external attitudes as well.

"Finally, the selection of the specific dialect or form of the language which will serve as the basis of the literary language may doom the literary language to obsolescence if the selected dialect is one which the majority of speakers reject for linguistic or social



reasons. The choice of orthography is also relevant to whether literacy in one's native tongue serves as a boon to literacy in another language. If the two scripts are similar in design, for instance both being based on the Latin alphabet and employing many of the same sound-grapheme correspondences, then literacy in one script should greatly facilitate literacy in the second ..

“The question of whether literacy in the native language fosters literacy in the majority language is crucial. There is ample evidence that literacy in one's native language does in fact facilitate the acquisition of literacy in a second, non-native language (Okedara and Okedara 1992:93). The extent to which biliteracy facilitates a shift toward the majority language and culture and away from the indigenous one stems from the role of literacy in the individual community.” (Grenoble and Whaley 1998:34-35)

There is an intricate association between literacy and the maintenance or loss of an endangered language. Grenoble and Whaley highlight the necessity of incorporating issues of literacy into a typological model of endangerment situations. Literacy is thus understood to be a bundle of interrelated factors, which include at least the following features, given in table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Literacy variables

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**MACRO-VARIABLES**

Education	Language(s) of instruction, level of multilingualism in school, etc.
Language planning	Nature of goals, input from native community, role of majority culture, financial resources available from majority culture, etc.
Regional attitudes towards multi-lingualism, multiliteracy, multiculturalism	
Regional languages and Orthographies	Relation to minority languages, degree of prestige
Types of readily available Printed materials	Religious, pedagogical, instruction manuals, political, literature, etc.

**MICRO-VARIABLES**

Role of literacy in community	Education, religion, laws, literature, histories, personal records and correspondence, public records, technical diagrams and instructions, etc.
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Acquisition of literacy	Motivation, learning environment, teachers, pedagogical methods and materials, nature of sessions, numbers of participants, etc.
Standardization issues	Which dialect is basis for literary language, prestige, Intelligibility, learnability, orthography
Nature of indigenous community	History, language density, levels of multilingualism, multiliteracy, education, prestige factors, etc.

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Grenoble and Whaley, editores (1998:36)

They consider that for cases where a written form of native language has been implemented, the impact of any literacy program in terms of fostering or hindering depends primarily upon three micro-variables, with the understanding that there is overlap among these categories as well as others in table 3.2. The three micro-variables are:

- (1) issues of standardisation, including the relative compatibility of the new literary dialect with the speech form of any given community, as well as orthographic issues;
- (2) the financial resources available to produce written materials in the indigenous language; and
- (3) the role of literacy in a given community.

There is also a direct correlation between the language of education and the kinds of pedagogical materials available, or between the social functions of literacy and language prestige.

Grenoble and Whaley (1998:38) make an important point regarding the priority of economically based variables over most others. Over and over again, one finds the relinquishing of a native tongue is tied in part to the belief that success in a non-native language is crucial to economic advantage ..

Language planning and literacy decisions are often developed with economic concerns at the forefront...The lack of prestige assigned to a great many minority groups and the corresponding prestige tied to larger groups is frequently grounded in relative economic prosperity. Patterns of in- and out- migration are often a function of economic concerns. Taken together, such issues suggest that for many cultures, the reality of current economic pressures has the potential to override all other variables.

### **Conclusions**

Speakers of many local languages in the world are evaluating the need to design an alphabet, orthography and written materials. With the predominate use of official languages, some speakers feel the need to take steps to revitalise their languages by protecting the communicative spaces in which they are used and by creating new functions,

and other members of local communities are letting the process of language shift take its course.

The question of pursuing literacy is an important question that may determine the future of languages and cultures. By examining experiences in different parts of the world (e.g. Ostler and Rudes, 2000) we have discovered that the answer is not the same for all communities, nor is the process of developing literacy in different local languages the same.

To begin with, in Mexico, for some communities the process implies literacy in the native tongue, and in other communities where children are learning to read and in write in Spanish first, literacy in the traditional language is second language literacy, returning to the original language and creating new spaces for its use.

There are many questions to be answered. For example, if the language is traditionally oral and has no written materials, what kind of uses will the orthography be put to?: To write textbooks, grammars, dictionaries or vocabularies, guides for community activities, literature like poetry or stories, to write letters, legal or civil documents, local newspapers. For practical or prestige purposes, or both?

The truth is that to have an alphabet or books in an endangered language does not guarantee its survival. It may complement or support verbal language. Alphabet and orthographic design, and the goal of literacy, should probably be part of a larger community cultural and linguistic project that promotes all kinds of culturally relevant language use in context.

Since each language (and its speakers) are found in different types of situations, any decision or actions should be preceded by an evaluation, such as that of Ash, Fermino and Hale (2001:20) for Lardil of Australia, Tuahka (Sumu) of Nicaragua, Wampanoag (Massachusetts) of southern New England, United States, and Irish of Belfast, Ireland, which examines: 1) the present condition of the language; 2) projects initiated: their history, results, and prospects; 3) resources available to the community; 4) socio-political and economic factors bearing on the effectiveness of the projects; and 5) decisions and agreements which require discussion in the community. There may be other aspects as well depending on the language.

### **Final remarks**

The role of literacy is usually a supporting role in language revitalisation efforts and will depend on each particular group; its history, sociocultural context, the relationship of oral and written language to group identity as well as the social function that literacy fulfills for the speakers in their everyday life. According to Collins and Blot (2003:2), "Although literacy often seems essential to our lives, many aspects of what makes us human-language, intellect, the capacity for social living, technical resourcefulness- do not rely on literate practices..."

If the Tlahuicas (Ocuiltecos) do pursue literacy in the traditional language as part of a language and cultural revitalisation program it will entail creating spaces and habits for literacy as a communicative practice, a difficult task for a community that no longer uses

the traditional language on a daily basis. Literacy practices would have to bring social and economic benefits and meaning to the lives of individuals who begin to write in the traditional language. The first step is literacy becoming “integral to the sense of self (Collins and Blot 2003:xviii) and eventually becoming the means for expressing a collective voice.(see Rockwell, forthcoming).

The revitalisation process here requires a conscious re-creation of a new dynamic identity that incorporates what the community considers to be desirable aspects of traditional culture alongside bilingual (or multilingual) ways of talking and writing about aspects of current lifestyles and experiences.

Although Doña Naty, of San Juan Atzingo, says that even if she could read and write, she doesn't have time (in Tlahuica or Spanish). Her day is work from morn to night, and when she does have a moment she would prefer to sit and talk, share a little “pulque” with a neighbor.

To conclude, I'd like to quote Leanne Hinton (2001:241) from the Green Book of Language Revitalisation in Practice:

#### **“Writing may slow and impoverish Language Learning**

“Many people believe that a writing system must be developed before language teaching can occur, and teaching would be through the written word. But one does not learn to speak a language by reading and writing; one learns by hearing and speaking. It is sadly typical for language classes in communities to consist of teaching written vocabulary, with the primary spoken language of instruction being English...If people are not already literate in their language, learning how to use the writing system takes further time away from oral language learning; and if there is not yet a writing system for the language, still more time and energy is taken up with its development...The main point here is that whether or not a community wants to have and use a writing system, **the community should never decide that documentation and language teaching should wait** until after the development and teaching of literacy. (emphasis mine)

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