



## EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND MINORITY LANGUAGES

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Leanne Hinton (2001:3) begins the introductory overview of *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* by saying that "In a world of around 250 nations, there are over 6000 languages. This means that there are very few languages with a country of their own. A language that is not a language of government, nor a language of education, nor a language of wider communication is a language whose very existence is threatened in the modern world." That means that the majority of the world's languages are at risk and facing that risk is not just the concern of the speakers of minority languages.

As we look around us at presentday and past historical events we see that language loss is closely related to inequalities and injustices in the access to and distribution of resources; generally being limited to those who are in power. What can be done to change this and to protect minority languages?

Working toward creating equal access to goods and resources is usually not part of the linguist's job but I do believe we need to look for ways to change the dominant ideology. Important work is being done and needs to be done within minority language communities but language and culture loss also needs to be dealt with from the outside.

I don't know if it is animal (including humans) instinct to distrust that which is different from oneself or a cultural/biological mechanism to protect one's group and territory, including access to food sources. Throughout history human groups have conquered and dominated minority groups around them and have traveled far from their homelands to take over and control other lands and human groups. The ideology that supports the attitudes and actions required are learned in the home, in the schools and through political and religious rhetoric. This ideology creates a worldview that allows and justifies control of resources and technology by a particular group.

In the modern world I would like to think we are now civilized enough to create an ideology that eliminates the fear of the "other" and replaces it with curiosity and respect. Also, an ideology that recognizes that control in the hands of a few will lead to homogenization and a world in which scarcity is the norm. Instead of fighting over what is left, we need to search for solutions.

It sounds very idealistic and what does it have to do with protecting minority languages? We know that a minority language can have an alphabet and written materials, bilingual education or programs that favor its use, but will not be transmitted if people do not speak it on a daily basis. The process of language loss in many places in the world began with language contact and an ideology that promoted the use of the language of the dominant group, sometimes in subtle ways

(like the fact that those in control speak a particular language) or explicitly like in the prohibited use of minority languages in the schools. So we end up with a group in power that thinks their culture and language is superior and minority groups who are taught to think that their languages and cultures are not capable of coexisting as "world languages", do not have prestige, or are worthless. A dangerous pattern emerges that catches like wildfire. No one or few people in minority language communities say that it is possible to be bilingual or bicultural -or if they do- it is hard to believe after centuries of an ideology that says otherwise. It is time to overcome the elitist ideology and transform the mindset of speakers of majority and minority languages alike. That means recognizing the fallacy of dichotomies like "primitive-non-primitive" or all the myths related to language structure, such as "Spanish and English are languages,



Native tongues are dialects", "Indian languages don't have grammar", "Some languages are better than others", etc..

As linguists we know that language does reflect certain aspects of culture but that cultural groups that are agriculturalist or live in tropical rain forests may speak languages with very "complicated" linguistic structures, whereas often "first world" languages may manifest less complexity. Certain components of the same language may be more complex than others; for example, the phonology versus the morphology or syntax. And that languages are always changing and can be studied by comparing the language of different geographical or social groups, or the same dialect of a language at different moments in time. The type of language structure has nothing to do with the countries' national debt or yearly income.

Knowledge and awareness about language and culture should be part of our basic education. How do we do that? There are materials and programs like Linguistic Olympics, an entertaining and educational website for secondary school students and teachers designed by Thomas E. Payne of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon, based on a regular part of education in Russia since 1965, when over 450 students participated in the Moscow Linguistic Olympics and 350 in the St. Petersburg Olympics. These fun exercises "expose students to the tremendous variety, complexity and beauty of the world's languages" and "combine analytic reasoning and cultural awareness... In order to solve the puzzles, the student must apply hypothesis generation, and analytic reasoning common to all kinds of intellectual tasks, as well as ordinary common sense. All puzzles are self-sufficient, i.e., one need not have special language ability or knowledge to solve the puzzles." (Linguistic Olympics, 2000:1-2). Another fun website is Sounds of the World's Animals (for example, for rooster sounds in different languages, see <http://www.georgetown.edu/cball/animals/rooster.html>).

Two examples of Linguistic Olympics (Payne 2000) printed off the website are:

#### Yaqui!

Yaqui (also known as Yoreme) is an American Indian language currently spoken by about 16,400 people in Northern Mexico and southern Arizona. It is a member of the Uto-Aztecan language family. This is one of the geographically most widespread language families in the Americas, extending from El Salvador (Pipil) to the state of Oregon (Northern Paiute) and from Southern California (Cahuilla, Luiseño and others) to Colorado (Ute). There are several other varieties of Nahuatl, another Uto-Aztecan language, spoken in Mexico today. This is the language of descendants of the famed Aztec empire.

The following are eight emphatic sentences in the Yaqui language. Your task is to match the correct English translations, given below in random order, to each Yaqui sentence. (Adapted from Farmer and Demers 1996:135).

English translations (in random order):

1. Inepo siika. A. You helped me.
2. Empo nee aniak. B. You danced.
3. Inepo apo'ik aniak. C. I saw you.
4. Inepo apo'ik vichak. D. I saw him.
5. Inepo enchi vichak. E. I helped you.
6. Inepo enchi aniak. F. I helped him.
7. Empo ye'ek. G. He saw you.
8. Aapo enchi vichak H. I left.

#### Shugnan

Shugnan, also known as Shugni, is an Indo-Iranian language spoken in Tajikistan and Afganistan. The Indo-Iranian languages are part of the Indo-European family, so Shugnan is distantly related to English. There are approximately 40,000 speakers altogether. Here are some phrases in Shugnan and their translations into English:

- kuzaa hats - jar of water
- chalak zimmadj - bucket of dirt
- tambal byuyun - beard of a lazybones



- biig dyuyunaa - pot of corn
- kuzaa gjev - lid of a jar
- beechoraa zimaadj -dirt of a beggar

Now, translate the following into Shughnan:

- bucket of water
- corn of a beggar
- jar of a lazybones

I have used these exercises in Linguistics classes as a warm-up or as a break, as well as in a workshop I call Taller de Conciencia Lingüística. The purpose of the workshop, which has been given to Otomí speakers/teachers in San Bartolo Tutotepec, Hidalgo, Mexico; students and teachers of the Atzinca (known as Ocuilteco, Tlahuica or Pjiekakjo) community of San Juan Atzingo, state of Mexico, and Spanish speaking secondary students in Mexico City, is to increase awareness about languages and their structures. One of the characteristics of human language is the ability to acquire and speak it without conscious effort. Participants in the workshop learn to analyze phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of different languages, especially their own and the languages spoken in their community and geographical region. Problems from different sources are adapted so they can be solved easily or quickly depending on the time of the workshop (from 2 hours to 3-5 days). A native speaker as a helper, or the students themselves can provide the linguistic data to be analyzed.

What are the consequences of learning about what the different languages of the world have in common? Or how they differ? Or the fact that language often reflects the culture of their speakers but is not determined by it. Our language will have words for our physical surroundings and the kinds of work we do; but having numeral classifiers doesn't mean we have a greater number of bankers in our midst than speakers of a language that doesn't have numeral classifiers.

When speakers of indigenous languages learn about the structure of their languages and compare them to the structures of languages like English, Spanish, German or French it is empowering because it may be the first time they realize that all languages have sound systems, morphological composition, a lexicon, syntactic order, and semantics. No one can ever tell them again that they speak dialects instead of languages. For example, in a Taller de Conciencia Lingüística, by comparing Otomí (Hñahñu), English and Spanish phonological systems, Otomí speakers discovered their language has more in common with the English vowel system - a "prestige" language- than with Spanish which has fewer and none of the high central vowels which both Otomí and English have. So by comparing linguistic diversity they realize that myths about language are not true and sociocultural and economic development is not related to the language being spoken.

When members of the majority group analyze different language structures and discover that indigenous languages are as complex or more so than the official or standard languages of their countries, and are able to express any idea or concept that can be expressed in any other language, it is an important moment of awareness. They learn to respect linguistic diversity or at the very least, one argument used to support the superiority of one group over another is eliminated.

This knowledge contributes to the transformation of an ideology that favors and supports the superiority of certain languages and cultural groups.

Educational philosophy should promote consciousness and respect for ethnic diversity, cultural differences, different beliefs and customs, and mutual respect between peoples.

How can we create an educational philosophy that protects and promotes minority languages as well as respect for ethnic and cultural diversity?

First, by making the study of linguistic diversity a part of basic education. Secondly, by teaching different oral traditions and indigenous literatures; including modern literary works created by native poets and novelists or dramatists.

Oral and written literatures express our beliefs, our values, and our traditions. Folk tales from all over the world share similar concerns and characteristics. By studying different genres in different languages we learn about how all people share the same concerns: with their families, the cycle of life-birth, maturity, marriage, children, old age and death, working to survive and celebrating important moments, playing, resting and praying. Often for each moment there is a linguistic and cultural genre related to a daily, monthly or yearly ritual. There are proverbs, jokes, poetry, fables, myths, legends, stories, narrations, and many other types of oral and written tradition in all kinds of societies. When we study them we connect in a very basic way with people all around the world. We learn to relate and empathize with them. They are not so very different from us. We learn to respect them, their languages and their cultures. The speakers of minority languages learn to respect themselves, their languages and their cultures.

¿So how are these similarities and differences reflected in indigenous literatures around the world?

We can present function and content, and we can study literary and linguistic form. There is not enough time to deal with any one of these approaches in any more than a superficial way. Function and content can be dealt with by using an ethnography of communication approach in which oral and written traditions are related to their context and function within a particular culture and society. Although there may be many examples of literary and linguistic analyses of indigenous literatures, I can recommend Nigel Fabb's (1997) *Linguistics and Literature*, and Adolfo Constenla Umaña's (1996) *Poesía tradicional indígena costarricense* as examples of what can be done. And nothing can take the place of interactive teaching methods and techniques such as those presented in Jeffries (1992) such as focussing on the traits of specific characters, discussing the main idea as it relates the lives of the students, visualizing and mapping the setting or actions of a story, comparing poems or stories, doing art projects or playing games, or relating the content to other subjects like science or history.

To get an idea of what we are talking about, I'd like to present several examples of oral or written tradition. For starters, riddles in Nahuatl:

Adivinanzas (riddles) in Nahuatl

Often riddles are fun and reflect the environment or culture of origin. They can be dramatized or drawn as an art project. Students can also invent their own riddles. The following riddles are from the state of Guerrero, near Iguala, by the Mezcala River, found in *Se tosaasaanil, se tosaasaanil, Adivinanzas nahuas de ayer y hoy*, by Arnulfo G. Ramírez, José Antonio Flores and Leopoldo Valiñas (1992).

Zazan tleino Adivínala si puedes:  
 quetzalcomoctzin Canas tiene hasta la punta  
 quetzalli conmantica y también plumas verdes.  
 (Xonacatl, la cebolla)

Zazan tleino Adivina adivinando:  
 icuitlaxcol quiuilana Con las tripas arrastrando  
 tepetozcatl quitoca. por el valle va pasando.  
 (Huitzmallotl, la aguja)

Alfredo Ramírez explains (translated from Spanish to English) this riddle: "When you put thread through the needle, and you put the needle through a piece of cloth, the thread drags, creeps, crawls, because it is very long. So the thread is like a long intestine. That's why wherever the needle goes, it is followed by the intestine (tripa). The valley, in this case, is the cloth or fabric that you are going to sew or where you place the needle. So the cloth is the valley that the intestine crawls through, supposedly".

Zazan tleino Adivínala si sabes:  
 excampa ticalaqui Desnudo entras por tres partes.  
 an cecni tiquiza. vestido por una sales.  
 (Tocamisa, Cotontli, la camisa)

Zacan tleino Quieta duermo en tu camino.  
 otlica tequatica Si no me ves te muerdo



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catitotecuinia. y te derribo.  
(Tetl, la piedra)

Riddles are not just for guessing. They often combine sound and rhyme and rhythm. How do riddles begin in Nahuatl? Why, zazan tleino...of course!

Mentiras y chistes (lies and jokes) in didxaza (zapoteco)

Víctor Vásquez Castellejos of Juchitán, Oaxaca, called my attention to lies and jokes in Didxaza (Zapoteco), like the following by don Sabino:

Xmentira ta sabinu

Ti dxi birée de cacería, na ta Sabinu. Biaaze guixhi cuyube luá tuuxa mani gucuáguá. Maala birée ti líon ngola luá, cuxhiaa láya ne rigapa lú bi, canazaa cherí cherica. Gunaaze xquiiba, biine puntá, bicáa guiée ni lu guiáme, biasipée guie lú me ladu derecho que bicuáguá. Peru qui ñaabame, biaazime guixhi ne zeeme.

Xti semana que bibiguéta ra quéeca. Bíiya lú ti loma huiini zuba ti líon ngola. Chaahui ga bidxiña gaxha, bíiya cháahue, láaca ca líon ngola que láa, peru caa antiojo lú. (Biui Román Gómez Cruz)

Mentira del Señor Sabino

Un día de cacería, dijo el señor Sabino. Penetré el bosque buscando algún animal para cazar. De repente salió un león enorme ante mí, enseñaba sus dientes y manoteaba en el aire, caminaba por aquí, por allá. Tomé mi arma, apunté, disparé sobre él, exactamente su ojo derecho herí. Pero no se cayó, penetró el bosque y se fue.

A la otra semana regresé allí mismo. Vi sobre una loma pequeña sentado un león enorme. Despacio me acerqué miré bien, el mismo león enorme era, pero traía anteojos.  
(López Chiñas 1967:18, 58)

This genre in Didxaza (Zapoteco) uses exaggeration to delight the audience, and contains many elements that can be discussed and related to the lives of the speakers.

Huehuetlatolli del Libro sexto del Códice Florentino

The ancient Nahuas, like parents anywhere at any time, give advice to their children on how best to live their lives. Alfredo Ramírez y Carmen Herrera Meza, helped choose one of their favorite Nahuatl Tlatollis to illustrate this genre:

(75 v.)

Ca nemoa in tlalticpac, tecutihua, tlatocatihua, piltihua, quauhtihua, ocelotihua.

Auh aquin za quitotica ca yuhcan i in tlalticpac, aquin za momiquizyecotica; ca tlaayoa, ca nemtilo, necaltilo, tlatequipanolo; auh necihuatlanilo, nenamictilo, neucchotilo, tlapaliuhcatihua.

Auh in axcan, nochpuchtzé, tla huel xiccaqui, tla xiquihuianitta, ca iz unca in monantzin in motecuyotzin, in ixillan, in itozcatlampa otizcicuehuac otitlapan. In maan tixiuhtzintli, in maan tiquiltzintli otihuali-/

(76 r.) Xehuac, otixotlac, oticuepon, in maan noce oticochia, otihualizac.

Xitlachia, xitlacaqui, auh xitlamati: yuhcan i in tlalticpac. Ma tinen, ma za tinen, ma aci tictoca; ¿quenin tinemiz, quen achi tictocaz? Mach huel ohuican in tlalticpac, tetzauhohuican, nochpuchtzé, cocotzé, tepitzé.

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Se vive en la tierra, se es jefe, señor, noble, águila, tigre. Hay quienes no más buscan morir. Pero se actúa, se vive, se construye, se trabaja, se busca uno mujer, se casa él, se casa ella, se madura.



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**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLITICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

Pues ahora, mi niña, oye bien, mira con calma; aquí está tu madre, tu señora, de cuyo seno y entrañas te despegaste, te desprendiste; como una plantita, como una yerbita te/

(76 r) alzaste, echaste hojas, floreciste; como si hubieras estado dormida y despertaras.

Mira, oye, entiende, así son las cosas en la tierra. No vivas de cualquier modo, no vayas por donde sea. ¿Cómo vivirás, por dónde has de ir? Se dice, niña mía, palomita, chiquita, que la tierra es en verdad un lugar difícil, espantosamente difícil...

(fragment of 75 v., 76 r., Díaz Cíntora 1995:36,42)

Carmen and Alfredo explain this fragment of huehuetlatolli:

There are people who say that this is what life on earth is like; some of us are just waiting to die, but one must act, live and work. One searches for a wife, marries, marries her and matures.

¿When would parents say this to their children? Parents would say this to their children when they are growing and when they need to be careful to mature before getting married, to live a discrete and exemplary life.

This advice, as all the counsel or testimonies collected in Libro Sexto del Códice Florentino and another collection of Huehuetlatolli or Words that the Elderly speak to their children, their spouses or newborn children, or during the different important moments that occur in life, was important advice meant to help guide one throughout their life on an earth filled with challenges and vice.

Víctor Vásquez Castillejos, who studies liibana, a type of huehuetlatolli in Zapotec, says that nowadays in Juchitán, Oaxaca, it is only used for blessing couples, bride and groom, to be betrothed, whereas before it was used during baptisms, a special discourse when loved ones died as a consolation to the relatives and friends, as well as council to the dead person so s/he would not return to the world of the living. Huehuetlatollis are also documented for Otopamean languages.

**"Chupa Male", a fable in Didxaza (zapoteco)**

Sicari bizaaca lú ti dxúndxuri ne ti bigarii. Ti dxi mala bidxaagalú came.

-Pa diuxi, male --na Dxúndxuri rabi Bigarii.

-Pa diuxi --na Bigarii.

-Pa ladu ndi guyé lu ya' --na Dxúndxuri.

-Ye guuya xua, ma gule ba'du'.

-Tu ba'du, male--na Dxúndxuri.

-Badu nguiiu --na Bigarii.

-Biaa gu'yu siou' --na Dxúndxuri--. Peru nazaaca nuu cabe la? --na.

-Nazaaca--na Bigarii--. Laga lii ya', xumale --na Bigarii-- paraa cheu'.

-Chas chi guuya ndi', na cabe bibaagu ñee Ta Biulú.

-Ay, na si --na Bigarii--. Qué pe ganna nga, ba'du'. Ximodo ga canabaagu ñee xhunca ça ya'.

-Pues, na cabe canazá be canayé' be bupu sti guie' chaachi, mala guxidxi biree ti tiru. Ñee cadi nou' laa pe be ucuá ni la?--na Dxúndxuri.

-Ay caa, caa --na Bigarii.

-Yanna la? --na Dxúndxuri-- chi guuya xi nuu xa be.

-Chuu, male--na Bigarii-- naa laaca ziaa'. Chi izaca laani'.

Ra yendá cabe ra nuu Biulú na cabe:

-Xii ndi guca lu ya', binnigola.

-Biaa desgracia ri' --na Biulú. Biree miati nazaaca dxichi. Zi yubi ni go. Cadi cá ique endananá.

Yanna biaa modo nexhe'.

Bizulú ca Biulú cayuuna ne na:

-Yanna ximodo ndi guiasa chi yube ni gahua'. A que naná ndi' ora qué gapa binni tu gu'ya laa xa --na.



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**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

-Cadi cu' xa ique lu nga --na Dxúndxuri rabi laabe--. Laadu idu'ya du lii. Ti dxi guenda' ne ti dxi gueeda xumale'.  
Ne dxandí zaqué bi'ni came. Ti dxi rie Dxúndxuri ne ti dxi rie Bigarii dede ra bi'ya came ma gunda yeutopa jlaagu guidxa Biulú. Zacá bihuinni pabiá' gunaxhii saa came. (Villalobos 1976: 6,7).

Las dos comadres, Spanish translation of "Chupa Male"  
Había una vez una estornina y una cigarra. Un día las dos se encontraron.  
-Hola, Comadre--dijo la estornina.  
-Buenas tardes, Comadrita--contestó la cigarra.  
-¿De dónde vienes?--preguntó la estornina.  
-De ver a mi nuera que acaba de aliviarse.  
-¿Y qué fue? ¿Niño o niña?--preguntó la estornina.  
-Niño.  
-Fíjate no más--dijo la estornina--. ¿Y están bien?  
-Sí, están muy bien--contestó la cigarra--. Y tú, ¿a dónde vas, Comadre  
-Voy a ver al colibrí; dicen que le dieron un balazo en un pie.  
-¡No me digas!--dijo la cigarra--. Yo no sabía eso. ¿Quién se pudo atrever a darle un balazo a él en el pie?  
-Pues, dicen que el colibrí estaba tomando un poco de néctar cuando se oyó un disparo, y no me vas a creer, pero fíjate que a él fue al que le pegaron--dijo la estornina.  
--Pobrecito, mira nomás lo que le fue a pasar--dijo la cigarra.  
-Por eso voy a ver cómo está--dijo la estornina.  
-Vamos juntas, Comadre--dijo la cigarra--. Yo también quiero ir a consolarlo.  
Cuando llegaron a la casa del colibrí, le dijeron:  
-¿Qué te pasó, viejo?  
-Pues miren nada más esta desgracia que me cayó encima --dijo el colibrí--. Uno sale de su casa sano y salvo a buscar comida y un accidente es lo último que uno cree que le puede pasar. Y sin esperarlo ¡el mundo se me viene encima y me lastiman una pierna y aquí me tienen tirado!--y el colibrí empezó a llorar--. Ahora, ¿cómo le voy a hacer para conseguir mi comida? ¡Qué duro es cuando uno no tiene nadie que se preocupe por él.  
-No creas que te vamos a dejar solo--dijo la estornina al colibrí--. Nosotras te vamos a cuidar. Yo vendré un día a verter el otro mi comadre.  
Y así lo hicieron. Un día venía la estornina y otro día la cigarra hasta que el colibrí sanó. Así se demostraron que el amor que se tenían era verdadero. (Villalobos 1976:19)

In very general terms this fable talks of the importance of friends and helping one another in times of need.

### Contemporary indigenous literature

An example of contemporary literature is the poetry by Fausto Guadarrama López (1998:60-61) in the volume *Male Albina, Ne Male Bina, Letras Indígena Contemporáneas*, in Mazahua and Spanish. One of his poems is:



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**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLITICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

EL MOLCAJETE DE MI MADRE ("My mother's grinding stone.")

O ts'aji nzakja angeze  
nu a mezhe na punkj e kjee.

Yo dyaja mam ji k' ts'isk'etrjo  
pe nuzgo ri janr k' nra na nojo  
k'o nu i kji'i nu potrj  
A fiek'ua negeje nu otr' ru si'i  
jnu i'i mbaja k'o yo ts'ijmo'o!  
jNu kjaji kja, I nzum go!

Nu nzhi nu pedye exi na sezhi  
ngeje nu kja nu in nanago  
nu ximi k'inchi na punkj

Gue a trijiji nu sungofi  
bexto jango nzerojitrjo  
na jøg na jo'o yo chjo'o  
k'eme nu yax nu ts'ingum .

Nu maza nu ts'a i nanago  
ngeje nu a ngeme dyanu  
ne'e yo dyee in nanago  
yo o ts'aji ts'imaledyá.

Ma angeze ne'e ra mimi kjule  
i xi nee ra ngemetrjo e fieb'a  
ximi nu i nanago o ngara  
kja pjingua, jnu mi jom trjo!

Tallado a semejanza de ella  
Se sostiene con sus bellos años.

Algunos dicen que es pequeño  
mas yo lo contemplo enseñoreado  
con su sangre de barro moreno.  
En él comí por primera vez  
jsalsa roja con charalitos!  
ja especialidad de la casa!

El sonido que se convierte en eco  
es el ritmo que ejecuta mi madre  
ensimismada en sus pensamientos

Cacarea alegre la gallina  
cerca del patio desnudo  
madura lentamente el maizal  
se queda la sombra del jacal.

El molcajete de mi madre  
se ha quedado en su instante  
adora las manos de viejita  
que se moldearon lentamente.

Si éste ha sido terco y necio  
y ni el tiempo lo ha hecho rajarse  
cuantimás mi madre que nació  
en un lecho jde puritita tierra!

In this poem, the author speaks of his mother's molcajete (grinding stone). By describing the importance of the molcajete, or grinding stone, how his mother prepares a salsa with charalitos to be eaten with tortillas made from corn grown in the cornfields and kept in the jacal, the sound of the hen, and his mother, year after year lost in her thoughts, in tune to the rhythm of the movement of her hands on the molcajete. We are allowed a glimpse into the life of the poet through his mother's yearly labor at the grinding stone.

The discussion can center around the mundane, daily life, what his mother is like, what they eat, how it is prepared, what our mothers and the poet's mother are like, what they have in common or how they are different, and the life of the poet as compared to the lives of the students who are reading or listening to the poem.

Riddles, advice, poetry, as well as any other type of literature or oral tradition tells us about the author, his/her life, and what is important to him/her. The universalities we share as humans will be reflected in the thoughts and concerns expressed by verbal art, as well as the differences in our life styles and physical environments. We empathize and relate to the people behind the words. We learn to respect them because they are like us.

#### Reconstructing identities and realities

Awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity and literary activity in indigenous languages have contributed to the creation of new ideologies, by transforming identities and realities.

In Mexico, these ideologies, motivated to a great extent by the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the development of new forms of self-determination within Indigenous Mexican society, have led to greater sensitivity to the situation of the indigenous groups of Mexico. They have influenced the attitudes of society as a whole and created the necessary political conditions for officializing equitable linguistic policies. The battle has begun but we still have a long way to go toward protecting minority languages and cultures.

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## EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND MINORITY LANGUAGES

**Martha C. Muntzel**, Dirección de Lingüística, INAH, México

Leanne Hinton (2001:3) begins the introductory overview of *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* by saying that "In a world of around 250 nations, there are over 6000 languages. This means that there are very few languages with a country of their own. A language that is not a language of government, nor a language of education, nor a language of wider communication is a language whose very existence is threatened in the modern world." That means that the majority of the world's languages are at risk and facing that risk is not just the concern of the speakers of minority languages.

As we look around us at presentday and past historical events we see that language loss is closely related to inequalities and injustices in the access to and distribution of resources; generally being limited to those who are in power. What can be done to change this and to protect minority languages?

Working toward creating equal access to goods and resources is usually not part of the linguist's job but I do believe we need to look for ways to change the dominant ideology. Important work is being done and needs to be done within minority language communities but language and culture loss also needs to be dealt with from the outside.

I don't know if it is animal (including humans) instinct to distrust that which is different from oneself or a cultural/biological mechanism to protect one's group and territory, including access to food sources. Throughout history human groups have conquered and dominated minority groups around them and have traveled far from their homelands to take over and control other lands and human groups. The ideology that supports the attitudes and actions required are learned in the home, in the schools and through political and religious rhetoric. This ideology creates a worldview that allows and justifies control of resources and technology by a particular group.

In the modern world I would like to think we are now civilized enough to create an ideology that eliminates the fear of the "other" and replaces it with curiosity and respect. Also, an ideology that recognizes that control in the hands of a few will lead to homogenization and a world in which scarcity is the norm. Instead of fighting over what is left, we need to search for solutions.

It sounds very idealistic and what does it have to do with protecting minority languages? We know that a minority language can have an alphabet and written materials, bilingual education or programs that favor its use, but will not be transmitted if people do not speak it on a daily basis. The process of language loss in many places in the world began with language contact and an ideology that promoted the use of the language of the dominant group, sometimes in subtle ways (like the fact that those in control speak a particular language) or explicitly like in the prohibited use of minority languages in the schools. So we end up with a group in power that thinks their culture and language is superior and minority groups who are taught to think that their languages and cultures are not capable of coexisting as "world languages", do not have prestige, or are worthless. A dangerous pattern emerges that catches like wildfire. No one or few people in minority language communities say that it is



possible to be bilingual or bicultural -or if they do- it is hard to believe after centuries of an ideology that says otherwise. It is time to overcome the elitist ideology and transform the mindset of speakers of majority and minority languages alike. That means recognizing the fallacy of dichotomies like "primitive-non-primitive" or all the myths related to language structure, such as "Spanish and English are languages, Native tongues are dialects", "Indian languages don't have grammar", "Some languages are better than others", etc..

As linguists we know that language does reflect certain aspects of culture but that cultural groups that are agriculturalist or live in tropical rain forests may speak languages with very "complicated" linguistic structures, whereas often "first world" languages may manifest less complexity. Certain components of the same language may be more complex than others; for example, the phonology versus the morphology or syntax. And that languages are always changing and can be studied by comparing the language of different geographical or social groups, or the same dialect of a language at different moments in time. The type of language structure has nothing to do with the countries' national debt or yearly income.

Knowledge and awareness about language and culture should be part of our basic education. How do we do that? There are materials and programs like Linguistic Olympics, an entertaining and educational website for secondary school students and teachers designed by Thomas E. Payne of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon, based on a regular part of education in Russia since 1965, when over 450 students participated in the Moscow Linguistic Olympics and 350 in the St. Petersburg Olympics. These fun exercises "expose students to the tremendous variety, complexity and beauty of the world's languages" and "combine analytic reasoning and cultural awareness... In order to solve the puzzles, the student must apply hypothesis generation, and analytic reasoning common to all kinds of intellectual tasks, as well as ordinary common sense. All puzzles are self-sufficient, i.e., one need not have special language ability or knowledge to solve the puzzles." (Linguistic Olympics, 2000:1-2). Another fun website is Sounds of the World's Animals (for example, for rooster sounds in different languages, see <http://www.georgetown.edu/cball/animals/rooster.html>).

Two examples of Linguistic Olympics (Payne 2000) printed off the website are:

#### Yaqui!

Yaqui (also known as Yoreme) is an American Indian language currently spoken by about 16,400 people in Northern Mexico and southern Arizona. It is a member of the Uto-Aztecan language family. This is one of the geographically most widespread language families in the Americas, extending from El Salvador (Pipil) to the state of Oregon (Northern Paiute) and from Southern California (Cahuilla, Luiseño and others) to Colorado (Ute). There are several other varieties of Nahuatl, another Uto-Aztecan language, spoken in Mexico today. This is the language of descendants of the famed Aztec empire.

The following are eight emphatic sentences in the Yaqui language. Your task is to match the correct English translations, given below in random order, to each Yaqui sentence. (Adapted from Farmer and Demers 1996:135).

English translations (in random order):

1. Inepo siika. A. You helped me.
2. Empo nee aniak. B. You danced.
3. Inepo apo'ik aniak. C. I saw you.
4. Inepo apo'ik vichak. D. I saw him.
5. Inepo enchi vichak. E. I helped you.
6. Inepo enchi aniak. F. I helped him.
7. Empo ye'ek. G. He saw you.
8. Aapo enchi vichak H. I left.

#### Shugnan

Shugnan, also known as Shugni, is an Indo-Iranian language spoken in Tajikistan and Afganistan. The Indo-Iranian languages are part of the Indo-European family, so Shugnan is distantly related to English. There are approximately 40,000 speakers altogether. Here are some phrases in Shugnan and their translations into English:



**CONGRÉS MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**CONGRÈS MONDIAL SUR LES POLITIQUES LINGUISTIQUES**  
**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLITICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

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- kuzaa hats - jar of water
- chalak zimmadj - bucket of dirt
- tambal byuyun - beard of a lazybones
- biig dyuyunaa - pot of corn
- kuzaa gjev - lid of a jar
- beechoraa zimaadj -dirt of a beggar

Now, translate the following into Shugnan:

- bucket of water
- corn of a beggar
- jar of a lazybones

I have used these exercises in Linguistics classes as a warm-up or as a break, as well as in a workshop I call Taller de Conciencia Lingüística. The purpose of the workshop, which has been given to Otomí speakers/teachers in San Bartolo Tutotepec, Hidalgo, Mexico; students and teachers of the Atzinca (known as Ocuilteco, Tlahuica or Pjiekakjo) community of San Juan Atzingo, state of Mexico, and Spanish speaking secondary students in Mexico City, is to increase awareness about languages and their structures. One of the characteristics of human language is the ability to acquire and speak it without conscious effort. Participants in the workshop learn to analyze phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of different languages, especially their own and the languages spoken in their community and geographical region. Problems from different sources are adapted so they can be solved easily or quickly depending on the time of the workshop (from 2 hours to 3-5 days). A native speaker as a helper, or the students themselves can provide the linguistic data to be analyzed.

What are the consequences of learning about what the different languages of the world have in common? Or how they differ? Or the fact that language often reflects the culture of their speakers but is not determined by it. Our language will have words for our physical surroundings and the kinds of work we do; but having numeral classifiers doesn't mean we have a greater number of bankers in our midst than speakers of a language that doesn't have numeral classifiers.

When speakers of indigenous languages learn about the structure of their languages and compare them to the structures of languages like English, Spanish, German or French it is empowering because it may be the first time they realize that all languages have sound systems, morphological composition, a lexicon, syntactic order, and semantics. No one can ever tell them again that they speak dialects instead of languages. For example, in a Taller de Conciencia Lingüística, by comparing Otomí (Hñahñu), English and Spanish phonological systems, Otomí speakers discovered their language has more in common with the English vowel system - a "prestige" language- than with Spanish which has fewer and none of the high central vowels which both Otomí and English have. So by comparing linguistic diversity they realize that myths about language are not true and sociocultural and economic development is not related to the language being spoken.

When members of the majority group analyze different language structures and discover that indigenous languages are as complex or more so than the official or standard languages of their countries, and are able to express any idea or concept that can be expressed in any other language, it is an important moment of awareness. They learn to respect linguistic diversity or at the very least, one argument used to support the superiority of one group over another is eliminated.

This knowledge contributes to the transformation of an ideology that favors and supports the superiority of certain languages and cultural groups.

Educational philosophy should promote consciousness and respect for ethnic diversity, cultural differences, different beliefs and customs, and mutual respect between peoples.

How can we create an educational philosophy that protects and promotes minority languages as well as respect for ethnic and cultural diversity?



First, by making the study of linguistic diversity a part of basic education. Secondly, by teaching different oral traditions and indigenous literatures; including modern literary works created by native poets and novelists or dramatists.

Oral and written literatures express our beliefs, our values, and our traditions. Folk tales from all over the world share similar concerns and characteristics. By studying different genres in different languages we learn about how all people share the same concerns: with their families, the cycle of life-birth, maturity, marriage, children, old age and death, working to survive and celebrating important moments, playing, resting and praying. Often for each moment there is a linguistic and cultural genre related to a daily, monthly or yearly ritual. There are proverbs, jokes, poetry, fables, myths, legends, stories, narrations, and many other types of oral and written tradition in all kinds of societies. When we study them we connect in a very basic way with people all around the world. We learn to relate and empathize with them. They are not so very different from us. We learn to respect them, their languages and their cultures. The speakers of minority languages learn to respect themselves, their languages and their cultures.

¿So how are these similarities and differences reflected in indigenous literatures around the world?

We can present function and content, and we can study literary and linguistic form. There is not enough time to deal with any one of these approaches in any more than a superficial way. Function and content can be dealt with by using an ethnography of communication approach in which oral and written traditions are related to their context and function within a particular culture and society. Although there may be many examples of literary and linguistic analyses of indigenous literatures, I can recommend Nigel Fabb's (1997) *Linguistics and Literature*, and Adolfo Constenla Umaña's (1996) *Poesía tradicional indígena costarricense* as examples of what can be done. And nothing can take the place of interactive teaching methods and techniques such as those presented in Jeffries (1992) such as focussing on the traits of specific characters, discussing the main idea as it relates the lives of the students, visualizing and mapping the setting or actions of a story, comparing poems or stories, doing art projects or playing games, or relating the content to other subjects like science or history.

To get an idea of what we are talking about, I'd like to present several examples of oral or written tradition. For starters, riddles in Nahuatl::

Adivinanzas (riddles) in Nahuatl

Often riddles are fun and reflect the environment or culture of of origen. They can be dramatized or drawn as an art project. Students can also invent their own riddles. The following riddles are from the state of Guerrero, near Iguala, by the Mezcala River, found in *Se tosaasaanil, se tosaasaanil, Adivinanzas nahuas de ayer y hoy*, by Arnulfo G. Ramírez, José Antonio Flores and Leopoldo Valiñas (1992).

Zazan tleino Adivínala si puedes:  
quetzalcomoctzin Canas tiene hasta la punta  
quetzalli conmantica y también plumas verdes.  
(Xonacatl, la cebolla)

Zazan tleino Adivina adivinando:  
icuitlaxcol quiuilana Con las tripas arrastrando  
tepetozcatl quitoca. por el valle va pasando.  
(Huitzmallotl, la aguja)

Alfredo Ramírez explains (translated from Spanish to English) this riddle: "When you put thread through the needle, and you put the needle through a piece of cloth, the thread drags, creeps, crawls, because it is very long. So the thread is like a long intestine. That's why wherever the needle goes, it is followed by the intestine (tripa). The valley, in this case, is the cloth or fabric that you are going to sew or where you place the needle. So the cloth is the valley that the intestine crawls through, supposedly".

Zazan tleino Adivínala si sabes:  
excampa ticalaqui Desnudo entras por tres partes.

an cecni tiquiza. vestido por una sales.  
(Tocamisa, Cotontli, la camisa)

Zacan tleino Quieta duermo en tu camino.  
otlica tequatica Si no me ves te muerdo  
catitotecuinia. y te derribo.  
(Tetl, la piedra)

Riddles are not just for guessing. They often combine sound and rhyme and rhythm. How do riddles begin in Nahuatl? Why, zacan tleino...of course!

Mentiras y chistes (lies and jokes) in didxaza (zapoteco)

Víctor Vásquez Castellejos of Juchitán, Oaxaca, called my attention to lies and jokes in Didxaza (Zapoteco), like the following by don Sabino:

Xmentira ta sabinu

Ti dxi birée de cacería, na ta Sabinu. Biaaze guixhi cuyube luá tuuxa mani gucuáguá. Maala birée ti líon ngola luá, cushiaa láya ne rigapa lú bi, canazaa cherí cherica. Gunaaze xquiiba, biine puntá, bicáa guiée ni lu guiáme, biasipée guie lú me ladu derecho que bicuáguá. Peru qui ñaábame, biaazime guixhi ne zeeme.

Xti semana que bibiguéta ra quéeca. Bíiya lú ti loma huiini zuba ti líon ngola. Chaahui ga bidxiña gaxha, bíiya cháahue, láaca ca líon ngola que láa, peru caa antiojo lú. (Biui Román Gómez Cruz)

Mentira del Señor Sabino

Un día de cacería, dijo el señor Sabino. Penetré el bosque buscando algún animal para cazar. De repente salió un león enorme ante mí, enseñaba sus dientes y manoteaba en el aire, caminaba por aquí, por allá. Tomé mi arma, apunté, disparé sobre él, exactamente su ojo derecho herí. Pero no se cayó, penetró el bosque y se fue.

A la otra semana regresé allí mismo. Vi sobre una loma pequeña sentado un león enorme. Despacito me acerqué miré bien, el mismo león enorme era, pero traía anteojos.  
(López Chiñas 1967:18, 58)

This genre in Didxaza (Zapoteco) uses exaggeration to delight the audience, and contains many elements that can be discussed and related to the lives of the speakers.

Huehuetlatolli del Libro sexto del Códice Florentino

The ancient Nahuas, like parents anywhere at any time, give advice to their children on how best to live their lives. Alfredo Ramírez y Carmen Herrera Meza, helped choose one of their favorite Nahuatl Tlatollis to illustrate this genre:

(75 v.)

Ca nemoa in tlalticpac, tecutihua, tlatocatihua, piltihua, quauhtihua, ocelotihua.

Auh aquin za quitotica ca yuhcan i in tlalticpac, aquin za momiquizyecotica; ca tlaayoa, ca nemiltilo, necaltilo, tlatequipanolo; auh necihuatlanilo, nenamictilo, neucchotilo, tlapaliuhcatihua.

Auh in axcan, nochpuchtzé, tla huel xiccaqui, tla xiquihuanitta, ca iz unca in monantzin in motecuyotzin, in ixillan, in itozcatlampa otizcicuehuac otitlapan. In maan tixiuhztintli, in maan tiquiltzintli otihuali-/



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**CONGRÈS MONDIAL SUR LES POLITIQUES LINGUISTIQUES**  
**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLITICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

(76 r.) Xehuac, otixotlac, oticuepon, in maan noce oticochia, otihualizac.

Xitlachia, xitlacaqui, auh xitlamati: yuhcan i in tlalticpac. Ma tinen, ma za tinen, ma aci tictoca; ¿quenin tinemiz, quen achi tictocaz? Mach huel ohuican in tlalticpac, tetzauhuican, nochpuchtzé, cocotzé, tepitzé.

Se vive en la tierra, se es jefe, señor, noble, águila, tigre. Hay quienes no más buscan morir. Pero se actúa, se vive, se construye, se trabaja, se busca uno mujer, se casa él, se casa ella, se madura. Pues ahora, mi niña, oye bien, mira con calma; aquí está tu madre, tu señora, de cuyo seno y entrañas te despegaste, te desprendiste; como una plantita, como una yerbita te/

(76 r) alzaste, echaste hojas, floreciste; como si hubieras estado dormida y despertaras.

Mira, oye, entiende, así son las cosas en la tierra. No vivas de cualquier modo, no vayas por donde sea. ¿Cómo vivirás, por dónde has de ir? Se dice, niña mía, palomita, chiquita, que la tierra es en verdad un lugar difícil, espantosamente difícil...

(fragment of 75 v., 76 r., Díaz Cántora 1995:36,42)

Carmen and Alfredo explain this fragment of huehuetlatolli:

There are people who say that this is what life on earth is like; some of us are just waiting to die, but one must act, live and work. One searches for a wife, marries, marries her and matures.

¿When would parents say this to their children? Parents would say this to their children when they are growing and when they need to be careful to mature before getting married, to live a discrete and exemplary life.

This advice, as all the counsel or testimonies collected in Libro Sexto del Códice Florentino and another collection of Huehuetlatolli or Words that the Elderly speak to their children, their spouses or newborn children, or during the different important moments that occur in life, was important advice meant to help guide one throughout their life on an earth filled with challenges and vice.

Víctor Vásquez Castillejos, who studies liibana, a type of huehuetlatolli in Zapotec, says that nowadays in Juchitán, Oaxaca, it is only used for blessing couples, bride and groom, to be betrothed, whereas before it was used during baptisms, a special discourse when loved ones died as a consolation to the relatives and friends, as well as council to the dead person so s/he would not return to the world of the living. Huehuetlatollis are also documented for Otopamean languages.

**"Chupa Male", a fable in Didxaza (zapoteco)**

Sicari bizaaca lú ti dxúndxuri ne ti bigarii. Ti dxi mala bidxaagalú came.

-Pa diuxi, male --na Dxúndxuri rabi Bigarii.

-Pa diuxi --na Bigarii.

-Pa ladu ndi guyé lu ya' --na Dxúndxuri.

-Ye guuya xua, ma gule ba'du'.

-Tu ba'du, male--na Dxúndxuri.

-Badu nguiiu --na Bigarii.

-Biaa gu'yu siou' --na Dxúndxuri--. Peru nazaaca nuu cabe la? --na.

-Nazaaca--na Bigarii--. Laga lli ya', xumale --na Bigarii-- paraa cheu'.

-Chas chi guuya ndi', na cabe bibaagu ñee Ta Biulú.

-Ay, na si --na Bigarii--. Qué pe ganna nga, ba'du'. Ximodo ga canabaagu ñee xhunca ca ya'.

-Pues, na cabe canazá be canayé' be bupu sti guie' chaachi, mala guxidxi biree ti tiru. Ñee cadí nou' laa pe be ucuá ni la?--na Dxúndxuri.

-Ay caa, caa --na Bigarii.

-Yanna la? --na Dxúndxuri-- chi guuya xi nuu xa be.



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**CONGRÈS MONDIAL SUR LES POLITIQUES LINGUISTIQUES**  
**CONGRESO MUNDIAL SOBRE POLITICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

-Chuu, male--na Bigarii-- naa laaca ziaa'. Chi izaca laani'.  
Ra yendá cabe ra nuu Biulú na cabe:  
-Xii ndi guca lu ya', binnigola.  
-Biaa desgracia ri' --na Biulú. Biree miati nazaaca dxichi. Zi yubi ni go. Cadi cá ique endananá.  
Yanna biao modo nexhe'.  
Bizulú ca Biulú cayuuna ne na:  
-Yanna ximodo ndi guasa chi yube ni gahua'. A que naná ndi' ora qué gapa binni tu gu'ya laa xa --na.  
-Cadi cu' xa ique lu nga --na Dxúndxuri rabi laabe--. Laadu idu'ya du lii. Ti dxi guenda' ne ti dxi gueeda xumale'.  
Ne dxandí zaqué bi'ni came. Ti dxi rie Dxúndxuri ne ti dxi rie Bigarii dede ra bi'ya came ma gunda yeutopa jlaagu guidxa Biulú. Zacá bihuinni pabiá' gunaxhii saa came. (Villalobos 1976: 6,7).

Las dos comadres, Spanish translation of "Chupa Male"  
Había una vez una estornina y una cigarra. Un día las dos se encontraron.  
-Hola, Comadre--dijo la estornina.  
-Buenas tardes, Comadrita--contestó la cigarra.  
-¿De dónde vienes?--preguntó la estornina.  
-De ver a mi nuera que acaba de aliviarse.  
-¿Y qué fue? ¿Niño o niña?--preguntó la estornina.  
-Niño.  
-Fíjate no más--dijo la estornina--. ¿Y están bien?  
-Sí, están muy bien--contestó la cigarra--. Y tú, ¿a dónde vas, Comadre  
-Voy a ver al colibrí; dicen que le dieron un balazo en un pie.  
-¡No me digas!--dijo la cigarra--. Yo no sabía eso. ¿Quién se pudo atrever a darle un balazo a él en el pie?  
-Pues, dicen que el colibrí estaba tomando un poco de néctar cuando se oyó un disparo, y no me vas a creer, pero fíjate que a él fue al que le pegaron--dijo la estornina.  
--Pobrecito, mira nomás lo que le fue a pasar--dijo la cigarra.  
-Por eso voy a ver cómo está--dijo la estornina.  
-Vamos juntas, Comadre--dijo la cigarra--. Yo también quiero ir a consolarlo.  
Cuando llegaron a la casa del colibrí, le dijeron:  
-¿Qué te pasó, viejo?  
-Pues miren nada más esta desgracia que me cayó encima --dijo el colibrí--. Uno sale de su casa sano y salvo a buscar comida y un accidente es lo último que uno cree que le puede pasar. Y sin esperarlo ¡el mundo se me viene encima y me lastiman una pierna y aquí me tienen tirado!--y el colibrí empezó a llorar--. Ahora, ¿cómo le voy a hacer para conseguir mi comida? ¡Qué duro es cuando uno no tiene nadie que se preocupe por él.  
-No creas que te vamos a dejar solo--dijo la estornina al colibrí--. Nosotras te vamos a cuidar. Yo vendré un día a verter el otro mi comadre.  
Y así lo hicieron. Un día venía la estornina y otro día la cigarra hasta que el colibrí sanó. Así se demostraron que el amor que se tenían era verdadero. (Villalobos 1976:19)

In very general terms this fable talks of the importance of friends and helping one another in times of need.

### Contemporary indigenous literature

An example of contemporary literature is the poetry by Fausto Guadarrama López (1998:60-61) in the volume *Male Albina, Ne Male Bina, Letras Indígena Contemporáneas*, in Mazahua and Spanish. One of his poems is:



**CONGRÉS MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTQUES LINGÜÍSTQUES**  
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**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002

EL MOLCAJETE DE MI MADRE ("My mother's grinding stone.")

O ts'aji nzakja angeze  
nu a mezhe na punkj e kjee.

Yo dyaja mam ji k' ts'isk'etrjo  
pe nuzgo ri janr k' nra na nojo  
k'o nu i kji'i nu potrj  
A fiek'ua negeje nu otr' ru si'i  
jnu i'i mbaja k'o yo ts'ijmo'o!  
jNu kjaji kja, I nzum go!

Nu nzhi nu pedye exi na sezhi  
ngeje nu kja nu in nanago  
nu ximi k'inchi na punkj

Gue a trijiji nu sungofi  
bexto jango nzerojitrjo  
na jög na jo'o yo chjo'o  
k'eme nu yax nu ts'ingum .

Nu maza nu ts'a i nanago  
ngeje nu a ngeme dyanu  
ne'e yo dyee in nanago  
yo o ts'aji ts'imaledya.

Ma angeze ne'e ra mimi kjule  
i xi nee ra ngemetrjo e fieb'a  
ximi nu i nanago o ngara  
kja pjingua, jnu mi jom trjo!

Tallado a semejanza de ella  
Se sostiene con sus bellos años.

Algunos dicen que es pequeño  
mas yo lo contemplo enseñoreado  
con su sangre de barro moreno.  
En él comí por primera vez  
jsalsa roja con charalitos!  
ja especialidad de la casa!

El sonido que se convierte en eco  
es el ritmo que ejecuta mi madre  
ensimismada en sus pensamientos

Cacarea alegre la gallina  
cerca del patio desnudo  
madura lentamente el maizal  
se queda la sombra del jacal.

El molcajete de mi madre  
se ha quedado en su instante  
adora las manos de viejita  
que se moldearon lentamente.

Si éste ha sido terco y necio  
y ni el tiempo lo ha hecho rajarse  
cuantimás mi madre que nació  
en un lecho jde puritita tierra!

In this poem, the author speaks of his mother's molcajete (grinding stone). By describing the importance of the molcajete, or grinding stone, how his mother prepares a salsa with charalitos to be eaten with tortillas made from corn grown in the cornfields and kept in the jacal, the sound of the hen, and his mother, year after year lost in her thoughts, in tune to the rhythm of the movement of her hands on the molcajete. We are allowed a glimpse into the life of the poet through his mother's yearly labor at the grinding stone.

The discussion can center around the mundane, daily life, what his mother is like, what they eat, how it is prepared, what our mothers and the poet's mother are like, what they have in common or how they are different, and the life of the poet as compared to the lives of the students who are reading or listening to the poem.

Riddles, advice, poetry, as well as any other type of literature or oral tradition tells us about the author, his/her life, and what is important to him/her. The universalities we share as humans will be reflected in the thoughts and concerns expressed by verbal art, as well as the differences in our life styles and physical environments. We empathize and relate to the people behind the words. We learn to respect them because they are like us.

#### Reconstructing identities and realities

Awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity and literary activity in indigenous languages have contributed to the creation of new ideologies, by transforming identities and realities.

In Mexico, these ideologies, motivated to a great extent by the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the development of new forms of self-determination within Indigenous Mexican society, have led to greater sensitivity to the situation of the indigenous groups of Mexico. They have influenced the attitudes of society as a whole and created the necessary political conditions for officializing equitable linguistic policies. The battle has begun but we still have a long way to go toward protecting minority languages and cultures.

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