ABSTRACT


Indigenous languages throughout the Americas are endangered. For instance, in Mexico 16% of the national population spoke an indigenous language in 1930; that is more than 14 million people at that time. In 2015, only 6.6% of the total population or 7’382,785 people currently speak an indigenous language in Mexico. Even for Yucatec Maya, the second most spoken indigenous language in Mexico with more than 795,000 speakers, intergenerational transmission of the language to new generations is compromised. In the summer of 2018, I completed my research in the state of Yucatan, with the purpose of gathering data on the efforts educators, social scientists, and other proactive participants engaged in to revitalize Yucatec Maya. A second purpose was to obtain the ideologies and experiences they bring to their profession in its revitalization. My field methods included observation, informant interviewing, and collecting of printed material in Yucatec Maya as well as digital collection of material by taking photos, and I collected my data in the urban centers of Merida and Valladolid. Despite lukewarm efforts of financial support for Maya language revitalization from the government, my data shows that my participants unanimously agree that there is insufficient legislative enforcing action to secure the linguistic and cultural rights of Maya speakers in Yucatan as delineated in the Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas (General Law of Indigenous Peoples’ Linguistic Rights) in Mexico. Among the linguistic and cultural rights my participants identify as weak there is poor infrastructure and insufficient number of indigenous schools, lack of sufficient qualified educators to teach Maya, lack of meaningful Maya pedagogic material production and distribution, and an almost non-existent offering of public services for Maya-speakers in their language, such as medical and legal interpreting.

by
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ vi
LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................... vii

Chapter 1 ......................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
A Global Perspective on Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization .......... 1
Purpose and Objectives ................................................................................................. 4
Literacy, Language Ideology, and Revitalization: Key Concepts .................................. 6
Research Problem and Research Questions .................................................................. 7
Thesis Structure ............................................................................................................. 12

Chapter 2 Yucatec Maya as a Contested Language: Theory Framework ..................... 15
Literacy from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective ............................................. 15
Digital Literacy: Definition and Context in Indigenous Languages ......................... 17
Language Ideology from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective ......................... 19
Language Revitalization from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective ................. 20
Yucatec Maya: A Socio-Historic Background in the Context of Literacy, Language Ideology, and Revitalization ................................................................. 22
General Linguistic Background of Yucatec Maya ....................................................... 22
Yucatec Maya: Colonial Yucatec Maya, the Caste War, and Language Policy in the Mexican State ................................................................. 23
Yucatec Maya Immediately after the Conquest .......................................................... 24
The Caste War ............................................................................................................... 26
Yucatecans in the Post-War Era .................................................................................. 27
The Creation of the 1984 Alphabet ............................................................................. 29
INDEMAYA and INALI: Relevant State Institutions for Yucatec Maya .................... 32
Theoretical Debates on the Role of Literacy, Language Ideology, and Language Revitalization Model in the Context of this Thesis ........................................... 33
Literacy in the Context of Language Revitalization: Hornberger’s Indigenous Literacy and Empowerment .............................................................. 33
Language ideologies in the Context of Language Revitalization: Kroskrity’s Language Ideological Clarification ............................................................... 36
Language ideologies in the Context of Language Revitalization: Cru’s Language ideological Shift ................................................................. 38
Language ideologies in the Context of Language Revitalization: Guerrettazz’ Language Ownership ............................................................... 41
Language Revitalization Theory: Fishman’s Reversing Language Shift Theory (RLS) ............................................................................................... 43

Chapter 3 Research Methods ......................................................................................... 49
Locations and Time Frame ........................................................................................... 49
Ethical Procedures ........................................................................................................ 49
Methods for Data Collection ....................................................................................... 50
Description of the Study Participants ......................................................................... 51
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1  Research Participants. .................................................................52
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 6.1  Wooj-themed cup ..............................................................................................................83
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Language is, in many instances, the most important identifier for ethnicity and the prevention of further language loss or language recovery, especially in indigenous communities is critical for the revitalization of language and society itself. This is also true for the Yucatec Maya language and people in Mexico about whom I write about in this thesis. An important element for the maintenance and revitalization of subordinated, indigenous languages is literacy. However, language ideologies surrounding the use of literacy in these languages, including Maya, are constantly present. Consequently, any revitalization effort for a language that is done from literacy or by other means is influenced by speakers and stakeholders’ language ideologies. The latter can have a decisive influence in the relative success of language revitalization movements overall, including that of the Yucatec Maya. In the following chapters, I will explain the efforts that are underway in one region of Mexico-the Yucatan- by academic professionals, including the use of literacy, to create more spaces for the acquisition, transmission, and visibility of Yucatec Maya among native speakers and non-Maya speakers. Thus, I argue in this thesis that understanding the role that language ideologies and literacy play in the revitalization of an indigenous endangered language is vital for the successful, future maintenance of the language.

A Global Perspective on Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization

It has been predicted that, by the end of the nineteenth century, approximately half of the world’s 7000 languages will be extinct. Some more pessimistic sources predict that up to 90% of languages may become extinct by the end of the 21st century (Austin and Sallabank 2014, 2).
Furthermore, it is not just individual languages that are becoming extinct but entire language families are going away. Whalen and Simons (2012) looked at the 372 linguistic stocks, which are the greatest reconstructible groups of related languages, that have been registered as still spoken since 1950 (2012, 156). They have found that since that date 15% of the world’s language stocks have disappeared and 27% of the stocks since that year are close to extinction as of 2012 (Whalen and Simons 2012, 156). The authors conclude that several world language families are indeed endangered, despite the lack of indicators allowing to determine the level of endangerment of many other stocks directly (Whalen and Simons 2012, 156).

In their conclusion Whalen and Simons indicate that the world regions with the greatest number of endangered language stocks are the Americas with 41% of their language stocks in a moribund state and 11% definitely endangered out of a total of 149 stocks (2012, 169). This does not mean that other world regions are exempt from language endangerment. In fact, Africa is in second place with 28% of its language stocks in definite danger of extinction (Whalen and Simons 2012, 169). In regions like Southern Africa, many Khoisan languages have gone extinct after their speakers suffered systematic genocide at the hands of European death squads (Brenzinger 2007, 184). The few Khoisan surviving languages are spoken by few speakers and are different stages of endangerment. Languages like Ts’ixa, Kua and Tshoa are quite endangered, whereas languages like |Xam and Nǀǀu have been extinct since the early twentieth century (Brenzinger 2007, 189).

Language endangerment is also happening in regions like mainland South Asia, including China, where most of Mon-Khmer Austroasiatic languages are at different stages of endangerment (Bradley 2007). For instance, minority languages with no national status in China such as Hu, Buxia, Buguo, and Paijiao are also endangered (Bradley 2007, 280).
To prevent this horrible loss, stakeholder communities around the world, allied with scholars and activists, have been making efforts to revitalize endangered indigenous languages globally and, although many are struggling in these efforts, there are some successful examples. Well-known cases include languages like Maori in New Zealand (King 2009; Reo 2009), Hawaiian in the Hawaii islands (Warner 2001; Wilson and Kamana 2001), Basque in Spain (Valadez et al 2015; Gorter et al 2012; Lasagabaster 2001), Hebrew in Israel (Fellman 1973; Paulston et al 1993); Saami in Scandinavia (Aikio-Puoskari 2009; Pietikainen 2010); and Papuan New Guinea indigenous languages (Yasuko and Lister 2003; Skuttnab-Kangas 2003). For instance, in New Zealand there are projects such as Reo o te Kāinga that encourage and aid the intergenerational transmission of Maori from parents to children at home (Reo 2009). Here, important factors like spiritual and traditional Maori values, family relations, motivations, and societal influence are key in the home revitalization of Maori (Reo 2009, 107). Even the traditional Maori Haka dance has been adopted as a symbol of national pride. Furthermore, languages in Europe like Basque in Spain are also experiencing a revitalization through a strong bilingual immersion model within the Basque Autonomous Community with the continuation of Basque-immersion schools known as ikastolas (Lasagabaster 2001). Through the immersion bilingual model implemented in this school, students achieve an additive bilingualism where they have literate and oral proficiency both in Basque and Spanish, thus students are becoming functional bilinguals in this language (Lasagabaster 2001, 415-6).

Looking even in Central America, there is the case of Mayan languages, for example in Guatemala, which with Mexico hold the greatest numbers of Mayan speakers. Guatemala counts 22 Maya languages, including Kek’chi’, K’iche’, Kakchiquel, and Mam, accounting for over 3 million native speakers. There are ongoing revitalization efforts that can be potentially
successful. For example, In Guatemala, linguists are working with *Wuqu’ Kawoq: Maya Health Alliance*, a health care NGO in the country, in order to help communities maintain the Kaqchikel language in several rural communities (Henderson et al 2014, 75-6).

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the different narratives, perspectives, and experiences that professionals involved in the revitalization of Yucatec Maya language have and the role that literacy and local language ideologies play in it. I want to understand how the acquisition of Maya literacy contributes to or complicates the revitalization of Maya. In the summer of 2017 I experienced for the first time the enthusiasm my teachers of Yucatec Maya had when I participated in the 2107 Yucatec Maya program in Valladolid, Mexico. This experience sparked my interest in topics that became the focus of my thesis research in the summer of 2018. I saw in my informants a revitalization spirit as we talked over coffee and during formal and informal interviews. My thesis will also present the results of our ideological discourses about language use from the perspectives of my study participants. It will also explain the role of language ideology at societal and individual levels, as seen through the lens of both Spanish speakers, the dominant linguistic community, and that of the subordinate community of Yucatec Maya speakers, and I will assess the relative success of Maya language revitalization, so far, and its maintenance.

The chapters in this thesis specifically focus on the Yucatec Maya language spoken in the state of Yucatan in Mexico, specifically in the cities of Merida and Valladolid. I have chosen this language and locations for three main reasons: one, the region has a long tradition of literacy, both in the pre-Columbian times before contact with Europeans, and during the colonial period, where the language was used in the public area and for evangelization. There were other
societies in Meso-America that developed writing systems, such as the Olmec (Pohl et al. 2002; Justeson and Kaufman 1993), the Aztec (Taube 2000; Whittaker 1992), and the Zapotec (Whittaker 1992; Marcus 1980). The Maya writing system stands out because it is the best studied and most complex (Stuart 1992), and it is still used today by Mayanists and language revitalizers alike.

Second, I learned to speak, read, and write in Yucatec Maya through the FLAS Yucatec Maya Summer program offered each summer by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Completing the first level of the program in the summer of 2017 influenced me in choosing Yucatec Maya as my language of study. I had already a basic level of Yucatec Maya linguistics, as well as having been exposed to the socio-cultural environment where it is spoken. I had the opportunity to practice and learn from Maya speakers, which was a great motivation for my choosing this language. Although the topic of Yucatec Maya maintenance was not explicitly brought up in class by instructors, they were very committed to its teaching and transmission. However, I noticed something worrisome when I interacted both with instructors and when I did the program cultural-immersion trips to Xocen. On the one hand, I noticed that one of the instructors spoke Spanish to her children mainly despite being a native Maya speaker and Maya language teacher. But, I also noticed that in the Maya-speaking village of Xocen, some children I interacted with spoke no Maya whatsoever, despite their doing so. These two observations made me reflect on the ongoing language shift from Maya to Spanish and on the role that language ideologies by speakers have in this language endangerment.

Third, I hope this thesis will contribute to new knowledge towards the role of literacy and ideology in the revitalization of Yucatec Maya. I think this work fills a research gap, because what I report on and analyze regarding the construction of language ideologies by professionals
involved in the revitalization of Yucatec Maya through their work in literacy and language acquisition is not well documented. In the thesis I will show how these professionals approach their pedagogy in Maya revitalization, literacy, and endangerment. These proactive agents, through their professions, are trying to change the sociolinguistic landscape in favor of Maya.

**Literacy, Language Ideology, and Revitalization: Key Concepts**

It may seem as if the concepts of literacy, language ideology, and language revitalization stand on their own; nevertheless, it is important to understand them also as interconnected. These concepts are connected both in theory and practice because for indigenous endangered languages, language ideologies directly influence the development and adoption of a standardized code in the form of literacy by speakers. Decisions such as representing linguistic features of a given dialect or implementing certain orthography can affect speakers’ decisions to acquire literacy (Wroblewski 2010, 10-11).

Ideological decisions when deciding on the literacy standardization of an indigenous language can be socio-historical, political, and even scientific. The scholars and language planners behind any standardization can have various motives for choosing a specific dialect or orthography as the standard norm. Motives can be based on ideas about a regional dialect having more prestige than others or, for example, on the perceived notion of “purifying” an indigenous language from the influence of a more dominant language in contact (e.g. Yucatec Maya vs Spanish). These motives can have repercussions on a language revitalization movement. For instance, Kichwa-speaking scholars in Ecuador are facing rejection because they are attempting to unify the different Kichwa dialects spoken in Ecuador under a “Unified Kichwa” based on Andean dialects (Wroblewski 2012, 64). The reason that Kichwa-speakers from the Amazonas
region reject such an imposition is because it is a threat to their sociolinguistic identity as expressed in their Amazonian Kichwa dialects (Wroblewski 2012, 64-83).

**Research Problem and Research Questions**

With the Spanish arrival and conquest of Meso-American lands, indigenous peoples suffered a drastic reduction in their numbers and their languages also suffered in the process. Diseases, warfare, and the cultural assimilation campaign launched by the Spaniards constituted a great challenge for the survival of indigenous languages in colonial Mexico (Hidalgo 2006, 86-89). However, many indigenous languages survived throughout the colonial period until today in Mexico due to various important factors. The first factor in favor of language maintenance for indigenous languages in Mexico was the campaigns of Christianization initiated by several Catholic orders in the sixteenth century (Hidalgo 2006, 100). Through language policy, Spanish missionaries decided that the most effective way to convert indigenous people to Christianity was through their own languages, therefore, they did the necessary linguistic studies to learn these languages and adapt them to a Latin Alphabet by designing orthographies (Hidalgo 2006, 100-1). However, it was through orality mainly that indigenous speakers maintained their languages, as they devised various forms of cultural and linguistic resistance in the colonial period. One of these forms was the counter-hegemonic socio-religious movements based on language ideologies of ethnic identity and resistance. These movements emerged as a reaction to the imposition of Spanish culture and language by colonizers (Hidalgo 2006, 104-5). A notable example of such a movement throughout colonial history, and later in the Mexican state, is the case of Chiapas and its indigenous peoples (Hidalgo 2006, 108-9). Indigenous communities who were speakers of languages like Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, and Zoque constantly fought against Spaniards in the colonial period and mestizos in the post-Mexico independence period.
after 1821 (Hidalgo 2006, 106) to maintain as much independence as possible. Eventually, these indigenous language speaking communities were the region that gave rise to the 1994 Zapatista (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional EZLN) insurrection in Chiapas. The Zapatista movement, still ongoing, was a response to the precarious conditions modern indigenous peoples had been enduring (Hidalgo 2006, 113). Eventually the Zapatistas, on behalf of the Maya communities of Chiapas, and the Mexican government reached an accord known as the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords (SALA), which was the precursor of important reforms for the cultural, linguistic, and land rights for indigenous peoples throughout Mexico (Hidalgo 2006, 114-5). The case of Chiapas is particularly important since the number of indigenous-language speakers has continued to grow there steadily from 139,532 speakers in 1930 to 809,592 speakers in 2000 (Valdes 1995 qtd in Hidalgo 2006, 116; INEGI 2001 qtd in Hidalgo 2006, 116).

The use of indigenous language literacy developed early on in the 16th century mainly for purposes of conversion and indoctrination into the Christian religion. The first languages for which literacy was created were Nahuatl, Otomi, Matlalzinca, Totonac, Tarascan, Mixtec, Zapotec, Zoque, and Huastec (Hidalgo 2006, 101-103). Although literacy in indigenous languages played an essential role in preserving the colonial history of indigenous peoples in Mexico, it was very limited in terms of the number of indigenous speakers who acquired it. In fact, it was rather seen as an index of Spanish rule, as it was a “privilege that was the patrimony of the Church” (Hidalgo 2006, 102-3).

Today, the acquisition of literacy is considered as an important aspect of indigenous language maintenance and revitalization by the Mexican state today. However, there are still negative attitudes and ideologies around the use of literacy for indigenous languages since the initial goal for the alphabetization of indigenous speakers in their languages was to facilitate the
transition into Spanish, with no regard for the maintenance of the mother language (Pfeiler and Zamisova 2006, 281-286). Nevertheless, there are alternative language revitalization projects incorporating literacy that are successful in language transmission for indigenous children in domains like education. One such a project is the Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento, y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural (PRMDLC) implemented for languages like Nahuatl (Flores Farfán 2006). In this project children are exposed and encultured to Nahuatl language and culture through a series of audio-visual methods that include culturally-relevant videos about legends of Nahuatl literature, Amates or illustrative depictions of cultural icons about Nahuatl cosmovision and religion, riddles in Nahuatl language (Flores Farfán 2006, 311-14). Although the project has the acquisition of literacy as one of its components, it neither relies nor focuses entirely on literacy since it is a bottom-up approach that attempts to provide children with an amenable learning environment, thus distancing itself from top-down approaches used by the Mexican state (Flores Farfán 2006, 310-15). This kind of a project demonstrates that an approach to literacy through counter-hegemonic language ideologies in the form of a grassroots movement is possible.

Other cases for indigenous language revitalization are happening in the state of Oaxaca where 50 or so indigenous languages spoken in this state (Meyer 2018). A series of teacher-community collaborative school programs started emerging since 2001 in order to promote language revitalization among children (Meyer 2018, 388). The main programs are Our Word in Our Languages, which was created to address the lack of pedagogic materials for children at schools and to train teachers to teach literacy in their languages, Tequio Pedagógico (Tequio Project), which enhanced collaboration between teachers and parents through assemblies, committees, and workshops (Meyer 2018, 399). Such a project served communities speaking
Zapotec, Huave, Mixtec, Mazatec, Chinantec, and Amuzgo (Meyer 2018, 399). Other teacher-based language revitalization projects in Oaxaca were *Indios Who Teach* and *Diplomado in Community-based Initial Education* (Meyer 2018, 399). These projects show teachers and parents’ commitment towards the preservation of their languages through positive ideologies of maintenance and revitalization.

Language revitalization and maintenance efforts are occurring throughout Mexico and Yucatan is no exception. There have been several efforts for the revitalization and visibility of Yucatec Maya in various aspects, including the diffusion of Maya through radio stations (e.g. XEPET Radio Peto), the creation of the Academy of the Mayan Language Itzamná (founded in 1986), and the foundation of the Institute for the Development of the Mayan Culture (INDEMAYA) in 2001 (Pfeiler and Zamisova 2006, 294-5). Furthermore, revitalization efforts are taking place at schools through bilingual education. Guemez et al (2008) report that there have been satisfactory experiences where children acquire Yucatec Maya and eventually Spanish in elementary school in communities like Hunukú and Ekpedz (2008, 44). Despite these efforts, there are still many challenges that Yucatec Maya bilingual education has to face, such as the lack of qualified teachers to teach Maya language or Maya literacy, as well as inappropriate materials in the instruction of literacy to children (Guemez et al 2008, 59). However, the acquisition of literacy in Maya, as well as in other indigenous languages, by children and adults alike has been increasing over the last twenty years (Brody 2007). Ironically, although the adult enrollment for Spanish classes was ten times greater than for Maya in 2000 in Yucatan (12,671 enrolled for Spanish and 1416 enrolled for Maya), the graduation rates for Maya literacy learners were 62% compared to only 58% for Spanish literacy learners (INEGI 2000; INEA 2000 qtd in Brody 2007, 286).
The role of literacy in the education of indigenous speakers in Mexico, including for Yucatec Maya speakers in Yucatan, is increasing as the number of subsidized publications for written materials in Maya by IBE (intercultural bilingual education) government programs has also increased exponentially (Brody 2007, 287). Therefore, the historicity of literacy in the context of language endangerment, maintenance, and revitalization for indigenous languages in Mexico throughout the colonial period through today raises important questions. In the case of Yucatec Maya, it has made me wonder about the actual role that literacy has today for language revitalization efforts and the influence that language ideologies play in the teaching of Yucatec Maya and other language revitalization efforts. By this rationale, I decided to design a series of research questions that constitute the backbone of the current thesis, as I analyze my study participants’ narratives. The following are the research questions I use that have guided me in the research and writing of this thesis:

- How relevant is contemporary Yucatec Maya literacy in the teaching of Maya?
- How do Maya language teachers construct language ideologies around students’ attitudes when acquiring Yucatec Maya?
- What are the main obstacles for Maya language maintenance and revitalization? How do study participants construct language ideologies around these obstacles?
- In what ways do study participants contribute to Maya language revitalization and maintenance through their professions?
- What study participants envision as the future of a more effective Maya language revitalization movement and how might they be achieved?

These questions intend to determine the interconnectedness between the concepts of literacy, language ideology, and language revitalization in the context of Maya in Yucatan. Furthermore,
they set the rationale for the presentation and analysis of participants’ narratives, as these directly address the questions at hand. Literacy and ideology are concepts that are intrinsically related, and they are both extremely relevant for a meaningful discussion on the revitalization movement for Yucatec Maya; therefore, they are essential for understanding my efforts this thesis to clarify the role of training and educational practice in Maya literacy pedagogy. Going forward, I will draw upon them in all of my chapters to help the reader understand their critical role.

**Thesis Structure**

In the following chapters I will lay out my research and data to show how I answered my research questions. In chapter 2, I will examine the literature for each of the concepts -- literacy, language ideology, and language revitalization -- to develop my arguments.

Beginning with chapter 2, I start to define the concept of literacy by providing a concise definition (Salzmann et al 2012; Baquedano-Lopez 2006), as I contextualize its definition by providing ethnographic case studies where indigenous communities like the Pueblo (Debenport 2012) and the Cherokee (Bender 2002) make use of literacy in their respective languages differently. I also elaborate on the concept of digital literacy in the context of indigenous language revitalization by providing research on its use by indigenous language speakers worldwide (Galla 2009; 2016). I also contextualize the concept of digital literacy as empowerment and revitalization by providing case studies for Yucatec Maya speakers in their use of social media and technology in Maya (May 2010; Cru 2015). I elaborate on the concept of language ideology by providing a comprehensive definition (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Kroskirty 2006) and I expand on this concept through case studies regarding language ideologies held by Nahuatl speakers in rural communities (Hill 1985) and the use of Singaporean English by teachers in the classroom at Singapore (Farrell and Kiat Kun 2007). Next in Chapter 2, I
define the concept of language revitalization (Hilton, Huss, Roche 2018) at the same time as I provide case studies in which this concept is tied to indigenous language activism for Mayan-languages speakers in Guatemala (England 1998; Grinevald 2007).

In Chapter 2 I will also provide a socio-historic review of Yucatec Maya language from the colonial period in 1547 (Restall 1999). I will highlight the influence that Catholic priests had over the sociolinguistic and cultural behaviors of colonized Maya people in Yucatan, where a colonial version of Maya is created by these priests in their efforts of Christianization (Hanks 2010; 2012; 2015). The Yucatan Caste War of the 19th century is a significant pivotal point for history in the Yucatan region (Rugeley 1996), and I will show how its aftermath affected language policies in the Mexican nation-state to the detriment of indigenous languages (Heath 1972; Hidalgo 2006). The review continues by explaining the transition from the colonial alphabet to the 1984 alphabet used for modern Yucatec Maya for written corpus production (Brody 2004; 2007) and their role in culture and language revitalization projects. The last section of chapter two is a presentation various key theories in connection with my research questions of this thesis as they are related to literacy, language ideology, and language revitalization.

In Chapter 3, I explain my modus operandi in my research fieldwork during the summer of 2018 in Yucatan. There I will discuss my field sites, my data collection techniques, and how I selected my study participants and the ethical steps I took to protect their identities. In Chapter 4 I discuss the organizations, programs and teaching pedagogy of my study participants. I explain their students’ language attitudes in the classroom and teachers reactions to them as they acquire Maya literacy. In Chapter 5, I present my study participants’ narratives regarding the current and ongoing obstacles facing Maya language and culture revitalization. Chapter 6 discusses Maya language and culture revitalization efforts that participants perform through their professions. In
Chapter 7, I present the expectations that my study participants have for the improvement of the Maya language revitalization movement. Finally, in Chapter 8, I present a holistic summary for my research findings based on the ethnographic component of my thesis in relation to my original research questions as described here in Chapter 1. Additionally, I reflect on the possible future for the Yucatec Maya language revitalization movement.
CHAPTER 2
YUCATEC MAYA AS A CONTESTED LANGUAGE:
THEORY FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I introduce the theoretical frameworks that connect with my research questions (Chapter 1) and the theoretical debates that are generated around them. I begin with the empowerment of indigenous literacy for indigenous in the context of the Americas in relation to the importance of literacy for Yucatec Maya education and revitalization efforts. Second, I explain language ideological clarification and language ideological shift as a useful theoretical concepts that accounts for the construction of language ideologies around the obstacles that prevent the achievement of a more successful Maya language revitalization. Afterwards, I will explain the concept of ownership of language in the context of Maya language training for teachers, as I connect it with the research question regarding Maya teachers’ construction of language ideologies around students’ acquisition of Maya. Finally, I introduce the Reversing Language Shift theoretical model in the context of general endangered language revitalization, and I connect this theory with the ways study participants perform language revitalization efforts around Yucatec Maya and their own expectations for the future of the language’s revitalization and maintenance.

Literacy from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective

Literacy is a form of conceiving and molding already existing knowledge as well as acquiring and assimilating new incoming knowledge (Salzmann et al 2012, 294-5). It is also an interpretive process for people's experiences and realities in their world. It is experimental and developmental, and language plays an important role in literacy’s acquisition and development (Baquedano-Lopez 2006, 246-8). For the purpose of this thesis, I define literacy as the
written/texted performance and interpretation of language beyond the acquisition of a set of skills. Such a performance and interpretation often involve motivations from speakers to communicate or index a meaning or identity to other readers. Furthermore, it is a means of communication that may be used as an instrument of empowerment by indigenous language speakers. As a consequence, literacy is often ideologically-charged with ideas beyond its technical use. Within the context of indigenous languages, it is important to go beyond the definition of literacy because there are many instances where indigenous language speakers in a community have different ideologies about the role that literacy should accomplish for their language. For example, for the Pueblo people of San Antonio, in New Mexico, literacy in Tiwa is seen as a commodity that is to be “perfected and circulated” in the same way other objects or cultural performances are (Debenport 2012, 213). In the context of the study done by Debenport (2012), the circulation of written creation stories is not used as a means for language acquisition but as a form of “perfectibility, limited circulation, and indirect political address” towards others (2012, 214). Just in the way that literacy is beyond a set of skills, it also takes different forms, and as digital technology spreads through every corner of the world, the practice of literacy also takes a digital dimension, as agents use it in several ways. In this sense, a new concept known as digital literacy emerges.

Another countervailing example of literacy as used by indigenous people is Sequoyah Syllabary as used by the Cherokee people in the past and today. Cherokee people were the first literate American Indian tribe in the U.S thanks to the invention of the syllabary by Cherokee monolingual scholar Sequoyah (Cushman 2011, 255). He created a writing system that comprised 86 symbols that linguistically adapted to the needs of native Cherokee speakers. Only 29 years after its informal implementation by the Cherokee tribal council in 1821, about 90% of
the Cherokee population was literate in their native language (Cushman 2011, 255; Wolfram and Reaser 2014, 33). Today, Cherokee is still taught in some schools to children and adults in the Eastern Band (North Carolina) and Oklahoma; however, the syllabary is seen as a code indexing socio-cultural meaningful categories, such as religious texts, and ethnic identity (Bender 2002, 113). Cherokee people do not see the acquisition of literacy through the syllabary as a universal, functional ability that can be applicable in several contexts (Bender 2002, 113); instead, they would rather treat it as “context saturated rather than decontextualized, and as a nontransferable good rather than as a commodity for a generalized market” (Bender 2002, 113). In other words, Cherokee literacy for Cherokee people has a situated-context iconicity and socio-cultural meaning rather than a utilitarian purpose.

Literacy is not just a set of skills. It also takes different forms. Recent advances in global telecommunications is producing many new ways for literacy to be and become significant also for indigenous peoples. One of these new ways is through digital literacy. And, as digital technology spreads through every corner of the world, the practice of literacy also takes a digital dimension, as agents use it in several ways. And so a new concept known as digital literacy has emerged and must be discussed in the context of language ideology and revitalization.

**Digital Literacy: Definition and Context in Indigenous Languages**

Digital literacy is defined as the cognition and set of skills necessary to make use of internet-related resources to obtain, distribute, and create content from a particular digital means or platform (e.g., a computer) (Bawden 2008, 19-20). In the context of indigenous language revitalization, digital literacy can serve as de-colonizing methodology that speakers can use to invigorate an indigenous language. In a technologically advanced world, many indigenous peoples are using digital media platforms to write and interact in their languages (e.g. Hawaiian).
(Galla 2009, 168). In a survey comprising 80 indigenous language speakers from Mexico, U.S, Australia, and Guatemala, 61.25% of participants (49 people) agreed that digital technologies facilitated the access and sharing of relevant learning material in their language across the globe (Galla 2016, 1143). The use of digital means to create spaces for speaking and learning indigenous languages boosts their use among young speakers (Galla 2016, 1144). In fact, an example of this is Maya speakers’ use of digital literacy in Yucatan through SMS cellphone messages, emails, and chat sessions in Maya (May 2010, 214). Digital literacies work to enhance the agency of indigenous Maya language users because they re-define their language and identity (May 2010, 221). Maya speakers express their Maya orality through these literacies by creating new forms of writing Maya, regardless of their literacy formal instruction, and they negotiate current forms of writing the language (May 2010, 232). One example in May’s research is the representation of the /ts’/ phoneme through the grapheme <tz> among several texters (2010, 222).

More recent studies have shown the same tendency regarding the role of digital literacy as a form of Maya language revitalization. Cru (2015) demonstrated the importance that Facebook has on the linguistic practices of a group of 30 university young adult students at the intercultural University of Quintana Roo (Cru 2015, 287). The practice of Maya as digital literacy in Facebook by Maya late teenage and young adult students is an important step towards a meaningful effort in revitalizing Maya. (Cru 2015, 292). Digital spaces like Facebook are indeed providing the opportunity for young adults and teenagers to engage in literacy practices of Maya that enhance their identity and socio-political participation as part of the revitalization movement of Maya (Cru 2015, 293). The point of showing these studies is that literacy, as I defined it previously, can take a digital form, thus becoming digital literacy, which enhances
speakers to express their ideas in several ways in digital platforms. This is a form of language revitalization among study participants in my own research since they also make use of digital literacy. It is important to know that digital literacy is an important means for indigenous speakers to use their language freely.

At the same time, embedded with literacy of any kind, there are always language ideologies within the context of language maintenance and revitalization affecting that practice of literacy. Thus, it is necessary to briefly review the concept of language ideology in order to better understand how ideology works to affect linguistic choices in literacy.

**Language Ideology from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective**

Language ideology is a cultural constructions about language that can be neutral or positive (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, 58), or as both implicit and explicit agendas that a group of people, either a minority elite or a general majority, carry out and reinforce through daily speech discourse (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, 58). It can also be seen as widespread mental conception of ideas about language found with speakers at every level of society (Kroskrity 2006, 498). Language ideologies are not necessarily based on factual evidence and conceived in multiple forms within a single community and/or society because members within them are divided into social groups based on social class, gender, age, or ethnicity (Kroskrity 2006, 497-503). For example, young wage-working Nahuatl speakers in the Tlaxcala-Puebla region in Mexico see the Hispanicization of Nahuatl as a violation of their local identity since they associate it with ethnic identity and solidarity. Spanish is seen as a language of economic power and social distancing (Hill 1985, 734). As a reaction, these workers have adopted a prescriptivist grammar attitude towards speaking Nahuatl as a way to obtain symbolic power in their community (Hill 1985, 734). A prescriptivist grammar consists of a series of norms that are
intended to encourage (or enforce) a subjective appropriate use of a language (Matthews 1997, 316). For example, Nahuatl-speaking wage workers qualify the sociolinguistic practices of rural communities as "illegitimate", since the speakers in these communities are not speaking their idealized version of Nahuatl but are code-switching it with Spanish (Hill 1985, 733-4).

Language ideologies regarding the use of a language can also take place in formal spaces, such as the school. A good example comes from Farrell and Kiat Kun’s (2007) study on the ideologies about the use of formal English vs Singaporean English with students in the classroom. In their case study, the authors make an ethnographic study emphasizing the ideological diglossia of three Singaporean teachers instructing their students in standard English in formal settings and using Singlish (Singaporean colloquial English) (Farrell and Kiat Kun 2007, 381). In this study, teachers cannot necessarily explain the reasons for their belief of formal English being more appropriate than Singlish to teach (Farrell and Kiat Kun 2007, 383). Furthermore, they are inconsistent between their discourse and practices in classroom since they used Singlish for informalities (Farrell and Kiat Kun 2007, 397).

Language Revitalization from a Linguistic Anthropological Perspective

Language ideologies held by lay speakers, scholars, and proactive members are influential in the revitalization or the continuing endangerment of a language. Consequently, it is important to understand the relationship between language ideology and language revitalization. I think we should start with explaining the concept of language revitalization first.

Language revitalization may be defined as the reinvigoration and recovery of a minoritized language that has a decreasing number of speakers or a language that does not even have speakers at all (Skutnabb-Kangas qtd in Hilton, Huss, Roche 2018, 13). It is intrinsically related both to mental health and linguistic human rights from which indigenous peoples and
minorities have been deprived (Hilton, Huss, Roche 2018, 1-13). Furthermore, language revitalization is a direct response to the current high rates of language endangerment and disappearance in the last decade (Hilton, Huss, Roche 2018, 1-13). It can also be transformed into a movement used by oppressed peoples and their allies as a method of de-colonization and as a socio-political platform that allows them to claim their social rights beyond language in matters like education, land rights, political representation and more (Ibid. 2018, XXII,). An example of a de-colonizing agency, is the Academy of Mayan Languages in Guatemala which was officially granted autonomous power in 1991 thanks to the political activism of Mayan scholars (England qtd in Grenoble and Whaley 1998, 106). Besides this academy, there are other organizations in Guatemala directly involved in the preservation of Mayan languages. Guatemalan universities like Universidad Mariano Galvez (UMG) and Universidad Rafael Landivar (URL) offer Bachelor’s degrees and graduate programs in sociolinguistic studies of Mayan languages (England1998, 109). In addition, Oxlajuuq Keej Maya’ Ajtz’iib’ (OKMA), founded by Nora England in 1990, is one of the strongest and most prominent organizations involved in the production of pedagogic and research material in various Mayan languages like “K’ichee’, Achi, Kaqchikel, Q’anjob’al and Poqoman” (Grinevald 2007, 68). This program trains native Mayan-languages speakers in various subfields of linguistics and pedagogy with the purpose of enhancing language revitalization in their respective communities (Grinevald 2007, 68).

The concepts of literacy, language, ideology, and language revitalization are relevant in the context of this thesis because, together, they account for the research gaps that are addressed in my research questions. Therefore, in reviewing how different indigenous language speakers use literacy in their contexts, one can predict the possible role of literacy for Yucatec Maya
speakers in education and other revitalization efforts. By reviewing how language ideologies play a role in the use and transmission of a vernacular language or dialect, one can hypothesize how Maya language teachers construct language ideologies around students’ attitudes when learning Maya. Such revision can also inform us about the different ideological conflicts one might expect for Yucatec Maya revitalization. Finally, in reviewing the rationale and the specific cases for language revitalization, one can predict and better understand my study participants’ revitalization efforts for Yucatec Maya and the expectations they have for the future of their language. In the next section, I will discuss Yucatec Maya in the context of theoretical debates around language ideology, and revitalization.

Yucatec Maya: A Socio-Historic Background in the Context of Literacy, Language Ideology, and Revitalization

Now I want to undertake a brief, socio-historic review of Yucatec Maya language from the colonial period through modern times, with an emphasis on the role of literacy. I elaborate on the modern written production in Yucatec Maya since the 1980s and its modern orthographic conventions, particularly the 1984 Maya alphabet and the 2014 Norma Maya orthographic revision. Then, I provide a brief description of the relevant state institutions currently involved in the maintenance and revitalization of Yucatec Maya: INDEMAYA and INALI, which are relevant for my research findings. Finally, I establish a theoretical debate in which I compare and contrast the theoretical frameworks and research of various authors in order to situate my own research.

General Linguistic Background of Yucatec Maya

Yucatec Maya belongs to a group of 28 modern spoken languages known today as the Mayan family. This Mayan family is a linguistic equivalent to the modern Indo-European family of languages and is further divided into eleven subfamilies: Yucatecan, Ch’olan, Tzeltalan, Chuj,
Q’anjobal, Mocho’, Mamean, K’ichean, Pocom, K’ekchi, and Huastecan (Gomez Navarrete 2009, 10). Yucatec Maya, along with Itzá, Lakantun, and Mopan, belong to the Yucatecan linguistic branch (Gomez Navarrete 2009, 10), and it is currently spoken in the Mexican states of Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Campeche; and in Northern Belize (in Corozal and Orange districts) (Orie and Bricker 2000, 285). Yucatec Maya and the other Mayan languages share a common ancestor spoken beyond 4000 years ago known as Proto-Mayan. Today there are about five million people in the countries of Mexico, Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala who speak one of the Proto-Mayan descendant languages (England 2003, 733).

Yucatec Maya is spoken today by approximately 758,000 people in the Yucatan Peninsula (Guerrettaz 2015, 168) and it has had a long use of literacy in Mayan history. Mayan scholars and priests developed a glyph-based writing system that is more than one millennia old, and although it was heavily suppressed by the Spanish invaders since the XVI century, it never died completely (Brody 2007, 276). Colonial, Catholic missionaries developed three Latin alphabet-based orthographies in order to convert Mayan peoples to Christianity. These orthographies still have a considerable influence in contemporary written Yucatec Maya (Brody 2007, 276). Consequently, the production of texts in Yucatec Maya has taken place since the colonial period.

Yucatec Maya: Colonial Yucatec Maya, the Caste War, and Language Policy in the Mexican State

In this section, I briefly present three significant events that are instrumental to the contemporary socio-cultural and linguistic situation of modern Yucatecan Maya. The first event is creation, spread, and perpetuation, even until the present, of a colonial Yucatec Maya by the Franciscan order through the spiritual conversion of Yucatec Maya people to Christianity for
pacification. Its implementation through the creation of a Maya alphabet and the training of scribes was critical for the spread and perpetuation of colonial Maya. The second event is the Caste War that took place between Maya peasant rebels and Yucatecan Mestizos in 1841, which was a pivotal event for Yucatan’s post-colonial history. The third event is the creation and legislation of detrimental national language policies by the Mexican nation-state in the early twentieth century, which led to the demise of indigenous languages nationally, including Yucatec Maya, and the current state of affairs for indigenous languages in Mexico in general.

Yucatec Maya Immediately after the Conquest

After the military conquest of Maya in 1547, the Spaniards took control of the overall organizational structure of Maya communities by establishing settlements called Cah, which were under colonial rule (Hanks 2015, 669 and Restall 1999, 2) As the Colonial Spanish system was being established in Yucatan, one of the main goals of Catholic Spanish missionaries was the peaceful “spiritual conquest” of Maya people in Yucatan through their conversion to Christianity through what Hanks terms as Reduccion. This term describes the campaign of pacification, conversion, and ordering that Franciscan priests envisioned for the Yucatec Maya people (Ibid. 2010, XIV). In order for Reduccion to be attainable for the Maya people, their social behavior had to be habituated to the Christian European standards; language was an essential aspect of such habituation (Ibid. 2010, 3-4). In fact, the heart of the entire Reduccion campaign was the creation of a new colonial code known as Reduced Maya (Maya reducido). This code is the systematic production of semantic meanings that, embedded in the grammar of Yucatec Maya, transformed and substituted previous terms in the language associated with the Maya religion and its deities (Hanks 2010, XIV). Hanks argues that this new Colonial Yucatec Maya known as Maya Reducido was crucial for the pacification and conversion of Maya people,
as he argues that “Because of its extreme portability and its ubiquity in human affairs, the new language spread faster and penetrated deeper and more tenaciously into Maya culture than any other aspect of *reduccion*” (Hanks 2010, XIV). The achievement of a reduced Maya and, consequently a reduced individual (at least in theory) was only possible through the entire re-ordering of Maya villages, where entire populations were forced to relocate into centralized settlements known as reduced towns, which were the same Cah (*pueblo reducido*) (Hanks 2012, 450). Eventually, entire Maya populations adopted *Maya reducido* as their native language throughout the colonial period and the code would become a “language of resistance” for Yucatec Maya in the Caste War centuries ahead (Hanks 2012, 457).

One of the main aspects in the creation and implementation of *Maya reducido* into Yucatec Maya populations by the Franciscans was literacy, through the development of a Latin-based alphabet for Yucatec Maya. It has been historically documented even as early as 1557, there were several written documents, including letters and land documents, by native Maya scribes in the settlements (Hanks 2015, 669). Maya scribes and the colonial Maya alphabet were critical in the establishment and longevity of the reduced colonial Yucatec Maya through written attestations throughout the colonial period. The scribes were local natives trained by Maya *maestros* (teachers), who were trained by the Maya assistants that helped the Franciscans to design the Maya alphabet, grammar, and first dictionaries (Hanks 2015, 651). These scribes had the purpose of facilitating conversions, since they were baptized and educated by the Catholic missionaries (Hanks 2012, 450). Once they were ordained, they were sent to Maya towns under Spanish rule to work in administrative positions. Their knowledge of written, reduced Maya enabled them to serve as proxies for the colonial interests of Spaniards in controlling Maya populations (Hanks 2012, 465). Regarding the colonial Maya alphabet, Hanks argues that
through it, scribes readily spread colonial reduced Maya, as he writes that “[its] flexibility, portability, and universal applicability made it a uniquely powerful vector for the spread of discourse of all kinds” (Hanks 2015, 652). Scribes, under self-governing Maya towns (Cahob) continued to write extensively generating vast amounts of documents in Yucatec Maya throughout the colonial period until the mid-nineteenth century (Restall 1999, 229). However, as Mexico achieved its independence from Spain in 1821, the self-governance of the Cah and its Maya governor, the batab, became extremely fragile, as Yucatecan Mestizos were not willing to offer the same benefits as Spanish did in the colonial system (Restall 1999 306-7). Such conditions were part of the scenario leading to the Caste of War, the most important Yucatec Maya war of the late colonial period. Overall, the production of written corpus in Yucatec Maya in the colonial period took place from 1557 to 1851; however, it started declining as the Caste War was taking place (Restall 1999, 247). The last evidence of the use of Yucatec Maya for a public document was the election list of officers in the town of Yaxcabá on December 5, 1867 (Restall 1999, 311). The colonial Maya electoral system was permanently dismantled that same year and no evidence of official use of Yucatec Maya for public governance functions have been found after that (Restall 1999, 312).

The Caste War

In 1847 the Caste War exploded in the region. One significant reason this ethnic war between Maya people, mestizos (non-Indian Mexicans of European descent), and Spaniards originated was from the heavy constraints placed on Maya people’s autonomy in their own territories by mestizo Yucatecans through the latter’s acquisition of public lands for private enterprises (Rugeley 1996, XIV-XVII and Restall 1999, 307). The complete breakdown of the Spanish colonial rule greatly facilitated the overtaking of Spanish administration by Yucatecan
mestizo since Mexican independence had already been successfully achieved in 1821 (Rugeley 1996, XVII). This increasing economic monopoly by Yucatecan mestizos alienated Maya peasant elites, who were in charge of keeping the vast, poor, rural, Maya population in peace in exchange for political and economic benefits they had enjoyed in the colonial system (Rugeley 1996, XV-XVII). Yucatec Maya peasantry was socially stratified, and the Maya peasant elites had a decisive influence in mobilizing entire peasant communities to arms to wage the Caste War because of their high social status and accumulated material resources (Rugeley 1996, XVI). At first the Maya held the upper, but by the end of the war the Yucatecan mestizos recovered most of the territory they had lost at the beginning. But, Maya rebels did successfully establish independent territories in the eastern forests and they continued the conflict, but at a smaller scale (Rugeley 1996, 181). Finally, The Maya rebel attacks finally came to an end in 1930, as a treaty was reached with the emerging Mexican government; thus the Caste War was finally over after 90 years (Rugeley 1996, 181).

**Yucatecans in the Post-War Era**

As the Caste War waned in Yucatan and the formerly independent region eventually became the latest Mexican nation-state in 1848 (Rugeley 1996, XII). In Mexico, the first attempts to unify all peoples within the national territory under an education in Spanish were being promoted by politicians as early as 1830 (Heath 1972, 63). Advocates of this idea argued that “Indians” could not be given special treatment, for that would encourage them to strengthen tribal polities at the expense of the Mexican nation-state (Heath 1972, 63). Nevertheless, politicians like Ignacio Ramirez, cabinet member in the President Benito Juarez administration, in 1856 advocated the instruction of school content in indigenous languages like Nahuatl, Maya, and others with the purpose of dividing the “small Indian nations” in order to eventually
integrate them into the Mexican state (Heath 1972, 70). In the following decades, the unification of the Mexican state under compulsory primary education and the inclusion of indigenous people under such an educational policy started operating in practice in 1887 (Heath 1972, 72). This policy encouraging indian inclusion and the maintenance of their languages gained popularity under the Porfirio Diaz’s government in 1910, as his administration encouraged the study of indigenous languages and peoples for the purposes of their “civilization” and unification (Heath 1972, 77). However, an increasing backlash against the maintenance of indigenous tongues increased among politicians as the Diaz regime neared its end, for a new national ideology known as the “Mexican soul” was emerging (Heath 1972, 78-9). Such an ideology promoted the Mexican nation’s unification under Spanish as the only legitimate language to be learned and spoken (Heath 1972, 79). After the Mexican revolution ended in 1920, the new nation-state started implementing a nation-wide language policy of linguistic ethnocide by applying the Direct Method in indigenous education, where Spanish was taught from the beginning with no support from the children’s native tongue (Heath 1972, 92-3). Since 1930, this course on language by the Mexican state, plus the widespread inculcation of a nation-state ideology on the numerous mestizo populations nationwide through formal education, constituted the start of the demise for indigenous language post-independence into the twentieth century (Heath 1972, X-93). This is evidenced by the drastic decline in the number of speakers of indigenous languages (SIL) with respect to the total of the Mexican population. In 1930, there were 2'251.086 SIL who were five years or older, which formed 16% of the total population. By 1970, the percentage of SIL out of the total Mexican population was of 7.8%, and by 2000 it was only 7.1% or little more than 6 million people (Valdèz 1995 and INEGI 2001 qtd in Hidalgo 2006, 98). For Yucatec Maya, the percentage of monolingual speakers (131, 836 in 1930 to 65,061 in 2000) decreased
considerably while the percentage of Maya-Spanish bilinguals increased to 92.6% of the total Maya-speaking population in 2000 (Valdéz 1995 and INEGI 2001 qtd in Hidalgo 2006, 98). Increased bilingualism for minority language populations usually tends to transit towards a monolingualism in the dominant language (Shin 2017, 60), and this has been the case for Yucatec Maya speakers with respect to Spanish.

The Mexican state’s policy of linguistic ethnocide of indigenous languages continued until the 1990s, when several NGOs throughout Mexico started demanding the fulfillment of indigenous rights (Hidalgo 2006, 15-6). Both the Universal Declaration for the Linguistics Rights in Barcelona (1966) and the actions of the EZLN (National Zapatista Army of Liberation) in Chiapas set the stage for the creation and approval of the General Law on Linguistic Rights of the Mexican Indigenous Peoples (*Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* LGDLPI) in 2002 (Hidalgo 2006, 15-6). Today, 60 indigenous languages are spoken in Mexico by less than 7% of the total population in the nation-state and, despite the LGDLPI legally ensuring appropriate bilingual education for indigenous peoples, the law faces important practical limitations and challenges (Pellicer et al 2006, 136-7 qtd in Hidalgo). Among the most important challenges it faces is the establishment for standard guidelines of actions in a diverse linguistic landscape that has not been properly surveyed in terms of number of speakers, linguistic diversity, and distribution of speakers (Pellicer et al 2006, 138 qtd in Hidalgo).

*The Creation of the 1984 Alphabet*

During the entire colonial period in Yucatan, a colonial orthography based on the Spanish alphabet was the system in which Yucatec Maya was written by scribes; nonetheless, this orthography presented various challenges. Probably the major challenge in this orthography is that it failed to distinguish the length, tone, and glottalization of the vowel system in Yucatec
Maya, despite it accurately representing its five vowels (Hanks 2015, 656). This flaw represents a serious problem in reconstructing these linguistic features distinctive of Maya from the colonial orthography (Hanks 2015, 656). The flaw in accuracy representing the linguistic features in Yucatec Maya motivated a group of scholars representing government and non-government agencies to start meeting in 1981 to plan the establishment of a new alphabet for Yucatec Maya (Brody 2004, 143). A series of meetings with the purpose of coming to a consensus about the new alphabet took place between 1981 and 1984 where representatives from organizations like the Indigenous Education Department of Education Agency (Departamento de Educación Indígena de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, DEI), the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI), the National Institute of Anthropology and History (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, INAH), and the Mayan Language Academy (Academia de la Lengua Maya, ALM) gathered (Brody 2004, 145). Furthermore, previous works on comprehensive Yucatec Maya dictionaries like the Cordemex dictionary by linguists like Barrera Velazquez were greatly influential in the creation of the 1984 alphabet (Brody 2004, 149). The 1984 Alphabet represents the linguistic features of the Maya vowel system, such as length, tone, and glottalization (e.g. a, aa, áa, a’a). It also represented the Maya consonants in accordance with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) by changing graphemes like <tz, dz> to <ts, ts’> (Brody 2004, 155). In addition, it incorporates phonemes borrowed from Spanish as the graphemes <r, g, and f>. The ideological force that motivated groups of linguists, anthropologists, and other scholars to create the 1984 alphabet were mainly scientific and “of little or no interest to everyday readers and writers in the language” as Brody explains (Brody 2004, 155-6). Ordinary speakers did not care to understand the formal linguistic justification for many of the changes implemented in the new alphabet, including why representations like <ts,
ts’} where more “accurate” than the use of the older <tz, dz> (Brody 2004, 156). This Maya alphabet is currently promoted and incorporated both by state institutions and academic circles, and it is the one used by the majority of those who teach Maya or content in Maya to their students.

As the 1984 alphabet was being established, production and corpus publication in Yucatec Maya using the 1984 alphabet started taking place. The material was destined for two groups of learners, those children and adult Maya speakers acquiring literacy, and non-Maya speakers (ethnic Maya or not) who are acquiring the language (Brody 2007, 277). Only a small fraction of the material is destined to Maya speakers who are literate, as the vast majority of publications are created for the two previous groups (Brody 2007, 277). Some examples of such publications are Ko’one’ex Kanik Maaya, produced by the Yucatan State Public Education Secretary (Secretaría Pública de Educación del Estado de Yucatán) in 1993, and Ko’ox tsikbal, which means “Let’s Talk” in Maya and authored by Ismael May in 2002 (Brody 2007, 279). Additionally, local government institutions in Yucatan, as well as national organizations, have further spread the use of the 1984 alphabet through publications and even artistic contests in writing songs, poetry, and stories in Yucatec Maya (Brody 2004, 277). The Institute for the Development of Maya Culture in the State of Yucatan (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán INDEMAYA) and the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas INALI) were the main government institutions in charge of producing and distributing material in Maya with the 1984 Alphabet. These two institutions are important in the context of this thesis because they are institutions that are well known by my study participants since they have either participated in projects organized by them or have directly worked for these institutions.
INDEMAYA and INALI: Relevant State Institutions for Yucatec Maya

Created in 2000, INDEMAYA’s main purpose is to be an advocate for Yucatec Maya people’s rights through their participation and development in the economic and socio-political sectors and the maintenance of their culture (INDEMAYA 2018). It contributes to the maintenance and revitalization of Maya language and culture by encouraging performances of Maya culture, promoting Maya culture, and by offering a wide variety of services, including cultural workshops, and Maya language classes. (INDEMAYA 20, 2018). INALI, is a decentralized state institution pertaining to the Federal Public Administration of Mexico whose goals are based on the 2003 LGDLPI. Their goals are the strengthening, preservation, and development of indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. In addition, the institution acts under the LGDLPI to pursue the necessary public policies to ensure such endeavors (INALI 2017). In addition, INALI has particular relevance because it is responsible for the most recent and comprehensive set of updated rules added to the 1984 Maya alphabet known as the 2014 Norma. The 2014 Norma is a document containing the graphemes and orthographic conventions of the Maya language that are to be used in its written production (INALI 2014). It had its beginnings in 2006 in Yucatan and it is supported by the LGDLPI (INALI 2014). According to INALI, the objective of this norm is the strengthening, preservation, diffusion, and development of Maya in Mexico since it seeks to establish its written use and to elevate the status of Maya and the domains in which it is used, including education (INALI 2014). The 2014 Norma is relevant for the discussion that takes place in Chapter 4 about the role of Maya literacy in teaching Maya and its revitalization.
Theoretical Debates on the Role of Literacy, Language Ideology, and Language Revitalization Model in the Context of this Thesis

In the next section of this chapter, I lay out the necessary scholar theory that contributes greatly to the purpose of my research by connecting it with the five research questions I stated in Chapter 1. I present each scholar’s theory first and then I proceed to contextualize their theories in the context and purpose of my research by drawing connections with my research questions. I also address important research gaps in the literature by drawing from authors’ research. The five authors I present are Nancy Hornberger’s (1997) theory on indigenous literacy in the context of the Americas; Paul Kroskrity’s (2009) language ideological clarification; Josep Cru’s (2016) language ideological shift; Anne Marie Guerrattaz’ (2015) ownership of language; and Joshua Fishman’s (2001; 2013) Reversing Language Shift Theory. The authors’ theories and research are presented in the aforementioned order and each subsection addresses one or more research questions in this thesis.

Literacy in the Context of Language Revitalization: Hornberger’s Indigenous Literacy and Empowerment

Nancy Hornberger (1997) explains that local literacies (for local or indigenous languages) and bi-literacies (any case in which an individual or group communicates in two languages) within nation states have different “orientations” or perspectives in which these polities see local/indigenous languages and literacy in these (Ibid. 1997, 8). On the one hand, a nation state can see indigenous languages as an obstacle for the successful incorporation/assimilation of indigenous people into mainstream society, because it sees these indigenous languages (and cultures) as index and cause of their own poverty, lack of progress, and lack of education (Hornberger 1997, 8). On the other hand, a nation-state can see indigenous
languages as part of indigenous people’s rights and work to ensure their protection through legislation and programs. Nation-states can also take a utilitarian view of indigenous languages as untapped resources that can be used for the benefit of the society as a whole and for the benefit of indigenous language speakers as well (Hornberger 1997, 8). Hornberger asserts that, depending on the orientation nation states take towards their own languages, indigenous literacies can thrive, and she argues that the enhancement and revitalization of indigenous languages in the Americas is important. Their revitalization through alphabetic literacies at several levels (e.g. classroom classes, community program, and regional programs) is feasible, she says (Hornberger 1997, 8-9). As evidence, Hornberger performed an ethnography of communication in Peru with three Quechua speakers who became literate in Quechua out of necessity under different circumstances. The three participants in her research acquired literacy as the performed duties that were connected to bilingual education in Quechua, religious conversion through bible instruction in Quechua, and compilation of oral histories and their transcription into written Quechua (Hornberger 1997, 223-8). From her own study, Hornberger argues that an increasing number of Quechua speakers not only would lead to higher literacy rates among the Quechua-speaking population, but also that the encouragement and support for functional literacy in Quechua would empower marginalized communities by including them in societal participation (Hornberger 1997, 215). For the three interlocutors in Hornberger’s research, their development of literacy in Quechua made them develop oral and literacy abilities they had not previously had and improved their lives, as she argues that “in all three cases, out of the opportunity to develop their fuller language and literacy abilities, came empowerment not only for themselves but also for others around them (Hornberger 1997, 230-1)”.
Hornberger’s theory and research have a direct relation to my research because it directly deals with the importance of literacy for the revitalization and empowerment of indigenous languages and speakers in the context of the Americas. In fact, one of my research questions is, “How relevant is contemporary Yucatec Maya literacy in teaching Maya and for its revitalization?” and looking at Hornberger’s theory of local literacies as seen through different positions has made me ask whether Yucatecan society, and Maya speakers, consider literacy as a relevant tool for the teaching and revitalization of Yucatec Maya. Hornberger’s study is relevant to my research because it directly addresses how the life experiences of her Quechua-speaking interlocutors led to their becoming fully functional literates in their language within the larger nation-state context of Peru. This relevance has a direct connection with my asking this research question because all of the Maya-speaking participants I interviewed in my research are functional biliterates in Maya and Spanish but my first trip to the Yucatan suggested to me that they may vary in their consideration of the relevance of Maya literacy to their own lives.

One way in which Hornberger’s study differs from my own research is that she was interested in looking at how her interlocutors, through different life experiences, enhanced their biliteracy and bilingual skills. My research, on the other hand, does not bestow such a central role to literacy but considers it as one more important factor to take into account, among other relevant factors accounting for both the continuing endangerment of Maya as well as the potential for revitalization of Maya. In other words, Hornberger does not focus on the language ideology of her interlocutors nor how they construct these through their narratives, and I believe this is an important research gap that is addressed in my own research. Even though I consider literacy important and thus Hornberger’s study helpful, my research brings together a
multiplicity of perspectives by looking at the role of language ideologies and language revitalization efforts among my study participants for the strengthening of Yucatec Maya.

*Language ideologies in the Context of Language Revitalization: Kroskrity’s Language Ideological Clarification*

Now I want to introduce Paul Kroskrity (2009)’s theoretical version of language ideological clarification (LIC) as a useful reference for the understanding of language ideologies surrounding Yucatec Maya revitalization. Kroskrity defines language ideological clarification as “the process of identifying issues of language ideological contestation within a heritage language community, including both beliefs and feelings that are indigenous to that community and those introduced by outsiders that can negatively impact community efforts to successfully engage in language maintenance and renewal” (2009, 73). In this definition Kroskrity identifies two relevant actors around language revitalization efforts: (1) speakers of an endangered language (whether they are native or heritage speakers) and (2) other local stakeholders and external people such as social scientists and government officials (2009, 73). Kroskrity argues that besides eliminating external negative ideologies about their endangered language and culture, revitalizers must contest and confront ideological differences that arise when they act as co-workers with external agents for the establishment of language policies (2009, 73). LIC does not happen quickly within groups of people that are revitalizing their languages and neither it is a “one-time achievement”, rather; it is a continuous process that requires maintenance and re-evaluation (Kroskrity 2009, 78). Furthermore, Kroskrity argues that LIC is necessary for any successful language revitalization movement because, if it is not achieved through consensus, it would likely end up in a rejection of language revitalization products for a community due to internal divisions within the community (Ibid. 2009, 80). A strong LIC theoretical model
requires three essential components: awareness, positionality, and multiplicity (Ibid. 2009, 83). Let me explain in more detail, first, with regard to Kroskitsky’s concept of awareness, people bring unspoken yet powerful local ideologies and performances to the surface, as they recognize their problems, have feedback and receive emotional support and dialogue in a conscious way (2009, 80). Second, Kroskrtity argues that through positionality one can better understand the challenges to language revitalization efforts because, depending on one’s status within an endangered language community or a nation-state, one can have different ideas and feelings about a language with respect to others. Thus, positionality allows us to better empathize with others who have different perspectives on language endangerment (2009, 80). Finally, Kroskrtity argues that multiplicity allows us to recognize a variety of potentially conflicting local language ideologies held by people of different statuses in an endangered language community, such as youth and elders, and teachers, and parents for example (2009, 80). Thus, Kroskrtity explains that multiplicity helps us understand how groups with conflicting ideologies can make dialogues to solve their differences towards a better-implemented language revitalization (2009, 80-1).

Krokrity’s Language Ideological Clarification theory is relevant and has a direct connection with the purpose of my research because it addresses the language ideological aspect of language revitalization efforts, which is the central focus of my research. Therefore, LIC is a theoretical tool to answer an important research question in my work: “What are the main obstacles for Maya language maintenance and revitalization? And how do participants construct language ideologies around these obstacles?” The purpose of this research question is, rather than finding out the technical aspects of each obstacle, to obtain a diversity of perspectives in the form of narratives that allow for the construction of language ideologies around these issues from different perspectives. Thus, Kroskrtity’s positionality is relevant here also because it enables me
to look at the obstacles preventing a successful Maya language revitalization from different angles and professional perspectives. This allows me a more holistic perspective in understanding these issues in my research. Kroeskrito’s awareness also comes to play because, as study participants elaborate on what they consider the most serious obstacles for Maya language revitalization, they become conscious of others and their own language ideologies and the role these can play in revitalization efforts. Finally, Kroskrito’s multiplicity enables me to appreciate the disagreements and conflicts happening within the Maya language revitalization movement and how my study participants attempt to come to solutions that satisfy conflicting parties. One specific example of multiplicity is the controversy around the use of neologisms that as we will see, my study participants elaborate as problematic within the revitalization movement.

Language ideologies in the Context of Language Revitalization: Cru’s Language ideological Shift

Next I want to introduce Josep Cru’s (2016) research on language ideological shift as a referential concept in order to address how Yucatecans may construct language ideologies around Yucatec Maya revitalization. This played a significant role in my research.

In his work in Yucatan, Cru looks at the narratives of three professional language Maya-Spanish bilinguals in order to understand the shift in language ideology they have undergone due to their educational experience in linguistics (2016, 112). Cru seeks to determine how this shift in language ideology has influenced these professionals’ positive view on the speaking of vernacular forms of Yucatec Maya as a legitimate and authentic code (2016, 112). Analyzing these professionals’ narratives and comparing them with narratives exhibiting language purism among teachers and writers within academia, Cru argues that his participants’ ideological shift towards a positive language ideology around vernacular dialects revitalizes Maya (2016, 127).
He says it revitalizes Maya, because it counteracts negative language ideologies stemming from “extremist language purism” attitudes held by “experts” that stigmatize vernacular forms of Maya and that endangers the vitality of the language by delegitimizing lay speakers’ use of these forms (2016, 118-27). Finally, Cru argues the importance of such a language ideological shift among language professionals as a positive factor for Maya language revitalization. He writes that “their [language professionals] individual agency, grounded on sociolinguistic awareness and empowerment, are examples of much needed bottom-up revitalization policies against...relentless language shift to Spanish in the Yucatan” (2016, 127). Thus, Cru sees language ideological shift as a crucial step towards a better prospect for Maya language revitalization. The evidence that supports this argument can be found in research such as the examination of language ideological shift among children and youth as they are socialized into speaking Kaska, an endangered Athapascan language at the Liard River First Nation in Yukon, Canada (Meek 2007, 23-5). Meek argues that, through an ideological change, youth in the community have addressed the sociolinguistic discontinuity of Kaska language by “conceptualizing Kaska linguistic practices in terms of status rather than competence” (2007, 36-7). In other words, the younger generations’ ideological shift contributes positively to the revitalization of Kaska. Other scholars like Milani (2007) support Cru’s argument as he contextualizes language ideological shift as a debate where “textual/discursive battlegrounds” take place as “social actors struggle with each other in producing, reproducing, and/or challenging culturally situated conceptions of the social world enmeshed in representations of language(s) or language practices” (2007, 170). These debates are key sites for the status quo of discourses promoting hegemonic ideologies to be maintained, negotiated, or shifted in favor of counter-hegemonic ideologies (Malini 2007, 170). In the context of Cru’s research, this
ideological debate, and shift, happens as participants challenge the hegemonic discourse of language purists as owners and authentic speakers of Yucatec Maya.

Cru’s (2016) research on language ideological shift among Maya language professionals is relevant for the purpose of my research because it directly connects with my research question “How do study participants construct language ideologies around obstacles preventing Maya language revitalization?” An important purpose of this question is to bring to the surface how Yucatecan Maya language professionals’ awareness of their own and others’ language ideologies may be preventing a more successful Maya language revitalization. Thus, Cru’s concept of language ideological shift is an important theoretical concept because it connects with the purpose of my research question as I explore the ideological conflicts and issues that my study participants construct both inside and outside the Maya language revitalization movement. Furthermore, I seek to find out whether a major (or minor) language ideological shift among Yucatecan society and Maya speakers is something language professionals consider a priority for Maya language revitalization. Cru’s research is also important, because it compares language ideologies of positive ideological shift with language purism within the Maya revitalization movement. Unfortunately, Cru’s research does not focus on any non-linguistic related issues that may be preventing Yucatec Maya’s progress toward true revitalization. This is an issue I do address through my research, however, because my study participants comprise both ethnic Maya and non-Maya professionals with academic training in other areas, such as anthropology, communications, and law. Furthermore, Cru’s research included only three informants for his data, and my own research, with over 15 participants, also reports on the incidence of non-ideological obstacles problematic for language revitalization such as the ideological conflicts currently present within the Maya revitalization movement.
Another study that deals with language ideology within the context of Maya language revitalization are studies of teachers and the classroom. One of the few is one by Anne Marie Guerrettaz (2015) who studied a Yucatec Maya language training program for 44 teacher-learners given by four instructors organized by a regional Yucatecan university during 39 weeks (three semesters) (2015, 167-72). Guerrettaz reports that at the beginning-level class there were 36 learners of whom 25 were Maya-Spanish bilinguals and 11 were Spanish monolinguals. In addition, 23 learners had Maya as their first language, 11 learners had Spanish as their native language, and 2 learners were simultaneous Maya-Spanish bilinguals (2015, 175). Guerrettaz’ study consisted in focusing on the hegemonic discourses and language ideologies present among participants that enhanced ownership of language through the written, and oral in a lesser degree, standardization of Yucatec Maya for language planning (Ibid. 2015, 167). Guerrettaz defines ownership of language as a “political concept that encompasses diverse notions such as nativeness, expertise, and linguistic inheritance…and it is a framework for understanding the role of teachers in the implementation of language planning and [it is] defined as the authority that a user of a language has over that language and her sense of authenticity vis-a-vis the language” (2015, 170-1). Thus, ownership of language is both a theoretical concept and a framework that Guerretaz uses to analyse the hegemonic discourses and language ideologies present among learners and instructors about “who owns Maya” as an authentic speaker (Ibid, 2015, 172). Based on her findings, Guerrettaz argues that hegemonic discourses and language ideologies situates sociolinguistic authenticity of Maya identity to a romanticized and privilege the ownership and use of a standardized form of Maya in the classroom (Ibid. 2015, 180). She
explains that such romanticization and ownership de-legitimizes living Maya speakers of vernacular dialects and bestows ownership of language to those possessing the standardized form as the authority (Ibid. 2015, 180). Lastly, Guerretaz argues that these hegemonic discourses and language ideologies promoting ownership of language through a standardized Maya form seriously compromising the revitalization of Yucatec Maya via language planning because it takes away living lay speakers’ legitimacy of their own language and self-esteem as Maya people (Ibid. 2015, 181).

Guerretaz’ research of ownership of language among teachers is relevant for my research because it is closely related to two research questions I seek to address: 1) “How do Maya language teachers (my study participants) construct language ideologies around students’ attitudes when acquiring Yucatec Maya?” and 2) “How do study participants construct language ideologies around obstacles preventing Maya language revitalization?”. The purpose of the first question is to find out through Maya language teachers’ narratives what are students’ attitudes when acquiring the language, orally and for literacy, and to understand how they construct language ideologies through their experiences. Therefore, Guerretaz’ concept of ownership of language is useful because it helps me focus on what my study participants who are Maya language teachers define as constituting positive or negative attitudes from their students openness to Maya acquisition. Guerretaz’ theory is also relevant because I seek to find out whether hegemonic discourses and ideologies of ownership around Maya constitute an obstacle preventing language revitalization among study participants. In addition, my research also focuses on understanding how my academically prepared study participants’ own language ideologies as ownership of language can be a potential obstacle preventing a more successful approach to Maya language revitalization.
Although Guerrettaz’ study focuses on the discourses and ideologies that disempower living Maya speakers from their language and prevent a successful bilingual education through language planning (Ibid. 2015, 181), her study does not focus sufficiently on non-ideological factors. I argue that this is an important research gap that should be addressed because there can be other factors, such as lack of funding, insufficient infrastructure, and lack of qualified teachers, that may also be affecting Maya language revitalization through teaching.

Language Revitalization Theory: Fishman’s Reversing Language Shift Theory (RLS)

Joshua Fishman (2001) explained that the greatest trigger for language endangerment today are the globalization processes spreading Western culture, inevitably affecting threatened languages through political decisions at every level of society. The influx of new technologies, people, and information (Ibid. 2001, 6) all can have significant impact on endangered languages. Threatened languages and their speakers must contend with nation-state and global integration forces and are often facing the dilemma of abandoning their language in favor of a more dominant language for socio-economic reasons and social mobility (Fishman 2001, 9). This is the main reason, as Fishman argues, why it is very hard to save threatened languages. Revitalization, Fishman postulates, can be applicable to any endangered language, regardless of its level of attrition. He calls his ideas about revitalization as the Reversing Language Shift Theory (RLS) (Fishman 2001, XII). In this model, Fishman proposes a series of stages through which endangered language revitalizers or RLSers (“Reversing-Language Shifters”), as he calls them (Ibid. 2001, 7), must commit in order to have a better chance in revitalizing and maintaining their languages’ vitality. Given that in all RLS efforts there is the constant ethnonlinguistic presence of a dominant language that has more prestige and offers more advantages than the endangered language, socio-political boundaries must be established.
between the domains in which each language functions (Fishman 2001, 9-10). For this to occur, Fishman defines power functions (P), such as government functions, mass media communication, and higher education and the public arena and non-power functions (n-P), such as “family, neighborhood, community of practice, and community-managed local institutions” (Ibid. 2009, 10). For a successful RLS case to happen, the threatened language should eventually gain domain in both P and n-P functions; nevertheless, this scenario is uncommon, since the most common situation for endangered languages is to have domain over the n-P functions, whereas the dominant language has domain over the P functions (Ibid. 2009, 10). In the worst cases of attrition, endangered languages have also lost domain over n-P functions either partially or completely. What Fishman proposes as a more realistic and feasible scenario for successful RLS is that the endangered language (Th as in threatened) has domain over n-P functions, and that there be a compromise between this and the dominant language (n-Th as in non-threatened) over the P functions (Ibid. 2001, 10). Of course, there are always more complicated scenarios, such as when n-Th is also present with Th at n-P and the P functions since there are only a few speakers of the Th in the family and community domains, and also because there are n-Th speakers in these domains who rarely, if ever, speak the Th language (Ibid. 2001, 11). Fishman argues that it is strongly recommended that revitalizers secure the transmission of Th over the n-P functions, especially at home. Otherwise, if there is more focus on revitalizing Th by incorporating it in P functions at the expense of n-P function transmission, there will be no native Th speakers left in one generation (Ibid. 2001, 11). If this happens, Th would have to be revitalized through n-Th-controlled institutions and will be subject to regulations and agendas that n-Th speakers controlling such institutions have towards the revitalization of Th (Ibid. 2001, 11). For this theoretical model to work, Fishman heavily emphasizes that the most important
foundation of every RLS effort is the securing of a continuous intergenerational caretaker-child transmission of the endangered language in the family and local community of practice (Ibid. 2013, 493). Any RLS effort that has no strong foundation in this intergenerational transmission will be considerably diminished in its overall capability for revitalization. In fact, Fishman notes that a crucial foundation is overlooked in RLS efforts when change agents are in favor of pursuing “high status/power functions”, such as compulsory schooling at the state level for the endangered language without definite results (e.g. Irish in Ireland) (Fishman 2013, 485-6).

According to Carnie (1966), Irish revival efforts enjoys vast logistic and financial government support and has an official status in Ireland as “first official language” (1996,1). Despite this the Celtic language had about 80,000 native speakers distributed as language pockets on the west coast of the country, it faces serious risk of disappearing within two generations (Carnie 1996, 1-2). One main reasons attributed to the current failure of the revitalization movement for Irish is the language policy of requiring English-speaking students to take Irish language immersion programs at schools throughout the Irish-speaking zones (the Gaeltachtaí) (Carnie 1996, 9). This type of language policy has placed a gigantic responsibility on the educational system for Irish revitalization, since children were expected to acquire the language at school without any significant investment to create sociolinguistic spaces for the language outside school (Carnie 1996, 12). This language policy, in combination with poor pedagogical methods to teach the language, has fostered considerable resentment among students towards learning Irish at school since Irish-language classes and exams were compulsory (Carnie 1996, 11). Therefore, the case of Irish constitute an important example of what errors to avoid when applying Fishman’s RLS model (or any model!) to an endangered language with the goal of its revitalization.
Fishman warns against other “traps” in RLS efforts. For instance, an over-emphasis on the folklorization or romanticization of endangered languages through discourses based on “traditionalism, revivalism, or other expressions of anthropological revitalization” can cause a backlash from the targeted audience, who can criticize RLS efforts as “anti-modern” or stuck in a past or on stereotypes (Fishman 2013, 487). Another trap is the formalization of, otherwise, spontaneous, naturally-occurring intergenerational transmission of the endangered language (Ibid. 2013. 487-9). Therefore, it is essential to provide space for “self-regulatory home-family-community” transmission in the endangered language, as Fishman argues (2013, 489). At the end, language revitalizers’ ultimate goal is generally to achieve “greater self-regulation over the processes of sociocultural change which globalization fosters” (Fishman 2001, 6). Thus, they seek to equilibrate these pervasive processes with their own cultural knowledge and language with and through functional institutions working for them (Fishman 2001, 6).

Fishman’s theory on RLS is relevant and connects well with my research because his theoretical model addresses an important research question in my work: “In what ways do my study participants contribute to Maya language revitalization and maintenance through their profession?” This question necessarily implies finding out what those revitalization efforts by my participants are and how they happen. This research question is connected to Fishman’s theory because I can observe whether study participants are focusing their efforts on non-power or power functions within their professional context. It is important to understand how study participants, through their RLS efforts, are dealing with the “globalization processes” taking place at the national and regional levels, as Fishman (2001) postulates, and how they deal with the omnipresence of Spanish as the dominant language in the region.
In the end, the purpose of my research differs from Fishman’s theoretical perspective since I am not measuring the level of RLS success for each of my study participants or as a whole. Rather, I look at how Yucatec Maya is constructed as a valuable language through study participants’ RLS efforts. I argue instead that there is a research gap in the way Maya revitalization efforts are conceptualized at the individual level for professionals because Fishman does not focus on the language ideologies for RLS activists at the individual level. Thus, my research seeks to address this gap by looking at study participants’ revitalization efforts through their ideologies.

Fishman’s theory also directly connects with another research question I pursued: “What do study participants envision as the future of a more effective Maya language revitalization movement and how might they be achieved?” Through this research question, I seek to understand how my study participants reflect on the future steps for RLS efforts in comparison to the current situation for Yucatec Maya in Yucatan. In other words, I seek to understand their hopes and expectations for a more successful language revitalization for Maya. Fishman’s proposed scenarios in which the endangered and dominant language in a given society had domains over powerful (P) and non-powerful (n-P) is important, because it directly has to do with what my study participants expect to see as the next domains in which Yucatec Maya should be sociolinguistically present. Fishman’s theoretical model makes it possible to visualize (in theory) what the current stage of RLS for Yucatec Maya is and what could be based on study participants’ narratives; however, my research differs from Fishman’s model because, although he proposes a model that is able to predict RLS stages for an endangered language, his model is not concerned, nor does it account for the strategies that language revitalizers consider important for the future of an endangered language at the individual level. I argue that this is a research gap
that is better addressed in my own research, because I seek to find out the strategies that my study participants consider relevant for the future of Yucatec Maya revitalization.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS

Locations and Time Frame

I conducted my field research for almost 2 months during the summer of 2018 in the state of Yucatan, Mexico. My data collection took place in Merida and Valladolid, both medium-sized cities within the state of Yucatan. As the state capitol, Merida has 892,363 inhabitants, while Valladolid is much smaller with a population of 80,313 (INEGI-National Institute of Statistics and Geography in Mexico, 2015). I chose these two cities because they were strategic places for me to find informants. All of the study participants I recruited worked and/or lived in these urban centers. In Merida, I also visited the Hideo Noguchi Institute, the Institute for the Development of Maya Culture (INDEMAYA), the Department of Anthropological Sciences of the Autonomous University of Yucatan (UADY), and the UADY Institutional Center of Languages (CIL). In Valladolid, I visited the local editorial publishing house of Lakaam Naj (one of my participant’s company); and the Universidad de Oriente (UNO) (Eastern University).

Ethical Procedures

Before interviewing any interlocutor, I contacted every participant via email, text message, telephone call, or talked to them in person about the purpose and goals of my projects. I obtained permission from the NCSU IRB to use oral consent from participants for permission for involvement in my study. As participants agreed to participate, I created a master list with each participant’s name with their respective code in the form of a capital letter and a numeral (e.g: A2). These codes replaced participants’ names when I jotted down my notes during and after the interviews with each participant. This was done in order to ensure their anonymity. In addition, all participants wanted to use their real names in the writing my thesis, except for four
participants. For the four participants who expressed their desire to remain anonymous, I created pseudonyms without any traceable information or reference to their real identity. Finally, I used two devices to record every interview I did with my participants: a professional SONY audio recorder, and my own smartphone as a back-up device. After the interviews were recorded, I transferred the interview audio files from the recorder to my personal laptop and erased the interview files from my smartphone. I did not let anyone have access neither to my audio recorder nor laptop; I kept the recorder locked when unused, nor I locked my laptop with a security code only accessible by me.

**Methods for Data Collection**

I mainly collected data through formal semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Each interview was customized in accordance with the professional background of each of my study participants. I recorded these interviews and transcribed them verbatim in their original language. The questions I asked my interlocutors during the interviews were of two kinds. First, I asked study participants about their perspectives on possible future revitalization efforts. Second, I asked about participants’ specific background in connection to the Maya language revitalization movement. I wanted to understand each one’s view on the effectiveness of current Maya language revitalization efforts.

Although I obtained the vast majority of my thesis through interviewing, there were other methods I used to obtain some valuable data. One of the ways was through participant observation in a wide range of places in Merida and Valladolid. For example, in Merida I visited museums, such as the *Gran Mundo Maya* (Great Mayan World), I took classes at the *Insitituto Hideo Noguchi* for social sciences. I observed cultural venues in downtown Merida where local people performed several aspects of Yucatec Maya cultural heritage, such as regional dances
and Maya ball games. I also took Maya language classes at Merida and Valladolid as part of the FLAS (Foreign Languages across the Spectrum Program) language immersion program during the summer of 2018. Finally, I made occasional trips to the Maya-speaking village of Xocen, where I spent time with an adoptive Maya-speaking family as part of the immersion program.

Furthermore, I supplemented the interviews with collecting digital and written materials. For example, I went to some bookstores in downtown Merida to make a qualitative assessment of the availability, type, and quality of corpus written production in Yucatec Maya. I wrote down details on some of the books, which were published bilingually in Maya and Spanish in their vast majority. I took pictures of some of these books, and I also purchased materials in Maya from professors teaching in the language immersion program I was doing.

**Description of the Study Participants**

For this research, I ended up interviewing 16 participants in total. Out of the total, 10 were male and 6 were female; 11 of them were ethnic Maya and the remaining five were non-indigenous white and mestizo Mexican. There were also 12 Maya speakers, out of which 11 were native speakers (ethnic Maya) and one participant (Mexican, white) learned Spanish as his mother tongue and Maya was his second language. All participants had university degrees and many worked in higher education academic settings. Some worked independently or at public institutions. Finally, the age of the study participants ranged greatly, from their early thirties up to their early seventies. Below, I present a table with study participants’ general information. Notice that L1 refers to the participant’s first language and L2 refers to their second language.
Table 3.1. Research Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participant</th>
<th>Bilingualism (Maya and Spanish only)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Profession/Occupation</th>
<th>Relative age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cesar Can Canul</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Language teacher/professor</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didier Chan Quijano</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Language teacher/professor</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Fernandez-Repetto</td>
<td>Spanish L1 speaker</td>
<td>Mestizo Yucatecan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>anthropologist/professor</td>
<td>60s-70s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximina</td>
<td>Spanish (L1)-Maya (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>anthropologist/government</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gustavo</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>language teacher/linguist (freelance)</td>
<td>early 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilaria Máas Colli</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Language teacher/anthropologist</td>
<td>early 70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilia Hau Ucan</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Language teacher/lawyer</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam Uitz May</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Language teacher/communicator</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naruma Solutions (3 members)</td>
<td>Spanish L1 speakers</td>
<td>Mestizo Mexican/Non-Maya Yucatecan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>students/engineering/design</td>
<td>early 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar Chan Dzul</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Language teacher/linguist</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ricardo Vollbrechthausen</td>
<td>Spanish (L1)-Maya (L2) speaker</td>
<td>White Mexican/Non-Maya Yucatecan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>proactivist/writer/publisher</td>
<td>mid-late 20s/30s</td>
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<td>William</td>
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<td>male</td>
<td>Language teacher/educator</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Language teacher/linguist</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorgio Coba</td>
<td>Maya (L1)-Spanish (L2) speaker</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>social scientist/researcher</td>
<td>mid-aged 40s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma Cuña</td>
<td>Spanish L1 speaker</td>
<td>Mestizo Yucatecan</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>anthropologist/professor</td>
<td>40s-50s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before beginning the actual research, I initially designed three categories of people with certain criteria they should fulfill in order to participate in my research. The three categories I originally envisioned were teachers and educators; social scientists, and other kinds of proactive professionals involved somehow in the revitalization of Maya from their profession. In the end I decided not to use the term “activist” to refer to the third category since its meaning is too broad for the specific purpose of the category I initially had in mind. Thus, I simply needed a third temporary category to group those professionals who I initially thought did not fit in the previous categories of teachers/educators and social scientists. I make emphasis on the adjective “temporary” because, in the end, I discarded this category since the participants I grouped here also had overlapping with teaching and social scientist occupations. In fact, I realized that many participants who I had initially placed in one category (e.g. teachers and educators), were also trained as social scientists, such as linguists and anthropologists and had performed their own research. Others, whom I had classified as teachers and educators initially, also did activities focused on the revitalization of Maya that were not really related to teaching Maya in a classroom. An example of this comes from a study participant who designed t-shirts, cups, and other merchandise printing Mayan glyphs on the gear for selling. Consequently, I did not consider it necessary to classify study participants in these rigid, bounded categories. The only exception for the use of a category was for Maya language teachers. I only used the category of teachers/educators for Chapter 4, where I analyze study participants’ experiences teaching Maya to their students, as well as their perspective on the role of literacy for language education and revitalization.

Ultimately, study participants ranged from an interesting variety of professional participants, such as anthropology college professors who were neither Maya nor spoke the
language, to a series of Maya-speaking academic professionals who were trained in several disciplines such as linguistics, media communication, anthropology, history, law, and Maya epigraphy. Several study participants, all of whom are Maya native speakers, also taught Yucatec Maya as part of their professional activities. I also recruited one non-academic professional who worked at a public institution who was trained as an anthropologist. Ideally, the interviews with Maya speakers should have been in their first language, and although I have basic-intermediate conversational skills in Maya and linguistic knowledge on it, I do not possess the necessary functional knowledge to perform complex interviews in the language. Therefore, all the interviews with my interlocutors were done in Spanish, except for one performed in English. All participants who were native Maya-speakers also where fluent bilingual in Spanish.

**Framing of Research Question and Salient Themes**

Before doing the fieldwork in Yucatan, Mexico, my initial objective was to research the perspective of professionals involved in Maya language revitalization around Yucatec Maya from the production and implementation of materials in their professions. For this purpose, I initially designed various research questions that consisted of asking how their language ideologies influenced their revitalization efforts around the use of literacy. However, I did not anticipate the wide diversity that study participants had as their professional background of activities. As I explained before, many study participants performed a wide range of overlapping activities that invalidated my original categorization, so I decided to drop these categories altogether. Furthermore, one of the major changes I implemented during and after my fieldwork was the change of focus from literacy as the central theme of the research. Before my fieldwork, I had assumed that study participants performed their profession and did their revitalization efforts around literacy, but I was wrong. As I was doing interviews, and in the consequent data
analysis, I realized that, overall, participants did not put a critical emphasis and importance on literacy as a central theme in their professions, although it was still important to them. This made me re-consider the focus of my questions and, instead, I decided to design my questions to elicit the variety of strategies study participants seemed to be using for topics of Maya revitalization. Thus, their revitalization efforts and strategies became the main focus of my research. Literacy continued to be a relevant topic for my research; however, it did not occupy as central a role.

The survey questions I used were open-ended, and I framed the interview questions for participants in accordance with their experience and professional training. There were a series of questions I asked every participant, and also there were specialized questions depending on my study participants’ academic and professional background. Given that I discarded the categories I had initially designed, I re-wrote many of my original questions in order to standardize the interviews for all participants.

Post-Research Data Analysis

After finishing my fieldwork research in Yucatan, I started transcribing verbatim each of the interviews in the original language in which they were made. I used the Sony Sound Organizer software to transcribe the interviews from my research. As I finished transcribing each interview, I starting codifying the interviews by looking at relevant themes that were frequent across the interviews, and I did this for the entire data once I finished transcribing everything. I printed physical copies of the interviews and started underlining instances where themes showed up, and I used specific codes for each theme (e.g. “LANGREV” for Language Revitalization or “RASDISC” for Racism and Discrimination). I used grounded theory methodology to code the interviews once I transcribed them. Thus, I approached the analysis of
my data through an inductive approach since I soughted to formulate theoretical claims based on the results from my data. In the beginning, I started by reading every study participant interview without doing any annotation whatsoever. Here the purpose was to get my mind used to the diversity of the bulk of data I had transcribed. Second, I assigned code abbreviations as I re-read the interviews a second time, and made sure to repeat this process as enough times as necessary to account for each code I considered relevant. Third, I started doing small annotations next to the codes that I had previously written in the previous step in order to explain the function of the code I had assigned a particular passage in the interview. Fourth, I created a code list with all the codes I used to classify the data in my interviews and counted the number of incidence for all codes in order to obtain their numeric distribution. Once I obtained a distribution, I reviewed the codes with the greatest number of instances across interviews and grouped them into four insights. These insights were Maya Language Education, Adversity, Language Revitalization, and Hope, and they became the four data chapters of the present work. Afterwards, I proceeded to group every coded data (quotes) under each insight according to the relevant themes that defined it. Once I had sorted the appropriate material within the insights, I started analyzing the data qualitatively and restructuring according to each chapter and section within it. I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo version 12 for the qualitative analysis, storage, and assortment, and classification of my data.

In the next chapter, I introduce my study participants. The majority of whom are Maya language teachers. I elaborate on the pedagogical experiences of teachers, as they construct language attitudes and ideologies from their students regarding the acquisition of Maya. Additionally, I also elaborate on the perceived role that literacy plays in Maya language
education, language revitalization, and the ideological controversies around its current implementation.
CHAPTER 4
MAYA LITERACY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXTS:
MAYA LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

The purpose of this chapter is to show the reader how Maya language teachers, who are a considerable part of the study-participant population, construct, through their narratives, language ideologies and attitudes around acquiring Yucatec Maya by their students. I also show how study participants evaluate the importance and role of literacy in Yucatec Maya for teaching the language and for its revitalization, as they evaluate various components and applications of literacy in the language. These components are specifically the 1984 Maya alphabet and the 2014 Norma Maya. This chapter provides ethnographic evidence about the perspective of professional teachers surrounding their teaching of Maya. It also shows teachers’ construction of language ideologies and perspectives around teaching, Maya, literacy, and students’ language attitudes; these are the research goals of the present thesis. The qualitative part of this thesis is on Maya language teachers because I consider their profession especially important for the transmission of Yucatec Maya in formal settings. Language teachers, very often, are the “foot soldiers” of a language revitalization movement, and we need to talk about their role first in order to understand what is happening in Maya revitalization now.

The Maya Language Teachers

In my research, ten out of sixteen of the study participants are Maya language teachers. There are six males and four females teaching Maya language at different levels of education, ranging from middle school to college, and to a wide audience. Such an audience includes Maya native speakers and those non-native speakers learning Maya coming from different parts of Mexico and the world. Of the 10 Maya language teachers in my study, four teach at UNO
(Valladolid), three at UADY and affiliated institutions (Merida), one at INDEMA (Merida),
one at a private only-girls middle school (Merida), and one is independent (Valladolid). In the
first section, I present how teachers construct, through their narratives, language ideologies and
attitudes based on their students' reactions in the classroom.

Language ideologies and attitudes in the classroom: Teachers’ Narratives on students’
reactions

The understanding of teachers’ narratives regarding their students’ language attitudes and
ideologies is important to study because it is in the construction of those narratives that one can
really appreciate the behaviors of students, their motivations and frustrations through the lens of
people at the forefront of language teaching and revitalization. I want to quote from one of my
teacher interlocutors, Miriam, about her perspective on the attitudes she has observed from her
students when acquiring literacy. A media communicator by training in her mid-thirties at UNO,
Miriam teaches Yucatec Maya to students of different programs, including gastronomy and
marketing. When I asked her about students’ reactions to her making them read texts in Maya in
class aloud, she expressed the following:

Miriam: It’s positive! I mean, I think for linguists it’s something they like, it’s
something that boosts their confidence. Regarding other classes and bachelors,
like marketing and gastronomy, they are like "ohh what are you giving me? What
are you telling me? why are you asking me this?" So they do dislike it some, or
they see it as something strange
Felipe: People outside linguistics.
Miriam: Yes, people outside linguistics.
Felipe: Regardless if they are Maya speakers?
Miriam: Regardless, even Maya speakers I feel they are embarrassed; I feel they
are embarrassed they speak Maya. So they are still speaking it as a secret
language, more intimate, more between them.

In her narrative, Miriam constructs two group of students based on their academic
background: those taking classes in the linguistics program and those taking classes in other
areas, in this case gastronomy and marketing. Students in the latter group are in their majority, non-Maya speakers. Consequently, Miriam positively presents the first group as she says “it’s something they like; something that boosts their confidence.” However, she presents the second group with a negative language attitude in their behavior with displeasing questions like “what are you telling me?/why are you asking me this?”. It is evident that she constructs this identity, not based on the students’ ability to use Maya, but in their attitude acquiring it. In this second group, comprising gastronomy and marketing students, Miriam also includes Maya speakers in this group by taking an affective stance as she says “I feel they are embarrassed they speak Maya.” Such a feeling projected by Miriam should be understood to be an unconscious, internalized language subordination ideology for these Maya-speaking students. In fact, I argue that Miriam’s ideological construction leads these students to signal that Maya has no place in their relevant academic domain.

Negative language ideologies among students tend to be a common theme in Maya-language teaching formal contexts, especially when students are monolingual Spanish speakers. At the same time, teachers are able to empathize with students’ by adopting their positionality with respect to Maya, as they have had their ideological instances in the past. As an example, teachers like Lorgio reflect on their own experiences when learning literacy for the first time. A Maya native speaker and a professional PhD historian by training, Lorgio is also Maya language teacher at UADY in his mid-forties. I asked him about his reactions when first acquiring literacy since I wanted to know his own attitude about literacy in Maya. Interestingly, he also extrapolated his experience to his own students when teaching Maya, as shown here:

Something I tell my students now is that Maya is another language and that it has other structures and that we, even as Maya speakers believe that there is not a structure or that there are no rules. Like any language, it has a syntax, and as Maya speakers, we do not realize that it has syntax when we speak it, and when
we enter college in this process of learning in an institution to read and write it is always difficult for us as students because it seems like the teacher is wrong in what he is telling us. So that happens to anyone who speaks the language at the time of learning: that there are orthographic and syntactic rules in a language. So that was my first difficulty: to realize that I believed that the teacher was wrong when he was a Maya speaker too. And he showed me that Maya has rules and norms by which it should be written.

Lorgio begins with an often too common, language belief or ideology among speakers of minority/indigenous languages that is that indigenous languages somehow lack the systematic order that more prestigious languages have in their respective nation-state (see King 2000, 174-5). He exposes this language ideology of subordination right from the beginning by explaining how his own belief was challenged. Lorgio thought that “the teacher is wrong” despite her/him being a Maya speaker as well. Based on this personal realization about his native language, Lorgio makes his own students aware of what he considers such false beliefs by anticipating and counter-acting these language ideologies of subordination by explaining to them that, linguistically, Maya has the same standing as Spanish or any other language.

The Current Yucatec Maya Literacy and the Controversy around it: the 1984 Alphabet, and the 2014 Norma Maya

In this section, I present the various perspectives participants have about the current implementation of literacy for Yucatec Maya. More exactly on the current implementation of the modern 1984 alphabet for Yucatec Maya and the 2014 Norma Maya. Given that these two aspects of literacy in Maya are widely implemented and known by all Maya language teachers in this research, I consider it important to investigate the controversy around it. I begin by providing Cesar’s perspective on the pragmatism of the 1984 alphabet that he currently implements in his teaching courses. Cesar is an ethnic Maya descriptive linguist by training in his early forties that teaches Maya at the CIL (Institutional Center for Languages) in Merida and
has expertise in this subject. I asked him about the effectiveness of this alphabet and he responded:

Since the 84′, where they put these characters, where they took out the /dz/, the /tz/, they took out /h/ our writing became less practical and less popular ....What was going through the minds of the people who took out these characters that had more tradition, such as /dz/ and /tz/ and /h/? the other situation, something very important, is to know the phonological system of Maya language. The first writings since the priests, even the writing from the XVIII in the Caste War did not distinguish the vocalic qualities; these writings do! it tells you: there are 25 vowels...So you are complicating more the writing. whereas the catholic priests, it’s not that they did not distinguish these vocalic differences but they were more practical in their writing. So really do you need to distinguish that or not? Today it is thought that we do, so that’s why we have this alphabet and this writing...I think that we are unappreciating the context and the pragmatism of the language.

In his narrative, when Cesar means “they took out”, he talks about the selected group of linguists that designed the alphabet before 1984. Cesar is clear on his critique regarding the lack of pragmatism in the 1984 alphabet on things like the replacing of traditional phonemes like “dz” and “tz”. He suggests that the scholars promoting this change did not think that Maya was not independent from Spanish because its writing was based on the latter’s orthography. An assumption that he refutes through a linguistic argument when he addresses the issue with the Maya vowels in the 1984 alphabet. Cesar argues that the practicality and simplicity of the colonial writing was sacrificed for linguistic specificity in the 1984 alphabet, which became counter-productive due to its popularity among Maya speakers who were already literate in the previous alphabet. Other teachers like Didier, a historical linguist teaching at UNO, also agree with Cesar’s critique. A historic linguist and Maya language teacher in his late thirties, Didier explained to me:

Some changes that were made that were not appropriate because people had gotten used to writing in a way. So for instance with the 84′ alphabet new changes come, so I feel that instead of moving forward there was like a halt because for example, I know how to write with /dz/, as it used to be written like, but the 84′ alphabet tells me that I had to write it with /ts'/.
As mentioned before, when Didier explains that “people had gotten used to writing in a way”, he means that Maya speakers who were literate were accustomed to use the previous alphabet. He questions the necessity of changing the graphemes used to represent Maya writing since these were widely known by Maya speakers and non-speakers alike in the region. In the example he provides, replacing the grapheme “dz” with “ts” to represent the phoneme /ts/, is a source of controversy since it is not what most people practiced. Although he acknowledges that sometimes change is necessary, he questions the degree of changing most of the alphabet’s graphemes.

Just as there is controversy among teachers regarding the current implementation of the 1984 alphabet to teach Maya literacy, there is also controversy regarding the role that the newest system, 2014 Norma, plays in the development of Maya literacy and the impact it has on its effectiveness. For instance, Juanita, an ethnic Maya linguist and Maya language teacher at UNO in her late twenties, highlights the infeasibility of the 2014 Norma’s rule dictating that loanwords should be written in cursive since there are many. Furthermore, accounting for all loanwords would require an epistemological knowledge of Maya that most speakers simply do not have, as she argued. To support the aforementioned statement, Juanita provide an interesting case:

*We were doing a Maya workshop, so they [Juanita’s students] were writing a report but the loans have a lot of morphemes. So it came to my attention that they were writing ‘Taan in beetik jun solicitud-il’ like ‘I am making a solicitation/request’ [translation]. But, when you are a native speaker, and even if you were not, you realize something is missing. And I called the student ‘Hey come here, why don’t you put the /-il/? Does’t it need the /-il/? I told him. He said yes, ‘So why didn’t you put it? And he said ‘I am not sure whether it’s going to be written in cursive or not’. In this example, I must first explain some basic Maya morphology. Here, /-il/ is a dependent morpheme that indicates possession and it is acting as a suffix to the Spanish loanword “solicitation” (request). The student in question is a Maya-speaker who is acquiring*
literacy in his first language, yet the student is not necessarily aware of the specific separation of this morpheme from the Spanish word, so he thinks that “solicitation-il” is one word, yet Juanita explains that, since the Norma requires cursive writing for loanwords, the debate is whether the morpheme /-il/ should be in cursive or not. Therefore, Juanita’s narrative projects her student’s insecurity as she contends between abiding by the Norma or writing a grammatically-correct sentences. For a student who is beginning to acquire literacy in his first language, this can be quite challenging and confusing. In other words, the student sacrifices writing a sentence as a native Maya speaker would pronounce it for the sake of, in Juanita’s own words, “a purist non-functional” rule.

There are other teachers who have a different opinion about the functionality and value of the 2014 Norma. Gustavo is one of them, and he explained to me that the Norma goes beyond simple prescriptivist rules in Maya language. Unlike Juanita, Gustavo, a linguist and epigraphist in his early thirties teaching Maya independently, claims that the 2014 Norma does have a considerable understanding of Maya language. When I asked him if he thought that the Norma was purist, he replied:

Well, I would not say it is really purist. So the purpose is that there are many things that can be written in Maya and this is what has been trying to be achieved from the beginning. Neologisms are inserted, new words, but there are also archaisms! So for example, there are specialized words, right? I think that’s the kind of problem, right? There are specialized words for everything. For example, the J-meen [medicine men] have a way of speaking their language. When they do their prayers they talk about ‘álalmaj t’aan’, so those kind of words that are very specialized. So ‘álalmaj t’aan’ is something like a law or something important that has been used to talk about laws or norms.

Gustavo explains that the purpose of the 2014 Norma is to maximize the amount of potential topics/subjects that can be written in Maya, and he emphasizes the insertion of neologisms, specialized jargon, and archaisms. Now, archaisms are words that, traditionally, had
or have been in use for many generations but have become obsolete or scarcely-used by community members in general; they are usually used only by the eldest generations. Since archaisms are words not widely known by many people in this case, Gustavo praises the research upon which the Norma is based as it seeks to preserve these words in use, many of which have been replaced by Spanish direct loanwords. Likewise, Gustavo talks about specialized lexicon in traditional professions in Yucatec Maya culture when mentioning the j-meen (or x-meen for female), who are curers who have a vast knowledge of tsaak, or traditional herbal-based Maya medicine. His example of áalmajt’aan is a specialized term for the profession of j-meen. Thus, Gustavo explains that it is an actual Maya word in use, which has been given a new domain outside the herbal Maya medicine occupation.

The Role of Literacy in Maya language Education and Revitalization

Among the participants there is a division regarding the role and importance that literacy should have in the revitalization of Maya. Some participants implement the possible forms literacy can take in order to encourage their students to acquire it for Yucatec Maya. In fact, I previously discussed in the literature review that digital literacies are an effective way of getting speakers to write and read in Maya and I presented studies by May (2010) and Cru (2015) proving this. In this research, Didier, a historical linguist and Maya language teacher at UNO, sets a good example by incorporating the use of digital literacy in his class through the use of technology. Didier makes use of different applications to encourage the use of digital literacy among his students as depicted here:

I like to use some platforms online, that are not created to teach Maya but we can take advantage of them when we teach the language...There is one called Quizlet. Then we have Educaplay, then Quizzes, then one that is pretty recent I found on the web called Learning Apps. Yes, and in a lesser manner I use Cahut. Yeah
these are the main ones and I use some platforms like Motlet that I also have some courses online in Motlet...it effectively changes students’ motivation.

In his narrative, Didier promotes the use of digital literacy to acquire Maya among his students, as a form of revitalization, as discussed in the literature review. He understands digital literacy as a developing form of expression of ideas and communication among indigenous languages like Maya, whether it is done through the publishing of news, multimedia material, learning apps or its more prevalent use in social media. Therefore, in his narrative, Didier succeeds in motivating his students to acquire literacy in Maya by telling them that the language can also be indexed with technological use and all the communication means associated with it. Didier later told me that the incorporation of technology in the acquisition of Maya literacy positively increased students’ participation to acquire literacy in Maya and use it in any context they desired to. Didier noted students’ participation as students read exercises and texts aloud in class, as he observed throughout the course. Didier’s students are second-language learners who are usually 18 years old or older and are enrolled at UNO University. It is possible that the use of technology has a positive influence on their learning curve, but I do not have the evidence to assert such a statement; it is only a probability.

There are disagreements on the role that literacy is seen to accomplish in the teaching of Maya and its revitalization. Other teachers like Oscar, a linguist and language teacher in his early thirties at UNO University, have a different view on this matter. When I talked to Oscar in our interview regarding the means by which Maya can be revitalized, he explained to me a similar issue regarding literacy:

*What is required, and this has been a critique to INALI, is that basically it only develops written projects when, in reality, it should develop projects that work with orality; that is that they can be used, not written! Because about writing in general, people don’t write or read! There are very few of us writing and reading, so they should work a lot on orality, so “what do you mean orality?” Well, to*
work in radio, TV, things that are more audio-visual more than writing itself. Although I am not denying that writing is important.

Oscar bases his critique on the practicality of these numerous projects done by INALI (National Institute of Indigenous Languages in Mexico), which I mentioned in the literature review. He provides a sound argument regarding the lack of application for these projects given that simply most Maya speakers are not literate in their own language, and that more emphasis should be placed on orality to take into account the increasing Maya language attrition among younger generations. Language revitalization then is not best achieved through literacy, as Oscar explains, because there are academic factions regarding how literacy should be performed based on ideological conflicts. In this sense, most Maya speakers would not understand the literacy-based projects done by INALI because they neither read nor write in Maya. It is possible that the use of digital means, as opposed to printed dictionaries for instance, enhances the acquisition of Maya among speakers; however, I do not have any evidence suggesting this statement so it would be an important topic for future research.

In this chapter, I have discussed the perspectives of those study participants who are teachers constructing language ideologies around their students’ attitudes and beliefs as they learn Maya. Thinking back to Miriam, for instance, we learned that she constructs negative language ideologies positioning Maya as a language that has no place in specialized subjects in the curriculum of a university. On the other hand, Lorgio constructed his understanding of ideology around students thinking that Maya did not have a “real grammar” or structure since it was subordinated with respect to Spanish. Although teachers are very aware of these ideologies and make an effort to counteract them, the latter’s persistence in their narratives represents a negative sign for the acquisition of Maya among their students. I have also presented their perspectives on the relevance, practicality, and the role of literacy in teaching as applied today
and the controversy around the 1984 alphabet and the 2014 Norma Maya. Participants like Cesar, Didier, and Juanita are dissatisfied with the current alphabet and Norma since they argue that the decisions that were taken were not optimal or practical. This dissatisfaction potentially implies a division within the revitalization movement between those advocating for the alphabet and 2014 Norma vs those who do not. Thus, participants in favor for the current implementation of literacy, such as Gustavo, argue that there is a considerable linguistic and ethnographic research behind the creation of the 2014 Norma. Thus Gustavo situates the 2014 Norma, as a symbol of modern literacy, as an advancement for Yucatec Maya based on a scientific-supported authority.

Finally, I presented teachers’ perspectives on the role that literacy has on the acquisition of Yucatec Maya and its revitalization. Teachers like Didier find it useful to use technology to facilitate the teaching of digital Maya literacy to their students. In the context of his class, Didier’s goal is for students to acquire literacy in their first language since there are many Maya native speakers. He reports that the acquisition of literacy through technology increases students’ participation in his class, as they write and read more content in the language. On the other hand, Oscar criticized literacy-oriented projects performed by INALI to revitalize Maya. This difference of perspective indicates that some teachers place more importance than others on the role of literacy as an instrument for language revitalization. In the next chapter, I present the challenges that, in study participants’ narratives, are the main obstacles preventing a more successful Maya language revitalization.
CHAPTER 5
ADVERSITY: CHALLENGES TO MAYA LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN YUCATAN

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss my study participants’ narratives in order to identify the several obstacles that, in their perspective, prevent a more successful Yucatec Maya language revitalization. Here, I show how participants construct language ideologies around these obstacles. These obstacles include issues like lack of funding and lack of institutional support, racism and other forms of discrimination. Other relevant issues are language purism in academia regarding the use of neologisms in Maya, and a lack of meaningful production and diffusion of materials in Maya.

Lack of Institutional Support for Public Services in Maya in Yucatan

In this section, I present a narrative by Lilia that questions the lack of law enforcement for the General Law of Linguistics Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Yucatan and its governmental apparatus. This section deals with issues like neglect of linguistic rights for Maya speakers in the offering of public services like health. Lilia, a professional lawyer, native Maya speaker, and Maya language teacher in her early thirties, expresses a sentiment of abandonment and lack of support from the system that is supposed to enforce and ensure the revitalization of Maya language. When we discussed the lack of budget for interpreters in our interview, Lilia explained to me a key reason for this financial scarcity.

*The law does not compel the institutions to have a budget reserve for exclusive use. So if they don't have Maya-speaking employees, you need to have at least two professional interpreters, right? But there is none. In the hospitals, how many people have suffered because of negligence? Whether they become physically impaired or they die because there were no staff who spoke Maya...in Yucatan there is a law that ensures that you can speak Maya in any space but that law does not ensure that you are given a public service in your mother tongue.*
There is a discrepancy between the government discourse through institutions like INALI and Lilia’s narrative regarding lack of budget to invest in Maya-speaking personnel. In their website, INALI explains that their objectives are based on the General Law of Linguistic Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Mexico (INALI 2017). In its seventh article, this law dictates that public services, information, and relevant programs for indigenous populations shall be done in their respective native languages (diputados.gob.mex 2, 2018). This is the same law Lilia talks about in reference to the inability that hospitals and other institutions have to provide Maya-speaking interpreters on site for Maya-speaking patients in many parts of the state. In addition, institutions like INALI’s in their mission promote “the exercise, respect and defense of indigenous peoples’ linguistic rights,” which necessarily includes the offering of public services for indigenous languages (INALI 2017). However, Lilia’s criticism is raised precisely because such service is lacking. However, the state of Yucatan is in charge of allocating a yearly health budget for services like bilingual interpreting. When I looked into the Secretariat of Health of the state of Yucatan’s official website, I did not find any means or services specifically offering Maya-Spanish bilingual interpretation services (yucatan.gob.mx 2018). Furthermore, according to the fiscal budget of the state for 2018, there is only a total budget of 7,200,000 Mexican pesos for human resource staff, which is just $380,000USD (Presupuesto de egresos del gobierno del estado de Yucatán 2018, 310). The aforementioned data confirms Lilia’s statement about the lack of funding allocation from government institutions for Maya-Spanish bilingual interpreters. A reason for this may be the Yucatan government’s lack of prioritization for hiring interpreters, despite the fact that a significant 30.3% of the population in Yucatan speaks Maya (inegi.org.mx 2010).
Society and Discrimination: Racism and Classism against Maya-speaking People

In this section, I present two participants’ narratives projecting instances of discrimination of racism and classism. The objective here is to discuss their construction of language ideologies around these social issues as they express their personal experiences. I argue in this chapter that the different forms of discrimination against Maya speakers and Yucatec Maya culture are based on a social phenomenon I call the “Great Yucatecan Divide”. I define the Great Yucatecan Divide as a binary division of Maya-speaking rural life and urban, Spanish-speaking, mestizo Yucatecan. Such a division between these life-styles takes place through the indexicality (or association) of both languages with non-linguistic factors. Based on participants’ narratives, such unequal indexicality positions Spanish as a superior language since it is commonly associated with education, socio-economic mobility, and modernity. On the other hand, Yucatec Maya has traditionally been seen as a language spoken in rural areas, and it is commonly associated with indigenous customs (tradition), lack of education, backwardness, and lack of social mobility. In this sense, the Great Yucatecan Divide is a strong ideological construct that, as indicated by my study participants, permeates Yucatecan society’s overall vision of Maya vs Spanish.

To exemplify this ideology, I present Hilariá’s narrative in the context of teaching Maya to a wide variety of students. A cultural anthropologist, teacher, and a native Maya speaker, Hilariá is prolific pedagogic material producer in her early seventies. Hilariá, who identifies as Maya, teaches Yucatec Maya to adults from the region, different parts of Mexico, and the world, such as people from Canada, Colombia, and European countries. When I asked Hilariá what were the attitudes of local students in her language class, she provided me with a particular example of how the Great Yucatecan Divide ideology is reproduced in the classroom:
Hilaria: The Yucatecans, some of them are like “Oh it’s so hard, oh I can’t”. So for me, it is not that it is difficult for them but they want to portray themselves as from the city, right? And that they cannot pronounce the /k’,/ but they can do it.
Felipe: Right, so is it more like attitude?
Hilaria: Attitude, yes! To portray oneself as from the city, “then how am I going to pronounce that?” Because that was the idea being held, right?
Felipe: Right, and do you think that this can be a matter of racism or classism?
Hilaria: Eeh noo, once they get it that is it, because I never allow them that! “No, you can!” “Oh but I can’t”, “Ok, so why did you come to class? Did you come to class to learn or just to say that it is difficult? Well, if it is so difficult, the door is open”.

In her narrative, Hilaria states the Great Yucatecan Divide as an important socio-historic fact in Yucatecan society as she states “So for me it is not that it is difficult for them but they want to portray themselves as from the city, right? And that they cannot pronounce the /k’/ but they can do it”. First, I must explain that the ejective phoneme /k’/ is present in Yucatec Maya but absent in Spanish, thus this phoneme is an index of linguistic Maya identity. However, Hilaria is also stating another division here, as she contrasts the unwillingness of non-Maya Yucatecan students’ pronouncing this phoneme by positioning them in an urban identity when she says “portraying themselves as from the city”. In this sense, there is a division between rural and urban peoples in Yucatecan society. In Hilaria’s narrative, the identities revolving around this dichotomous socio-historic class division states that rurality is an index of Maya culture and language. Thus, urbanness is an index of Spanish-speaking Yucatecan-Mexican culture. This is how Hilaria reproduces the Great Yucatecan Divide in her narrative. Furthermore, the idea in Hilaria’s narrative that urban dwellers need not and should not speak Maya but Spanish for reasons such as status and identity is also part of the Great Yucatecan Divide. Through the expression “then how am I going to pronounce that?” Hilaria constructs a negative ideology around her student’s attitude as an instance of discrimination towards Maya language. For her, such an ideological stance deems as embarrassing and inappropriate for urban dwellers the
speaking of this language. In this sense, there is an issue of indexicality because Maya is not only being associated with rurality but also is associated with backwardness and lack of education. This process is very similar to the one Hill (1985) described about the indexicality of Mexicano identity among Nahuatl speakers with in-group solidarity and Spanish with authority and modernity. In fact, this tends to be the case for many indigenous languages in Latin America.

Participants in my research also told me of more insidious instances of discrimination. In this example, I analyze one of the narratives by Walter, a Maya native speaker and Maya language teacher at INDEMAYA, in Merida. A teacher by training in his early thirties who identifies as Maya, Walter elaborates on the problem of linguistic discrimination that he sees in his life daily:

*I have seen and realized that actually there are a lot of people who think we are inferior to them by the sheer fact of being Maya-speakers or because we come from a town. *But what is your basis for saying that I am inferior to you? *We are equals. On the contrary, I can speak Spanish and Maya; it's my culture. There's a great culture behind a language. So we have two ways of looking at the world, *so what makes you think that I am less than you?*

In his narrative, Walter begins by establishing an inequality based on the racist idea that the language a person speaks and the place where s/he comes from makes her inferior. In this sense, he creates a dichotomy to explain the racism embedded in such an idea. This is another example of the Great Yucatecan Divide ideology in action since there is a negative indexicality of the language one speaks and where one comes from. Walter also defies the logic of such ideology by exclaiming “*what is your basis for saying that I am inferior to you?*” He constructs a counter-hegemonic positive language ideology through his narrative through statements like “*There's a great culture behind a language*”, where he emphasizes the importance of being bilingual and bicultural. Thus, Walter, through his counter-hegemonic ideology, values bicultural bilingualism because he is able to understand the dynamics of Maya and Spanish-speaking
societies. In this way, I understand Walter’s argument as a call for a better integration in both worlds since he sees himself as an inter-cultural bilingual bridge between these worlds.

**Language Purism in Maya-Speaking Academia: Debates on Neologism Creation and Implementation in Educational Materials**

In this section, my purpose is to shed light on the various issues regarding an ideology of purism in academia concerning neologisms for Yucatec Maya. Study participants construct negative ideologies revolving around their implementation. Neologisms, such as *kisbuuts*, the word for “bus” or “truck”, are being used by speakers in the Maya-speaking academia to replace Spanish loanwords that lay speakers use to describe these objects. Overall, neologisms are usually foreign for lay speakers of minority languages like Yucatec Maya because people usually do not understand them or have to deconstruct their meaning to do so (Hornsby and Quentel 2013, 71-2). Furthermore, neologisms are created and used by a selected group of people who are literate elite in the minority language (Yucatec Maya). However, the meaning and use of these neologisms is not generalized into the general population of speakers, which is why lay speakers do not understand them and disagree with their use (Hornsby and Quentel 2013, 72). By analyzing the narratives of several participants in my research, I can generalize that neologisms tend to be controversial given they are ideologically charged and are, too often, counterproductive to the overall efforts of Yucatec Maya revitalization.

The first example of neologisms comes from Juanita, the Maya language teacher at UNO. As we were having a discussion about the role and influence of neologisms in literacy, Juanita explained to me that one has to pay attention to the kind of neologisms found in texts, because this has an impact on students' learning process and sense of self-competence as this quote demonstrates it:
What’s scary is that when it is a text that it is full of neologisms, because there are {some} texts with neologisms and {some} without them. Some of them have neologisms but even they are understandable. Some others are full of neologisms and it no longer makes sense. And it is there when the student herself, who is a native speaker, reads the text and doesn't understand it and she feels bad because s/he feels non-competent in the language s/he has always spoken. And that is dangerous! Especially because the majority of those who speak Maya become literate in the language when we are already grown-ups.

In her narrative, Juanita starts by explaining that neologisms are not intrinsically negative and that there are various degrees of neologisms in a given text according to the amount and understandability of these neologisms. For Juanita, the most extreme cases are these books “full of neologisms”, which constitute a threat to students’ self-esteem because they feel incompetent in the language they have spoken all their life. Thus, Juanita constructs in her narrative the potential emergence of a negative language ideology around Maya literacy caused by students’ lack of self-esteem. Understandably, she bestows a negative representation of these types of books given that they contain vocabulary that is incomprehensible and renders them useless. Therefore, she makes special emphasis in choosing more amenable readings that are not influenced by negative ideologies around language purism.

In a similar way, Oscar, a trained linguist teaching at UNO, also disagrees on the arbitrary use of neologisms by purists, as he criticizes the role that institutions like INALI play in the reproduction and distribution of ideologically-charged materials, as he explains:

_Something that worries me, as I work in interpreting and translating, is that material is being produced without being aware of the consequences that these neologisms can have, which generally are negative. For example, in INALI’s website you can download a Yucatec Maya-Spanish juridical glossary. I don't know or care who did it but their perspective of omitting any loanword is very clear...and this glossary is full of these types of decisions, and they are at INALI’s website, so that does not make me feel comfortable with resources on the internet; but I am not saying they are all like that._
Here Oscar makes a clear connection between language purism as a negative language ideology hindering language revitalization efforts through the production of corpus material by scholars at INALI. Oscar had previously criticized this institution’s projects for focusing too much on literacy and not enough on orality regarding indigenous language revitalization and maintenance. Now what neologisms and what decisions is he talking about? Oscar explains his critique through a detailed example following-up from the context of his previous quote:

*I think it was the word “rape”, and they created a neologism but they use words from Maya, but they do not correspond to the same register! So for “rape” they use the word /ts’iis/, but this word is vulgar. So it means “to fornicate” or “to fuck” in English, but its pretty vulgar, and not only that. They also add a prefix /Chee/ that means something like “crazy” or “insane”. So they create a composed word known as /Chee-t’siis/, which means “to brutally or crazily fuck.” So I can’t imagine a lawyer who is learning unknowingly or dutifully uses this term. Imagine that lawyer using such a term in court without knowing. So it’s like asking this person “Did this person brutally rape you?” So that is the type of problems that I pose to my students. Because it’s not only about “lets assign a meaning”, No. The language does not work through individual decisions.*

Oscar explains that, even if the composed word *chee-ts’iis* is grammatically correct from a morpho-syntactic perspective, it is inappropriate because it violates the sociolinguistic register, the social context, in which each of these words would normally be used. Since this is a vulgar expression; its use most likely corresponds to informal conversation, but perhaps not an appropriate term to use on a victim since it may hurt the receiver. Furthermore, Oscar constructs a conflict of code choice between the professional Maya-speaking lawyer serving as an interpreter in court and the neologism *chee-ts’iis*, which has a negative connotation and whose use can have an unpredictable effect over the receiver. Therefore, The neologism *Chee-t’siis* in a formal setting can be seen as “matter out of place” borrowing Mary Douglas’ theoretical framework of defilement (Douglas 1966, 35-6). In this sense, it is not that neologisms, like *Chee-t’siis*, are all together wrong, but rather it is their use in a formal context that it is wrong, as in a
situation in which a sensible subject is talked about with a rape victim, as in this case, but the usage can be seen as inappropriate, or as in here - “dirty”. Unfortunately, cases like this tend to reinforce negative language ideologies held by some people thinking that Maya is not an appropriate language and has no place for formal legal settings like a court trial.

It is these types of cases presented by study participants that can significantly hinder efforts of Maya language revitalization in potential public domains, including legal court interpreting and the usability of written corpus produced in the language by relevant institutions. Ideologies of language purism, through its many manifestations, can potentially alienate non-academic Maya speakers and non-Maya speakers alike. The problem lies in that people encounter a considerable amount of neologisms and rules that do not reflect the sociolinguistic reality of their language.

**Lack of Access and Meaningful Production of Material in Maya**

In this section I present my study participant's narrative regarding the lack of production and distribution of meaningful and useful materials for Maya literacy development, without which the revitalization of Maya will be delayed or impeded. I use Miriam’s perspective to highlight two critiques emanating from her narrative: the lack of institutional commitment and continuity towards production, and the lack of community outreach from scholars. In the context of the narrative, Miriam, communications and Maya language teacher at UNO, worked in an interdisciplinary project in which she never found out whether the final product was applied at the schools. I asked Miriam to reflect on what were the causes of the material production if no one knew how the materials would be applied. In her reflection, she responded:

*I sometimes feel that what it's created supposedly to revitalize Maya language from the government is just for 'Oh it's right there, I did my part'. A million were edited; they were delivered to someone, something else. That's it. There is no*
continuity nor evaluation of the project and there is neither a restructuring of it. That for one part regarding the government, and for the other part, us as the selected group who knows how to write and read we are not doing that much neither; I don’t see that there are activities that are really massive about teaching ‘Let’s teach literacy to Maya speakers’. Because I do see they are done in the city; but that it doesn’t happen in communities; I think it’s there where we have to reinforce it. And we limit ourselves to that selected group, in that little bubble in that city and that’s it.

In her narrative, Miriam launches a critique against the government institution in charge of the project for having, as she suggests, an apathetic attitude towards its fate and assessment. Here, she frames the institution’s real concern of the project as limited to statistical proof through number of materials produced rather than whether the project had a successful application at schools or not. In this sense, Miriam argues that the government does not produce these materials out of conviction or commitment to a revitalization for Maya but rather out of obligation since it is mandated in the constitution. In the second part of her narrative, she launches a critique against the academic circle of professors who are literate in Maya because they prefer to teach literacy in urban centers like Merida, where people from a higher socio-economic status can afford courses. When Miriam exclaims, “we limit ourselves in that selected group, in that little bubble”, she criticizes the lack of knowledge diffusion from those who have the knowledge to teach literacy in Maya, as it is concentrated in urban centers and lacking in rural communities. Ironically, it is in rural communities where Maya literacy may be needed the most since most Maya speakers reside there.

In this chapter, I presented the forms in which participants construct language ideologies around the negative issues affecting Yucatec Maya language revitalization. I first presented the issue of the lack of enforcement of linguistic rights for Maya speakers in Yucatan through Lilia’s narrative on the lack of bilingual interpreters in hospitals. Both Lilia’s narrative and Miriam’s narrative on the lack of commitment and continuity from relevant government institutions on the
meaningful productions of teaching materials are two sides of the same coin. They indicate the same source as the root of the problem: a scarcity of funding and assessment for the relevant projects due to the state’s lack of prioritization of the latter. Such problems continue happening despite the fact the Maya-speaking general population is significant, yet it is underserved.

On the ideological component of this chapter, there are two main issues of debate preventing a more successful revitalization of Maya. The first is widespread racism and discrimination in Yucatecan society, which is rooted in the ideological construction I have coined as the Great Yucatecan Divide. The second issue is the language purism as manifested in the implementation of neologisms through academic circles, especially in written publications. Both of these issues are constructed as negative language ideologies by participants in their narratives; however, the issues at hand are different in nature. The racism and classism Maya speakers are subject to have long historical roots from the colonial period and has its origins in the colonizing Spanish speaking society and its current descendant society. The language purism through neologisms is much more recent, as it has its origins within the Maya language revitalization movement itself, as scholars saw the need to come up with new terms that, too often, are in conflict with the actual sociolinguistic practices of Maya-speaking people overall. In the next chapter, I present the revitalization projects and activities participants are performing both collectively and individually towards Maya language revitalization through their narratives.
CHAPTER 6
REVITALIZATION: EFFORTS AND POSITIVE IDEOLOGIES IN THE STRENGTHENING OF MAYA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN YUCATAN

In this chapter I shall focus on the Maya language and culture revitalization efforts that participants perform through their professions as well as the positive language attitudes and ideologies they seek to advocate for and diffuse in defense of this language and cultural revitalization movement. The relevance of this chapter lies in presenting the wide variety of strategies and efforts participants engage in and explaining how these different efforts from different fronts make a contribution to the overall language revitalization of Maya. I argue here that participants are heavily committed and involved in the successful revitalization of Maya; nevertheless, they differ in their forms to do so and prioritize different aspects of language revitalization through their professional and personal projects.

Conscious and Meaningful Production in Maya

In this section, I present three study participants’ narratives on their own revitalization effort through the production of digital and physical materials with a focus on audio-visual material production and literacy. In this sense, participants’ narratives indicate that the creation and publication of good-quality information into comprehensible, available materials for the general population is a key aspect of creating a larger Maya-speaking and literate population in fronts like education, entertainment, sciences, research and more.

In the first example, I start with Miriam’s project on the meaningful production for Maya language and culture. As a media communication professional, Miriam trains her students in the production of audio-visual material within the Maya language and culture program at UNO, as she narrates:
We are working on a project about short-filming in order to vitalize orality and document it about the Maya people. So it’s rich because we directly work with young Maya speakers and there’s no filters. So I will explain it: the content is completely thought from the idea of us as Maya speakers done in Maya language, and if it is possible we use the second language, which is Spanish, so that other people understand. But it is thought and done by and for Maya speakers. The short-filming; our goal is that communities can look at themselves as a mirror.

In her narrative, Miriam also incentivizes her students to work collaboratively in the production of audio-visual media since these are projects sponsored by UNO as part of the program curriculum. Interestingly, this audio-visual media production is a collaboration with members of Maya-speaking communities and Maya-speaking college students alike as a grassroots movement of language and culture revitalization. In general, Indigenous activists are increasingly creating communitary organizations for the audio-visual production of relevant content in indigenous languages. One example is as the *Cine Comunitario* (Community Cinema) for a Kichwa-speaking audience in Ecuador (Muenala qtd in Haboud and Ostler 2013, 225). In the context of the quote, Miriam’s goal with this collaborative project is to create a social awareness for those who watch the short films about their own communities through meaningful production. This type of meaningful production by audiovisual means promotes positive language ideologies about Maya as a means of communication.

There are other participants who focus on meaningful production to create awareness of the importance of Yucatec Maya as language, yet they do so through literacy corpus production. In this case, Ricardo is an excellent example since he is very invested in the production and publication of relevant content in Maya both in Latin orthography and wooj (glyph-system). A young white Mexican in his early thirties who founded the Maya language publishing house Laakam Naj and who learned to speak Maya as a second language as a teenager, Ricardo argues that a language and culture should be in the service of its people given that it should serve the
purpose of enhancing communication between people. With his team, Ricardo worked on a collaborative project focused on creating for the school system bilingual Maya-Spanish materials about the inclusion of children with several types of physical and mental challenges. He observed that there was a need to serve a currently underserved Maya-speaking population through this project.

We worked on a project actually. Its called the 'Laboratorio ciudadano', [citizen’s lab] which is like a convocatoria [summoning]. Basically, a bunch of universities got together with the education ministry to ask for ideas for how to better inclusion in the school system. For children that have physical disabilities, so wheelchairs, blindness, deafness, or mental and psychological issues. So they wanted to publish this in Spanish only to a bilingual society, so we ended up doing the translations of the convocatoria. But they should have reached out to us to say, like 'Hey can you translate it?' instead of us reaching out to them saying 'Hey, can we translate it for you?'

Ricardo and his team’s participation in this project demonstrates that the meaningful literacy production of Maya can have a wide spectrum of action. The fact that helpful signs, manuals, and other materials are produced in Maya with the double purpose of serving two underserved set of populations, handicapped people and Maya speakers, truly speaks to the practicality in Ricardo’s endeavor. Despite the fact that his team had to take the initiative, which he criticized as a rather apathetic attitude from the project’s organizers, he managed to produce these types of practical materials, which renders visibility to the use of Maya in the public setting, thus contributing to its revitalization.

In a similar fashion, other participants like Gustavo also produce valuable literacy in the form of a wide variety of products with practical purposes. In his specific case, Gustavo focuses on literacy material production using Mayan glyphs (wooj) through merchandise he designs as in the following image:
Gustavo’s personalized wooj-themed gear like cups and t-shirts highly renders more visibility to this type of Maya literacy to anyone who may encounter a client wearing such gear anywhere and anytime. Despite its limited geographical reach, Gustavo’s strategy has the potential of reaching a younger and wider population in his area, whether the audience is Maya speaking or not. Furthermore, Gustavo makes an important emphasis on the wooj material production to rescue valuable knowledge about ancient Maya practices. In this sense, Gustavo’s production is meaningful and an effective means to revitalize Maya language.

**Community Activism and Outreach for the Promotion of Maya language and Culture**

In this section, I present four narratives explaining the language revitalization community-oriented projects that various my study participants are doing both in rural and urban areas. I begin with Lilia’s narrative about a project done by INDEMAYA in 2004 called
Wayano’one’, which means “we are here” in Yucatec Maya. A native Maya speaker who works at a only-girls private middle school in Merida, Lilia worked in an interdisciplinary team of professional Maya speakers for Wayano’one’. She told me about her experience participating in her mass-communication project.

At that time we participated along with a radio company called Raza Comunicaciones, which opened a space for a completely Maya-speaking radio station and that was on air like seven years. So imagine, the campaign at its highest peak and having the radio station in the city: the first of its kind and in Maya language; it was so good! We did two events in the main plaza with hundreds of people! So that power of summoning! And I tell you, like all Mayans that were in the city hiding came out, so we could see how many people spoke Maya or people coming from towns that were in the city.

In Lilia’s account, a very important component of Wayano’one’ as a campaign was the fruitful alliance with a radio company and the establishment of a Maya-broadcasting radio station that complemented the visual component of visibility, for which billboards in strategic parts of the city were used. More importantly, the series of organized events like the one narrated by Lilia also visibilized Maya speakers in a Spanish-dominant, now largely Spanish-monolingual, city like Merida. The audio-visual massive visibility of Maya language through mass communication media and the consequent visibility of Maya speakers in a large urban area like Merida creates a meaningful impact in favor of Maya language and culture revitalization and awareness, especially to a large Spanish-monolingual population that would, otherwise, not be aware of Maya in their daily lives.

Big, collaborately-done projects like Wayano’one’ have a significant impact on the targeted population of both Maya-speakers and Spanish-speaking monolinguals; nevertheless, they require significant planning, time and resources not available to other study participants who do not work alongside government institutions. There are forms of doing community outreach at a smaller scale and at a lesser cost that can be equally meaningful for those receiving
the information. Thus, Gustavo, an independent linguist, Maya native speaker, language teacher, and Mayan epigraphist, does community outreach, where he performs glyph-literacy workshops in marginalized communities.

Every time I teach glyphs in a town where I am not from, I may feel a bit of fear but the moment you see that you are teaching them, giving them information about their own language, their own history, they are happy, fascinated! Then they realize that their language is valued! For example, children, in this case youth to whom I teach glyphs, if they choose me I would choose these towns because they are the most marginalized. It is very hard they get access to that information. There is a town in Káanxook in the east in a mount...So I go there to awaken their curiosity, and once that happens, they will want to look for other ways to go outside because many times they are afraid.

In his narrative, Gustavo’s positive language ideology counteracts an elitist, centralized language attitude and the fact that many resources and valuable information about Maya language and culture is situated in urban centers and is rarely, if ever, distributed and made available in marginalized Maya-speaking communities. The fact that Gustavo’s glyph workshops awakens the intellectual curiosity of youngsters who have never had access to their own ancestors’ knowledge is a remarkable effort of language revitalization through knowledge diffusion and community outreach. An outreach like this in rural marginalized communities is vital since these tend to be Maya monolingual communities where education and other public services are also scarce, if nonexistent. Furthermore, Gustavo faces his own uncertainty and fear into coming into towns he is not from, which proves to the locals his commitment and intention to the diffusion of this knowledge about glyphs to Maya-speakers who, otherwise, would never have access to such knowledge in their daily life.

Like Gustavo’s outreach, there are other ways to perform community outreach on a small-scale by involving community members to participate in a project’s making. Such is the case for Dr. Francisco Fernandez-Repetto who is creating a virtual museum in collaboration
with the Maya-speaking community of San Antonio Siho, which is a locality from the municipality of Halacho, on the west coast of Yucatan, bordering with Campeche (yucatan.gob.mex) that has around 1566 inhabitants (INEGI 2010). Francisco, a Yucatecan mestizo who learned Maya at college, social anthropologist, and tenured anthropology professor at UADY in his sixties, explained to me that he intends to recover audio-visual, and photographic material, interviews. He directly works with the community and with the high school students on the project given that his idea is to make a virtual museum where, through the internet, people can have access to what is known as close patrimony. Here Francisco explains in further detail what he means.

We are contributing to the recollection of information, and the purpose of the museum has to do with this. For example, we are going to subtitle in Spanish and leave the original audio of the interview recording we did last Tuesday in Maya; and perhaps we may subtitle it in English afterwards to have a different exhibition dynamic. We also have interviews with herbal medicine people that we are leaving in Maya, so that’s a contribution, as small as it may be, but we are participating in this having to do with the identity of a very specific locality, but we are also activating a bit the work because the kids at the high school are also interviewing their grandparents, acquaintances, and at the same time we will participate in that.

The purpose of the virtual museum, as Francisco told me in the interview, is for people to have access to the museum from the high school without the need of an expensive maintenance or rigid opening schedule. The museum also serves as a repository of valuable compilations of social wisdom from a Maya mother teaching specific Maya regional dishes, which is the interview Francisco talks about as being “done from Tuesday” to common people telling oral histories about themselves and their community. Francisco’s virtual museum is a joint team effort in which Maya-speaking students of San Antonio Siho are agents of maintenance and preservation of their own culture, which allows them to value the effort they themselves have put
into assembling such museum. In my opinion, it is a noble and effective endeavor towards the Maya language and culture revitalization movement.

In the same way that community outreach projects can be done through mass-media communication in large urban settings like Merida and also at a small-scale level in smaller communities, other projects using an exclusively digital platform like smartphone apps can also have a positive impact on diffusion. Such is the case of a basic-level learning app for Maya designed by Naruma Solutions, which is a grassroots organization formed by Luis, Najim, Nivan, and Rudiel, four mestizo male students in their twenties living in Cancun, Quintana Roo. They have professions like graphic design and computer engineering, rather than education. These young men have created an app called Aprendiendo Maya Jugando (Learning Maya playing). Naruma Solutions, in a joint interview with Luis, Najim, and Nivan via skype, explained to me that the app was available in the Apple and Google Android as well as Google Play. They decided to take advantage of a new field in apps in languages like Maya through didactic games, as they explain here.

There are mobile apps, but many are based in dictionaries, so we wanted to do it through games, dynamics, something more entertaining to learn. Regarding Maya, the ideal for us is that this is a long-term project. We are two years now since we first launched this app, and we have been innovating some things in the app. We want to develop other projects, and as we told you this is not a project we designed to get profit out of it, but it is a social project.

Naruma solutions dared to do something that it is not commonly seen today; and that is interactive apps for learning indigenous languages. Even though the organization does not really earn much money through this app, they clearly have a social commitment towards the digital diffusion of Yucatec Maya, as well as they also enhance digital literacy of the language through digital interactive means. As I proved it to myself when I used the app in Mexico, it is interactive and allows you to listen to the pronunciation of words as a native speaker of Maya would
pronounce them as well as write and read them in their language. Naruma Solutions’ learning app has ample room to work on the platforms it offers to learn Maya. Thus, the app has the potential to improve users’ experience learning Yucatec Maya with interactive features. This app is an important step done by a small team of entrepreneurial young men with little more support than their own pooled resources, efforts, and time.

Community outreach projects are meaningful and important for Maya language and culture revitalization because they create a positive impact upon the people who benefit from them. Study participants used different strategies to reach different types of audiences to engage with Yucatec Maya; their commitment to facilitate the access of the language to an underserved sector of the population is valuable for revitalization efforts.

Digital Literacies in Language Revitalization

In this last section, I provide two brief examples of how study participants, through their informal literacy practices, perform Maya language revitalization in their more intimate domains. The first example of the use of digital literacy in Maya is from Walter, the Maya language teacher at INDEMAYA. When I asked him about his uses of Maya literacy in informal spaces, Walter described the good relationship with his coworkers as friends since they spoke Maya since they first met. Here he describes how it is like keeping in touch with them.

So up to today, whenever I see them we speak Maya, and I keep in contact with them, so we message each other in Maya through WhatsApp. We write out information in Maya to our emails, Facebook, by messaging, so, yeah, I keep in touch with them every day in Maya.

In his narrative, Walter has created a Maya-texting sociolinguistic space with his former co-workers. The use of digital means of communication like social media apps is increasingly prevalent among indigenous-language speakers as a way to keep in touch with friends, family,
and significant others. It is important to take into account that, although generally there are agreed-upon rules in texting, the grammar of texting itself in informal domains is non-prescriptive, as May (2010)’s study on Maya speakers’ texting practices demonstrates.

In study participants’ narratives, digital literacies constitute practices from a bottom-up approach, where users sending text messages are agents of their own writing, without the pressure of prescriptivist rules applying from Maya orthography. A good example of this is Maximina. A native Maya speaker, ethnic Maya anthropologist in her early thirties working for INDEMAyA, Maximina commented to me about her own texting practices.

*When we are texting via WhatsApp or via email we are not that careful with orthography or if it has an apostrophe or a tonal vowel; in the personal domain I am not that careful about that.*

Walter and Maximina’s texting habits when writing Maya enhance the use of Maya language literacy, not because it is somehow important to write in Maya but rather because social bonds of solidarity are created, reinforced, and maintained, and also because this kind of digital literacy allows them autonomy and creativity over their own writing. This argument is demonstrated in Cru’s study (2015) on the practices of young bilingual college students in Quintana Roo as they use Facebook postings to enhance their identity and visibility. When texting habits in Maya allow people these important social and personal needs, it is a salient aspect of their lives and it will further enhance the use of Maya through digital literacy.

In this chapter I have argued that participants are heavily committed to the revitalization of Maya; nevertheless, they differ in their forms doing so and prioritize different aspects of language revitalization through their projects. I addressed study participants’ efforts in this chapter on fronts like meaningful material production, community activism and outreach, and informal digital literacies. Overall, through their efforts, my study participants are aiming for
greater visibility and re-valorization of Yucatec Maya language in order to increase the
language’s popularity/prestige, accessibility, and diffusion. In the next chapter of this thesis, I
present the various expectations and needs that study participants consider necessary for a more
successful Maya language revitalization movement.
CHAPTER 7
HOPE: EXPECTATIONS FOR A TRUE MAYA LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

In this chapter, I present the various hopes and expectations that my study participants have about the future of Maya language revitalization in Yucatan. My study participants expressed a wide diversity of needs that are necessary to improve the sociolinguistic landscape of Maya in its homeland. They also expressed that Maya cultural vitality must be reinforced and Maya language vigorized. In addition, study participants advocated for socio-economic equality for ethnic Maya-speaking people through more socio-political representation, especially for communities in rural areas. Study participants propose a series of strategies that address Maya language revitalization movement and elaborate on the difficulty of realizing them. These strategies are the creation and maintenance of sociolinguistic spaces in the public domain; the cultural and linguistic integration, inclusion, and tolerance towards Yucatec Maya language and culture; the economic incentivizing of speaking Maya by its inclusion in the job market; and the meaningful material production and distribution of material in Maya with an emphasis on pedagogy.

Maya Sociolinguistic Spaces in Yucatan: Bilingual Education and Health

One of the most important public arenas for sustaining language revitalization is public schooling, because educating the youngest generations in Maya speaking and literacy production will have long-lasting consequences that will benefit the Maya not only linguistically, but also socio-politically and culturally. In my research I wanted to determine the subjective importance of a compulsory education in Maya in the school system in the state, thus I asked Hilaria, who is a Maya native speaker and Maya language teacher at the Hideo Noguchi institute. In my
interview with her, I asked her what should be the ideal presence of Maya in the educational system given that Spanish is the official language. She responded:

_In the schools yes! Everyone should learn Maya! “Are you in Yucatan?,” learn Maya. Then just because “Oh, I am from Merida!” You are from Merida, you belong to a people with a culture. Although you were not born in the town but where we have that heritage, why should we not value that? Why should we think something else that is against it? When the little group of Maya teachers and writers think “Oh, Maya should be preserved in towns.” Maya should be preserved everywhere! In all of Yucatan; not only people from towns should speak it because if they have the chance of studying, getting into college and they dominate their language, that’s good. Everything they learn will be something more that will strengthen their language and knowledge...So at the same time Spanish should be taught in towns so that the students coming to Merida do not feel like helpless rural people, but that they easily integrate with their classmates._

In her narrative, Hilaria makes a straight-forward association of Maya language as an essential index of Yucatecan identity (whether indigenous or Mestizo) as well as an official standard of the Yucatecan state. Through questions like “Why should we not value that?”, her argument to advocate for the compulsory teaching of Maya in the state stems from a socio-cultural heritage shared in the region, where the original Yucatec Maya culture and language has a tremendous influence in the region (Restall 1999). Consequently, she taunts the divisive hegemonic ideology by taking on a character role of someone who holds that ideology by expressing “Oh, Maya should be preserved in towns.” Here, this statement is one that indexicalizes metalinguistically people like the Maya through false assumptions about the aspects of rural life implying limited opportunities for socio-economic mobility and formal education. This denigrating, divisive ideology based on linguistic, class and ethnic division has been present since Spanish colonial rule and persists today in the Yucatan.

In the above quote from Hilaria, she contests and counteracts such ideology by devising a counter-hegemonic ideology of her own by exclaiming “Maya should be preserved everywhere!” Hilaria’s ideology is based on a concept of pan-regional Yucatecan identity in
which Yucatec Maya forms a vital identity marker. For Hilaria, a fully-implemented compulsory bilingual education system in all schools of the state symbolizes the ultimate means by which a unified Yucatecan identity is achieved. Such an identity unites ethnic Maya and non-indigenous people in a cohesive society. Furthermore, Hilaria argues the importance of a far-reaching integrative bilingual education system for all ages in Yucatec Maya. She believes that it will facilitate the integration of rural Maya students into urban settings and will mitigate discrimination and self-helplessness, which, she believes, are root causes of these denigrating, inter-cultural and ideological contacts with urban dwellers. Although Hilaria currently teaches Maya only to professional adults as their second language, she has a vast experience teaching Maya at several levels of education (K-12), thus her opinion is important.

There are other essential public sectors that are the focus of participants’ expectations, such as health. The specific need being addressed by their expectations is the scarcity of Maya-speaking personnel (whether they are health caretakers or medical bilingual interpreters). Study participants like Ricardo expressed concern about the lack of access to health services for Maya speakers in their language in much of the state despite Maya is an official language in the state of Yucatan. When I asked him, where he would start incorporating changes if he had the power, he responded:

*I would regulate the use of Maya particularly in health care. A lot of the medical professionals speak only Spanish. They are white, Hispanic Yucatecos and they are treating Maya non-Hispanic patients so you have lots of breakdowns in communication.*

Ricardo refers here to the importance of a public policy, one that dictates the need of bilingual Maya-Spanish assistance in public services like healthcare because it is a right of every citizen to have access. Interestingly, he makes a comparison and contrast, based on race, as he highlights the fact of *white Hispanic Yucatecos* treating *Maya non-Hispanic patients*. This
comparison is relevant because it implicates a cultural distancing between caretaker and patient since they are not from the same cultural group and do not share the same sociolinguistic background. The usual hierarchical relationship between a doctor and a patient is intensified with the race/class intersectionalities. This is the case when the doctor is a non-Maya mestizo or white speaker and the patient is a native Maya speaker. From Ricardo’s narrative, the lack of Maya-speaking personnel in hospitals in many communities is indeed a recurrent concern expressed across participants. In fact, 25% of the surveyed health centers in communities throughout the state of Yucatan had no Maya-speaking staff at all, despite the fact they serve Maya-speaking patients (CODHEY 2017, 12). For example, in towns like Xcuyun, in Yucatan with approximately 1560 people, it was reported that no personnel in the hospital spoke Maya despite 70% of the patients were Maya speakers (CODHEY 2017, 16).

The maintenance of sociolinguistic spaces for Maya in the form of a strong bilingual education model and the offering of services, such as health care in the state is essential. Study participants argue that this maintenance is necessary for the improvement of Maya-speaking people's life and the fulfillment of their rights as citizens.

Tolerance, Integration, and Awareness: Cultural and Linguistic Reciprocity and Respect among the Maya and the Mestizo

One of the most effective ways to change the ideological paradigm of the Great Yucatecan divide is to change the ideology of Maya speakers themselves. Since Maya speakers have the capacity to ensure the language transmission in the family, this ideological shift and language transmission is an essential expectation that all study participants would like to see. In fact this is already happening in places like New Zealand with Maori, where motivated L2 speaking parents are transmitting Maori to their children (King 2009, 97). I begin with Lilia’s
narrative because she provides an example of how this change can be brought about. Lilia, a lawyer and middle school Maya language teacher, is a firm advocate of interculturality in domains like education, especially at the college level, and she proposes an intercultural university in Yucatan. However, she explains that before doing that, an ideological change from below must occur:

*We have to work in an integral manner. If we are going to educate a boy or girl to reinforce their identity and can recognize other identities, we have to do it from the family nucleus; the community nucleus. Why? Because you will be reinforcing this person, but if we keep dragging them down from home or the community to not let them get out of the hole, then we are not doing anything. So it’s about changing an ideology at the integral level.*

Through her narrative, Lilia addresses the historical and ongoing instances of discrimination, racism and classism that exist in Yucatecan society towards the Maya-speaking population. She understands that a bottom-up approach of cultural awareness, and a reinforcement of identity within the family to children is a vital step in the process of language revitalization through interculturality. The latter means that both Maya and non-Maya children should learn each other’s languages and cultures (Spanish and Yucatec Maya) and get along. However, when Lilia writes “*but if we keep dragging them down*” she means that there are parents who have ideologically bought into a sense of negative, Maya, language subordination from the larger society. They, then, transmit these same negative ideologies to their children. In other words, Lilia argues that from an early age there is a need for cultural awareness and reinforcement of identity for children in order for an intercultural model of linguistic and cultural sharing to work.

The emphasis on an intercultural space in the academic or work formal settings is important and has also been emphasized by others participants like Didier, Maya language teacher at UNO. Here is his perspective regarding opening spaces for interculturality:
One more matter is that through schools, not so much and not just the teaching of Maya language, but in this case to teach values like respect, diversity, like interculturality. These are matters that need to be worked at schools a lot, right? And not only at indigenous education institutions, but also in private schools, right? Or institutions that are not considered under the branch of indigenous education, so that we can have a balance, right in some way. I feel these should be the actions. And mainly that people feel the value; that they feel that their language has a value and is worth as much as Spanish or English. But if there is no necessity, we will not achieve it.

Didier advocates interculturality as an ethical value that all educational institutions, indigenous bilingual or not, should incorporate at all levels and instances in Yucatan’s educational system. For him, it is a matter of achieving a balanced reciprocity between both the mestizo Yucatecan and the Maya ethnic populations that can break the pervasive, classist, racial ideology of the Great Yucatecan Divide. Consequently, he argues that the need for Maya to be valued as a tool in domains like work and academia should be created. Didier explains that an appreciation for a language comes out of the need to use it in any given context, and he argues that interculturality, as a meaningful space, will open those spatial contexts for Maya.

In their narratives my study participants argue that there is a clear need for grassroots, bottom-up approaches of cultural identity awareness among the young generations in Yucatan, both Maya and Mestizo, both at the school level and the family level. It is important to take these narratives into account for they reflect the hope and the need to begin a significant ideological shift from the Great Yucatecan Divide towards an ideology of inclusion, integration, tolerance, and interculturality.

**Maya and the Economy: Competitiveness in the Academia and Professional Job Market**

Probably the main reason people pursue college education in general is to obtain higher-paying professional jobs in which a specific set of skills are needed to satisfy the professional market demand. One of the best ways to encourage Maya-speaking students to pursue higher
education is to incentivize them financially. In his narrative, Oscar, linguistics Maya teacher at UNO, provides an example of how can it be done.

What can actually be done and would be good is to create educational scholarships. This can work because scholarships would say “Ok, who wants to study medicine?” who wants to study X career? The requirements are being a Maya speaker and such”. So many times to have a requisite such as being Maya speaker leads to a reflection of “Let’s see, do I declare myself Maya-speaker to obtain a scholarship or not? Am I a speaker or not? Do I identify as such?” So there is a change from that. The fact that the same institutions begin thinking in incorporating a language or how to develop the programs in Maya language because that is also valid!

Oscar’s strategy follows the same principle as Didier’s in the previous section: there must be a need to use the Maya language; if there is none, then one has to create it. In this specific case, the goal of these scholarships is the professional training and formation of a market of Maya-Spanish, bilingual professionals who make an active use of Maya as a requirement for their studies and jobs. By the same token, this scenario provides a legitimate reason that, with a debt-free education, will encourage speaking and even writing and reading in Maya. In fact, such opportunities might encourage Maya speakers’ introspection and negotiation of their own identity as a means to achieve an important advantage in society. Many speakers of minority languages, including Maya speakers do not openly identify as speakers of these languages for a number of reasons that may include discrimination or lack of opportunities. Oscar’s strategy challenges these speakers to re-evaluate their identity and overcome their lack of self-esteem in order to reap the potential benefits of their Maya language identity. Finally, Oscar’s strategy incentivizes the incorporation of Maya in the professional job market, which implies there is a demand for its use. In this way Maya can become a capital resource in the same fashion as Spanish and its teaching will become more demandable.
Enhancing Learning and Literacy: Meaningful Material Production in Maya

From the narratives of my study participants there is a scarcity of teaching materials even at the public institutions where, by law, they are supposed to be found. Maximina, an anthropologist by training and native Maya speaker, provides an insider’s perspective because she is a former employee at INDEMA. Regarding her expressed need for teaching materials, she comments:

So I talked to you about doing these Maya language and culture workshops in schools and also prepare teachers to impart classes on Maya language and culture, but we are lacking in material edition. Many people come here asking “is not there any material so that I can learn Maya?” And we do not have any! We cannot count on having them and Indigenous Education doesn’t have them either. So these are things we need to achieve. And, the financial matter is always important.

Maximina explains there are no pedagogical resources in Maya to cover the physical demand from the general public. According to their website, INDEMA readily offers goods and services in Yucatec Maya, which includes cultural and language content materials in Maya for the general public (INDEMA 20, 2018). However, according to Maximina, this is clearly not always the case given the lack of financial support at the institution. She links the absence of such services and material availability with a deficit in the financial budget of the public institution in which she used to work. As suggested in Maximina’s narrative, there needs to be a more consistent and funded production, edition, and distribution of materials for the acquisition of Maya.

Summary

In this chapter, participants expressed a diverse range of expectations for the improvement of the Maya revitalization movement. First, there is a need for a full inclusion of Maya in essential public domains such as bilingual education and health. The lack of public
services offering in Maya has consequences beyond education and health, because it leads to miscommunication based on linguistic and cultural barriers between Maya and non-Maya Yucatecans. Also, participants expressed the need to subvert the negative ideological paradigm known as the Great Yucatecan Divide regarding Maya language, culture and society, through family socialization and to raise cultural awareness in the entire school system. This is likely the most challenging expectation because, unlike the others, it cannot be solved through technical solutions alone, because it is a social problem that has deep historical roots. The achievement of such expectations implies a gradual process of ideology shift where negative ideologies, like the Great Yucatecan Divide, gradually lose their hegemonic status. Finally, there is an expectation among my study participants to financially incentivize the use of Maya through its complete incorporation into the regional capital market. One important conclusion from this section is that participants acknowledge and welcome the use of Maya in the professional job market as well as in other sectors of the capitalist economy of the state. Such use and incorporation is beneficial for Maya speakers who want to pursue higher education so they can use their bilingualism to their advantage.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

In the last four chapters of this thesis, I have presented and analyzed the narratives of my study participants on the salient aspects stemming from my research concerning the language revitalization of Yucatec Maya. In Chapter 4, I analyzed the narratives of Maya language teachers, a significant portion of the total study participant sample. Thus, the first research question I sought to answer was “How do Maya language teachers construct language ideologies around students’ attitudes when acquiring Yucatec Maya?” as I took into account Guerrettaz’s (2015) research on ownership of language as hegemonic discourses and language ideologies around standardized Yucatec Maya among professors in a pilot program in Yucatan. From the analysis I did in Chapter 4, I found out, based on the narratives of Miriam and Lorgio, that these teachers constructed two types of negative ideologies around students. The first ideology concerns Yucatec Maya’s lack of prestige as a means of transmission for academic knowledge at the college level, as this was evidenced, for example, in Miriam’s construction of gastronomy and marketing students’ discomfort acquiring Maya in the classroom. The other type of ideology is one of subordination of Maya, as it is thought to lack the complexity be “a real language”, which was evidenced in Lorgio’s reflection on students’ folk false beliefs about Maya not having a “grammar” or “order.” These folk beliefs position Yucatec Maya as a de-legitimized language that does not have the complexity that nation-state official languages like Spanish have. There was no clear construction of a positive language ideology among students, at least according to the attitudes in analyzed narratives by teachers.

The second research question I answered in Chapter 4 was “How relevant is contemporary Yucatec Maya literacy in the teaching of Yucatec Maya language and in its
revitalization?”. To formulate this question, I took Hornberger’s research on indigenous literacies in Quechua language as a form of empowerment in order to find out whether there were similar findings for Maya. In order to answer this question, I addressed study participants’ perspectives around the implementation of literacy today by taking into account the 1984 Alphabet and the 2014 Norma Maya. I complemented the answering of this question by analyzing study participants’ experiences on the implementation of literacy in their professions. I found out that, despite all the teachers use the 1984 alphabet, they are divided as to its practicality for the spread of literacy to more Maya speakers. For instance, teachers like Cesar and Didier did not favor the 1984 Alphabet as an appropriate transition, as they considered that it was based on scientific perceptions and not on social consensus, especially since literate Maya speakers were used to the older, pre-1984 orthography. Regarding the 2014 Norma, teachers like Juanita, through a practical example, argued that the Norma is “purist” and “non-functional” given its unrealistic expectations. Gustavo, instead, argued that the 2014 Norma was useful given its extensive research on Maya language, specifically on the re-adaptation of archaisms. Regarding the role of literacy in Maya language revitalization, study participants like Didier, Walter, and Maximina positively highlighted the role that digital literacy in Maya had had in their profession (Didier) and personal life (Walter and Maximina). However, participants like Oscar criticized the over emphasis of literacy-oriented projects by relevant institutions like INALI. Overall, study participants make use of Maya literacy in their professions and personal lives, yet they are significantly divided on the ideal application literacy should have today.

The third research question I answered was “What are the main obstacles for Maya language maintenance and revitalization? And how do participants construct language ideologies around these obstacles?” In substantiating the formulation of this question, I relied on

Based on the analysis of study participants’ narrative in Chapter 5, I found that my interlocutors identify a wide range of obstacles around which they construct negative language ideologies. The main obstacles identified by study participants were a lack of institutional support for public services in Maya; discrimination, including racism and classism, against ethnic Maya-speaking people; a pervasive language purism ideology among scholars within academia; and the lack of access and meaningful production of material in Maya. In the obstacle related to lack of institutional support, Lilia elaborated on the lack of budget for medical interpreters in the healthcare system as a serious issue that violated Maya-speaking people’s constitutional rights, as stipulated in the 2003 General Law of Linguistic Rights. On the obstacle of social discrimination, Hilaria and Walter construct negative language ideologies around instances of explicit and implicit racism and classism through an ideological construct I have coined as the Great Yucatecan Divide. Hilaria and Walter construct these ideologies by constructing an indexicality that associates Yucatec Maya with negative connotations, including lack of education, backwardness, and lack of social mobility. However, they also construct counter-hegemonic positive ideologies that empower them as language revitalizers. The ideological obstacles continued as study participants elaborated on the pervasive language purism present in academia. This was mainly exemplified by Juanita and Oscar’s negative view on the implementation of neologisms in the corpus production of written content in Maya as well as in the application of neologisms in formal domains, such as court hearings. Overall, I concluded, based on Juanita and Oscar’s narratives, that language purism through the implementation of neologisms is both counter-productive and detrimental for the revitalization of Maya. For the last
obstacle, Miriam elaborated through her narrative on the lack of access and meaningful production in Maya through a project in which she participated. Thus, she launched a stern critique to government institutions’ apathy and to her own circle of scholars given their inactivity regarding the spreading of literacy to rural areas.

The fourth research question I addressed in Chapter 6 was “In what ways do study participants contribute to Maya language revitalization and maintenance through their professions?” For the rationale of this question, I took Fishman’s (2001; 2013) Language Reverse Shift theoretical model and theory in order to determine the domains that study participants prioritized in their work for the language revitalization of Yucatec Maya. The main ways in which study participants revitalized Maya are: the meaningful production of relevant content in Maya (written or audio-visual); community outreach for stakeholder communities (both in the city, rural areas, and digitally); and personal habits among participants that promoted the use of digital literacy. In the first type of revitalization effort, Miriam focused on the creation of culturally-relevant audio-visual content in Maya for a local audience. Ricardo focused on a project related to social activism that created content in Maya on inclusiveness for impaired children, while Gustavo focused on the production and selling of merchandise with printed Mayan glyph on it. In the second type of revitalization effort, study participants like Lilia, Gustavo, Francisco, and Naruma Solutions focused on the dissemination and visibility of Yucatec Maya. They did this through both large-scale urban projects (e.g. *Wayano’one* in Merida), local-based community projects (e.g. Mayan glyphs workshops in Käänxook and the virtual museum in San Antonio Siho), and learning apps to learn Maya (*Aprendiendo Maya Jugando* smartphone app). Therefore, study participants are performing revitalization efforts both through the promotion of literacy, audio-visual cultural content, personal habits enhancing
use of Maya in social apps, and the acquisition of Maya through technological applications. In sum, participants perform their revitalization efforts through different fronts as they prioritize different aspects of Maya language revitalization through their professions.

The fifth and last research question I addressed in Chapter 7 was “What study participants envision as the future of a more effective Maya language revitalization movement and how they might be achieved?” I also based this question on Fishman’s Reversing Language Shift theory because it allowed me to explore the possible hypothetical future that study participants hoped and expected for Maya language revitalization. Study participants expressed their expectation for the Maya language revitalization movement to be strengthened in four aspects: (1) The inclusion of Maya in public services, such as compulsory bilingual education in Yucatan (Hilaria) and a regulation of the healthcare system that hires more Maya-speaking personnel (Ricardo); (2), there should be a cultural and linguistic reciprocity among the ethnic Maya and Yucatecan Mestizo based on tolerance, integration, and awareness (Lilia and Didier); (3) there should be more opportunities for Maya speakers to compete in academia and the professional job market (Oscar); and, (4) there should be a more meaningful material production for Maya, especially for pedagogic materials for the language (Maximina). Summarizing, study participants expressed the expectation that there needs to be a major change in ideological, societal thinking in matters of discrimination against ethnic Maya speakers both from the Mestizo Yucatecan community and from the Maya-speaking community itself. Additionally, study participants suggested that there needs to be a major shift in language policy for Yucatec Maya in the region in terms of the job market for Maya speakers, the offering of public services for Maya speakers, a better funding allocation for Maya-related projects, especially in the production of pedagogic materials.
In my opinion, it is likely that if the expectations of study participants are not achieved within a reasonable amount of time, the vitality of Yucatec Maya will keep declining until it reaches critical levels of endangerment. I believe that the changes at the language policy level are achievable in the medium-term if the current legislation is properly enforced and more national and regional budget is injected into cultural and language-revitalization-related projects.

However, I do think that a major ideological shift in Yucatecan society towards a positive cultural and linguistic reciprocity between Maya and mestizo is considerably harder and if it occurs will only be a long-term endeavor. Ideological paradigms such as the Great Yucatecan Divide will take a long time in receding, because they are socially and historically deeply rooted. Nevertheless, I remain hopeful and positive that the revitalization efforts of my study participants will be successful in the revitalization of this beautiful language and that their expectations for the future of Yucatec Maya become true.
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