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SHIFTING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AMONG YOUNG MAYA PROFESSIONALS: OVERCOMING PURISM IN YUCATÁN

Abstract:

This paper looks at the ideologies of language purism among young Maya professionals from the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico. After an introduction to language purism and its influence on revitalisation processes, I analyse the narratives of some young adults and their professional development and contrast them with those of some Maya intellectuals and teachers. In a context of widespread indigenous language abandonment, these bilingual professionals have been through a process of strengthening their ethnic identity and currently show a committed attitude towards the maintenance and reproduction of the Maya language. According to their narratives, a fundamental ideological shift during a particular life stage, namely studying Sociolinguistics at higher education institutions, has been determinant for adopting a more flexible stance towards language contact between Spanish and Maya and purism. I argue that their shift in linguistic ideologies counterbalances pervasive stigmatisation of so called ‘mixed’ varieties of Maya, increases the valorisation and the legitimation of vernacular Maya, and ultimately works towards language revitalisation.

Keywords:

language purism ♦ language revitalisation ♦ Yucatec Maya ♦ language ideologies ♦
indigenous professionals ♦ Maya intellectuals

Introduction

Yucatec Maya is an indigenous language spoken by some 750,000 people on the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico. Unlike other multilingual states, such as Oaxaca and Chiapas, Yucatec Maya is the main indigenous language on the Peninsula, which is administratively divided into the states of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo. While these figures are comparatively substantial in the Mexican context (only Nahuatl has a larger number of speakers), according to official censuses the percentage of Maya speakers within the total population of Yucatán has steadily been decreasing in the last four decades (INEGI, 2010). Against the background of extensive and profound socioeconomic transformations such as urbanisation, migration, and the growth of tourism and the service industry (Blakanoff, 2008), language shift to Spanish is caused by persistent stigmatisation and the subordinate position that most Maya speakers hold in the Yucatecan society (Bracamonte et al, 2011). The increasing importance of English, particularly on the Caribbean coast of the Peninsula, adds to the complexity of the changing linguistic ecology of the Peninsula.

As a response to indigenous demands, significant legislation has been passed in the last few decades with a view to recognising the contribution of indigenous peoples to the Mexican nation (Hernández et al, 2004). Thus, in 2003 the General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples was drafted, and three years later, a federal agency, the National Institute for Indigenous Languages (INALI) was created. In the state of Yucatán, where most of the population of the Peninsula is concentrated, a regional institute for the development of Maya culture, INDEMAYA, has existed since 2000. Alongside these institutional policies to promote indigenous languages and cultures, activists are also making efforts through the grassroots to introduce Maya in domains such as social media, theatre, literature, and modern music, to name but a few. Arguably, these efforts, from both the top down and from the ground up, have had a positive impact on the visibility and valorisation of Maya in the Peninsula. These transformations have also paved the way for the emergence of a group of middle-class professionals who have capitalised on their ethnic identity and language competence in Maya to accrue both symbolic and economic capital (López Santillán, 2011). In this paper, I analyse the language ideologies of

a small but—I argue—key group of young Maya adults in their mid-thirties, all of them language professionals, and compare them with purist ideologies which are widespread among Maya writers, teachers, and intellectuals.

Methodology

Data for this paper were gathered in the Yucatán Peninsula, where I have been doing fieldwork intermittently since 2008. The approach is ethnographic and qualitative, with special attention to language ideologies. Language ideologies can be described as “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (Kroskrity, 2010: 192). Language ideologies can be brought to the surface in productive and critical ways through ethnographic fieldwork and are of the utmost importance to understand language minoritisation processes and the reproduction of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses (Schieffelin et al 1998; Blommaert 1999; Kroskrity 2000, 2016). Crucially, language ideologies are more often than not part and parcel of broader societal struggles and conflicts and thus are central to an understanding of the strategic sociopolitical positioning of speakers.

Building upon previous work and extensive observation in the field, the data for this particular paper come from further informal interviews in Spanish with three young adult professionals in the early thirties who have had the chance to study Sociolinguistics at higher education institutions in Mexico and abroad. With their permission, I use their real names throughout this paper: César Can, Flor Canché, and Yazmin Novelo. The three of them are bilingual in Spanish and Maya. While they maintain strong links with the towns where their families live (Motul, Timucuy and Peto, respectively), they were based in Mérida, the capital city of Yucatán state, at the time of my fieldwork. As for many other Yucatecans, urban and rural life was for them a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy. Moreover, they have become cosmopolitan young adults thanks to access to higher education in Mexico City, Barcelona (Spain), and Cochabamba (Bolivia), to name but the three main cities where they have carried out studies in Sociolinguistics. Being socialised in families where Maya and Spanish were used on a daily basis, it has been through a process of increasing language valorisation and appropriation that César, Flor and Yazmin have become not only active Maya language speakers but also committed agents who actively work for its revitalisation. I maintain that analysing the language ideologies of these three highly educated young adults is of the utmost importance because of the

symbolic impact they have in a context where schooling rates beyond primary education among Mayas are still appallingly low (Bracamonte and al. 2011). Furthermore, I have also included the contrasting opinions about contact between Spanish and Maya of another group of Maya speakers, namely, some teachers and intellectuals, to gauge the relevance of these young adults' changing and flexible stance on purism.

Aside from face to face interviews, electronic communication has been regular with the three participants, who have become friends, after we first met in 2008. The use of social networks, especially Facebook and email, have been fundamental tools to not only establish and maintain contact with these participants but also to learn more about the ways in which these speakers, along with other Maya youngsters in general, currently use these platforms to express their beliefs and promote minoritised languages.

Language Purism and Revitalisation

The ideology of language purism often emerges as a conspicuous phenomenon in processes of language standardisation. Based on his work on European languages, Thomas has defined linguistic purism as:

The manifestation of a desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve a language from, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable (including those originated in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language). It may be directed at all linguistic levels but primarily the lexicon. Above all, purism is an aspect of the codification, cultivation and planning of standard languages (Thomas 1991: 12).

Within the context of increasing efforts to expand the functional expression of indigenous languages, in Latin America, language ideological debates have often revolved around the interdependent issues of purism, authenticity, legitimacy, ownership, and standardisation. Therefore, tensions have arisen, particularly in the educational domain, out of the clash between 'official' standardised indigenous languages and vernacular varieties as spoken on the ground (for the Andean region see Hornberger and King 1998; Howard 2007; for Guatemala see England 2003; Brown 1996). Also, the seminal work by Jane Hill and Kenneth Hill (1986), and more recently Flores Farfán (2003, 2009) and Messing (2009) have explored the syncretic character of current Nahuatl and the role of purism in the process of language shift to Spanish in Mexico. As noted above, purism typically appears in the early stages of standardisation and particularly in corpus planning and lan-

guage cultivation. These early stages often spur ideological debates which are prominent at the lexical level, since speakers can focus more easily on the lexicon of a language, and especially nouns, due to their easy accessibility (Hill and Hill 1986: 122; Kroskrity 2010: 199).

Indeed, value judgements and perceptions on language variation, authenticity and legitimation are present in all societies, be they literate or not, with or without standard languages (Joseph 1987: 4; Dorian 1994: 480; Brincat et al. 2003: viii). Whereas the focus of this paper is on vernacular varieties of oral Maya, it is safe to say that literacy is one of the most salient and emotionally charged terrains in which opposing views and ideologies of language stand out (see Brody 2010 for Yucatec Maya). The need to strengthen the oral use of indigenous languages on the ground, therefore, contrasts sharply with the language policies of some institutions, such as INALI, which put the emphasis on language standardisation and the development of literacy as a central strategy for the promotion of Mexican indigenous languages (INALI 2009).

Language Purism in Yucatán

Drawing on cultural metaphors of ‘mestizaje’ in Latin America, which, simply put, refers to the racial and/or cultural mixing of Amerindians with Europeans, the word ‘amestizada’ (mixed) often emerges in discourses to define vernacular varieties of Maya in Yucatán (Armstrong-Fumero 2009; Hanks 2010: xvi; Chi 2015). Maya speakers often point out the hybrid character of current Maya, which is heavily influenced by Spanish, while positively assessing the existence of a supposedly ‘pure’ Maya. These two varieties are commonly known as *jach* (authentic) Maya and *xe’ek’* (mixed) Maya (Pfeiler 1996, 1997), but also *mayaespañol* (Mayaspanish) (Chi 2015). The former corresponds to an allegedly legitimate and authentic variety spoken by some older people, while the latter literally means ‘mixed’, and is the widespread vernacular currently used by most speakers.

A perception of the low quality of *xe’ek’* Maya, considered less genuine because it is mixed with Spanish, explains the lack of legitimacy often attached to this variety. Against this backdrop, speakers may consider Maya as deficient because of long-standing language contact with Spanish. This, for instance, becomes evident in the expression of numbers. Maya speakers generally use numbers in Maya up to number four, but from number five onwards they borrow the Spanish equivalents and give them a nativised pronunciation. Negative assessments, stemming from Spanish loanwords have also been

noted in the case of Mayan languages of Guatemala by Fischer and Brown (1996). These authors write that “the Mayan languages are often criticized in Guatemala as ‘incomplete’ or ‘defective’ because their many loanwords from Spanish –easily recognized by Spanish speakers– are seen as evidence of inferior expressive capacity” (1996: 5). It is important



Map 1. Main cities of the Yucatán and location of interviewees' hometowns

to note that the issue of legitimacy and authenticity is fundamental not only in language revitalisation efforts but also in wider cultural and political struggles for recognition among indigenous peoples, as England (2003) and Fischer and Brown (1996) have noted.

As for the geographical location of the allegedly pure variety of Maya, Yucatecans often point to ‘hardcore’ Maya regions of the Peninsula such as the interior of Quintana Roo state, around the town of Peto in the centre of the Peninsula, or the environs of the city of Valladolid (Pfeiler 1996). These areas correspond to the municipalities with the highest percentages of Maya speakers according to national censuses (INEGI 2010, see *Map 1*).

César Can, one of the three young linguists who belongs to the key group of interviewees and hails from Motul in Yucatán state, gave a prime example of this ideology when he recounted that:

Cuando estaba realizando trabajo de campo, me mencionaron esto: “*ba’axten ka taal weye’ si to’one’ ma’ k ojel t’aan maayai’*, le *k abuelo’ob ka’ach úuche’ lelo’ sí, u yojelo’ob* / ¿Para qué vienes acá?, si nosotros no sabemos hablar la verdadera maya. Nuestros abuelitos sí la hablaban”. Cuando estuve en la zona de los Chenes, en Campeche, me dijeron: “*to’one’ ma’ maaya k t’aniki’*, le *jach maayao’ te’ ta kaajal ku t’a’analó’*, *Yucatán ku t’a’anal*, *wa te’ Quintana Rooo’*, *te’elo’ si ku t’aniko’ob maaya* / Nosotros no hablamos la maya. La verdadera

maya se habla allá en tu pueblo, en Yucatán, o allá en Quintana Roo. Allá sí hablan maya”.

[When I was undertaking fieldwork, I was told this: “*ba’axten ka taal weye’ si to’one’ ma’ k ojel t’aan maayai’, le k abuelo’ob ka’ach úuche’ lelo’ sí, u yoje-lo’ob* / Why do you come here? We can’t speak the true Maya. Our grandparents could speak it”. When I was in the Chenes region, in Campeche, they told me: “*to’one’ ma’ maaya k t’aniki’, le jach maayao’ te’ ta kaajal ku t’a’analó’, Yucatán ku t’a’anal, wa te’ Quintana Rooo’, te’elo’ si ku t’aniko’ob maaya* / We don’t speak Maya. The true Maya is spoken back there in your village, in Yucatán, or in Quintana Roo. They do speak Maya there”]

As César reports, Campechanos believe that it is people from Yucatán or Quintana Roo that speak ‘authentic’ Maya, even though this language, as used in reported speech here, is also spoken in the state of Campeche. Whereas some parts of central Yucatán and Quintana Roo currently show high percentages of language use (INEGI 2010), it is highly unlikely that the Maya language has been kept pure after five centuries of contact with Spanish, even in the most remote parts of the Peninsula. William Hanks, who has examined in detail colonial texts written in Maya and Spanish, writes that:

From quite early in the colonial period in Yucatán, the indigenous language and the European language came to shape one another such that, in a broad contact zone, it became difficult or pointless to sort out the indigenous from the non-indigenous elements of what was becoming a single social world (2010: xvi).

Furthermore, the idea of a pure variety of Maya, spoken ‘somewhere else’ by ‘someone else’, often the ancestors, is reminiscent of the discourse of nostalgia noted by Hill and Hill (1986). The Yucatecan case strongly resonates with the context researched by these authors in central Mexico. As they underline:

[Language mixing] is said to shift speaking away from a legendary perfect language called *legítimo mexicano* ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic Mexicano’. *Legítimo mexicano* is said to have existed in *achto* ‘in the past’. It is said that it can be found in old books, or that some old man, now dead, used to speak it (1986: 98).

Along these lines, in the Yucatán Peninsula, Maya speakers often associate the supposedly ‘pure’ variety of Maya with the kind of Maya spoken in prehispanic times (see also Guettteraz 2015). This connection between the ‘real’ Maya language and the Maya people of pre-conquest times supports the contentious and complex meanings that the ethnic

label ‘Maya’ has in contemporary Yucatán (Castañeda 2004). This is an example of what Milroy calls ‘the historicization of languages’, a common phenomenon connected to purism which affects the ideological construction of a language. Milroy points out that “the historicization of the language requires that it should possess a continuous unbroken history, a respectable and legitimate ancestry and a long pedigree. It is also highly desirable that it should be as pure and unmixed as possible” (2001: 548).

Ambivalence and complexity, however, are more often than not at the core of languages ideologies (Field and Kroskrity 2009). Widespread negative assessments do not preclude, therefore, the possibility for Maya speakers to attach distinct positive ideologies to vernacular varieties of Maya. In this sense, Armstrong-Fumero has explored the ways in which this perceived mismatch, between what he calls *Imaginary Maya* (‘pure’ Maya) and *Deep Maya* (‘mixed’ Maya), “index a range of hierarchized social identities” (2009: 362). He argues that heteroglossic practices of bilingual speakers, who make use of vernacular mixed varieties and code-switching on a daily basis, are indeed fundamental to understand the expression of humour and wit among Yucatec Mayas. Along similar lines, in his study of humorous narratives in Yucatec Maya literature Burns (2012) underlines that the singular essence of humour among Maya speakers often depends on language choice. As Burns writes, “[w]hen speaking Spanish, Mayan speakers are often serious, courteous, and even deferential. But when monolingual Mayan conversations begin, humor becomes endemic to social linguistic events” (2012: 399). In sum, multi-layered ideologies are key to understanding how speakers make strategic use of indexicalities inherent in linguistic variables at hand to deploy an array of social identifications (Milroy 2001; Kroskrity 2010, 2016).

Language Purism among Writers and Intellectuals

Within a context of increasing standardisation efforts targeted at indigenous languages, language academies have been set up in several Latin American countries. Although these institutions, usually mirroring well-known and established European models, can help legitimise indigenous languages, research has shown that their work can also be detrimental to their maintenance and reproduction, particularly when they forcefully promote extreme purism, essentialisation, and glorification of the norm (for Quechua see Niño-Murcia 1997; Marr 1999; Howard 2007; Zavala 2014). An Academy of the Maya Language in Mérida (*Academia de la Lengua Maya*) does exist, made up of experts who supposedly have a say in the normative use of Maya, work on specialised lexical terminolo-

gy, and produce dictionaries. The main achievements of this Academia, founded in 1938 by the renowned Mayanist Alfredo Barrera Vásquez, have been the publication of a journal on Maya literature from 1939 to 1955 and the elaboration of the *Diccionario Maya Cordemex*. However, their activities have been kept to a minimum due to lack of financial resources and the Academia is, therefore, not a central institution in the current process of language planning in Yucatán. INDEMAYA does have a section of Maya language and culture, but the work of that regional institution on the revitalisation of Maya is merely tokenistic. In view of the lack of an authoritative body in the field of language planning in Yucatán, some intellectuals have proposed the creation of an Institute of the Maya Language for the ‘normalisation’ of Maya, that is, ‘normativisation,’ but so far this demand has not come to fruition.

As in other Latin American contexts (see Zavala 2014 for Quechua in Peru, also Lagos et al 2013 for Mapudungun in Chile), in Yucatán there is a community of intellectuals, writers, and teachers who consider themselves ‘experts’ on the Maya language. Authors such as Gutiérrez Chong (1999) and López Santillán (2011) have looked at discourses of Maya intellectuals in relation to nationalist agendas and socioeconomic repositioning in Southern Mexico. Even though their expertise is central in the public construction of the Maya language (Gal and Woolard 2001), a thorough analysis of the language ideologies of this group of influential policy makers remains to be done. Corpus planning is a matter of particular concern to these specialists. As I noted during my fieldwork, some of these experts show highly purist attitudes. Thus, in a cultural project that ran from 2000 to 2007 and that consisted of compiling literary texts based on the Mayan oral tradition, Sánchez (2004: 14) writes that “se hará la ‘restauración’ de la versión maya, a fin de ‘limpiar’ lo más que se pueda de la contaminación del español” [the ‘restoration’ of the Maya version will be carried out with a view to ‘cleaning’ contamination from Spanish as much as possible].

As I was told in several interviews and as I observed in a meeting of indigenous teachers, neologisms and loan words from Spanish, contractions in colloquial oral Maya, and lexical differences according to region are all common topics of discussion among teachers, writers and intellectuals in Yucatán. Moreover, the emphasis on *lectoescritura* in Maya—that is, developing literacy in Standard Maya—is a salient discourse among many of these teachers as well, as proficiency in this variety often determines who can be considered a legitimate speaker (see also Guerrettaz 2015).

Below is the opinion of Jorge about loan words from Spanish and intonation patterns in Maya. Jorge is a teacher in his sixties who has been working in the indigenous education system of Yucatán for decades:

Muchos maestros dicen que la lengua maya está amestizada y se platica mucho sobre eso, los préstamos, y el tono cantadito que le damos a muchas palabras del español. Pero yo creo que la lengua maya es suficientemente rica para no tener que pedir prestado. [...] si tú tuvieras dinero, si fueras rico, ¿pedirías prestado? [...] Pero así están las cosas, nosotros por ejemplo, no tenemos por qué pedir prestado.

[Many teachers say that the Maya language is ‘amestizada’ and we talk a lot about that, loan words, and the singing pitch that we give to a lot of Spanish words. But I think that the Maya language is rich enough so that it does not need to borrow. [...] If you were rich, would you borrow money? [...] But that’s the way things are, we, for instance, do not see a reason for borrowing].

Acknowledging the hybrid nature of Maya, Jorge opines that borrowing is not necessary because the Maya language is a rich language. Arguably, the pecuniary metaphor frames the act of borrowing as an almost illicit and dishonest act. Miguel, who is also a bilingual teacher working in indigenous education, provides a second example of such discussions. He focuses on lexical variation:

Otra cosa para comentar también es la cuestión de las palabras, por ejemplo, el vocabulario que tenemos en maya. *Kiwi*’ llamamos por Valladolid, en el oriente, al achiote pero por el sur del estado se le llama *k’uxub* y decimos que es un regionalismo, pero no lo aceptamos como un sinónimo que enriquece la lengua.

[Also, something to comment on is the issue of words, for instance, the vocabulary that we have in Maya. *Kiwi*’ we call achiote here in Valladolid, in the East, but in the South of the state it is called *k’uxub* and we say that is a regional variant but we do not accept it as a synonym that enriches the language].¹

I argue that the current process of valorising the Maya language is taking place within the context of a standard language culture, which is deeply ingrained in Mexico and other multilingual Latin American countries, and which is inherited from colonial Spain (Hidalgo 2006; see Zavala 2014 for similarities with Peru). Spanish, as the official, dominant and highly standardised language, is the yardstick against which indigenous languages

¹Achiote is a spice made from the red seed of the annatto tree.

are set. These latter languages are mainly used in their oral form and are often perceived as incomplete and in need of development. It is important to underline that the appropriation and reproduction of the abovementioned linguistic ideologies place these experts in a position of power and authority. As Dorian has noted, “the norms invoked [by purists] are not truly those of the community at large, but rather those of a small segment of it: an educated elite of teachers, writers, broadcast journalists, intellectuals, and the like” (1994: 480). I turn now to analyse the language ideologies of the three young Maya professionals I have presented in the introduction.

Shifting Language Ideologies among Young Maya Professionals

In contrast to the emphasis on language norms, literacy and purism stemming from official institutions and a number of intellectuals and teachers, some young activists show comparatively divergent ideologies of language contact and revitalisation. Along these lines, several studies in the Latin American context have highlighted that a pragmatic and realistic approach to syncretic linguistic phenomena can be explained as an opportunity for linguistic and cultural resistance rather than as a sign of language decay (for Nahuatl see Hill and Hill 1986; also Flores Farfán 1999: 236; for Quechua see Howard 2007: 340). In what follows I present the profound shift of language ideologies that César, Yazmin and Flor experienced in their late twenties and early thirties.

César Can is a Maya young adult in his early thirties now who studied Linguistics at a prestigious higher education institution in Mexico City. He comes from Motul, a middle-size town in Yucatán state, and grew up bilingually. He is now a teacher of Maya in Mérida and a grassroots activist. When asked about a reflection on his language competence in Maya, he reported that

La gente está creyendo que ya la lengua está corrupta, y sí sientes como una culpa, como algo feo... Yo en algún momento dije como que no hablo maya verdadero, en algún momento me molesté, me enojé, y luego recapitulé y dije no. Pero cuánta gente puede hacer eso y cuánta gente se va a quedar con la idea de que, ¡ah! Pues mira ¿sabes qué? No hablo bien y mejor pues ya ni hablo, pues eso es difícil. Sí, sin duda fue un cambio importante en mí.

[People now believe that the [Maya] language is corrupted, and yes, you do feel something like blame, something ugly... At some point I said like perhaps I don't speak authentic Maya, at some point I got upset, I got angry, but then I thought it through and I said no. But how many people can do that and how many people

are going to stick to the idea that, ah! Well, look, you know what? I don't speak [Maya] well so I'd rather not speak it, well, that is tough. Yes, no doubt that was an important change to me].

While the causes for this shift of language attitude are complex and include social, political and economic reasons, I argue that, at the micro level of the speaker's ideologies, language insecurity, lack of 'eloquence and power,' as Joseph (1987) puts it, in a minoritised language plays a role for shift to the dominant language.

According to César, the perception of speaking a mixed and corrupted variety of a minoritised language may trigger the usually difficult process of abandoning one's own language and shifting to a dominant one. Research on this topic in Mexico has shown that purism may be counterproductive for the reproduction of minoritised languages and may ultimately have a paralysing effect for language revitalisation. The case of Nahuatl in central Mexico supports this potential outcome. Writing on the situation of central Mexico, Hill and Hill (1986: 140f.) conclude that "when young speakers feel that their Mexicano is inadequate, they may choose to use only Spanish."

In brief, the potential effects of purism on language shift are relevant because speakers who deem their languages as inadequate, deficient, and illegitimate may be more prone to abandon them. However, linguistic attitudes regarding purism may change, as Cesar also points out. This is his reflection after his experience in Mexico City where he studied Linguistics:

Debo reconocer que por un tiempo yo también compartía y reproducía algunas de actitudes puristas. La realidad es que hay un antes y un después de la lingüística. Actualmente, tengo una perspectiva diferente sobre las lenguas y sobre el complejo sistema comunicativo humano.

[I must admit that for a while I also shared purist attitudes. The truth is that Linguistics marks a before and after. Now I have a different view on languages and the complex human communicative system].

In a similar vein, Flor elaborates on a personal shift of purist beliefs and linguistic behaviour in the following excerpt. Flor's family comes from Timucuy, a small town not far from Mérida. She holds a Master's degree in Sociolinguistics that she earned at CIESAS in Mexico City and a PhD she did at the University of Barcelona. It is worth quoting her at length because again she touches on both reflection and subsequent rejection of language purism. When I asked her about her views on purism, she replied:

Yo he de confesarte que antes de la maestría, que no había hecho lingüística para nada, pensaba también un poco así, de hecho cuando platicábamos y alguien en la casa usaba una palabra o una frase en español, como que no me gustaba mucho, porque uno cree que es incorrecto estar mezclando las lenguas, o sea, así hasta tiene la idea de que no suena bien, por ejemplo, que estás metiendo cosas de otra lengua, y no es hasta que estudié la maestría que lo tuve como más claro. Como que dije pues sí, no hay ningún problema, nos entendemos perfecto, no pasa nada y luego cuando vas viendo un poco de la lingüística histórica y te vas enterando de que lo que pensabas que era de tu lengua no es, o sea, que viene de otro lado, entonces, yo sí me maravillé y todo. También tienes tu propia reflexión, pero bueno eso lo he tenido yo y poca gente alcanza a tener un conocimiento así, ¿no? Entonces la mayoría tiene la idea de que si mezclas la lengua le estás restando valor, entonces mucha gente no acepta préstamos, ni del español, ni de ninguna otra, cuando se entera que viene de otra lengua. La escritura también, hablando un poco de la escritura, siempre quieren que sea una sola forma de escribir y no aceptan que existan varias formas para escribir una palabra.

[I must confess that before the master's degree, when I hadn't done linguistics at all, I'd think a bit like that as well, in fact when we were talking and someone at home used a word or an expression in Spanish, it was as if I didn't really like it, because one thinks that mixing languages is incorrect, I mean, one has the impression that it doesn't sound well, for instance, that you're introducing things from another language and it wasn't until I studied the master's degree that I saw it more clearly. I said to myself well, yes, there's no problem, we understand each other perfectly well, there's nothing wrong, and then when you see a bit of historical linguistics and you're learning that things you thought belonged to your language, they actually don't, I mean, they come from somewhere else, then I was even amazed. Also, you reflect on that, but well that is something I have had and few people get to that kind of learning, right? Then, most people have the idea that if you're mixing the (Maya) language, you're diminishing its value, a lot of people don't accept loan words, neither from Spanish nor from any other language. Also writing, talking about writing, they always demand but one way of writing it and they don't accept the existence of other ways of writing a word].

Explaining her own change of attitudes toward mixing, Flor contrasts her views on language contact with an extreme form of purism that does not accept variation, especially in writing but also in the lexicon, and whose goal is to purge Maya of Spanish loanwords (the 'they' in the last sentence refers to some writers and intellectuals). As already noted, literacy, and particularly orthography, is a prominent arena for language ideological

struggles (Jaffe et al 2012). In her analysis on variation in written Maya, Brody argues that “orthographic variation in written Yucatec Maya is not seriously problematic for its readers and writers and may even contribute positively to the development of literacy and literature” (2004: 264). In the case of César and Flor, change of language attitudes, stemming from their education in Linguistics, is the result of conscious reflection on the variability of Maya. In both cases they became aware of the fact that contemporary Maya has become a syncretic variety which is valid for any communicative purpose. Again, it is important to note that both participants show high loyalty to Maya, a strong commitment to everyday use, and activism for its promotion.

In each of these cases speakers revisited their language ideologies throughout their lives and shifted from having purist attitudes to embracing contact, with the direct consequence of strengthening language maintenance and reproduction (see Messing 2009 for similar experiences with Nahuatl in Central Mexico; Hornberger and Swinehart 2012, Hornberger 2014 for the Andean area; Woolard 2011 for Catalonia in Spain). Admittedly and as the interviewees acknowledge, not many people have the opportunity to go through this particular process of linguistic reflection and empowerment through higher education and to become key agents of policy making from the bottom-up.

Finally, Yazmin is a journalist and has long been involved in the revitalisation of Maya. She has just finished a Master’s degree at PROEIB Andes, one of the most important higher education institutions in Latin America which has been offering postgraduate studies in Intercultural Bilingual Education since 1996. In the case of Yazmin, she also contrasts purist concerns, common among intellectuals, writers and linguists, with the widespread perceived distinction between vernacular varieties of Maya (*jach* and *xe’ek’*) as spoken on the ground. She points out:

Y me parece que el debate sobre el purismo es algo más presente en grupos cuyo trabajo se relaciona con la lengua maya, no así entre hablantes de manera general, entre estos últimos el debate al parecer se centra en lo *jach* y lo *xe’ek’*.

[And I think that the debate on purism is more present within groups whose work is linked with the Maya language, not that much among speakers generally speaking, apparently among the latter the debates centre on what is *jach* and what is *xe’ek’*.]

In her account, Yazmin also notes the impact that working in a radio station had on her attitudes towards Maya.

La idea de hablar totalmente en maya por cuestiones ideológicas (puristas) la tuve cuando empecé a trabajar en Radio Yóol Iik', en el que el uso de la lengua sí era algo que se reflexionaba. Y ya no pensábamos en términos de una *jach* maya por autenticidad ancestral, sino en términos de una maya correcta que era necesaria para ir introduciendo entre los radioescuchas la idea que podíamos tener una lengua completa.

[I had the idea of speaking completely in Maya for ideological (purist) reasons when I started working at Radio Yóol Iik', where the use of the language was indeed something that was reflected upon. And we were not thinking anymore in terms of a *jach* Maya based on ancestral authenticity, but in terms of a correct Maya which was necessary to introduce among the listeners the insight that we could have a complete language].

Conflicting ideologies between purist attitudes, in which broadcasters are supposed to spread a 'correct' and 'complete' Maya to legitimise its use, and being aware of the functionality and validity of the 'mixed' vernacular Maya surfaces in Yazmin's discourse. These ambivalent views are unsurprising if we think of media, in this case she mentions a pioneer urban radio station that used to broadcast in Maya, as essential domains for the production of language ideologies (Spitulnik 1998). Yazmin's experience in the Basque Country in Spain, where she spent some time with other indigenous activist of Latin America, and her interviews with other Maya sociolinguists, such as Ismael May, have deeply shaped her language ideologies in opposing ways. She added further:

En mi caso haber sido parte del Curso Experto en el País Vasco sí me influyó mucho en las actitudes que tenía en la coordinación de la estación, al tratar lo menos posible de usar palabras en español. Aunque también estaba consciente de que para lograr tener una lengua completa teníamos que pasar por un proceso largo y que no podíamos cerrarnos a la forma de hablar coloquial en la que había muchas palabras en español. En aquel entonces también fue que dejé de pensar en términos de una *jach* maya. Recuerdo una entrevista que realicé a Ismael May, en donde me explicaba el tema del *jach* maya. Él decía que si la lengua antigua fue funcional en un tiempo, en ese tiempo era la *jach* maya, y que ahora, en el tiempo de esta lengua que tenemos ahora, la *jach* maya es la que se entiende, la que permite la comunicación.

[In my case having been part of the Experts' Course in the Basque Country did have an influence on the attitudes I had while coordinating the radio station because I was trying to use Spanish words as rarely as possible. Although I was al-

so aware that to have a complete language we had to go through a long process and that we could not ignore the colloquial speech with many words in Spanish. It was also at that time that I stopped thinking in terms of *jach* Maya. I remember an interview with Ismael May in which he explained to me the topic of *jach* Maya. He said that if ancient Maya was functional back in time, at that time it was *jach* Maya, and that now, at the time of this language we have now, the *jach* Maya is that which is understood, which allows communication.]

Acknowledging that colloquial Maya is interspersed with Spanish words, Yazmin highlights the struggle to cleanse Maya of Spanish words and the need for language cultivation to make Maya a ‘complete’ language, namely, without ‘interferences’ from Spanish. While drawing from her experience in the Basque Country, a region where language policy and planning have been underpinned by a standard language culture, she also points out her shift to concentrate on language practices and function rather than just on language forms.

Apart from the activism of these young adults, more efforts are needed to disseminate tolerant attitudes towards loanwords among Maya speakers and legitimise the so-called ‘mixed’ variety. Beyond the education system, where prescriptivist views are rife, the mass media, as Yazmin notes above, and also the social media (see Cru 2014), might be key domains in the necessary task of changing linguistic attitudes and fighting against prejudices and the minoritisation of the Maya language in the Yucatán.

Conclusion

As is common in processes of language revitalisation, two or more versions of a minoritised language, tainted with ideologies of authenticity and authority, often get in conflict with each other. This situation is not exclusive to Yucatán and the contradictions highlighted in this paper crop up as well in other geographical areas as distant as Europe (Jaffe 2012). Indeed, language revitalisation is not always, or mainly, about languages and their speakers, but often becomes a proxy for wider socio-political struggles (Woolard 1998). Therefore, the ideology of purism must be contextualised within a specific sociopolitical and historical context if we want to unveil the non-linguistic roots of purist attitudes and their covert ideological underpinnings.

In Yucatán, language purism indexes more than a mere concern about language contact and variation and is better understood within the broader picture of efforts to legitimise Maya and the social position of some of its speakers. According to a group of writers,

intellectuals and civil servants, the Maya language must be authentic, a concept which is inextricably linked with purism within a standard language culture, if it is to have any strategic weight in the struggle for sociocultural recognition (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). Crucially, the promotion of this sort of language ideology accrues cultural and symbolic capital to those who are precisely best positioned to claim a command of pure Maya. Within the context of essentialising language boundaries and widespread purism, many speakers see Spanish loanwords and variation, be that at syntactic, lexical, or phonological level, as the reason for the current lesser social status of Maya. In short, the competing positioning for authenticity among Maya speakers is at the core of a struggle for language legitimacy. For language revitalisation purposes, however, while some degree of purism may be a positive component for legitimation, extreme purist attitudes may have the detrimental effect of paving the way for language shift. Purism often leads to linguistic insecurity and, eventually, to abandonment, when speakers of the subordinated language decide not to use what they perceive as a delegitimised and debased variety of a supposedly true, pure, and often pre-contact language.

Furthermore, perceptions of authenticity and hybridity often stand in a contradictory position in contexts of unequal language contact. Drawing on Dorian (1994), a compromise between available varieties may be necessary for the survival of minoritised languages. Rescuing words in disuse, updating terms from the vast epigraphic Mayan records, and coining some new words can be used as positive and highly symbolic strategies to revalorise the Maya language. I maintain that these cultivation efforts, though, need to be combined with an impending legitimation of the 'mixed' variety of Maya, since destigmatising vernacular varieties, spoken by most if not all speakers of Maya, is of paramount importance for their reproduction. Finally, on a positive note, I have shown how three young adults Maya speakers, who are committed to the use of that language in all kinds of domains, have shifted their ideologies after metalinguistic reflection on language purism. Even if they belong to a small group of activists, their individual agency, grounded on sociolinguistic awareness and empowerment, are examples of much needed bottom-up revitalisation policies against the background of relentless language shift to Spanish in the Yucatán.

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