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## 9 Life histories, language attitudes and linguistic variation: Navigating the micro-politics of language revitalization in an Otomí community in Mexico

### 1 Introduction

It is by now a well-established fact that language communities are not homogeneous in their linguistic norms and practices. It is also well established that linguistic variation often correlates with variation in attitudes about how one should speak (what linguistic anthropologists today call metalinguistic ideologies), even if there may be quite large discrepancies between conscious and unconscious language attitudes. In the context of language documentation and revitalization, such variation presents a challenge to the linguist who must find ways of representing the language in a way that is acceptable to both contemporary and future speakers. In a language revitalization context, often a small number of speakers participate each with their own idiolect in the form of unique linguistic repertoires and each with their own ideas about what makes the language valuable and worthy of revitalization. And in the end the success of the revitalization project depends on the ability of these speakers to agree to pass on some form of the language, hopefully one that they can all consider legitimate, to a new generation.

In this paper we describe a case in which language attitudes and linguistic variation also covary with the role of the language within the life histories of individual speakers participating in a language revitalization project. Further, we show that the challenge faced by revitalization projects is increased when the local political framework does not unambiguously establish which speakers have the authority to represent the linguistic community and authenticate a linguistic

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standard. When speakers have different views of what constitutes the source of linguistic authority, this may lead to tensions that are difficult to resolve without attending directly to the underlying discrepancy in assumptions. We argue that by recognizing how individual language preferences and views of linguistic authority are tied to the ways that speakers understand themselves and their lives, linguists may find it easier to mediate when tensions arise between participants in the project, and ultimately increase the likelihood of revitalization success.

## 1.1 The politics of community based language revitalization

Standard practice today for linguistic documentation and revitalization is “community based” fieldwork. In the early days of linguistic fieldwork, linguists often worked alone with one or two informants and generally did not consider the possibility that the community of speakers might want access to their research output. In contrast, the current ideal for descriptive work on endangered languages sees the linguists as a kind of specialist consultant for a community of speakers who are working to preserve their language (Cameron, Rampton, and Richardson 1993; Dwyer 2006; Dobrin 2008; Gerdtz 2010). This change in research ethics came partly from the realization that traditional linguistic fieldwork was often exploitative in nature, and from the increasing awareness of linguists in the role they might play in reversing language shift by working collaboratively with speakers of endangered languages. Recent fieldwork literature describes in detail the ethical issues of intellectual ownership and community involvement (Dwyer 2006), and describe how truly collaborative fieldwork takes into account the fact that the research objectives of linguists and community members frequently differ (Collins 1998; Mosel 2006; Musgrave and Thieberger 2007; Whaley 2011). Indeed, the discourse that emphasizes collaboration and community involvement has become so pervasive that some linguists have felt it necessary to defend the merits of “lone wolf research” as ethically defensible and appropriate in some cases, for example when the goal is simply to document an endangered variety and there is no community interest in revitalization (Crippen and Robinson 2013).

One implicit challenge with many of these ethical principles of collaborative research is that they tend to be tacitly based on an ideal in which the community of speakers is considered to have relatively homogeneous interests and objectives. And even the very idea of revitalizing or preserving “a language” tacitly assumes that the community in question shares a single linguistic variety. However, as pointed out by Whaley (2011), such assumptions are frequently at odds with reality. Linguists often find that both linguistic and ideological variation is rampant in even the seemingly most coherent and homogeneous com-

munities (Dorian 2001, 2010), and that political or interpersonal tensions play a role in determining how revitalization efforts are received (Canger 1994; Kroskrity 1998; Suslak 2010). The studies by Pérez Báez, by Rogers, and by Villard and Sullivant in this volume provide further examples of cases where community attitudes impede revitalization efforts, or make them impossible. Whaley (2011) argues that simplistic assumptions of linguistic and ideological homogeneity in the community, as well as a lack of appreciation of the complexity of local social dynamics and the risk for linguists to be overly controlling of the revitalization project, are among the factors that contribute to “endangering” projects designed to counteract language endangerment. Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus (2013) similarly argue that linguists should not only expect but also accept the existence of ideological differences and even conflict within revitalization movements. Contrary to Kroskrity (2009), they argue that rather than promoting a process of “ideological clarification” prior to engaging in a project of language revival, the linguist should not aim at resolving conflicts between different ideological positions, since such heterogeneity is inherent in the constitution of any social movement. Rather, they argue the aim should be to foster a discussion within the community of speakers that may or may not eventually lead to a unified view of the future of the language. This argument, which holds that there are no neutral positions within the context of language revival, points to the traditional distinction between the linguist as an objective scientist and the linguist as a politically engaged activist – suggesting that perhaps, at least in language revival contexts, such a distinction is not possible.

## 1.2 Revitalization as linguistic prescription

Linguists have traditionally tended to see themselves as describing linguistic norms, rather than as producing them (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 3). While language documentation is indeed basically descriptive, we would argue that there is a fundamentally prescriptive aspect inherent in the idea of language revitalization: it entails the proposition that a specific way of speaking should be used more than it is. Probably few linguists would feel comfortable in assuming the authority to tell a community how or what to speak. Hinton (2002: 151–152) has commented specifically on how the prescriptive aspect of language revitalization requires community support for the linguists to be able to feel at ease. It is the community that prescribes a set of norms and the linguist is simply in charge of documenting and circulating them. A certain authority is inherent in the linguist’s specialist knowledge and the fact that she often represents a politically dominant community. Such an authority cannot simply be divested, but must be taken into account.

Others have pointed to the authority that is sometimes considered inherent in the medium of writing itself, which may make a community perceive a written text in their language as necessarily posing a claim to authority even when the linguist specifically avoided making such a claim (Canger 1994). Ultimately, in a revitalization context, the question of authority is inescapable.

### 1.3 Language and authority in North American and Latin American contexts

The view of the linguist as facilitator of the establishment of a linguistic norm for an already existing community often fits well when the linguist is working at the request of the political authority of the community. Here the linguist is simply a kind of consultant working on the task of formally codifying a linguistic norm which has already been selected by the political authority who will also be responsible for promoting it to gain community acceptance (Haugen 1966). Such a relation is possible when indigenous speech communities have their own political authorities, such as it is often the case in the contemporary USA and Canada, where linguists today are occasionally approached by tribal governments to act as expert consultants when a community has already decided to preserve or revitalize their traditional languages (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 193–194). This relation is facilitated by the fact that today in the USA and Canada indigenous groups have relatively high degrees of ethnic identity and political autonomy – at least regarding internal issues such as cultural politics – and that they are conceived of as independent nations within a larger nation state.<sup>1</sup> Many tribal governments have officials specifically dedicated to handling questions of cultural and linguistic heritage. Such officials may choose to engage linguists as consultants, or choose to either support or disavow specific products of linguistic description, or to promote specific ideologies of language use. There are many examples where North American Native communities have explicitly claimed the political authority over their language in relation to linguists and other outsiders. The Hopi tribal government resisted the Hopi Dictionary project (Hill 2001) and the Jemez Pueblo decided to prohibit the writing of their indigenous language (Whiteley 2003) (see also the cases described by Collins 1998, Kroskrity 2009, and Loether 2009). Nonetheless, some of the most successful language revitali-

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<sup>1</sup> This has not always been the case; historically the US and Canadian states have played an active role in the attempted eradication of indigenous languages through Anglophone educational policy (McCarty 2013).

zation projects have not been undertaken by tribal governments, but by groups of community members who have organized to form a revitalization project and contacted linguists to assist them, often with only subsequent involvement and support by the tribal government. This is the case for the Master-Apprentice programs organized by the The Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, and for the Mohawk immersion schools of Kahnawake (both described in Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 193–194; see also Hermes 2012 and McCarty 2013).

In contrast, in many parts of Latin America, indigenous speech communities are not constituted or conceived as politically independent nations, but are simply considered citizens who happen to speak a local vernacular that differs from the language used in administration. Indigenous communities are often simply towns or localities where a particular language is spoken. In many cases there is little or no sense of ethnic identity among different communities of speakers of the same language, local political identities being more salient. This means that in Latin America language revitalization projects are often initiated by linguists or by small sub-groups within the speech community who for different reasons take an interest in promoting the indigenous language. (See also the studies by Santos García, Carillo de la Cruz, and Verdín Amaro as well as Yáñez Rosales et al., this volume for examples of how revitalization projects may be initially caused by outside academic interest which in turn sparks interest in the community.)

In the absence of ethno-national political organization of indigenous groups, different countries and linguistic groups in Latin America have taken different approaches to organizing cultural and linguistic preservation or revival. In Guatemala, in the midst of genocidal campaigns against them, the different Mayan speech communities and indigenous linguists collaborated with North American linguists to establish an academy with the responsibility for supporting and developing the indigenous languages (England 2003; Romero 2012; Warren 1998). (See also Benedicto, Shettle and Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna, this volume, for a case in which a political institution assumed responsibility of language revitalization efforts in Nicaragua.) In Mexico, the geographic context of this paper, the government assumed a responsibility for the usage of indigenous languages after the revolution, seeing indigenous languages as a barrier to the development and modernization of the indigenous peoples. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a series of ideological and institutional struggles between *hispanista* and *indigenista* educators. The former considered the best approach to the eradication of indigenous languages and their replacement by Spanish, and the latter considered the best way to modernize the indigenous populations and their languages so that the values of modernity could be accessed through the native medium of knowledge. Eventually the *hispanistas* won, and a program of

subtractive bilingual education was instituted, aimed at gradually familiarizing indigenous students with Spanish during primary school, so that from middle school all education could be carried out exclusively in Spanish (Heath 1972). From this point on, the Mexican government did little to encourage or support local efforts to organize or promote the use of indigenous languages. The *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) assumed the responsibility of creating linguistic standards to be used in indigenous primary education in collaboration with the *Instituto Lingüístico de Verano* (ILV), the affiliate body of the US missionary organization Summer Institute of Linguistics International (Hartch 2006). Up until the end of collaboration between the SEP and the ILV in the early 1980s, the tradition in Mexico was for linguists to work not for the communities, but for the Mexican government, as a partner in its education policy. The strong governmental control of indigenous education and organization has likely contributed to the fact that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century there have been few community efforts to promote or support the use of indigenous languages. Indeed, as demonstrated by Pérez Báez and by Villard and Sullivant in this volume, it is frequently the case that there is little or no community interest in reviving the local language.

There are exceptions to this general picture, and the Otomí community provides one of them. In the Mezquital region, the region with most speakers of Otomí, the ILV representatives worked with the community to establish an *Academia de la lengua*, with the function of standardizing, developing and supporting the Mezquital variety of Otomí (Hernández Cruz, Victoria Torquemada and Sinclair 2004). This level of organization and promotion has effectively established the Mezquital variety of Otomí as the prestige variety of the language. Another exception is the Toluca Valley, where the Otomí community that we are here describing is located. Here indigenous communities comprising three different linguistic groups (Otomí, Mazahua and Matlatzinca/Tlawika) organized into a formal network to better lobby for recognition of their rights. The establishment of local or regional language academies, or of indigenous political and ritual networks can be understood as local strategies to work around the tradition of government control of the cultural and linguistic resources of indigenous communities.

In the following, we describe how this political framework affects the way that the Otomí of San Jerónimo Acazulco in the Toluca valley organize their project of language revival, and how different views of linguistic authority coexist within the project.

## 1.4 San Jerónimo Acazolco: Power and language

The authors have been participating in a community based effort to revitalize the Otomí language in the community of San Jerónimo Acazolco, (Otomí: *Ndöngü* [ndöngü]) since 2009. We arrived in Acazolco with the plan of linguistic documentation of the endangered and undocumented variety of Otomí, but soon became involved in the community's ongoing efforts to raise interest in the language among the youth. We were asked to produce written materials in the language in order to apply for recognition as an indigenous community by the Mexican state (Pharao Hansen, Turnbull, and Boeg-Thomsen, 2011). During several field periods since then, we have produced and disseminated three successive editions of a booklet of basic Otomí lessons, supported a course of Otomí classes for children taught by community members, taught an English course to youths in order to foment a cultural and linguistic interchange, and are in the process of elaborating a didactic grammar, vocabulary and a set of lessons for future classes. In addition, Néstor Hernández-Green has produced and published a small grammar, in collaboration with Efrén Maíz, the organizer of the community Otomí classes. This grammar is meant to support the teacher during classes, and is published by the *Comisión Para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas* (CDI) (Organización Civil Ndöngü 2014).

San Jerónimo Acazolco is a community in the cold pine-clad hills 3000 meters above sea level in the Sierra Madre Occidental in Central Mexico. Until the 1980s the community was socially marginalized and characterized by poverty and a reliance on subsistence agriculture and occasional wage labor in the nearest city. The completion of a highway through the community's land provided new economic opportunities, which the people of San Jerónimo Acazolco exploited with great success. They turned their *ejido* (community land) into a tourist attraction, which is now well known in the area as a place where the large urban population of the Valley of Mexico comes to enjoy the experience of nature on the weekends. Due to this development, recent decades have seen rapid economic growth in the community, but also a significant break with traditions.

The local political authorities elected by the community are the *delegado*, who represents the community in the municipality of Ocoyoacac, and three *comisariados* with responsibility for communal property, ejidal property and potable water. All of these officials are young men in their thirties and none of them speak Otomí. They are generally supportive of the language revitalization project and have allowed the Otomí classes to take place in the offices of the *delegación*, but they do not themselves participate in the project and do not consider it to fall within their jurisdiction.

Since 2008 the local government of San Jerónimo Acazulco is in the process of lobbying for recognition of status as an indigenous community, which would give access to certain sources of governmental support from the CDI. In Mexico the status of a given community as “indigenous” is achieved if the community can demonstrate a relation to one of the recognized ethno-linguistic groups. In theory the relation depends on the percentage of speakers of the indigenous language in the community, but in practice the percentage of speakers in census data matters less than the degree of public visibility of the community. For a community in which the language is in decline to be considered indigenous, the indigenous language and heritage must be documented and promoted in ways that make the community visible and recognizable as “indigenous” to municipal and state authorities. To achieve this goal, the community of Acazulco applied for membership to the organization of indigenous communities of the Toluca Valley. This organization was established in 1977 with the signing of the *Pacto del Valle de Matlatzinca* (Pact of the Matlatzinca Valley), in which a *Consejo Supremo* (Supreme Council) was established for each of the different indigenous ethnic groups in the valley. Each of the signatory communities elected a Supreme chief to sit on the council. Acazulco was not among the original signatories, but in 2010 they applied for recognition as an indigenous Otomí community with right to representation in the council. As part of the application for representation in the Consejo Supremo, the community democratically elected a council of cultural leaders, separate from the political authorities of the community.

The Otomí Council of *Ndöngü* is headed by a *Jefe Supremo* [Supreme Chief], his female counterpart designated *la mujer otomí* (the Otomí Woman), a community chronicler, and a language teacher. The titles are invariably given in Spanish, and it does not seem that anyone has coined Otomí terms for these titles. The somewhat peculiar title of Supreme Chief for the cultural authorities of each community may have been taken in reference to the political structure of U.S. Indigenous nations. Mexican indigenous communities have not generally used the title *jefe* for their authorities, a title which in a Mexican context seems to evoke the tribal organization of North American Indians. The Supreme Chief represents Acazulco in this organization as well as in many public occasions of cultural relevance. Acazulco’s claim to indigenous status, as well as its visibility, is enhanced simply by having a Supreme Chief. The Otomí council has moral but not political authority, and their standing in the community is partly undermined by the fact that most of them, partly due to their age and lack of participation in the workforce, belong to the lower socio-economic rung of the community. This lack of status makes it difficult for them to persuade local youth of the value of their language.

Within the indigenous council, authority is contested among the proficient speakers, each of whom holds different ideologies about what type of authority legitimates a linguistic standard. In one view, a legitimate standard is upheld through a “hierarchy based” view of authority according to which authority is determined by age, gender, kinship network and standing in the politico-religious cargo system; in this view the legitimate standard is simply the standard of the person with the highest standing. Another “tradition based” view sees linguistic authority as embodied in the ways of speaking of ancestors, so that claims about the correct usage tend to be supported by childhood memories of specific speech situations. In this view, the speech of the elders of the community and, importantly, their memories of the speech of their own elders, can be considered a true and authentic representation of the language. When talking about how to use the language, some community members repeat verbatim (or in ways that represent the memory as a verbatim repetition) the voices of those family members who used it in the past. A third “modernist” view sees linguistic authority as dependent on formal education and literacy, so that authority comes from being able to read or write the language or having received schooling as a native language educator. A fourth “purist” view sees the legitimate language as being the one that has no discernible influence from Spanish, meaning that the ability to create neologisms and avoid loanwords is highly valued. In this way the linguistic ideologies are associated with linguistic choices and with notions of who gets to claim status as an authoritative speaker<sup>2</sup>. At the same time the questions of values and ideologies are embedded in complex interpersonal dynamics among the speakers participating in the revitalization project that raises the stakes of linguistic choices made in the process of documentation and revitalization. This social setting in which multiple structures of authority are embedded and counterpoised to each other, and in which rapid economic development has created gaps between generations and between social classes, provides the context for our discussion of the sources of micro-political tensions in the small subgroup of the language community who were interested in revitalizing the indigenous language.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that concrete language use can never be expected to be a simple function of conscious ideology. It is quite common to find discrepancies between speakers’ conscious and unconscious language attitudes (cf. Kristiansen 2003; Maegaard 2005).

## 2 The Otomí Council of *Ndöngü* and the revitalization project

The Supreme Chief of San Jerónimo Acazolco, head of the Otomí Council of *Ndöngü*, is Don Feliciano Soler, an 87 year old man who speaks the indigenous language as his first language. He was first a consultant for the linguists working on simple documentation, but then in turn he requested a published book in the language to present to the state-level authorities as additional proof that Acazolco has an indigenous language and is therefore an indigenous community. So, the documentation project turned into a community-based revitalization project. Another early participant in the revitalization project was Don Felipe Sánchez. Don Felipe was trained as an Otomí teacher and had established a basic cultural and linguistic education program in town before the arrival of the linguists. He became a key collaborator with the linguists in both the revitalization project and the documentation work. Another main participant was Doña Trinidad Beltrán (74), who sometimes collaborated with Don Felipe and participated in teaching the children and who also became involved in the revitalization project early on. In the following we will concentrate on showing how these three major players in the revitalization project each have different views of what constitutes a legitimate linguistic authority, which combined with the linguistic variation between them presented formidable challenges to the project. First we describe the Otomí language, and some of the intra-personal variation between the three main participants in the project.

### 2.1 Otomí themes and variations: Dialectal and individual

Otomí is the name of a group of closely related languages that belongs to the Otomanguean language family and is spoken by ca. 180,000 people in central Mexico, most of them in the states of México and Hidalgo. Most varieties of Otomí are considered endangered languages (Lastra 2001a) and many varieties have undergone considerable linguistic change under the influence of Spanish (Hekking 1995; Hekking and Bakker 2007). All varieties of Otomí are characterized by a complex phonology and verbal morphology, and linguists have struggled with aspects of grammatical and phonological analysis since the 1930s (Soustelle 1937; Sinclair and Pike 1948; Leon and Swadesh 1949; Wallis 1964). Large advances in analysis and documentation have happened in the past decades (Hekking 1995; Hernández et al. 1998; Lastra 2001b, 2006; Palancar 2009). The Otomí variety of San Jerónimo Acazolco is currently almost completely undescribed, the only publica-

tions about it being a few texts and a two page ethnographic description in Lastra (2001b) plus a few publications by the present authors. Lastra defines the Otomí variety of Acazolco, as well as the neighboring variety of Santiago Tilapa, as being most closely related to the highland varieties spoken in the northern sierra of Puebla and Veracruz, which she defines as belonging to the Eastern dialect group. The Acazolco variety is also linguistically conservative, for example retaining the complex system of verbal conjugational classes found in colonial Otomí (Cárceles 1907; Palancar 2011) which was lost in the better described innovative varieties of Hidalgo and Queretaro (Palancar 2009). It also conserves phonemic and grammatical distinctions that have been lost in most other dialects such as the three-way distinction between voiced, voiceless, and aspirated stops, and the dual number.

The people of Acazolco refer to their language as *yühú* [jühú] and not as *hñähñu* as the speakers of the prestige dialect of El Mezquital, Hidalgo do. In the present study we use the exonym Otomí, originally from the Nahuatl language, to refer to the language and related ethnic identity of the people of Acazolco, in spite of the fact that some other communities advocate the use of endonyms. The people of Acazolco invariably identify themselves as *Otomíes* when speaking in Spanish, and do not see any problem with this label. The advantage of the term Otomí is that it makes visible the affinity of the people of Acazolco with other speakers of Otomí languages – although they do not share the same endonym. The people of Acazolco use the term Otomí exactly for this purpose.

## 2.2 Intra-speaker variation

The problem of disagreements about crucial elements of culture between members of the same community has been recognized since Dorsey's (1885) description of Omaha customs, where he frequently noted his informant Two Crows' denial of the existence of certain customs described by other informants (Sapir 1938). Early field linguists studying variation between speech communities often worried mostly about finding the truly authoritative informant (sometimes defined, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, as the NORM "non-mobile, older rural male" [Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 29]). This approach to language was challenged with the development of sociolinguistics, and the realization that linguistic variation often correlated with social variables, such as class, age or language attitudes (Labov 1972). Outside of the field of sociolinguistics, intra-community variation in endangered languages has often been understood primarily as caused by varying degrees of linguistic competence, for example Dorian's (1977, 1981) concept of the "semi-speaker", which is often used as a basis for typolo-

gies of speaker competence (see also Grinevald's 2011 approach to the issue of speaker typologies). Linguists and anthropologists have since learned to accept and indeed to expect community-internal variation, and there is some evidence that linguistic variation is particularly prevalent in minority languages that are in a process of contraction (Cook 1989; Dorian 2010). Variation and how to valorize it presents a particular obstacle in linguistic revitalization where communities are often eager to establish a set standard for what is to be considered as correct speech that can be passed on to future generations. This causes an implicit pressure to distinguish explicitly between correct and incorrect forms of speaking. The question of which standard to choose may be further complicated by intra-community discussions about who may claim status as an authoritative speaker, creating a complex interaction between notions of authenticity, identity and language variation (Bucholtz 2003). At the same time, in revitalization contexts there is often a paucity of speakers who are dominant in the indigenous language, and the dominant speakers may not be able or willing to participate in the project. Thus, the responsibility for passing on the language may fall on speakers who are dominant in the majority language and speak the indigenous language with less confidence. The indigenous language speech of such speakers, sometimes called semi-speakers, may display considerable influence from their first language. One question for a revitalization project then becomes how to evaluate such speech. Should it be considered legitimate variation, or should it be discouraged? In the following we make no such judgments, rather considering all variation among speakers who participate in the project to be potentially legitimate variation regardless of whether it seems to be caused by interference from Spanish.

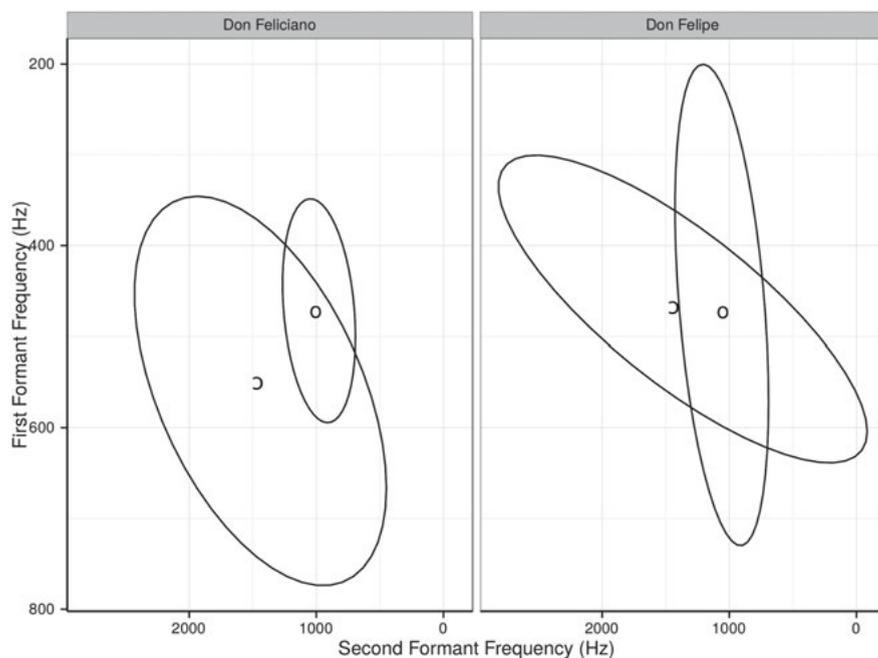
### 2.3 Phonological variation

There is considerable phonological variation between Otomí speakers in Acapulco. Several phonological distinctions appear to be lost among some speakers – for example the distinction between mid-high and mid-low vowels. Some variation appears to correlate with gender, and some with age.<sup>3</sup> Historically the vowel

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**3** In the previous sections we have used the practical Otomí orthography used for the revitalization project in order to reflect the way the words are used in written materials in the community. This orthography uses diereses to mark vowel nasalization, underlined letters to mark mid-low vowel quality, and diacritical marks to mark tone. In the following sections which describes linguistic variation we use an IPA-based orthography to make it more accessible to linguists.

system of Acazolco Otomí had nine distinct monophthong vowels /i e ε i ə a u o ɔ/ as well as a distinction between oral and nasal vowels for five of the vowel qualities. However, the distinction between the mid vowels /e/ and /ε/, and /o/ and /ɔ/, seems to be currently undergoing a merger among some speakers, perhaps under the influence of Spanish. Figure 1 shows mean first and second formant values for the mid back vowels taken from 90 word productions by Don Feliciano and Don Felipe. As the figure shows, Don Feliciano produced [o] and [ɔ] quite distinctly. Don Felipe's vowels, on the other hand, show considerable overlap, especially in terms of F1 (vowel height), suggesting that he has merged the two categories.



**Fig. 1:** Mean first and second formant frequencies for /ɔ/ and /o/ for two male talkers. Ellipses indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Following IPA conventions, the acute accent marks high tone and the caron marks rising tone. Low tone is left unmarked.

## 2.4 Variation in spatial language

One of the topics we set out to document was the use of spatial language. Here we consulted many more speakers than the primary three.

We had 10 speakers describe the 71 spatial scenes in the stimulus set Topological Relations Picture Series (TRPS; Bowerman and Pederson 1992). The TRPS stimulus set is aimed at eliciting location predications, and for each of 71 drawings of relations between two entities, the consultant is asked “Where is the X?”. The ten consultants generally used the same set of predicates and constructions in this task, although they differed in which patterns they preferred to use. However, in use of a general location verb, significant variation was found. Acazulco Otomí distinguishes between animate and inanimate location, reserving the verb *khǎ* for inanimate entities and requiring *'mbii* or a more specific position verb for animate beings (people, animals and occasionally agaves). So, for instance, Don Feliciano would correct the question *ábi rà khǎ ni pǐjkhwa?* (TRPS 67, “where is the owl?”) to:

- 1) *ábi*      *rà*      *mi'h*      *k'a*      *pǐjkhwa?*<sup>4</sup>  
 where    3.ICP    sit      DET.SG   owl  
 “Where does that owl sit?”

Both he and Doña Trinidad consistently distinguished between animate and inanimate location with different verbs and also explained the difference to us. Attending to the animate/inanimate distinction and categorizing scenes as different by means of separate verbs appear to be fundamental to Otomí; it is also salient in other varieties, such as Sierra Otomí (Dow 2005). The rest of our consultants generally honoured this distinction as well, but a couple of them were less consistent and sometimes extended *khǎ* to animate beings:

- 2) *rà*      *khǎ*      *a*      *mbo*      *meja*      *ni*      *mbiftu*  
 3.ICP    be      PREP    in      table    DET.SG   cat  
 “The cat is under the table.”

(2) was uttered by a male consultant whom we were referred to by other speakers in the village as another linguistic and cultural authority whom we would benefit

<sup>4</sup> Gloss abbreviations conform to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Apart from these standard abbreviations, the following abbreviations are used in this article: AUG – augmentative, CPL – complete, ICP – incomplete, PC – property concept, PO – primary object, PREP – preposition.

from speaking with. It would seem that strict linguistic differentiation between animate and inanimate is not required to be appreciated as a linguistic authority by the community.

In order to examine the orientation system in Acazolco Otomí, we had 6 pairs of speakers play a director-matcher game, Man and Tree (Levinson et al. 1992). In this game, one speaker describes a set of photos and the other has to find the matching photos in his/her own set. Many of the photos only differ as to spatial configuration, and to solve the task, speakers have to employ a frame of reference (FoR). Each pair played the game twice, swapping roles. To test whether choice of spatial terms would depend on the interlocutors' own location the game was played in different parts of the village and facing different directions, rotating the table when the players swapped roles. For 5 out of 6 pairs, the speakers routinely and successfully employed a geocentric frame of reference, using four directions: *a rí gwaní* ("uphill", east), *a rí thót'i* ("downhill", west), *a fǒnthə* ("at mountain", north) and *a mbǒtidí* ("where the ocote pines stand", south) / *a rí khóni* ("across, where it is flat", south).

Among the 5 successful pairs employing geocentric directions, all relied on reference to the same central east-west axis represented by *a rí gwaní* ("uphill") and *a rí thót'i* ("downhill"). Whether these directions are used so abstractly that they can be categorized as absolute or whether they are geomorphic (in the senses of O'Meara and Pérez Báez 2011) needs further investigation, but in experiments as well as spontaneous speech they are used consistently by all fluent speakers for communication about location on the east-west axis both within the village and in the surrounding area. Equally consistent across participants and loci for playing was the use of *a fǒnthə* ("at mountain") to indicate location north of something else. As for its counterpart, i.e. south, there was, however, some variation. Most pairs consistently referred to south with *a mbǒtidí* ("where the ocote pines stand"), whereas other pairs used instead *a rí khóni* ("across, where it is flat"). Both terms were used and understood fluently in their respective pairs, and it is possible that this type of variation pertains to either family (two of the pairs were close relatives) or, more systematically, to subtle differences in angles or position of the loci of playing on either side of the main road following the uphill-downhill axis.

The last pair was a mother and her non-fluent son. They used a relative frame of reference, utilizing loanwords from Spanish for left and right, but they used these terms differently and thus did not manage to match the photos. Beside supporting the more general finding that the relative FoR is not routinely employed in Otomí communication about orientation (see also Hernández-Green et al. (2011) for a discussion of Spanish loans in spatial language in another variety of Otomí), this kind of variation points to an important challenge for revitalization:

different linguistic FoRs require different types of nonlinguistic routine attention (cf. Pederson et al. 1998), and switching between linguistic FoRs when speaking different languages (here: Otomí and Spanish) may thus prove more demanding than acquiring vocabulary, syntax and traditional greetings for speakers who acquire Otomí as their second language.

## 2.5 Morphological variation

Most of the morphosyntactic variation among the three consultants is related to verb agreement. Don Feliciano tends to express 1<sup>st</sup> person object only by using the 1<sup>st</sup> person enclitic =*ga*; in addition, he sometimes omits the TAM/subject proclitics when the context is sufficiently clear to establish reference. Don Felipe and Doña Trinidad, on the other hand, consider this as lacking correctness, and they rarely fail to express 1<sup>st</sup> person object with the suffix *-gi/-ki* ‘1PO’ (primary object); they rarely omit TAM/subject proclitic either. The kind of morphemes in bold used by Doña Trinidad in (3a) are missing in Don Feliciano’s speech in (3b), where the omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person proclitic is permitted by the lack of a referential 3<sup>rd</sup>-person agent in constructions such as these.

- 3) a. **bi**            *'ndah-ki=ga*      *dahtá*      *pá=tshé*  
       **3.CPL**      give-1PO=1      AUG      heat=alone  
       ‘I got a real fever.’ {txt}  
       (Lit. ‘It gave me fever.’)
- b. *'ndah=ka*      *k'a*            *'i-mbi*  
       give=1            DET.SG      pain-belly  
       ‘I get a stomach ache.’ {txt}  
       (Lit. ‘It gives me stomach ache.’)

Another difference among the consultants is that a structure similar to secondary predication in other Mesoamerican languages (secondary predicate + primary predicate, P2 + P1; see Aissen & Zavala 2010) is used widely by Doña Trinidad (and other female speakers as well), as shown in (4), while it has not been found in the speech of Don Felipe or Don Feliciano.

- 4)
- |      |            |                             |   |
|------|------------|-----------------------------|---|
|      | <b>P2</b>  | <b>P1</b>                   |   |
| /ʃi  | [d-ra zɔ]  | [ <sup>h</sup> ká mbəɲ]=k'a | 'ndónkhwa                               |
| PURP | IRR-PC.ICP | good                        | 3.IRR(ADV) come.out=DET.SG carrying.net |
- 'So that the carrying net is well done.' {txt}
- (Lit. 'So that [it will be good] [it will come out] the carrying net.'
- The two pairs of brackets enclose the secondary and the primary predicate, respectively)

This type of linguistic variation is significant both because it correlates in certain ways with language ideologies, and because it often ends up being the cause of discord, triggering latent interpersonal or ideological differences. The next section describes how this happens.

### 3 Ideologies of authority and authenticity

None of the three main speakers in the project had close personal relationships with each other. What united these people was their interest in promoting the language and their willingness to work with linguists in doing so. The relation between the men was overtly antagonistic and competitive, whereas both men had a good working relation with Doña Trinidad. In the following we will describe the life histories of the main participants in the project which will demonstrate how attitudes towards the language and motivation to participate in a revitalization project are highly individual and associated with differences in life experience and personal outlook. It is also clear how this variation can cause interpersonal tensions that may jeopardize the possibility to make a revitalization project coherent.

#### 3.1 Don Feliciano: A hierarchical view of authority

Don Feliciano, the Supreme Chief of Acazolco's indigenous council, grew up as a monolingual speaker of the indigenous language for the main part of his childhood. His father was abusive and violent, and only allowed Feliciano a total of three months of schooling during his childhood. This experience nonetheless gave Feliciano a taste of learning and a deep appreciation of the value of literacy. He says about the village in the past that "*traían vendados los ojos, no sabían ni leer ni escribir, la gente abusaba de ellos*" (their eyes were blindfolded, they didn't know how to read or write, and outsiders would take advantage of them). As a

young man Feliciano taught himself to read and write, and went on to occupy political posts within the community and to hold several positions of authority within the civic religious hierarchies of the community. During his period as a local politician in the 1960s, the community received electricity, a development for which Don Feliciano takes credit. Don Feliciano simultaneously highly values modernization through education and technological development, but also deplores the loss of religious traditions and of traditional agricultural practices. He has an extensive knowledge of traditional lore, which he generously shares with community members who frequently seek him out for that purpose.

In relation to the language, his interest is two-fold: First, he wants to help the community advance by securing recognition as an indigenous community. This is the reason he wants some kind of tangible evidence for the fact that they speak an indigenous language. He does not have much faith in the possibility of revitalization. Rather, he has a strong interest in what Moore (2006) terms *memorialization*, that is, to record the ways in which his ancestors spoke, so that it will not be forgotten. He argues that the ideal outcome would be the production of a dictionary that records every word that his parents spoke, and which records each word “*exactamente como debe ser* (exactly as it should be)”. When working with linguists, he is extremely patient, speaking slowly and repeating when asked. He is emphatic that it does not matter how long it takes, but that he wants us to write down each word precisely as he says them. His speech has several idiosyncrasies relative to other speakers: he uses a non-standard form of the morning greeting, and what are apparently shortened forms of some suffixes, and he uses the dual number category more frequently than many other speakers do. He frequently abbreviates his utterances leaving out morphemes when they can be inferred by context, and employs many Spanish borrowings, which he adapts to Otomí phonology. He does not read or write the indigenous language, and when shown samples of written language he is discouraged by the use of letters that do not exist in the Spanish alphabet.

For Don Feliciano linguistic authenticity is a function of political authority: authentic language is the language that is able to get things done. This point of view is essentially pragmatic, focusing on the practical value of language as an instrument. This view is also expressed in his desire for the dictionary, which he sees as serving the primary function of providing the community with political legitimacy. He also considers legitimate language to be marked by the adequate recognition of social roles and hierarchies, by the use of the proper terms of respect, such as correctly greeting one’s *kúmbaytó’mbé* (*compadres* [i.e. kinsmen related not through blood but through ceremonial relations]) and elders. As an elder of the town and the Supreme Chief, he sees himself as a linguistic authority, and his language as inherently authentic. When he talks about “getting it right”

he means “writing it exactly as I say it”, and he does not generally draw upon memory of past speech situations as a means of building authenticity or authority. When asked specifically what authority decides what authentic Otomí is, he answered that to be an authority you are elected by the community: “*El pueblo me eligió porque confían en mí.*” (The community elected me because they have confidence in me)

### 3.2 Don Felipe: A modernist and purist view of authority

Don Felipe was the language teacher appointed by the Otomí Council of Ndöngü. He acquired passive knowledge of the language in childhood – his parents would speak Otomí to each other, but not to him. However, he had a compelling mystical narrative about how he came to take an active interest in reviving the language, which we paraphrase here.

For most of his life, he did not think much about Otomí at all. When he was about 40 years old he was widowed, and a series of events took place that changed his view of the language. Shortly after he lost his wife, he had a dream in which a group of elders approached him and entrusted him with a large old tome of knowledge. He interpreted the tome as representing knowledge of the traditional heritage of the community, and understood the dream to be encouraging him to take an active interest in promoting the local language and cultural tradition. At the time, he was a soccer coach, and one day as his local team was playing against their archrivals, he started yelling instructions to his players in Otomí, using expletives and demonstratives that even those who did not speak the language knew well enough to understand. The other team was flabbergasted and lost the game. From this day on, the players gave him the nickname *khak'wa* “Like that!” which was one of his exclamations during the game. He began studying the language on his own, using books written on other similar varieties, and conversing with a friend who was a more proficient speaker. The two started a musical group that would perform songs in the indigenous language while garbed in folkloric dress. He also took the initiative to organize and teach the first Otomí language course in Acapulco, offering free classes for the children of the town twice a week in the town hall, and for the rest of his life he was the prime mover behind the Otomí language classes in Acapulco. One day he chanced a meeting with an official from a state college for bilingual teachers, and he decided to take a certification course. They required him to take an exam to demonstrate his proficiency in the indigenous language (of which they spoke a different variety), and then accepted him into the course. Here, he took classes in basic linguistics and pedagogy, and received a diploma as an indigenous language instructor. Each day on

his way to class, he noticed a small bird singing close to the school. One of his classmates was a young woman from another indigenous community and Don Felipe admired her work ethics and beauty, although they never talked and he never saw her outside of the school grounds. On the last day of classes, she finally talked to him and told him that what he was doing was praiseworthy and that he would be a good teacher. She gave him a book about the language. As he left that day, the little bird appeared again singing as he was leaving the school, and Don Felipe realized that the young woman and the bird were one and the same, and that they were manifestations of his deceased wife encouraging his efforts.

Don Felipe used this mystical narrative to justify his own linguistic authority as coming not simply from books, but from a supernatural source, clearly beyond reproach by those who would question his source of knowledge.

Don Felipe's speech was different from that of many others in that he appeared to be following a clear purist language ideology, avoiding Spanish loan words as much as possible by inventing neologisms and discouraging the use of crude language, even to the degree of inventing neologisms for indigenous words that sound similar to rude words in Spanish. At the same time, his fluency was limited and he rarely had extended conversations with fluent speakers of the language. Indeed, around fluent speakers, he tended to avoid speaking in Otomí, or he took a didactic stance and corrected their pronunciation or their use of loan words. This behavior was perhaps encouraged by his self-image of having authority as a language teacher. This won him few friends among the more fluent speakers, none of whom considered him a legitimate or authentic speaker. Don Feliciano particularly disliked Don Felipe, who he felt undercut his authority as a speaker and a Supreme Chief by correcting him in public even during ceremonial occasions. Perhaps because of his lack of colloquial fluency, Don Felipe focused on literacy in his classes, and had a good understanding of the practical orthography developed for the language. The fact that Don Felipe knew how to write the language garnered a modicum of respect from some of the elders. In terms of orthography, Don Felipe preferred a highly detailed script that marked all phonemic distinctions, including tones. His understanding of the language system was good, and he was invaluable in helping the linguists translate and transcribe recorded speech. He knew the language was tonal, but he did not have full awareness of how tonal distinctions manifest (nor do any of the fluent speakers, who all recognize tonal minimal pairs but have a very hard time describing what makes them different), but nonetheless he insisted that the local orthography should be as phonemically accurate as possible. This may also be partly because the standard orthography, based on Mezquital Otomí, does not indicate tone, and by indicating tone the local orthography can be argued to be "even more correct" than the standard orthography. This was part of a larger argument of his, which sees

Acazulco Otomí as the most ancient and most original, and the other varieties of Otomí as adulterated or debased. His pronunciation was extremely clear, almost exaggeratedly so, but he did not distinguish between high-mid and low-mid vowels (see section 2.3), and in conversation his rhythm and intonation differed from that of the fluent speakers. He took strong exception to the elision of morphemes and the unclear pronunciation he perceived in Don Feliciano's speech. He also argued that since the traditional indigenous language name of the town is not a direct translation of the Nahuatl name *Acazulco* a new direct translation should be preferred instead.

Don Felipe saw linguistic authority as stemming from academic knowledge and from an analytic awareness of how language is to be used. He had a high degree of respect for linguistic knowledge and analysis. He gave authenticity and authority to his own neologisms by rationally arguing for their use. He would argue that his terms were preferable because they were not offensive, because they were not loanwords, or because they established a less ambiguous reference to objects in the world.

Don Felipe died suddenly in 2012, which was a hard blow to the language course. The classes are now organized by Efrén Maíz, a young man who is in the process of learning Otomí. He relies on the assistance of two fluent speakers (one of them Doña Trinidad) to help him teach. His pedagogical method emphasizes conversational competency rather than literacy.

### 3.3 Doña Trinidad: A traditionalist view of authority

Doña Trinidad is a widow and a great grandmother who lives with her extended family as head of the household. She is a fully fluent speaker and spoke only Otomí throughout her youth. She appreciates Otomí especially because of the way it connects her to her family, her parents, her late husband and her in-laws. She says that, “*mbwi ndídí tegá hín dra pōhka gídí jō?mphigá, porke drí jūhú. mbwi ndí míhká, k’i mtá?gambé jūhú. Hím bra pōdí gin yō ra jō?mphí. ... bi jūhú, ora fo ngenho di yōgá ra jūhú.* (When I grew up I didn’t know how to speak Spanish, because I am Otomí. When I was born our parents were Otomíes, they didn’t know how to speak Spanish... They were Otomíes, well now I also speak Otomí.)” She tells of learning the language through instruction by her parents in the daily tasks of the household. Her mother would issue orders and she would obey, gradually expanding her vocabulary as well as her repertoire of household skills. Doña Trinidad did not teach Otomí to her children, who apparently did not want to learn it, but she speaks it regularly with some of her older relatives such as her sister in-law. For Doña Trinidad her language is a part of her social identity and

something of which she is proud, a pride in tradition also reflected in the fact that she is one of the few women in Acazulco who still wear the traditional woolen skirt.

All other speakers to/with whom we have talked consider her speech exemplary and fully legitimate. She uses few Spanish loan words, although she does not seem averse to using them. She has a high degree of metalinguistic awareness and recognizes minimal pairs and paradigms, and explains them in lay terms. She is illiterate and consequently has no orthographic preferences. When she has time she participates in Efrén's classes, and she does so because she believes it important for children to hear a proficient speaker. She acknowledged Don Felipe's efforts and recognizes that he was not a proficient speaker, but argues that people should not criticize him unless they are themselves willing to teach the language. She says her reason for participating in the teaching program is that it would be beautiful for local children to learn about their roots, and about what it means to be an indigenous Acazulco person.

When she talks about how to use the language she repeats verbatim the voices of those family members who used it in the past, quoting what seems to be her memory of their exact words. For her, the final source of authenticity is her memory of how those past people spoke to her, often remembering the exact situation in which words were spoken, and using the tone of voice in which they were said. When asked what authority decides what is legitimate Otomí is, she answered "*Bueno, todos nosotros que crecimos con el otomí, los de mi generación, todos lo sabemos hablar bien. Solamente hay que invitarlos a todos a una junta para que nos pongamos de acuerdo de cómo hablarlo bien.* (All of those of us who grew up speaking Otomí, my generation, we all know how to speak it right. We just need to invite them all to a meeting and decide together what is the correct way to speak it.)"<sup>5</sup>

## 4 Conflicts and solutions

From the short biographies of the three primary community members who showed an interest in participating in revitalization work in Acazulco, it should be obvious that there are several possible sources of micro-political tension. Each

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<sup>5</sup> At Doña Trinidad's suggestion, such a meeting of as many of the native speakers as possible was organized, but did not turn out exactly as planned as it only came to include Doña Trinidad and two of her friends who all agreed on a single usage.

individual is motivated by a specific set of life experiences and ways of understanding the value of Otomí, and each has a highly personal way of conceptualizing the relation between authority and authenticity, which would make it exceedingly difficult for them to agree on a single standard for speaking and teaching. At the same time, each has a different set of strengths and weaknesses to bring to the project, which would make it highly desirable if it were possible to make the three work together respecting each other's unique abilities. Now that Don Felipe has passed away, many of the tensions have disappeared or become irrelevant. Nonetheless a new set of tensions have come into play by the fact that the current Otomí teacher Efrén Maíz is even less proficient as a speaker of Otomí than Don Felipe was, although he has much better personal relations with all involved.

In the collaboration between Feliciano, Trinidad and Felipe, micro-political tensions arose in several areas:

- *Personal competition*: The need felt by participants to bolster their own sense of identity by taking on an authoritative role may lead to competition, which is waged by dismissing the forms of knowledge other speakers have and elevating one's own criteria of authenticity.
- *Different understandings of the nature of linguistic authority and the source of authentic language*: Linguistic authority can be derived from the political and social authority of the speaker, from the degree of academic preparation and literacy, or from memories of the speech of older generations. Each of these in turn implies different criteria of authenticity valuing either referential/communicative adequacy, theoretical adequacy, or historical adequacy. The role of purism as a challenge to revitalization has often been noted (e.g., Dorian 1994), but the possible role of other more subtle differences in ideologies of authorities has generally been left unexplored.
- *Different understandings of what makes language valuable*: In the case of Acazulco, this understanding varies from the politically pragmatic approach exemplified by Don Feliciano, to the highly social value ascribed to the language by Doña Trinidad, to the highly personal way in which Don Felipe tied his own identity as a teacher to his love for his wife.
- *Linguistic variation*: The evaluation of linguistic variation as either neutral or problematic is tied to both interpersonal relations and the perception of different degrees of proficiency. Doña Trinidad had a good personal relation with both Don Felipe and Don Feliciano, and both of them spoke highly of her proficiency. However, because of their mutual competition the two men each deprecated the proficiency of the other in relation to their own criteria of authority and authenticity.
- *Gender and social class*. The norms about who has the right to claim particular kinds of authority in particular situations are often gendered. Even when

they are unspoken, there may be powerful social constraints on women when working together with men in a revitalization project like this. In Acazolco, Doña Trinidad does not seem to feel restrained in her participation, although perhaps her ability to work well with both of the male participants is partly due to the gendered norms of conduct. Nevertheless, we have experienced a clear tendency for male participants to be socially dominant in ways that make female participants uncomfortable in mixed gender interview situations. Similar restrictions can be expected to arise from class distinctions, but this did not play a role in this specific project, probably both because of the relative socio-economic homogeneity of Acazolco, and because none of the participants were from the upper layers of Acazolcan society.

- *Orthographic choices*: This is one area of ideological variation that has received ample attention from linguists, exactly because it is often a crucial point in determining the success of a revitalization project. Should orthographies be more phonemic or phonetic, designed to be easy to type, read or learn, or similar to or different from Spanish orthography? How important is similarity to orthographies of other Otomí varieties? Should tone be marked or not? Or maybe a standardized orthography is not necessary at all? (See Bartholomew [1979] and Bernard [1980] to see how linguists have argued about this question for Otomí specifically).
- *Primacy of discursive/pragmatic, lexical/grammatical or literary competences*: is it more important to teach the norms for what to say to whom and when or to teach how to form new utterances, or how to read and write the language?

All of these areas of tension are tied to each other in complex ways so that stances taken on one issue may have effects on others. Each of the areas of micro-political tension may lead to eruptions of conflicts as participants and linguists work together towards establishing a set of norms. In the case of Acazolco, tension regarding orthography has been minimal, because the two most proficient participants do not read the texts produced by the linguists. Rather in our experience conflict has erupted mostly because of interpersonal animosity and competition, and due to tension between fully fluent speakers and semi-speakers. One such case happened when Don Feliciano objected to Don Felipe being mentioned as “maestro” in the text material, since he was not a “real” maestro but rather an “instructor” (i.e. someone who teaches without having a teacher’s education). Another example was when Don Felipe told the linguists that Don Feliciano was really too old and feeble minded for his statements to be considered authoritative (in actuality, Feliciano has an outstanding memory). In both these cases the participants criticized each other in private to the linguists, which put the linguists in

the awkward position of either having to tacitly or explicitly validate or challenge their mutual critiques.

## 5 From speaker typologies to the speaker as individual

As can be seen from the description of how individual speakers construct their own personal ideologies of language based on their life experiences and stances, it is not necessarily informative or useful to divide speakers based on linguistic competence. As Dorian (2010) notes, linguistic variation need not correlate with competence, and neither do linguistic ideologies.

Classifying Don Felipe as a “semi-speaker” or an “L2 speaker” would perhaps tell us something about his standing relative to other more fluent speakers. However, it would not explain how it is that in spite of such a classification he can create a position of linguistic authority for himself through the use of a specific set of language ideologies. It also does not explain why some first language speakers have accepted that position. Similarly, what separates Don Feliciano and Doña Trinidad is not their degrees of competence, but their ideologies of authority – which for each of them forms an integrated whole with their lived linguistic experience. For Don Feliciano, appreciation of the language did not come from the fact that it was spoken by his abusive father, but rather from the prestige it could bring him in the social circles of Acapulco where Otomí was valued, such as in the sphere of religious organization. On the other hand, Doña Trinidad remembers her Otomí speaking parents fondly, and they became her main source of value for the language. In short, language ideologies are not simply a function of the metalinguistic discourses circulated in a community, but also of the lived experience that make some ideologies resonate with our subjective sense of self, more than others. If linguists begin to understand language ideologies as more than simple circulating political discourses, we will become able to make much closer analyses of how language ideologies circulate and thrive in communities, and the task of “ideological clarification” (Kroskrity 2009) or “ideological manipulation” (Loether 2009) will become much easier.

In the end, language revitalization is not carried out by linguists and communities, but by a group of individuals who relate to their community in different ways, who have different social and political visions, and who choose to participate in the project of revitalization for different reasons. Dwyer (2006) considers the role of the linguist in a revitalization context to be that of the mediator, mediating between a Western academic set of ideologies and the ideologies of

the community. We think that, at least in a socio-political context such as the one found in San Jerónimo Acazolco, the role of the linguist should also be that of the mediator between the individuals who participate in the project, and their different ways of conceptualizing its goals. This requires the linguist to strive towards achieving a strong empathic understanding of the people with whom they work, because this is necessary in order to mediate between opposing views and ideologies, and also in interpersonal conflicts. By building strong relationships with the participants and by relating to them as individuals with individual goals and needs, we both diminish the risk of having the project be experienced as exploitative or otherwise disappointing by the participants, and increase the likelihood of the revitalization project succeeding.

## 6 Authority in language revitalization and in Acazolco

In Mexico, and probably in many contexts in Latin America and elsewhere, linguists interested in working with language revitalization are confronted with the challenge that there are no clear political structures that can support and authenticate a linguistic standard. Rather in many cases there can be different groups within a language community who have different reasons to be interested in revitalization, which may or may not be compatible. As Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus (2013) point out, this frequently or perhaps inevitably means that as a linguist taking a neutral position in relation to these different views is not an option. When a language community has a political organization where the authority to authenticate linguistic issues is clearly defined, the choice of political position of the linguist is obvious, and this has been the case in many of the best documented cases of language revitalization projects in the USA and Canada (McCarty 2013). But when this is not the case, as tends to be the case in Mexico, the linguist has to navigate the micro-political context in a way that makes a positive outcome of the project most likely. Sometimes this may entail assisting the community in creating a political structure that can support the project, and at other times this requires simply accepting that it is only possible to work with a segment of the community and tailor one's efforts to the ideologies and wishes of that segment. That is, in relation to the question mentioned in the introduction regarding whether to engage in a process of "ideological clarification" or whether to simply accept and embrace the presence of ideological conflict, we would neither commit fully to Kroskrity's strategy of ideological clarification as consensus building, nor to Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus' conflictive view with its emphasis on choosing

sides. Rather the choice of doing either should be taken within a specific political stance (sometimes relatively micro-political as in the case of Acazolco, sometimes relatively macro-political as in the case of Provence). We argue that the linguist should strive for ideological clarification by first understanding the views, ideologies and stakes for the individuals who are investing their time and interest in the project. Then the choice of when to strive for consensus and when to accept heterogeneity can be made with a clearer view of the possible outcomes. In the context of San Jerónimo Acazolco, where the community of speakers is small but the amount of ideological and interpersonal tension and linguistic variation is considerable, we have found the role as mediators striving to build consensus to be the best option. It has allowed us to maintain good relations with the participants, in spite of their divergent views, and to mitigate some of the interpersonal conflict by working to understand the different views involved, so that the process of ideological clarification can proceed and a consensus can be formed.

Currently one challenge for the revival project concerns the question of whether the community should opt for a strategy based on *memorialization* or *regeneration* (Moore 2006). In the former case, the production and circulation of a canon of knowledge of certain words, phrases and discourses, may be enough to form a basis for the reproduction of a cultural identity, and for achieving the political recognition that seems to be the main goal of Don Feliciano.<sup>6</sup> In the latter case, the main objective would be to foster communicative competence in the children who attend the weekly classes with Efrén Maíz and Doña Trinidad, such as they both envision. But just like the linguistic ideologies of Don Feliciano, Doña Trinidad and Don Felipe were motivated not simply by conscious choices but also by the role that the language played within the context of their lives, in the same way, perhaps the conscious choice of revitalization strategy matters less than what kinds of experiences it engenders in the children and youths who will carry the future of the Otomí language in Acazolco.

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<sup>6</sup> See also the Xinka case described by Rogers (this volume), which proposes that such strategy may be viable when the community is primarily in search of a shared ethnic identity.

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