

The Language of Education:
An Investigation of Attitudes towards Bilingual Education in Rural Guatemala

El Mundo Maya: Carleton Social and Cultural Research Seminar in Guatemala

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Abstract

This ethnography is an investigation of the structure of bilingual education in the small town of San Antonio Palopó, as well as the attitudes towards the two principal languages of the community: Spanish and Kaqchikel. While the use of indigenous languages in Guatemala has been dwindling since the Spanish invasion, the government has created a national bilingual education program called PRONEBI in the recent decades to educate students on the multicultural aspects of Guatemalan identity. This paper describes the theoretical and actual structure of bilingual education in San Antonio's three schools, as well as the opinions of teachers, students, and community members on the importance of each language. After observing classrooms within the schools and conducting interviews with members of these three groups, I concluded that Spanish is viewed as the language most appropriate in educational settings and that more educated subjects tend to see more value in teaching Kaqchikel in schools.

Introduction and Goals of Study

When I first arrived at my host family's house in San Antonio Palopó to spend an introductory week in the town, I knew that I wanted to investigate bilingual education in a town that speaks both Spanish and one of Guatemala's twenty-two indigenous languages, Kaqchikel. In that first week, the use of both languages caught my attention within my own host family. My host mom, Manuela, a very traditional woman in her sixties with six children, numerous grandchildren and even one great grandchild, spoke little Spanish and communicated with her family members and friends in Kaqchikel. However, one night her son, Luis and his family came over for dinner, and I realized that something was a little bit different than usual at the dinner table: I could understand some of the conversation because Luis and his wife spoke in Spanish about half the time. I later learned that Luis' children do not speak Kaqchikel, so their parents are accustomed to speak to each other in Spanish. My host family's household also included Manuela's younger son, Chino, his wife, Lola and their year-old son, Josué. I realized that Josué's parents and aunts speak to him in Spanish more often than not, although they normally only speak Kaqchikel in the house.

These two observations sparked my curiosity about how Spanish and Kaqchikel are used in San Antonio and how people's use of each language varies across generations. From these experiences, I expected to find that many children speak mainly in Spanish and that Kaqchikel had become a language reserved for the older generation.

Keeping this idea in mind, I set out to study when, with whom, and in what situations the people of San Antonio speak Spanish versus Kaqchikel. Specifically, I was most interested in how the use of both languages played out in the school setting- how are both languages taught and what is the structure of the bilingual system in San Antonio schools? I was also interested in how people of the community think about Spanish and Kaqchikel and what significance they believe each language will have for the future of the young San Antonian generation. I focused on three different groups of people, teachers, students and community members, to determine if different roles in the community corresponded to different opinions on the value of each language. After observing schools in San Antonio and interviewing members of each of these groups, I found that, while most people give lip service to the importance of teaching Kaqchikel in schools, Spanish is thought of as the language of education, and that more educated subjects tend to place greater value on the importance of Kaqchikel than less educated ones.

Language Use in Guatemala

Since the arrival of the Spanish in Guatemala, the number of indigenous people who grow up speaking a Mayan language has decreased, and even fewer Mayan people can read or write in their own language. However Guatemala recently began making efforts to produce educational materials in Mayan languages, and the government has recognized the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala's standardization of Mayan words and spellings (Carmack et al. 2007: 423). Guatemala set up its first national bilingual education program called Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe (PRONEBI) in 1979 with funding from USAID/G. The program included forty schools and four different Mayan languages at its beginning. In 1980, it became an official program under the Ministry of Education through Government Decree #1093-84, and was expanded to

include 400 schools (Chesterfield, et al. 2003: 3-4). In 1995 PRONEBI changed its name to la Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (DIGEBI), and by 1997 the program included over 1,400 schools. In 2005, the program was active in thirteen of Guatemala's twenty two *departamentos* (Catalo Gómez 2005).

Many indigenous languages that were once spoken throughout Mesoamerica are now either completely extinct or dwindling in numbers of people who still use them. Throughout many areas of Guatemala a process called "language shift" is taking place in which people who traditionally speak one language begin to replace it with another (Carmack, et al. 2007: 421). Often this is because the replacement language, in this case Spanish, is more useful socially and economically. In many regions of Mesoamerica, people continue to speak their indigenous language in private settings but begin using Spanish in more public situations, and Spanish is considered more appropriate for "'important' types of communication" (Carmack, et al. 2007: 422). One specific type of language shift occurs when parents, seeing indigenous languages as an obstacle for their children's future, begin speaking to their children strictly in Spanish. Carmack, Gasco, and Gossen note that bilingual speakers may use Spanish in some contexts in order to present a certain identity or to relate to certain people not in their community (Carmack, et al. 2007: 423). These region-wide processes provided a foundation for my observation of the reality of language use within San Antonio; however, the situation in this community is unlike many other areas of Mesoamerica.

There have been several recent studies of the use of Mayan languages in Guatemalan communities. Terese Rand Bridges from University of Arizona worked in a community close to San Antonio called Santa Lucía Utitlan, trying to regenerate interest in the indigenous language of the town, K'iche. She found that many people no longer value the K'iche language and now use Spanish in their daily lives. The people of the community saw Spanish as more important for their children's futures (Rand Bridges 2003: 153). Ronald Wilhelm studied bilingual schools in two different Guatemalan towns: Piedras Negras and Santa Ana, Chimaltenango. In Piedras Negras, a small *aldea* of 450 Kaqchikel-speakers, he found that the majority of students at the community

school spoke Spanish as their first language (Wilhelm 1994: 178). Both students and parents had little interest in teaching Kaqchikel in schools because speaking Spanish was seen as a prestige symbol in the community. While both languages were taught in the schools, students were noticeably more engaged when teachers taught in Spanish (Wilhelm 1994: 179). In Santa Ana, Chimaltenango, the school included about 230 native Kaqchikel-speaking students. Although the school was technically part of the PRONEBI program, the teachers decided to prohibit teaching in Kaqchikel because students were behind in their understanding and usage of Spanish (Wilhelm 1994: 180).

In 2006, Mary Alivia Bryan studied bilingual and intercultural education in San Andres Xecul, a town outside of the second largest city in Guatemala, Xela. She found the town to be largely bilingual in Spanish and K'iche, but using mainly K'iche for interactions among community members. Upon investigating bilingual education in the schools of the town, Bryan found that the schools taught exclusively in Spanish because parents were opposed to the teaching of K'iche, saying that their children already spoke K'iche and needed to focus on learning Spanish (Bryan 2006: 10).

In 2008, Mikaela Van Sistine studied bilingual education in two K'iche-speaking *aldeas* in Cantel, Guatemala: Pachaj and Choquiac. She found that in the schools in these aldeas, K'iche is taught as a separate class for students a twice a week and all other classes are taught entirely in Spanish. While students at the schools are generally bilingual, they are more comfortable speaking Spanish. She found that teachers overall were favorable to the idea of teaching K'iche in schools, although both students and parents seemed to have mixed reactions to bilingual education. She saw a correlation between education level of parents and their attitudes towards bilingual education: less educated parents tended to see the teaching of K'iche as unnecessary or even “a step backward” (Van Sistine 2008: 13). These studies, as well as my introductory week in San Antonio, gave me some idea of what to expect in regards to language use among the people of San Antonio. However, I soon learned that San Antonio had a slightly different situation.

Research Setting: San Antonio Palopó

San Antonio Palopó is one of about a dozen towns scattered around the picturesque Lake Atitlan in the *departamento* of Sololá, Guatemala. The lake is a big destination spot for tourists, but although San Antonio has the kind of view that makes newcomers simply stop and stare for minutes at a time, it is only starting to work its way into the tourist route. Mostly, San Antonio is a small town of hard-working people making their living through various different forms. The town itself consists of about 4,000 Kaqchikel-speaking people. The vast majority of women and girls wear their simple blue and green striped *traje* with the festive addition of gold Mardi gras beads and hair wraps ending metallic streamers every day. A few older men still wear the traditional black and white checked skirts with red striped shirts, but most sport jeans and t-shirts. Many inhabitants own land on the *monte* where they grow onion, coffee, avocado, and other subsistence crops. People also supplement their income by selling beautifully woven textiles and hand-crafted ceramics to tourists who arrive for an hour or two on boats from Panajachel, a nearby tourist town.

San Antonio has two *primarias* (elementary schools) and one *básico* (the equivalent of American middle schools with 7th through 9th grades), which were the settings for much of my research. The *primarias*' official names are Escuela Oficial Urbana Mixta 15 de Septiembre 1821, Jornada Matutina and the Escuela Oficial Urbana Mixta 15 de Septiembre 1821, Jornada Vespertina; however considering the similarities between the two names and the amount of time it would take to say each of them, they are rarely called by name. Within the community, people generally say the "school over there" and then point in the vague direction of the school in order to get their point across. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to Jornada Matutina as Green school and Jornada Vespertina as Peach school. Green school houses 579 students of *párvulos* (preschool) through 6th grade. In the morning session, officially beginning at 7:30 but generally getting underway around 8 and lasting until 12:30, there are several classes of each grade. In the afternoon, from 1:00 until 6:00, there are a couple classes of grades one through three. Peach school divides its 504 students by age into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning session

consists of *párvulos* through second grade, while the afternoon session is for grades third through sixth.

All of the elementary students in the community funnel into one *básico* with about 120 students, which is located in Green school. From 1:15 to 6:15, the two classes of *primero*, one class of *segundo*, and one class of *tercero*, learn Spanish, English, Kaqchikel, math, music, social studies and other subjects in half hour increments. The students range anywhere from twelve to seventeen in any given grade, and are just as likely to be wandering around the hallways as sitting in their classroom listening to their teachers. There seems to be an abundance of free periods and absence of teachers. After completing the required six years of education in *primaria*, many young people begin working instead of continuing with their education in *básico*. Even fewer members of San Antonio go on to *colegio*, the equivalent of American high school where they pick a *carrera*, or major, to prepare them for a specific career. The closest *colegio* is in Panajachel, about a twenty minute commute by pick-up, but others choose to stay overnight at schools in the bigger cities of Sololá and Antigua. *Colegio* is expensive and few families can afford to spare their children from the daily work their families depend on.

Bilingual Education System in San Antonio

Each of the schools in San Antonio has a slightly different structure of bilingual education. Green school teaches *párvulos*, the youngest grade, in Spanish, but grades *preprimaria* (kindergarten) through third grade have bilingual teachers. This means that these grades receive both a Spanish and Kaqchikel language class and teachers instruct, to varying degrees, in both languages. By grades four through six, the students receive Spanish-only education, meaning that most of the upper-grade teachers are monolingual, and there is only a Spanish language class. All of the students' text books and homework are in Spanish. Peach school has a little different set up. They also teach *párvulos* only in Spanish, with monolingual teachers (although they generally understand Kaqchikel and simply do not speak it themselves), but all other grades, *preprimaria*

through sixth grade, are taught bilingually. They all have bilingual teachers, receive both Spanish and Kaqchikel language classes and receive varying degrees of instruction in both languages.

In *básico*, all classes receive three language classes, in Spanish, Kaqchikel, and English. Except for about an hour of Kaqchikel class per week, the students are taught entirely in Spanish. Their textbooks are all in Spanish and they turn in homework only in Spanish in non-Kaqchikel classes. As a school guideline, the students are asked to talk to each other and their teachers only in Spanish. In Kaqchikel class, however, both the students and teacher are expected to speak only in Kaqchikel for that period.

Methodology

My investigation consisted of two main research techniques: participant observation and structured and unstructured interviews. In order to understand how the structure of bilingual education in San Antonio schools, I observed classrooms in both *primarias* as well as the *básico*. In the *primarias*, my goal was to observe one class of each grade level in both schools, and in *básico*, I aimed to attend Kaqchikel language classes, as well as one Spanish language class and one English class. I began my research at the Green school. My host sisters, María, and Tomasa, turned out to be first grade teachers at the school. On my first day in the community, Green school was celebrating Carnival by electing *La niña carnaval*, and after watching about eight little girls timidly presenting themselves onstage, all the teachers reported to the library for a meeting. My *compañeros* who were also planning to observe classes in the school, Jojo and Alex, and I took this opportunity to introduce ourselves to the teachers. Luckily, the principal, Alex's host father, was very familiar with our purpose for invading the school, so he helped explain our projects to the teachers. After the meeting, I followed María to her classroom to watch the students make clown hats for the next day's continuation of the Carnival celebrations. On the walk home, I asked Tomasa if I could sit in on her class the next day, and from that a pattern emerged. Every day, during the students' 10-10:30 recess, I would go to a teacher and ask to watch their class the next day. They all seemed more than happy to have me sit in their classroom, if only to have an extra

pair of eyes on their students while they left for spontaneous half hour meetings with the whole staff. For the younger grades, I tried to schedule my visit during the time set aside for Kaqchikel class. In the end, I observed two first grade classes and one class in second through fifth grades, and was able to sit in on Kaqchikel classes in second and third grades.

I made my way to Peach school for the first time at the end of the first week, mostly because, while I could see the school clearly from my house, I had no idea how to get to it. After asking for directions and following a very windy path that threatened to dead end several times, Alex and I arrived successfully at Peach school and made an appointment to meet with the principal. The principal, Odilio, received us in his office, listened to our reasons for being there, answered our questions, and assured us that we were welcome to talk to teachers and sit in on any classes we wanted. I introduced myself to teachers one by one at this school, and they were all welcoming and accepted my presence in their class willingly. At Peach school, I observed one class in every grade from *párvulos* through sixth grade.

While observing class, there were very specific dynamics to which I paid special attention. I noted how often teachers used Spanish versus Kaqchikel, and in what language they gave instructions, taught new material, and addressed students in a more informal way, such as responding to questions or scolding students. I also observed which language teachers used when addressing the class as a whole versus individual students. The students' language use was of interest to me as well. I observed whether students talked amongst themselves in Spanish or Kaqchikel, and in which language they addressed the teacher. I paid attention to which language they used for addressing the teacher in a certain way: which language did they use to answer a teacher's question during instruction and which did they use to ask the teacher a question individually? In the Kaqchikel classes that I was able to observe, I noted how the language was taught: was it taught as if it were a second language or in a similar way as Spanish? What kinds of examples were used for Kaqchikel words, and if any, what kind of stories were read in Kaqchikel classes.

In *básico*, I started out by visiting the *tercero* class for the first half of their school day. At this school, the students of each grade have one classroom, and their teachers rotate through the classrooms. I sat in *tercero*'s classroom for their Spanish, social studies, *hogares* (a class just for girls similar to Family and Consumer Sciences), and English classes. During this time, I paid attention to the language that students used amongst themselves and with their teacher, both in answering questions directed at the class and in more informal conversations. I also observed the language of the teachers, in giving instructions, teaching new material, and talking informally with students. During English and Spanish classes, I noted what kinds of things were being taught in each language class, to serve as a comparison with the Kaqchikel class. I then asked the school's Kaqchikel teacher, Ignacia, if I could sit in on her Kaqchikel classes. She was quite welcoming as well, and although Kaqchikel class seemed to inevitably start fifteen minutes into the half hour period or simply not happen for no particular reason, I was able to attend several classes for both *primero* and *segundo*. During these classes, I again observed which language was used by Ignacia and her students in various situations. Additionally, I noted how the language was being taught, especially compared to Spanish and English classes, what kind of words were used for examples, and the material that was covered.

While observing classrooms showed me how the bilingual education system was structured, in order to learn about community member's views on Spanish and Kaqchikel, I used unstructured and structured interviews of teachers, students, and community members. Teachers were generally quite easy to track down because I could ask to interview them after observing their class. During recess or after school, once the students had cleared out of the classroom, teachers were willing to spend about ten minutes answering my questions. At Green school, about half of the teachers I talked to were from San Antonio and half were from other towns or smaller *aldeas* nearby. At Peach school, all of the teachers I talked to were from other towns around the lake. For teachers, I used structured interviews, asking the same questions to each teacher. I asked teachers what language they originally spoke, and what language they use with students in certain situations. I

also asked them if they think both Spanish and Kaqchikel should be taught in schools, why they think each language is important for students to learn in schools, and which language they think will be more important for their students' futures. In total, I interviewed one teacher from *párvulos*, *preprimaria*, and second grade, two teachers from third, fourth, and fifth grades, and three first grade teachers. I also include in the category of teachers, Odilio, the principal of Peach school.

Students' opinions gave me another valuable point of view on people's perspectives of bilingual education in San Antonio. When I began my research, I expected to interview at least one student from each grade, including both *primaria* and *básico*. However, after attempting to interview several younger students, I found that they occasionally did not speak enough Spanish to answer me or were too shy to give their opinions. I decided instead to simply interview students at the *básico* because they are exposed to both languages: Kaqchikel at home and Spanish for the majority of time at school. After making that decision, the next dilemma was to find a time and space to interview them, as even when not in class, the students are generally in big groups and unwilling to cooperate when their friends are there to look on and laugh at them. Vicente, the *básico* principal, allowed me to use the students' free periods to interview students. This gave me the opportunity to interview students of all three grades. When talking with students, I again used a structured interview format, asking students of all grades a specific list of questions. I asked them what language they use in different situations in their daily lives and if they feel having language classes in both Spanish and Kaqchikel is beneficial. I also asked why they think each language is important to learn in school, which language they feel will be more valuable for their futures, and which language they plan to speak with their children. In the end, I was able to speak with nine *primero*, eight *segundo*, and three *tercero* students.

I felt it was also important to talk to adult members of the community who are not currently direct participants in the school system. One challenge in talking to community members is that many of the less educated members of San Antonio are not fluent in Spanish. I started off by talking to the members of my host family who were not teachers or students themselves. I then

went to the numerous *artisanía* stores in San Antonio, where I knew that the vendors would be likely to speak Spanish in order to talk to clients. While a few of them did not seem to want to answer questions that did not seem to be leading to a sale, most of them were very friendly and cooperative. With community members, I used an unstructured interview style, making my questions more into a conversation with them about the use of Kaqchikel and Spanish within the community, so that they would not feel intimidated by my notebook and carefully-recited questions. I found that when I had my notebook in hand, people became suspicious about why I was pressing them for information and were less likely to share their opinions with me. I asked community members if they have children, what language(s) the schools in San Antonio use to teach, and whether they think both languages should be taught in schools. I also asked them why each language is important for students to learn and which will be more important for students' futures. In total, I was able to talk to twelve community members of various ages.

While I did my best to conduct as thorough a study as possible, my research is certainly is not without its limitations. Given more time, I definitely would have conducted more interviews, especially with community members. Many of the community members were middle aged women, and a better overall view of how the people of San Antonio feel about bilingual education would have been achieved if I had talked to more elderly community members and more men. Another interesting group that I did not interview is young people of *básico*- or *colegio*-age who are not in school. They may have a different perspective on bilingual education than their peers who are currently studying. One class that I did not have the opportunity to observe was the *tercero básico* Kaqchikel class, and it certainly would have been valuable to find out what they learn in their last year of Kaqchikel class. However, I did notice that *primero* and *segundo* seemed to do a lot of the same lessons, so it is possible that *tercero's* class would also be similar. One inherent limitation that seems unavoidable is that I am a Spanish speaker and conducted these interviews in Spanish. This narrows the people that I am able to talk to within the community, and also may affect what

subjects say about Spanish and Kaqchikel. For example, subjects may be more likely to express positive feelings about Spanish because it is the language that I use to communicate with them.

Results

Through my research, I found trends about the use of each language within San Antonio. In general, most people's first language within the community is Kaqchikel, whether they are children or elderly. Many members of the community are bilingual, either as a result of formal education or working with tourists. The following is a description of how each language is used and thought about within the community, both within and outside of the education system.

Spanish

Spanish is almost never used in day to day interactions between San Antonians. When I walked down the street or was in my host family's small store next to our house and heard Spanish, I instinctively looked around for an outsider- perhaps a tourist or someone from another town. However, Spanish is the language spoken by all teachers at school, whether they are from San Antonio or one of the neighboring towns, whether their first language is Kaqchikel or Spanish. As I mentioned, two of my host sisters were teachers at Green school. Every time I witnessed a conversation between the two outside of school, they spoke in Kaqchikel to each other; however, at school, their conversations are strictly in Spanish. This seems to be the trend for teachers of all grades at all three schools I observed. Spanish was also used exclusively during the presentations I attended in both Green school and *básico*. All announcements for elections of *Niña Carnaval*, *Señorita Carnaval*, and the *mercado típico* were in Spanish, although they were directed at students from five to seventeen years old.

Within the classroom, Spanish also seemed to be the dominant language overall. All textbooks, unless they are specifically designated for a Kaqchikel language class, were written Spanish and in all schools, all homework unless assigned in Kaqchikel class was in Spanish. At Green school, despite the bilingual nature of grades one through three, teachers generally gave instructions and taught material in Spanish to the extent that students could understand. Often,

teachers first gave an instruction in Spanish and then repeated it in Kaqchikel if students did not seem to follow it. For older grades at both Green and Peach school, teachers taught almost entirely in Spanish unless during Kaqchikel class. As a general trend, as the students got older, teachers used Spanish more and more within the classroom, both for instruction and informal conversations with students. In *básico*, all communication between teachers and students outside of Kaqchikel class was in Spanish.

No matter the setting, even when San Antonians speak in Kaqchikel, there are some Spanish words that they simply do not translate into Kaqchikel, which Carmack, Gasco, and Gossen point out is not uncommon for concepts introduced after the arrival of the Spanish (Carmack, et al. 2007: 424). This is an example of what linguists call “code switching” which Nilep defines as “the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction” (Nilep 2006: 1). Interestingly, almost all words related to education are always spoken in Spanish. Spanish terms are always used for “school”, “teacher”, “class”, as well as most school supplies.

The actual Spanish language classes that I visited varied between grade levels. For younger students they often focused on learning the alphabet, giving examples of words that start with the letter of the day. Generally all of the examples were in Spanish, but Carla, a first grade teacher at Peach school, gave the Kaqchikel example “uk’” to compliment several other Spanish examples as the students learned about the sound of the letter “u”. As students got older in *primaria*, the class seemed to revolve more around reading stories, and often copying those stories in their notebooks. In *básico*, the *tercero* students learned about communication in Spanish class, making a diagram about the different components of communication.

Teachers, students, and community members all seemed to think about Spanish as useful for similar and distinctive reasons. First and foremost, Spanish is the language that people speak with others who are not from San Antonio. This could mean people who come to San Antonio from somewhere else, but many people think about it as the language San Antonians use to communicate in places outside of their town. Subjects called Spanish the “international”, “national”, “world”, or

“universal” language. There was the overall feeling that Spanish is a language that connects San Antonians with the outside world, whether it be with people from a neighboring town or across the world. Many people also felt that Spanish was extremely important in continuing their education or finding jobs. As Emilio, a seventeen year old *segundo básico* put it, Spanish helps you “find opportunities”. There was also a recurring idea that the people of San Antonio do not speak Spanish, and a few people mentioned that it is important to learn Spanish to be able to teach it to people who only speak Kaqchikel.

Kaqchikel

Because Kaqchikel is the first language of the vast majority of San Antonians, community members use it in all daily interactions with other community members. San Antonians speak predominantly Kaqchikel in their homes. Within the classroom, students follow this trend and speak Kaqchikel amongst themselves regardless of school, grade, or subject matter. Fredy demonstrated San Antonians’ mastery of Kaqchikel by asking his third grade class how many of them speak Kaqchikel. Every student raised their hand. José Rigoberto told me that when he spoke entirely in Spanish on the first day of his *preprimaria* class, some students burst out crying because they could not understand him. With the exception of some of the younger grades in Peach school, within the *primaria*, Kaqchikel is used only as necessary so that students understand their instructions. At Peach school, the teachers of younger grades used Kaqchikel just as much, if not more, than Spanish when teaching materials in all subjects. For example, in Alma’s third grade class, she explains the systems of the body to the students in Kaqchikel. The language that students used with teachers generally seemed to depend on their age. As I observed and many teachers reported, most of the younger students, certainly in *párvulos* through second grade, speak to their teachers in Kaqchikel, especially if they are addressing the teacher individually and not as part of a whole class discussion. Many teachers noted that they have some students who can speak in Spanish or are motivated to speak in Spanish, but the majority of students prefer to speak in

Kaqchikel. Students use Kaqchikel less and less with their teachers as they reach the upper levels of *primaria* and extremely rarely in *básico*.

Kaqchikel classes often differed from Spanish language classes. In both *primaria* and *básico*, the focus of Kaqchikel classes are to teach student to read and write rather than focusing on oral aspects of the language that most students learn at home. I witnessed Kaqchikel classes in second and third grades at Green school and in *primero* and *segundo básico*. Despite the substantial age difference in these classes, they all seem to focus of the basics of reading and writing the language. In Julio's third grade class, the lesson is centered around learning the different Kaqchikel vowels and their respective sounds. In *segundo básico*, the students learned the alphabet, and Ignacia, the teacher, pointed out the vowels and consonants. Several of the Kaqchikel classes I have observed also incorporated Spanish into their lessons. For example, one assignment in Ignacia's *segundo básico* class consisted of making a poster with about twenty Kaqchikel words and their Spanish translations. Ignacia stated that one of the goals of Kaqchikel class is to improve the students' Spanish vocabulary and speaking skills, so if the students learn a word in Kaqchikel during class, they also are taught it in Spanish. On tests students are asked to write five sentences in Kaqchikel and then translate their sentences to Spanish. Ignacia explained that the purpose of Kaqchikel class in *básico* is to teach students new vocabulary and grammar rules in Kaqchikel because if they do not learn them in Kaqchikel "it is difficult to learn them in Spanish".

Just as with the Spanish language, interviewees seemed to have distinct associations and opinions about the Kaqchikel language. Students, teachers, and community members alike reported that Kaqchikel is the language of San Antonio. It is the language associated with the culture and identity of the community. Many people said that it is the "custom" of the town to speak in Kaqchikel. There were also a significant number of people who related Kaqchikel to the language of the past. As Elmer, a sixteen year old *tercero básico* student put it, Kaqchikel is "our language, which has always been spoken by our grandparents and great great-grandparents". Gladys, a fifth grade teacher at Peach school, identified Kaqchikel as "an inheritance". When people told me

about Kaqchikel, they seemed to think it was important to learn so that they did not “lose” or “forget” the language. They also often used the words “preserve the culture” and “preserve their identity”. Many people felt that it is important to know Kaqchikel so that they can talk to the people of San Antonio specifically, and many followed this up by saying that many San Antonians only speak Kaqchikel. There was also an overall idea that Kaqchikel education should focus on reading and writing because children arrive at school already possessing knowledge about speaking the language. A few subjects also responded that it is important to learn Kaqchikel because tourists often ask San Antonians how to say words in Kaqchikel and they should be able to answer them.

People’s Perspectives

Many of the trends that I found were specific to different groups of people. There were significant consistencies in the opinions and values among teachers, students, and community members respectively. One of the most telling examples of this is how they answered the question “Which language will be more important for students’ futures?”. Chart A below represents the answers of each different group.

Chart A: Opinions of Language that is Most Important for Students’ Futures

	Spanish		Kaqchikel		Both	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Teachers	6	42.9%	1	7.1%	7	50.0%
Students	18	90.0%	2	10.0%	0	0.0%
Community Members	9	75.0%	0	0.0%	3	25.0%

Teachers

As Chart A shows that half of teachers feel that both languages will be equally important for their students’ futures, whereas 42% of teachers feel that Spanish will be more important for their students’ futures. Only one teacher felt that Kaqchikel will be most valuable. These numbers show that many teachers do value Kaqchikel as a language that should be taught, and consistent with this, every teacher in my interviews responded positively to teaching both Spanish and Kaqchikel in

schools. I noticed throughout my observation of classrooms and interviews that teachers tend to overestimate how often they speak to their students in Kaqchikel during class. In Fredy's third grade class at Green school, I was able to tally the number of specific times that Fredy spoke in Kaqchikel, which I would estimate was approximately 20% of the time. However, in my interview when I asked in which language he generally gives instructions and teaches, he responded Kaqchikel. I also noticed that teachers seemed to underestimate the amount of Spanish that their students understand. In fifth grade at Green school, María says that she communicates with her students only in Spanish, which I observed to be true, but she says that five to eight of her students do not understand Spanish. One surprising answer about the importance of Kaqchikel that was particular to teachers is that Kaqchikel is becoming important in the work field. As Carla, a first grade teacher at Peach school put it, Kaqchikel "is an important foundation for getting a good job. It is a requirement to know one or two languages of the country [indigenous languages] to communicate with the people". Teachers overall recognized the importance of both languages in responding to my interview questions.

Students

As Chart A shows, students almost universally put more importance on Spanish than on Kaqchikel, and seemed to value Spanish more than teachers. 90 percent of students felt that Spanish will be most important to their futures, and zero students considered both languages equally important. Asenio, a fifteen year old *tercero básico* student, sums up the students' perspective on the importance of knowing Spanish: "without being able to speak Spanish, we cannot say anything". This is interesting because in my observation of students at school, they almost always interacted with each other in Kaqchikel. When interviewing students, I decided to add the question "When you have children what language will you speak with them?" to get an idea of whether they considered Kaqchikel an important language to pass on to future generations. Chart B below shows the results of this question.

Chart B: Language Students will Speak with Future Children

	Number	Percentage
Spanish	7	41.2%
Kaqchikel	0	0.0%
Both	10	58.8%

Although there is an overall idea among students that Spanish is the more important language, more than half of students want to speak both Kaqchikel and Spanish with their children, showing that they do appreciate the use of Kaqchikel in the home and wish to continue this tradition in the future. It also is significant that all students want to teach their children Spanish, showing how much students value the language. Mayra, a fifteen year old *segundo básico* student told me that she wants her children to speak in Spanish so that “their future will be a success”. Students, compared with teachers, seem to give less importance to Kaqchikel and focus most of their attentions on Spanish.

Community Members

The majority of community members also favor Spanish as the most important language of young people today. As Chart A shows, 75 percent of community members answered that Spanish will be more valuable to current students. One interesting trend among community members was that, unlike the other two groups, who both favored the teaching of both languages almost completely, not all community members were convinced that Kaqchikel should be taught in schools. Chart C below shows this trend.

Chart C: Community Members Opinions on Languages that Should be Taught in Schools

	Number	Percentage
Spanish	5	41.7%
Kaqchikel	0	0.0%
Both	7	58.3%

While less than half of community members are in favor of teaching only in Spanish, it is nevertheless significant that community members were the only group with a substantial amount of people who believe that Kaqchikel should not be taught in schools. The majority of community members who gave this opinion said that because students arrive at school already speaking and understanding Kaqchikel, they do not need to learn it in school, and teachers should focus on improving their students' Spanish skills. In general, community members seemed to be the group least in favor of bilingual education and giving the least amount of importance to the teaching of Kaqchikel in schools. They tended to see Spanish as a significantly more useful language for the future of young people in San Antonio.

Conclusions

The coordinators of the education system in San Antonio almost unilaterally recognized the value of educating today's San Antonio students in Kaqchikel; however their actions and the general structure of bilingual education in schools in the community seem to point to an overall attitude of Spanish being the language of education. Teachers say that it is important to be literate in Kaqchikel to preserve the language of San Antonio, but within most classrooms, and within all three schools as a whole, Kaqchikel is treated as the less valuable language. Many of the teachers of younger grades told me that they speak to students in Spanish, using Kaqchikel when students do not understand. In all classrooms, with the exception of specific Kaqchikel classes, the students turn in all their homework in Spanish. Even teachers who are generally more comfortable speaking in Kaqchikel converse in Spanish once they step into the school. When San Antonians have a conversation in Kaqchikel, they still use Spanish words for concepts related to education, emphasizing that Spanish is the language that they associate with education.

A great illustration of the discrepancy between teachers' words and actions came in my interview with Odilio, the principal of Peach school. When I asked him if both languages should be taught in schools, he responded positively, saying, "We need to fight to make Kaqchikel the equal of Spanish". However, a few minutes before he told me that he asks all students to speak to him in

Spanish. This request seems to simply further the idea that Spanish is the only appropriate language in educational situations. In many of the classes devoted specifically to Kaqchikel, especially in the *básico*, part of the purpose of the class was to help students speak and write Spanish. While students seem to focus on reading stories and learning how to communicate in more formal situations in their Spanish language classes, Kaqchikel classes never seem to progress beyond the basics.

Another general trend arose is that more educated people seemed to recognize the value of teaching Kaqchikel more than those who had received less education. Overall teachers were much more supportive of Kaqchikel as a necessity in students' education than either community members or students. This suggests the idea that Kaqchikel is now appreciated by educated people who have the luxury of prioritizing a language for the sake of culture and identity, whereas most community members are forced by economic circumstances to place value on the language that will be of most immediate financial and social gain. The community members that I interviewed need to be able to converse in Spanish in order to sell products to tourists and communicate with connections outside of San Antonio that help them earn their living. Students are focused on studying so that they can find jobs in the near future and have more opportunities later in life. To them, Spanish is the language that will help them achieve their goals for the future. Although the bilingual education system in San Antonio theoretically places value on the teaching of Kaqchikel, the reality of the practices within the school and the attitudes of community members within and outside of the educational system show that Spanish is the dominant language of education in San Antonio.

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