

K'iche' vs. Español:

Bilingual schools and linguistic domains
in a rural Guatemalan community

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Abstract

This ethnography examines the practice and opinions of bilingual education in a rural Guatemalan community and analyses the ways that these are affected by and representative of linguistic domains in the community. In recent decades, the Guatemalan government has begun to change its position on the presence of indigenous languages and cultures in many domains, including that of education, from assimilationist and Spanish-dominant, to a more pluralistic stance that, at least in theory, celebrates the pluricultural and multilingual realities of Guatemala. This paper traces the history of bilingual education and language use in Guatemala and the current realities of these in Pachaj and Choquiac, two neighboring *aldeas* in the K'iche'-speaking *municipio* of Cantel in the western highlands of Guatemala. I conclude that language preference within the schools is conditioned by the wider linguistic environment in the community. Data were derived from classroom observations and interviews with directors, teachers, parents, and students.

Introduction

Since the arrival of the Spanish in Guatemala, the Maya have been subjected to forced *castellanización*, the conversion of indigenous culture and language to that of the Spanish. Public education in Guatemala has, for much of its history, been a medium for transmitting Western ideas and the Spanish language to the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. However, in recent decades, there has been a movement toward educating the Maya in their own languages about their own history and values. Nearly 25 years after the creation of the *Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe* (PRONEBI), I seek to find how the current practice of bilingual education in two K'iche'-Maya communities is affected by and representative of linguistic domains, or the situations and contexts in which each language is spoken, in those communities. Substantial research has been done on the history, practices, and perceptions of bilingual education in Guatemala. I build on the existing research that has been conducted on bilingual education and especially to make connections between language preference within the schools and the language preference in the wider community outside the schools.

I conducted my research in Cantel, a *municipio* of 32,000 inhabitants in *departamento* of Quetzaltenango. Twelve percent of the population lives in the urban *cabecera* of Cantel, while the remaining 88 percent are situated in the surrounding *aldeas* (hamlets) (Cantel, Quetzaltenango website). During my field research, I stayed with a family in the *aldea* of Pachaj, a dispersed collection of homes and *tiendas* separated by cornfields and criss-crossed by earth footpaths, all nestled within the mountains that characterize the western highlands of Guatemala. Eighty percent of Cantel's population speaks K'iche', the indigenous language of the region. An estimated 94 percent of the population belongs to the K'iche' ethnic group, while the remaining 6 percent are ladino. The *municipio* is home to thirteen public primary schools, four in the urban center of Cantel and nine in rural areas, in addition to several privately-run schools (Cantel,

Quetzaltenango website). During my time in Cantel, I focused on the state of bilingual education at three schools in the neighboring *aldeas* of Pachaj and Choquiac.

A history of bilingual education and language use in Guatemala

Guatemala has a long history of assimilationist policies regarding education and language use for its indigenous populations. Both during the colonial period and after Guatemala's independence from Spain in 1821, policies of *castellanización*, or the conversion from indigenous language and culture to Spanish language and culture, were in place but were never fully realized. After the conquest, the Spaniards decreed that the official language of instruction in Christianity for the conversion of the Indians would be Spanish, but the friars in Indian towns found that they could more effectively communicate with the Indians in Mayan languages. The Guatemalan Constituent Congress of 1824 called for the "extinction" of indigenous languages because they were "so diverse, incomplete, and imperfect," and threatened the unity of the country (Richards and Richards 2001: 209). Ladinos have often used the fact that Mayan languages have borrowed many words from Spanish as evidence that the former are inferior to the latter (Bricker 2004: 85). However, despite the ideal of *castellanización*, the indigenous regions of Guatemala were under scant supervision by policy makers, and most Mayas remained monolingual speakers of Mayan languages (Richards and Richards 2001: 210).

The Guatemalan Constitution of 1965 called for the integration of indigenous people into the "national" (ladino) culture. A preschool program called *Castellanización Bilingüe* was also created in 1965, and, unlike its unsuccessful, monolingual Spanish predecessors, involved instruction in indigenous languages. Like its predecessors, however, *Castellanización Bilingüe's* goals were assimilationist—"to achieve total acceptance of the national language (Spanish)" (MINEDUC, as cited in Richards 1989: 98). Because the ultimate goal was literacy in Spanish, the bilingual primers used in *Castellanización Bilingüe* utilized Mayan-language alphabets based

on the Spanish language writing system, even though it meant that some sounds in the Mayan language could not be written or could only be approximated (Richards 1989: 99). Meanwhile, all education following the bilingual preschool year was still conducted entirely in Spanish. When Rosita Lima, now a bilingual *Preprimaria* teacher at the public primary school in Pachaj, was in school, the teachers taught only in Spanish, even though Rosita, like many other students, was a monolingual K'iche' speaker—their parents did not know Spanish. The teachers hit them with rulers and made them kneel on corn kernels if they did not understand Spanish (Interview Feb 21st 2008).

When it became obvious that one preschool year of bilingual education did not sufficiently prepare students for all-Spanish primary schools, a pilot program called the *Proyecto Nacional de Educación Bilingüe* introduced a bilingual curriculum through second grade from 1980 through 1984. Out of the success of the pilot program, a more permanent program, the *Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe* (PRONEBI) was born in 1985. Before this time, bilingual education was seen as a way to fix the “Indian problem,” under PRONEBI, it aimed to give equal rights and opportunities to indigenous peoples and to preserve part of the cultural heritage of the country. In 1990, PRONEBI was extended to provide bilingual education through fourth grade (Richards 1989: 101). In 1995, PRONEBI changed its name to DIGEBI (*Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*), which is the organization in charge of Bilingual Intercultural Education (EBI) in Guatemala today. DIGEBI functions in 13 out of Guatemala’s 22 political departments. DIGEBI’s vision is “a new Guatemalan identity as a multiethnic, pluricultural, multilingual, democratic, and participative nation,” and its mission is “to develop in Maya, Garífuna, and Xinca boys and girls a bilingual, multicultural, and intercultural education with linguistic, cultural, technological, and scientific competence” (Cotzalo Gómez 2005, translation mine). These recent changes in the bilingual education program correspond to changes

in the way the broader Guatemalan government views the indigenous populations and their languages. The 1985 Guatemalan Constitution still proclaims that “the official language of Guatemala is Spanish.” However, in contrast to earlier Constitutions, it recognizes that “the vernacular languages form part of the cultural heritage of the Nation” (Republic of Guatemala 1993: Article 143). In fact, the 1985 Constitution even mentions that “in schools established in the areas with a predominantly Indian population, the instruction should preferably be imparted in bilingual form” (Republic of Guatemala 1993: Article 76).

Methodology

I lived with a family in the rural *aldea* of Pachaj, in the *municipio* of Cantel in the *departamento* of Quetzaltenango from February 10 through March 3, 2008. My research was concentrated on three schools in Pachaj and in the neighboring *aldea* of Choquiac. The majority of my time in the field was spent observing in the schools, and I also conducted formal and informal interviews with directors, teachers, parents, and students.

I arrived in Cantel with some familiarity with the history of and the debates and obstacles surrounding the bilingual education system in Guatemala. Two previous studies on bilingual education, Ronald W. Wilhelm’s 1990 comparison of two Kaqchikel-Spanish bilingual schools in the department of Chimaltenango and Mary Alivia Bryan’s 2006 study in the K’iche’-speaking *municipio* of San Andrés Xecul, as well as other communities in the departments of Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango helped me to develop a research methodology for my own project. Based on the results of these two studies, I was also able to compare my observations in Cantel schools to the situations that Wilhelm and Bryan found in their areas of research. However, because the situation of bilingual education in Cantel was quite different than that of the communities described in the two papers, I had to modify my expectations for the project slightly.

Getting into contact with the schools in the community was easy. Relatives and friends of my host family and coordinator in Cantel turned out to be teachers at the various schools, and even without a personal connection to the schools, the directors and teachers at the schools were very welcoming and willing to have me observe classes and speak with them about bilingual education in their schools.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. While I did not come across any specific obstacles in my research, in only three weeks of research it was difficult to get a complete and accurate picture of bilingual education in rural Cantel, thus, this is only a “snapshot.” I conducted research at only three schools in one *municipio*, and only in the K’iche’-speaking region of the country, so it is impossible to draw conclusions about the practice and opinions of bilingual education or about the linguistics domains of communities in Guatemala as a whole. However, despite the small scale of my research, I suspect the conclusions about bilingual education and language use in the communities of Pachaj and Choquiatic are representative.

Language and education in my host family

Estela Chuc Poz, my host mother in Pachaj, is a bilingual K’iche’-Spanish speaker. Her father died when she was one year old and her mother was a monolingual K’iche’ speaker. Estela started primary school at the government-run school in Pachaj, but her mother did not have enough money to buy her textbooks and other school supplies, so she told Estela she could not go to school anymore. Estela hardly knew any Spanish when she left Pachaj to work in Guatemala City as a young woman because her mother could not afford to buy her clothes and other necessities. It was there that she learned some Spanish. Later Estela returned to Pachaj, married, and had three daughters, Shaney, Ingrid, and Karina. She said she learned Spanish along with her daughters, they came home from school and taught her words she did not know. Estela said that

her daughters have not missed even one year of school—they went to *primaria*, *básico*, and *diversificado*. Her youngest daughter, Karina, is currently studying to become a doctor at a university in Quetzaltenango. She is currently learning K'iche' as part of her studies in the university in order to be able to communicate with K'iche'-speaking patients. (Interview Mar 2nd 2008).

Since Ingrid, Estela's 22-year-old middle daughter, was little, she has spoken K'iche' with her grandparents, who live next door and do not speak Spanish. With most other people, including her parents, she speaks Spanish. Her older sister Shaney also speaks K'iche', but Karina, her younger sister, hardly speaks any K'iche'. Ingrid plans to speak to her one-month-old son, Sheyn, in both Spanish and K'iche'. "K'iche' is very important in this community. (Speaking K'iche') is practically a requirement to get a job in this community." She said she would be happy if Sheyn received K'iche' classes at school. "At school, they learn *verdadero* K'iche'. What we speak at home is not *verdadero* K'iche'. Also, at the schools they learn how to read and write K'iche'" (Interview Mar 1st 2008).

Previous studies on bilingual education in Guatemala

Ronald W. Wilhelm conducted an in-depth study of two PRONEBI primary schools in Kaqchikel communities in 1990. While his primary focus was to examine how the curriculum and the instruction style of teachers in PRONEBI schools gave students alternative views on Maya history and culture and the ethnic relations between Mayas and ladinos, he also discusses the role of the Kaqchikel language in the schools. At one school, whose pseudonym is Piedras Negras, "to the frustration of their teachers, the students came to school speaking Spanish, not Kaqchikel, and ... neither the students nor their parents showed much interest in their learning to read, write and speak Kaqchikel" (1994: 179). The Piedras Negras teachers either instructed in Kaqchikel with a Spanish summary or in Spanish with a Kaqchikel summary, though the students

participated more actively during lessons conducted in Spanish. In contrast, though the students at the second school, Santa Ana, were fluent in Kaqchikel, and Spanish was their second language, the teachers decided to teach most subjects in Spanish and to only use Kaqchikel to explain what the students did not understand. The reason for this is because, previously, when students went on to *básico* (middle school), they were behind in their Spanish skills. Wilhelm concluded that the students' and parents' resistance to Kaqchikel instruction in Piedras Negras and the teachers' resistance to the same in Santa Ana limited the potential success of PRONEBI's goal of cultural and social empowerment for the Maya.

Similar to Wilhelm's findings, Mary Alivia Bryan found in her work in 2006 in the K'iche'-speaking *municipio* of San Andrés Xecul, that "EBI (*Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*) was not only absent in Xecul, but it had been actively resisted by the community" (n.d.: 9). Bryan encountered a mother who wanted her daughters to be successful when they moved onto middle school in Quetzaltenango and teachers who thought of bilingual education programs as "a conspiracy to keep indigenous children communicating in Maya languages and thus in an unthreatening position to the ladinos in power" (n.d.: 14). While I was conducting my research in Cantel, I used these communities as models with which to compare the practice and opinions of bilingual education in Cantel.

The practice and opinions of bilingual education in Cantel

During my time in the *municipio* of Cantel, I visited three of the four primary and *básico* schools located in the neighboring *aldeas* of Pachaj and Choquiac (see Table 1). The Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Pachaj Cantel (common name Pachaj) is a government-run public primary school of 300 students. A Tigo-painted concrete block structure arranged around a central basketball court, Pachaj offers grades *Preprimaria* through sixth, equivalent to Kindergarten through sixth grade in the United States. Pachaj is a DIGEBI school, and in accordance with

DIGEBI recommendations, Pachaj offers K'iche' instruction in Preprimaria through fourth grade, with occasional K'iche' classes in fifth and sixth grades as well. Bilingual education at Pachaj, with one observed exception, consists of offering two periods weekly of K'iche' class, while the other subjects, such as natural sciences and math, are taught exclusively in Spanish. The school uses bilingual materials produced by DIGEBI, JEDEBI (*Jefatura Departamental de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*), and private institutions such as the Universidad Rafael Landívar.

Colegio Maya is a small, private primary school in the *aldea* of Choquiac. The classrooms are arranged around a small earth patio, and the building is bright blue with a "Bienvenidos al Colegio Maya" sign painted on the exterior, along with a Mayan figure. With only 70 students in all, each teacher is in charge of two grades. In addition to normal classes, students receive marimba lessons and classes in English and K'iche'. K'iche' is taught two periods a week to all of the grades. The youngest children learn K'iche' songs and stories. Then, they learn the Mayan numeral system, including the bar-and-dot symbols and K'iche' pronunciations for each number. By the fifth and sixth grades, the students are learning the K'iche' alphabet, working on various verb tenses, and having conversations in K'iche'. According to a Colegio Maya teacher, the school offers K'iche' instruction in accordance with the MINEDUC's requirement that schools in rural areas offer instruction in the maternal language of the area. Because Colegio Maya is a private school, it is not closely supervised by MINEDUC, nor does it belong to any organization that deals with bilingual education, but they work on K'iche' anyway. All of the teachers at the school speak K'iche'. However, because the teachers do not have access to DIGEBI materials like public schools do, each of the teachers uses a different methodology to teach his or her K'iche' classes (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008).

The Instituto Mixto de Educación Básica por Cooperativa Choquiac (common name Choquiac) is a *básico* school (equivalent to grades 7-9 in the US) that holds classes from one

until six in the afternoon. The building is also home to the primary school Centro Educativo Autogestión Comunitaria Choquiac (common name Autogestión), which has class from 8 AM until 1 PM. Both schools provide English classes for their students, but Choquiac, unlike Autogestión, also gives classes in K'iche'. There is one K'iche' instructor, Señora Elida, at Choquiac who gives K'iche' classes twice a week to each section of each of the three grades. The cooperative nature of Choquiac means that a parent committee holds the power to make decisions about the school's curriculum. Elida said that it was Choquiac's parent committee that decided that they wanted K'iche' taught in the school (Interview Feb 27th 2008). Elida uses K'iche' language textbooks produced by the *Proyecto Lingüística Santa María* to teach her classes.

I found many commonalities in the area of language use in all three schools I visited, Pachaj, Choquiac, and Colegio Maya. In all three schools, the students talked amongst themselves in the classroom and at recess exclusively in Spanish. The teachers confirmed that, though the majority of students come from bilingual homes and are at least somewhat familiar with the K'iche' language, they are far more comfortable speaking Spanish. There are few students who come from only Spanish-speaking homes, but even fewer who come from exclusively K'iche'-speaking homes. With one observed exception, all three schools offer instruction in K'iche' twice a week, essentially as a foreign language, while the remainder of subjects, such as natural sciences and math, are taught entirely in Spanish. The exception was a *Preprimaria* class at Pachaj, in which the teacher, Rosita Lima, incorporated both Spanish and K'iche' into nearly every activity. For instance, on the day I observed, Lima greeted her class in Spanish and K'iche', sang with her class a body parts song in Spanish and K'iche', and taught the names of various parts of plants in both Spanish and K'iche'. However, the students were already familiar with and were much better at naming plant and body parts in Spanish than in

K'iche'. I found Lima's style of teaching each subject in K'iche' along with Spanish, rather than relegating it to two periods a week, to be the closest to what I believe to be the ideal model of bilingual education.

<u>School Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>K'iche' taught?</u>	<u>Funding</u>
Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Pachaj Cantel	Pachaj	<i>Primaria</i> (equivalent to grades K-6)	yes, <i>Preprimaria-4th</i>	<i>Oficial</i> (public government school)
Colegio Maya	Colegio Maya	<i>Primaria</i>	yes, <i>Preprimaria-6th</i>	<i>Privada</i> (families pay Q100/month)
Centro Educativo Autogestión Comunitaria Choquiac	Autogestión	<i>Primaria</i>	no	<i>Autogestión</i> (families pay Q20/month)
Instituto Mixto de Educación Básica por Cooperativa Choquiac	Choquiac	<i>Básico</i> (equivalent to grades 7-9)	yes, <i>1st básico-3rd básico</i>	<i>Cooperativa</i> (families pay Q25/month)

Table 1: Schools in the aldeas of Pachaj and Choquiac.

Among teachers, I encountered mostly positive opinions of bilingual education in Cantel. They thought bilingual education was instrumental in “*rescatando nuestro idioma*” (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008). They considered K'iche' to be an “essential element” in Maya culture (Morales, Interview Mar 3rd 2008). One teacher said, “K'iche' is important because it's ours. Just like our traje—we are proud to wear it” (Lima, Interview Feb 21st 2008).

Among students, I encountered somewhat more mixed reactions, but the majority of students were still in favor of bilingual education. Mayra Gómez, a 14-year-old student in *segundo básico* at Choquiac, said learning K'iche' is important because it is the language of the community, and not everyone speaks Spanish (Interview Feb 27th 2008). In contrast, Mayra's 19-year-old sister Leticia prefers Spanish to K'iche'. She thinks K'iche' sounds ugly and is unnecessary because everyone she knows speaks Spanish. She had K'iche' classes when she was

in *básico* at Choquiac but almost never participated. What she really wants to learn is English because someday she wants to travel to the United States (Interview Feb 27th 2008).

Parents also had mixed reactions towards bilingual education. Although the parents I spoke with were in favor of bilingual education, Director Ventura Cortés said that a minority of parents at Pachaj were opposed to bilingual education because they thought it was more important for their children to learn Spanish and did not think that their children would need to use K'iche' (Interview Feb 28th 2008). Some parents at Colegio Maya think the K'iche' lessons represent a step backwards (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008). Romeo Morales has noticed a correlation between the parents' level of education and their opinions about bilingual education for their children: parents who are educated generally see the value of bilingual education and believe that it is important to rescue the K'iche' language, while parents who are not as educated "*rechazan su propio idioma*" and only want their children to speak *castellano*. They want their children to be able to function in today's Spanish-speaking world, to be able to speak for themselves in offices, courts, and hospitals (Interview Mar 3rd 2008). However, most parents do not feel threatened by bilingual education as it is currently practiced in Pachaj and Choquiac. "It's only two periods a week, it's not a lot" (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008).

I found bilingual education to be in practice in the schools in Pachaj and Choquiac, but not in the way I had expected. Like Wilhelm in one of his Kaqchikel communities, I discovered that the first language of the children was Spanish rather than the Mayan language of the region. The community is at least mildly receptive to bilingual education, but in every school, the K'iche' instruction essentially took the form of a twice-a-week foreign language class. Curiously, Pachaj followed DIGEBI's bilingual education model of progressively decreasing K'iche' instruction and increasing Spanish instruction, though Spanish and not K'iche' was the first language of the vast majority of the students.

Language in the home

At two of the schools I visited during my time in Cantel, at Pachaj, a primary school, and at Choquiac, a *básico* school, I conducted languages surveys in various classrooms (see tables 2 and 3 and figure 1). I asked the students in each class, in Spanish, to raise their hand if they spoke K'iche' at home with their family. I divided the number of raised hands by the total number of students present in the class in order to find a percentage.

K'iche' spoken in the home? – Oficial Pachaj		
Grade	Speak K'iche'/ total students	Percentage of K'iche' speakers
Preprimaria	5/18	27.8%
1	6/16	37.5%
2	11/15	73.3%
3	6/20	30%
4	-----	-----
5	-----	-----
6	15/37	40.5%
School average: 41.8%		

Table 2: Results of K'iche' survey at the Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Pachaj Cantel.

K'iche' spoken in the home? -- Choquiac		
Grade	Speak K'iche'/ total students	Percentage of K'iche' speakers
1 st Básico	16/43	37.2%
2 nd Básico	22/34	64.7%
3 rd Básico	22/33	66.7%
School average: 56.2%		

Table 3: Results of K'iche' survey at the Instituto Mixto de Educación Básica por Cooperativa Choquiac.

The results show that fewer of the youngest students speak K'iche' than the older students. This could be the result of any of several factors. First, the results might not have any significance. The language survey was done on an extremely small scale and was conducted in two different types of schools, public and cooperative. Students in particular classes might also have felt pressured to raise their hands or to not raise their hands or have interpreted the question in

different ways. (For instance, while I was observing the sixth grade class at Pachaj, a group of girls were having difficulty with a K'iche' assignment and said they only spoke a little bit of K'iche', yet were among the students who raised their hands. It is also possible that the reverse situation occurred.) A second possibility is that students start speaking K'iche' as they get older, either as a result of learning it in school or as a result of parents delaying speaking K'iche' in the home until their children have mastered Spanish. A third possibility that would explain the trend in the results of the survey would be that fewer children are learning K'iche' every year.

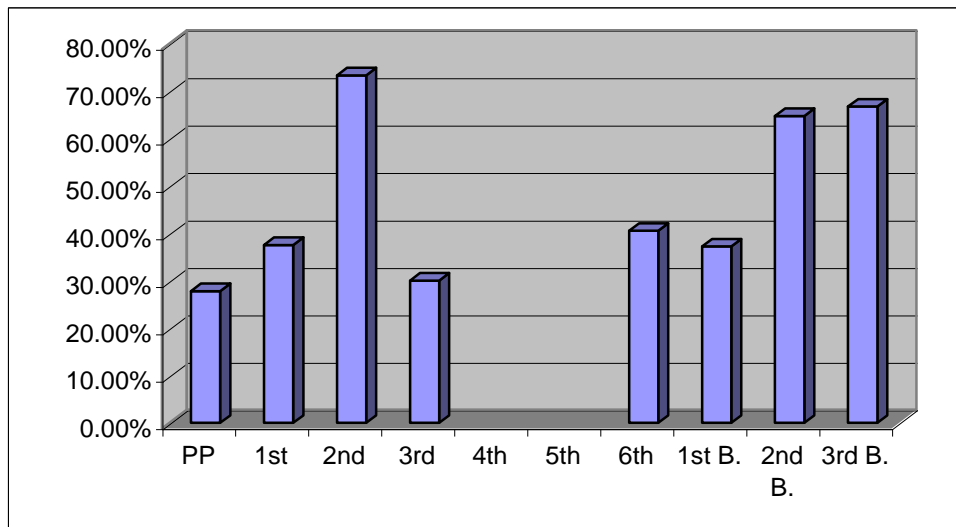


Figure 1: Combined results of K'iche' surveys done at the Pachaj primary school and the Choquiabásico school.

Linguistic domains in the community

My hypothesis is that language preference within the schools is conditioned by linguistic domains in the wider community outside the schools. During my time in Cantel, I made a series of observations about the linguistic domains of K'iche', Spanish, and even English, essentially categorizing when, where, and in what types of situations each of the three languages were spoken in the community. I hypothesized the existence of a correlation between the linguistic domains within the schools in the community and the linguistic domains in the wider community

outside the schools. Information from interviews also helped me determine the linguistic domains of the community.

According to Carmack et al, in much of Mesoamerica, including western Guatemala, Spanish is the language of the marketplace, even in areas where Spanish is only a second language for most people (2007: 365). Following this generalization, I observed Spanish to be the predominant language at the markets in both Cantel and Quetzaltenango, perhaps the two markets most commonly visited by residents of Pachaj and Choquiac. I also found Spanish to be the language spoken in an Evangelical church in Pachaj, at businesses in Quetzaltenango, at a Municipal Development Committee meeting in Cantel, on school playgrounds, as well as in the majority of instruction in the schools. Spanish is also the main language of pop culture in Guatemala, dominating television, radio, and movies, and many residents of Pachaj watch television and listen to the radio daily. Through interviews, I gathered that Spanish is the predominant language spoken in banks, courts, and hospitals (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008; Morales, Interview Mar 3rd 2008).

K'iche' is the predominant language of adults within the *aldeas* of Pachaj and Choquiac. It, along with Spanish, is used to greet people on the street and in social gatherings. All meetings of the local Pachaj Water Committee were conducted in K'iche'. Additionally, schools in Pachaj and Choquiac teach K'iche' two periods a week.

The English language is also present in the communities of Pachaj and Choquiac. English language movies with Spanish subtitles are frequently shown on television, and English music is commonly played on the radio. Knowing English is an advantage for the many people in the community that want to live, work, or travel to the United States, or to communicate with foreigners staying in Guatemala. English also enables people to work in the tourist or international industries. English is taught at the Colegio Maya, Autogestión, and Choquiac.

Many people in the community, especially children and young adults, have English names. My host nephews were named Dennis, Abner, and Sheyn, and up to one third of students in some of the primary school classes I observed at Pachaj had English names.

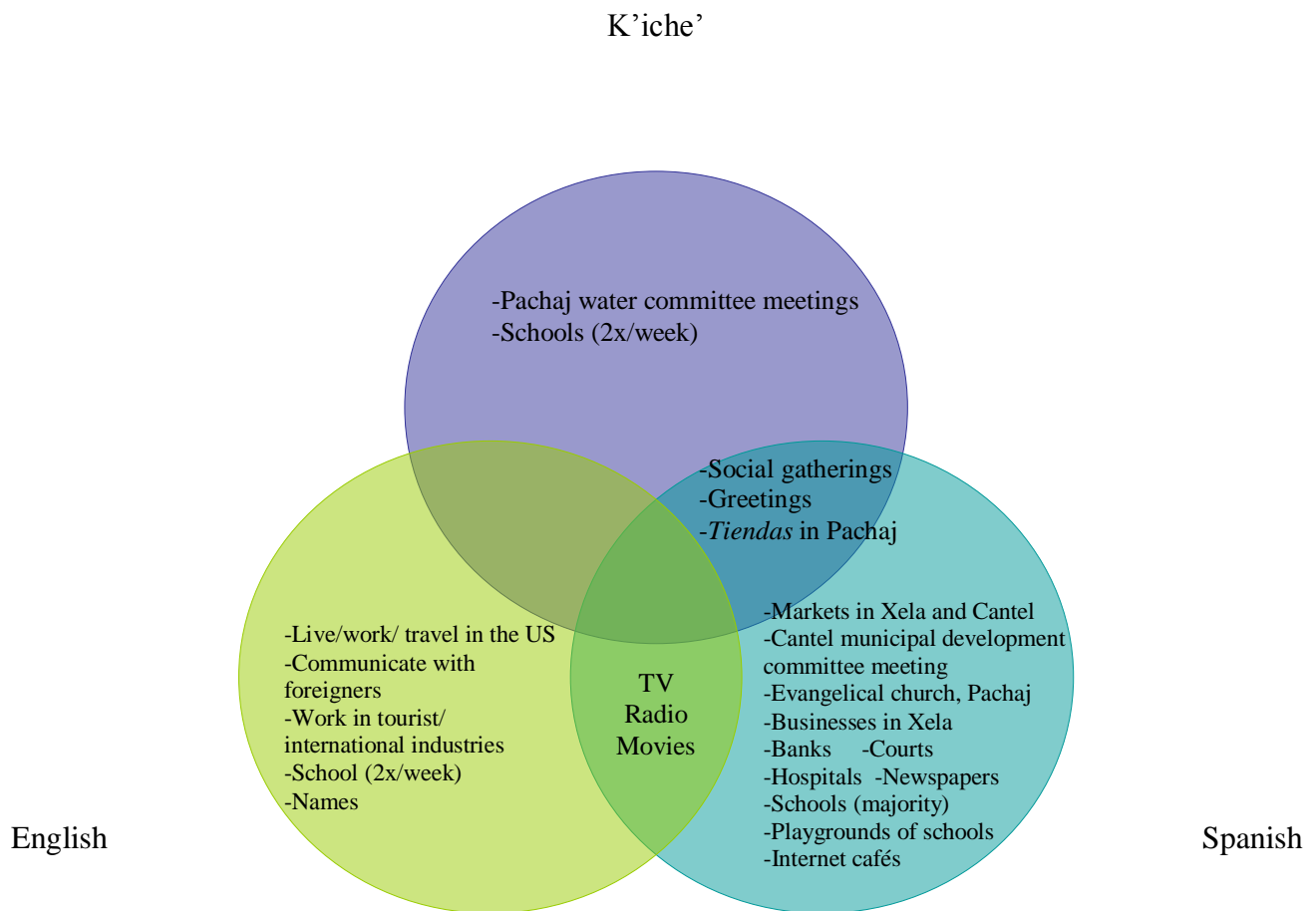


Figure 2: Linguistic domains in Cantel

According to Carmack et al, “choosing one or another language or dialect conveys complex message about colonialism, community, and ethnic identity” (2007: 438). Most adults in Pachaj are bilingual in K'iche' and Spanish, reflecting their desire to participate in both the local, traditional culture and in the wider national culture. However, children and young adults are speaking increasingly less K'iche', perhaps demonstrating the greater priority that they are giving

to the political and economic power that Spanish will provide them and the diminishing priority they are giving to traditional cultural values. Many young people want to learn English, language that will enable them to participate in the global economy and culture.

Language shift and revitalization

Sixth grade teacher Romeo Morales believes that the K'iche' language is in danger of being lost. "In the case of Cantel, specifically, the majority of children do not learn K'iche' anymore, only Spanish" (Interview Mar 3rd 2008). Rosita Lima, a *Preprimaria* teacher, offers an explanation as to why most of her students do not speak K'iche'. "All of the parents can speak K'iche' well. The dads and moms speak K'iche' to each other, but they speak Spanish to their children. They are afraid to speak K'iche' to their children because they do not want them to be discriminated against at school" (Interview Feb 21st 2008). The situation in Cantel is far from unique. Victoria Bricker's research on the Yucatec Maya people and language in Mexico shows some similarities to the trends I have found in Cantel.

"(The Yucatec Maya language) is increasingly becoming a second language for children of Maya descent: many bilingual parents encourage their children to learn Spanish as their first language because they believe that their economic future depends greatly on fluency and literacy in that language. Children who do not learn Maya as their first language may never learn it well or may never learn to speak it at all" (2004: 88-89).

R. McKenna Brown found in his research on Kaqchikel language vitality that more Mayan children in the region he studied are learning Kaqchikel incompletely or not at all. The youngest children involved in Brown's research had had the lowest levels of fluency in the Kaqchikel language (1996: 168)

What is currently happening in Cantel, as well as in other parts of Maya territory, is a process called language shift, a situation which occurs when one language in a bilingual community, in this case Spanish, is considered more prestigious than the other, in this case K'iche'. Bilingual speakers feel pressured to speak only Spanish, especially in situations deemed

formal or important, and to stop speaking their native language. Most alarmingly, bilingual parents may only speak Spanish to their children “when the native language is seen as a hindrance to social and economic advancement,” a situation that can cause language endangerment and ultimately language loss (Carmack et al 2007: 421-422).

The state of the K’iche’ language in Cantel is not entirely bleak. Schools in Pachaj and Choquiac are using K’iche’ classes in an attempt to rescue the language. Rosita Lima believes that an increasing number of people are beginning to see that K’iche’ is important (Interview Feb 21st 2008). Language domains in the community may eventually change. For instance, students studying to become doctors at a university in Xela are required to learn K’iche’ in order to communicate with *maya-hablantes*. Still the perception of most people is that “it is not possible to only know K’iche’” (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008). Spanish is, officially and in practice, the language of Guatemala. Many generations of people were discriminated against because they could not speak Spanish. Even today, “if you need to go to a bank or need some other public service done for you, you need to speak Spanish because there are not always translators” (Roberta, Interview Feb 29th 2008). For many reasons, I believe the end of the existence of monolingual K’iche’ speakers in Cantel is nearing. However, I believe that it is possible that K’iche’ will not be lost forever in Cantel if it remains an important language in the community.

Conclusions

Mary Alivia Bryan suggested a top-down solution to the problems she encountered in bilingual education in San Andrés Xecul in 2006. She claims that “until a leader emerges from the community with a desire to change the educational system, put EBI as a priority, and locate parents and educators prepared to support it, the education in Xecul will continue to contribute to the forces of ladinization” (n.d.: 24). Similarly, Wilhelm claims that a combination of student, community, and teacher resistance to instruction in the Kaqchikel language in the schools he

observed, limited “the PRONEBI curriculum’s potential for cultural, if not social, empowerment” for the indigenous students (1994: 188). I propose a slightly different conclusion. The attitudes of educators, parents, and students certainly play a role in the success or failure of bilingual education in a community, but, deeper than that, the opinions of the community concerning instruction in indigenous languages are based on the domains of the community in which Spanish and the indigenous language are used and the prestige each language enjoys in the community. No amount of top-down activism from the government or Pan-Maya movement activists promoting bilingual education will be able to stem the “growing tide of monolingualism in Spanish among the young” (Bricker 2004: 81) if Spanish remains the language of power in the community. For bilingual education to be successful, K’iche’ and Spanish must enjoy equal prestige within the wider community.

Although Spanish is the language of political and economic power in Guatemala, even at the level of the *departamento* and the *municipio*, K’iche’ remains an important language in the *aldeas* of Pachaj and Choquiac. K’iche’ is the primary language in these communities of greetings, social interactions, and, perhaps most significantly, local politics such as the water committee in Pachaj. In the words of sixth-grade teacher Romeo Morales, “*Una persona bilingüe es una persona que vale por dos*” (Interview Mar 3rd 2008). Indeed, bilingual residents of Pachaj and Choquiac are successful because they can navigate both traditional culture and pop culture, both the local and the national. The future success of bilingual education in Cantel, and indeed, the survival of bilingualism in general, is dependent on whether the linguistic domain of the K’iche’ language increases or decreases in importance in the lives of the people.

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Appendix I

Cited Interviews

Chuc Poz, Estela, mother of three daughters in their teens and 20s. (Mar 2nd 2008)

Cortés, Ventura, Director of Pachaj. (Feb 28th 2008)

Elida, K'iche' teacher at Choquiac (Feb 27th, 2008)

Gómez, Leticia, 19-year-old graduate of Autogestión and Choquiac. (Feb 27th 2008)

Gómez, Mayra, 14-year-old student in *segundo básico* at Choquiac. (Feb 27th 2008)

Lima, Rosita, *Preprimaria* teacher at Pachaj, member of the *Asociación de Escritores Mayanses de Guatemala* (Feb 21st 2008)

Morales, Romeo, 6th grade professor at Pachaj (Mar 3rd 2008)

Roberta Alicia, 5th and 6th grade teacher at Colegio Maya. (Feb 29th 2008)

Tixal Chuc, Ingrid, mother of an infant, former *Preprimaria* teacher. (Mar 1st 2008)

Appendix II

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

EBI	Educación Bilingüe Intercultural
ENBI	Escuela Normal Bilingüe Intercultural
DIGEBI	Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural
JEDEBI	Jefatura Departamental de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural
MINEDUC	Ministerio de Educación
PRONEBI	Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe