

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

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The present Language Documentation and Conservation Special Publication is a full translation into English of an earlier Special Publication in Spanish:

Cruz Cruz, Emiliana, ed. 2020. Reflexiones teóricas en torno a la función del trabajo de campo en lingüística-antropológica: Contribuciones de investigadores indígenas del sur de México. *Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication* 22. [PDF](#)

This translation is an effort and product of the University of Texas at Austin Department of Linguistics, to which we belong as faculty and doctoral students, and of our Center for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA). CILLA, a part of the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at UT, was established in 2001 when one of us, Nora England, joined the Linguistics faculty with a mission to promote teaching and research focused on the documentation, description, conservation, and support of Latin American Indigenous languages. Nora's guiding idea was that the centerpiece of any such enterprise should be the doctoral training of native and heritage speakers of Indigenous languages of Latin America in linguistics and allied fields like anthropology; from that, she maintained, the rest would follow (described in Woodbury and England 2004). In the years since then, nine Indigenous students from Latin America have earned their degrees here, with one more shortly on the way, writing doctoral dissertations on a range of mostly documentary and descriptive topics on their own or other languages and working alongside other

graduate students and faculty from a variety of other backgrounds. We believe that respecting, promoting, and integrating Indigenous students' perspectives and goals has led to new thinking about disciplinary agendas and also reflects and supports our commitment to acknowledging and rectifying discrimination in academia at all stages. This volume, it seems to us, is an outstanding example of such new thinking.

We had several interlocking motivations for undertaking this translation. Above all, we want English readers to know this work and the thinking it represents and for them to consider it among the growing number of critiques of linguistics and linguistic anthropology from indigenous and other perspectives: see for example Charity Hudley and Bucholtz (2020) and the several responses and commentaries it received, including especially the Australian and North American Indigenous perspectives offered by Gaby and Woods (2020) and Leonard (2020). The volume consists of six papers, with an introduction and a preface, all by linguists who are native speakers of Indigenous Mexican languages, writing on themes arising in their experience as linguists and linguistic anthropologists working in their own or other communities, becoming involved in language activism and revitalization, and becoming a part of academia abroad in the United States, at home in Mexico, and across the world. The themes in their writing range from the scientific and humanistic, to the social, political, practical, and personal; in our view their ideas, accounts of their experiences as linguists, and their formulations of disciplinary goals are new and important.

We were also motivated by our institutional connections with the authors. Three are graduates of our program: Emiliana Cruz Cruz, Hilaria Cruz Cruz, and Jaime Pérez González. Two more, Ana Alonso Ortiz and Isaura de los Santos, have in turn been graduate students of Emiliana Cruz Cruz at the University of Massachusetts, and even earlier, of summer workshops for Otomanguan speaker linguists in Oaxaca organized by Emiliana Cruz Cruz with participation by Anthony Woodbury. And three, Emiliana Cruz Cruz, Jaime Pérez González and Margarita Martínez Pérez, are or have been graduate students or faculty in the masters and doctoral programs in *Lingüística Indoamericana* at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City and Chiapas, with which our department and CILLA have had a long and fruitful collaboration. Finally, alongside those institutional connections, various sets of us—authors and translators—have been collaborators in teaching and research.

Our translation process has been deeply collaborative and has been carried out in the context of the collegial relationships among our whole group, authors and translators. If perhaps it might serve as a model for other such work, we would like to explain it.

The translators all are native speakers of English and proficient in Spanish; one of us, Elizabeth Wood, also is a native speaker of Spanish. The idea for a translation arose in the context of a longstanding collaboration between the original editor, Emiliana Cruz Cruz, and Anthony Woodbury, who decided to serve together as trans-

lation editors. Once recruited, the translators, alone or in pairs, assigned themselves to the articles and produced draft translations by early 2021. From there the authors, all proficient in English, read the translation drafts and commented on them, following a variety of working styles which some of the author-and-translator teams have described at the ends of the translations. That led to new translation drafts.

Then, during the Spring 2021 semester, each author was invited to visit an ongoing graduate class in UT's Department of Linguistics called *Research in Documentary, Descriptive, and Historical Linguistics*. The class meets once a week every semester and includes all documentary, descriptive, and historical linguistics graduate students, faculty, and postdocs, along with interested undergraduates and outside guests. Its mission is to vertically integrate our whole scholarly community around ongoing research and common interests, especially with respect to deeper issues of purpose, agenda, and ethics that arise within our field. All of that made the class a natural setting for exchanges with the authors and critical support for the translators.

That Spring, the class met entirely online due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and so—conveniently—the authors' visits could proceed without the need for travel. The purpose of the visits was to share commentary on the authors' original paper as well as the translation draft, which were posted online beforehand, with an open invitation for written comments on any aspect of the translations. The discussions were in some cases in Spanish and in some cases in English (virtually everyone is bilingual) and were moderated by the visitor's translator(s). Conversations were wide ranging, but tended to focus most on the authors' content and on further issues inspired by that content; meanwhile, the more technical or mechanical commentaries on the translations tended to show up in written form on the shared documents. After the visits, the translators were responsible for producing a yet further revised draft based on all of the input received, in many cases alongside further exchange with the authors; then there was a final round of editing by the two translation editors.

Each translator-author team found itself having to make decisions about a recurring set of questions of translation and, alongside that, of contextual and cultural explanation. That led on the one hand to some translation choices that we have tried to use consistently across all the articles and, on the other hand, to a jointly constructed *Cultural Glossary* in which we compiled certain decisions while also giving background that should help in reading all of the articles. In particular, this document offers explanations for some basic features of life and of the social and political organization that are common across indigenous communities in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, where the authors are based. The *Cultural Glossary* is admittedly somewhat eclectic and haphazard, but we think it gives crucial background and we also hope that it will be interesting and informative if simply read through from beginning to end. At the same time, the translation editors have taken a somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude, preferring to let choices emerge within each article translation that the author-translator team is happy with and likewise letting the

translators elaborate in footnotes those further elements of context that they would like to include.

The translator-author groupings are interesting and varied, including graduate students translating fellow graduate students; graduate students translating more senior scholars; and senior scholars translating their students, former students, and colleagues. In several cases, there has been even more to say about the translation process: Nora England and Margarita Martínez Pérez offer a joint reflection on the translation of Margarita's article; Anthony Woodbury reflects on his experience at the end of Isaura de los Santos's article; and Sophie Pierson and Emiliana Cruz Cruz present a dialog at the end of Emiliana's article that explores translation in collaboration.

In all, we as translators found the whole process highly rewarding. We especially felt that by devoting considerable time to the volume and its translation in the *Research* course, we were able to work toward our goal of engaging the deeper issues of purpose, agenda, and ethics that arise in documentary linguistic research and to make that an integral part of training in our field. On a number of occasions, translators and other class members commented on the deeply personal and emotional dimensions of fieldwork and on the commitment revealed in the articles and discussions; they expressed gratitude to the authors for being willing to face—and expand upon—their own, often difficult, experiences. In turn, several of the authors said that, for themselves, there was value in being able to discuss and be heard about these issues, especially in a somewhat formal academic context. Making and refining translations, too, added important and unexpected facets to the discussions: we take translation to be not merely intralinguistic conversion but rather a hermeneutic, interpretive process, and that invited us all—authors, translators, and other class members—to dig deeper into the articles and thereby consider further meanings.

In this light, we offer this volume of translation, as well as the method of its making, as tangible steps along the way in our department's now two-decade long effort to build a program in language documentation around professional training and subsequent professional support for native and heritage speakers of Indigenous languages of Latin America; we also hope that it serves as a way of acknowledging and promoting the new thinking that the authors of this volume have achieved.

References

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