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Between insiders and outsiders: When an Indigenous researcher conducts studies in her own community

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Abstract

This work presents the experiences of an Indigenous researcher carrying out linguistic and ethnographic studies within her own community. A growing number of Indigenous peoples are venturing into documentation, description and promotion of their languages of origin. As a field, linguistic documentation and linguistic description were created by and for members of academic institutions that were historically distant from collaborative work with the speakers of Indigenous languages. The author's place within the community, and thus the culture, gives her a profound insight into not only local linguistic research, but also its limitations and difficulties. There is a great need for resources and materials that address the complexities of a female native researcher's experiences in the field. These intricacies concern the paradoxical roles they play, as women, as members of complex intergenerational families, as community members and as members of educational institutions.

Key words: Indigenous identity, female researcher, Chatino, Indigenous languages of Mexico, local researchers, external researchers.

Introduction

In this article[1], I present the experiences, challenges, opportunities, advantages and disadvantages that female Indigenous researchers encounter while carrying out linguistic and ethnographic research within their own communities. I discuss this topic from my position as a female researcher, as a member of an extended and multigenerational family, and as a member of an Indigenous community.

Various aspects of this topic are illustrated with personal narratives and experiences. They reflect my perspective as a native female linguist and language activist engaged in language documentation, revitalization and promotion within my own community and within other Chatino communities since 2004 (H. Cruz 2014). I have carried out these activities individually and also as part of the Chatino language documentation team (E. Cruz and Woodbury 2014). My experience, like those experiences of other Indigenous academics, highlights the changes that have taken place across the discipline of language documentation, language description, and field linguistics as a whole.

The fields of linguistics and anthropology were created by intellectuals and religious figures of European origin. Two 16th century Catholic monks, Bernardino de Sahagún and Juan de Córdoba, became pioneers within these fields after performing the first anthropological and linguistic analyses of the New World. The former described Nahuatl culture and the latter published a dictionary of the Zapotec language and performed a detailed analysis of its grammar (1957 [1578]).

In the 20th century, Francisco Belmar (1901) set out to identify specific affiliations between multiple Indigenous languages of Oaxaca by collecting word lists from languages like Chatino (Sullivant 2016), Zapotec, Mixtec, and Huave. In 1940, during World War II, members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) arrived in Mexico with the goal of translating the Bible into several Indigenous languages. SIL members would serve as missionaries and (both professional and amateur) linguists living within the region. During their stay in the Chatino region, they published dictionaries, pedagogical primers, and documented various aspects of the grammar. Based on federal integrationist policies, the Mexican government abandoned Indigenous language research during the mid-20th century. As such, any published material we now have on the Chatino languages of Oaxaca from the period between the 1940's to the 1980's is limited to the documentation, analysis, and promotion carried out by members of SIL (Upson and Longacre 1965; Pride 1965 and 2004).

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The primary objective of the Mexican government has been the integration of Indigenous people via a national project of *castellanización* ('Castillianization'). Political implementations of this have included heavily promoting state symbols, namely the Spanish language, the flag, and the national anthem. Students are often forced to stand for hours in the scorching sun, marching and saluting the Mexican flag, while singing the national anthem. These policies expedited the disappearance of the Indigenous languages of Mexico, with their effects still lingering today.

In the early 1980's, a number of linguists (Dorian 1981; Himmelmann 1998; Krauss 1992) began to warn the public about the accelerated loss of Indigenous languages throughout the world as a result of integrationist policies from colonial nations which imposed their languages, religions and cultures. This concern resulted in the creation of the field of language documentation, with the goal of recording these languages before the final native speakers passed away.

However, as language documentation originated in colonial states, like most areas of knowledge currently taught in schools, the theories, methods and practices were created from the perspective of the researchers. On July 20th 2020, Amy Dahlstrom, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Chicago, wrote on her Facebook page (Dahlstrom 2020) that after almost a century of linguists and anthropologists from that university analyzing and writing about Indigenous languages and cultures, only now had two Indigenous students, members of the communities that these academics had been studying, obtained PhDs in Linguistics from that institution. Therefore, the field experiences that have been documented up to this date are those of researchers from developed nations.

Currently there is an explosion of texts and publications considering best practices for researchers documenting and describing Indigenous languages. The majority of these practices, however, are designed by and for researchers who are external to the communities. These practices cover a wide range of language documentation activities, such as planning, execution, analysis, archiving, and data dissemination (Gippert *et al*. 2006; Bowern 2008; Newman *et al*. 2001; Berez *et al*. 2010).

In addition to the practical suggestions that these texts offer on how to plan a field trip, and what preparations a researcher must make before leaving for the research site such as requesting funding for the trip and obtaining the technology required for collecting the data, these texts also discuss protocols that a researcher should follow when approaching the community. For example, Larry Hyman, a linguist who works within African communities, noted that the first time he did fieldwork there, he met his collaborators through a priest from the Catholic church (Hyman 2001).

Within these texts, academics also reveal their motivations behind conducting fieldwork in places that are foreign to them. Many mention personal goals such as their sense of adventure or their eagerness to be the first to "discover" unique, interesting and often strange aspects of a language, grammar, and culture.

These reflections show that external linguists unconsciously impose a cultural, linguistic, economic and educational hierarchy upon the speakers and communities with whom they carry out their research. For example, the most common referents these academics typically use for the speakers are "they" or "the others". These phrases represent discursive patterns indicative of a hegemonic dominant European culture, which destructively enforces exclusionary practices against other peoples and languages on the basis of class, gender, race, and other socioeconomic factors.

Ulrike Mossel, for example, writes that "the relationship between a researcher and a speaker is difficult because aside from their interest in the community's language, the two parties don't share anything else in common in terms of background and objectives" (2006: 68). The distance that linguists from the "first world" feel towards the speakers of the languages that they study is problematic because it replicates the colonial, paternalist and exclusionary mindset that has characterized Western science.

If an academic feels foreign to what they study, they will lack the passion, pleasure and love necessary to do a good job. This disregard is most easily recognized in the scarce and hasty studies of Indigenous languages of Mexico in the early 20th century. One example is Franz Boas' brief publication on the classification of Chatino languages (1913). Boas based his publication on a two-hour long encounter with two Chatinos that he met at a conference on Zapotec languages in Pochutla, Oaxaca in 1912. In this article, Boas names the two Chatino speakers that he worked with, but fails to mention the community of origin of these speakers. This is unfortunate because that information is of vital importance for the classification of the Chatino languages, and Chatino academics today have no choice but to speculate about the community of origin of this documentation.

The distance that academics have towards the languages and cultures that they study is also shown in their descriptions of their native speaker collaborators. Many external researchers call them: informants, consultants, collaborators, *compadres* or *comadres*[2]. These Eurocentric ideologies are clearest when we examine the way in which these external academics handle the data collected in the field, such as recordings of wordlists. They often guard this data with jealousy, even from the speakers themselves, with the aim of publishing it first. In the worst case scenarios, many of these materials end up in the researcher's closet and never seeing the light of day (H. Cruz 2019). If we truly wish to conserve Indigenous languages, we must integrate the perspectives of the speakers into every aspect of their documentation. This will aid in these languages receiving the attention that they deserve.

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[2] The relationship between the godparents (*compadre* 'male relation'/*comadre* 'female relation') and the parents of a child who was baptized in the Catholic Church.

As previously stated, works which mention the experiences of local researchers are very scarce. Australian Indigenous linguist and language activist Jeanie Bell (2007) is one exception. Upon reflecting on her experiences working within her own community, she recounts similar events such as hearing people in her community saying that she is "selling the language to outsiders". She also urges native speakers to participate in the analysis of their languages and cultures.

Since the 1990's, the number of members of Indigenous communities who are engaged in linguistic and ethnographic research within their own communities has grown. In this article, I refer to these researchers as internal or local researchers, with researchers who do not belong to the communities of study referred to as external researchers.

The efforts to train Indigenous linguists in Latin America began with Mayan speakers in Guatemala through the *Grupos de Estudios Mayas* (Mayan Studies Groups). This group was comprised of Francisco Marroquín and the OKMA-*Associación Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib'* (England 1992). Later, Nora England, Joel Sherzer and Anthony Woodbury designed and implemented a program at the University of Texas at Austin to train speakers of Indigenous languages from Latin America (Woodbury and England 2004). More recently, several Masters and Doctoral programs have emerged to train students who are speakers of Indigenous languages from Mexico, most notably at the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, CIESAS) and the Masters in Amerindian Studies and Bilingual Education at the *Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro* (Autonomous University of Querétaro, UAQ). In the context of Central America, a team of speakers of Mayangna languages at the *Universidad de Uraccan* (University of Uraccan) on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, together with Elena Benedicto and Elizabeth Salomón, have documented Mayangna language and culture incorporating the parameters of participant-action research (Benedicto *et al.* 2007).

This article emerged from a group project which was first presented at a discussion on the need to raise awareness to the experiences of Indigenous researchers in Mexico. This exchange took place at the conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in Boston in 2019. Many Indigenous linguists from Mexico participated, including Jaime Pérez, a native speaker of Tseltal; Ana D. Alonso Ortiz, a speaker of Zapotec from the Sierra Norte; and Isaura de los Santos, Emiliana Cruz and the author, speakers of Chatino from Panixtlahuaca and San Juan Quiahije, respectively. The participants related their experiences, challenges, and frustrations with the bureaucracy present through their multiple interactions with various institutions such as educational institutions, local authorities and members of the community.

Positive aspects of doing fieldwork within your own community

There is no doubt that researchers who carry out fieldwork within their own communities enjoy certain advantages over researchers who are not from the community. Local researchers benefit from working in an environment that is familiar to them, and in which they know the daily routines, cultural customs, and expectations of the community. It takes time for external researchers to acclimate to the food, culture and context of a new place. The local researcher's familiarity with the surrounding contexts, as well as the company, affection and support of their family, speed up and deepen their research.

While an external researcher tends to spend a lot of time and energy building relationships and gaining the trust of the community in order to carry out their fieldwork, a local researcher benefits from a wide network of connections that their family has had in place for many generations. This network of connections gives access to the language, culture, places and ceremonies that are often out of reach for external researchers.

Advantages can also be found from a local researcher's familiarity with the community's customs surrounding transmission of knowledge. In Indigenous cultures in Southern Mexico, for example, knowledge is passed down through the family, from grandparents to children and from children to grandchildren. For instance, Indigenous girls learn from their family members how to make tortillas, sow corn, clear the cornfield, and to hunt or fish. An external researcher must gain the trust of the experts (bakers, seamstress, musicians, and orators) if they desire to acquire any of this knowledge.

In the same way, the local researcher's existing relationships will help in reducing loneliness, isolation and the feeling of displacement that external researchers frequently experience upon finding themselves in a culture different from their own (Bowern 2008: 13).

In the upcoming sections, I will discuss several social and community factors that a local researcher encounters when they carry out research within their own community. These include issues related to the various roles that the female local researcher embodies as a woman, as a member of an extended intergenerational family, as a part of the community and as a member of academia. This article also concludes with a discussion of the role that healers play in the community and their collaboration with the researcher.

Female researcher

Agency, which is defined as a person's capacity to make decisions, is closely tied to the roles that women play with respect to kinship, relationships and the obligations that they have to their families and to the wider community. In San Juan Quiahije, it is expected that a woman should be calm, quiet and hardworking in order to find a partner and get married. In daily life, women are in charge of domestic tasks such as making tortillas, preparing food and taking care of the children. Men are only required to cook on holidays as the food containers are very heavy.

Across the political realm, offices within the civil-religious hierarchy of the local government are held by men, with the responsibility of patrolling the town's borders also falling to men. Up until 1970, women were able to participate in the monthly prayers with the council of elders and members of the authority alongside men to ask the spirits to protect the wellbeing of the community. However, now only men are allowed to participate in these monthly prayers (H. Cruz 2017).

The traditional work of women in San Juan Quiahije is contrary to the work that a researcher does within the community: recording and eliciting data, writing, teaching and visiting different people across the town. Researchers privilege this type of work over that which is traditionally done by Chatino women. However, female researchers may be seen as an oddity and perceived as lazy, as men, as licentious or as crazy. These perceptions can become a cause of shame for the extended family.

Because of this, despite the previously mentioned advantages, fieldwork is not easy for any female researcher, whether from the community or external to it. Local female researchers must have the resilience and agility to surpass the gender-based limitations imposed on them due to the nature of their work. They also have to deal with feelings of loneliness and displacement such as those mentioned by Bowern (2008), although these feelings are often caused by different factors than those underlying the experiences of external researchers. The anguish that local researchers often feel primarily emerges from the alienation they experience within the community, and often times within their own families when people do not understand the goal of their work. In many Indigenous societies, "work" equates to doing a physical activity such as preparing food (tortillas), taking care of children, fetching firewood, planting corn, clearing the cornfield, building a house, carrying water or putting out the fire. By this definition, the activities that a researcher does are not considered work and members of the community often see these activities as a hobby that one does in their free time.

Kwentu^{K}: gossip

Although the inhabitants of Cieneguilla and San Juan profess to hate gossip, many have a complicated relationship with this type of discourse. No one wants to be branded as a gossip or wander the town collecting and spreading gossip from one place to another. These same people are offended, however, when they feel that someone is withholding information from them. They feel that, in denying them the information, they are not being respected.

Gossiping is dangerous. There are records of people who have been murdered for being branded as a gossip or as a result of the gossip shared. This is another danger that the local researcher risks due to the nature of their work. The act of going about visiting people and recording audio and video with a large number of the community may be perceived as collecting and sharing gossip. This is even more problematic for female researchers, who are more often branded as gossips because of their gender. On one occasion I received an urgent call from my Aunt Mila, who told me that my Aunt Kaya had arrived at her home very troubled that my sister, Emiliana Cruz, was going to broadcast an interview that she had done with her on a public Mexican television channel. Mila said that Aunt Kaya was crying because she didn't want to be on television. I had to assure Mila that Emiliana had no plan to broadcast any of her interviews on television nor could she, for ethical reasons, broadcast them without Kaya's consent. This rumor went away and I never heard Kaya ask about her possible appearance on television again.

Researcher and member of a large multigenerational family

In an Indigenous area, family ties are the foundation, support and continuation of the community. As Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) notes, Indigenous families are composed of extended family units. Several generations of the same family usually live under the same roof in one main house. Traditionally, these houses consist of a kitchen, in Chatino *neq*^{A} *qan*^{E} *kiq*^{I} 'the house of the fire', and a bedroom, *neq*^{A} *qan*^{E} *kjin*^{B} 'main room'.

Customarily, when the children of the nuclear family that live in the main house grow up, they move to a nearby place. My extended family lived in the house of my great-grandparents Alberto *Tu*^{C}*-ke*^{A} and Arnulfa *Tyku*^{E} *Kiqya*^{J}. Alberto and Arnulfa had six children, and for a period of time, we all lived in their house together. As each family member grew up, each son or daughter steadily began to move away with their respective families to a location near the main house. Each nuclear family worked their own land, as well as the lands of Alberto and Arnulfa, the oldest grandparents.

The fact that multiple generations share one roof strengthens their ties of affection, mutual assistance, collectivity and reciprocal commitment.

As Emiliana Cruz mentions in her article published in this volume, the vast majority of residents of the towns of Cieneguilla and San Juan are our relatives, especially because marriages in my community were traditionally endogamous. This is to say that, residents preferred to marry people from the same community. Relationships between the inhabitants of the town are very close. Within the same small community, I have some relatives that are related to me on both sides of my family. One example is my relationship with my cousin, Alma Cruz. Alma's father was Teobaldo Cruz, my mother's brother. Meanwhile Catalina Candelario, Alma's mother, is also a second cousin of my father. My blood ties with Alma, in other words, are on both my paternal and maternal sides.

Yweq^{H} (curse) and *yqu*^{H} (shame)

The family group exerts a strong pressure over each member (including the local researcher) to conform to what the family and community dictate. Anything that happens to a member of the family or anything that the family does must remain within the family. This means that no-one can divulge the problems of a family member to anyone outside the family. On one occasion my family hosted a Christmas party where they invited children from all over the town to break piñatas, get toys and have bread and coffee. I was about to comment that my uncle Arlo was drunk when a cousin standing beside me moved to cover my mouth with her hands to prevent me from speaking about my uncle Arlo in the presence of children from outside of the family.

Depending on the behavior of an individual, her actions, as mentioned above, may be cause for pride or shame for the extended family. Community members believe that the actions of an individual family member affect not only that person, but their family as well. If a family member is considered to be licentious, this causes shame for the extended family. Moreover, any commitments, contracts, debts or conflicts a person shares with other people in the town ultimately extends to the members of the extended family, including the researcher herself.

Similarly, when an individual commits an act that the community considers morally reprehensible, such as stealing, killing or coveting, the punishment falls not only on the perpetrator, but on the generations that follow. These behaviors may bring bad luck, disease, and even death to future generations. In Chatino, this is known as *yweq*^{H} (curse). My uncle Arlo, for example, says that many of his siblings, including my father, were murdered and or assassinated at a young age because my grandfather, Ignacio Cruz, was accused of stealing cows from others in the town as food for himself and a band of young men who were fighting in the Mexican revolution when he was younger. Uncle Arlo thinks that our family still carries the *yweq*^{H} of the actions of my grandfather Ignacio.

Just as many families have cultivated ties of friendship with other families in the town, there are also hostilities, often grudges held for long periods of time. Very often, these conflicts result in violent confrontations and killings (Greenberg 1989), and for the local researcher, this means that people in the town who are rivals of her family, will refuse to collaborate with her on research projects.

Family obligations may cloud the objectivity that European research methods demand of a local researcher, who often finds herself in the middle of conflicting expectations. On the one hand, her family demands loyalty and support, while on the other hand, academia demands objectivity. Western research methodologies expect that researchers remain at the edges, neutral and objective, like a "fly on the wall". In order for the researcher to climb the work ladder and "contribute to science", academia requires her to publish articles with theoretical content that can only be understood by a select group.

Suppose that a linguist proposes to carry out a study on dialectal variation in her community. In order for the study to meet the research standards of linguistics, she must take a balanced and wide sample of the speakers in the community, which covers a range of genders, ages, geographic locations and social statuses. For a local researcher, these requirements may be in opposition to her obligations to her family, her community, and place of work. These divergent obligations often leave the researcher teetering with one foot in academia and the other in her community.

However, these family obligations are not always negative. Having family in the community also brings about many advantages, and the notion of the extended family has deeply influenced my research on the Chatino language. Familial relationships in the community have opened doors for me to document, revitalize and promote the Chatino language. While other people may have initially refused to work with me, my relatives were the first to agree to tell me their stories, prayers and customs, as well as the first students in the Chatino courses I taught. They were also the ones who listened to my commitment to preserving our language. One recording trip that I made to San José Ixtapan illustrates this point. In December 2008, my Aunt Mila and my cousin Zuri accompanied me to their *comadre*'s house in Ixtapan to record their local Chatino. At the request of my Aunt Mila, the *comadre* agreed to record a word list with me when she visited us in Cieneguilla. The *comadre* asked us to go to her house in Ixtapan, which is about 16 kilometers from Cieneguilla. Due to the land dispute that the inhabitants of Ixtapan have with the inhabitants of Quiahije (E. Cruz and Smith Aguilar 2020), we did not have permission from the Ixtapan authorities to record the language. In order to pass unnoticed, we left Cieneguilla when it was still dark. We arrived in Ixtapan at dawn. The *comadre* was very enthusiastic to see us and invited us in for breakfast. We had to make the recordings secretly inside of her house and afterwards she gave us lunch and food to take with us. If I didn't have these family connections, I would never have had the opportunity to record the Chatino of Ixtapan.

Researcher and member of a community and ethnicity

Everyone who is born in the town is bestowed with lasting obligations and commitments to their family, community and land. These commitments endure throughout the lifetime of a person and change as they mature. Families in Quiahije have the obligation of maintaining the community's institutions, such as the local government, the church, the schools and the medical clinic. Each family has to serve one of these institutions without pay. In the community, from a young age (12 years old), men must work their way up through the various positions of the traditional government system. In addition, there are also voluntary service roles in the school committee, the medical clinic, and as sacristans and catechists within the parish. Some of these services include cooking for special events, making candles, collecting water from the thirteen springs for the town's prayers, advising the municipality and maintaining public buildings, roads and the cemetery. Men also have the obligation to patrol the territory limits of Quiahije each year.

As previously mentioned, a person's obligation to community service begins at birth. While individualism prevails above the common good in Western societies, Indigenous societies (including San Juan Quiahije) are governed by collectivism, reciprocity and a connection with the ancestors. These relationships are cemented through the prayers and supplications that accompany Chatinos' daily life and routines.

The prayers for newborns show the perpetual relationship that an individual has with their community, ancestors, and their place of birth. When a boy or girl is born in San Juan Quiahije, the family presents them to the spirits of the ancestors and offers their service to the municipality when they grow up (see lines 12-19 of the Request for the newborn, below). The inhabitants of Quiahije believe that for a person to be able to grow, mature and have a decent life, they need equal amounts of material sustenance (food, lodgings, clothing and shoes), spiritual practice (prayers and offerings of flowers, candles and water) and an intimate connection to the land (mountains, forests and rivers). In the requests that parents make for a newborn, they ask the spirits for their wellbeing so that they won't lack food, a roof or love (lines 1 to 11). They also ask that the child be successful, that they mature, find a partner, and have children. The prayer especially emphasizes that the newborn becomes a good citizen who serves their community and the mountains.

Prayers for newborn baby girls and boys are particularly important because of the marginalization and lack of medical services; the infant mortality rate in San Juan

Quiahije was and still is very high. The *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI*, National Institute of Statistics and Geography) reports that the infant mortality rate is 21% compared to the national rate of 12% and of 12% in the state of Oaxaca (INEGI 2016).

One of the primary functions of the prayer is to embed the individual in the land, culture and community. This means that a person who is born in this place is always closely tied to this ecosystem. Emiliana Cruz, for example, writes that within the ritual of prayer: “Planting the placenta implies having the protection of the ancestors and makes a person part of this place, therefore there is a close relationship between a ceremonial space and the feeling of belonging to the community” (“*Sembrar la placenta implica tener la protección de los ancestros y hace a la persona ser parte de este lugar, por lo tanto hay una estrecha relación entre un espacio ceremonial y el sentido de pertenencia a la comunidad*”) (in press p. 19).

A “request for the newborn” is shown as follows (Narration by Félix Agripino Baltazar, modified and translated to Spanish by Hilaria Cruz):

Chatino	Spanish	English
1. Kiqyu^{E} kla^{J},	Ancianos,	Elder men,
2. Qan^{E} kla^{J},	Ancianas,	Elder women,
3. Qwen^{A} qne^{J} kqu^{E},	Ustedes lo crecen,	You make grow,
4. Qwen^{A} qne^{J} tjoq^{E},	Ustedes lo harán fuerte,	You will make strong,
5. Qwen^{A} qne^{J} tno^{G},	Ustedes lo harán grande,	You will make big,
6. Qin^{I} kwiq^{C} no^{A} ka^{J} qya^{G},	A este bebé que apenas bajó,	This baby who just came down,
7. No^{A} ka^{J} ntsu^{G},	Al que apenas brotó,	Who just sprouted,
8. No^{A} ka^{J} yla^{E},	Al que apenas llegó,	Who just arrived,
9. Sqwa^{H} yaq^{E},	Denle una mano,	Give him/her a hand,
10. Sqwa^{H} skon^{E} qin^{J},	Denle un brazo,	Give him/her an arm,
11. Chaq^{F}, ja^{E} no^{E} tya^{J} jyan^{A},	Para que cuando llegue el año,	So that when the year arrives,

Chatino	Spanish	English
12. Tya^{J} koq^{F},	[Para] cuando llegue el mes,	When the month arrives,
13. Tya^{J} kla^{A},	[Para] cuando llegue el día,	When the day arrives,
14. Ka^{J} tnya^{J},	[Éste] será autoridad,	He/she will be authority,
15. Ka^{J} kchin^{E},	[Éste] será comunidad,	He/she will be community,
16. Sqwa^{B} yaq^{K} kiqya^{C},	Le echará una mano a las montañas,	He/she will lend a hand to the mountains,
17. Sqwa^{B} yaq^{K} kchin^{A},	Le echara una mano a la comunidad,	He/she will lend a hand to the community,
18. Tyon^{J} lo^{I},	Se parará enfrente,	He/she will stand before,
19. Tyon^{J} chonq^{G}.	Se parará atrás.	He/she will stand behind.

(For the orthographic conventions of Chatino, see Appendix 1).

This tight link between a researcher, their family, and community benefits the study of the social and linguistic systems of a community by allowing the researcher to carry out long-term projects that elevates the quality and depth of the analyses. In contrast, external researchers often come for a while and leave, with it very likely that the community never sees them again.

The notion of obligation has influenced my research in many ways. The community expects that a member who has achieved formal education assist the community in acquiring funds for projects and public work. A successful leader, in the eyes of the community, is one who manages to receive funds for public lighting, pavements, school computers, or other services from the state or federal government.

Community members often feel that local researchers do not contribute to the wellbeing of the community. People from my community, for example, have asked me how I support the community. Many feel that, because I have not built a school or hospital, or paved a road, my college education has not resulted in any material support for the community.

As I have already mentioned, the identities of local researchers are complex as they represent economic, educational and migratory differences as compared to community members who have not had the same opportunities. In order for an Indigenous researcher to acquire the necessary training for language documentation, they have had to leave their community to study, while navigating a new language and culture, and contending with possible racism and economic hardships along the way.

Just as a family expects absolute loyalty from its members, the community demands the same. Similarly, just as a researcher must balance research with familial obligations, they must also balance research with community obligation. A community member must not divulge matters that concern the whole town and its relationship with neighboring towns. This is particularly important if the communities, such as Quiahije and Ixtapan, are engaged in land disputes over boundary issues (E. Cruz and Smith Aguilar 2020). The collection of materials that I have obtained in Quiahije includes a set of recordings that I obtained at the town's general assemblies. These recordings contain conversations about the territorial conflicts that Quiahije has had with neighboring towns. The conversations include plans and agreements about how to proceed in these conflicts. Given the nature of these recordings, they cannot be widely shared without explicit permission from the community. I am also convinced that the only reason the community agreed to my recording of those conversations is because I am a part of the community. It would have been very difficult for an external researcher to acquire this data.

Working with healers

Another problematic area for local researchers is their work with healers. Throughout the course of my research, I have worked closely with them, as they hold local knowledge concerning prayers, oratory, plants and sacred spaces. My work with healers has often caused misunderstandings with my family because, like other people in the community, they believe that it is dangerous to associate with these specialists.

Chatinos have a complicated relationship with healers. On the one hand, they go to them to consult on how to relieve diseases and afflictions, but on the other hand they believe that healers use their knowledge to bring bad luck, steal spirits, and spread diseases and death. When someone gets sick or dies, a healer is always named as the one who caused the death or illness.

Until the 1980s, there were no allopathic doctors in Quiahije, so residents depended on healers, herbalists and bonesetters to diagnose, cure, and aid them through both physical conditions (diarrhea, flu, back pain, pain when urinating, giving birth), and also mental conditions (the interpretation of dreams and lovesickness). They also consult healers in locating missing people, preventing harm from enemies or, more lately, to give them luck when crossing the border to the United States.

Despite the fact that there is access to allopathic medicine through the medical clinic of the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social* (IMSS, Mexican Institute of Social Security) and various doctors available in San Juan, many people in Quiahije still go to healers. People who follow these practices call themselves *nten*^{B} *kre*^{K}*nsya*^{B} or people of belief. In the next section, I will describe my work with a healer who I will call Lila.

Lila the healer, a micro-case study

From 2004 onwards, I have stayed at my grandfather's house whenever I return to Quiahije to do fieldwork. Once I am settled in, I go through the town looking for people to talk with and record our conversations. My family is always aware of where I go, who I talk to and who I am with. I have frequently worked with a healer in my town who I will call Lila to protect her identity. Many of the residents fear Lila because she has the reputation of using her spells to hurt people.

They say that when Lila visits someone's home, she carries plants, water or some spiritual item hidden in her clothes and discretely drops it somewhere in the house when the owners are distracted in order to bring about sickness or death to the inhabitants. When Lila goes to help at the annual sponsored fiestas (*fiestas de mayordomía)*, she likes to sit next to the pots of food from which the guests are served. Lila likes this job, of serving food at the festivals, because it is a prestigious task in the hierarchy of helpers at the festivals. This task is generally assigned to elderly, wise, and respected women in the town. This causes a lot of stress among some of the hosts, however, because often the guests refuse to eat the food that Lila serves. These guests say that Lila likes to serve the food so that she can drops spiritual items into the food that she serves them.

As with other healers, the residents of Quiahije have a very strained relationship with Lila. Although in public they refuse to speak to her, in private they ask her to read tarot cards, diagnose diseases, interpret dreams and nightmares, or cast spells. In my experience working with Lila, I have always found her to be an intelligent person with an enormous talent in verbal art and Chatino oratory. She knows a lot about medicinal plants and has a great ability to recite prayers for any occasion, including prayers directed at plants, animals, sacred spaces or with the aim of forgetting a boyfriend or lover. Every time I visit her, she talks a lot about her life, the herbs that should be used to cure patients, and about the prayers that she recites. When I go to visit Lila, I try not to tell my family out of fear that they will tell me not to go. Sometimes when I return home and they realize that I have seen Lila, they tease me about sorcery and ask me about the visit. They ask me what we talked about and who came to the house when I was there. My grandfather is an introverted person and was the only one, as far as I knew, who had no opinion of my work with Lila; at least that is what I thought.

However, one day during a rainy summer in 2008, when I returned home from working with Lila, I made plans to drive six hours away to the city of Oaxaca. I invited my grandfather to accompany me, he agreed, and we left the town early. When we were about an hour away from the city, my grandfather suddenly said: "Are you still working with Lila?" I answered yes, and then he said "You know she is a very bad person, right? She cast a spell on your uncle and because of it he almost died".

According to my grandfather, when Lila learned that my uncle had blocked her path, she cast a spell on him so that he would hurt himself. My grandfather said: "I told your uncle, 'You shouldn't have blocked the path of that woman because she is very bad and will hurt you,' and that is what happened". According to my grandfather, the accident happened two days after he blocked Lila's path. My grandfather continued: "It was that woman's fault that your uncle almost died". Indirectly, my grandfather was telling me that he did not agree with me working with Lila.

My grandfather was referring to a brain hemorrhage that my uncle had when he was hit on the head with a wooden post that he was using to fence a piece of land. My grandfather said that my uncle fenced in the path where Lila passed every day to go to her cornfield. To save my uncle's life, they had to open up his skull to alleviate the pressure. The surgery almost killed him. My grandfather said that Lila had caused the accident with her spells because she was angry at my uncle. It was clear to me that my grandfather was telling me that he did not agree with me working with Lila. I listened to my grandfather, and affirmed that I was listening. But I didn't say anything. I have told this story to show the complicated relationship that exists between Indigenous researchers and their relatives.

Conclusion

In this article, I have narrated my experience as an Indigenous female researcher who does fieldwork in her own community. I have discussed my paradoxical role as a woman navigating academia, family, and the community.

While many academics maintain that Indigenous researchers do not contribute sufficiently to linguistic theory, many community members feel that researchers do not contribute to the development of their community of origin in concrete and tangible ways such as maintaining public buildings, supplying economic resources or consulting how best to deal with the outside world or on problems with neighboring towns.

Furthermore, while in academic environments in developed countries women fight against sexual harassment, unequal pay and a lack of respect. In these spaces, women of color also have to fight against a lack of support and institutional racism and classism. Members of the academic community often feel that Indigenous women are there, not because of their intellectual capacity, but due to affirmative action.

Contrastingly, what is demanded of women within their communities is meekness. Due to the nature of their job, local female researchers are often seen as licentious, dangerous, or as people who collect information about the language to sell it.

In light of this, the growing number of members of Indigenous communities who are carrying out documentation, revitalization and promotion work on their languages opens the field up to new experiences, as until now the majority of published field experiences, tools, and methodologies had come from external academics.

It is imperative to create spaces, both in academia and in the community, where local researchers can share experiences and create materials, methodologies and tools that will be useful for both contexts.

Without the equitable participation of Indigenous speakers in the research on their languages, most of these efforts will, sadly, continue to be inadequate and incomplete.

Therefore, I invite Indigenous researchers, present and future, to have the courage to speak and raise awareness of their work and their experiences, to open up spaces in which they can research, write and publish, and to participate in both community and academic discussions about diverse aspects of language, culture and politics.

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APPENDIX I ORTHOGRAPHIC CONVENTION

CONSONANTS

IPA	ORTHOGRAPHY
ᵐb	mb
ⁿd	nd
ⁿd̻	ndy
ŋ	ng
h	j
k	k
kw	kw
ⁿkw	nkw
ⁿk	nk
ⁿk̻	nky
l	l
ɬ	ly
l̻	ly
m	m
n	n
n̻	ny
p	p
ɾ	r
s	s
t	t
ⁿt	nt
t̻	ty
ⁿt̻	nty
w	w
ʃ	x
j	y
ʔ	q
tʃ	ch

VOWELS

	IPA	ORTHOGRAPHY
Oral vowels	a	a
	e	e
	i	i
	o	o
	u	u
Nasal vowels	ã	an
	ẽ	en
	ĩ	in
	õ	on

TONES

LEVEL	FALLING	RISING
K Super-high	J Mid-low	H Mid super-high
E High	B High-low	I Mid high
C Mid		G Low-high
A Low		F Low-mid