



## Language Vitality Among School Students In Ayutla Mixe

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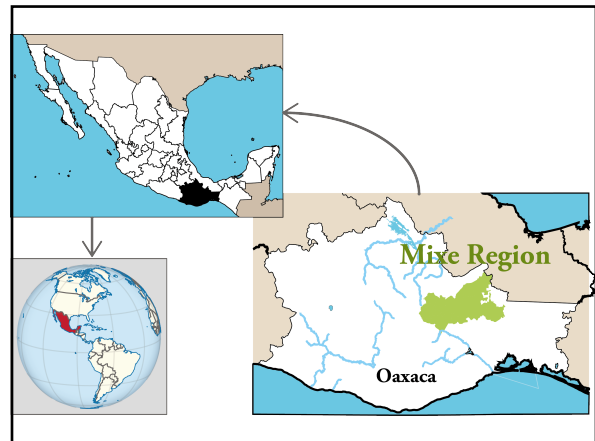

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## Introduction

- In this paper, I present results from a survey conducted among school students to assess the vitality of Ayutla Mixe ['mixe]
  - or Tukyo'mët y'ää y'ayuuik [tu'gjo'mit 'ʔja: ʔja'ju:ʔk],
- a Mixezoque language spoken in Southern Mexico.
- I work mainly on the documentation and description of the language
  - Grammar
  - Text collection ←Community oriented
  - Evolution of the language
  - Dialectology
  - Dictionary (working on this) ←Community oriented

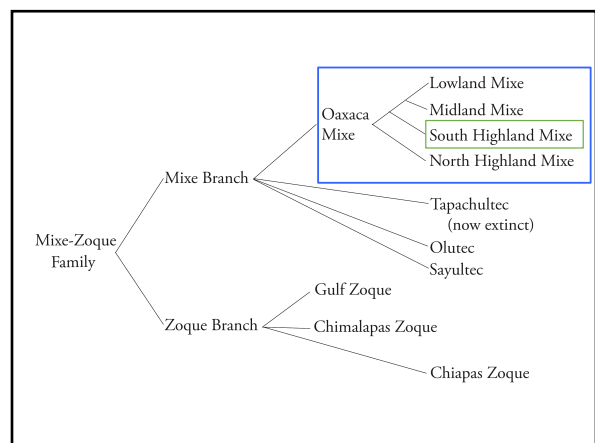
### Introduction

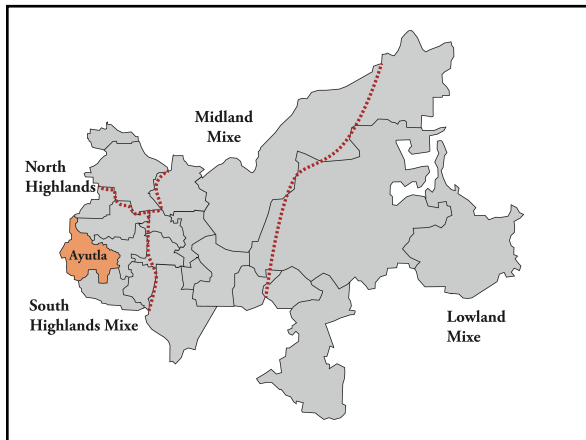
- But I want to have an assessment of the vitality of the language because that could help me take decisions about future work,
  - particularly about materials that can be useful to the community
- And I would like to get your opinion about the methodology I'm using for assessing the vitality of the language.



## Mixe languages

- Ayutla Mixe is a Mixezoque language.
- The Mixezoque linguistic family is not related to Uto-Aztec, Zapotec or Mayan languages.
- It is most likely related to the Olmec civilization (Kaufman, 1969; Campbell & Kaufman, 1976; Justeson & Kaufman, 1993; *inter alia*),
  - also known as the “mother culture” in Mesoamerica
  - because they invented the Mesoamerican writing system and the Mesoamerican calendar.





- However, it is better to think of the Oaxaca Mixe languages as a dialectal chain, as I have recently shown
  - comparing 35 phonological, morphological and syntactic features:

Vitality of the language according to official figures

- According to the official census, in 2010 there were 136,736 people who are 3 years and older and speak a Mixe language.
  - In fact, Mixe language are one of the ten biggest linguistic groups in Mexico.
- Within the Mixe territory, in most of the municipalities an overwhelming majority of people speak Mixe.
  - In 11 more 95% speak Mixe.
  - In 3 between 85% and 95% speak Mixe
  - And in only 3 less than 85% speak Mixe.

- For Ayutla Mixe:

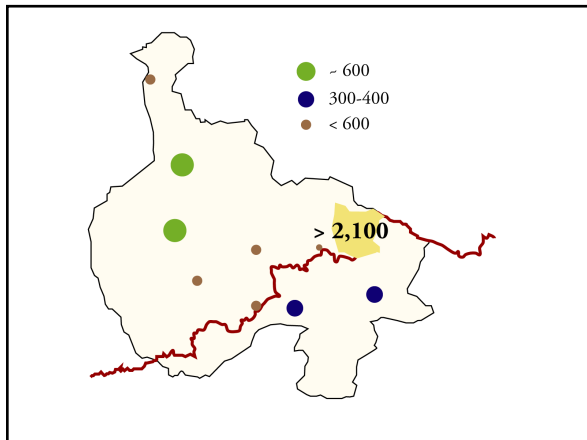
Language Category	Percentage
Mixe Monolingual	24.9%
Bilingual Mixe-Spanish	65.1%
Spanish Monolingual	8.8%
Other	1.5%

Vitality of the language according to official figures

- However, I was suspicious that the situation was not exactly like that.
- Particularly in the main town, it seemed to me that many people did not really speak Mixe.
- And depending on someone's beliefs and attitudes toward the language, they might say that everybody speaks Mixe or that almost no one does.
  - Some community activists would emphasize that people did not want to speak the language but that many can.
  - And people from other communities would say that most people in Ayutla did not.

Vitality of the language according to official figures

- Bilingualism *per se* is not a sign of language decline, we cannot pretend that indigenous societies will live isolated, in an immaculate state.
- But for many indigenous languages in Latin America I have the feeling that bilingualism is a transitional phase between being monolingual speakers of their native language and being Spanish monolingual speakers.
- So, I wanted to have a better evaluation of the endangerment of the language I am working on.



First survey

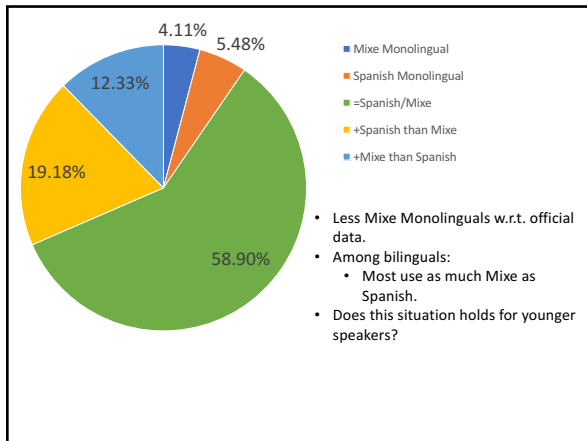
• A group of students and I (Romero *et al.* 2016) used a questionnaire for conducting interviews to 61 speakers in two towns in the municipality:

1. Main Town: San Pedro y San Pablo Ayutla

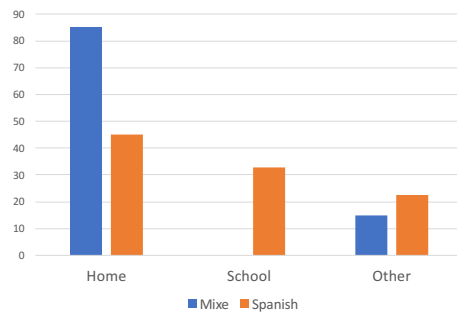
	< 20	20-40	40-60	> 60	Total
Female	3	6	6	2	17
Male	4	6	6	1	17
Total	7	12	12	3	34

2. One of the villages: El Duraznal

	< 20	20-40	40-60	> 60	Total
Female	5	3	8	3	19
Male	3	2	2	1	8
Total	8	5	10	4	27



• Where did you learn...?



Survey among school students

• I wanted to focus the assessment of the vitality of the language on children, since they are the future of the language.

1. Questionnaire.

- Applied to 897 children in 21 schools, grades 3rd to 9th.

2. Interviews (with five tasks)

- Conducted with 27 children in two schools

Questionnaire

- It consisted of 58 questions.
- Applied to 897 children in 21 schools, grades 3rd to 9th.
- All the children studying in those grades (except for those who did not attend the day the questionnaire was applied)
- This corresponds to the second half of primary school and the three years of secondary school in Mexico.
- In few cases, the school has as more than 100 students; in others, less than 25.

- Main town: 336 children
- Other villages: 562 children

Encuesta sociolingüística para estudiantes

Idioma	Padres	Hermanos	Abuelos	Amigos
Only Mixe	13.73%	6.01%	43.08%	1.50%
Only Spanish	44.48%	67.41%	30.15%	83.18%
Both	41.79%	26.58%	26.77%	15.32%

In the rest of the municipality:

Idioma	Padres	Hermanos	Abuelos	Amigos
Only Mixe	33.61%	14.84%	61.90%	14.29%
Only Spanish	22.04%	37.69%	13.73%	46.78%
Both	44.35%	47.48%	24.37%	38.94%

• Main town:

	Speaks	Speaks better	Understands Better
Mixe	1.49%	5.67%	8.66%
Spanish	37.91%	67.46%	57.01%
Both	60.60%	26.27%	34.03%

• In the rest of the municipality:

	Speaks	Speaks better	Understands Better
Mixe	4.10%	17.76%	18.85%
Spanish	16.39%	35.79%	32.51%
Both	77.60%	44.81%	46.17%

Which language do you speak to...?

• Main town:

	Parents	Siblings	Grandparents	Friends
Only Mixe	13.73%	6.01%	43.08%	1.50%
Only Spanish	44.48%	67.41%	30.15%	83.18%
Both	41.79%	26.58%	26.77%	15.32%

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- Interview**
- Conducted with 27 children in two schools;
  - only with those studying in grades 7th to 9th,
    - to avoid questions about language acquisition in early states.
  - With children in the main town (Ayutla)
    - and one village (Cerro Pelón)
  - Five tasks:
    - a) Identifying names from pictures. Lexical comprehension.
    - b) Naming objects, animals, plants, body parts and colors from pictures. Lexical comprehension.
    - c) Answering five questions. Language skills in small talk.
    - d) Text comprehension. I played a story in mixe
    - e) Text production.

Interview: Lexical knowledge

Mää ja' \_\_\_\_\_? 'Where is the \_\_\_\_\_?'











### Lexical Production



	Main Town	Village
<b>Comprehension (average)</b>	62.89%	91.82%
<b>Max. % comprehension</b>	88%	100%
<b>Min. % comprehension</b>	18%	72%
<b>Production (average)</b>	27.11%	84.18%
<b>Max. % production</b>	60%	98%
<b>Min. % production</b>	0%	38%
<b>Difference</b>	35.78%	7.64%

### Questions

- They were asked five questions in Mixe.
  - Where do you live?
  - How do you go home?
  - What do you like to eat?
  - How do you prepare *mā'ätsy*?
  - What do you do when you get home?
- And I told them to answer them in Mixe or in Spanish.

#### Questions

##### In the village:

- All of them understood all the questions and answered them appropriately.
- However, most of them answered (at least some of the questions) in Spanish, not in Mixe. Only one student answered all the questions in Mixe.
  - All of them can have a simple conversation with a Mixe speaker, even if they answer in Spanish (although they could not have it in Mixe).

##### In the main town,

- 25% did not understand a single question.
- 50% understood all the questions, and answered them (almost all) appropriately.
- 25% understood some questions.
- Only 3 of them answered some questions in Mixe.
  - Only half of them can have a simple conversation in Mixe, even if they answer in Spanish (and they could not have a simple conversation if the other person does not know some Spanish).

### Text comprehension

- I ask them to tell me the story in Mixe or Spanish:
- No one used Mixe for telling the story.
- With half of the children in the main town, it was not possible to do the task, because it was clear that they did not understand anything, or they understanding was very poor.
- One third of them had a poor to medium understanding of the story.
  - They did not understand who the main character was, or what he did, or where he went, or what he thought.
- Only a fifth of them had a good understanding of the story.
- In the village where the study was conducted, only two kids told me the story in Mixe
- However, all of them had a good understanding of the story.
- Except for one who got distracted at that point with other students.

### Text comprehension

- Based on the frog story.
- I asked the students to narrate it in Mixe or in Spanish. If they told it in Mixe, then I asked them to tell it in Spanish and *vice versa*.
- In the main town, no one told me the story in Mixe first; only in Spanish.
- When asked to do it in Mixe, only 25% could do it. However, only one of them could narrate something that made sense for an adult competent speaker.
- The rest, used words that did not exist,
  - use the wrong lexical items
  - or pronounce words very differently: [pa'wa'ʔj] not [θpa'βo'oʔj] 'he chased it' or [su] not [sɛ:] 'day'
  - and sometimes they did not use person prefixes on verbs.
- The one that did tell the story in Mixe, spoke slowly, and did not remember some word (instead had to use Spanish).

## Text comprehension

- In the village where the study was conducted, 64% told it first in Spanish, and only one could not tell it in Mixe.
- The rest, told the story in mixe: some well enough, most very well and some in an excellent manner.
- 25% of them were even more articulate in Spanish than in Mixe.
- For those who told the story well enough, some spoke Mixe without confidence.
- Some, pronounce words very differently:
  - [hi'ðo'hk], not [haðuyə'hk] 'then'; [
  - ha'zu'u], not [ha'dzu'u] 'deer'.
- And some of them, even those who told the story very well, did not use the 3rd person prefix for transitive verbs:
  - [ij], not [θɔj] 'he saw it';
  - [pɛ:t], not [tpɛ:t]

## Final Remarks

- Surveys, even with adults, allowed me to have a better understanding of the language's vitality.
- However, focusing on children allows me to have a better assessment of the language's vitality since they are indeed the future of the language.
- Focusing on children also allows for a early intervention in case of language loss.
- Comparing results from the interviews and the surveys, the latter produced reliable information.

## Text comprehension

- There are two sociolinguistic situations in the municipality.
- Ayutla Mixe is being lost rapidly among school children in the main town. In many cases they truly do not speak mixe or understand but not speak the language.
- Even though it has an apparent vitality in smaller villages, they seem to go in the same direction.
- Most children speak the language outside the main town.
- Revitalization programs must consider this situation.

Tyoskujuyë'p

## Special thanks

- Flor García and all the directors and school teachers in Ayutla.
- Federico Villanueva
- Tayzu Sánchez, for helping me code the data.