



Todos los seres humanos nacen libres e iguales en dignidad y derechos. Dotados de razón y conciencia, deben comportarse fraternalmente los unos con los otros.

Todos os seres humanos nascem livres e iguais em dignidade e em direitos. Dotados de razão e de consciência, devem agir uns para com os outros em espírito de fraternidade.

Todos los seres humanos nacen libres e iguales en dignidad y derechos y, dotados como están de razón y conciencia, deben comportarse fraternalmente los unos con los otros.

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Americas Research Group / School of Modern Languages / Institut Ramon Llull
Symposium

Language and Sociopolitical Struggle in the Hispanic World

Wednesday **28 April 2010**

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Discourses of language revalorisation in the Yucatecan press¹

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Introduction

Yucatec Maya, simply known locally as Maya, is the main indigenous language spoken in the south eastern Mexican states of Yucatan, Campeche and Quintana Roo and also in the neighbouring country of Belize. Yucatec Maya belongs to the Mayan language family which includes several indigenous languages of southern Mexico and Guatemala.² According to the last census carried out in 2000 by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI 2000), Yucatan was the Mexican state with the highest proportion of speakers of an indigenous language (37.3 %), followed by Oaxaca (37.1 %) and Chiapas (35.3).³ The main difference between these three states, however, is the enormous linguistic diversity of both Oaxaca and Chiapas compared to Yucatan, where Maya speakers make 99.5% of the indigenous population (INEGI 2000). More than half a million people declared themselves speakers of Maya in that census in Yucatan (exactly 549,532 people) with a total of 816,889 speakers in the three states that form the Peninsula.

In a highly diverse country such as Mexico, concern about the future of indigenous languages in Mexico has lately become more apparent as a consequence of cultural homogenisation and rapid language loss (Garza Cuarón and Lastra 1991; Hidalgo 2006). This focus on indigenous languages has arguably been reinforced by a growing international awareness of language endangerment. In the last decades, and especially after the Zapatista uprising of 1994, significant legislative changes have been introduced in Mexico, such as the amendment of the National Constitution in

¹ This paper is part of groundwork toward a PhD thesis on language ideologies in Yucatan. I would like to thank Rosaleen Howard, Peter Sercombe and Jens Hentschke for their useful feedback while drafting this piece.

² See Campbell (1997: 163) for a complete genealogical relationship of the Mayan language family, also Suárez (1983) for a grammatical overview of Maya and other Mesoamerican languages.

³ INEGI only counts speakers over five years of age.
<http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/Proyectos/ccpv/cpv2000/default.aspx>

2001, which includes an article that explicitly refers to language. Other modifications have been the passing of a Law on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2003 with an additional reform of the Education Law, and the subsequent creation of a federal institution based in Mexico City to deal with indigenous languages called INALI (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas). Although there is no specific governmental institution in charge of implementing language policy in Yucatan, INDEMAYA (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya), which was created in the year 2000, has among its aims the promotion of the Maya language.

Considering the press as a relevant and privileged public site where language debates take place (DiGiacomo 1999), this paper looks at the discourses produced by two main newspapers published in Yucatan to better understand how the promotion of Maya is played out. Specifically, it analyses how these discourses both create and reflect an ideological debate about the maintenance and loss of the Maya language and how they unveil the ideological foundations of the process of language promotion in the region. After the presentation of the theoretical framework and the corpus used, the relation between language and nationalist discourses and language to biological discourses will be dealt with in some detail. I argue that efforts to revalorise Maya, which is usually linked to concepts such as pride, dignity and respect, need to be understood as a response to historical marginalisation of the Maya people.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the following analysis is based on the tools and methods provided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially the work of Fairclough (1992, 1995), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and also on the research carried out by, mainly North American, linguistic anthropologists on language ideologies (see e.g. the collection of essays in Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998; also in Kroskrity 2000). On the one hand, CDA has been a powerful analytical tool to uncover unequal power relationships in different kinds of texts, with particular interest in those produced by the mass media. The aim of CDA is to make explicit the underlying ideological foundations of discourses, highlighting the key role that language plays as a medium through which, as Richardson (2007: 26) puts it "relationships of disempowerment, dominance, prejudice and/or discrimination" in society are structured and maintained. Researchers using CDA analysis have focused on issues such as gender, ethnicity and class, therefore linking the use of language with the wider sociocultural context. Likewise, the work of the North American linguistic anthropologists mentioned above is especially appropriate for this research because it focuses on how language ideologies are played out in specific contexts of language contact and conflict, and, specifically, on how ensuing processes of language shift or minorisation are ideologically driven. It

is this latter focus on ideologies in multilingual settings which is of special interest for our research. In sum, both approaches may be used complementarily to better understand the sociolinguistic situation under analysis, since despite the focus from slightly different angles, concepts such as ideology, discourse, hegemony and power do figure centrally in both perspectives.

The newspapers

The basis for this analysis is a corpus of 437 newspaper articles that were published from 2000 to 2008 in the Yucatecan dailies 'Por Esto!' and 'Diario de Yucatán'. Both are among the most important newspapers in Yucatan as regards circulation figures.⁴ It must also be noted that 'Diario de Yucatán', founded in 1925, is the oldest surviving newspaper in Yucatan and belongs to what is considered the quality press. 'Por Esto!' is, instead, a clear example of sensationalist press. Their physical formats closely correspond to a British broadsheet, the former, and a tabloid paper, the latter. Both dailies have their headquarters in Mérida, capital city of Yucatán state, a city where the use of Spanish is dominant and where almost half of the population of the state lives.⁵ Also, both newspapers, in spite of the ideological and political differences, conservative 'Diario de Yucatán' and leftist and populist 'Por Esto!', use exclusively Spanish in their contents. What is more, Maya is not used in the mainstream printed press in Yucatan and has only occasionally been included in a tokenistic way in the past (Ligorred 1997: 35). This is ironic if we consider that literacy in Maya stands out among the main policies to preserve the use of Maya, and, as Castells-Talens (2004: 9) has noted, the fact that many newspaper employees are Maya speakers. Literacy and its relationship with orality is without a doubt at the core of the ideological underpinnings in the efforts to revalorise the use of Maya and deserves specific and detailed analysis on its own.

The articles

The articles used for this analysis are part of an electronic archive which can be accessed on line.⁶ The archive is administered by the Autonomous

⁴ According to the official institution 'Padrón Nacional de Medios Impresos', the average number of copies of 'Diario de Yucatán' is 48,689 from Monday to Saturday and 62,879 on Sunday, the highest of all newspapers in Yucatan, whereas 'Por Esto!' figures are 28,383 and 31,955 respectively. Only the sensationalist newspaper 'De Peso' created in 2004 has reached similar figures to 'Diario de Yucatán'. http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/PNMI/PNMP_home.php

⁵ Exactly 40.2 % of the population of Yucatan lives in Merida according to INEGI (2000).

⁶ http://www.mayas.uady.mx/breves/index_01.html

University of Yucatan (UADY is the acronym in Spanish) and gathers articles related to Maya culture and society since 1999. The selection used in this paper belongs to a subgroup of news items where language as an object of news comment plays an essential role. A complete semiotic analysis including the layout, photographs, type of font, colour, etc. of the news is not possible owing to the nature of the archive, which only reproduces the text that was originally published in the newspaper.

Most of the articles related to the Maya language fall into one of the following broad categories: education and literacy, socio-political issues, media, religion and folklore. Another set of articles forms a category which report events which have to do with public presentations and different kinds of meetings (symposia, workshops, conferences, etc.) linked in some way or another to the Maya language. A significant number of articles (74) refer specifically to concerns about the 'health' of the language, a small representative number of which will be analysed in detail in this paper. This taxonomy, however, does not imply that there exists a clear-cut delimitation of topics in the news. On the contrary, we often find examples of interdiscursivity, that is, the shaping of discourses with reference to other discourses.⁷

After reviewing the corpus, we claim, following Blommaert's (1999: 1) definition of language debate, that an ongoing ideological public debate about the maintenance and loss of Yucatec Maya is taking place in Yucatan.⁸ While targeting different readerships and coming from different political stances, both dailies consider newsworthy to report the current situation of Maya and regularly include news on the topic. Interestingly, this regional phenomenon stands in stark contrast with a similar study carried out by Carbó and Salgado (2006) about the invisibility of indigenous languages in thirteen Mexican newspapers from 1989 to 1995. Finding very few examples of articles that focus on indigenous languages out of a corpus of 657 pieces of news, the authors conclude that, in spite of much vaunted pride in the indigenous heritage of Mexico, indigenous languages as a topic of discussion are invisible in the Mexican national press (2006: 555).⁹ They also argue that, on the few occasions when the topic is touched upon, a paternalistic approach is adopted. Even though awareness of indigenous issues has been growing in the media (Warren and Jackson 2002: 2), it is safe to say that we are still far from seeing indigenous 'self-representation', as these two authors put it, in

⁷ Chouliraki and Fairclough (1999: 16) use the term 'the order of discourse' and 'interdiscursivity', which are defined as "the social structuring of semiotic hybridity".

⁸ Blommaert (1999:1) defines language debate as that "in which language is a central topic, a motif, a target, and in which language ideologies are being articulated, formed, amended, enforced".

⁹ The authors examine thirteen Mexican newspapers from 1989 to 1995. About 60% of the news items were found in three newspapers: La Jornada (36.53%), El Día (12.48%) and El Nacional (12.02%)

the two newspapers under analysis, let alone an example of mainstream media controlled by an indigenous group. Indigenous peoples of Mexico are, at least in our corpus, objects of media discourse rather than producers of their own discourses. This is not surprising since, as Fairclough (1995: 40) puts it, "in general it is those who already have other forms of economic, political and cultural power that have the best access to the media". This situation also applies to Yucatan in spite of the relative significant size of the indigenous population. As researched by Castells-Talens (2004), even the exceptional case of XEPET 'The voice of the Mayas', an indigenist radio where the use of Maya is predominant, issues of power and control need to be constantly negotiated since the station belongs to a governmental institution (CDI).¹⁰

The discursive construction of languages and nations

Following the narrow definition of discourse as 'a social construction of reality and a form of knowledge' (Fairclough 1995: 18), we will look first at how the Yucatecan press in particular creates discourses of language revitalisation in a specific sociopolitical framework. Research has shown that the mass media have become fundamental sites for the construction of the nation and of national identities (Anderson 2006, Billig 1995, Gal and Woolard 2001). The following analysis is based on the idea that the media is not just an objective and neutral mirror of reality but an interested and politically positioned institution that both constructs and reflects a specific version of the social reality (Richardson: 2007:13).

I will first look at Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities", since it is particularly relevant here because his analysis is based on the novel and newspapers in the era of print-capitalism and language standardisation to present and represent the nation (2006: 26). While Anderson's idea of the nation as an 'imagined community' has been very influential in sociopolitical thinking, his general view on language has also been criticised by anthropological linguists. Thus, his arguably Eurocentric idea that the "then and now bulk of mankind is monoglot" (2006: 38) is surprising, considering that Anderson's area of expertise is a country as linguistically diverse and populated as Indonesia. Irvine and Gal (2000: 76), for instance, underline that "homogenous language is as much imagined as is community". Similarly, Michael Billig (1995: 10), referring to the work of Anderson among other scholars interested in how nationalism is constructed, calls attention to the fact that "national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today's common-sense belief that discrete languages 'naturally' exist". That languages, and specifically certain varieties of languages such as the 'standard', are ideologically created has also been noted by Bourdieu, who

¹⁰ CDI is the 'Comisión para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas', formerly the 'Instituto Nacional Indigenista' (INI), a governmental body that controls a network of indigenous stations all over Mexico.

criticises structural linguists who "merely incorporate into their theory a pre-constructed object, ignoring its *social laws of construction* and masking its social genesis" (1991: 44, emphasis in original). The reification of language is a critique that anthropological linguists have made not only of Anderson but also of other prominent scholars who have written about language and nationalism. In this regard, it is worth quoting Paul Kroskrity who states:

Like Gellner, Benedict Anderson too naturalizes the process of linguistic standardization by assuming that such state-supported language policies produce a uniform linguistic product and a concomitant homogenizing influence on citizens through their consumption of newspapers and novels [...]. Further work on language and nationalism would certainly benefit from problematizing linguistic homogeneity as an issue of how language ideologies operate. (2000: 26)

Further to these critiques, we may add Anderson's conception of languages as fundamentally inclusive instruments:

Language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn a language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of Babel: no one lives long enough to learn *all* languages. (Anderson 2006: 134, emphasis in original)

Leaving aside the biblical metaphor as a powerful source of negative associations with language diversity,¹¹ what can be questioned is the fact that learning a language necessarily leads to social inclusion. Although it is true that languages are transmissible and cumulative, Anderson's view does not take into account the fact that access to languages is not tantamount to access to other kinds of resources, be it political, economic or sociocultural. This access may depend more on relations of power rather than simply on the language people speak, especially in the postcolonial context with relation to Anderson's observation. Moreover, research has shown that learning the dominant language does not always mean avoiding discrimination since the stigma can then be passed onto the accent indigenous speakers have when using the dominant language. This is, according to my own fieldwork, what happens with Spanish spoken in Yucatan, which is often considered divergent, because of its conspicuous deviations from Standard Mexican Spanish.¹²

In sum, we claim that this discussion about language and nation is better understood in terms of Cameron's 'verbal hygiene' which "is not about

¹¹ The reason why Babel, representing language diversity as a curse, has been such a successful metaphor but why the parable of Pentecost, which carries exactly the contrary meaning, is instead fairly unknown is a worthy topic of research.

¹² Yucatec Spanish is often negatively portrayed as 'aporreado' (literally 'beaten') probably because of Maya phonological influence (especially, suprasegmental features such as tone and stress). See Martín Briceño (1997) for discussion.

ordering language itself, but also exploits the powerful symbolism in which language stands for other kinds of order- moral, social and political" (1995: 25).

Let us turn now to Mexico, since it is essential to look at how the press depicts the sociopolitical framework where the language ideological debate takes place. Administratively, the 'Estados Unidos Mexicanos', the official name of the country, is a federation of thirty-one states and a federal district, which are in turn divided into municipalities. In spite of this division, Mexico is an example of a highly centralised nation-state, with much power concentrated in Mexico City, where, unsurprisingly, the INALI ('Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas') is based.¹³ Although the noun 'federation' and the adjective 'federal' might as well be used, the terms nation and national are, without exception, reserved for Mexico as a whole. There is only one nation and that is, according to the press, the taken for granted Mexican nation-state. In our corpus, we contend that Yucatan is continuously presented and represented as a region. The ubiquitous 'language-culture-nation ideological nexus', as Heller and Duchêne (2007: 7) put it, which is often used for nation-states, could be paraphrased into a 'language-culture-region ideological nexus' in the case of Yucatan. In this regard, it is not uncommon to find the collocation 'regional identity' in the corpus.

Michael Billig's (1995: 6) concept of 'banal nationalism' which he describes as "the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced" is a useful idea for our analysis. A close look at the corpus shows that we can undoubtedly include Mexico as a nation that continuously 'flags' its nationhood in the press.

Against the backdrop of a discursive project whose goal is to acknowledge diversity, Mexicans need to be reminded of their Mexicanness. In a country where the use of Spanish is hegemonic, the promotion of linguistic diversity necessarily creates ideological tensions. As Debra Spitulnik has noted "one of the fundamental problems faced by virtually every nation state in the world today [is] the challenging of forging a unified national identity while simultaneously giving some recognition to national diversity" (1998: 165).

In this vein, one of the recent projects of INALI has been the translation of the Mexican anthem into several indigenous languages. Not only has the anthem been translated into several indigenous languages, but also the 'bando solemne' or presidential edict, which so far can be found in 24 indigenous linguistic variants, as INALI calls them.¹⁴ These translations raise purist controversies, since more often than not it is only a few members of

¹³ This does not mean, however, that there are not tensions between centripetal power of the capital and centrifugal federalism of the states (see e.g. Anna 1998: 29).

¹⁴ On line at: <http://www.inali.gob.mx/web/portal/ind-bando>

the indigenous intellectual elite who can use the variety and know the neologisms used in the translation of such formal documents (Flores Farfán 2009: 34). We have found a significant number of articles that reflect this project and, therefore, we will deal with them in some detail. Most of the articles that cover this topic are published in 'Por Esto!', a newspaper that clearly flags its nationalist ideology with the motto 'dignidad, identidad y soberanía (sic)' under its letterhead. This argumentation can be illustrated with a close look at some articles which focus on the anthem as a key symbol of national identity:

29/02/00. **Interpretan el Himno Nacional en Maya.** El pasado 23 de febrero **se llevó a cabo** el IX encuentro de demostración de escoltas e interpretación de Himno Nacional Mexicano en lengua maya del nivel preescolar en la localidad de Tabi, comisaría de Sotuta, Yucatán. La inauguración del evento estuvo a cargo del munícipe Roger Castillo Ruiz, quien agradeció al **consejo técnico consultivo** de la Zona Escolar 310 con sede en Huhí, por haber escogido a esta comunidad para **llevar a efecto el evento** y, sobre todo, "**inculcar a nuestros hijos desde pequeños a reconocer nuestro símbolos patrios que nos identifican como mexicanos** y que esto sea para el **bienestar** de la educación del municipio, la región y el estado de Yucatán". En este evento los niños demostraron sus habilidades en la entonación, dicción, fluidez y ritmo al momento de cantar el Himno en lengua maya, en donde sobresalieron las escuelas de Tixcaltuyub y Seyé. 'Por Esto!' (My emphasis)

From the linguistic point of view, it is worth noting the use of the verb 'inculcar' (to inculcate), which has both in Spanish, and its English cognate, a sense of repetition, obedience and discipline. The national symbols, thus, need to be inculcated in the children from an early age (the ones mentioned in the article attend kindergarten!) so that they can identify themselves as Mexican. What better place to do so than in the school, one of the official national institutions par excellence that, as Gellner (1983: 34) puts it, is 'at the crux of the state's sociosymbolic power'? It is of interest to note as well how a formal style is used throughout the article. This is achieved through both the use of formal vocabulary, e.g. 'se llevó a cabo', 'llevar a efecto el evento' (to carry out the event) and of long subordinate clauses (there are just three sentences in the article). This formal style reinforces the solemnity and significance of an activity which is related to patriotic symbols. We also find in this article an example of intertextuality, namely, the introduction of a text within a text through direct reported speech.¹⁵ It is the local politician, whose words are reproduced, the person who is given voice in this article. While the children are the alleged protagonists of the event, what we really see is a dialogue between the local politician and the consultative committee. Notice also that the subject of 'interpretan' has been elided in the headline: rather

¹⁵ See Fairclough (1999: 49) for the origins of the concept of intertextuality in Bakhtin's (1986) dialogical view of language.

than the actors of the event, the children seem to be the recipients of a top down official policy of nationalist propaganda.

The following article elaborates on the significance of singing the anthem in Maya and its introduction in bilingual schools in Yucatan through the organisation of contests. This policy is seen as an example of intercultural education:

27/05/2006. **Concurso sobre el Himno Nacional.** Con el **objetivo de difundir la lengua maya**, la Secretaría de Educación Pública, a través de la Subdirección de Educación Indígena, realizó el V Concurso Estatal de Interpretación del Himno Nacional Mexicano en Lengua Maya. En este encuentro participan escuelas regulares que promueven el programa 'Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya' (aprendamos maya), que la SEP implementó a partir del ciclo escolar 1991-1992, **con el fin de fomentar la enseñanza del idioma**, desarrollando las habilidades básicas de comprensión auditiva, expresión oral, comprensión de la lectura y expresión escrita. El Prof. Edgar Peraza Estañol, subdirector de Educación Indígena, señaló que **impulsar la educación 'intercultural bilingüe' es para mejorar la calidad de la educación que se ofrece a la población maya**. Añadió que **los acordes del himno nacional se interpretan con toda naturalidad en el idioma del Mayab**, como una muestra del alcance de la interculturalidad en el ámbito escolar del estado. (...)'Por Esto!' (My emphasis)

Singing along the national anthem in Maya is, thus, considered by the deputy director of Indigenous Education as an example of interculturality and promotion of the indigenous language. Although this initiative might have some impact as a sign of institutional recognition for the indigenous language, one wonders whether this is basically or merely an example of the nation 'flagging' one of its most essential symbols. The anthem in Maya is not sung, though, in schools that do not offer Intercultural Bilingual Education, a policy which would be more truly 'intercultural'. As the deputy director states (again it is a civil servant who is given voice) 'intercultural bilingual education' has been designed to improve the quality of the education the Maya population receives. It is also worth noting that in this case, in contrast with the previous article, the quotation is indirect, which inevitably entails a more interpretive stance of the journalist (Richardson 2007: 106). The reason why the words 'intercultural and bilingual' are used in inverted commas is not clear, but one can guess that they signal the kind of education which is still exceptional, marked and not owned by Maya speakers in Yucatan. The use of the word Mayab is also worth commenting upon, since that name stands for the historical geographical area of the Maya culture and language. It should also be noted that the use of Mayab does not seem to have, however, any contemporary relation to an active Pan-Mayan movement and is not, to my knowledge, politically nuanced.¹⁶ One interesting avenue for further research

¹⁶ I have in mind here the dissimilar cases of the use of 'Països Catalans' (Catalan Countries) and 'Euskal Herria' (Basque Land) in Europe. Both names are politically used by Catalan and Basque activists to

would be a comparative study of the significance of Pan-Maya movements (Warren 1998, Warren and Jackson 2002) as a basis for sociopolitical struggles and the seemingly contrasting situation in southern Mexico. Let us concentrate now on a third article which touches on the same subject but linked now with concerns about the use of the Maya.

19/05/2007. **Participación de 250 alumnos de primaria. Cantan el Himno Nacional en Maya.** Con la participación de 8 escuelas de nivel primaria se llevó a cabo el VI Concurso Estatal de Interpretación del Himno Nacional Mexicano en Lengua Maya en el que destacó la afluencia de al menos 250 alumnos que, ataviados con **trajes típicos de la región**, entonaron la traducción de la letra de Francisco González Bocanegra, al ritmo de los acordes de Jaime Nunó. Aunque uno de los objetivos del programa es el de **propiciar que los infantes y la misma población revaloren la lengua maya**, Amílcar Pacab Alcocer, coordinador estatal del programa Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya (Aprendamos Maya) explicó que uno de los principales factores a los que se enfrentan en dicha tarea es **la falta de interés de la sociedad por preservar dicho lenguaje**, ya que el entorno en el que se desenvuelven los estudiantes después de clases no contribuye a la **conservación del lenguaje heredado por los antepasados del Mayab**, es decir, **no hay seguimiento fuera del aula**. Agregó que además **es parte de la formación de valores cívicos el inculcar el respeto por los símbolos patrios**. 'Por Esto!' (My emphasis)

This article uses both interdiscursivity (various topics are intertwined in the discourses about the maintenance of Maya) and intertextuality, with the inclusion of a voice other than the reporter's. Through indirect quotation we see in this article a smooth transition between the reporter's and the state coordinator's voice. This is how the argument is deployed: firstly, as we have seen above, singing the national anthem is considered a way of revalorising the Maya language (reporter's voice) but, at the same time, is a form of inculcating (notice again the use of the same verb) civic values and respect for patriotic symbols (state coordinator's voice). The choice of the term 'patrios' (patriotic) reminds us of Billig's (1995: 55) distinction between the ideological use of patriotism and nationalism, the former with positive connotations and the latter with negative connotations and which entail a juxtaposition between 'us' and 'them'. Within this discussion about the anthem as a patriotic symbol it is important to highlight that the lyrics of the anthem, as those of many other national anthems around the world, are anything but a source of positive 'civic values'.¹⁷ Secondly, we also find the argument that Maya needs to be preserved since it embodies the essential link with the ancestors (antepasados) and, therefore, with cultural continuity in the region. This is an example of a usual discursive strategy which draws on concepts related to a glorious pre-Hispanic Maya civilisation to enhance the 'pedigree' of the language. It is also worth noting

foreground the cultural and linguistic unity of territories which are administratively divided between different nation-states.

¹⁷ The lyrics of the Mexican anthem can be found in an appendix at the end of this paper.

the fact that students, on this special occasion, wear typical regional dresses. Spivak's 'strategic essentialism' (1993) may be recalled here, and following Warren and Jackson's (2002: 8) discussion of that concept, this specific case seems more an example of essentialism fostered by the authorities, as an attempt to bind up the language with folklore, rather than a form of indigenous empowerment and resistance.¹⁸ The article also highlights one of the basic problems of programmes of Intercultural Bilingual Education in Yucatan and beyond: too often there is no use of the language outside the school setting. The problem arises, then, because there is a lack of interest in the society at large to preserve Maya. There seems to be, eventually, an ambivalent attitude to the revalorisation of Maya. On the one hand, it is fundamental to maintain the use of the indigenous language for the sake of the cultural identity of the region. On the other hand, however, Maya is not valued by the society at large (and by many of its speakers) since it is not useful for socioeconomic betterment, or to use Bourdieu's terms (1991: 14), it does not represent cultural or symbolic capital in the linguistic market. After this review of the nation, let us now turn to a critique of how languages are discursively constructed and reified in the press.

Discourses on language vitality in Yucatan

Discourses that use metaphors drawn from the biological sciences have burgeoned not only in the sociolinguistics literature but also in the press,¹⁹ as can be seen by the significant number of articles in the corpus that deal with this topic.

Within a context of growing concern about the future of Maya, the idea that languages exist independently of speakers seems to be deeply ingrained both in folk and professional linguistics discourses. Let us look first at some examples of the conceptualisation of languages as living species and then at some of their implications:

24/10/2001. Pese a 'contaminaciones' de otros idiomas. La maya, de las lenguas que gozan de 'mayor salud'. 'Por Esto!'

11/03/2005. Lengua maya puede morir en 40 años. Lingüista invita a estudiantes a no avergonzarse al hablarla. 'Por Esto!'

13/05/2005. Lengua maya aún viva. 'Por Esto!'

03/07/2005. La lengua maya, 'idioma vivo del pueblo'. 'Diario de Yucatán'.

22/02/2007. La lengua maya lucha por sobrevivir. Logros y retos en un encuentro estatal de educación indígena. 'Diario de Yucatán'.

¹⁸ See Howard (2009: 27) for the use of 'strategic essentialism' à la Spivak (1993) in the construction of identities in the Andes.

¹⁹ Language endangerment, language vitality, language revitalisation, language extinction, language survival are some of the common terms used in the specialised literature. See Pennycook (2004) for a critique of the 'biomorphic metaphor'.

Based on these headlines and other articles we have found in the corpus, we argue that an abundant use of biological tropes helps conceiving of languages as natural species. In these examples, Maya is presented as an organic entity which can be 'healthy' or 'polluted', which can die in forty years, which is still alive, etc. Although, as Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) classic book shows, metaphors are indispensable linguistic devices we live by, these headlines, through metonymic replacement (Richardson 2007: 68), foreground languages and background speakers. From a linguistic point of view, the last example is particularly telling: the structure of the headline is an active sentence in which the language is the agent, who is struggling to survive, consequently erasing the real agency that can only come from the speaker. This conception of languages as if they had life of their own has been critically analysed by scholars, such as Heller and Duchêne (2008: 7), who note that this kind of discourse "displaces concerns with speakers on to a concern with languages". Linking, then, the threats that biological species face with processes of language abandonment may result in the essentialisation not only of languages but also indigenous peoples (Muehlmann 2007: 15). It is worth quoting Deborah Cameron again, since she emphasises the fact that the 'biologised' discourse of language endangerment is but an ideological choice among many other possibilities. She argues that

Moral indignation about the plight of endangered languages is generated by linking the issue to ecological concerns about biodiversity and the conservation of the earth's resources (which are seen in this context as including its arrays of human cultures), rather than – as would also be possible – to political concerns about human rights, social justice and the distribution of resources among more and less powerful groups (2007: 270).

Nevertheless, despite concurring with these critiques and being wary of the caveats, borrowing metaphors from the ecological paradigm has also been very productive for sociolinguistic research. Since the seventies, but especially in the last decade, many connections have been established between the fields of sociolinguistics and ecology, and new concepts such as linguistic sustainability have emerged in the literature (Bastardas 2005). Einar Haugen's seminal article ([1972] 2001) on the ecology of language and the later development by William Mackey ([1980] 2001), have been influential for subsequent elaboration of a subfield known as ecolinguistics, which is based on the principles of interaction and diversity (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001: 2). Peter Mühlhäusler has precisely adopted an ecological framework while working with languages of the Pacific region emphasising "the view that diversity reflects adaptation to specific environmental conditions" (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001: 6). To summarise a rather complex and manifold issue, in our view, the ecological approach has contributed from different angles to expand sociolinguistic research. First, it has emphasised the need to adopt a

more holistic, interdependent and dynamic approach in the study of sociolinguistic phenomena. This new broader approach, then, which supersedes the structuralist positions that had dominated the field of linguistics in the twentieth century, has become a much more complex but, at the same time, a more powerful heuristic tool to look at the multiplicity of factors that need to be considered in situations of language contact. Second, it has highlighted the role that language can play as the main adaptive tool to the social and natural environment. Third, the connection between language and ecology has undoubtedly helped raise awareness of current trends of cultural, and particularly linguistic, homogenisation worldwide.²⁰

Closely related to the development of metaphors that conceive of languages as natural entities, the first article brings to the surface the prominent issue of linguistic purism, stating that despite its 'polluting' contact with Spanish, the language is still in good 'health'. Purism is one of the most frequent (and contentious) ideological issues present not only in the official discourses of language policy and planning but also in the discourses of the speakers themselves, who are well aware of the value attached to different linguistic varieties.

Conclusion

Using the methods and tools of Critical Discourse Analysis and drawing on the literature of language ideologies, we have analysed in this paper news articles that focus on the concerns about the future of Yucatec Maya. First, this critical analysis has focused on how the two newspapers selected discursively create and recreate a hierarchical sociopolitical framework, divided into region and nation, in which the debate about the revalorisation of Maya takes place. It is almost a truism in the specialised literature that nations, and also nation-states, are 'imagined' and that the press is a central institution involved in the process of recreating national images. As shown above, in the Yucatecan context singing the anthem in Maya is used as an essential building block to reinforce the national Mexican identity, although the goal is supposedly the promotion of the indigenous language. We have also seen how the press gives voice to either authorities or experts, who are both reported directly or indirectly in the articles, reflecting power structures of the wider society. While this analysis has centred upon the representation of the Maya language in the press and its implications in the wider sociocultural context, we are aware that this investigation needs to take into account as well processes of text production and consumption, which is an avenue for further research. For the former, it will be necessary to look in some depth at how different political ideologies are embedded in the newspaper discourses. For the latter,

²⁰ See Crystal (2004: 3) for a brief historical comparison between the development of awareness of language loss and other social movements.

it will be important to include reception theory as a part of our future research, with ethnographic work as an essential part to assess the impact that the linguistic ideologies represented in the press may have on the speakers.

The second part of the paper has dealt with the discourses of language vitality in Yucatan. The representation of the current situation of Maya often draws on biological metaphors that easily pave the way for an essentialised view of languages. Thus, the tropes used refer to languages as organic entities that can be, to a greater or lesser extent, pure or polluted. In this regard, language purism becomes a key ideological debate which critically emerges in processes of language revitalisation, although it can be found as well in other sociolinguistic contexts since value judgements on language use seem to be a ubiquitous phenomenon. Whereas a monolithic concept of identity has been put into question and deconstructed in postmodern theory, being now described as hybrid, multilayered, contingent and fluid, language, at least in language policy and planning, is still too often seen as a fixed and bounded object. In fact, similar adjectives to those used to define identity could be applied to languages. It is essential to note, however, that many sociolinguists have attempted to critically deconstruct language or, as Makoni and Pennycook (2007) put it, to 'disinvent' languages. In our corpus, for example, a reified concept of mother tongue is widespread, which I will examine in subsequent papers.

After analysing the corpus of the two newspapers, we can summarise the argument about the language debate with a few terms that often crop up in the news items. The Maya language is at the core of Yucatan's regional identity, it is part of that region's roots and epitomises a glorious past that has been handed down from the ancestors. However, speaking the indigenous language is still often associated with marginalisation, discrimination, backwardness, poverty, stigma and shame. Therefore, Maya should be valorised, preserved, dignified, rescued, respected and revitalised. Finally, going back to Cameron's key issue, namely, that language provides a 'symbolic way of addressing conflicts about race, class, culture and gender' (1995: 216), we argue that the ongoing sociolinguistic debate in Yucatan is more than just a concern about the reproduction or loss of the Maya language. It is, in a nutshell, a process of regaining self-esteem, respect and pride as a response to historical marginalisation. In the news, the emphasis is often put on the need to give value to the indigenous language, and, it is, therefore, not only a process of revitalising Maya, but also, and perhaps more importantly, about giving value metonymically to the Maya people. Whether this endeavour of revalorisation is a deciding factor for the future of the Maya language or will mainly remain a symbolic component in the process is, however, an open question.

Appendix

Mexican National Anthem

On line at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himno_Nacional_Mexicano

Music: Jaime Nunó

Lyrics: Francisco González Bocanegra

Coro:

Mexicanos, al grito de guerra
el acero aprestad y el bridón.
Y retiemble en sus centros la Tierra,
al sonoro rugir del cañón.
¡Y retiemble en sus centros la Tierra,
al sonoro rugir del cañón!

Chorus:

Mexicans, at the cry of war,
make ready the steel and the bridle,
and the earth trembles at its centers
at the resounding roar of the cannon.
and the earth trembles at its centers
at the resounding roar of the cannon!

Estrofa I:

Ciña ¡oh Patria! tus sienes de oliva
de la paz el arcángel divino,
que en el cielo tu eterno destino
por el dedo de Dios se escribió.
Mas si osare un extraño enemigo
profanar con su planta tu suelo,
piensa ¡oh Patria querida! que el cielo
un soldado en cada hijo te dio.

First Stanza:

Let gird, oh Fatherland, your brow with olive
by the divine archangel of peace,
for in heaven your eternal destiny
was written by the finger of God.
But if some enemy outlander should dare
to profane your ground with his step,
think, oh beloved Fatherland, that heaven
has given you a soldier in every son.

Estrofa V:

¡Guerra, guerra sin tregua al que intente
De la patria manchar los blasones!
¡Guerra, guerra! Los patrios pendones
En las olas de sangre empapad.
¡Guerra, guerra! En el monte, en el valle
Los cañones horrísonos truenen,
Y los ecos sonoros resuenen
Con las voces de ¡Unión! ¡Libertad!

Stanza V:

War, war without quarter to any who dare
to tarnish the coat of arms!
War, war! Let the national banners
be soaked in waves of blood.
War, war! In the mountain, in the valley,
let the cannons thunder in horrid unison
and may the sonorous echoes resound
with cries of Union! Liberty!

Estrofa VI:

Antes, patria, que inermes tus hijos
Bajo el yugo su cuello dobleguen,
Tus campiñas con sangre se rieguen,
Sobre sangre se estampe su pie.
Y tus templos, palacios y torres
Se derrumben con hórrido estruendo,
Y sus ruinas existan diciendo:
De mil héroes la patria aquí fue.

Stanza VI:

O, Motherland, ere your children, defenseless
bend their neck beneath the yoke,
may your fields be watered with blood,
may their foot be printed in blood.
And may your temples, palaces and towers
collapse with horrid clamor,
and may their ruins continue on, saying:
Of one thousand heroes, here the Motherland began.

Estrofa X:

¡Patria! ¡Patria! Tus hijos te juran
Exhalar en tus aras su aliento,
Si el clarín con su bélico acento
los convoca a lidiar con valor.
¡Para ti las guirnaldas de oliva!
¡Un recuerdo para ellos de gloria!
¡Un laurel para ti de victoria!
¡Un sepulcro para ellos de honor!

Stanza X:

Motherland! Motherland! your children swear to you
to breathe their last for your sake,
if the bugle with its warlike accent
persuades them to battle with courage.
For you, olive wreathes!
A memory for them of glory!
For you, a laurel of victory!
A tomb for them of honor!

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