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**Publication Date**

2020

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

**Language Ideology, Linguistic Differentiation, and Language Maintenance in the**

**California Mixtec Diaspora**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Linguistics

by

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September 2020

The dissertation of Anna C. Bax is approved.

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July 2020

Language Ideology, Linguistic Differentiation, and Language Maintenance in the California
Mixtec Diaspora

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by

Anna C. Bax

# Acknowledgements

*I respectfully acknowledge that this dissertation was researched and written while I was living on the unceded lands of the Chumash and Kumeyaay people.*

I am deeply grateful to so many people whose time, labor, and love have made this dissertation possible. Completing and defending this work from quarantine in the midst of a global pandemic has made me reflect on the many individuals who have helped me along the way, so many of whom I eagerly await the opportunity to see again in person.

First, none of this work would have been possible without the generosity, patience, and enthusiasm of the Mixtec residents of Ventura County who have so graciously shared their lives, thoughts, time, and energy with me over the years. I am especially grateful to Isabel, Nina, and Ita Ndivi, the focal participant-researchers in this dissertation, for their dedication to this project and their trust. Thanks also go to their friends and family who participated in this research, particularly to Nina's mother, who aided with transcription and translation of her variety of Mixtec. Thanks to the staff at the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project for their support throughout the years, especially Arcenio López, Vanessa Terán, Sonya Zapien Torres, and Elizabeth Villa. A special thanks to Griselda Reyes Basurto, for patiently and generously teaching the 2015-2016 Field Methods class about Tlahuapa Mixtec. I am also grateful to all of the Indigenous youth whom I had the privilege to teach at MICOP over the years through the SKILLS program. Your honesty in sharing your stories and your determination to support your languages have been the inspiration for all of my work on language shift and maintenance.

An enormous thank you to the members of my committee, especially to my chair and advisor Mary Bucholtz. I am the scholar I am today because of you and your big-tent, inclusive, welcoming approach to sociocultural linguistics. You have never thrown up barriers in front of me, never told me that what I wanted to study "wasn't linguistics." You have always said "yes! and—", expressed enthusiasm about every single idea I brought to you, and found ways to deepen and strengthen my intuitions and insights. Thank you for your extensive feedback on drafts over the years and your meticulous attention to detail, which has helped me polish my rough ideas into sparkling clarity. Your dedication to structural change and fighting for the next generation of scholars is an inspiration as I consider the kind of advisor I want to be in the next step of my academic career. A few years ago, I participated in a campus panel to give advice to new NSF GRFP applicants, and the moderator introduced me as "the next best thing to Mary Bucholtz." I still haven't recovered from the compliment. I am so proud and fortunate to have been your student. Thank you for everything. I am also immensely grateful to my other committee members, whose work has improved not only this project but my scholarship as a whole. Eric Campbell has been willing to go the extra mile to support my intellectual development since he came to UCSB, even before I worked with him officially. I am forever grateful to him for laying the foundation for my work with the Mixtec community in Ventura County and for working jointly with Mary and with the NSF to financially support my participation in this research. Lal Zimman has been an incredible role model for academic success; his advice has helped me add precision and sharpen my analyses with regards to both phonetics and social theory. Gabriela Pérez Báez's guidance has been an indispensable reminder of the value of principled accountability to the data; I am also grateful to her for pushing me to

contextualize this research for the broadest possible linguistic audience. My most sincere thanks to all my committee members for supporting this work even on a strict time crunch and in the middle of a pandemic.

I am extremely fortunate to have been trained in UC Santa Barbara's Department of Linguistics, where my colleagues and teachers have been far less interested in reproducing orthodoxy than in pushing the boundaries of our field in creative and thought-provoking ways. In addition to my committee, several other faculty members have supported my development as a scholar. Jack Du Bois has had a formative role in shaping the way I think about language and interaction, and I thank him for opening my eyes to the deeply dialogic nature of both everyday interaction and massive social systems. Thanks also go to Patricia Clancy for teaching me about language socialization; Lina Hou for supporting and advising my applied community work with Mixtec; Bob Kennedy for his pedagogical guidance; and Sandy Thompson for her generosity and unflagging good cheer throughout the years. In addition, the audience members at the Language, Interaction, and Social Organization (LISO) research group have consistently supplied extremely useful feedback and training in interactional analysis.

I am thankful for the companionship of my many grad student friends at UCSB both within and outside of the Linguistics Department, who are too numerous to list individually. Special thanks go to the other members of the MILPA team, including Alexia Fawcett, Gabriel Mendoza, and especially Simon Peters for never failing to answer my out-of-the-blue random text message questions about Mixtec tone. I also owe a debt of gratitude to many wonderful UCSB undergraduates: my research assistants, Fátima Andrade Martínez and Diego Verastegui; SKILLS program mentors Itzel Cruz, Steven García, and Oliver Zuniga; and the numerous MILPA research assistants who have tirelessly processed the community language survey data that I cite in this dissertation. Thanks to Miguel Morán-Lanier for sharing his ongoing work on Mixtec with me, and for a deeply inspiring conversation, close to the end of the writing process, that threw the core arguments of this dissertation into sharp focus and reinvigorated my excitement to finish writing. Thanks also to Cynthia Montaño, whom I met at the 2019 WAIL Conference, for providing important insights about the New York Mixtec diaspora. For extremely useful feedback on this work during my final quarters at UCSB, I thank Susan Derwin and the rest of the participants in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center's Dissertation Fellows seminar. Lastly, I am grateful for the patience and flexibility of my LING 131 students during the Spring 2020 quarter as we all adjusted to a less-than-ideal learning situation and for cheering me on as I finished the dissertation.

I decided to pursue a career as a linguist in Dr. Michael Getty's Introduction to Linguistics class at Washington University in St. Louis over a decade ago. I am so grateful

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# Abstract

Language ideology, linguistic differentiation, and language maintenance in the

California Mixtec diaspora

by

Anna Bax

This dissertation focuses on a setting that is characterized by a markedly high level of linguistic diversity among related languages: a relatively recently settled immigrant community in Ventura County, California, in which over three dozen mutually intelligible varieties of Mixtec (Otomanguean) are in regular contact with one another, as well as with Spanish, English, and other Indigenous Mesoamerican languages. Mixtecs are an Indigenous group whose traditional homelands are located in what are now the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla. *Mixtec* is also the name of the diverse group of linguistic varieties spoken by the Mixtec people. In this dissertation, I explore the language ideologies and linguistic differentiation practices that Mixtec speakers use to navigate the sea of linguistic diversity they encounter in the diaspora. In particular, I explore the ways that speakers mobilize their existing knowledge of the Mixtec linguistic landscape to talk about, name, and account for variation among Mixtec varieties spoken in Ventura County, via the labels *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*. Although these are geographical classifications and not linguistic ones (referring to 'Highlands Mixtec' and 'Lowlands Mixtec', respectively), they have been adopted by both linguists and speakers as classificatory labels. Many Mixtecs in Ventura County self-identify as speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*, but this is a broad umbrella term that comprises numerous distinct village varieties. The vast majority of

Mixtec varieties spoken in Ventura County come from the Mixteca Baja region of Mexico, while Mixteca Alta varieties are exceedingly rare in this community. Nevertheless, this dissertation demonstrates that for self-identified speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*, the label *Mixteco Alto* has become ideologized as a way to refer any variety which is perceived as distinctly different from their own, regardless of whether that variety's geographic origin lies in the Mixteca Alta region.

This dissertation presents three interlinked analyses that trace the trajectory of this metalinguistic naming practice throughout the Ventura County Mixtec community. The first analysis excavates the local meaning of this practice and its ideological implications, the second explores what the practice reveals about understandings of sociolinguistic variation and emergent sociolinguistic variables in the diaspora community, and the third analyzes the effects of these labels on one young Mixtec heritage speaker and his relationship to the Mixtec language, ultimately demonstrating a surprising link between the *Mixteco Alto* label and language shift away from Mixtec. By following the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* metalinguistic labels across contexts, I demonstrate that it is possible to observe the real-time construction of meaning in this situation of contact between related varieties of Mixtec and lay out several avenues for future research on this subject.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | first person |
| 2 | second person |
| 3 | third person |
| DEM | demonstrative |
| DM | discourse marker |
| F | feminine |
| INAN | noun class of inanimates |
| INCL | inclusive |
| INTERJ | interjection |
| IPFV | imperfective |
| NEG | negation |
| PFV | perfective |
| PL | plural |
| POT | potential |
| SG | singular |
| SPEC | specifier |
| WD | noun class of wood, etc. |
| ZO | noun class of animals |

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

*"Everyone knows that language is variable." (Edward Sapir, 1921: 147)*

## 1.1 Overview and research goals

Everyone may know that language is variable, as Sapir states in the epigraph above, but that doesn't stop anyone from wanting to talk about it. While linguistic diversity is a widely acknowledged fact in many communities, it is rarely, if ever, treated as a neutral or unremarkable topic. Much of human interaction consists in deploying and interpreting variation to (re)produce, construct, and transform the sociocultural landscape (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). We encounter linguistic variation and infer social contrast (Silverstein 2003); we project ideological distinctions onto variable linguistic forms (Irvine and Gal 2000). Many people find talking about these linguistic differences to be an endlessly fascinating pastime (Niedzielski and Preston 2000), not least because it is a primary means through which we come to understand the social worlds in which we live.

This dissertation focuses on a setting that is characterized by a markedly high level of linguistic diversity among related languages: a relatively recently settled immigrant community in Ventura County, California, which is north of Los Angeles, in which over three dozen mutually intelligible varieties of Mixtec (Otomanguean) are in regular contact with one another, as well as with Spanish and English. Mixtecs are an Indigenous group whose traditional homelands are located in what are now the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla. *Mixtec* is also the name of the diverse group of linguistic varieties spoken by the Mixtec people, which belong to the Otomanguean language family (Campbell 2017a, 2017b; Kaufman 2006). California is home to a large, established

community of Mixtec people, numbering in the tens of thousands, who have mostly migrated to pursue agricultural work (Fox 2013; Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010); approximately 20,000 live in Ventura County (Kresge 2007: 9). In this dissertation, I explore the language ideologies and linguistic differentiation practices that Mixtec speakers use to navigate the sea of linguistic diversity they encounter in the diaspora. In particular, I explore the ways that speakers mobilize their existing knowledge of the Mixtec linguistic landscape to talk about, name, and account for the "exuberant" linguistic variation (Skilton 2017: 97) in Ventura County, via the labels *Mixteco Alto* (literally 'High Mixtec') and *Mixteco Bajo* (literally 'Low Mixtec').

The conceptual schemas through which language users perceive and classify linguistic diversity are neither universal nor fixed. The categorization of linguistic difference is an active, live process of meaning-making, which is fundamentally shaped by local language ideologies (Woolard, Schieffelin, and Kroskrity 1998). As Law (2014) argues, this also holds true for the definition of *language* itself:

> The obstacles to precisely defining a 'language' are both cognitive and social. In other words, both in terms of the mental system of signs within an individual mind, and in terms of the social distribution of language(s), dividing lines are often very difficult to place clearly. We do place these lines, however, and the way that we place them can profoundly affect how language is realized and how it changes in situations of language contact. Because of this, understanding how languages in contact are defined, socially and cognitively, within a community is arguably an essential preliminary to understanding a given situation of language contact, not, as it is often treated, an *a priori* given. This is perhaps particularly true in situations of contact between related languages … where pervasive and systematic similarities between languages are an additional resource for constructing and revising those boundaries. (2014: 159)

To understand the contact situation of diasporic Mixtec, it is necessary to investigate the processes that speakers use to place dividing lines between locally spoken varieties. In addition to being social and cognitive, as Law posits, "people's conceptualizations about the makeup of a language, such as types of varieties and connections to salient social entities"

are always ideological (Migge and Léglise 2013: 116). Language ideologies have been defined as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979: 193). This includes beliefs about the divisions between perceived linguistic categories as well. However, no community is ideologically homogeneous, especially not one which is characterized by a high level of dialectal diversity. Therefore, language ideologies are always "multiple," shaped by intersecting axes of social identity (Kroskrity 2010: 197).

Despite the central role that ideologies play in contact between related languages, studies of dialect contact—that is, interaction between speakers of mutually intelligible varieties— often focus not on language ideology but on structural linguistic changes like koineization and dialect leveling (Ferguson 1959; Kerswill and Trudgill 2005; Kerswill and Williams 2000; Trudgill et al. 2000). Many of these studies treat languages in longer-term contact, where dialect leveling has occurred over the span of multiple generations. Less is known, however, about relatively new contact situations, in which not enough time has elapsed for a uniform koiné to emerge. Furthermore, while it is widely accepted that structural linguistic change can be influenced by ideological factors (e.g., Barrett 2008; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 1979, 1985), few studies have attempted to describe the language-ideological landscape of contact between mutually intelligible varieties of the "same" language, particularly in newer contact situations. This dissertation examines the relatively recent phenomenon of contact between multiple varieties of California Mixtec through an ideological lens, with a particular focus on the language-naming practices used by speakers to make sense of the polydialectal contact setting in which they live.

Contrary to popular perception, named languages are not natural entities with objectively observable boundaries (Makoni and Pennycook 2005). The separation of ways of speaking or signing into discrete categories is an inherently ideological process, sometimes referred to as "linguistic differentiation" (Gal and Irvine 2019; Irvine and Gal 2000). To draw a line around a certain set of linguistic patterns and call it a distinct language is fundamentally contrastive: other forms and patterns will necessarily remain outside the boundaries.

Language names can create fictions of both internal homogeneity and external difference. As such, they are a key mechanism of linguistic differentiation. A community's language-naming practices can reveal power relationships, processes of inclusion and exclusion, allyship and enemy-making, societal mythmaking and the construction of shared histories. Still, because language names are "ideologically generated," they "[do] not refer to any objectively constituted linguistic reality" so much as they help to build collective social realities (Piller 2015: 2).

The fact that a particular speech code has been delineated with a name signals that it has reached some degree of enregisterment (Agha 1999, 2005), meaning that it circulates within a community as a discrete cultural object. Named linguistic entities are often associated with particular social and moral values or ideologized speaker types—or, as this chapter illustrates, socially meaningful places. Localization (Auer 2013), or the construction of ideological links between language and place, is often brought about via naming as a boundary-making process. This dissertation analyzes place-linked language names within the Mixtec diaspora and explores the degree to which such names have been enregistered as cultural objects in this community.

Despite the salience of names as ideological flashpoints, Léglise and Migge argue that the ideological and discursive processes behind naming conventions are undertheorized: they write that "researchers … generally have not considered in detail how these names are employed in discourse by the various social actors in the local linguistic market" (2006: 315). This dissertation examines the discursive uses of language names in the diasporic Mixtec community, specifically how they are used to make sense of linguistic differences between self and other. In particular, I document a metalinguistic labeling practice that Ventura County Mixtecs employ to "locate, interpret, and rationalize sociolinguistic complexity" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 36) in the diaspora community, which centers around the ideologized spatial terms *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*. Among speakers of varieties from the Mixteca Baja region, the label *Mixteco Alto* has come to be used as a generic designation of linguistic difference from one's own variety—even when applied to varieties which are also from the Mixteca Baja.

The three interlinked analyses presented here trace the trajectory of this metalinguistic naming practice throughout different contexts of use in the Ventura County Mixtec community. Chapter 3 excavates the local meaning of this practice and its ideological implications, Chapter 4 explores what the practice reveals about understandings of sociolinguistic variation in the diaspora community, and Chapter 5 analyzes the effects of these labels on one young Mixtec heritage speaker and his relationship to the Mixtec language. By following the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* labels across contexts in this way, it is possible to observe the real-time construction of meaning in this situation of contact between related varieties of Mixtec.

The remainder of the introduction provides background about Indigenous Mexican languages and Indigenous Mexican migration to the United States, then discusses the social and economic processes which have created the Mixtec diaspora in particular. I also lay out relevant information about language shift in diasporic Mixtec before giving an overview of the dissertation as a whole.

## 1.2 Mixtec background

### 1.2.1 Indigenous languages of Mexico

The land that is today called Mexico is home to a high degree of linguistic diversity. The Mexican Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas ('National Institute of Indigenous Languages', or INALI) recognizes 63 Indigenous languages, although the true count is far higher, since many languages have a large number of non-mutually intelligible varieties. These languages fall into several major families, including Mayan, Mixe-Zoquean, Otomanguean, Totonacan, and Uto-Aztecan, as well as numerous isolates.

Indigenous languages in Mexico have been in contact with Spanish to varying degrees since the Spanish conquest in the early 16th century. While some Spaniards saw fit to learn and study Indigenous languages, in particular for the purposes of colonial administration and religious conversion (Riegelhaupt, Carrasco, and Brandt 2003), there was nonetheless a strict racial hierarchy in New Spain that marked Indigenous people, and their languages, as inferior (Josserand, Jansen, and Romero 1984: 161-162). Still today, discriminatory colonial attitudes and stereotypes about Indigenous people are common. For instance, speaking Indigenous languages is frequently seen as lower-class, uneducated, and even uncivilized (Hill and Hill 1986; Messing 2007). At the same time, symbols of Indigeneity are fetishized

as emblematic of "authentic" Mexican identity in ways that exclude Indigenous people themselves (e.g., Vega 2020). There are also popular media depictions which portray Indigenous people with a patronizing fondness, such as the extremely popular comic film character La India María ('María the Indian') (Rohrer 2017).

Indigenous groups have long been oppressed by Mexican state policies of mestizaje ('mixing'), which has historically encouraged an abandonment of Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices in favor of a homogenizing Spanish-language norm (Saldívar 2008, 2011), in an assimilatory process known as castellanización ('Castilianization' or 'Hispanicization') (Hamel 2008). Today, however, the Mexican government equates speaking an Indigenous language with Indigenous identity itself. In the decennial census, for instance, an individual with fully Indigenous ancestry will not be classified by the government as Indigenous unless they speak an Indigenous language (Bonfil Batalla 1972; Yoshioka 2010). This narrow view of Indigenous identity represents a process of erasure through which "Indigenous Mexicans are discursively relegated to the past and imagined to have been completely assimilated into the mestizo majority" (Martínez and Mesinas 2019: 139).

Despite these attempts at cultural genocide, many Indigenous groups have continued to maintain their unique linguistic and cultural traditions. According to the Mexican government's Instituto Nacional de la Estadística y Geografía ('National Institute of Statistics and Geography'), 6.6% of the Mexican population over the age of five spoke an Indigenous language in 2015, a total of approximately 8 million people (INEGI 2015). However, when this calculation is expanded to include all individuals living in homes in which Indigenous languages are spoken, 13% of the Mexican population may be

Indigenous, or almost 16 million people (Fox 2013: 9). The largest number of these individuals live in the state of Oaxaca, which is home to approximately 1.17 million Indigenous-language speakers, although significant populations also live in several other states, such as Chiapas, Veracruz, Puebla, and Guerrero (INEGI 2010a).

**1.2.2 The Mixtec language complex**

After Nahuatl and Yucatec Maya, Mixtec is the third most commonly spoken group of Indigenous languages in Mexico (INEGI 2010a). In the most recent census, there were close to half a million speakers of Mixtec in Mexico (INEGI 2010b), 16.6% of whom were monolingual (INEGI 2015).

Mixtec languages belong to the Otomanguean family (Campbell 2017a, 2017b; Kaufman 2006). Most Otomanguean languages, Mixtec included, fall within the well-established Mesoamerican linguistic area, which means that they share similarities with language families such as Aztecan, Mixe-Zoquean, Mayan, Totonacan, and isolates like Purépecha and Huave (Campbell, Kaufman, and Smith-Stark 1986). Within Otomanguean, Mixtec is classified in the Amuzgo-Mixtecan branch: it is most closely related to Cuicatec and Triqui, followed by Amuzgo, and is more distantly related to Zapotec, Otomí, Mazahua, and several others.

The Mixtec languages are originally from the present-day southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla, a region known as *la Mixteca*. In Figure 1.1 below, which shows the distribution of the Otomanguean languages within the modern-day Mexican states, Mixtec languages are represented in the area labeled with the number 10. The Mixteca is primarily located within western Oaxaca (the southernmost state, outlined in

white), and also extends into eastern Guerrero (the westernmost state, which is along the Pacific coast), and southern Puebla.
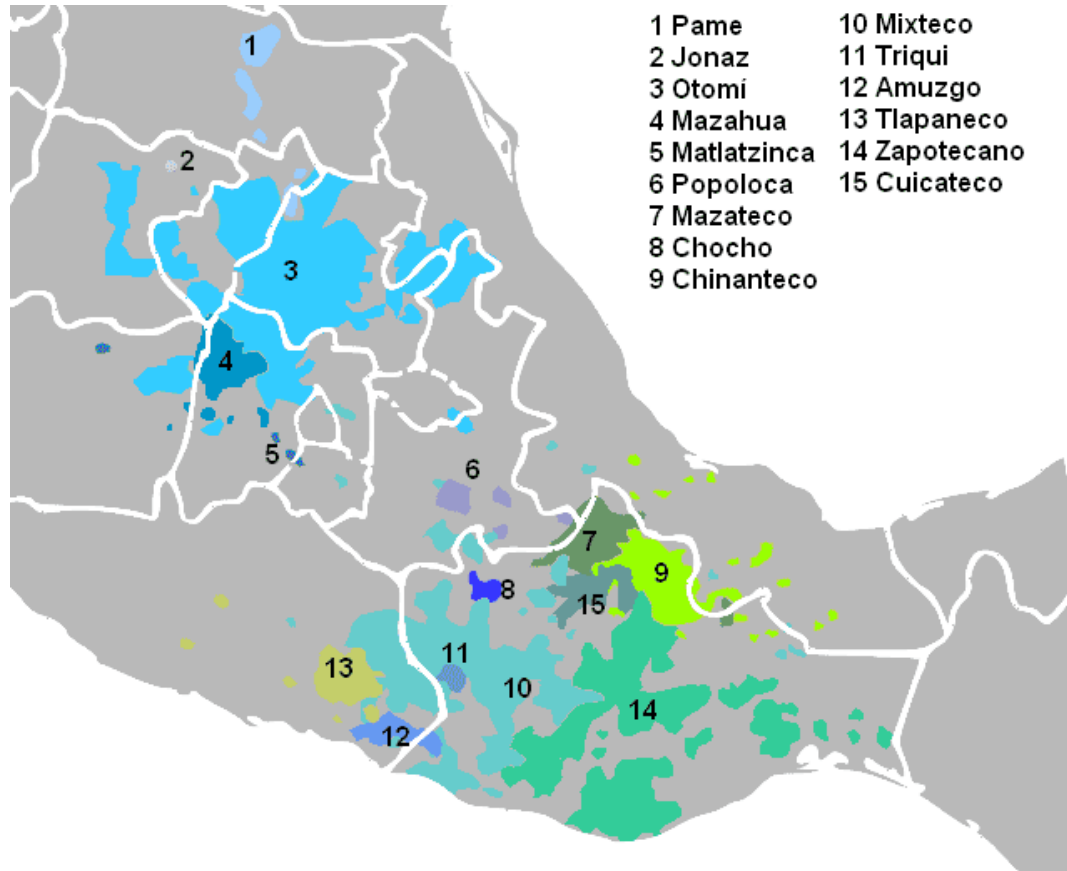


*Figure 1.1: Map of Otomanguean languages within Mexico. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Otomanguean_Languages.png*

*Mixtec* is itself a broad umbrella label which belies the true linguistic diversity of the Mixteca region. Not all languages which are called *Mixtec* are mutually intelligible; as DiCanio, Benn, and Garcia write, "there are a large number of languages, each of which is labelled 'Mixtec', but many of which are as distinct as modern-day Italian and Portuguese" (2018: 8). However, it is difficult to quantify precisely how many Mixtec languages exist. For this reason, I refer to Mixtec as a "language complex" throughout this dissertation (Kaufman 1990: 70). As Pérez Báez and Kaufman state regarding Zapotec, this term

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"provides an alternative to 'language' and 'language family' that allows reference to both the structural diversity within Zapotec languages and the challenge that such diversity represents for the identification of discrete Zapotec languages" (2016: 217); the same also holds true for Mixtec. It is commonly asserted that each of the hundreds of villages in the Mixteca region has its own unique variety (e.g., Caballero 2009: 260), many of which are not mutually intelligible. A detailed discussion of linguistic diversity in the Mixtec language complex can be found in Chapter 3.

The Mixteca is frequently divided into three sub-regions that are named for local geographical features: the Mixteca Alta (literally 'High Mixteca') and Mixteca Baja ('Low Mixteca'), located respectively in the highlands and the lower-elevation foothills, as well as the Mixteca de la Costa ('Coastal Mixteca'). These three names are also used to label broad dialect categories by linguists and speakers alike—*Mixteco Alto*, *Mixteco Bajo*, and *Mixteco de la Costa*—although they are highly imprecise from the standpoint of genetic classification (Campbell 2017b). Nonetheless, most attempts at internal classifications of Mixtec use a modified version of this terminology to some degree. For example, Josserand (1983) divides Mixtec into twelve subgroups, which have names like "Southern Baja" and "Northeastern Alta." Figure 2 below shows one version of a classification of Mixtec languages, based on the listing in Glottolog, which is itself an adaptation of Josserand (1983).
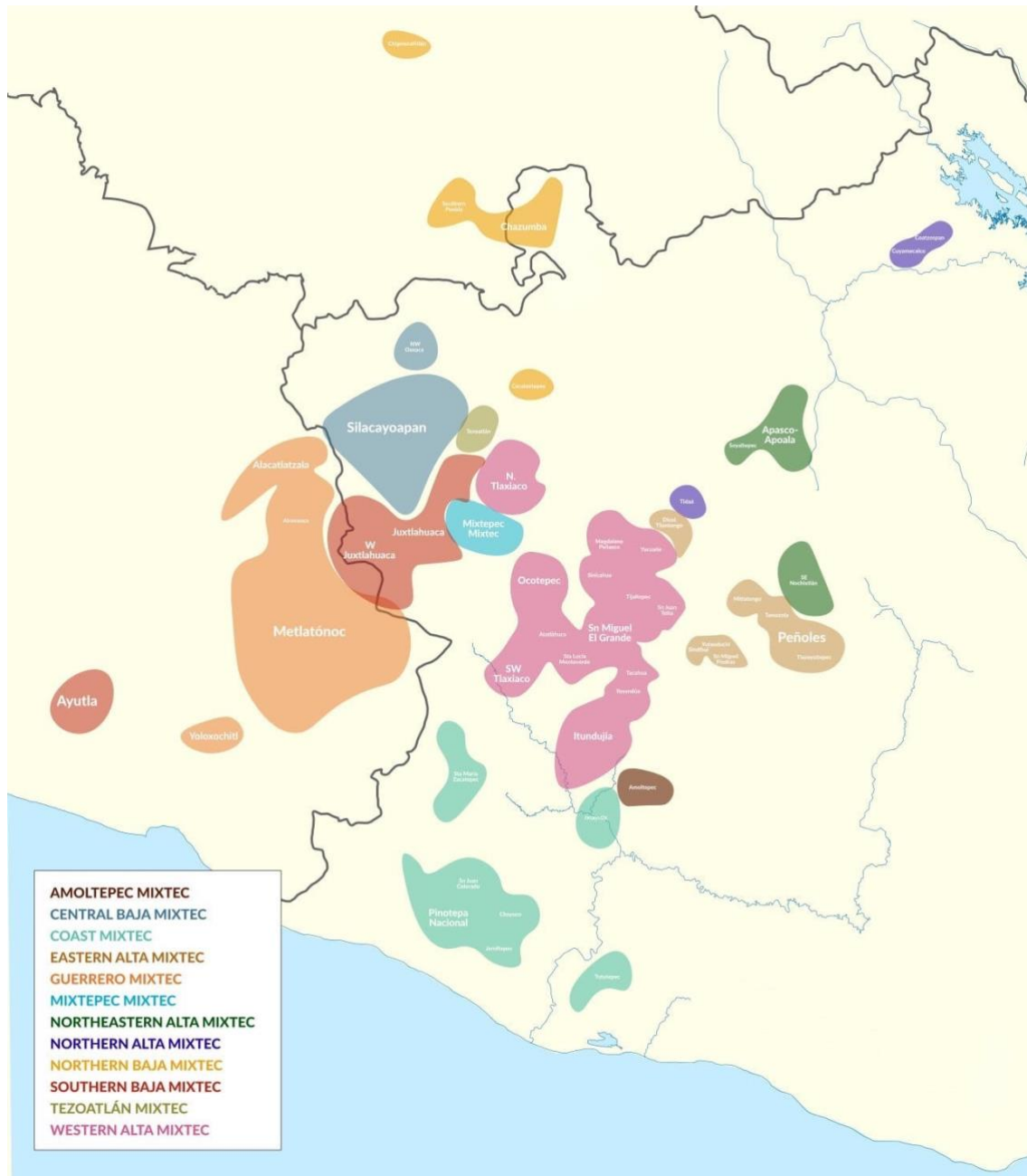
*Figure 1.2: Distribution of Mixtec languages within the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla (distribution from Ethnologue; classification of Mixtec languages from Glottolog). Wikimedia Commons user Noahedits, CC BY-SA 4.0.*
*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixtec_language#/media/File:Detailed_Mixtec_map.svg*

Because many Mixtec languages remain undocumented, linguists' current understanding of the internal diversification and classification of Mixtec languages is partial at best. Chapter 3 returns to the subject of Mixtec subgroups in more detail.

### 1.2.3 The Indigenous Mexican diaspora in the United States

Recent decades have seen a sizeable shift in the demographic patterns of Mexican migration to the United States, with a large increase in migrants from Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas, the Mexican states with some of the largest numbers of Indigenous residents (Marcelli and Cornelius 2001). The precise numbers are difficult to ascertain, in large part because of the challenges of gathering accurate demographic data on migrant populations. However, a rough estimate can be obtained by looking at the US Census counts for people who checked both the "Hispanic/Latino" and "American Indian" boxes (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004). Huizar Murillo and Cerda (2004) estimated that a minimum of 150,000 "Hispanic American Indians" lived in California as of the 2000 Census. In the 2010 Census, this estimate rose to at least 200,000 (Fox 2013; Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010).

In both California and the United States as a whole, many recent Indigenous migrants have come from the state of Oaxaca. Oaxacan groups in the US are primarily Mixtecs and Zapotecs (López and Runsten 2004; Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010), but Triquis, Chinantecs, Chatinos, Mixes, and Zoques have established migration pathways as well (López and Runsten 2004). So, too, have Indigenous groups from other regions of Mexico and Mesoamerica, such as speakers of Nahuatl and Mayan languages (LeBaron 2012; Peñalosa 1986; Pérez 2009; Gladwin 2004). In California, however, Oaxacans are a

majority. This migration began in the 1960s, increased in the 1970s, (López and Runsten 2004), and grew even more in the 1980s (Runsten and Kearney 1994).

Indigenous Mexican migrants generally have different life circumstances, migration patterns, cultural identities, and linguistic repertoires than their mestizo (non-Indigenous-identified) compatriots. On average, Indigenous migrants face greater barriers to success than do mestizos, including a higher poverty rate, Indigenous monolingualism or a lower degree of comfort with Spanish, and lower levels of literacy (Zabin et al. 1993). However, American bureaucracies tend to ignore these particularities, both in governmental settings (Fox 2006) and educational ones (Campbell-Montalvo 2020). Even most sociolinguistic and linguistic-anthropological studies of Latinx diaspora communities in the US have tended to overlook the Indigenous immigrant population (e.g., Márquez Reiter and Martín Rojo 2014; Mendoza-Denton 1999).

Fortunately, a small but vibrant new body of work has begun to develop that considers the intersections and transformations undergone by Indigenous Mexican immigrants in the US, including work by a generation of Indigenous immigrant scholars (e.g., Blackwell, Lopez, and Urrieta 2017; Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004a; Martínez and Mesinas 2019; Mesinas and Pérez 2016; Nicolás 2012). Much of this research has centered around Indigenous Mexican parents and students in the context of schooling (Barillas Chón 2010, 2019; Campbell-Montalvo 2020; López and Irizarry 2019; Machado-Casas 2009, 2012; Martínez 2017, 2018; Morales 2016; Pérez 2009; Pérez, Vasquez, and Buriel 2016; Pérez Báez 2012; Pick, Wolfram, and López 2011; Ruiz and Barajas 2012; Urrieta, Mesinas, and Martínez 2019; Vásquez 2012, 2019; Velasco 2010, 2014). Some recent scholarship has also considered Indigenous Latinx perspectives from outside of Mexico (Saldaña-Portillo 2016,

2017). However, while almost all of this work takes language into account to some degree, focused sociolinguistic investigations of Indigenous immigrant communities are still rare, a gap which this dissertation begins to fill.

**1.2.4 The Mixtec diaspora in the United States**

While moving to the United States has become markedly more common for Mixtecs in the last half-century, Mixtec migration itself is not a new phenomenon. According to de la Peña (1950), initial migration out of the Mixteca was spurred by factors like severe soil erosion, which itself has its roots in colonization: the mountain-side terraces used in traditional Mixtec farming were ravaged by the Spanish introduction of the ox-drawn plow and of hoofed animals (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 11). This erosion has worsened in the last half-century due to the introduction of chemical fertilizers, which have further weakened agricultural productivity and created food scarcity. In addition, the Mexican government withdrew federal subsidies for corn producers around the same time that the North American Free Trade Agreement flooded the Mexican markets with cheap corn, meaning that small Mixtec farmers could no longer reliably earn a living off their land (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 12-13). Mixtec migration has therefore been spurred by economic necessity.

Mixtecs from many towns frequently migrate within Mexico for work, particularly to the states of Baja California, Sinaloa, and Veracruz (Rubio and Millán 2000; Stephen 2007: 5), as well as large urban centers like Mexico City (Cohen 2004: 63; Hirabayashi 1983; Orellana 1973), Guadalajara (Cornelius and Bustamante 1989), and regional centers such as Oaxaca City (Monto 1994). In particular, Mixtecs frequently migrate in pursuit of

agricultural labor. These migrations began in the 1930s and 1940s, first flowing toward the sugarcane fields of Veracruz, then reorienting to the states of Sinaloa and Morelos in the 1960s and 1970s, and finally to Baja California in the 1980s (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 14-15). This process has resulted in "daughter" Mixtec communities throughout the country (López and Runsten 1994).

Mexico-internal migration often precedes a move to the United States (Stephen 2007), as it did for some of the participants in this dissertation. In the US, Mixtec migrants primarily settle in California, followed by Oregon, Washington, Florida, and New York City. There are also smaller groups of Mixtecs living in Idaho, North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, Illinois, and Pennsylvania (Runsten and Kearney 1994). Early Mixtec migration was circular, meaning that people regularly traveled back and forth between their hometowns and their migration destinations to follow the harvest (Runsten and Kearney 1994). Some circular migration has continued into the 21$_{st}$ century, although restrictive immigration policies have made it less frequent. However, more permanent Mixtec communities in the US began to be established in the 1970s and 1980s (López and Runsten 2004) and have continued to grow into the 2000s. As a result, multiple generations of Mixtecs now live in California: first-generation immigrants were born in Mexico and moved to the US after the age of twelve, members of the 1.5 generation were born in Mexico but migrated before they were twelve, and second-generation immigrants were born in the US to Mexican-born parents (Portes and Rumbaut 2006 [1990]). However, these generations do not correspond neatly to the amount of time someone has been in the United States: for instance, new first-generation migrants continue to arrive in California, where they live alongside members of the first generation who have been in the US for over 40 years.

Based on a survey of farmworkers conducted in 1991, Runsten and Kearney (1994) estimated that there were between 20,000 and 40,000 Mixtecs living in California, a number which has at least tripled since that time. In addition, their numbers only included Mixtecs from Oaxaca and are therefore undercounted, since there are also many Guerrero Mixtecs in California. Many community members and scholars refer to the transnational community of Indigenous migrants in California as "Oaxacalifornia," a name coined by Michael Kearney (1995). However, I refrain from using this term in this dissertation because it erases (Irvine and Gal 2000) the numerous Mixtecs in Ventura County who are from the state of Guerrero.

Indigenous Oaxacan immigrants tend to follow established migration networks, often moving to the same towns and cities in California as others from their village (Runsten and Kearney 1994). Almost half of the Indigenous farmworkers in the state live on the Central Coast, which includes the counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito, and another 25% live in Fresno and Madera Counties (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). Large numbers of Mixtecs also live in northern San Diego County, Bakersfield, and Santa Rosa, as well as in smaller agricultural areas throughout the state. In the Central Coast region, which is where the present research was conducted, many Mixtecs live in the cities of Oxnard, Santa Maria, Salinas, Santa Cruz, and Watsonville (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010).

As is true for other Indigenous groups, Mixtecs face significant stigma and discrimination in both Mexico and the US (Stephen 2007: 210-230). They are subjected to anti-Indigenous prejudice from non-Indigenous-identified Mexicans as well as anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-Mexican racism from the broader American society (Kresge 2007: 3; López and Runsten 2004; Marie Uliasz 2018: 68; Pérez, Vasquez, and Buriel 2016;

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Zabin et al. 1993; cf. Holmes 2007, 2013). Many Mixtec people in California perform backbreaking agricultural labor, especially in the strawberry fields. However, despite frequently working 12-hour days, there is a 90% poverty rate for Indigenous Mexican immigrants (Pérez, Vásquez, and Buriel 2016). Mixtecs are poorer than mestizo migrants; they typically hold the worst-paying agricultural jobs (as do other Indigenous Oaxacans, such as Triquis; Holmes 2007, 2013). Because many migrants are monolingual or Mixtec-dominant, especially those from more rural areas, they often face prejudice at work for not speaking Spanish (López and Runsten 2004; Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). They are frequently the targets of exploitation by unscrupulous employers, including wage theft and labor law violations, because they lack the resources to defend themselves in Spanish (Runsten and Kearney 1994). The intersection of gender can further compound these experiences of oppression (Martínez and Mesinas 2019). Because of patriarchal structures which limit women's access to formal education, Indigenous Oaxacan women are more likely to be monolingual speakers of their heritage languages when they migrate to the US (Blackwell 2017), further restricting their access to jobs that require Spanish and/or English and making them vulnerable to linguistic discrimination at work (Holmes 2013). Furthermore, anti-Mixtec discrimination is not solely targeted at monolinguals, nor is it exclusively found in the agricultural fields. Several studies have documented the negative remarks and bullying that young Oaxacan migrants endure at school (Barillas Chón 2010; Gálvez-Hard 2006; Hernández Morales 2012; Kovats 2010; Ruiz and Barajas 2012), including anti-Indigenous slurs which mock physical features that are stereotypically indexical of Indigeneity, such as shorter stature and darker skin (Stephen 2007: 210).

Fox (2006: 47) has argued that these experiences have led to the birth of new collective identities in the Indigenous Mexican diaspora. He writes that while Indigenous community identity in Mexico tends to center on individual Mixtec-speaking villages, shared oppression in diaspora has fostered a "scaling up" to *Mixtec* as a broader ethnic and political category. Nonetheless, many Mixtecs in the United States do maintain strong ties to their hometown networks. In particular, there is a local governance system in the Mixteca, called "usos y costumbres" ('customs and traditions'), under which members of a hometown community are assigned "cargos" ('posts' or 'duties') that they must fulfill in order to maintain active membership and in some cases land ownership (Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). Cargos can create large financial and political obligations. For example, they may include taking on responsibility for funding the town's annual patron saint festival or sitting on committees for land protection and school funding. Even in diaspora, Mixtecs are still held accountable for these cargos as a part of their "tequio," or responsibility to their community. Representatives of some hometown networks even meet in the United States in order to make governance decisions for their hometown, transforming the usos y costumbres tradition into a newly binational community governance system (Velasco Ortiz 2005). In addition to being politically involved through hometown networks, diasporic Mixtecs and Zapotecs in California have also created a number of binational organizations to build infrastructure to support Indigenous migrants and to combat oppression (Blackwell 2017; Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004b), including some organizations that are primarily youth-led (ECO 2013).

The linguistic repertoire of the California Mixtec community is highly complex. As in Mexico, many Mixtecs in California are monolingual Mixtec speakers. Some of them learn

Spanish when they arrive in the US by interacting with Mexican Americans, non-Indigenous Mexicans, and Central Americans. Some community members are bilingual Mixtec-Spanish speakers who acquired both languages as children. Many Mixtecs also become trilingual, learning English when they arrive in the US, especially youth who enter the school system. Mixtec children born in the US or those who immigrate at a young age generally grow up speaking some combination of these three languages. Due to anti-Indigenous discrimination, however, many youth have shifted away from speaking Mixtec in favor of Spanish and English, which I discuss further in the next section. Depending on location, speakers of Mixtec may also be in contact with other Indigenous Mexican languages, such as Zapotec and Mayan, as well as other immigrant languages like Tagalog or Vietnamese.

Moreover, a high level of linguistic diversity is found within California Mixtec itself. As previously mentioned, each village in the Mixtec language complex is said to have its own unique variety. There are hundreds of villages in the Mixteca region, approximately 170 of which were represented in California in 1991 (Runsten and Kearney 1994). A sampling of this dialectal diversity is also found in the Ventura County diaspora community. During my research I personally interacted with speakers of over a dozen varieties of Mixtec; preliminary survey data indicate that over two dozen more varieties are present in the county as well (Bax et al. in prep.). Because representatives of so many distinct villages are now co-located and interact regularly with one another, the Mixtec varieties spoken in Ventura County are in a situation of intense, regular language contact. To be sure, speakers of distinct Mixtec varieties have always interacted with one another in the Mixteca region, whether through marriage to a resident of another village or via economic relationships that take place in urban centers and regional markets (Josserand 1983). In California, however,

speakers of a large number of different varieties spend multiple hours every day working side-by-side in the agricultural fields. This high degree of frequent, regularly occurring contact between related varieties is fertile ground for understanding the ideological dynamics of linguistic differentiation.

It is possible that similar intervarietal contact is also taking place in internal migration destinations like Mexico City (Hirabayashi 1983; Orellana 1973) and the states of Baja California, Sinaloa, and Veracruz (Stephen 2007: 5), as well as in other Mixtec population centers in the US, such as California's Central Valley, Oregon, and Washington (Stephen 2007). To my knowledge, however, no researcher has investigated the phenomenon of sustained contact between multiple mutually intelligible varieties of Mixtec. Linguists' treatment of Mixtec variation has primarily been dialectological, often with a focus on internal diversification and historical reconstruction (e.g., Josserand 1983). Likely due to the scant nature of basic documentation of many Mixtec dialects, linguists' understanding of contact between related varieties is extremely limited. Furthermore, no analysis to date has examined how speakers themselves conceive of dialectal contact and variation within the Mixtec language complex.

Because speakers of Mixtec encounter a multitude of distinct languages and varieties in California, the diaspora can be characterized as a "superdiverse" linguistic contact situation (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Vertovec 2007). Superdiversity is "a diversification of diversity," caused by the fact that "[p]eople from more places now migrate to more places, causing unprecedented forms of social and cultural diversity especially in the large urban centers of the world" (Blommaert 2013: 193). Despite the large number of Mixtecs in California, however, the ideological, interactional, and semiotic dynamics of this

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multilingual linguistic ecology have not been examined in depth. This dissertation fills this gap by examining the ideological processes that emerge from and shape this complex language contact situation, as well as how such ideologies affect large-scale sociolinguistic dynamics of linguistic maintenance or shift.

### 1.2.5 Language shift

Language shift is a phenomenon in which a community ceases to use one language in favor of another, which is typically more socially and/or economically powerful than their own. Shift is especially common in (post)-colonial societies and among Indigenous people, immigrants, and other socially marginalized groups. This topic has a long trajectory among linguistic anthropologists and scholars of language revitalization and reclamation (e.g., Dorian 1981, 1989; Edwards 1992; Fishman 1991, 2001; Gal 1979; Grenoble and Whaley 1998; Hill 1993; Hill and Hill 1980, 1986).

Language shift is a fundamentally sociopolitical phenomenon whose likelihood cannot be predicted based on purely linguistic factors (Dobrin and Sicoli 2018a, 2018b). The propagation or suppression of Indigenous languages like Mixtec does not occur in a vacuum: as Davis puts it, "[b]orrowing conceptually from Newton's first law of motion, we can posit that languages tend to remain in motion – being transmitted to subsequent generations – unless an external force is applied to them" (2017: 41). The forces that underlie language shift tend to be "coercive," arising as a result of "the uneven distribution of resources and respect that have emerged in the last half millennium of global colonialism" (Roche 2019: 1). In other words, language shift is in many cases not an accident, but part of a larger strategy of social and economic domination. For this reason, a number of Indigenous

scholars have critiqued terms such as *language endangerment* for the way that they elide

colonial agency and frame these phenomena as seemingly natural processes (Davis 2017).

To recenter the agentive role of structures of power in processes of shift and endangerment,

Taff and colleagues have proposed the term *language oppression*, which they define as

"[t]he enforcement of language loss by physical, mental, social and spiritual coercion" (Taff

et al. 2018: 863; see also Roche 2020). This enforcement can also be enacted through

economic and ideological means, as I discuss below for the case of Mixtec.

A major threat to the long-term stability of a language arises when it is no longer

actively acquired by children (Krauss 1992). A community's linguistic vitality can therefore

be assessed by studying the language practices of children and youth, as the next generation

of possible speakers (Meek 2019). Because of their critical role, there is a large body of

literature on young people and language shift, including work with Indigenous youth

throughout North America (Bielenberg 2002; Lee 2007, 2009; McCarty, Romero-Little, and

Zepeda 2006; Meek 2007; Nicholas 2009; Tulloch 2004; Wilson and Kamanā 2009; Wyman

2012) and Central America (Bonner 2001; Messing 2007, 2009; Muehlmann 2008). Youth

have also shown to be pivotal for both experiencing and preventing language shift in

contexts of diaspora and migration (e.g., Canagarajah 2008, 2013; Pérez Báez 2013, 2014;

Wyman 2013). Much of this work involves identifying the causes of shift and its

consequences for youth identity. One major finding that holds true across many contexts is

that pressures toward shift are exerted by peers, especially those who are non-Indigenous

and/or those whose primary language is the locally dominant one (McCarty and Wyman

2009). Such pressures may be exerted overtly through bullying and teasing, or they may be

conveyed through indexical links between particular speech practices and desired or

stigmatized local social categories. For example, Wyman (2013) found that when Yup'ik-speaking youth migrated to English-speaking towns in Alaska, they often faced bullying and peer scorn that caused them to stop wanting to speak Yup'ik. However, when children moved back to villages where Yup'ik was the language of everyday life, these attitudes could be reversed, albeit slowly, with youth eventually coming to see their Indigenous language as important for constructing a local identity. This finding illustrates the importance of young people for language maintenance and reclamation, a topic which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

### 1.2.6 Language shift in the Mixtec diaspora

As a result of hundreds of years of colonial and now neoliberal domination by first the Spanish empire and now the Mexican nation-state, many speakers of Mixtec and other Indigenous Mexican languages have been shifting to Spanish in their home communities (Yoshioka 2010), often due to explicit governmental policies of castellanización. Although recent years have seen the government pivot to declarations of support of Indigenous languages and even bilingual education, this has not necessarily been borne out in practice for all groups (de León 2016). While shift is an ongoing process throughout the Mixteca, it does not proceed at an equal pace throughout the region. Shift is most advanced in urban centers, especially in cities in the Mixteca Alta which were built on the site of old Mixtec *señoríos* or seats of power. More rural areas, including most of the Mixteca Baja region, have higher rates of Mixtec monolingualism due to their relative inaccessibility, but Spanish has still entered the Baja region via cities, irrigated valleys, and along the Pan-American highway (Josserand 1983: 115). Some villages where shift has occurred are currently

engaged in reclamation efforts, often building on the community-service principle of tequio, such as a Mixtec language nest founded in the Oaxacan village of Llano de Avispa in 2008 (Meyer 2018). In recent years, the founding of the Academia de la Lengua Mixteca ('Mixtec Language Academy') by a group of Mixtec scholars has helped to boost the local status of the language as well (Guadalupe Joaquina 2014).

Migration complicates the picture of intergenerational linguistic transmission, especially in California, where Mixtecs face pressure to shift to both Spanish and English. Language shift is often accelerated in this complex multilingual environment, in which Spanish (and to an increasing degree, English) serves as the lingua franca between Mixtecs, speakers of other Indigenous Mexican languages, and Mexican and Central Americans who do not identify as Indigenous. The commonly cited statistic is that immigrants tend to undergo language shift within three generations of arriving in the United States (Fishman 1972: 115-116). Among Indigenous Mexican immigrants to California, however, shift has been observed to occur far more rapidly, even within the course of a single generation: a Mexico-born child who spoke Mixtec as their first language may, upon migrating to the US and entering school, stop speaking Mixtec in favor of Spanish and English within just a few years (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). A similar pattern of rapid-onset language shift, also called language "tip" (Dorian 1981), has been documented for other Indigenous Mexican immigrants as well, such as San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec speakers in Los Angeles (Pérez Báez 2014). This is a significantly faster rate of shift than what has been previously observed among Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants (Rumbaut 2009).

Pérez Báez (2013) argues that migration itself can be a determining factor in language endangerment and shift, although this is not often recognized in scholarly conversations

about language reclamation and revitalization, which typically assume that such work takes place in a speech community's ancestral territory. Unlike language shift away from Spanish in the United States, which does not pose a threat to the Spanish language itself, shift away from Zapotec in Los Angeles puts the entire language at risk, especially for those villages with extremely high rates of migration. The same is true of Mixtec. Mines, Nichols, and Runsten write that "[t]here is clear evidence … that bringing children to the United States accentuates language loss" (2010: 42). In the nine Mixtec and Zapotec diaspora communities they studied, over 70% of parents in Mexico spoke to their children exclusively in their Indigenous language, while only 35% of parents maintained this practice in California.

One of the factors influencing language shift in Ventura County, in particular, is the belief that one must speak Spanish and English to have any hope of economic mobility, that is, work outside the fields. In other words, this ideology holds that Indigenous languages have no economic value (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010; Zamudio 2015). In the efficiency-oriented landscape of late-capitalist America (Jameson 1991), there is an accompanying implication that any cultural practice which has no economic value must necessarily be discarded. Both in California and in Mexico (Hill 1998: 171), this mandate is often relayed to Indigenous parents by school personnel who assert that they are looking out for children's futures. Velasco (2014) showed that because Mixtec mothers in New York valued education highly and trusted their children's teachers, they internalized such ideologies and came to see Mixtec as useless. Some parents in Ventura County encourage their children to focus on speaking Spanish and English instead of Mixtec to improve their future life chances. It is notable that many diasporic Mixtec youth shift first to Spanish,

which is itself a stigmatized and racialized language in the United States (a pattern which Pérez Báez 2014 also notes among Zapotecs in Los Angeles). However, Spanish is the lingua franca of the broader Mexican immigrant community. As a result, it can open quite a few economic doors even for individuals who do not attain a high level of English fluency.

Another contributor to shift is anti-Indigenous school bullying. As noted above, Mixtec children are frequently taunted for their physical appearance or for speaking their heritage language (Barillas Chón 2010; Ruiz and Barajas 2012). This causes some youth to feel shame about being Indigenous (Zamudio 2015). Some take steps to protect themselves by actively concealing their Indigenous language abilities, which in the long term has the potential to lead to language shift, even for youth whose first language was Mixtec and whose parents still speak it in the home. Parents in Ventura County sometimes caution their children to stop speaking Mixtec once they begin attending school in order to avoid discrimination; others choose to protect their children by never teaching them Mixtec in the first place.

As a result of this rapid-onset shift, there are a large number of receptively bilingual and trilingual youth and young adults in the Mixtec diaspora. Receptive multilingualism is a linguistic skill in which young people do not identify as speakers of a given language, but are nevertheless able to fully understand what they hear (Beardsmore 1986; ten Thije and Zeevaert 2007; Valdés 2005). Some youth who retain receptive competency are former speakers who spoke the language as children, perhaps even as their L1, but shifted away from it once they entered school.

Young people's rapid tip away from Mixtec has tended to yield asymmetrical patterns of family communication, in which parents speak to their children in Mixtec and their children

reply in Spanish, which is often their parents' L2 (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 39). This pattern has been noted in the Mixtec diaspora in New York City (Axelrod 2017); I have also observed it in Ventura County. Within a single family, children often have varying levels of multilingual proficiency due to birth order, which plays a similar role in many other immigrant and Indigenous communities (Fishman 1991; Parada 2013; Shin 2005; Wyman 2013; Zentella 1997). Productive Mixtec skills are common for the older children in a family, many of whom spent at least some of their formative years in their parents' hometowns, but younger siblings tend to maintain exclusively receptive capacity. This can be partially attributed to overall changes in parental communication patterns in diaspora. Mines, Nichols, and Runsten found that while two-thirds of newer Mixtec and Zapotec immigrants to California spoke exclusively their Indigenous language to their children, that number dropped to approximately 40% once families had lived in California for three years or more, at which time many parents shifted to using exclusively Spanish or a mix of their native language and Spanish (2010: 42). After a few years, many Mixtec parents who were originally monolingual had gained enough experience with Spanish to be able to understand it from their younger children, whereas they may not have been able to do so with their firstborn.

Some scholars have proposed that in the diasporic context, the ability to speak an Indigenous language is no longer seen as completely necessary for someone to be able to identify as Indigenous, as long as they participate in cultural activities and maintain family links (Mesinas and Pérez 2016; Nicolás 2012; Stephen 2007). This description applies to many Mixtec youth in Ventura County, who strongly identify as Mixtec even though they may not speak the Mixtec language. Some young people who have previously undergone

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language shift are now highly motivated to reclaim their heritage language, particularly those who are involved with community organizations, such as the one I discuss in Chapter 2. A more thorough discussion of language maintenance and youth agency in the wake of language shift can be found in Chapter 5.

## 1.3 Dissertation outline

While the previous section supplied information about the Mixtec diaspora in California, Chapter 2 gives more specific ethnographic context about Ventura County, where the present research was conducted. I include details about the focal participants, my positionality as a researcher, and the methods used in this study. Because this dissertation incorporates theories and literature from several distinct areas, including interactional sociolinguistics, language ideologies and language naming, Mixtec dialectology, sociolinguistic variation in minoritized languages, language shift, language socialization, and language maintenance, relevant literature will be introduced in each of the chapters.

Chapter 3 attempts to understand how ideologies about linguistic difference and linguistic variation come to be part of the social and cognitive reality of members of the diasporic Mixtec community. I first investigate the historical origin and technical linguistic uses of the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* metalinguistic labels before examining the ways that speakers use these terms to make sense of the diversity of varieties they encounter in diaspora. I argue that for self-identified *Mixteco Bajo* speakers, *Mixteco Alto* has become a way to refer to any speaker of an unknown Mixtec variety which is different than the labeler's own, regardless of whether that variety's geographic origin lies in the Mixteca Alta region.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the links between the *Mixteco Alto* label and sociolinguistic variation. I first show that the *Mixteco Alto* label, which originally encoded geographic information, has been extended to rationalize another axis of variation: that which is linked to a speaker's age or novice status. In addition, I argue that by examining linguistic features which are said to sound like *Mixteco Alto*, it is possible to identify salient sites of place-linked variation that have emerged among the adult varieties of Mixtec spoken in Ventura County. While identifying sociolinguistic variables in underdocumented languages can pose a particular challenge (Mansfield and Stanford 2017), the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label provides a means of observing the process of enregisterment (Agha 1999, 2005) in real time in this complex multivarietal contact setting.

In Chapter 5, I explore the consequences that the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic name has had for one individual family, with a particular focus on the individual implications of the ideologized labeling of linguistic difference. I first present a hypothesis, articulated by one of the youth participants in this study, that the *Mixteco Alto* label is linked to language shift. I then analyze an unusual language socialization interaction in which the same young woman exercised her agency to maintain the Mixtec language in diaspora by working to counter the encroachment of language shift into her own home.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of each chapter and states outstanding questions, directions for future research, and practical implications of this work, with a special focus on the importance of conducting research in partnership with Indigenous community members. The dissertation concludes with a reflection on the consequences of the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* metalinguistic labels for the material and ideological landscape of the Mixtec diaspora community in Ventura County.

# Chapter 2

## Ethnographic context and methods

This dissertation draws on methodologies from ethnography and interactional sociolinguistic analysis to understand the situated production and circulation of metalinguistic labels and language ideologies in the Mixtec diaspora community. In this chapter I present ethnographic detail about the research site, my own positionality, the focal participants, and the methods of data collection and analysis.

### 2.1 Research site: Ventura County, California

The research for this dissertation was conducted in Ventura County, California, in areas in and around the city of Oxnard. Ventura County is home to approximately 20,000 Mixtec people (Kresge 2007), the majority of whom work as agricultural laborers, especially in the strawberry fields of Oxnard, but also picking raspberries, green beans, and other seasonal crops. Temporary migration within California is frequent; for instance, many Ventura County Mixtecs spend each summer working in the strawberry fields in Salinas or Watsonville (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). Despite the difficult, physically taxing, and societally essential nature of working in the fields, agricultural labor does not pay well. As a result, many Mixtecs in Ventura County are highly economically marginalized. According to López and Runsten, "whenever the worst living conditions [for Indigenous farmworkers throughout California] are found, it is now usually the Mixtec[s] who are suffering them" (2004: 260). Nonetheless, Mixtecs are still generally able to earn higher incomes than would be possible in the Mixteca region of Mexico, often regularly sending

remittances back to family members who remain in their hometowns (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010).

Most Mixtecs in Ventura County are originally from the Oaxacan district of Juxtlahuaca (López and Runsten 2004: 216), but many also come from the districts of Silacayoápam and Huajuapan. In addition, Oxnard is home to a sizeable population of Mixtecs from the portion of the Mixteca that extends into the state of Guerrero. By far the largest hometown network represented in Ventura County is that of San Martín Peras, which is a municipality (similar to a county in the United States) within the Juxtlahuaca district (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). Residents of San Martín Peras have been migrating to California since the late 1970s, but their numbers grew significantly after the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 granted amnesty to many undocumented immigrants. Most of the male migrants from San Martín Peras in California arrived after the late 1990s, while most women arrived after 2000 (2010: 25). It is not uncommon for families to migrate to California in stages— for instance, children may live with their grandparents in San Martín Peras until their parents have saved up enough money to bring them to California (Ruiz, Baird, and Torres Hernández 2016). During the years that it often requires to build up sufficient funds for their older children's migration, many couples continue to have children in California (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 117-118). The end result is that many nuclear families have members who fall into distinct immigrant generations (Portes and Rumbaut 2006 [1990]): first-generation parents, second-generation youngest children, and older children who belong to the 1.5 generation, having migrated before the age of 12.

The linguistic environment in Ventura County is multilingual and complex. In this community, speakers' linguistic competencies cannot be straightforwardly inferred from

other sociological aspects of their identity; rather, they are shaped by intersecting categories, such as how recently individuals and families arrived in the United States, the age at which they migrated, the rurality of their home village, their socioeconomic status, and their previous educational experience. Unlike in other zones of Mixtec migration in California, where many migrants come from villages where language shift to Spanish is already advanced (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010), many Ventura County residents hail from regions in which Mixtec is still commonly spoken. In 2010, for example, 84% of those living in San Martín Peras identified as speakers of an Indigenous language (INEGI 2010a). In part because of the rurality of places like San Martín Peras, some Mixtecs do not grow up speaking Spanish (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 25). Therefore, a sizeable number of Ventura County residents are Mixtec-dominant speakers or Mixtec monolinguals. Limited competency in Spanish and English makes these migrants' integration into the county's broader Spanish-speaking immigrant and local communities difficult. However, many other members of the community are bilingual in Mixtec and Spanish, which tends to be a lingua franca among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Mexican immigrants. English is increasingly spoken, especially by younger generations, who learn it at an early age when they enter school. In addition, Ventura County is home to a smaller number of speakers of other Indigenous Mesoamerican languages, most notably Zapotec and Otomí, but also Nahuatl, Mixe, Huave, and Purépecha (Bax et al. in prep.). Finally, as discussed in Chapter 1, at least three dozen individual varieties of Mixtec are currently spoken in Ventura County.

Although Indigenous languages generally face stigma in Mexico, recent developments in Ventura County have created domains in which those who possess Mixtec language skills are sometimes at an advantage. For instance, the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing

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Project (MICOP), a highly politically active Mixtec nonprofit and community center in Oxnard, provides employment opportunities for Mixtec-speaking multilinguals (as well as speakers of other Indigenous languages, like Zapotec), whether as interpreters, farmworker outreach coordinators, or programming facilitators (http://mixteco.org/). I have heard some young Mixtec-heritage members of the community express a desire to (re)learn Mixtec for reasons of economic opportunity, a surprising subversion of the more commonplace belief that Spanish and English, but never Indigenous languages, are the sole codes of economic mobility (Bax 2019). Mixtec linguistic skills are also culturally rewarded at MICOP through the ability to participate in Mixtec-language celebrations and cultural activities, as well as involvement with Radio Indígena, the organization's Indigenous-language radio station.

While the research presented in this dissertation was not conducted at MICOP, my relationship with the Mixtec community in Ventura County nonetheless grows out of the partnership between MICOP and the UC Santa Barbara Department of Linguistics. This partnership was formally established in 2015, when a MICOP staff member was hired as a consultant for a year-long graduate Linguistic Field Methods seminar on the Tlahuapa variety of Mixtec, in which I participated as a student (Reyes Basurto et al. 2016). In the following section, I elaborate on my relationship with the Mixtec community in Oxnard and discuss some of the collaborative projects in which I have been involved.

## 2.2 Researcher positionality and community involvement

As mentioned above, my involvement with the Indigenous immigrant community in Ventura County, and Mixtec in particular, began during a Linguistic Field Methods seminar at UC Santa Barbara during the 2015-2016 academic year. As I learned more about the

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community in Ventura County, it became clear to me that documentary and sociocultural linguistics in this context had the potential to align with my own preexisting commitment to sociolinguistic justice — that is, the responsibility to use linguistics frameworks and tools in the service of "self-determination for linguistically subordinated individuals and groups in sociopolitical struggles over language" (Bucholtz et al. 2014: 145). The Mixtec immigrant community has several language-related goals, including ensuring language access for Mixtec speakers in the public domain, combating linguistic discrimination, resisting the forces that lead to language shift, and creating resources for Mixtec language maintenance. As a trained linguist with access to significant institutional and departmental resources, it seemed natural and right to direct those resources in support of a minoritized local language group that is, to a certain degree, local to my university.

While we may be neighbors in a broad sense, there are many areas in which my own positionality differs from that of Mixtecs in Ventura County. Like the Mixtecs, I am not originally from the land on which I met them—Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties are Chumash territory—but our trajectories of coming to live on this land have been vastly different. I am a white settler who freely chose to live in California. This freedom of mobility is afforded to me because of my whiteness and settler privilege, which permitted me unconstrained choice in where I attended graduate school and where I conducted my research. Many Mixtecs in California have walked a very different path to get here, having in many cases been forced out of their home villages by extreme poverty. Because I have citizenship privilege, I do not fear for my ability to stay in California for the foreseeable future, whereas many Indigenous immigrants who lack legal residency or citizenship are in a position of precarity and fear because the United States government, itself an illegitimate

colonial enterprise, has deemed their presence unlawful. Furthermore, I am a native speaker of American English, a variety that is never stigmatized based on my race, but many Mixtecs lack similar access to English, especially to prestige (i.e., white) varieties (cf. Rosa and Flores 2017). The combination of these factors means that my experiences of living in the same local area are significantly different than the experiences of many Mixtecs. These differences have undoubtedly shaped the present analysis, including the research questions I ask and the conceptual categories and frames through which I organize my own understanding of Mixtec linguistic and cultural phenomena. I have striven to be attentive of the ways in which my positionality has shaped both my linguistic analyses and my interpersonal relationships with Mixtec people.

I have been involved in a number of different projects during the nearly five years since I began working with the Mixtec community in Ventura County. Much of this work has been conducted as a member of the Mexican Indigenous Languages Promotion and Advocacy (MILPA) research team, which includes Mixtec language professionals and activists, graduate students and faculty members from the UC Santa Barbara Linguistics Department, and UCSB undergraduate students, many of whom identified as Indigenous Mexicans. A major endeavor of the MILPA team during the last few years has been the development and implementation of a 500-participant survey of linguistic practices and attitudes among the Indigenous Mexican immigrant community in Ventura County (Bax et al. in prep.). I have been heavily involved in the survey process, including providing training for youth community members in the interviewing process. One of the central goals of the survey was to enumerate the languages and varieties that are spoken in the diaspora community, which provides key background for the arguments about linguistic diversity

presented in this dissertation. Survey data about this topic are briefly discussed below in Section 2.4, as well as in Chapters 3 and 4.

In addition, I am engaged in an ongoing collaboration with a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who treats Mixtec-speaking clients in Oxnard, with the goal of producing educational materials about Mixtec linguistic diversity and language structure for practicing SLPs (Bax and Enevoldsen 2020). Previously, I also worked with a network of medical interpreters to create Mixtec-language anatomical diagrams, volunteered at Mixtec literacy classes for adults, contributed to the ongoing documentation of several locally-spoken varieties of Mixtec, and periodically volunteered at MICOP events, including community fundraising events and monthly food distribution meetings.

A key aspect of my involvement with MICOP has taken place through its Tequio Youth Group, which serves Indigenous youth from middle school through college. Tequio provides youth with academic support, such as scholarships and study skills workshops, but it also helps youth embrace and revalorize their Indigenous identities and languages. Tequio youth also frequently engage in local and state-level activism: for example, in 2012 they launched a widely publicized campaign against the use of anti-Indigenous slurs in schools (Esquivel 2012; Moragas 2012). As is true of the MICOP community more broadly, the staff members who facilitate the Tequio Youth Group create a linguistically inclusive environment which both acknowledges and valorizes the high degree of cultural and linguistic diversity among Indigenous residents of Ventura County. In addition to being socialized into activist discourses and practices at MICOP, youth encounter a local discourse of linguistic pluralism that treats variation as both expected and accepted—for example, through the deliberate use of the neutral Spanish word "variante" ('variety'), as opposed to the more stigmatizing term

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"dialecto" ('dialect'), to discuss Mixtec varieties. At MICOP, variability within the Mixtec language complex is framed as a fact of life instead of as a problem or barrier, which reflects both the staff's political orientation to Indigenous solidarity and their involvement with academic linguistics.

Since 2016, members of the Tequio Youth Group have participated in UC Santa Barbara's School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society (SKILLS) program, which teaches sociocultural linguistics to local high school and community-college students in the area around Santa Barbara (Bucholtz, Casillas, and Lee 2018, 2019; Bucholtz et al. 2014). I co-taught the semester-long SKILLS class to Tequio youth three times from 2016 to 2018, with a special curriculum that included the history of Indigenous Mesoamerican languages, Indigenous literacy, and tweeting in Indigenous languages (inspired by Lillehaugen 2016). As part of SKILLS, I have collaborated with members of the Tequio Youth Group on several projects related to the maintenance of Indigenous languages, such as the production of Mixtec and Zapotec literacy materials and podcasts about sociolinguistic issues.

It is through this involvement with Tequio that I met the three focal participants for this dissertation, who all participated in at least one iteration of my SKILLS class (and in one case, all three iterations).

## 2.3 Participants

The original research plan for this dissertation involved studying a broader range of topics than what is presented here. My original focus was rapid-onset language shift among youth in the Mixtec diaspora, with an emphasis on understanding how young people used

the multiple languages in their repertoires to construct Indigenous identities in the wake of language shift. For this reason, I recruited potential participants by reaching out to several young people who had previously been students in the SKILLS program and whom I knew to have varying levels of Mixtec fluency. Current or past speakerhood were not necessary for inclusion in the research; the sole requirement was that participants identify as a Mixtec person.

The three young women who agreed to be the focal participants are Ita Ndivi (Mixtec for 'beautiful flower'), Isabel, and Nina, who were all ages 19 to 20 during the research period.[1] These young women's linguistic biographies were fairly representative of the range of linguistic abilities commonly found among Mixtec youth in Ventura County:

- Ita Ndivi was a fluent L1 speaker of Mixtec from a town in the municipality of San Martín Peras. As a child in Oaxaca she learned some Spanish through school, but her competency stabilized once she began working in the strawberry fields of Baja California as an adolescent. She was a first-generation immigrant, having moved to the United States around age 15, at which time she enrolled in high school and began to learn English. She generally preferred Mixtec as the language of everyday life, speaking it daily with her Mixtec-dominant parents, as well as with her boyfriend, siblings, and other family members.

- Isabel was a member of the 1.5 immigrant generation. After spending the first seven years of her life in her father's hometown in Guerrero and her mother's village in Oaxaca, she moved to California in 2005. While Isabel's first language was Mixtec, she was severely bullied in elementary school for being a Mixtec speaker. At the

[1] These names are pseudonyms, as are all others in this dissertation.

same time, Isabel's parents were advised by a teacher that it would be more advantageous for their children to focus on Spanish and English instead of Mixtec, for economic purposes. Around the age of ten, Isabel stopped speaking Mixtec. When I met her in 2017, she identified as a Spanish-English bilingual. She still maintained full receptive competency in Mixtec, which she heard every day from her parents, although she generally replied to them in Spanish (cf. Valdés 2005).

- Nina was also a member of the 1.5 generation, although she moved to California when she was very young and has no memories of living in Oaxaca. Nina's mother was a fluent Mixtec speaker, but Nina herself neither spoke nor understood Mixtec. Nina attributed her mother's decision not to teach her children Mixtec to the fact that her biological father was not Mixtec, which made Spanish the de facto language of home communication. Nina was bilingual in Spanish and English and proudly identified as an Indigenous woman.

I first met these young women between three and five years ago when I taught them in the SKILLS program. Since then, I have attended their high school graduations, poetry performances, family events, fundraisers, and other community activities, volunteered alongside them at MICOP events, and gotten to know some of their family members.

All three women had parents who were farmworkers or had been farmworkers in the past, and Isabel and Ita Ndivi had worked in the fields themselves. When her community college was not in session, Ita Ndivi often picked up short-term fieldwork contracts. Isabel and Nina were also enrolled in community college during the research process, and both of them worked part-time in food service as well.

In addition to the three focal youth, this study involved 26 additional participants, most of whom were recruited from the young women's families and peer groups. I discuss the details of their participation in the next section.

## 2.4 Methods: Data collection

The data for this dissertation consist of audio-recorded and transcribed ethnographic interviews with the focal participants, as well as recordings of naturally occurring interaction between the focal participants and their families and peers. The arguments presented here also draw on my years of participant-observation in the community, as well as field notes that I took throughout the process of data collection. As additional background, to understand the nature of the linguistic diversity represented in Ventura County, I conducted a preliminary analysis of data from the community language survey discussed above in Section 2.2 (Bax et al. in prep.). This section first elaborates on the findings from this survey before outlining the methodologies used to gather the interview and interactional data.

In order to reach a wide range of individuals regardless of literacy or multilingual fluency, the community language survey was administered in an audio-recorded oral interview format by Indigenous community members affiliated with MICOP, using whatever language the participant preferred. To contextualize this dissertation, I examined data from the over 250 Mixtec-identified individuals who spoke Spanish and/or English in their survey interviews (processing of the surveys that were conducted in Mixtec is still ongoing). Based on this partial sample, I identified several demographic characteristics of the Indigenous immigrant community in Ventura County which are relevant for the analyses that follow:

1. While Mixtec is the most commonly spoken Indigenous Mesoamerican language in the county, there are also a smaller number of speakers of other Otomanguean languages like Otomí and Zapotec (especially the variety from San Vicente Coatlán), in addition to speakers of Nahuatl (Uto-Aztecan), Mixe (Mixe-Zoquean), and the isolates Huave and Purépecha.

2. At least three dozen individual varieties of Mixtec are spoken in Ventura County.

3. The overwhelming majority of Mixtecs living in Ventura County are from the Mixteca Baja region, namely western Oaxaca and eastern Guerrero (Josserand 1983). Of the more than 250 respondents who identified their hometowns, only a single individual said they were from a town in the Mixteca Alta region.

4. A large plurality (46%) of the Mixtec speakers who reported their hometowns on the survey are from villages in the municipality of San Martín Peras, which is located in the Oaxacan district of Juxtlahuaca. (Because many individuals from San Martín Peras are monolingual Mixtec speakers, according to Mines, Nichols, and Runsten (2010), this number will likely grow once the Mixtec-language survey interviews are included in the analysis.)

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the significance of these findings for the analysis of language ideologies in Ventura County.

While the survey data and other insights gleaned from participant-observation provide necessary context, the primary data examined in this dissertation come from the ethnographic interviews and interactional recordings, which were collected over a ten-month period from November 2018 to August 2019. Below I outline the methodology for each one in turn.

Based on my broader research questions about language shift and identity, I compiled a list of loosely formulated topics to ask about during the ethnographic interviews. These topics included linguistic themes, such as the participants' linguistic autobiographies, relationships to Mixtec identity and language, perceptions of linguistic diversity in the Mixtec diaspora, present-day family language practices and interactional patterns, and hopes for the future of the Mixtec language, as well as more personal themes like participants' career and educational aspirations, hobbies, volunteer work, personal goals, stories about when they entered school in the US, memories of life in Oaxaca or Guerrero, and relationships with family still living in Oaxaca or Guerrero. After each interview, I iteratively added more topics to the list if I had follow-up questions.

The ethnographic interviews were loosely structured and highly conversational. Since I knew the participants fairly well by the time the research took place, interviews typically began with everyday conversation and catching up. We generally discussed topics like their college courses and jobs, relationship drama, and their housing situation and/or family life. When I saw an opportunity to smoothly incorporate one of my interview topics into the interaction by building on something the participant had already said, I would subtly steer the conversation in that direction, but participants were also free to change the focus of the discussion.

All interviews were recorded using a Zoom H4N digital audio recorder at a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz and a Shure SM-93 omnidirectional lavalier microphone. They took place at cafés, the public library, on a college campus, and in participants' homes. In all, I conducted fourteen audio-recorded ethnographic interviews with the three focal participants (thirteen individual, one paired), as well as one joint transcription work session and one

playback interview with a participant to gather retrospective commentary on a previous

recording (Gumperz 1982), for a total of approximately 23.5 hours of audio-recorded

interview data. I also conducted one ethnographic interview with a slightly older participant

from the same community. These interviews primarily took place in Spanish with Ita Ndivi,

in Spanish-English translanguaging (García 2009) with Isabel; and mostly English with

some Spanish lexical insertions when talking to Nina.

Because of my broader interest in multilingual identity practices, I also chose to collect

naturally occurring interactional data, since identity is accomplished in the course of

interaction (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). The three focal youth took on the role of participant-

researchers for this task by recording themselves interacting with members of their social

circle. All three of the focal dissertation participants had previously been involved in the

MILPA community language survey mentioned in Section 2.2, both as interviewers and as

interviewees for a pilot study. As part of that experience, they had learned best practices in

research ethics, consent, and audio recording, lessons which I reviewed with them before

they began collecting interactional data. Each participant-researcher was given a Roland R-

05 digital audio recorder and a Polsen OLM-10 omnidirectional lavalier microphone, as well

as metadata sheets and consent forms in both English and Spanish which explained the

purpose of the research and requested permission to use recordings in this dissertation.

Similar to the case-study methodology outlined in Podesva (2006, 2007), I asked each of the

focal participants to record themselves in five distinct social contexts:

1. one-on-one with an Indigenous-identified person of the same age cohort (e.g., a

   friend, partner, or sibling);

2. one-on-one with a non-Indigenous friend in the same age cohort;

3. one-on-one with an older Mixtec-speaking family member;

4. in a group family setting; and

5. in a non-family group social interaction of their choice.

Based on these instructions, the three youth created a total of seventeen interactional recordings with consenting members of their family and social networks, comprising approximately 10.5 hours of audio-recorded interactional data. These recordings included 25 additional participants, most of whom are Mixtec but some of whom are non-Indigenous-identified Mexicans. Mixtec fluency was not a requirement for participation; the participant-researchers were able to create recordings with whomever they chose. Ita Ndivi, Isabel, and Nina sometimes took written notes on the context of the recordings, which they passed on to me; at other times they chose to discuss some element of their interactional data during our next ethnographic interview. All participants were free to request that any portion of the recording be deleted at any time, although no one chose to exercise this option. Youth were compensated $20 per hour of recorded interactional or interview data they gathered, rounded up to the nearest hour.

Given the large size and complex nature of the approximately 30 hours of audio data gathered during this project, in particular the challenges of working with overlapping, multi-participant interactional audio recordings, data processing and analysis are still ongoing for the portions of the interactional data in which Mixtec is spoken. The participant-researchers have been fundamental to this process. Ita Ndivi and Isabel have both done independent work on transcription, translation, and glossing of Mixtec in the free open-source program ELAN. Where their academic and work schedules permit, they continue to work on these transcriptions. In addition, Nina's mother transcribed the one recording in which she and her

mother (Nina's grandmother) have an extended conversation in Mixtec. Again, participants were compensated $20 per hour for the time they spent transcribing and translating.

## 2.5 Methods: Interactional discourse analysis

The primary method used to analyze the ethnographic interviews and recordings of naturalistic interaction was interactional discourse analysis. This qualitative methodology, which is frequently employed within the interdisciplinary field of sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz and Hall 2008), involves the examination of "small-scale interaction … in order to provide a microscopic and insider view on larger social processes that crucially depend on these small-scale actions" (Jaspers 2012: 141). The originators of interactional sociolinguistics, such as John Gumperz (1982) and Erving Goffman (1981, 1983), prioritized the fine-grained analysis of individual contextualized speech events over more top-down approaches to investigating the linguistic and cultural norms of a particular community (Auer and Roberts 2011). However, the scope of the claims derived from interactional analysis is not limited to the local. Rather, this approach illuminates the interface between the micro and macro levels of social and linguistic structure, showing how extant norms and social arrangements are reinforced, challenged, and/or transformed in day-to-day interaction. As Jaspers (2012) argues, the ability of interactional methodologies to account for both small-scale and large-scale social structures reveals that interaction is "a privileged site for the study of society. It is the arena where customary ways of doing are confronted with the unpredictability of interaction, or the window through which we can observe social actors maintaining their own and others' identities at the same time as they are creatively reworking older or past traditions, which may eventually impact on larger-

scale social patterns. Daily interactions could in this way be viewed as the small cogwheels of the broader social (and also) linguistic mechanism that interactants, through their talk, constantly grease or may throw sand into" (2012: 141). Because of its ability to shed light on this broader social mechanism, interactional analysis is commonly used to study how language ideologies are constructed, circulated, and contested across and within communities (e.g., Bunte 2009; Kroskrity 2009; Richland 2009), as well as to identify participants' emic perspectives on and understandings of other social phenomena.

For this reason, an interactional framework was deemed to be suitable for the analyses of metalinguistic labeling practices and other language ideologies that I present in this dissertation. As shared cultural constructs, language ideologies generally circulate between numerous community members, but they are also invoked and applied within individual interactions. Similarly, broad sociolinguistic processes like language shift or maintenance also depend on small-scale interactions—that is, individuals' moment-to-moment decisions about language choice—which over time accrete and crystallize into recognizable patterns. Thus, a central goal of this dissertation is to explore how ideological processes of metalinguistic labeling, linguistic differentiation, and language shift and maintenance are negotiated and propagated in interaction between members of the Mixtec diaspora community in Ventura County. By grounding these ideologies in their discursive, interactional, and ethnographic contexts, I seek to understand both what such ideologies grow out of (that is, what existing norms and cultural meanings they are predicated upon) and what they grow into (in the sense of long-lasting social structures and patterns of discourse.)

As the name implies, interactional analysis relies on the audio- or video-recording of interactions between particular individuals or groups. Once recorded, these data are transcribed in detail, repeatedly reviewed in a process of iterative analysis (for instance, via qualitative coding), and cross-referenced to ascertain patterns and significant differences across speech contexts and speakers (Rampton 2017). Data are also typically contextualized with participant-observation and participants' own metapragmatic commentary, the latter of which is often accessed through playback interviews (Gumperz 1982), a genre which I discuss more in Chapters 4 and 5.

Alongside an inclusive approach to data, the interactional mode of analysis often "moves across a wide range of levels of organization, from the phonetic to the institutional" (Rampton 2017: 1). In addition to discourse analysis and ethnography, this dissertation draws on methods and theories from language socialization, phonetic analysis, conversation analysis, variationist sociolinguistics, and dialectology. Structural linguistic analysis, Goffmanian interactional analysis, and selected techniques from conversation analysis show the unfolding of linguistically constituted action at the micro-level, whereas ethnography "provides a sense of the stability, status and resonance that linguistic forms, rhetorical strategies and semiotic materials have in different social networks beyond the encounter-on-hand; an idea of how and where an encounter fits into longer and broader biographies, institutions and histories; and a sense of the cultural and personal perspectives/experiences that participants bring to interactions, and take from them" (Rampton 2017: 2). By blending these multiple scales of analysis, it is possible to gain insight into broader sociolinguistic phenomena through the lens of a small amount of deeply contextualized, discursively grounded interactional data.

The beauty of the interactional approach used here is that it allows the identification, in rich detail, of local categories and systems of belief which are "psychologically real" for community members, which Canagarajah (2008: 173) argues is pivotal for the validity of any model of a sociolinguistic process. This dissertation seeks to understand how ideologies and discourses about linguistic difference and linguistic variation come to be part of the psychological reality of members of the diasporic Mixtec community—for instance, how these ideologies shape the perceptual categorization of linguistic (and therefore social) similarity or difference.

Like all analyses of complex language communities, however, the present analysis is unavoidably incomplete. I cannot definitively state that my findings hold for the Ventura County Mixtec community as a whole without first triangulating them with other kinds of information, such as survey data. To create an emically valid survey or other sociolinguistic description of a community, however, it is first necessary to gain a baseline understanding of locally relevant social categories and topics of interest to community members. This dissertation therefore functions as an exploratory, hypothesis-generating endeavor which yields ample, clearly delineated avenues for future research. The chapters below present several hypotheses that emerge from close interactional analysis, some of which were collaboratively generated alongside community members. This includes hypotheses about sociolinguistic variables that are salient across Mixtec varieties and social categories with which they may be linked (Chapter 4), as well as hypotheses about the causal connection between metalinguistic discourse about children's speech and language shift among those same children (Chapter 5).

In addition to hypotheses, the following three chapters generate several concrete findings about the metalinguistic category labels *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*. I demonstrate the value of interactional analysis for illuminating "not only the interactional subjectivities of interlocutors but also the more enduring subject positions and social categories they take up or have thrust upon them" (Bucholtz 2009: 166), such as the identity category of *Mixtec speaker*. For example, Chapter 5 shows how one young Mixtec woman interactionally constructs her younger brother, an emerging but reluctant speaker of Mixtec, as a fully-fledged speaker in hopes that he will embrace this role in the future. These findings also include community members' use of metalinguistic labels to simplify discussions of diversity within Mixtec varieties, as well as to rationalize sociolinguistic variation in the diaspora community.

In order to generate these hypotheses and findings, the first step of data analysis involved indexing and coding all interviews with the focal participants and all portions of the interactional data that were in Spanish and English, as well as all fieldnotes. I initially used a set of codes that I had compiled *a priori* to segment out phenomena like metalinguistic discourse, code-switching, and constructed dialogue, since these are often ideologically charged and/or connected to processes of identity construction (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Codes were also used to track participants' metalinguistic accounts of language shift and variation in their community—their beliefs about why shift happens, their attitudes toward multilingualism and code-switching, and their own affective relationship to and history with the Mixtec language. New codes emerged during the indexing and coding process as I noticed recurrent patterns and speech practices across the data, including a number of codes which tracked discourse about linguistic variation in the diaspora

community; these were subsequently applied throughout the full data set. It was through this iterative coding process that I observed the frequency of participants' use of the labels *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*.

Once the coding process was complete, I identified every moment of metapragmatic discourse about linguistic diversity and variation within Mixtec. I also extracted every use of the phrases *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*, as well as any other metalinguistic labels used by participants. In addition, I isolated moments in which speakers voiced or recounted other individuals' views on linguistic diversity, since constructed dialogue can reveal both participants' own conceptualizations of social and linguistic phenomena and their stances toward what they perceive to be others' conceptualizations (Tannen 1986). All segments of discourse identified in this manner were then transcribed using a system of transcription conventions based on Du Bois (2006) (**Appendix I**). As mentioned above, data in Mixtec were transcribed and translated with the assistance of the participant-researchers. The Mixtec orthography used throughout this dissertation is roughly based on that developed by Mixtec scholars in the Ve'e Tu'un Savi ('Mixtec Language Academy', Guadalupe Joaquina 2014). Orthographic conventions for Ita Ndivi's variety of Mixtec, which appears most frequently throughout this dissertation, can be found in **Appendix II**.

The full set of transcribed excerpts was then subjected to close interactional analysis, the results of which can be found in the following three chapters. All evidence of language ideologies, metalinguistic labels, and other metapragmatic discourse practices in the transcripts were compared within and across contexts and participants. Differences and similarities were noted and analyzed with reference to ethnographic context.

One important final point has to do with my treatment of interview data within an interactional framework. Following scholars like Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 412) and Briggs (1986), I position ethnographic interviews as situated speech events in their own right, rather than "straightforward, unproblematic technolog[ies] for investigating objective facts, subjective experience, and authentic feelings" (Talmy 2011: 26). My analysis of the ethnographic interviews considers the interview discourse itself to be a contingent interactional achievement, shaped by the particulars of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, as well as the ideologies, discourses, and interpretive frameworks they bring to the moment of interaction. In the analyses that follow, I have therefore striven to reflexively understand the ways that my own presence and interactional contributions may have fundamentally shaped participants' responses.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter located the dissertation within the ethnographic context of the Mixtec diaspora in Ventura County, also describing my positionality as a white, non-Indigenous researcher with regard to the Mixtec community. In addition, I outlined the data collection and analysis procedures before explaining the goals of interactional analysis and delimiting the scope of the claims made in the following chapters.

Because this dissertation focuses on variation and ideologies within Mixtec, data from Nina, who does not speak or understand Mixtec, did not turn out to be relevant to what follows here. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 all draw primarily on data from Isabel and Ita Ndivi's ethnographic interviews and interactional recordings, supplementing these with information from participant-observation and the community language surveys where relevant

(particularly in Chapter 3's discussion of linguistic diversity in the diaspora community).

Ultimately, a far larger amount of data was collected than can be discussed in the present

analyses. However, I have already begun to lay the analytic groundwork for future studies of

several other topics that emerge from these data, some of which will be discussed in Chapter

6.

# Chapter 3

## "Eso es sólo para los mixtecos alto, no para nosotros": Linguistic differentiation and metalinguistic labeling in the Mixtec diaspora

### 3.1 Introduction

In the Mixtec diaspora, as in other multilingual contact settings, "an analysis of the discursive uses of language names… provides significant insights into the social and linguistic makeup of a complex sociolinguistic situation" (Léglise and Migge 2006: 313). This chapter describes a metalinguistic labeling practice employed by members of the Mixtec diaspora to navigate the "superdiverse" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Vertovec 2007) contact setting in Ventura County. Specifically, I analyze how speakers reappropriate, binarize, and ideologize an opposition between two geographically-based dialect labels, *Mixteco Bajo* (literally 'low Mixtec') and *Mixteco Alto* (literally 'high Mixtec'), to rationalize linguistic difference between their own varieties and those spoken by other members of the local community. Among speakers of Baja varieties, *Mixteco Alto* has come to be used as a generic designation for ways of speaking Mixtec that are different from one's own—even when those varieties would be classified by linguists as also belonging to Baja subgroups.[2] By analyzing how this labeling practice functions discursively, this chapter sheds light on one aspect of the extraordinarily complex sociolinguistic situation of Mixtec in California.

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[2] To distinguish the metalinguistic labels *(Mixteco) Alto* and *(Mixteco) Bajo*, as used by speakers, from the names of dialect groups as used by linguists (e.g., the Alta subgroups), the former are written in italics. The metalinguistic labels are also used in the masculine form, which agrees with the grammatical gender of *Mixteco*; the linguistic groupings are in the feminine, which agrees with the gender of the region, *la Mixteca*.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section 3.2 outlines previous scholarly

treatments of Mixtec dialectology and discuss the origins of the *Alto* and *Bajo* subgroup

labels. Section 3.3 provides key context about additional practices of linguistic

differentiation that I as well as other scholars have encountered in the Ventura County

diaspora community, including a discussion of endonyms for the Mixtec languages. Using

data from ethnographic interviews and participant-observation, Section 3.4 analyzes the

ideological processes through which speakers reappropriate and project the *Alto*/*Bajo*

opposition. Section 3.5 concludes by summarizing the function of the *Mixteco Alto* label in

this community.


**3.2 Linguistic differentiation within Mixtec: History and dialectology**

**3.2.1 Linguistic diversity in la Mixteca**

The Mixtec language complex (Kaufman 1990: 70) exhibits a high level of internal

diversity, which is typically described as resulting from sociogeographical separation. As

one early study notes, "[t]he mountainous topography of the [Mixteca] region, and the

relatively autonomous life of its widely separated communities, have no doubt contributed to

the present diversity even in neighboring villages" (Mak 1958: 61). Both linguists and

community members generally agree with the assertion that each individual pueblo or

village has its own unique variety:

> el mixteco se caracteriza por una variación al hablarlo entre los pueblos, aún en aquellos que
> están más cercanos. En muchas partes de la región hay tantos cambios en el mixteco que la
> comunicación es muy difícil, al grado de que dos hablantes del mixteco de distintos pueblos no
> se pueden entender entre sí. Si un mixteco viaja más de un día (hasta 40 km, según el terreno),
> muchas veces no puede entender el mixteco de aquella región. Entre pueblos más cercanos, la
> gente aprende las diferencias y así se entienden, pero cada individuo sigue hablando el dialecto
> de su pueblo.

(*Mixtec is characterized by variation in the ways it is spoken from pueblo to pueblo, even between those which are close to one another. In many parts of the region there are so many linguistic changes that communication is very difficult, to the extent that two Mixtec speakers from different pueblos cannot understand one another. If a Mixtec person travels for more than a day (up to 40km, depending on the terrain), often they cannot understand the Mixtec of that distant region. Between closer pueblos, people learn the differences and understand one another that way, but each individual continues to speak the dialect of their pueblo.*) (Egland 1983: 25; translation my own)

This variation dates to before the time of the Spanish invasion. In his 1593 *Arte en Lengua Mixteca*, the Dominican friar Antonio de los Reyes noted that "no solamente entre pueblos diversos se usen differentes modos de hablar, pero en un mesmo pueblo se hallia en un barrio de una manera y en otro, la otra: siendo la legua Mixteca toda una" ('It's not only between different pueblos that there are different ways of speaking, but even in the same pueblo there is one way [of speaking] in one neighborhood and in another [neighborhood], another [way of speaking]: it is this way across the whole Mixteca region') (de los Reyes 1890 [1593]: ii-iii; translation my own). It is likely that some individuals had multidialectal competence during the Postclassic era (900 CE-c. 1500 CE). Josserand states that at its peak of "florescent cultural unity," Mixtec "was almost certainly triglossic" (1983: 469). Three distinct varieties occupied different social spheres: a courtly language used by nobility; a lingua franca used for commercial trade, which was likely the Teposcolula variety documented by the Dominicans; and the local varieties associated with home villages. In the Mixteca today, Spanish has replaced the Teposcolula variety as a lingua franca, except in the most isolated regions of the Mixteca Baja and Guerrero, where speakers use local varieties of Mixtec to communicate with one another (Josserand 1983: 467-468).

In the last century, some scholars of Mixtec have attempted to enumerate its varieties and understand their internal classification. In the most recent estimates, *Ethnologue* lists 52 Mixtec languages (Simons and Fennig 2017), while the Mexican government's Instituto

Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas ('National Institute of Indigenous Languages') proposes 81 distinct varieties (INALI 2008). The early literature—and indeed, some more contemporary work—presents no clear consensus about whether Mixtec should be described in terms of "languages" or "dialects," in large part because scholars' definitions of these words are themselves variable. While Mak and Longacre (1960: 24) present a study of 28 "dialects," they use *dialect* simply to refer to the variety spoken in a single town. Jiménez Moreno (1962) asserts that there are seven "dialect complexes," the internal structure of which is underdescribed. Merrifield and Stoudt (1967: 58) claim that Mixtec has "perhaps as many as twelve mutually unintelligible dialects," although they do not explain how they arrive at this figure. Bradley (1970: 1) posits up to twice this number of dialects, likely on the basis of unpublished intelligibility surveys (Bradley 1967). Daly (1973: 4) and Pensinger and Lyman (1975) were among the first linguists to describe Mixtec as a group of distinct languages, with the latter positing up to 15 (Josserand 1983: 133).

While linguistic studies of Mixtec have undoubtedly benefited from this early literature, it nonetheless suffers from terminological uncertainty and unproblematized definitions when it comes to classifying Mixtec variation. Egland (1978) is among the few studies that have attempted to use wide-scale intelligibility testing as a criterion, sorting the Mixtec spoken in 84 towns into 29 subgroups. However, he employed a lower cut-off level than was used in other contemporary intelligibility surveys of Mexican languages (70% instead of 80%), due to low overall rates of mutual intelligibility between all Mixtec varieties (Josserand 1983: 148-149); his results should therefore not be taken as a definitive guide to internal subgrouping. More recent linguistic studies (e.g., Peters 2018), including the present dissertation, employ the more neutral term *variety* to avoid this terminological conundrum.

Regardless of the terms that linguists use to describe it, variation across the Mixteca is significant: Josserand's (1983) study of Mixtec dialect history drew on correspondence sets from 120 villages, all of which diverged from the others in some unique way. Despite the broad scope of her survey, the Mixtec spoken in many villages was not included in this work. Documentation of additional varieties is currently in progress, including documentation of varieties spoken in Ventura County (e.g., Bax et al. in prep.; Hernández Martínez et al. 2018; Mendoza 2020; MILPA 2020; Reyes Basurto et al. 2016), which will contribute to a more in-depth knowledge base for understanding the historical diversification of the Mixtec language complex.

### 3.2.2 The origin of the *Alto*/*Bajo* dialect labels

The internal classification of Mixtec is frequently discussed with reference to three dialect macro-groups: Mixteco Alto (literally 'high Mixtec'), Mixteco Bajo (literally 'low Mixtec'), and Mixteco de la Costa ('Coastal Mixtec'). These groupings originally stem from the names of geographical zones of the Mixteca region, which encompasses 25,000 $km_2$. *Alta* and *Baja* refer to these zones' relative elevation profile, located among high-elevation mountains (generally over 6,000 feet above sea level; Josserand 1983: 108) and lower-elevation foothills, respectively. Figure 3.1 reproduces Macaulay's (1996: 9) map of the Mixtec area (for an extensive description of the geography of the region, see Josserand 1983: 102-119).
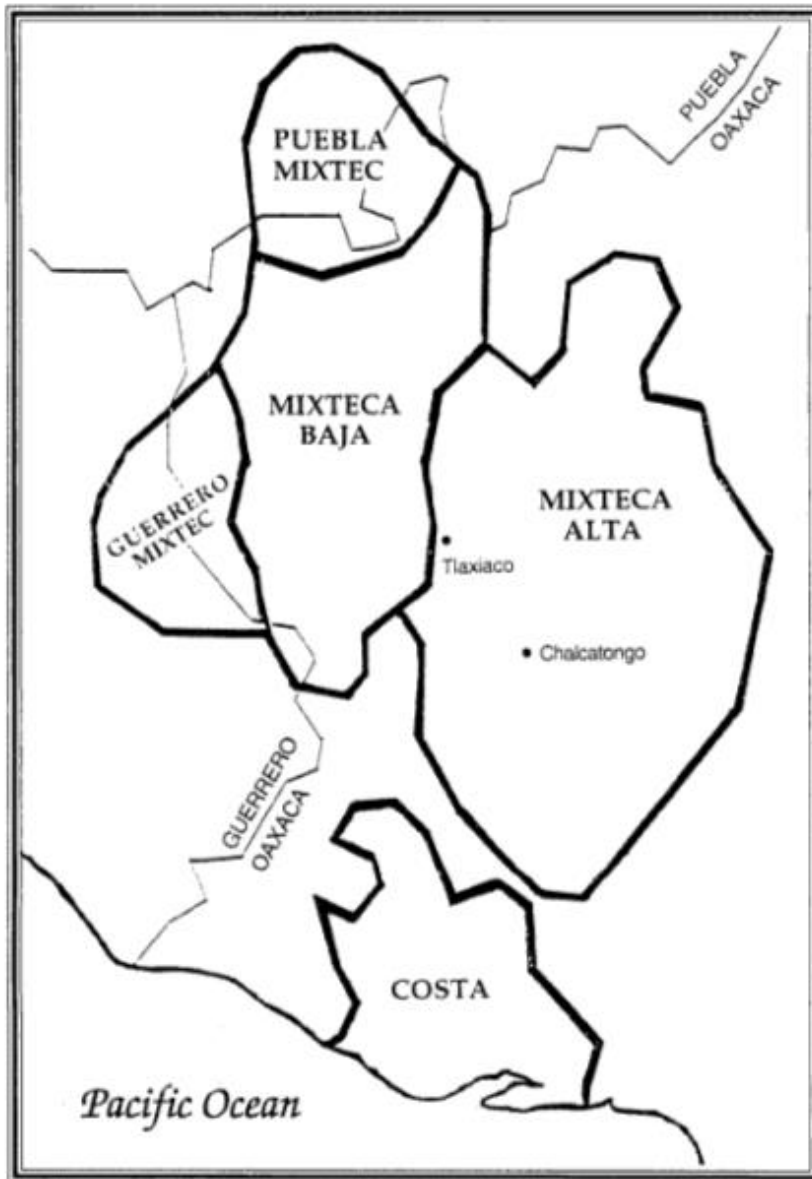
Map 4: Five Mixtec Dialect Areas
(Adapted from Josserand 1983:107; used with permission)

*Figure 3.1: Macaulay's (1996: 9) map of the zones of the Mixteca region, adapted from Josserand (1983: 107)*

The division of the Mixteca into three distinct regions apparently dates back to

prehispanic times.[3] Precolonial Mixtecs referred to the Mixteca Alta region as *Ñudzahui*

[3] De los Reyes (1890 [1593]: i-ii) also lists a fourth region, the "Chuchon Mixteca," which was inhabited by speakers of the Chocho language (from the Popolocan branch of Otomanguean), but this region is rarely discussed in subsequent literature.

*ñuhu* ('divine and esteemed place'), the Mixteca Baja as "Ñuniñe, por ser una zona cálida"

('for being a hot region'), and the Mixteca de la Costa was called "Ñundaa, por ser tierra

llana" ('because it was a flat land') (de los Reyes 1890 [1593]: i-ii; Rojas Santos 2011: 39,

citing Romero Frizzi 1996: 47).4 Based on their citation by de los Reyes, it is likely that

these names are taken from a variety of Alta Mixtec, since his primary consultants were

speakers of the Teposcolula and Yanhuitlán varieties, both of which fall into Josserand's

Northeastern Alta group (1983: 171). Sixteenth-century Spanish colonizers imposed the

*Alta*, *Baja*, and *de la Costa* regional names; these zones were collectively referred to as "las

tres mixtecas" ('the three Mixtecas') (Josserand 1983: 105-106).5

The linkage between these geographical regions and the varieties of language spoken

within them, which "territorializes" Mixtec linguistic variation (Auer 2005: 11), emerges

quite early on in colonial documents. De los Reyes' *Arte en Lengua Mixteca* compares

forms spoken in the "Mixteca baxa" to those from the "Mixteca alta" (1890 [1593]: vi). The

Spanish chronicler Antonio de Hererra y Tordesillas (1726 [1601-1615], vol. 3: 97) claimed

that the two primary dialects were those spoken in the Mixteca Alta and the Mixteca Baja

(Josserand 1983: 123). The territorialized connection between geographical labels and

language names is now firmly established in the present-day bureaucracy of the Mexican

state. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geographía ('National Institute of Statistics

and Geography'), which is tasked with conducting the decennial census, uses the terms

*Mixteco de la mixteca baja* and *Mixteco de la mixteca alta* in its definition of the Mixtec

languages (INEGI 2010b):

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4 The Mixtec names of sub-regions within these larger groupings can be found in de los Reyes 1890
[1593]: i-ii.
5 This tripartite division omits the portions of the Mixteca that extend into the southern portion of the
modern-day state of Puebla, as well as the mountains of eastern Guerrero (Josserand 1983: 105-106).

Definición: Las lenguas mixtecas comprenden: Mixteco, Mixteco de la costa, **Mixteco de la mixteca alta, Mixteco de la mixteca baja,** Mixteco de la zona mazateca, Mixteco de Puebla y Tecuate. (Emphasis mine)

(*Definition: The Mixtec languages include: Mixteco, Mixteco de la Costa, Mixteco from the Mixteca Alta, Mixteco from the Mixteca Baja, Mixteco from the Mazatec zone, Mixteco from Puebla, and Tecuate* [sic: this refers to Tacuate, the Mixtec variety spoken in the municipalities of Santa María Zacatepec and Santiago Ixtayutla in the Costa region].)

However, Campbell cautions that "[w]hile larger regions such as the Mixteca Alta, Mixteca Baja, and Mixteca de la Costa may have geographic utility, they are not linguistic groupings" (2017b: 8). Nevertheless, in the most thorough study of Mixtec internal classification to date, Josserand used modified versions of these labels to name her 12 dialect groups (Figure 3.2), which she reconstructed based on correspondence sets from 120 varieties (1983: 165).

*Figure 3.2: Josserand's (1983: 470) map of Mixtec dialect areas*

Josserand's classifications continue to be used in most contemporary studies of Mixtec

today, although linguists also generally take care to mention which particular village their

consultants are from in addition to the variety's subgroup.

Although *Alto*, *Bajo*, and *de la Costa* may not be linguistic groups in the strict historical-comparative sense, I argue that they have nevertheless become linguistic-ideological groupings. In particular, speakers have appropriated *Alto* and *Bajo* as broad metalinguistic labels to classify and make sense of the variation they encounter within the Mixtec diaspora, which I discuss in more detail below.

## 3.3 Linguistic differentiation in the Mixtec diaspora

The extraordinarily complex sociolinguistic situation of California Mixtec is in large part due to the geographical diversity of residents' hometowns, which cover a wide swath of the Mixteca. Most Mixtecs living in the southern portion of California's Central Coast region, which includes Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, are from villages in western Oaxaca or eastern Guerrero (Mines, Nichols, and Runsten 2010). In Ventura County, Mixtecs from the Oaxacan municipality of San Martín Peras are numerically dominant (Bax et al. in prep.; López and Runsten 2004: 290); they speak varieties that Josserand (1983: 470) classified as members of the Southern Baja subgroup, such as those from the towns of El Paredón, Ahuejutla, San Isidro la Raya, and Piedra Azul (cf. Mendoza 2020; Peters 2018). Other Southern Baja varieties spoken in Ventura County include, but are not limited to, San Martín Duraznos, San Jéronimo Progreso, Santiago Juxtlahuaca, and San Francisco Higos. An in-progress survey of almost 500 Mixtec speakers living in Ventura County (Bax et al. in prep., see Chapter 2) has also identified the presence of varieties classified in the subgroups of Central Baja (e.g., from the towns of San Sebastián del Monte and San Jorge Nuchita), Guerrero (e.g., Tlahuapa), and Mixtepec (e.g., Snuu Viko, also called San Juan Mixtepec), though Southern Baja varieties predominate. Crucially, among the more than 250 Mixtecs

whose survey data have thus far been analyzed, only a single individual has identified as speaking a variety from the Mixteca Alta.

On multiple different occasions, I was a part of quasi-administrative interactions at MICOP in which I or other UCSB linguists asked Mixtecs 'what variety' ("qué variante") they speak. When I asked this question, whether in my role as a teacher of a special linguistics class for an Indigenous youth group, as a linguistic consultant for a medical interpreters' network, or as a co-participant in a Mixtec literacy workshop, it was in an attempt to find out the respondent's home village in order to better classify the variation in their speech. It was not uncommon, however, to instead receive the response "I speak Mixteco Bajo." Asking directly about participants' hometowns instead ultimately yielded the information I was seeking. Nevertheless, I was struck by the fact that speakers from multiple villages used the broad label *Mixteco Bajo* for their own way of speaking. Moreover, this self-labeling practice does not only occur when speaking to linguists: Example 3, analyzed later in this chapter, illustrates its use in a conversation between two young Mixteca women.

Although *Mixteco Bajo* was sometimes used as an autonym by speakers of diverse varieties in Ventura County, community members were nonetheless aware of variation within that broad category. The fact that people from different villages speak differently was frequently the subject of metalinguistic discussion and interest, especially in language-oriented contexts like literacy workshops. In addition, staff at Indigenous advocacy organizations throughout California, including MICOP, are very aware of the need to correctly identify specific varieties in order to provide appropriate language services; for

instance, when assigning Mixtec-language interpreters to clients who speak the same variety (Marie Uliasz 2018).

Mixtec speakers in the diaspora employ three distinct strategies when discussing dialectal variation.6 One strategy is to describe or exemplify variation without using a metalinguistic label to identify the variety it comes from. Another is to locate variation geographically via the names of individual villages. A third involves the use of non-village-based language names and metalinguistic labels, either in Mixtec or in Spanish. Below I discuss each strategy in turn.

### 3.3.1 Describing or exemplifying variation

Conversations about variation between Mixtec speakers often centered around lexical contrast, featuring explicit comparisons between how salient words or phrases are pronounced across communities: 'We say X but they say Y'. I have also heard multiple speakers describe other varieties as being "otro Mixteco" ('another Mixtec') or having a different "tono" ('tone'). Although Mixtec varieties do demonstrate divergent systems of lexical and grammatical tone, this is not the sense in which many speakers use the term *tono*. Instead, it describes a broader sense of difference, which can be lexical as well as phonological. Falconi (2016) documents a similar metalinguistic descriptive practice among Zapotec speakers from San Juan Guelavía, who describe speakers of a distant town as speaking a 'different dialect' and as having "otro tono" ('a different tone'). She argues that in this usage, words like *tono* "do not overlap exactly with how they are used by linguists, to

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6 It is entirely possible that speakers living in the Mixteca region engage in linguistic differentiation practices that are distinct from those found in the diaspora, as Falconi (2016) found for speakers of San Juan Guelavía Zapotec living in Los Angeles vs. in Oaxaca.

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describe … shifts in pitch that convey grammatically meaningful distinctions. Rather, they are reflexive assessments of the lexical and phonological differences between the varieties being compared" (Falconi 2016: 104). Sicoli, too, notes that both Lachixío Zapotec and Spanish speakers use *tono* "to describe tone, intonation, tone of voice, and more general habits of language pronunciation" (2007: 4). While both Falconi and Sicoli observed this usage among Zapotec speakers living in Oaxaca, I have frequently encountered it in the California Mixtec diaspora. (Its use in the Mixteca remains to be investigated.)

Example 1, taken from an interview with Ita Ndivi, demonstrates her repeated use of *tono* to describe intervarietal differences. Ita Ndivi's father and brothers speak the Piedra Azul variety, while she and her mother speak the El Paredón variety. Both villages are located in the municipality of San Martín Peras, roughly an hour and a half to two hours away from each other by car. The varieties are mutually intelligible but not identical, as the following discussion of lexical variation illustrates:

**Example 1: "Un tono poquito"**
*(20181218_ItaNdivi_interview2, 00:17:33-00:19:46)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Anna: | So en tu opinión, | *So in your opinion,* |
| 2 | | qué — | *what—* |
| 3 | | ¿Hay unas diferencias entre el mixteco de Paredón, | |
| | | *Are there any differences between the Mixteco of Paredón,* | |
| 4 | | y el mixteco de— | *and the Mixteco of—* |
| 5 | | de, | *of,* |
| 6 | | Piedra Azul? | *Piedra Azul?* |
| 7 | Ita Ndivi: | Uh. | *Uh.* |
| 8 | | Okay. | *Okay.* |
| 9 | | Hay algo, | *There's something,* |
| 10 | | muy raro allí? | *very strange there?* |
| 11 | | Siento? | *I feel?* |
| 12 | | Porque, | *Because,* |
| 13 | | um, | *um,* |
| 14 | | el pueblo? | *the village?* |
| 15 | | Cada pueblo, | *Each village,* |
| 16 | | tiene como, | *has like,* |
| 17 | | un tono poquito? | *a little tone?* |

| 18 |  | De lo que, | *Of the,* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 19 |  | de lo— | *of the—* |
| 20 |  | #pues, | *#well,* |
| 21 |  | yo siento que es, | *I feel like it's,* |
| 22 |  | como, | *like,* |
| 23 |  | diferente. | *different.* |
| 24 | Anna: | Mhm. | *Mhm.* |
| 25 | Ita Ndivi: | Porque el pueblo de mi mamá? | *Because my mom's village?* |
| 26 |  | Como, | *Like,* |
| 27 |  | a dirigir a Diós como jurar? | *to address God like to swear [an oath]?* |
| 28 |  | Le dicen, | *They say to him,* |
| 29 |  | "**á ntsióxì**." | "***á ntsióxì.***" |
| 30 |  | Dicen, | *They say,* |
| 31 |  | el pueblo de mi, | *the village of my,* |
| 32 |  | de mi papá. | *of my father.* (Piedra Azul) |
| 33 |  | Y de mi mamá dicen, | *And in my mom's [village]* (El Paredón) *they say,* |
| 34 |  | "**táte**." | "***táte.***" |
| 35 |  | Sí. | *Yes.* |
| 36 | Anna: | [####] |  |
| 37 | Ita Ndivi: | [Y luego] es como que, | *And then it's like,* |
| 38 |  | uh, | *uh,* |
| 39 |  | pero, | *but,* |
| 40 |  | lo dicen como un tono "**táte háăn**." |  |
|  |  | *they say it like a tone* "***táte haăn.***" |  |
| 41 |  | Así como que, | *So like,* |
| 42 |  | un tono diferente. | *a different tone.* |

*(60 seconds omitted)*

| 43 | Ita Ndivi: | Es que, | *It's that,* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 44 |  | uh, | *uh,* |
| 45 |  | el tono es el— | *the tone is the—* |
| 46 |  | el que hace un poquito. | *the thing that does a little bit.* |
| 47 |  | No mucho. | *Not a lot.* |
| 48 |  | No es un tono grande como, | *It's not a big tone like,* |
| 49 |  | de, | *of,* |
| 50 |  | Triqui, | *Triqui,* |
| 51 |  | de, | *of,* |
| 52 |  | de, | *of,* |
| 53 |  | como, | *like,* |
| 54 |  | otro, | *another,* |
| 55 |  | de nuestro lenguaje? | *of our language?* |
| 56 | Anna: | Mhm. | *Mhm.* |
| 57 | Ita Ndivi: | No es así, | *It's not like that,* |
| 58 |  | como de grande. | *like big.* |
| 59 |  | Sino como, | *Instead it's like,* |
| 60 |  | poquito. | *small.* |
| 61 |  | Nomás del tono. | *Just of the tone.* |
| 62 |  | Unas palabras que otras? | *Some words [rather] than others?* |
| 63 |  | También como, | *Also like,* |
| 64 |  | unas palabras agregan ellos, | *they add some words,* |
| 65 |  | o no sé, | *or I don't know,* |
| 66 |  | si lo cambian? | *if they change it?* |

| 67 | Y luego este, | *And then um,* |
|---|---|---|
| 68 | sí se dice diferente. | *they do say it differently.* |
| 69 | Unos tonos. | *Some tones.* |

In lines 1-6, I ask Ita Ndivi whether she has observed any dissimilarities between the Mixtec varieties spoken in her household. She confirms that it is not just between those two villages that she has noticed a distinction, but in fact every village has "como un tono poquito" ('like a little tone', lines 15-17). She then exemplifies this assertion by illuminating a salient difference in the name that one uses to address God, which is *á ntsióxì* in Piedra Azul and *táte* or *táte háăn* in El Paredón. In line 40 she describes the lexical difference as "un tono" before giving an extended example of the El Paredón phrase: "lo dicen como un tono 'táte háăn'" ('they say it like a tone "táte haăn"'*).* The difference between the two villages is neatly summed up in 41-42: "Así como que, un tono diferente" ('So like, a different tone'). She continues referring to Mixtec variation as *tono* in line 45, describing it as something that is responsible for the ways that varieties diverge from one another "un poquito, no mucho" ('a little, not a lot', lines 45-46). Lines 48-55 reveal that *tono* can also demarcate languages and not just varieties, when she says that Mixtec variation is not "un tono grande" ('a big tone') like the difference between Mixtec and Triqui (a language which is relatively closely related to but not mutually intelligible with any Mixtec variety). Varietal distinctions described as *tono* also include speakers 'adding' different words (line 64) and making other unspecified 'changes' (66). *Tono* in Example 1 refers broadly to linguistic dissimilarities both big and small, both cross-linguistic (Mixtec vs. Triqui) and intervarietal within a single municipality (El Paredón vs. Piedra Azul Mixtec). As in Falconi's work with Zapotec speakers, this discussion of linguistic difference is "grounded in specific comparisons of lexemes, which index the speakers' familiarity with and competence in both varieties" (2016: 104). *Tono* in this instance describes lexical difference rather than phonological

pitch, but it should be noted that elsewhere Ita Ndivi does, in fact, identify lexical and grammatical tone as a salient locus of variation (see Chapter 4).

In general, speakers' frequent comparisons of cognate forms across varieties and their use of broad metalinguistic descriptions like *tono* or *otro mixteco* reflects the highly salient nature of intervarietal diversity in the diaspora community.

### 3.3.2 Village names as variety names

Diasporic Mixtecs also sometimes map linguistic difference onto geographical origin by using the names of particular villages or municipalities to refer to distinct ways of speaking. In the following excerpt from Marie Uliasz (2018: 84), a monolingual Mixtec speaker living in Ventura County explains that he is not able to understand every variety of Mixtec which is broadcast on MICOP's Radio Indígena station, which he attributes to geographical difference:

> Even though it's the same language, sometimes we don't understand the Mixteco from each municipality. Sometimes this happens on the radio and we try to understand, but it's not the same... There are different variants; like we are from San Martín Peras, others are from San Martín Duraznos and Juxtlahuaca and the variants are different. I imagine the same thing happens with Zapoteco. One idea would be for the radio to use different Mixteco variants on different days.

It is clear that this speaker is highly knowledgeable about the linguistic landscape of the diaspora community, as well as how it maps onto the linguistic landscape of the Mixteca at multiple levels of political organization (district, municipality, and/or village). Juxtlahuaca may refer either to a district in the state of Oaxaca, the municipality of Santiago Juxtlahuaca within that district, or the town of Santiago Juxtlahuaca, which is the seat of that municipality. San Martín Peras refers both to a municipality in the district of Juxtlahuaca and its municipal seat of the same name. San Martín Duraznos is a town that is located

within the municipality of San Sebastián Tecomaxtlahuaca, also in the Juxtlahuaca district. The speaker suggests that a similar linkage of linguistic variation to community of origin may be present among other locally-represented Indigenous groups, such as Zapotecs. (Falconi 2016 found geographically-based ideologies of linguistic differentiation among Zapotecs in Oaxaca, but not in the Los Angeles diaspora community, although the situation in Ventura County may be different.)

The youth participants in my research also sometimes used the names of villages or municipalities to locate linguistic difference at multiple levels. For example, one young Mixteca woman, Isabel, contrasted her parents' family language policy, which emphasized the importance of learning Spanish and English at the expense of Mixtec, to "los de San Martín [Peras]" ('those from San Martín'), who according to her are more strict in their insistence that their children continue to speak Mixtec in the home. Isabel also identified certain Mixtec phonemes as characteristic of the speech of "los de San Martín," as I discuss in the next chapter (Section 4.4.2).

### 3.3.3 Glossonyms

The third strategy that diasporic Mixtecs use to talk about linguistic difference involves glossonyms (language names), both in Mixtec and in Spanish. The Spanish names *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* are common; the later sections of this chapter treat them in depth. In addition, some speakers prefer to use endonyms to describe their language. The name *Mixtec* is not actually a Mixtec word: it is a Nahuatl exonym, from *mis* 'cloud' + *-te-ka* 'inhabitant of place of' (Campbell 1997: 402). While the compositional meaning of the Nahuatl term clearly refers to the people, the word *Mixtec* has long been used to refer to the languages as

well (e.g., de los Reyes 1890 [1593]). Although I lack primary-source documentation of how the mapping process between ethnonym and glossonym took place for Mixtec specifically, a parallel example has been described for the Tzotzil Maya ethnolinguistic group. The ethnic label *Tzotzil* is derived from a Spanish mishearing and shortening of the endonym *sotz'il vinik* 'bat people'; the new ethnonym was then ascribed to the language: "Naturally, once they were named in this way, the Tzotzils couldn't speak anything else other than *the Tzotzil language*" (d'Ans 1997: 195, emphasis original).[7] In Indigenous Mexico, as elsewhere, it is clear that language names are not unchanging designations handed down from above, but are subject to the same ideological and discursive processes of translation and transformation as other elements of culture.

In keeping with the diversity of the Mixtec language complex, there seem to be almost as many glossonyms as there are village-based varieties. As of May 2020, INALI lists 91 "autodenominaciones" ('endonyms'), which are linked to 81 geographically-defined "variantes" ('varieties') associated with particular regions, municipalities, and/or villages.[8]

Ventura County Mixtecs tend to use one of two endonyms: *Tu'un Nda'vi* (literally 'language of the humble' or 'language of the poor') and *Tu'un Savi* (lit. 'language of the rain').[9] These map onto the person reference terms *Na Nda'vi* ('Mixtecs', lit. 'humble people') and *Na Savi* ('Mixtecs', lit. 'people of the rain'). Following Guadalupe Joaquina (2014) and Peters (2018), I represent these names without tonal diacritics to indicate

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[7] "Bien entendu, une fois désignés de cette façon, les Tzotzils ne pouvaient plus parler que *le tzotzil*" (translation my own).

[8] https://www.inali.gob.mx/clin-inali/html/l_mixteco.html

[9] In San Miguel Cuevas Mixtec (Southern Baja), the local glossonym for 'language of the rain' (*tù'ūn sàvì*) can also be translated as 'Dzahui's language', where "*Dzahui* is the name of the Mesoamerican rain deity that appears in Mixtec codices and ancient stone carvings" (Cisneros 2019: 52).

collective reference rather than provenance in a single Mixtec variety. For some speakers,

the use of one term over another bears ideological weight: "The stigma associated with

speaking Indigenous languages in Mexico led some Na Savi (Mixtec) intellectuals and

activists to popularize the alternative endonym Tu'un Savi … But because Tu'un Savi is

often less recognizable to speakers, the name Tu'un Nda'vi remains prominent, with some

additional emphasis on the association with humility" (Peters 2018: 1). Some Mixtecs in

Ventura County participate in activist discourses that argue for the use of *Tu'un Savi* over

*Tu'un Nda'vi* to avoid the negative connotations associated with the referential meaning of

*nda'vi*.[10]

At least for some speakers in the California diaspora, a language-ideological process has

taken place in which the *Tu'un Savi*/*Tu'un Nda'vi* endonyms are mapped onto the *Mixteco*

*Alto*/*Mixteco Bajo* Spanish labels, respectively. Morán-Lanier (2020) worked with four

Mixtec men on the Central Coast of California, all of whom were originally from Oaxacan

villages in the municipality of Juxtlahuaca. All four self-identified as speakers of Mixteco

Bajo varieties and preferred to call their language *Tu'un Nda'vi*. While the men were

familiar with the activist discourse that promotes the label *Tu'un Savi* over *Tu'un Nda'vi*,

they rejected this terminology for themselves because they did not feel that *Tu'un Savi*

accurately described their language. In their view, *Tu'un Savi* necessarily named a variety

belonging to a different group of Mixtecs. In other words, these men did not regard *Tu'un*

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[10] A similar effort appears to be underway in Mexico as well, according to Cisneros, who writes that "[t]he movement to rename all Mixtec languages as local translations of 'rain language' or 'Dzahui's language' has spread into much of the Mixteca region besides San Miguel Cuevas, though [he has] not been able to trace its origin or motivation" (2019: 52).

*Nda'vi* and *Tu'un Savi* as interchangeable labels for the same language; they used them to denote distinct lectal variants instead.

Furthermore, these labels were coupled with an evaluative judgment which positioned *Tu'un Savi* as more standard or higher status, compared to their own *Nda'vi* varieties. Morán-Lanier (2020) traces this hierarchy to two possible sources. First, the *Savi* glossonym is associated with a growing tradition of Mixtec literacy. It is the preferred term of a community of Mixtec scholars and intellectuals (e.g., Caballero 2009), including Ve'e Tu'un Savi (literally 'House of the Language of the Rain'), the Academy of the Mixtec Language (Guadalupe Joaquina 2014), a group of Oaxacan scholars who have developed an orthography for several Alta Mixtec varieties. Morán-Lanier's interviewees, who were not literate in Mixtec, associated *Tu'un Savi* with a more literary form of the language and their own *Tu'un Nda'vi* label with an unwritten, primarily oral variant. Second, Morán-Lanier argues that the denotational meaning of the words *Savi* ('rain') and *Nda'vi* ('humble, poor, naive') contributes to his consultants' linguistic insecurity. 'The language of the rain' was felt to be a more poetic name that contrasted with the participants' own glossonym, 'the language of the humble', locating the latter as lower-status by implication.

Most importantly for the present study, Morán-Lanier also reports the existence of an ideological mapping between *Tu'un Nda'vi* and *Mixteco Bajo* on the one hand, and *Tu'un Savi* and *Mixteco Alto* on the other. Like the focus on the semantic content of *Nda'vi*, this relies on a referential reinterpretation of the denotative meaning of *Bajo*. While it was originally used to refer to altitude, this novel linkage strips it of geographical significance, connecting the 'humble/poor' glosses of *Nda'vi* to a more general meaning of 'low' and, by

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extension, 'low-status'. A parallel application of this logic to *Alto* results in its reinterpretation as 'high-status', rather than 'high-altitude'.[11]

The roots of an ideological hierarchy of Mixtec varieties can be seen in early Spanish colonial documents. The Dominican friar Antonio de los Reyes based his Mixtec grammar on the Teposcolula variety, which was used as a commercial lingua franca throughout the Mixteca and which he considered to be "[la] más universal, y clara, y que mejor se entiende en toda la Mixteca" ('the most universal and clear, and which is understood best across the whole Mixteca') (1890 [1593]: iii). He believed all other Mixtec dialects were derived from either the Teposcolula variety or that from Yanhuitlán, which was also used as a lingua franca but less widely (Josserand 1983: 122-123). Both the Teposcolula and Yanhuitlán dialects fall into the Northeastern Alta group (Josserand 1983: 171). It seems possible that the Spanish colonizers' "hyperbolic valorization" (Hill 2002) of this Alta variety and its use in legal and linguistic colonial documents may have planted the seeds for Morán-Lanier's participants' view of modern-day *Mixteco Alto* as more standard or higher-status, especially paired with the modern-day connections between Alta varieties and literacy and the referential reinterpretation of *Alto*.

As Léglise and Migge (2006: 335) state, "[a]cts of naming linguistic varieties are never neutral but are always dependent on and contribute to their representation and to the

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[11] Bernard Comrie (p.c. 4/30/20) notes a parallel referential reinterpretation of 'high' and 'low' in a European context, and suggests that "maybe there is something more systematic that can be said about such cases. The one most familiar to me is the shift in the term 'High German', originally the speech of those who lived in the higher German-speaking areas as opposed to those living on the Northern European Plain, who spoke 'Low German'. But with the decline in prestige of Low German, 'High German' came to take on the meaning of 'prestigious variety', what we might now call 'Standard German'. This is the primary sense in ordinary German usage, and only those familiar with historical linguistics/dialectology would continue to use the term in its older sense. A Swiss German speaker would equate Hochdeutsch [High German] with Standard German, and might be surprised to learn that linguists consider their dialect to be 'High German'."

representation of the speakers involved." In Morán-Lanier's (2020) study, the *Nda'vi/Bajo* and *Savi/Alto* mappings are about more than just language—they are also a projection of language-ideological distinctions into the social sphere. His *Bajo*-speaking consultants perceived a status hierarchy among Mixtec varieties, on which they felt themselves to be located at the bottom. Importantly, these men were not comparing themselves to any actual *Mixteco Alto* or *Tu'un Savi* speakers with whom they interacted in daily life; in fact, it is doubtful that they encountered many speakers of Alta varieties in their region at all (Morán-Lanier, 4/15/2020). Instead, their use of *Mixteco Alto* referred to an imagined speech community (Pratt 1987), an idealized group who engaged in literacy practices and spoke some higher-status variety (the exact features of which were underspecified or not identified).

However, this hierarchical language ideology is not necessarily shared by all Mixtec speakers in the diaspora. Most Ventura County Mixtecs with whom I have interacted are accepting of village-based variation. I have not encountered the belief that *Alto* varieties are more standard, nor much discourse about there being "right" and "wrong" ways to speak the language. It must be noted, however, that my impression of the community's overall accepting stance should be taken with a caveat: most of my introductions to Mixtecs in Ventura County took place through MICOP, which has a welcoming, pluralist orientation to Mixtec variation and regularly engages in linguistic activism. It remains to be investigated whether this stance is also shared by those who are unaffiliated or unfamiliar with MICOP. Certainly, a community of this size is unlikely to exhibit homogeneity in its language attitudes. In a study of Indigenous-language interpreting in Ventura County, for instance,

Marie Uliasz (2018: 75-76) quotes a few Mixtec-speaking individuals who had negative experiences when working with interpreters who spoke a different variety of Mixtec:

> (1) This person was interpreting and since her variant is different she said one word and he answered another and she didn't understand and the man that was interpreting basically made fun of the woman who needed an interpreter because to him that word had another meaning.

> (2) A person who speaks Mixteco, but not the same Mixteco from my community, asked [the participant's sister-in-law] why she didn't understand and treated her poorly because she didn't speak the same variant.

None of the speakers quoted in Marie Uliasz (2018) label their own or others' varieties as *Alto*/*Bajo* or *Tu'un Savi*/*Tu'un Nda'vi*, however, so it is impossible to tell from these data whether such negative experiences result from a language-ideological hierarchy or simply from interpersonal rudeness. In any case, although the data for this dissertation were also collected with Mixtecs in Ventura County, I have found no evidence that any variety is perceived as higher-status than others**.** From time to time there are comments that indicate a slight preference for one's own variety, which normally take a jocular tone, but these assessments of one variety as superior to another are not based on an externally-imposed standard.[12]

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[12] The Mixtec scholar Juan Julián Caballero notes a similar preference for the norms of one's own village among Mixtecs in Mexico: "cada comunidad va determinando en qué difiere de otra comunidad que comparte la misma lengua, la misma historia y la misma cultura; a veces cada comunidad se siente poseedora de una historia verdadera y de una lengua auténtica; no pocas veces escuchamos expresar: 'aquí se habla el mejor mixteco', 'aquí se habla el mixteco más antiguo', 'esta es la comunidad más antigua', 'los mixtecos tuvieron su origen aquí' o 'de aquí salieron los mixtecos para fundar a otras comunidades'" (2009: 34). (*Each community decides what sets it apart from other communities that share the same language, the same history, and the same language; at times each community feels itself to be the possessor of a true history and an authentic language; it is not uncommon to hear "the best Mixteco is spoken here," "the oldest Mixtec is spoken here," "this is the oldest community," "the origin of all Mixtecs was here" or "this is where Mixtecs originated from to found other communities"*) (translation my own).

While the labels *Tu'un Savi* and *Tu'un Nda'vi* are both still present in Ventura County, their differential use indexes a somewhat different ideological split. Unlike what Morán-Lanier (2020) found, the variation does not seem to depend on a variety's perceived status or proximity to literacy. Instead, the endonyms appear to index a political stance. Some members of the MICOP community, such as the facilitators of the Tequio Youth Group, have advocated for the use of *Tu'un Savi* for the activist reasons I mentioned previously: because *Tu'un Nda'vi* is felt by some to represent a negative self-regard imposed via colonization, *Tu'un Savi* is suggested as an alternative decolonial label. Nevertheless, some of my data does demonstrate an association between *Mixteco Alto* and the ethnic label *Nuu Savi*, akin to Morán-Lanier's findings, as I discuss below.

Immediately prior to the interaction transcribed in Example 2, I had asked Isabel, a young Mixtec woman, about her preferred terms for describing her identity. She first responds by identifying the labels she uses in Spanish, then pivots to explaining the more complex rationale for her chosen Mixtec endonym, *Nuu Nda'vi* ('humble people').[13] Because Isabel's parents use this term for themselves, it is also the one to which she feels the strongest connection. But as a participant in the politically-oriented Tequio Youth Group, the facilitators of which favor *Savi*, Isabel's choice of *Nda'vi* is fraught. This tension

While these feelings of superiority are based on linguistic judgment, they are just as much if not more a cultural evaluation. Such remarks do not indicate hierarchical preference for a standard language, but rather reflect a concern with authenticity and a strong hometown preference. Caballero also identifies them as being rooted in a desire to set one's own community apart from others within the large and diverse Mixteca region. Although there may be individuals who stigmatize the varieties spoken in other village, Caballero argues that the true origins of this intra-Mixtec discrimination ultimately lie in colonial domination (2009: 35).

[13] In many other locally spoken Mixtec varieties, this endonym is *Na Nda'vi* 'humble people', with the 3rd-person plural pronoun *na* where Isabel uses *nuu* [nu:]. Isabel may have instead been aiming to produce the word for 'pueblo' ('people' or 'village'), which is *ñuun* [ñü:] in her father's Tlahuapa variety (Reyes Basurto et al. 2016).

is visible in the rest of the interaction, in which Isabel recounts a conversation with her father Salvador about these labels. Salvador is from Tlahuapa, Guerrero, and Isabel's mother is from a village in the San Martín Peras municipality. Broadly speaking, both of their varieties can be classified as belonging to Baja subgroups. In Example 2, Isabel explains that the reason Salvador favors *Nuu Nda'vi* is because he equates *Nuu Savi* with "los mixtecos alto," a group to which he and his wife, as Baja speakers, do not belong. (Isabel is receptively trilingual; her parents typically speak to her in Mixtec and she replies in Spanish. Although she uses Spanish for her (re)construction of Salvador's dialogue, he most likely would have been speaking to her in Mixtec or in a mix of Mixtec and Spanish.)

**Example 2: "Eso es sólo para los mixtecos altos, no para nosotros"**
*(20181111_Isabel_interview1, 00:50:11 - 00:51:30)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Isabel: | In Spanish? | |
| 2 | | Para mí it's like "Okay, | *For me it's like "Okay,* |
| 3 | | soy indígena o mixteco soy," | *I'm Indigenous or Mixteco I'm,"* |
| 4 | | yeah. | |
| 5 | Anna: | Mhm. | |
| 6 | Isabel: | <TEETH SUCK> | |
| 7 | | (1.4) | |
| 8 | | It's cause, | |
| 9 | | en Mixteco, | *in Mixteco,* |
| 10 | | como, | *like,* |
| 11 | | now they're going with, | |
| 12 | | um. | |
| 13 | | **Nuu S—** | *people of the r—* |
| 14 | | (1.0) | |
| 15 | | ##? | |
| 16 | | **Nuu Savi**? | ***Mixtec? (lit. 'people of the rain')*** |
| 17 | Anna: | [**Nuu Savi**?] | ***Mixtec?*** |
| 18 | Isabel: | [I— I don't,] | |
| 19 | | my parents don't, | |
| 20 | | (1.0) | |
| 21 | | they don't consider themselves that. | |
| 22 | Anna: | [They don't consider] themselves **Nuu Savi**? | |
| 23 | Isabel: | [They consi—] | |
| 24 | | No they consider themselves, | |
| 25 | | **Nuu Nda'vi**. | ***Mixtec. (lit. 'humble people')*** |
| 26 | Anna: | O[h.] | |
| 27 | Isabel: | [Yeah.] | |
| 28 | | Cause it's like, | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 29 | | they— |
| 30 | | they they changed it. |
| 31 | | Well for— |
| 32 | | *para mi parents,* | *for my parents,* |
| 33 | | it's like "Oh yeah, |
| 34 | | *los de—"* | *those from—"* |
| 35 | | Cause, |
| 36 | | I asked my dad that <u>too</u>. |
| 37 | | I was like cause, |
| 38 | | after I heard it from Tequio? |
| 39 Anna: | Mhm. |
| 40 Isabel: | And everything? |
| 41 | | And I told him, |
| 42 | | I was like "Oh, |
| 43 | | *Pa,* | *Dad,* |
| 44 | | *¿tú eres **Nuu Savi** verdad?"* | *you're **Mixtec ('people of the rain')** right?"* |
| 45 | | And he was like, |
| 46 | | "<u>No</u>." |
| 47 | | And I was like "¿Por qué @no?" | *And I was like "Why @not?"* |
| 48 | | And I was like "Es lo que me @dijeron." |
| | | *And I was like "That's what they @told me."* |
| 49 | | And this and that. |
| 50 | | He was like "No, |
| 51 | | porque eso es sólo para los mixtecos, | *because that's only for Mixtecos,* |
| 52 | | <u>alto</u>." | *<u>Altos</u>.* |
| 53 Anna: | [Oh.] |
| 54 Isabel: | [He was] like "No, |
| 55 | | *yo soy **Nuu** [du] **Nda'vi**."* | *I am **Mixtec (lit. 'humble people')**."* |
| 56 Anna: | [Ah okay.] |
| 57 Isabel: | ["**Nuu Nda'vi**."] | ***"Mixtec (lit. 'humble people')."*** |
| 58 | | [₂Yeah.] |
| 59 Anna: | [₂Aun]que "**nda'vi**" quiere decir como like pobre, |
| | | *Even though "**nda'vi**" means like poor,* |
| 60 | | o, | *or,* |
| 61 | | [o eso.] | *or that.* |
| 62 Isabel: | [Mhm.] |
| | *(10 seconds omitted)* |
| 63 Isabel: | Cause my parents say that, |
| 64 | | (1.3) |
| 65 | | *para,* | *for,* |
| 66 | | *ellos?* | *them?* |
| 67 | | Like that's, |
| 68 | | what they've always called them<u>selves</u>? |
| 69 | | *Y eso es,* | *And that's,* |
| 70 | | like, |
| 71 | | <u>them</u>? |
| 72 Anna: | Mhm. |
| 73 Isabel: | *Y,* | *And,* |
| 74 | | *y ahora que,* | *and now that,* |
| 75 | | like, |
| 76 | | cause, |

| 77 | mi dad también lo escuchó? | *my dad has also heard that?* |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 78 | And he was like, "No, | |
| 79 | eso es #sólo para los, | *that is #only for people,* |
| 80 | de mixteco <u>alto</u>, | *from [who speak] Mixteco <u>Alto</u>,* |
| 81 | no para nosotros." | *not for us."* |

Throughout the transcript, Isabel's discussion of *Nuu Savi* (lines 11-16, 30, 38, 48) makes it clear that it is not a term which belongs to her, but is rather an external imposition ("they changed it," line 30). *Nuu Savi* belongs to the unspecified third-person plural "them" (11-16, 30, 48), which is revealed in line 38 to refer to people she met via the Tequio Youth Group. But this label does not resonate for Isabel. She juxtaposes first her own self-identification (18) and then that of her parents (19-21) with *Nuu Savi*, stating that instead "they consider themselves Nuu Nda'vi" (24-25). After Isabel heard about the *Savi* label at Tequio, she asked her father whether he was *Nuu Savi*. At first, she voices him as baldly rejecting the label with no explanation (46). When she asked him to expand on this, saying *Savi* was something she had been told to use by others (47-49), he told her that "eso" ('that')—the *Nuu Savi* label—"es sólo para los mixtecos <u>alto</u>" ('is only for Mixtecos <u>Altos</u>', 50-52).[14] The contrastive stress on *alto* indicates Salvador's self-positioning outside of that category, as a speaker of a Guerrero (Baja) variety of Mixtec. The causal connection between his implied identity as a *Mixteco Bajo* speaker and his preference for the *Nda'vi* ethnonym is strengthened via the unequivocal "yo soy Nuu Nda'vi" ('I am Nuu Nda'vi') identity claim in lines 54-57. Despite its referential meaning of humility and/or poverty (59-62), the members of this family prefer *Nda'vi* because "eso es… <u>them</u>" ('that's <u>them</u>', 69-71): it is a core part of their identity, something Isabel's parents have always called themselves (63-68). In lines 79-80, Isabel reasserts Salvador's belief that *Nuu Savi* is a name for "los de mixteco alto"

[14] Final /s/ deletion or aspiration is a common feature of Mixtec-influenced Spanish (cf. Leow n.d.), as well as the Spanish of many youth for whom Mixtec is a heritage language.

('those [who speak] Mixteco Alto'). Notably, "los de mixteco alto" is a linguistic designation, not a geographical one. This statement is not tying the *Nuu Savi* label to people from the Mixteca Alta, but rather to speakers of *Mixteco Alto*—whose language, by extension, he would presumably call *Tu'un Savi*. These two divergent endonyms can therefore be seen as a focal point around which a process of linguistic differentiation coalesces.

But although *Tu'un Savi* may be discursively and ideologically related to *Mixteco Alto*, the geographical distribution of this endonym is not so clear-cut. A close examination of INALI's (2008) list of Mixtec varieties, their associated glossonyms, and the areas in which they are spoken, cross-referenced with Josserand's (1983) dialect map, reveals that the endonym *Tu'un Savi* is found across vast swaths of the Mixteca. It is used by speakers in regions of the Mixteca Alta, such as the Tlaxiaco District (located within Josserand's Western Alta group), towns close to Apoala in the Cuicatlán and Nochixtlán Districts (Northeastern Alta), and in the Etla District (Eastern Alta). However, it is also widespread across Guerrero, as well as in both the Southern Baja (e.g., Juxtlahuaca District) and Northern Baja areas (e.g., in the Huajapan District), all of which are referred to in common parlance as *Mixteco Bajo*. Furthermore, it is found in Mixteco de la Costa areas as well, such as the Jamiltepec and Juquila Districts. The *Alto*/*Savi* connection, then, is not based in geographical provenance so much as in a language ideology which erases (Irvine and Gal 2000) all non-Alta varieties whose endonym is *Tu'un Savi*. It also overlooks numerous other endonyms used by speakers of Alta varieties, such as *Da'an Davi* (associated with INALI's "mixteco del noreste" ['Mixtec of the Northeast'] region, including towns like Apoala, which fall into Josserand's Northeastern Alta subgroup), *Tnu'un Dau* (from "mixteco del

este central" ['Mixtec of the Central East'], including the village of San Juan Diuxi from the Eastern Alta subgroup), and *Sahin Sau* (from "mixteco del sur bajo" ['Mixtec of the Southern Lowlands'], which includes the town of Chalcatongo in the Western Alta group). (*Davi*, *Dau*, and *Sau* are all cognate with *Savi* 'rain'.)

In contrast, the glossonym *Tu'un Da'vi* (cognate with *Nda'vi*) is listed in the INALI catalogue as referring to "mixteco del oeste alto" ('Mixtec of the Western Highlands'), which encompasses numerous towns in Josserand's Southern Baja and Western Baja groups, including the entire municipality of Santiago Juxtlahuaca. A related term, *To'on Nda'vi*, is connected to the municipality of Santo Domingo Tonalá, where Central Baja varieties are spoken. According to INALI, the use of *Nda'vi* and its cognates appears to be limited to varieties of the Mixteca Baja, which is in line with how Morán-Lanier's (2020) participants paired the two terms. But as demonstrated above, the *Tu'un Savi* glossonym is also found in the same Baja-speaking regions. Therefore, the distinction between *Tu'un Savi* and *Tu'un Nda'vi* in these areas cannot be clearly explained through differences in geography or linguistic subgrouping alone. It seems likely that their overlapping distribution has to do with linguistic and/or political ideology, perhaps one which locates *Tu'un Savi* as a form of resistance to stigmatization (Peters 2018: 1).

To call someone's speech *Tu'un Savi* or *Mixteco Alto*, then, has far more to do with language ideology than it does with their precise geographical origin, at least in the Ventura County diaspora. Under this ideology, it is conceivable that a variety receiving the designation *Tu'un Savi* could in fact be called something else by its own speakers, such as *Da'an Davi* or *Sahin Sau*. The exact details of the ideology may differ, as they do between Mixtecs living elsewhere on California's Central Coast (Morán-Lanier 2020) and those

whose discourse is represented in this work. In the former context, *Tu'un Savi* was linked to *Mixteco Alto*, and both were associated with a higher-status way of speaking Mixtec—one which was spoken not by the men propagating this ideology, but by an imagined group of others. In Ventura County, there is as yet no evidence of a distinction in status. Nevertheless, as Example 2 demonstrates, the *Alto*/*Bajo* split is still an onomastic resource used by speakers of diasporic Baja varieties to explain the distinctions between their own and others' linguistic practices (such as favoring one ethnonym over another). The following section explains the language-ideological processes at work in this use of the *Mixteco Alto* label.

### 3.4 *Mixteco Alto* and linguistic differentiation

In Example 2, I showed how a speaker of a Baja Mixtec variety drew a clear distinction between his own speech practices and the practices of those he considered to be speakers of *Mixteco Alto*. Using data from ethnographic interviews and participant-made recordings of peer interaction, this section further analyzes the metalinguistic labeling practice in which speakers have taken up the broad terminology of *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* to make sense of intervarietal differences encountered within the Mixtec diaspora.

### 3.4.1 *Mixteco Alto* as generic difference

In the multidialectal contact setting of diaspora, Baja-variety speakers use *Mixteco Alto* as a generic term of reference for varieties which differ from their own—even when the so-called *Alto* variety would be classified by linguists in one of the Baja subgroups (i.e., even if it is very closely related to the speaker's own Baja dialect). In other words, Baja-speaking members of the Ventura County diaspora community use the term *Mixteco Alto* in a

distinctly different sense than it is used by linguists: it has become a way to "simplify the sociolinguistic field" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38) to a binary between self and other. I first discuss two examples in which *Mixteco Alto* is used in this way and then offer an explanation of the ideological processes that facilitate its use as an index or marker of linguistic differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019).

Examples 3a and 3b are taken from a conversation between Ita Ndivi and her friend Carla, who were respectively 19 and 16 years old at the time of recording. These young women met at school and had been friends for a few years; both previously participated in the Tequio Youth Group. This conversation was largely about the needs of young Indigenous people in the diaspora and touched on themes like academic support, language shift, and language maintenance. The pair had been talking for some time when Ita Ndivi remembered she had not turned on the recorder. Example 3a comes from the first minute of the recording. Ita Ndivi introduces Carla and briefly summarizes their conversation up until that point, including information about where Carla's parents are from and what level of Mixtec fluency her various family members possess. As evidenced by Ita Ndivi's use of the third-person singular pronoun *ella*, the audience for this introduction is me, the listener; she subsequently switches to the second-person singular pronoun *tú* when speaking directly to Carla.

**Example 3a: Ita Ndivi and Carla**
*(20190215_IN_04, 00:00:19-00:00:47)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Estamos pláticando ya? | *We've already been talking?* |
| 2 | | Sobre lo que, | *About,* |
| 3 | | uh, | *uh,* |
| 4 | | como ella iba a la, | *like how she was going to the,* |
| 5 | | ella #eres de, | *she #you're from,* |
| 6 | | su papá es de, | *her dad is from,* |
| 7 | | Guerrero, | *Guerrero,* |
| 8 | | y su mamá es de, | *and her mom is from,* |

| 9 | | Oaxaca verdad? | *Oaxaca right?* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Carla: | Mhm. | *Mhm.* |
| 11 | Ita Ndivi: | Uh y su papá habla, | *Uh and her dad speaks,* |
| 12 | | habla, | *speaks,* |
| 13 | | mixteco, | *Mixteco,* |
| 14 | | alto? | *Alto?* |
| 15 | | Y este, | *And um,* |
| 16 | | él lo habla, | *he speaks it,* |
| 17 | | bien? | *well?* |
| 18 | | Y ella, | *And she,* |
| 19 | | pues. | *well.* |
| 20 | | Um, | *Um,* |
| 21 | | no- | *no-* |
| 22 | | lo entiende pero, | *she understands it but,* |
| 23 | | no lo puede hablar verdad? | *can't speak it, right?* |

In lines 6-7 and 8-9, Ita Ndivi summarizes what Carla has already told her—her father is from Guerrero and her mother is from Oaxaca—which Carla confirms in line 10. Ita Ndivi goes on to say that Carla's father speaks "Mixteco Alto" (lines 11-14), adding that he speaks it well (16-17). Carla herself is receptively bilingual in her father's variety, which she can understand (line 22) but not speak (23). (Later on she reveals that she is learning to speak her mother's variety.)

Of interest here is the claim that Carla's father, who is from Guerrero, speaks "Mixteco Alto." With respect to geolinguistic classification, someone from Guerrero is extremely unlikely to speak an Alta variety. Under Josserand's (1983) taxonomy, they might speak a variety from the Guerrero or Southern Baja subgroups. Of course, it is possible that Carla's father has some history of migration from the Alta-speaking zones of the central and eastern Mixteca, but Carla mentions nothing of the sort in this interaction; she simply ratifies Ita Ndivi's statement about him being from Guerrero (line 10). The puzzle, then, is why his variety receives the designation *Mixteco Alto*. The interaction in Example 3b, which took place later in the same conversation, provides more information about the logic behind this metalinguistic label.

In the time between the excerpts transcribed in Examples 3a and 3b, Carla specified that

her mother is from the village of San Jéronimo Progreso, Oaxaca, located within the

Silacayoápam municipality and district of the same name. This means that her Mixtec

variety belongs to Josserand's Southern Baja dialect group (1983: 470), as does Ita Ndivi's

own variety, which is from El Paredón, a village in the municipality of San Martín Peras. Ita

Ndivi says she is unfamiliar with Carla's mother's village, however. In the following

excerpt, Ita Ndivi again addresses Carla and her family's linguistic repertoire. Immediately

prior, she had been explaining the purpose and goals of linguistic research and how it relates

to language maintenance.

**Example 3b: Ita Ndivi and Carla**
*(20190215_IN_04, 00:23:33-00:23:53)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Tú hablas — | *You speak —* |
| 2 | | tu papá, | *your dad,* |
| 3 | | dijiste que es, | *you said that it's,* |
| 4 | | mixteco, | *Mixteco,* |
| 5 | | bajo? | *Bajo?* |
| 6 | Carla: | Alto. | *Alto.* |
| 7 | Ita Ndivi: | Alto y tu mamá, | *Alto and your mom,* |
| 8 | Carla: | Uh, | *Uh,* |
| 9 | | mixteco bajo. | *Mixteco Bajo.* |
| 10 | Ita Ndivi: | Bajo verdad. | *Bajo right.* |
| 11 | | Es diferente. | *It's different.* |
| 12 | Carla: | Sí @. | *Yes @.* |
| 13 | Ita Ndivi: | Y cuál es el que estás aprendiendo? | *And which is the one that you're learning?* |
| 14 | Carla: | Estoy aprendiendo mixteco bajo. | *I'm learning Mixteco Bajo.* |
| 15 | Ita Ndivi: | Oh s[í]. | *Oh y[es.]* |
| 16 | Carla: | [Sí]. | *[Yes.]* |
| 17 | Ita Ndivi: | El de tu, | *That of your,* |
| 18 | | papá? | *dad?* |
| 19 | Carla: | De mi mamá. | *Of my mom.* |
| 20 | Ita Ndivi: | Oh de tu mamá? | *Oh of your mom?* |
| 21 | Carla: | Mhm. | *Mhm.* |
| 22 | Ita Ndivi: | Oh, | *Oh,* |
| 23 | | sí. | *yes.* |
| 24 | | Porque yo también hablo en mixteco bajo. | |
| | | *Because I also speak Mixteco Bajo.* | |
| 25 | | Pero qué bueno. | *But that's good.* |

Ita Ndivi incorrectly remembers Carla as saying that her father spoke "Mixteco Bajo" (lines 2-5), but Carla quickly says that he actually speaks Mixteco "Alto" (6). When asked about her mother's variety, Carla supplies the dialogically resonant (Du Bois 2014) but opposing label *Mixteco Bajo* (9). Ita Ndivi demonstrates uptake of this label in line 10 and underscores the linguistic distinction between *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* in line 11: "Bajo verdad. Es diferente." ('Bajo right. It's different'.) The assertion of difference is endorsed with "Sí@" ('Yes', 12), the laugh further demonstrating Carla's alignment. When asked which variety she is currently learning, Carla says, "Mixteco Bajo" (14), which she reminds Ita Ndivi is her mother's variety, not her father's (17-21). In line 24, Ita Ndivi locates herself as a speaker of *Mixteco Bajo*, just like Carla and her mother—even though they are from a different village than she is. Finally, Ita Ndivi positively evaluates the fact that Carla is making an effort to learn to speak their shared heritage language (25), an action which Ita Ndivi values highly as a cultural and linguistic activist.

These data demonstrate two key facets of the *Alto*/*Bajo* metalinguistic labeling practice. First, they reveal that *Mixteco Bajo* is a hypernym with more than one possible referent. Both young women self-identify as (emergent) speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*, but Carla uses the term to denote the variety from San Jéronimo Progreso, which she is learning to speak, whereas Ita Ndivi's use of *Mixteco Bajo* refers to the language of El Paredón. While these two varieties are very likely mutually intelligible given their co-membership in Josserand's Southern Baja group, they are not identical. Nonetheless, Ita Ndivi accepts Carla's designation of her and her mother's variety as *Mixteco Bajo*, the same glossonym which she herself claims, even though she knows Carla's mother to be from a different village—one which she had not even heard of before this interaction. The young women's use of *Mixteco*

*Bajo*, therefore, does not name a singular real-world entity. For these two unique varieties to receive the same label reflects an ideological process which Bucholtz and Hall have called "adequation": "in order for groups or individuals to be positioned as alike, they need not – and in any case cannot – be identical, but must merely be understood as sufficiently similar for current interactional purposes" (2005: 599). The same is true for language names. Because interdialectal difference *per se* is not at the forefront of this conversation about the kind of support that young Mixtec immigrants need, Carla and Ita Ndivi's varieties are seen as "sufficiently similar" to both be called *Mixteco Bajo*. (It is interesting to consider whether this would have held true had this interaction taken place in Mixtec, where intervarietal comparison might have been pushed to the fore. However, the entire conversation occurs in Spanish, likely because Carla understands but does not yet fluently speak Mixtec.)

In addition, I argue that the glossonym *Mixteco Alto* is used, both in Example 3 and in the Ventura County diaspora more broadly, to locate and name generic or unspecified linguistic difference-from-self. In Example 3b, Carla self-identifies as a learner of her mother's variety, which she calls *Mixteco Bajo*. There are two distinct varieties spoken within her home, however, which by definition display some degree of salient structural difference (whether lexical, phonological, and/or morphosyntactic). Given that Carla perceives these varieties to be discrete sociolinguistic entities, it is unsurprising that she would be inclined to assign them unique names (cf. Makoni and Pennycook 2005). Since the semantic space of *Mixteco Bajo* is already occupied by her own variety, the problem she faces is what to call her father's language. I argue that her choice of *Mixteco Alto* for this purpose stems from "the projection of an opposition" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38) onto the linguistic differences found in her home. In this case, the projected opposition relies on the

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semantic antonymy of *Bajo* ('low') and *Alto* ('high'). If her father's variety is distinct from her own and her mother's, which are *Bajo*, the name *Mixteco Alto* is a suitable candidate to project this linguistic differentiation at a maximal level. To call her father's speech *Mixteco Alto* is another way of saying, 'He speaks differently than I (and my mother) do'. A similar process is operative in Example 2, in which Isabel's father Salvador is reported to have referred to those who used a different ethnic label as speakers of *Mixteco Alto*, by implication locating himself as a *Mixteco Bajo* speaker. The logic can be summarized as follows: if *Mixteco Alto* refers to another's speech, then *Bajo* refers to one's own speech. *Mixteco Bajo* is a label one gives to oneself, as both Ita Ndivi and Carla do in Example 3. In sum, for self-identified speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*, the metalinguistic name *Mixteco Alto* implies distance, and difference, from self.

In addition to the self-other relation, Example 4 reveals another facet of the *Mixteco Alto* glossonym, one which has to do with relative (un)intelligibility. This excerpt is drawn from an ethnographic interview in which Ita Ndivi recounts her experiences talking to peers at school when she first arrived in the US, a time when she felt very socially isolated. Immediately prior, Ita Ndivi had said that she struggled to make herself understood to Spanish-speaking students because she was still learning the language. In Example 4 she explains that because of intervarietal differences, she had difficulty making friends with Mixtec-speaking students as well.

**Example 4: *Mixteco Alto* as unintelligible**
*(20181201_ItaNdivi_interview1, 01:17:32 - 01:17:43)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Sí también tenía los que hablan mixteco pero, | |
| | | *Yes also I had those who spoke Mixtec but,* | |
| 2 | | creo que era otro mixteco, | *I think it was another Mixtec,* |
| 3 | | alto, | *Alto,* |
| 4 | | no sé? | *I don't know?* |
| 5 | | No le en— | *I didn't understan—* |

| 6 | no le— | *I didn't—* |
| 7 | le entiendo pero muy poco. | *I understand them but very little.* |

While there were other Mixtec speakers at Ita Ndivi's school (line 1), she was unable to rely on a shared linguistic code to make friends with them due to a lack of mutual intelligibility; their speech was "otro mixteco" ('another Mixtec', line 2). In line 3, she provides "Alto" as a candidate label for the kind of Mixtec they might have spoken, although she hedges the description with "no sé" ('I don't know') in line 4, which projects a weakened epistemic stance (Du Bois 2007) and acknowledges the imprecision of the *Mixteco Alto* label. She twice begins to say that she did not understand those who spoke this way (lines 5 and 6), but then rewords this claim to clarify that while she did understand them to some degree, the level of mutual intelligibility was low (7).

Through this metalinguistic labeling practice, Ita Ndivi equates *Mixteco Alto* with linguistic distance. She constructs her peers as likely *Alto* speakers precisely because they were partially, or nearly, unintelligible to her. Ita Ndivi's own variety belongs to the Southern Baja group, and as Example 3b demonstrates, she identifies as a speaker of *Mixteco Bajo*. Assuming her high school's student body exhibits the same patterns as the larger Ventura County community (cf. Bax et al. in prep.), most of her Mixtec peers are likely to also speak a Southern Baja variety, or one that falls into the Central Baja, Guerrero, or Mixtepec subgroups. It is possible, then, that during her school experience Ita Ndivi did not encounter any varieties which would be linguistically taxonomized in an Alta group; if she had, she might have found them entirely unintelligible, since the Mixtec spoken in the Southern Mixteca Baja is "markedly" different from Alta Mixtec varieties (Josserand, Jansen, and Romero 1984: 154). As in Example 3, Ita Ndivi's description of her peers' speech as *Mixteco Alto* instead reflects a self-other relation: an assessment of linguistic

differentiation by a self-identified *Mixteco Bajo* speaker, with the added meaning that partial

unintelligibility may also play a role in the choice to label a variety *Alto*. And given the

multidialectal nature of the Ventura County community, *Mixteco Alto* here probably

encompasses more than one village's variety, just as *Mixteco Bajo* does in Example 3.


**3.4.2 Discussion: Semiotic processes and the *Alto* label**

As Gal and Irvine (2019) have argued, language users' perception of linguistic sameness

or difference is not objective, but is filtered through various ideologically-determined

conceptual schemes. Similarly, in the Mixtec diaspora, *Mixteco Bajo* speakers' use of

*Mixteco Alto* to name linguistic difference-from-self relies on a series of nested semiotic

processes described by Irvine and Gal (2000)—erasure and fractal recursivity—along with

an intermediate process that I refer to as *binarization*.

Irvine and Gal define erasure as "the process in which ideology, in simplifying the

sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena)

invisible" (2000: 38). Section 3.2 explained that the internal classification of the Mixtec

languages has traditionally relied on a tripartite set of macro-groups: Alta varieties, Baja

varieties, and de la Costa varieties. In the Ventura County diaspora, however, it seems that

*Mixteco de la Costa* has been erased as a possible category label. This erasure may have its

roots in the physical distribution of varieties within Mexico. The Costa subgroup is the most

geographically isolated (Josserand 1983: 463), and despite the likely historical origins of the

Costa varieties in out-migration from the Southern Mixteca Baja (Josserand, Jansen, and

Romero 1984: 154) or Central Baja regions (Josserand 1983: 471), Costa speakers have

traditionally maintained economic connections only with Alta-speaking villages (Josserand

1983: 118). Migration patterns may also bear some explanatory power. Because there are few, if any, speakers of Costa varieties in Ventura County (Bax et al. in prep.), the glossonym *Mixteco de la Costa* may not be part of residents' commonsense understandings of local linguistic diversity.

The erasure of *Mixteco de la Costa* allows a dichotomous contrast to emerge between *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*. This ideological process, which I call *binarization*, is reinforced by the modifiers' semantic relationship as antonyms. A self-identified *Bajo* speaker, when seeking a name for a variety they perceive as different, might look for an option that contrasts the referential meaning of the glossonym they claim for themselves ('low'). *Alto* ('high') is a natural choice, given that it can be inferred from a binary relation between *Bajo* and 'other' (unlike *Costa*, which cannot). I argue that it is precisely this logic which informs Carla's labeling of her parents' varieties in Example 3. Thanks to their antonymic relationship, *Alto* and *Bajo* construct linguistic differentiation at the highest level possible while still remaining within the bounds of the Mixtec language.

The bifurcation of *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* is therefore not a division based on linguistic grounds, but one that is constructed via ideological processes. When diasporic *Mixteco Bajo* speakers mobilize these terms to name linguistic difference, they rely on yet another semiotic process, fractal recursivity, in which a salient opposition at one level is mapped onto another level in order to make sense of it (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38). As I argued in the analysis of Examples 2 through 4 above, in areas of California where Baja varieties predominate, it is highly likely that at least some of the time, speakers of *Mixteco Bajo* assign the label *Mixteco Alto* to closely related varieties which are also from Baja subgroups. The macro-level split between *Bajo* and *Alto* variety labels is thus reproduced

within the Baja side of the dichotomy and projected inward onto the micro-level distinction between self and other. As Example 2 demonstrates, this glossonymic distinction may also be reproduced through the ideologically-laden choice of ethnonym (*Tu'un Savi* vs. *Tu'un Nda'vi*). Finally, it merits notice that the projection of the *Alto*/*Bajo* opposition entails still another erasure. Because it locates difference from one's own known Baja variety as necessarily outside of the *Mixteco Bajo* category, the internal diversity within *Mixteco Bajo* is obscured.

Figure 3.3 schematizes the interrelated semiotic processes of erasure, binarization, and fractal recursivity.
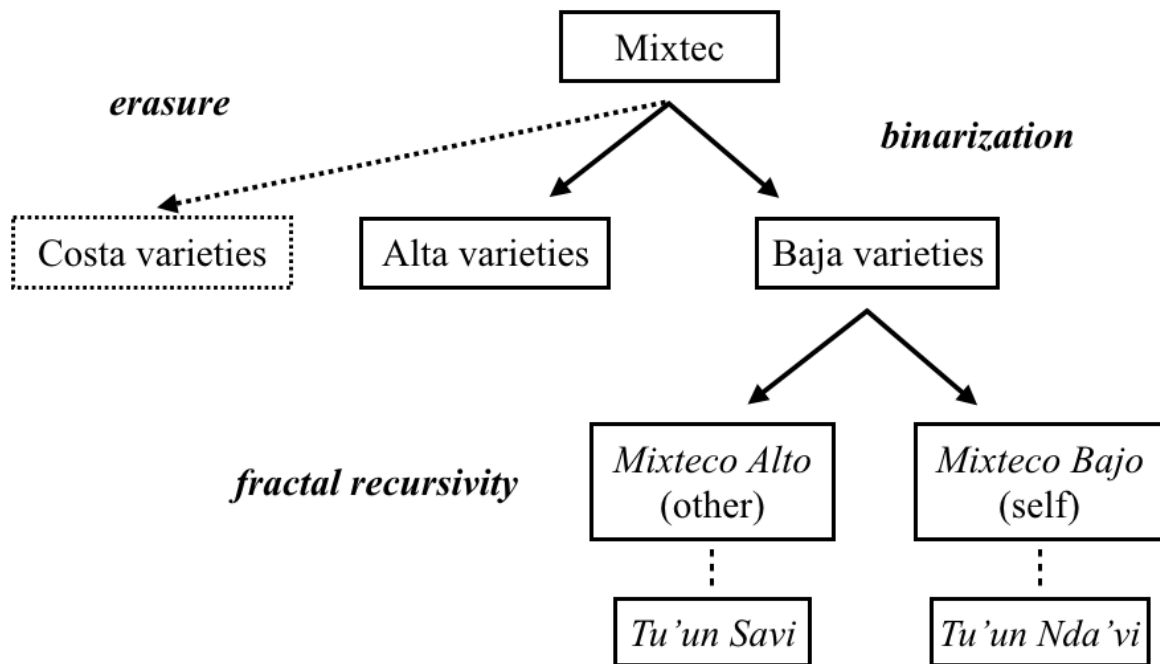


*Figure 3.3: Semiotic processes related to the labels* Mixteco Alto *and* Mixteco Bajo

Although they are linked, the semiotic processes described above may operate separately in some contexts. The binarized use of the labels *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*, and accompanying erasure of *Costa* varieties, is visible in certain genres of non-linguistic

professional writing targeted toward a broad American audience. For example, the terms are used by translation and interpretation companies, such as The Language Exchange, which is based in an agricultural region of Washington state that is home to many Mixtec immigrants. Along with many other languages, its website offers "professional Mixteco translation services for both spoken and written Mixteco Bajo and Alto" (The Language Exchange 2020). In this text, which was presumably written by a non-Mixtec person for a non-Mixtec target audience, the self-other relation is absent but the dichotomization and erasure aspects are still operable.15 In particular, the erasure of diversity under the *Alto* and *Bajo* headings could be problematic when matching clients with interpreters who speak the same variety (cf. Marie Uliasz 2018; Shen, Carmichael, and Vásquez Santos 2018). Used in this business-oriented context, these glossonyms paper over Mixtec's intricate dialectal diversity for ease of reference. As Makoni and Pennycook (2005) have argued, Western colonial logics are ultimately responsible for this bureaucratic desire to simplify and sort language variation into easily enumerable, intelligible categories.

Of course, not every instance of *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* is motivated by the same logic. A somewhat different usage can be found in non-linguistic scholarly writing about Mixtecs living in the United States, including work by the Mixtec scholar Gaspar Rivera-Salgado. In an article about Oaxacan migrant associations in California, he writes that these organizations train interpreters who "speak many variants of Mixtec, including Alto and Bajo" (2015: 123). Rivera-Salgado is from San Sebastián Tecomaxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, which Josserand (1983) classifies as part of the Southern Baja subgroup. His use of *Mixteco Bajo*

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15 It is of course possible that the erasure of Costa Mixtec varieties on this website is simply due to a lack of Costa speakers in the area of Washington State where The Language Exchange is located, but it is difficult to find accurate demographic data for this region to ascertain whether this is the case.

and *Mixteco Alto* serves to illustrate how widespread this binarizing labeling practice is among Mixtecs living in the California diaspora (at least those from communities where Baja varieties are spoken).[16]

The data analyzed above demonstrate that diasporic *Mixteco Bajo* speakers sometimes apply the label *Mixteco Alto* to varieties which in fact come from the Mixteca Baja, broadly defined. The question of whether this term is ever used for varieties that are linguistically classified as Alta, however, is less clear. As noted above and discussed in Chapter 2, the most thorough survey of Ventura County Mixtec to date (Bax et al. in prep.) registers an extremely small number of Alta-variety speakers—a single individual out of over 250. Therefore, at least in Ventura County, it is likely that most uses of *Mixteco Alto* do not name varieties from the Mixteca Alta region at all.

What, then, does *Mixteco Alto* refer to? It is perhaps simpler to start by eliminating everything it is not. As argued above, this label is not strictly geographical, despite the historical origins of the terms *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* in the colonial division of Mixtec land. It is not a descriptive expression either: it does not index any particular qualia or "sensuous qualities" (Gal 2013) of its referent. Unlike labels such as "narrow" vs. "embroidered" Bergamesco (Cavanaugh 2009: 42-44) or the "thick" Albanian of irritated

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[16] According to the Mixteca linguist Cynthia Montaño, *Mixteco Bajo* is commonly used as a self-identifier both in her home region of Southern Puebla and in the diaspora community in Staten Island, New York. Some of Montaño's interviewees recognize two or three dialect macro-categories: Mixteco Bajo, Mixteco Alto, and sometimes Guerrero Mixtec. As in the California diaspora, the *Costa* group is not included, and these terms are only partially related to exact geographical origin: "I could even say that we [Mixtec people] don't really know which pueblos Mixteca Baja or Mixteca Alta comprise geographically" (p.c., 5/15/2020). However, Montaño does not report hearing *Mixteco Alto* used as a term for 'generic linguistic difference from self' in the same sense as the usage documented here.

women (Morgan 2018), the linguistic differentiation accomplished by *Mixteco Alto* is not brought about through the invocation of any iconic qualities of *Alto* speech.

Nor does *Mixteco Alto* correspond to identifiable linguistic features that contribute to the perception of linguistic difference or unintelligibility, with the possible exception of the *Tu'un Savi* and *Tu'un Nda'vi* endonyms from Example 2 above.[17] Law writes that "[l]anguage and languages are not always culturally conceived of as clearly definable in terms of linguistic forms" (2014: 167), an assertion which appears to hold true for the *Alto* label. None of the tokens of the term *Mixteco Alto* in my data make reference to any distinct structural characteristics of the varieties labeled *Alto*, nor have I captured any mockeries or performances of what *Alto* speech sounds like: enregistered linguistic features simply do not seem to form part of the category definition. (Although whole varieties are not called *Mixteco Alto* on the basis of their linguistic features, individual features are sometimes said to sound 'like something someone who speaks Mixteco Alto would say'. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how this metalinguistic labeling practice can contribute to the identification of sociolinguistically meaningful phonological variation.)

Furthermore, because of this lack of shibboleths, *Mixteco Alto* cannot be said to denote a recognizable or typifiable register of Mixtec. Enregistered speech styles, such as Pittsburghese (Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006), are typically associated with salient features (Agha 1999; Irvine 1990; Silverstein 2003) or "stereotypes" (Labov 1972a) which have risen to the level of metapragmatic awareness. In contrast, the metalinguistic labeling practice of calling another way of speaking *Alto* is much more vague and generic, not

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[17] I currently lack data on how widespread the association is that maps *Tu'un Savi* to *Mixteco Alto* and *Tu'un Nda'vi* to *Mixteco Bajo*. My data reflect only a small subset of the diaspora community; further investigation of the linkage between language names and ethnic endonyms is a pressing question for future research.

necessarily connected to identifiable differences in linguistic form. Registers are also indexically linked with "particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices" (Agha 1999: 216). However, the only practice that earns the label *Mixteco Alto* is speaking Mixtec differently than the speaker, and the only people who engage in this practice are those from unidentified villages that are not the speaker's own hometown— hardly a well-fleshed-out "social-characterological type" (Agha 2005). Finally, like other ideologically mediated metapragmatic constructs, registers frequently form part of a moral economy (Irvine and Gal 2000) in the speech community from which they originate. But because the discursive construction of *Mixteco Alto* does not involve its speakers engaging in either stigmatized or valorized moral practices, the term does not locate its referent on a hierarchy of social value. Unlike Morán-Lanier's (2020) consultants, *Mixteco Bajo* speakers in Ventura County do not seem to perceive their own language as lower-status than *Mixteco Alto*. And unlike the Zapotec speakers with whom Falconi (2016) worked, this metalinguistic label does not project "social distance," except that which is created when one encounters a speaker of a variety that is not mutually intelligible, as in Example 4 above.

Yet despite all the ways in which it does not adhere to the claims that characterize registers in the sociolinguistic literature, *Mixteco Alto* has clearly achieved a certain level of metapragmatic recognizability. Its core meaning is a seemingly value-free evaluation of linguistic difference from self, sometimes accompanied by the perception of lower intelligibility, a phenomenon which by definition is only found among those who are different from oneself in some way. This meaning is consistent or "socially replicable" in the diaspora community, i.e., "shared by many categories of speakers within a population"

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(Agha 1999: 218), including first-generation immigrant adults and their 1.5-generation teenage children. Therefore, the enregisterment process for *Mixteco Alto* is still "partial" or "incomplete" (Campbell-Kibler 2012: 281): although it is not linked to any linguistic features, social practices, personae, or moral judgments, the label nonetheless circulates as an explanation for linguistic (or varietal) differentiation.

While the general sense of *Mixteco Alto* may be consistent, its indexical value is less fixed. As a category, its boundaries encompass all Mixtec varieties that are not deemed sufficiently similar to the speaker's own. Because it is defined by reference to self, its indexical value necessarily varies from speaker to speaker. Like deictics (Jakobson 1971 [1957]), *Mixteco Alto* is a true indexical (as is *Mixteco Bajo);* its meaning depends centrally on context. Depending on who is doing the naming, *Mixteco Alto* may therefore index entirely discrete sets of real-world varieties. Because there is no guarantee that any two speakers will use this label in exactly the same way, correctly interpreting its referent presupposes prior knowledge of the speaker's own variety.

In fact, the meaning of *Mixteco Alto* can vary even within the usage of a single speaker, depending on local communicative function. Ita Ndivi calls her peers' partially unintelligible varieties *Mixteco Alto*, but as I discuss in the next chapter, she also uses the term to describe her seven-year-old brother's emergent, non-adult-like Mixtec pronunciation. I do not mean to imply, however, that those who broadly apply this label are unaware of the diversity within the multiple varieties they call *Alto*. As discussed in Section 3.3 above, many Mixtec speakers are attuned to minute differences between their own and others' varieties and often enjoy metalinguistic conversations about variation. My overall point is simply that the intended meaning of *Mixteco Alto* is fluid across speakers and speech contexts.

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Therefore, this label projects an imagined speech community, composed not of speakers of a variety from a village in the Mixteca Alta, but speakers of *Mixteco Alto*. *Mixteco Bajo*, too, is an imagined speech community—or at least, a much smaller "real" community than the scope of the name implies. If *Mixteco Bajo* can be glossed as 'the variety which I speak', then there are as many discrete instances of *Mixteco Bajo* as there are villages within the Mixteca Baja, and still more if one accounts for sociolinguistic variation beyond the geographic (cf. Reyes Basurto, Hernández Martínez, and Campbell 2020 for a discussion of the concept of *community* within the Mixtec diaspora in California).

As Law argues, "[t]he perception on the part of members of the recipient language community that something is coming from 'another' speech community is tied to the sense of unity and similarity or distance and disjuncture between 'imagined' speech communities" like *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* (2014: 166). Such communities are constructed via the parallel processes of distinction and adequation (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Distinction, or the interactional construction of "distance and disjuncture" (Law 2014: 166), is responsible for the semiotic dichotomization of the *Alto*-as-other and *Bajo*-as-ego labels. On the other hand, adequation is what facilitates the clustering of numerous diverse varieties under the term *Mixteco Alto*. *Alto* does not name an internally homogeneous entity, yet *Alto* varieties are deemed sufficiently similar on the basis of a single shared trait, their difference from the speaker's variety. As previously argued for Ita Ndivi and Carla's self-identifications in Example 3, *Mixteco Bajo* relies on adequation as well. Under these broad headings, the differences between varieties are glossed over in a semiotic process of erasure.

But although *Mixteco Alto* is used to accomplish linguistic differentiation, it nevertheless still recognizes ethnic and linguistic co-belonging; distinction is not a totalizing process. To

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label someone's speech *Mixteco Alto* includes them under the shared cultural and ethnolinguistic label of *Mixtec*, even as it alludes to shades of internal differentiation. This is precisely because it territorializes (Auer 2005) the speech of the Other within the vast and variegated Mixteca region, locating it as being from "somewhere else"—but still a place that lies within one's ancestral lands.

## 3.5 Conclusion

In their landmark work on the invention of language categories, Makoni and Pennycook assert that such categories "do not describe any real state of affairs in the world, i.e they are not natural kinds … they are only convenient fictions to the extent that they provide a useful way of understanding the world and shaping language users" (2005: 147). Because of its malleable indexico-referential potential, it is clear that the *Alto* designation "do[es] not describe any real state of affairs in the world," at least insofar as it does not name a single bounded variety. Instead, I have argued in this chapter that *Mixteco Alto* is still only "partially enregistered" (Campbell-Kibler 2012: 281), as yet unassociated with unique linguistic structures, personae, or moral evaluations. Nonetheless, this label affords Mixtec speakers a way to verbalize linguistic distance from their own varieties and to make sense of encounters with members of the same ethnic group who use a variety that is nearly unintelligible. In other words, the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* names are "convenient fiction[s]" which "provide a useful way of understanding the world" for Mixtecs in Ventura County.

In the following chapters I document how the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label is extended into another arena of language use (that of child language acquisition). Chapter 4 shows how this label can be used to identify meaningful sociolinguistic variation across

Mixtec varieties and Chapter 5 discusses its unexpected link to language shift away from

Mixtec.

# Chapter 4

## The *Mixteco Alto* label and sociolinguistic variation

### 4.1 Introduction

Like Chapter 3, this chapter is about linguistic variation in the "superdiverse" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Vertovec 2007), multivarietal Mixtec diaspora in Ventura County. While the previous chapter analyzed the naming of distinct varieties of Mixtec through the reorganization of the category labels *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto*, in the present chapter I explore the application of this metalinguistic label to variation within a single variety. I demonstrate that the *Mixteco Alto* label provides insight into two distinct axes of sociolinguistic variation: that which is age-graded and that which varies according to a speaker's place of origin.

Section 4.2 first reviews the literature on sociolinguistic variation in minoritized and Indigenous languages. In Section 4.3, I describe how the *Mixteco Alto* label is mobilized to account for variation in the non-adult-like speech of children who are in the process of acquiring Baja varieties of Mixtec. Calling children's pronunciations *Mixteco Alto* is a way to make sense of the inherent variability in the acquisition process while avoiding the claim that linguistic novices are speaking "wrong"—in short, it offers a geographical explanation for age-based variation. In Section 4.4, I argue that the *Mixteco Alto* label can serve as a clue for linguists interested in the identification of sociolinguistically meaningful phonological variation across varieties, a challenging task when working with communities whose languages have not yet been adequately documented (Mansfield and Stanford 2017). I demonstrate that by isolating the elements of children's pronunciation that are said to sound like *Mixteco Alto*, it is possible to ascertain features of adult speech that vary saliently

(Kerswill and Williams 2002) between the Mixtec varieties that are represented in Ventura County, as well as to identify locally meaningful social categories that correlate with this variation. I conclude in Section 4.5.

## 4.2 On linguistic variation and minoritized languages

It is a deep irony of sociolinguistics that despite the vast diversity of the world's languages, the most influential theories of linguistic variation and change are based on a typologically limited sample of linguistic and social structures (Stanford 2016). The variationist paradigm, in particular, has been developed and refined using data from so-called WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies and speakers (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010), although Dahl (2015) has suggested that "Literate, Official, and with Lots of uses" (LOL) may more accurately capture the particular biases within the linguistic literature. The problem, in short, is that dominant theories of language variation and change have not historically been based upon the full scope of observable linguistic variation.

Fortunately, this irony has not gone unproblematized. In recent years, a small but vocal group of scholars have called for "more diverse sources of data" (Stanford 2016; cf. also Stanford and Preston 2009) both for the quantitative study of variation and within sociolinguistics more broadly (Smakman 2015). In order to make truly representative claims about language and society, the argument goes, it is paramount that sociolinguists' data base itself be truly representative. Sociolinguistic theory stands to gain quite a lot from the inclusion of Indigenous and other minoritized languages, research on which may challenge or expand the body of evidence for (Chirkova, Stanford, and Wang 2018; Ravindranath

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2009; Stanford 2009) many long-held assumptions about variation and change. This work is especially timely in light of globalization, which has triggered a rapid transformation of the social, economic, and political conditions of many Indigenous and other small language communities (Pietikäinen et al. 2016; Smakman and Henreich 2015), because such shifts are often reflected in, and sometimes brought about through, changing axes of sociolinguistic variation (Mansfield to appear).

According to Mansfield and Stanford (2017: 117), sociolinguistics has tended to neglect communities that share the following characteristics:

> (i) languages with relatively limited prior literature or scholarly knowledge of variables and language structure;
> (ii) languages that are very distinct from the majority language (i.e. not dialects of a local standard language);
> (iii) languages that are structurally very distinct from Western languages;
> (iv) communities that have historically been overlooked by variationist sociolinguistics;
> (v) communities that are culturally very distinct from the West;
> (vi) communities that are relatively small and kinship-oriented, and may have sociopolitical reasons to distrust Westerners.

In the case of Mixtec, points (i) through (v) certainly apply, while (vi) may be partially true: as an Indigenous group who resisted first Spanish colonization and now neoliberal economic incursion, Mixtecs certainly have "sociopolitical reasons to distrust Westerners," but "small" does not seem to be an appropriate way to describe a dialect complex with approximately half a million speakers (INEGI 2010b). Regardless, with the exception of Daly (1984), which compares oral and written versions of a text in Peñoles Mixtec, there have been no sociolinguistic studies of variation within Mixtec to date. Certainly, the sheer linguistic diversity of the region means that documentary resources must at least acknowledge the presence of spatial (i.e., village-based) variation, in a manner reminiscent of the dialectological tradition (e.g., Josserand 1983). Sociolinguists, however, have neglected

Mixtec, despite its status as the third most commonly spoken Indigenous language of Mexico (INEGI 2010b). In fact, with a few notable exceptions, such as Hill and Hill (1986) on Nahuatl and Sicoli (2010) on Lachixío Zapotec, investigations of variation within Mesoamerican languages overall are scant. A more broadly conceived body of sociocultural-linguistic (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 2008) or linguistic-anthropological work in this region does exist (e.g., Sicoli 2016 on Chinantec; Arcos López 2013, Barrett 2008, 2016; Haviland 1989; de León 1998, 2007 on Mayan languages; Coto Solano 2017 on Mè'phàà Váthàá; Rojas Santos 2011 on Mixtec; Messing 2007, 2009 on Nahuatl; Hou 2016 on San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language; Pérez Báez 2012, 2013, 2014 on Zapotec), but these studies do not focus on variation *per se*. In particular, "third-wave" (Eckert 2012, 2018) variation studies, which investigate indexical meaning and agentive processes of speaker identity construction and have recently proliferated within LOL (or WEIRD) sociolinguistics, are extremely rare for Mesoamerican Indigenous languages.

In large part, this gap is due to the fact that the documentary record for many Mesoamerican languages is itself sparse. Working with minoritized languages often necessitates "analyzing variation at the same time as you are grappling with the fundamental structure of the language" (Meyerhoff 2017: 525), whereas studies of variation in majority languages have the benefit of being able to rely on decades, and in some cases centuries, of pre-existing description. In the case of Mixtec, many varieties are represented in the literature by only a single publication, which may not directly address variation; numerous others remain entirely undocumented.

For its part, the field of documentary linguistics has recently embraced the necessity of including variation in documentary and descriptive materials, with the goal of creating an

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accurate, faithful record of language use in inherently heterogeneous communities. To this end, several scholars have advocated for the productive integration of language documentation with variation-focused sociolinguistic methods (Childs, Good, and Mitchell 2014; Hildebrandt, Jany, and Silva 2017; Meyerhoff 2019; Nagy 2009, 2017; Tagliamonte 2017), with some going so far as to claim that such an integration is indispensable when working with previously unstudied languages (Meyerhoff 2017). Naturally, however, this work is not necessarily undertaken with the same theoretical ends as sociolinguistic studies of variation. For this reason, much of the variation included in documentary records has been language-internal, rather than socially conditioned (Meyerhoff 2017). Even where variables are identified and patterns of social variation noted, their full indexical meanings are not always explored. Recently, however, there has emerged a new generation of scholars (e.g., Cotter 2017; Palakurthy 2018, 2020; Tse 2013) whose combination of sociolinguistic and documentary work lays a clear foundation for future third-wave investigations of the meanings of variation.

In understudied languages, the identification of sociolinguistic variables poses a distinct challenge. This is partially due to the lack of a descriptive structural baseline, but also due to a missing sociolinguistic baseline. As Mansfield and Stanford write, "identifying sociolinguistic variables is not an issue for cosmopolitan languages where major patterns of variation are often already known from prior work. But for indigenous languages, the morphosyntax and phonology tend to lack research attention, much less the relevant sociolinguistic variables" (2017: 119). Without the benefit of long-term exposure to a community, it is difficult to know whether observed variation is conditioned by social or linguistic factors, or a combination of both. Identifying variables is therefore particularly

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complicated for scholars who are just beginning a research collaboration with a given community. Collaborating with native speakers and native speaker linguists is one way to circumvent this challenge (e.g., Stanford 2010; Stanford and Pan 2013), although this is not always possible.

As an outsider linguist working with a community whose language is not well-described, it may be necessary to focus initially on those variables which are most salient to speakers (Mansfield and Stanford 2017). Languages vary at every level of linguistic structure, but not all variation is subject to the same degree of speaker awareness (Babel 2016a; Labov 1972a; Preston 1996, 2016; Silverstein 1981). So-called "folk-linguistic" intuitions (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) may provide a trail of breadcrumbs, as it were, for identifying the variables of which speakers are most aware. Such intuitions are frequently encountered when using ethnographic methods—for instance, through the observation of metalinguistic commentary or other kinds of language ideologies. Ethnography is also a key mode of uncovering the situated indexical meanings of variation within a local community (Eckert 2008; Silverstein 2003), as well as the role this variation plays in speaker identity construction (e.g., Bucholtz 2011; Cui 2019; Eckert 1989; Mendoza-Denton 2008).

In initial investigations of variation, it is also important to consider community members' metalinguistic remarks about the full range of speakers present in a community. More specifically, emergent speakers should not be excluded from variation studies simply because of their status as linguistic novices. In situations of language shift and reclamation, for instance, a growing body of scholarship has examined the role that adult "new speakers" can play as sources of novel sociolinguistic variation, as well as lightning rods for language ideologies (e.g., Jaffe 2015; Kasstan 2017). In Section 4.4, I consider the ways that

metalinguistic commentary on the speech of novices—in this case, children in the process of language acquisition—can provide important insight into salient sociolinguistic variation, even that found in adult varieties of Mixtec.

While metalinguistic commentary can be extremely useful for variable identification, it should not necessarily be taken at face value as a complete explanation of why such variation exists or which speakers make use of it. Preston cautions that "the folk account" of variation may not "mirror the facts (or one of the linguistic accounts of them)" (2016: 178). Metalinguistic remarks (including those made by linguists) are inherently ideological. As such, they may not correspond precisely to observable patterns of variation. Of course, this disjuncture is itself fertile ground for language-ideological investigation, as was demonstrated in the discussion in Chapter 3 of the gap between a variety's assigned geolinguistic label and its true geographic origin. Section 4.3 extends this finding by explaining the logic behind another disjuncture: the fact that *Mixteco Alto*, a label that entails variation on the spatial axis, is deployed to explain an entirely distinct source of sociolinguistic variation—that which results from novice speakers' age.

Linguistic diversity is a patently obvious fact of life in the California Mixtec diaspora, which is composed of individuals from many villages who therefore speak many different varieties. The question of meaningful sociolinguistic variation becomes especially interesting in this context, in which a large number of distinct Mixtec varieties are in sustained contact, some likely for the first time. On a broad level, speakers are particularly aware of the existence of variation that falls along the spatial or regional dimension, as illustrated by the prominence of the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label. What is not yet known, however, is which individual geographic variables are most salient to speakers as

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sites of sociolinguistic meaning, a gap which this chapter begins to address. I first

demonstrate how the spatial axis of variation becomes a resource for understanding other

kinds of variation. I analyze the comparison of children's non-adult-like speech to the

"imagined dialect" (Campbell-Kibler 2012) of *Mixteco Alto* to show how interdialectal

variation (along the highly salient geographical dimension) is used as a lens to explain

intradialectal variation (based on novice status). I then analyze how the *Mixteco Alto* label,

as a site of metalinguistic commentary, can provide clues for identifying geographic

variables that differ saliently between dialects.

## 4.3 Child learners talk like *Mixteco Alto* speakers

Chapter 3 demonstrated that some speakers of Baja Mixtec varieties use the term

*Mixteco Alto* to label intervarietal difference, specifically varieties that differ from their

own. In this section, I show how this labeling practice is extended to account for

intravarietal variation in another domain of language use: child language acquisition.

### 4.3.1 The perception of *Alto* speech: Ita Ndivi and Ernesto

The data for this section come from a playback interview (Gumperz 1982) recorded with

Ita Ndivi in December 2019. During this conversation, Ita Ndivi and I listened to and made

comments on a recording of a language-socialization interaction between herself and her

seven-year-old brother Ernesto. In the recording under discussion, Ita Ndivi used prompting

and repetition to teach Ernesto numerous words in her variety of Mixtec (El Paredón, a

Southern Baja variety), using a language-documentation wordlist (a modified version of

Campbell 2019, **Appendix III**) as a guide. Their interaction followed a repetitive structure

in which Ita Ndivi would say a Mixtec word, have Ernesto repeat it back to her, then initiate repair and correction if necessary. Chapter 5 analyzes this socialization interaction in depth.

Ernesto was receptively trilingual in Mixtec, which he heard daily from his parents and older siblings, who sometimes spoke to him in Spanish as well. Due to migration patterns, his father and older brothers spoke Piedra Azul Mixtec, while Ita Ndivi and their mother spoke the variety from El Paredón, both of which are from the municipality of San Martín Peras in Josserand's (1983) Southern Baja dialect group. These varieties are quite similar, however, and Ernesto had receptive competency in each. Despite the high degree of Mixtec input, he did not yet speak the language comfortably, preferring instead to use Spanish at home and English at school. Ita Ndivi frequently encouraged Ernesto to talk in Mixtec, but told me that he was still in the process of learning the language. In the recording she created with him, there were a number of instances where his pronunciation did not match her own. During the playback interview, Ita Ndivi often commented on these moments with phrases like "no es correcto" ('it's not correct') or "no suena bien" ('it doesn't sound good'). But some of Ernesto's non-matching pronunciations stood out from the rest: to Ita Ndivi, they sounded like forms that *Mixteco Alto* speakers would use.

For instance, the word for 'bean' is *ndujchĭ* [ⁿduht͡ʃ ĭ], which has a rising (R) tone on the second syllable. Ernesto instead pronounced it as [duht͡ʃĭ], without prenasalization on the initial stop and with a level mid (M) pitch instead of the final /R/. Ita Ndivi noticed both of these differences, but the latter one especially stood out to her. In Example 1, she relies upon the *Alto* label to explain the difference between her own tonal pronunciation and that of her brother.

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**Example 1: "El tono que él hace es el mixteco alto"**
*(20191219-IN-playbackinterview, 00:00:48 — 00:01:47)*

```
1 Ita Ndivi:     Creo que el tono que él hace es el —
                 I think the tone that he's doing is the —
2                el,                         the,
3                mixteco alto.               Mixteco Alto.
    (11 seconds omitted)
4                Creo que el de él,          I think that his one (tone),
5                hace como el de alto porque.  he's doing like the one of (Mixteco) Alto because,
6                Eh,                         Uh,
7                como nosotros decimos "ndujchǐ."
                 like we say "bean."        [ⁿduht͡ʃ ǐ]

8                Y él dice,                  And he says,
9                "ndujchí."                  "*bean."
                 [ⁿduht͡ʃí]
10               Así lo —                    That's how —
11               así más o menos lo dice,    that's more or less like he says it,
12               verdad?                     right?
13 Anna:         Mhm.                        Mhm.
14 Ita Ndivi:    Y entonces,                 And so,
15               es el tono más como alto,   it's the tone more like Alto,
16               el que hace él.             the one he does.
```

Prior to this excerpt, I had asked Ita Ndivi to comment on her brother's pronunciation of *ndujchǐ*. She noted that his tone was somewhat different than hers: "Creo que el tono que él hace es el mixteco alto" ('I think the tone that he's doing is Mixteco Alto', lines 1-3). As I discussed in Chapter 3, Ita Ndivi sometimes used the word *tono* to characterize broad intervarietal distinctions (cf. Falconi 2016; Sicoli 2007). Perhaps due to her extensive interactions with academic linguists, however, at times she also employed the term in the narrow linguistic sense, to refer to structurally meaningful shifts in pitch. I argue that *tono* in line 1 refers to the latter. This claim is reinforced in lines 7-9 by Ita Ndivi's performance of how 'we'—adult speakers of her variety of Baja Mixtec—say the word, with a rising final tone ([ⁿduht͡ʃ ǐ]), as compared to how her brother says it. However, line 9 is not a phonetically identical performance of Ernesto's original pronunciation ([duht͡ʃi]): Ita Ndivi says it with a prenasalized stop and a level high (H) instead of a [M] tone on the final

syllable ([ⁿduht͡ʃĩ]). She begins to assert in line 10 that 'that's how' he said it, but self-repairs in line 11 to acknowledge that her imitation may not have been exact. Regardless, she concludes that something about the "tono" ('tone') on his final syllable resembles *Mixteco Alto* (15-16).

Notably, Ita Ndivi does not describe Ernesto's divergent pronunciation as 'incorrect' or 'not sounding good', but rather relies on the previously described *Mixteco Alto*-as-generic-other metalinguistic labeling practice to make sense of his pronunciation. Throughout the playback interview, she draws on this label multiple times to explain particular differences between her own speech and her brother's, both with regard to tone and to segments. The sounds that receive the *Mixteco Alto* designation are discussed in detail in Section 4.4.

In addition to singling out certain features as sounding "más como alto" ('more like Alto'), Ita Ndivi employed this term at a later point in the playback interview to characterize the entirety of child learners' speech style. This usage, which is illustrated in Examples 2 and 3 below, reveals a language ideology which is fundamentally linked to the *Mixteco Alto*-as-generic-other labeling practice described in Chapter 3: when children who are in the process of acquiring Mixtec pronounce words in a way that does not resemble adult pronunciation, those children are not speaking the language "wrong"—they are simply talking like adult speakers of *Mixteco Alto*, from some other, geographically distant village.

Before the excerpt transcribed in Example 2, I asked Ita Ndivi whether these divergent tonal pronunciations were limited to seven-year-old Ernesto or whether their younger brother Mateo (age five or six) also displayed them. While Ernesto was sometimes resistant to speaking Mixtec, as discussed in Chapter 5, Mateo was much more enthusiastic about the language. The brothers' differing affective stances did not appear to influence their ability to

produce adult-like utterances, however; Ita Ndivi told me that both boys struggled equally

with "tono" (in the narrow linguistic sense). In Example 2, she elaborates on these

pronunciation problems before explaining that *Alto*-like speech is not limited to her brothers,

but in her estimation is a common occurrence among most child Mixtec learners.

**Example 2: 'They end up speaking a language almost like Mixteco Alto'**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:14:34 - 00:15:41)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Es como que, | *It's like,* |
| 2 | el tono al final. | *the tone at the end.* |
| 3 | Eh son los que les afecta porque, | |
| | *Uh those are the ones that affect them because,* | |
| 4 | sienten que es muy, | *they feel that it's very,* |
| 5 | (0.7) | |
| 6 | difícil de, | *hard to,* |
| 7 | de — | *to —* |
| 8 | a diferenciar el tono al final? | *to differentiate the tone at the end?* |
| 9 | Ya que, | *Because,* |
| 10 | suena tan — | *it sounds so —* |
| 11 | i- igual al prin- | *the s- same at the begin-* |
| 12 | principio de los dos palabras? | *beginning of the two words?* |
| 13 | Y eso es el que les afecta. | *And that's what affects them.* |
| 14 | Y no lo pued- | *And they can't-* |
| 15 | pueden tanto hablar? | *can't speak it so much?* |
| 16 | (0.4) | |
| 17 | Y sí, | *And yes,* |
| 18 | a veces terminan hablando un lenguaje hasta, | |
| | *sometimes they end up speaking a language almost like,* | |
| 19 | el otro lenguaje alto? | *the other Alto language?* |
| 20 | (0.4) | |
| 21 | Mixteco alto? | *Mixteco Alto?* |
| 22 | Porque, | *Because,* |
| 23 | casi eso son — | *they're almost that —* |
| 24 | como que, | *like,* |
| 25 | creo que lo sienten más fácil, | *I believe they feel like it's easier,* |
| 26 | no sé pero, | *I don't know but,* |
| 27 | casi todos los niños que he visto, | *almost all of the children that I've seen,* |
| 28 | que están aprendiendo el mixteco? | *who are learning Mixteco?* |
| 29 | Uh, | *Uh,* |
| 30 | lo hablan como lo — | *they speak it like —* |
| 31 | dicen, | *they say,* |
| 32 | algunas familia mía, | *some of my relatives,* |
| 33 | cuando lo ven — | *when they see it —* |
| 34 | y dicen, | *and they say,* |
| 35 | "Oh, | *"Oh,* |
| 36 | est- | *it's-* |
| 37 | hablan como los que hablan el lenguaje alto," | |

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| | *they talk like those who speak the Alto language,"* |
|---|---|
| 38 | dicen verdad? |
| 39 | Y yo digo, |
| 40 | "Sí cierto, |
| 41 | lo dicen así." |
| 42 | Y [sí la] verdad como lo — |
| 43 Anna: | [Mm.] |
| 44 Ita Ndivi: | lo ven rápido de esa manera porque, |
| 45 | así hablan ellos. |
| 46 Anna: | Uh huh. |
| 47 Ita Ndivi: | Los que hablan el lenguaje alto. |
| 48 Anna: | Sí. |
| 49 | Qué tan interesante es. |
| 50 Ita Ndivi: | Sí. |
| 51 Anna: | Y, |
| 52 | aun personas que, |
| 53 | no tienen — |
| 54 | hablante del idioma alto en sus familias. |
| | *speakers of the Alto language in their families.* |
| 55 Ita Ndivi: | Sí. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *they say, right?* |
| | *And I say,* |
| | *"Yes it's true,* |
| | *they say it like that."* |
| | *And yeah the truth like —* |
| | |
| | *you see it quickly in that way because,* |
| | *they talk like that.* |
| | |
| | *Those who speak the Alto language.* |
| | *Yeah.* |
| | *That's so interesting.* |
| | *Yes.* |
| | *And,* |
| | *even people who,* |
| | *don't have —* |
| | |
| | |
| | *Yes.* |

Monomorphemic words in Mixtec typically take the shape of a couplet, a bimoraic unit with either one or two syllables (Pike 1948). In the Piedra Azul variety, which is closely related to Ita Ndivi's own, the first syllable is restricted as to which tones it may bear—primarily level high, mid, and low tones with an occasional rising contour—while the final syllable has no such restrictions, permitting all three level tones as well as both rising and falling contours (Peters 2018). Furthermore, Mixtec varieties feature numerous tonal minimal pairs, such as the Piedra Azul words *ntiví* 'daytime' and *ntivi* 'pretty', which differ only in the high and mid tones on their second syllables, respectively (MILPA 2020).

In line 2, Ita Ndivi attributes the source of her brothers' difficulties with Mixtec to "el tono al final" ('the tone at the end'), meaning the second and final tone in the couplet. In her view, it is the boys' tonal perception that is ultimately responsible for their pronunciation challenges. She asserts in lines 9 through 13 that many words sound the same at the beginning, a claim which reflects the restricted distribution of tones on the first syllable of the couplet. Adequately perceiving "el tono al final" is therefore highly important for

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distinguishing minimal pairs (line 8), but her brothers apparently find this to be very hard (4-8). The difficulty of perception is cited as a reason why they 'can't speak it so much' (14-15). As a result, 'sometimes they end up speaking a language almost like … Mixteco Alto' (18-21), which may be easier for them to pronounce, as Ita Ndivi speculates (24-26). The fact that "el otro lenguaje alto" ('the other *Alto* language', line 19) is grammatically singular reveals a view of *Mixteco Alto* as one unitary language, as opposed to a cluster of related Alta varieties; this line is therefore an example of the ideologized usage outlined in Chapter 3, in which *Mixteco Alto* is used to denote generic linguistic difference. As presented here, Ita Ndivi's theory accounts for the data discussed in Example 1, in which Ernesto's realization of 'bean' diverged from his sister's with regard to the tone on the final syllable, which was heard as sounding "*Alto*."

Lines 27 and 28 widen the scope of this perceptual-ideological phenomenon beyond Ita Ndivi's immediate family. It is not just her brothers, but "casi todos los niños que he visto que están aprendiendo el mixteco" ('almost all of the children that I've seen who are learning Mixtec') who speak the language in an *Alto*-like manner. This impression is apparently not unique to Ita Ndivi, as she uses constructed dialogue (Tannen 1986) in lines 35-37 to voice some of her relatives who apparently also hear child learners as 'talk[ing] like those who speak the *Alto* language'. In her reconstruction, Ita Ndivi casts these unnamed family members as freely volunteering this observation (33-34), portraying herself as responding to this viewpoint but not as its ultimate originator (39-41). While elsewhere Ita Ndivi functions as the principal (Goffman 1981) or responsible party for the observation that children speak in an *Alto* way (e.g., lines 18-21, as well as in other examples), the constructed dialogue in lines 31 through 38 serves to communicate that this opinion is more

widely held. Hearers are apparently quick to perceive children's speech in this way (44); it is

a powerful, near-instantaneous impression. I ask in lines 51 through 54 whether this is also

true for those children who do not belong to families in which an Alta variety is spoken; Ita

Ndivi confirms that it is (55). In short, Example 2 reveals that even those children whose

primary source of linguistic input is a Baja variety of Mixtec can be heard to speak in a way

that sounds like "el lenguaje alto."

In Example 3, Ita Ndivi further explains this apparent contradiction.

**Example 3: "Lo aprenden en una manera mixteco alto"**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:17:01 - 00:17:28)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Cuando les hablas? | *When you talk to them?* |
| 2 | Pues el tono diferente? | *Like the different tone?* |
| 3 | Lo hacen como que, | *They do it like,* |
| 4 | (0.5) | |
| 5 | sí. | *yeah.* |
| 6 | Como que suena diferente. | *Like it sounds different.* |
| 7 | Porque hay palabras que, | *Because there are words that,* |
| 8 | también es bien diferente? | *it's also really different?* |
| 9 | (0.4) | |
| 10 | Hay palabras algunos míos que he visto que están aprendiendo también el lenguaje? | |
| | *There are some of my own words that I've seen that (those who) are also learning the language?* | |
| 11 | Que — | *Who —* |
| 12 | hablan el mixteco bajo? | *speak Mixteco Bajo?* |
| 13 Anna: | [Mhm.] | |
| 14 Ita Ndivi: | [Y,] | *And,* |
| 15 | están aprendiendo el mixteco alto. | *they're learning Mixteco Alto.* |
| 16 | (1.1) | |
| 17 | Y este, | *And um,* |
| 18 | están aprendiendo en mixteco bajo pero, | *they're learning in Mixteco Bajo but,* |
| 19 | lo com- | *they und-* |
| 20 | lo, | *it,* |
| 21 | lo aprenden en una manera mixteco alto. | |
| | *they learn it in a Mixteco Alto way.* | |

Unlike Examples 1 and 2, where the word *tono* was used in close proximity to discussions of

pitch, "el tono diferente" ('the different tone') in line 2 is ambiguous. It could refer either to

lexical or grammatical tone or to the more general sense of *tono* as a "reflexive assessment

… of the lexical and phonological differences between the varieties being compared" (Falconi 2016: 104) (cf. Chapter 3). Whatever its referent, Ita Ndivi reiterates that "el tono" is responsible for the fact that it 'sounds different' when one talks to young people (lines 1-6). The perception that children's speech differs from that of adults operates on the lexical level as well (lines 7, 10); Ita Ndivi has even heard some of her 'own words' pronounced in a divergent manner. Of course, tone plays a key role in lexical differentiation; variation in a child's production of tone might result in an utterance that is "bien diferente" ('really different', line 8) from its corresponding adult form, potentially surfacing as a different, unintended lexeme altogether.

The crucial portion of these data is found in the seemingly paradoxical observation in lines 10 through 21. In Ita Ndivi's experience, some language learners "que hablan el mixteco bajo" ('who speak Mixteco Bajo', 11-12) are nonetheless "aprendiendo el mixteco alto" ('learning Mixteco Alto', 15). After a pause, she clarifies that "están aprendiendo en mixteco bajo pero … lo aprenden en una manera mixteco alto" ( 'they're learning in Mixteco Bajo but … they learn it in a Mixteco Alto way', 18-21). In other words, during the Mixtec language-acquisition process, some or perhaps even all children in Ventura County end up speaking in a manner that is heard as resembling *Mixteco Alto*. (Section 4.4 explores the phonetic correlates of what it means to 'learn Mixteco Bajo … in a Mixteco Alto way'.) This perception also holds true for children whose primary source of linguistic input is a Baja variety, including those who do not have any Alta speakers in their families, as shown in Example 2.

**4.3.2 Place as a proxy for age-graded variation**

The language ideology reflected in these data can be summarized as follows: *Child learners of Baja Mixtec varieties sometimes talk like* Mixteco Alto *speakers*.

My interest in this proposition, which can be referred to as the "child learner as geographic other" ideology, is not motivated by a desire to ascertain why children speak Mixtec in a way that differs from the variety or varieties they regularly hear. Indeed, it is a mundane fact that at some stages of language acquisition, learners talk differently than fluent speakers do. What is most intriguing in these data are the socioperceptual processes by which children's variable, non-adult-like pronunciations are interpreted not as "incorrect" realizations of their home variety, but instead as sounding like adult speech in a different, geographically distant variety of Mixtec.

Place and space have played an important role in the history of sociolinguistic perception research, although much of the existing literature focuses on speakers of English and other major world languages (Stanford 2016). Numerous studies have explored speakers' differential social evaluation of regional variation (e.g., Bucholtz et al. 2008; Niedzielski and Preston 2000; Preston 1989), as well as how place-linked stereotypes influence the treatment of novel linguistic input (Carmichael 2016). However, although it relies on a regional metalinguistic label, the "child learner as geographic other" ideology is not exactly about the perception or evaluation of place-based variation. Instead, I argue that this language ideology mobilizes spatial terms to explain variation that is not itself spatial in origin—in this case, variation that arises due to age or linguistic novice status.

Geographically-based linguistic variation is an intrinsic feature of the home environment of many Mixtec children in Ventura County; it is not at all uncommon for diasporic Mixtecs

to have partners who speak a different variety than they do. (For instance, the parents of

both Isabel and Carla, discussed in Chapter 3, come from different villages in the Mixteca

Baja, as do Ita Ndivi and Ernesto's parents, and Ita Ndivi's own partner is a speaker of a

separate Baja variety, also from San Martín Peras.) However, at no point during the

playback interview did Ita Ndivi treat Ernesto's variable pronunciation as evidence of

"confusion" between multiple home languages. Neither did she classify Ernesto's utterances

as an attempt to speak their father's variety instead of hers. Instead, Examples 1 through 3

show that her brother's divergent language use is heard as falling outside the *Mixteco Bajo*

category boundaries altogether—that is, it is somehow hearable as resembling *Mixteco Alto*.

But as I argued in Chapter 3, the use of the *Mixteco Alto* label does not presuppose a

resemblance to any specific Alta variety. Section 4 demonstrates that Ernesto's *Alto*-like

features are not actually characteristic of described Alta varieties. Moreover, children

apparently come to be heard in this way even in the absence of input from adult Alta

speakers. Thus, as with the examples in the preceding chapter, to assert that a child's speech

sounds 'like *Mixteco Alto*' is a generic attribution of linguistic difference (but not, crucially,

one of deficit, as I explain in Chapter 5).18

   Although the ideologized label *Mixteco Alto* may be applied to both adult and child

speech, these two usages identify distinct underlying causes of variation. The adult variation

that is called *Mixteco Alto* does, in fact, have its origins in spatial difference: the term

denotes a possibly unintelligible dialect from a different village than the speaker's own (see

Chapter 3). But, as shown by the fact that the term may be used for varieties from the

18 To call a child's speech *Mixteco Alto* does not imply that their linguistic difference is permanent;
Ita Ndivi reports that adult family members sometimes try to teach children to speak more in the way
that they themselves do (see Chapter 5).

Mixteca Baja and Guerrero, calling a variety *Mixteco Alto* may inaccurately presuppose that it originates in the Mixteca Alta region. This usage is therefore not strictly or purely spatial. It projects an "imagined dialect landscape" (Campbell-Kibler 2012: 282), one which may overlap with but is not identical to the true geographical sources of so-called *Alto* varieties. A distinct explanatory process is operative when the term is applied to children. As used for the non-adult-like forms of child language learners, the metalinguistic label *Mixteco Alto* exploits the terminology of spatial variation across varieties to account for another kind of intra-varietal variation—that which arises due to the speaker's age or novice status.

The recourse to spatial explanation as a proxy for other kinds of linguistic variation is not unique to the Mixtec diaspora. It can also be found among parents of children acquiring American English. As a folk-linguistic explanation for non-adult-like pronunciation of rhotics, for instance, a parent might claim that their child "talks with a Boston accent."[19] Linguistic variation tied to neurocognitive and sociocognitive diversity is also sometimes explained in regional terms, as in so-called "Foreign Accent Syndrome" (FAS) (e.g., Coleman and Gurd 2006a). Individuals with FAS, a rare phenomenon that arises suddenly as a result of brain injury, are sometimes said to sound like non-native speakers of their L1, or alternatively like native speakers from a different region (Coleman and Gurd 2006b). Furthermore, some neuroatypical individuals, such as people with autism, are sometimes perceived as speaking with "an accent," possibly due to prosodic variation (McCann and Peppé 2003); Hall (2020) shows that some autistic speakers agentively exploit the indexical meanings of these attributed regional accents for the purposes of identity construction.

[19] Thanks to Nancy Hall for this connection (p.c., 3/13/20). Examples of this claim can be found in online discussion forums, such as https://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=564720 .

The foregoing examples all demonstrate Auer's point that "localization"—the linkage between language and place—is an ideological process, not a "simple reflex of the spatial location in which [language] occurs" (2013: 14). Localization is inherently intersubjective, jointly constructed in the socioperceptual space between linguistic producer and interlocutor: it includes both "the processes by which speakers produce linguistic signs that have an indexical value which can be interpreted in geographical terms, *and* the processes by which the recipient of these linguistic signs interprets them as an index of a certain place or space" (Auer 2013: 10, emphasis original). In the case of *Mixteco Alto*, however, I argue that speakers and hearers do not participate equally in localization. Rather, responsibility for the ascription of the regionally-based *Mixteco Alto* label lies primarily with the hearer, as the "listening subject" (Inoue 2003). In the interaction between Ita Ndivi and Ernesto, his communicative goal was presumably to repeat his sister's prompt words, not to indexically signal membership in a village speech community to which he does not belong and whose language he has likely never heard. Most likely, he was simply trying to produce signs whose geo-indexical value is linked to his own family's home village. Nonetheless, Ernesto's "mispronunciations," when filtered through the existing ideology of *Mixteco Alto* as a marker of generic linguistic difference, enabled his sister to "place" his speech (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985) somewhere else entirely. But there is a subtle ontological distinction to be made here: this labeling practice does not assert that Baja-acquiring children in fact speak *Mixteco Alto*, but rather that 'they talk like those who speak the Alto language' (Example 2). Although Ita Ndivi initially says in Example 1 that Ernesto's tone 'is' *Mixteco Alto* (lines 1-3), this is quickly downgraded to a statement of similarity—his tone is 'like' *Mixteco Alto* (lines 5, 15). Thus, when applied to Ernesto's speech, *Mixteco*

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*Alto* indexes resemblance rather than distant provenance. After all, Ita Ndivi knows where her own brother is from.

Therefore, the "child learner as geographic other" ideology reveals that not all variation which is perceived in spatial terms is actually spatial in origin.[20] Because geography is such a salient explanation for Mixtec linguistic differentiation, it is logical that the spatial frame would be resemiotized to explain other axes of variation. In the following section, I demonstrate that the ideological rationalization of children's speech in these spatial terms can provide insight into actual spatial variation across Mixtec varieties in Ventura County. I argue that by inspecting the discursive contexts in which the *Mixteco Alto* label is mobilized to describe particular phonetic details of Ernesto's speech, it is possible to identify emergent sociolinguistic variables that are indexically linked to village-based variation.

## 4.4 *Mixteco Alto* as a clue to meaningful sociolinguistic variation

The previous section demonstrated how children's Mixtec speech is explained with reference to adult variation between dialects. In this section, I demonstrate that *Alto*-labeled youth pronunciation can in turn provide a way to understand adult variation along the spatial axis. I argue that by isolating the elements of Ernesto's linguistic performance that are claimed to exemplify his 'learn[ing] Mixteco Bajo … in a *Mixteco Alto* way', it is possible to identify phonological features that vary saliently between adult varieties of Mixtec in Ventura County—in other words, to pinpoint likely sociolinguistic variables.

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[20] However, children's *Alto*-labeled forms may inadvertently resemble geographically distant Baja varieties, thus indexing a different level of spatial variation than that which is projected by *Mixteco Alto*. This argument is further explained in Section 4.4.

Localization, or listeners' ability to "place" speakers, "is only possible on the basis of some shared stereotypical knowledge about how linguistic variables are distributed geographically, i.e. some 'imagined' geo- and sociolinguistic system" (Auer 2013: 14-15). Chapter 3 established that the term *Mixteco Alto* is only partially enregistered: when used to name entire varieties, it does not necessarily seem to be correlated with any particular place of origin, descriptive qualities, or linguistic features. When it describes actual linguistic performance, however, the *Alto* label reveals aspects of the diasporic Mixtec community's "'imagined' geo- and sociolinguistic system." Moments when children are said to 'talk like those who speak the Alto language' are a means to access this "shared stereotypical knowledge" about spatially distributed variation.

The fact that Ita Ndivi hears some of Ernesto's speech as sounding like *Mixteco Alto* means that his pronunciation resembles forms she has heard used by some adult speaker of a different variety than her own (which, presumably, she would have also classified as *Mixteco Alto*). That is, these forms are something that a fluent adult speaker from another village could plausibly be heard to produce; at the very least, they are not evaluated as markedly incorrect. Forms that are said to sound like *Mixteco Alto* are thus "salient" to Ita Ndivi as a Baja speaker, meaning that they are "perceptually and cognitively prominent" sites of variability across Mixtec varieties (Kerswill and Williams 2002: 81). Ita Ndivi's application of the *Mixteco Alto* label to particular features of Ernesto's pronunciation indicates her awareness (Babel 2016a; Labov 1972a; Preston 1996, 2016; Silverstein 1981) of these features as likely loci of variation in adult speech. By picking out the structures that receive this metalinguistic label, it is therefore possible to identify starting points for

investigating socially meaningful variation and linguistic differentiation between Mixtec varieties in Ventura County.

Sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 describe two aspects of Ernesto's pronunciation that are said to sound like *Mixteco Alto*. The first has to do with rising contour tone; the second is a particular realization of the affricate /ts/. By way of contrast, Section 4.4.3 lists aspects of Ernesto's pronunciation that Ita Ndivi did not hear as resembling *Mixteco Alto*, despite their difference from her prompt words. In Section 4.4.4, I lay out some possibilities for future investigation of these newly identified variables.

### 4.4.1 The leveling of rising contour tones

Ita Ndivi repeatedly commented on Ernesto's ability to produce Mixtec tones during our playback interview, but one particular pronunciation pattern of his stood out from the rest: when repeating syllables with an underlying rising contour tone, he would sometimes produce a level mid or high tone instead. To Ita Ndivi, this pronunciation sounded 'like *Mixteco Alto*'.

Tone is one of the elements of Mixtec linguistic structure that varies most obviously along the spatial axis. Josserand writes that "[the] surface-level variation with respect to tone is so great that Mixtecs themselves notice it as being one [of] the first features to differentiate their speech from that of neighboring villages" (1983: 159), which is perhaps one reason why the term *tono* is so widely used to denote linguistic difference (Chapter 3). As a salient locus of variation, tone is a frequent object of metalinguistic commentary among Mixtecs in Ventura County, including Ita Ndivi. As detailed in Section 4.3 above, she attributed many of her brothers' difficulties with learning Mixtec to *tono*. In this section,

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I discuss the possibility that rising contour tones are emerging as a salient sociolinguistic variable between the Mixtec varieties spoken in Ventura County.

Tone plays a key role in Mixtec structure, as it does for other languages in the Otomanguean family (Campbell 2017a; Kaufman 2006). In spite of its structural importance, Mixtec tone is understudied; fewer than 35 varieties have had their tonal systems described in any level of detail (Peters 2018: 1). My preliminary analyses of the El Paredón tonal system largely resemble Peters' (2018) description of the closely related Piedra Azul variety. Both villages are located within the municipality of San Martín Peras and are less than two hours away from one another by car. Like Piedra Azul Mixtec, El Paredón Mixtec seems to have three level tones—high (/H/), mid (/M/), and low (/L/)—and two contour tones, one falling (/F/) and one rising (/R/). The diachronic origin of many /R/ tones appears to be the now-lost final glottal stop which Josserand (1983) reconstructed for Proto-Mixtec (Peters 2018: 31). While surface-level contours do occur in other Mixtec varieties, they are often analyzed as sequences of level tones—as in, for example, Yucunany Mixtec, where what sound like rising tones are argued to be instances of underlying /L.H/ that surface as [L.LH] (Paster and Beam de Azcona 2004)—or as the surface realization of a floating /L/ tone, as in Peñoles Mixtec (Daly and Hyman 2007). In comparison, Peters (2018) considers /R/ contours to be unitary and contrastive, that is, discrete elements of the tonal inventory instead of a sequence of level tones. In both the Piedra Azul and El Paredón varieties, the distribution of /R/ tones is mostly restricted to the final mora, and by extension the final syllable, of morphologically simplex words (Peters 2018: 20).

At various points throughout the language-socialization recording Ita Ndivi made with Ernesto, his repetitions of prompt words with a final /R/ tone surfaced with a level [M] or

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[H] pitch instead. (Not every /R/ tone was leveled in this way, however, and when prompted to repeat the word again Ernesto was almost always able to correct to a [R] pitch on his second attempt.) During our playback interview Ita Ndivi remarked that although this pronunciation would not necessarily affect comprehension, it still sounded markedly different to her, reminiscent of *Mixteco Alto*.

For example, this contour tone leveling took place in Ernesto's repetition of the word *ndujchǐ* 'bean', which has an underlying tonal melody of /M.R/: [ⁿduht͡ʃ ǐ]. Ernesto first pronounced it as [duht͡ʃi] [M.M], without prenasalization on the initial stop (see Section 4.4.3) and with a level [M] pitch instead of the final /R/. (When prompted to try again, he was able to produce a [R] on the second syllable.) Example 1 above presents Ita Ndivi's commentary on this portion of the recording. She first remarked that "[c]reo que el tono que él hace es el … mixteco alto" ('I think the tone that he's doing is *Mixteco Alto*'), later reiterating that "es el tono más como alto" ('it's the tone more like *Alto*'). For purposes of comparison, the pitch contours for Ita Ndivi and Ernesto's pronunciation of this lexeme are shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. The pitch on her final vowel /i/ rises, while his remains level.
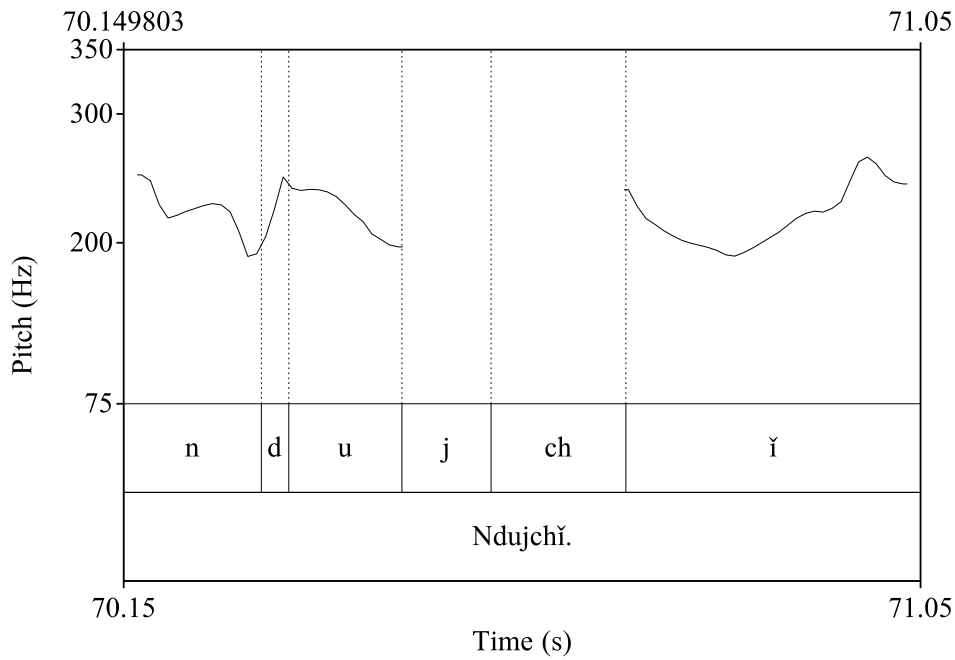
*Figure 4.1: Ita Ndivi's pitch contour for* ndujchĭ *'bean'*
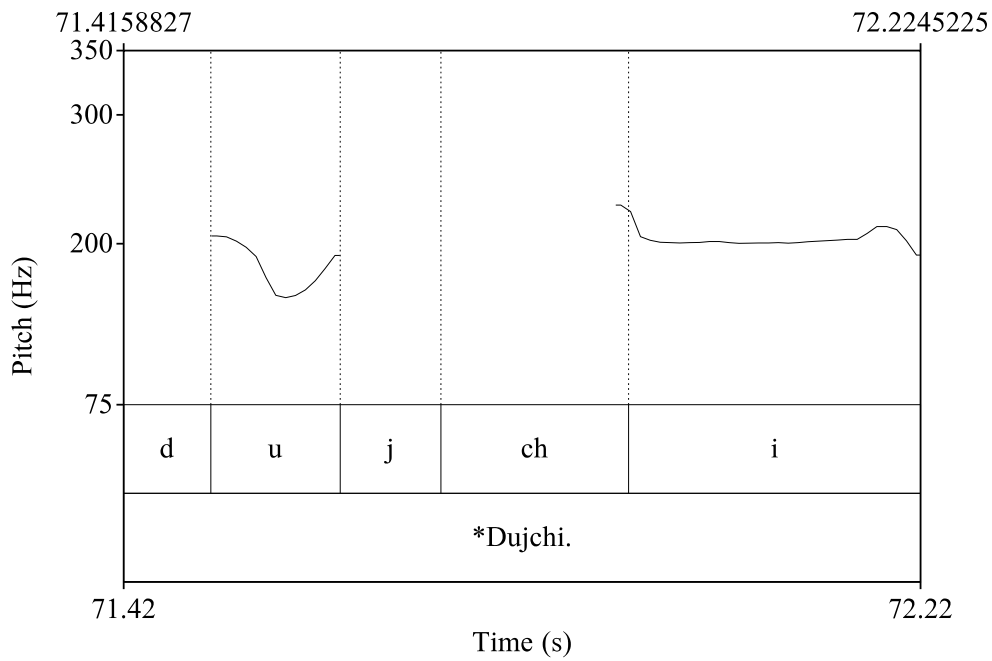


*Figure 4.2: Ernesto's pitch contour for* ndujchĭ *'bean'*

Table 4.1 lists all instances of contour leveling that occurred during the recorded

socialization interaction. As the data demonstrate, the leveling of /R/ contours did not seem

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to be restricted to particular tonal melodies; it surfaced regardless of whether the preceding

syllable was /L/, /M/, or /H/.[21] Leveled /R/ tones were always realized as either [H] or [M].

In two instances, on the words for 'dust' and 'goat', leveling was accompanied by a kind of

compensatory vowel lengthening on the leveled mora.

*Table 4.1: Instances of /R/ contour leveling in Ernesto's speech*

| | |
|---|---|
| /L.R/ → [L.H] | *xìjyŏ* 'griddle': [xìhjŏ] → [xìʔjó] |
| | *ndzìjkĭ* 'seed': [ⁿdzìhkĭ] → [dzìhkí] |
| | *xàˈă (Sofía)* '(Sofía's) claw': [ʃàʔă] → [ʃàʔá] |
| | *kìjĭ* 'day': [kìhĭ] → [kìhí] |
| /M.R/ → [M.M] | *viˈntsiă* 'cactus': [viʔntsiă] → [viʔntia] |
| | *ndujchĭ* 'bean': [ⁿduht͡ʃ ĭ] → [duht͡ʃì] |
| /M.R/ → [M.H] | *ndaˈě* 'our (incl.) hands': [ⁿdaʔě] → [daʔé] |
| | *ijtŭn* 'tree': [ihtŭ̌] → [ijtű̌] |
| /H.R/ → [H.M:] | *yájkă* 'dust': [jáhkă] → [jáhka:] |
| /H.R/ → [H.H:] | *chúˈŭ* 'goat': [t͡ʃúʔŭ] → [t͡ʃúʔú:] |

The actual pitch level that resulted from leveling seems to vary freely between [M] and [H],

with little influence from the tone of the first syllable (with the possible exception of /L.R/

forms). Therefore, the object of Ita Ndivi's *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic commentary appears

to be the process of leveling itself, not the surface pitch. This observation is supported by

her repetition of Ernesto's pronunciation of 'bean' in Example 1, the relevant portion of

which is reproduced below. Although Ernesto's underlying /M.R/ melody surfaced as

[M.M], Ita Ndivi repeated it as [M.H].

[21] However, Ernesto was able to reproduce the R tone perfectly on several words, including those
with both /M.R/ and /L.R/ melodies, such as *yaxĭn* 'gourd', *yaˈă* 'chile', *kaˈă* 'tail', and *ìxăn* 'masa
(corn dough)'.

**Example 1 (reproduced excerpt)**

7 Ita Ndivi: como nosotros decimos **ndujchǐ**.　　*like we say **bean**.*
　　　　　　　　　　[ⁿduht͡ʃ ǐ]
8　　　　　Y él dice,　　　　　　　　　*And he says,*
9　　　　　**ndujchí**.　　　　　　　　****bean**.*
　　　　　[ⁿduht͡ʃí]

Similarly, the leveling process itself was marked in Ita Ndivi's commentary on Ernesto's

pronunciation of 'tree', *ijtŭn*, which he realized as [M.H]. She noted that while she would

likely be able to understand the intended meaning if this pronunciation occurred in

conversation, the tonal leveling was noticeable: "lo dice muy regular" ('he says it in a very

regular [i.e., flat or steady] way').

As these data make clear, Ita Ndivi's "'imagined' geo- and sociolinguistic system" (Auer

2013: 15) includes the perception that leveled /R/ tones resemble *Mixteco Alto*. By

extension, the fully realized /R/ contour is ideologically mapped onto *Alto*'s binarized

opposite, *Mixteco Bajo*. Such binarization creates a salient opposition between variable

forms, an opposition which is explained with reference to spatial variation. I argue that this

is fertile ground for the development of a sociolinguistic variable. First a linguistic

difference becomes salient—in this case /R/ versus [M] and/or [H] pitch—and then the

distribution of this difference within a speech community is explained, rationalized, or

naturalized with reference to some local ideology—in this case, the *Alto*-as-difference

labeling practice.

In many of the other varieties spoken in Ventura County, lexical contour tones are not as

frequent as they are in El Paredón Mixtec, particularly when considering morphologically

simplex forms. Some varieties, such as that spoken in Tlahuapa (Guerrero), only exhibit

lexical contours on a limited set of primarily monosyllabic words, such as *yóǒ* 'moon',

whose surface rising tone is analyzed as a sequence of /LH/ targets rather than as a unitary

element (however, grammatical rising tones are attested in the Tlahuapa variety; see Reyes Basurto et al. 2016). Even so, there are multiple cognate sets of high-frequency words in which an El Paredón /R/ contour is cognate with a level tone in other varieties (MILPA 2020). Notably, those village varieties whose cognate forms also have an /R/ are all from the Oaxacan municipality of San Martín Peras, to which El Paredón also belongs. Table 4.2 lists several cognate forms for 'hand', which has an /M.R/ melody in El Paredón: *nda ˈă*. The varieties in the second column all come from municipalities other than San Martín Peras. Their dialect subgroups (Josserand 1983) are listed in parentheses.

*Table 4.2: Comparison of cognate forms for 'hand' between Peras and non-Peras Mixtec varieties*

| San Martín Peras (Southern Baja) varieties | | Non-Peras varieties | |
|---|---|---|---|
| /M.R/ | El Paredón: *nda ˈă* | /M.L/ | San Martín Duraznos (Southern Baja): *nta'à* |
| | Piedra Azul: *nta ˈă* | | San Sebastián del Monte (Central Baja): *ndaà* |
| | San Marco de la Flor: *nda ˈă* | /M.H/ | Tlahuapa (Guerrero): *nda'á* |
| | | | San Juan Mixtepec (Mixtepec): *nda'á* |

The final /R/ in Peras varieties corresponds to a level tone in the varieties spoken in other municipalities. When Ernesto pronounces /R/ contours as level, it is heard as similar to *Mixteco Alto*. From this it can be inferred that any of the cognates in the "Non-Peras varieties" column in Table 4.2 could plausibly be given the label *Mixteco Alto* as well. But none of these varieties are actually from an Alta subgroup.[22] In fact, the San Martín

[22] It is interesting to note that cognates in certain Alta varieties do, indeed, have a level tone where San Martín Peras varieties have a rise: e.g., in Chalcatongo Mixtec (Western Alta), 'hand' is *nda'a* (Macaulay 1996), and in Santa María Peñoles (Eastern Alta) it is likewise *nda'a* (Mexico Coll.

Duraznos variety belongs to the same Southern Baja subgroup as all of the San Martín Peras varieties, with which it shares a high degree of mutual intelligibility. While the /R/ contour may be an ideologically *Mixteco Bajo* pattern, it does not occur in all Baja varieties, at least as widely as it does in those from San Martín Peras.

Because cross-variety tonal correspondences are so complex, it is not the case that cognates from the varieties in the right column will unilaterally have level tones where San Martín Peras varieties have /R/. Exceptions to this general pattern of correspondence exist. For instance, the word for 'tree', which is *ijtŭn* in El Paredón, also has a rising contour in San Juan Mixtepec Mixtec: *yutŭ* (MILPA 2020). On the whole, however, the pattern of Peras varieties having an /R/ contour on syllables where others have a level tone is robust.

These data appear to reveal an emergent ideological categorization: a binarized contrast between non-Peras varieties, whose level tones sound like *Mixteco Alto*, and San Martín Peras varieties, whose contours are characteristic of *Mixteco Bajo*. Like the analysis advanced in Chapter 3, this contrast is also an instance of "fractal recursivity" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38). In this instance, the regional opposition between *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* is projected onto a smaller-scale geographical unit, that of the municipality, rather than onto a self-other relation like that described in Chapter 3.

This metalinguistic distinction may be explained by looking to the demographics of Ventura County, where Mixtecs from San Martín Peras represent a large proportion of speakers, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Bax et al. in prep.). Although several different villages

1977), both of which have /M.M/ melodies. In other words, these Alta varieties exhibit the ideologically *Alto* form. However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, Alta varieties are extremely rare in Ventura County; it is therefore far more likely that Ita Ndivi's commentary on her brother's speech was made with reference to the Baja or Guerrero varieties that are more commonly spoken in the local community.

beyond the three listed in Table 4.2 are included within this group, many people simply identify themselves as being from or speaking the Mixtec of "San Martín Peras" or "San Martín," only specifying the name of their village when a follow-up question is asked. The municipality name is also employed as a membership categorization device (Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007) by other Mixtecs in the diaspora community: Sections 3.3 and 4.4.2 illustrate how a young woman from a different municipality refers to "los de San Martín" ('people from San Martín [Peras]') as a category of people who behave differently than people from her own village. It seems, therefore, that "San Martín [Peras]" is an emergent macro-category that has begun to circulate within the diaspora community as an axis of distinction, both linguistic and otherwise. The fact that level tones (i.e., non-San Martín Peras forms) are located as *Alto*, in contrast to the /R/ contours found in San Martín Peras (i.e., *Bajo*) varieties, may indicate the formation of a sociolinguistic variable, one which varies along the spatial axis and divides up the Ventura County diaspora community according to municipality of origin.

### 4.4.2 Deaffrication of [ts]

In addition to differences with regard to tone, Ernesto periodically produced several segments, especially consonants, in a non-adult-like manner. Only one of these pronunciations was labeled as sounding like *Mixteco Alto*: the deaffrication of [ts] to [t].

In the El Paredón variety, the voiceless alveolar affricate [ts] occurs only before the high front vowel /i/. This cooccurrence, likely the result of a historical process of palatalization, led Peters (2018) to propose the palatalized alveolar affricate /tsʲ/ as a distinct phoneme in the closely related Piedra Azul variety. Both /t/ and /s/ exist elsewhere in the language, and

the sequence [ti] is attested, albeit infrequently, so palatalization is not currently an active phonetic process. For the purpose of the present analysis, what is relevant is the phonetic status of [ts] as an affricate (i.e., as compared to a stop), not its phonemic status *per se*.

Ernesto's deaffrication of [ts] to [t] only occurred in word-initial contexts, as in the word for 'water', *tsìkwĭi*, which he pronounced with an aspirated stop (in addition to level pitch instead of rising tone): [tʰikwi:]. This pronunciation was inconsistent, however; he produced [ts] in other words, such as *tsìnâ* 'dog'. In addition, all instances of [ts] word-internally were realized with the affricate, as in *viˈntsiă* 'cactus' and *ìjtsia* 'river'. Still, those instances in which Ernesto did deaffricate were highly noticeable to Ita Ndivi. She did not prompt him to re-attempt these words during their initial recording, but did point them out during our playback interview. For example, after hearing Ernesto's pronunciation of the word *tsiòkó* 'ant' as [tʰiòkó], Ita Ndivi volunteered the following assessment: "creo que este lenguaje lo dicen mucho los de, los que hablan el lenguaje alto. 'Tiòkó'." ('I think that way of speaking is often used by people who, those who speak the Alto language. "Tiòkó".') She immediately confirmed this impression with her boyfriend, also a speaker of a variety of Mixtec from San Martín Peras, who agreed that it sounded *Alto*. Figure 4.3 illustrates Ita Ndivi's pronunciation of *tsiòkó*, with an initial [ts] affricate; Figure 4.4 is Ernesto's pronunciation.
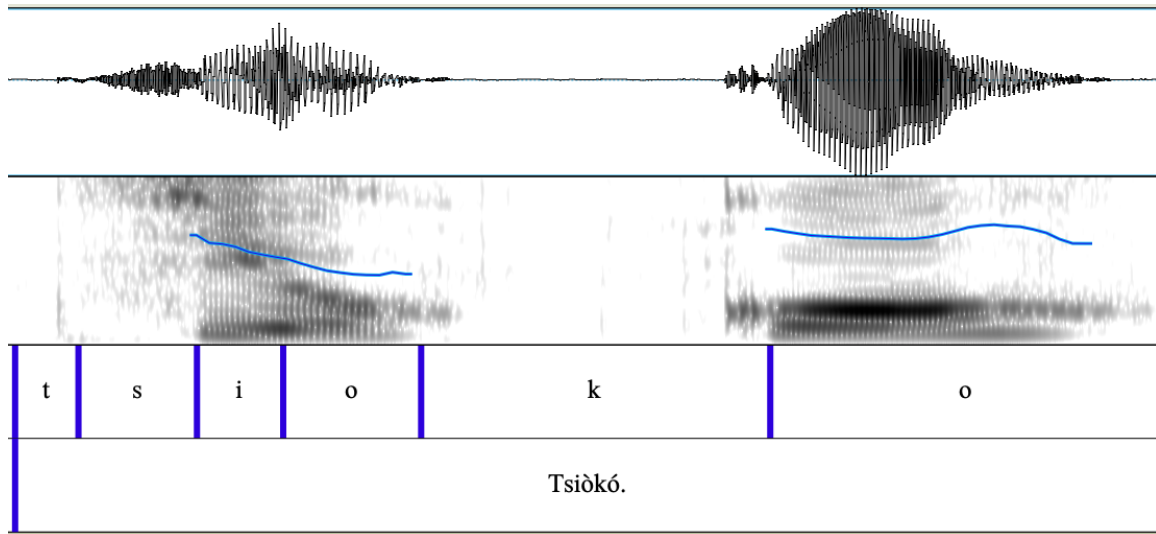
*Figure 4.3: Ita Ndivi's pronunciation of* tsiòkó *'ant'*
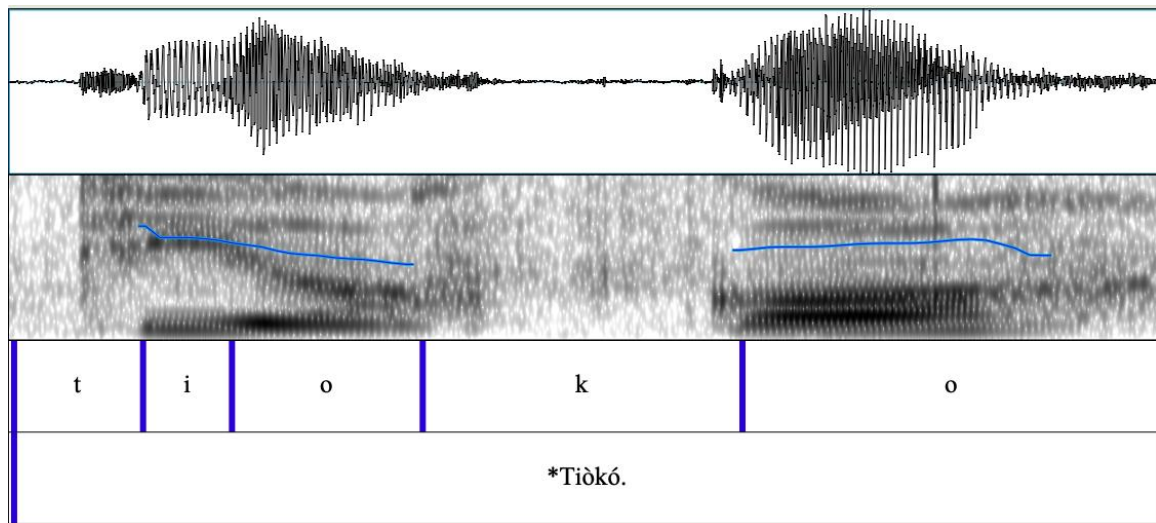


*Figure 4.4: Ernesto's pronunciation of* tsiòkó *'ant'*

Ernesto's stopped [t] in Figure 4.4 is aspirated, much like the English [tʰ] in words such as *team*. Ernesto is a fluent English speaker, so it is possible that his pronunciation may be attributable to language contact. But even if influence from English is the reason for his word-initial [ts] deaffrication—whether it stems from the influence of English stop aspiration or from phonotactic restrictions on word-initial clusters like [ts]—it is significant

that his sister did not hear it as indicative of contact. Instead, she interpreted this pronunciation as resembling that of 'those who speak the *Alto* language'.

As was the case for /R/ tone leveling, the distribution of the [ts] affricate in the Ventura County community does not in fact pattern according to speakers' geographical origin in the Mixteca Alta or Mixteca Baja regions. Cognate sets (MILPA 2020) reveal a high degree of cross-varietal variation in the phonetic value of this sound, in both word-initial and word-internal contexts. In addition to [t] and [ts], the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate [t͡ʃ] and voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate [t͡ɕ] are also attested in some varieties, as is the alveolar flap [ɾ], although less commonly. Upon first inspection, the presence of [ts] in cognate sets seems to pattern along municipality lines, as with /R/ contour tones, with varieties from the San Martín Peras municipality having [ts] where those from other municipalities have a different sound. Table 4.3 illustrates this distinction in the word for 'nose', in which the focal sound occurs word-internally. The municipalities of the villages in the "Non-Peras varieties" column are listed in parentheses. None of these varieties belong to an Alta subgroup.

*Table 4.3: Comparison of cognate forms for 'nose' between Peras and non-Peras Mixtec varieties*

| San Martín Peras varieties | | | Non-Peras varieties | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ts | El Paredón: *xijtsĭn* | t͡ɕ | San Martín Duraznos (San Sebastián Tecomaxtlahuaca): *xìtxì* | |
| | Piedra Azul: *xijtsĭn* | t͡ʃ | San Juan Mixtepec (San Juan Mixtepec): *xìchĭ* | |
| | San Marco de la Flor: *xijtsĭn* | t | Tlahuapa (Alcozauca de Guerrero): *xìtín* | |
| | | | San Sebastián del Monte (Santo Domingo Tonalá): *xìtì* | |

When additional varieties are included, however, the pattern becomes slightly less clear. (For the majority of locally spoken varieties, documentation is still in its early stages; some

cognate forms in certain varieties have not yet been collected.) Table 4.4 compares cognates

for 'water', which is *tsìkwĭi* in the El Paredón variety. While all four Peras varieties exhibit

the [ts] affricate in these cognates, it is also present in the Unión de Cárdenas variety, from

the municipality of Santiago Juxtlahuaca, and the variety from Santa María Asunción, which

is from the Ixpantepec Nieves municipality.

*Table 4.4: Comparison of cognate forms for 'water'*

| San Martín Peras varieties | | | Non-Peras varieties | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ts | El Paredón: *tsìkuĭi* | t͡ɕ | San Martín Duraznos (San Sebastián Tecomaxtlahuaca): *txìkuìi* | |
| | Piedra Azul: *tsìkuĭi* | t͡ʃ | San Juan Mixtepec (San Juan Mixtepec): *chukwíi* | |
| | San Marco de la Flor: *tsìkuĭi* | t | Tlahuapa (Alcozauca de Guerrero): *tìkwíi* | |
| | San Isidro la Raya: *tsikuĭ* | | San Sebastián del Monte (Santo Domingo Tonalá): *tikuií* | |
| **Non-Peras varieties with [ts]** | | r | San Francisco Higos (Santiago del Río): *rikwií* | |
| ts | Unión de Cárdenas (Santiago Juxtlahuaca): *tsikwìí* | | | |
| | Santa María Asunción (Ixpantepec Nieves): *tsikwií* | | | |

As the data in Table 4.4 make clear, [ts] is not exclusive to the San Martín Peras

municipality.[23] However, there is a robust overall pattern of [ts] in San Martín Peras

varieties where other locally spoken varieties have [t], [t͡ʃ], [t͡ɕ], or [ɾ].

[23] Indeed, the [ts] affricate is also common in certain other varieties spoken in the diaspora
community, such as San Juan Mixtepec Mixtec. However, instances of [ts] in the Mixtepec variety
are the modern reflex of proto-Mixtec *x, whereas the source of the [ts] in San Martín Peras varieties
is *t (cf. Josserand 1983). The Mixtepec [ts] therefore occurs in a distinct set of lexical contexts and

Ernesto's non-adult-like realization of [ts] as [t] resulted in a pronunciation that made him sound like a linguistic outsider—that is, like a speaker whose variety might be labeled *Mixteco Alto*. According to the data in Tables 4.3 and 4.4, at least two locally spoken varieties (and likely others which have not yet been documented) regularly have [t] where San Martín Peras varieties have [ts]: those of Tlahuapa (municipality of Alcozauca de Guerrero, in the state of Guerrero) and San Sebastián del Monte (municipality of Santo Domingo Tonalá, Oaxaca). The former belongs to the Guerrero subgroup and the latter is from the Central Baja. With regard to the initial consonant, Ernesto's pronunciation of *tsiòkó* 'ant' as [tʰiòkó] does indeed resemble the Tlahuapa cognate *tyòkó* [tjòkó] (Reyes Basurto et al. 2016), as well as that from San Sebastián del Monte, *tìkù kuaá*. A logically transitive relationship therefore exists: if Ernesto's pronunciation sounds *Alto*, and these other varieties' forms resemble Ernesto's, then it is likely that Ita Ndivi would also perceive the San Sebastián del Monte and Tlahuapa pronunciations as *Alto*-like.

However, Tlahuapa speakers themselves tend to identify their language as *Mixteco Bajo*, as illustrated in Section 3.3, in which Salvador, a Tlahuapa speaker, emphatically differentiated his own self-categorized *Bajo* variety from *Mixteco Alto* (cf. Reyes Basurto et al. 2016). I believe this disjuncture to be evidence for [ts] and its cognate forms as variants of an emergent sociolinguistic variable, the pronunciation of which is labeled *Alto* when it differs saliently from the labeler's own variant.

phonetic environments than the [ts] in San Martín Peras does. In addition, while the tokens of [ts] that are derived from *t are cognate with sounds like [t], [t͡ʃ], and [t͡ɕ], those that developed from *x are often cognate with [ʃ] or [ɕ] (MILPA 2020). The question of whether instances of [ts] are perceived differently depending on phonetic and lexical context, as well as which sounds they corresponds to cross-varietally, will need to be carefully addressed in future research on this topic.

The perceptual-dialectological distribution of this sound (Preston 1989) therefore seems to depend on both the self-other binary and the higher-order distinction of municipality. Although it is also attested in varieties from elsewhere, there is a strong correlation between the [ts] variant and the municipality of San Martín Peras. Furthermore, additional community members' metalinguistic commentary on [ts] indicates the relevance of Peras as a socioperceptual category. Example 4 comes from an interview with Isabel, who was 20 at the time of recording. Although Isabel's first language was Mixtec, she experienced language loss as an adolescent and no longer identified as a fluent speaker. At the time of the interview she considered herself to be a stronger speaker of Spanish and English, although she heard Mixtec spoken every day by her parents. Prior to the interaction presented below, she recounted how, as a receptive trilingual, she was able to understand Mixtec-speaking customers at her place of employment. In this excerpt she elaborates, saying that she can often even tell where particular customers are from—particularly those who are from San Martín Peras, in part because of their use of the [ts] affricate.

**Example 4: "How they add the [ts]"**
*(20181203_Isabel_interview2, 01:09:22 - 01:10:21)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Isabel: | And this is crazy también porque um, | *And this is crazy too because um,* |
| 2 | | hay muchos, | *there are a lot of people,* |
| 3 | | like, | |
| 4 | | de San Martín? | *from San Martín [Peras]?* |
| 5 | Anna: | Mhm? | |
| 6 | Isabel: | Y se s- pue- | *And you can-* |
| 7 | | you can sc- | |
| 8 | | hear — | |
| 9 | | um like, | |
| 10 | | hear their acento. | *hear their accent.* |
| 11 | | (1.2) | |
| 12 | Anna: | Wait how so? | |
| 13 | Isabel: | Like, | |
| 14 | | (0.4) | |
| 15 | | eh — | |
| 16 | | not their acento but like, | *not their accent but like,* |
| 17 | | their, | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 18 | variante. | *variety.* |
| 19 | Not variante? | *Not variety?* |
| 20 | Yeah vari[ante] right? | *Yeah variety right?* |
| 21 Anna: |       [Yeah.] | |
| 22 Isabel: | Yeah. | |
| 23 | Como, | *Like,* |
| 24 | like, | |
| 25 | ellos #son #wan**[tʰ]**. | *they #are #wan[tʰ].* |
| 26 | You know? | |
| 27 | (0.8) | |
| 28 | How they add the **[ts]**. | |
| 29 Anna: | **[ts]**. | |
| 30 Isabel: | Yeah. | |
| 31 Anna: | Uh huh. | |
| 32 Isabel: | Mhm. | |
| 33 Anna: | Yeah. | |
| 34 | Do you have a word where, | |
| 35 | it's different? | |
| 36 | Like for you and for the San Martín variante? | |
| 37 Isabel: | Yeah, | |
| 38 | li- | |
| 39 | like like like. | |
| 40 | (1.0) | |
| 41 | **Ti-**  [ti] | ***Wa-*** |
| 42 | Como like, | *Um like,* |
| 43 | with my mom I think? | |
| 44 | It's **tikwií**? | *It's **water?*** |
| |    [tikwií] | |
| 45 | (0.6) | |
| 46 | Y ellos like, | *And (for) them like,* |
| 47 | **tikwii**. | ***water.*** |
| | [tʰi̥kwii] | |
| 48 Anna: | Mhm. | |
| 49 Isabel: | Yeah it's like, | |
| 50 | **[tʰ]**. | |
| 51 | Li- | |
| 52 | Yeah. | |
| 53 | It's like más como like, | *It's like more like,* |
| 54 | with their teeth and their tongue. | |
| 55 Anna: | Uh huh. | |
| 56 Isabel: | Yeah. | |
| 57 | Y de nosotros más like, | *And with us it's more like,* |
| 58 | (0.8) | |
| 59 | like, | |
| 60 | (0.9) | |
| 61 | not, | |
| 62 | that. | |
| 63 | It's, | |
| 64 | I think it's nomás como like, | *I think it's just like,* |
| 65 | **tikwii**. | ***water.*** |
| | [tikwii] | |

| 66 | Like, | |
|---|---|---|
| 67 | we're like, | |
| 68 | (1.0) | |
| 69 | **tikwií**. | *water.* |
| | [ti̥kwií] | |
| 70 | (1.5) | |
| 71 | You get me? | |
| 72 | Like más como abres la boca. | *Like, you like open your mouth more.* |
| 73 Anna: | Ah? | |
| 74 Isabel: | Y ellos como like, | *And for them it's like,* |
| 75 | **tikwii**. | *water.* |
| | [tʰi̥kwii] | |
| 76 | (1.2) | |
| 77 | Ye[ah.] | |
| 78 Anna: | [So es] más cerrado? | *So it's more closed?* |
| 79 Isabel: | Mhm. | |
| 80 Anna: | Uh huh. | |
| 81 Isabel: | Yeah. | |

Isabel sets up her remarks on dialectal variation by explaining that "hay muchos … de San Martín" ('there are a lot of people from San Martín [Peras]', lines 2-4) in Ventura County. This group is distinctive because you can "hear their acento" ('accent', lines 7-10), which is so noticeable that it's "crazy" (1). In lines 16-20, Isabel self-repairs "acento" to "variante" ('variety'), likely due to her previous participation in my sociocultural linguistics class (Chapter 2) in which we discussed Mixtec linguistic diversity using the term *variante*. She gives an example of the audible varietal difference in line 25. Although the full word is unintelligible, the voiceless aspirated alveolar stop [tʰ] at the end is clearly audible. She appeals to me in line 26 to check whether I have understood, but after an 0.8-second pause in which she receives no uptake, she clarifies in line 28: "How they add the [ts]." In contrast to line 25, this pronunciation is clearly a voiceless alveolar affricate. I repeat the affricate [ts] back to her in line 29 to check that I have heard it correctly, which she confirms in line 30. In lines 34 through 36, I ask her to provide an example of a word where her own

pronunciation would be different from "the San Martín variante." She chooses the word for

'water', cognate forms of which are listed in Table 4.4 above.

Throughout the rest of the transcript, she repeatedly switches back and forth between the

"San Martín" word for 'water' and its cognate in her own variety, or more precisely that of

her mother (line 43). Isabel's mother is from the village of Santiago Petlacala, and hers is

the variety that Isabel primarily spoke as a child (as opposed to her father's Tlahuapa

variety). Inspection of the spectrogram reveals the phonetic detail that Isabel uses to

differentiate these two varieties. She pronounces her mother's word for 'water' as [tikwií]

(line 44), [tikwii] (65), and [ti̥kwií] (69), as well as the truncated attempt [ti] in line 41. Her

performances of the "San Martín" cognate, in addition to the [tʰ] and [ts] in lines 25 and 28,

respectively, include [tʰi̥kwii] (line 47), [tʰ] (50), and [tʰi̥kwii] (75).  There is always some

kind of fricative noise in Isabel's imitation of "San Martín," whether it is the affrication of

[ts] or the aspirated stop [tʰ], all tokens of which also exhibit a high-intensity stop burst.

None of the tokens from her mother's variety are aspirated or affricated.

Isabel identifies an articulatory explanation for variation in the initial consonant: "San

Martín" speakers pronounce it "más como like, with their teeth and their tongue" (53-54), so

it is "más cerrado" ('more closed', line 78), in contrast to the Santiago Petlacala variety, in

which "más como abres la boca" ('you like open your mouth more', line 72). Thanks to this

metalinguistic commentary, it is possible to infer that the phonetic value of the marked

sound in "San Martín" is [ts], even though the majority of Isabel's "San Martín" productions

include [tʰ]. The stop closure of [tʰ] requires no more "teeth and tongue" than [t] does,

whereas [ts] requires a longer-duration closure of these articulators in order to create the

sibilant portion of the affricate. Similarly, the secondary fricative articulation of [ts] is

constricted, or 'more closed', as compared to the 'more open mouth' of [t] once the stop closure has been released. These articulatory details, Isabel's reference to the affricate as a definite entity ("the [ts]" in line 28), and the fact that none of the currently documented Peras varieties have a strongly aspirated [tʰ] in the word for 'water' (see Table 4.4) lead me to believe that the salient "San Martín" variant here is [ts]—despite the fact that Isabel produces [tʰ] in connected speech.

It is well known that there is often a gap between linguistic perception and production, or "control" (Babel 2016a; Preston 1996, 2016). A speaker may be unable to accurately reproduce a feature of which they are aware, "as anyone who has attempted to imitate someone else's accent can attest" (Babel 2016b: xxi). Although Isabel is aware of the [ts] affricate as a *San Martín* feature, the fact that she generally realizes it as [tʰ] is evidence that she does not fully control it. Indeed, throughout the interaction in Example 4 she signals uncertainty about her rendition of the San Martín Peras form (as well as her mother's form) via repetition, hedging, and pauses. This separation between awareness and control is also common among child language learners, such as Ernesto, who perceive phonetic detail well before they can consistently reproduce it themselves (Clark 2016). Isabel's performance of this *San Martín* feature and Ernesto's non-adult-like pronunciations both miss the mark of their (presumed) target forms—[ts] on both counts—but end up being phonetically identical. Isabel's variable production of the [ts] affricate may have to do with the phonemic structure of her heritage variety. Alternatively, it may have been influenced by her fluency in English, a characteristic which she shares with Ernesto.

Whatever the reason for her pronunciation, Example 4 nonetheless illustrates that the affricate [ts] is metalinguistically salient to Isabel as a listener whose variety lacks it, just as

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its deaffricated cognate is salient to Ita Ndivi. The [ts] is an extra element that *San Martín* speakers "add" when they speak (line 24); the [tʰ] pronunciation is reminiscent of *Mixteco Alto*. Speakers on both sides of the sociolinguistic divide agree: this is a notable site of variation, one ripe for more targeted study.

As Example 4 shows, the [ts] variant is ideologically linked to the municipality of San Martín Peras, even if its actual distribution across municipalities is slightly messier (Table 4.4). There is a confounding bit of data, however. Although Isabel distinguished herself and her mother from "los de San Martín," her mother's home village of Santiago Petlacala is in fact located within the San Martín Peras municipality—but apparently outside of *San Martín* as an ideological category. The Santiago Petlacala variety has not yet been described, so I cannot state the degree to which it does or does not pattern with other San Martín Peras varieties. Nonetheless, what the discussion of [ts] in Example 4 reveals is that the geographic borders of San Martín Peras as a municipality are non-isomorphic with the ideological boundaries of *San Martín [Peras]* as a site of linguistic variation.

In order to understand the "'imagined' geo- and sociolinguistic system" (Auer 2013: 15) of both the [ts] variable and *San Martín*-linked variation more broadly, additional documentation of local varieties must be undertaken alongside further investigation of the language attitudes and metalinguistic discourses that have emerged in the diaspora context.

### 4.4.3 Non-*Alto* pronunciations

Although there were several ways in which Ernesto's speech did not match Ita Ndivi's prompt words, /R/ contour leveling and [ts] deaffrication were the only two phonetic processes that she highlighted as resembling *Mixteco Alto*. In this section, I illustrate some

of Ernesto's additional non-adult-like pronunciations and demonstrate that they do not correspond to patterns of cross-varietal variation in adult speech.

In word-initial contexts, Ernesto almost always pronounced the prenasalized stop /ⁿd/ and prenasalized affricate /ⁿd͡ʒ/ without the nasal element. As mentioned above, he realized *ndujchǐ* 'bean' as [duht͡ʃǐ], whereas his sister's pronunciation was [ⁿduht͡ʃ ǐ]. Likewise, while the adult form of the word for 'huarache', a kind of woven sandal, is *nchìxǎn* [ⁿd͡ʒ͡ìʃǎ], Ernesto said it as [dìʃǎ], deaffricating as well denasalizing the initial segment. Ita Ndivi's comment on his pronunciation of 'huarache' was "No suena bien" ('It doesn't sound good'). At no point, however, did she mention that it sounded *Alto*.

The denasalization of /ⁿd/ and /ⁿd͡ʒ/, as well as the deaffrication of the latter, both resulted in [d]. For most varieties of Mixtec, the plain voiced coronal stop [d] is not attested in surface forms. Instead, the prenasalized stop [ⁿd] contrasts with a voiceless counterpart [t] (Iverson and Salmons 1996). Table 4.5 lists the word for 'huarache' in several varieties spoken in Ventura County (MILPA 2020). The nasal element (shown in bold) is present in all cognates.

*Table 4.5: Comparison of cognate forms for 'huarache'*

| Variety | Cognate form for 'huarache' |
|---|---|
| San Juan Mixtepec | **n**tsìtsǎ |
| San Marco de la Flor | **n**tsìxǎn |
| San Martín Duraznos | í**n**txixàn |
| San Sebastián del Monte | **n**dìsà |
| Tlahuapa | **n**dìxán |
| El Paredón | **n**chìxǎn [ⁿd͡ʒ͡ìʃǎ] |
| **Ernesto's form** | *[dìʃǎ] |

The non-nasal stop [d] is not found as a variant of /ⁿd/ or /ⁿd͡ʒ/ in any Mixtec varieties

spoken in Ventura County. Therefore, Ernesto's pronunciation bears no resemblance to any

possible pattern of adult sociolinguistic variation—which, I argue, is the reason it was never

said to sound like *Mixteco Alto*. Although Ita Ndivi did not make any remarks indicating she

believed this to be the case, Ernesto's denasalization may instead reflect influence from

Spanish and/or English, both of which have /d/, but no word-initial [nd], in their phonemic

inventories.

In addition, Ita Ndivi frequently remarked upon Ernesto's tendency to insert sporadic

word-medial glottal stops. Although CVʔCV and CVʔV are common Mixtec word shapes,

Ernesto repeatedly overregularized that pattern, inserting a glottal stop in CVCV words

without any underlying glottal element (either synchronically or diachronically). For

example, he pronounced the word for 'dog', *tsìnâ* [tsìnâ], as [tsìʔnà], and the word for

'pretty', *ndivi* [ⁿdivi], as [diʔvi]. The Mixtec glottal stop is contrastive, and consequently Ita

Ndivi was highly attuned to moments in which it appeared where it did not belong.[24] Close

to the end of our playback interview, after she had heard it occur several times, she

remarked emphatically "Sí, el saltillo se pone mucho" ('Yes, the glottal stop is inserted a

lot'). Again, no tokens of spontaneous glottal stop insertion were marked as *Alto*-like. Table

4.6 lists several cognates for 'dog' and 'pretty', none of which have a glottal stop (MILPA

2020).

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[24] The status of glottalization has long been debated by scholars of Mixtec: some analyses treat [ʔ] as a consonant phoneme (e.g., North and Shields 1977), some consider glottalization to be a feature of "checked" vowels (e.g., Bradley 1970), and others argue for an analysis of glottalization as an underlying feature of the word root (Macaulay and Salmons 1995). Whatever its underlying phonological form, the glottal bears contrastive lexical meaning, as in the El Paredón near-minimal pair *xaa* 'how' and *xàˈǎ* 'foot'.

*Table 4.6: Comparison of cognate forms for 'dog' and 'pretty'*

| Variety | Cognate form for 'dog' | Cognate form for 'pretty' |
|---|---|---|
| San Juan Mixtepec | *tìnâ* | *vîí* |
| San Marco de la Flor | *tsǐnâ* | *ntivi* |
| San Martín Duraznos | *txìna* | *ntivi* |
| San Sebastián del Monte | *tìna* | *livi* |
| Tlahuapa | *tìna* | *nduvi* |
| El Paredón | *tsìnâ* [tsìnâ] | *ndivi* [ⁿdivi] |
| **Ernesto's form** | **\*[tsìʔnà]** | **\*[diʔvi]** |

Like denasalization, the process of glottal stop insertion did not result in pronunciations that sounded like those in other local Mixtec varieties; this pattern was therefore not singled out as *Alto*-like.

As these data reveal, Ita Ndivi selectively applied the *Mixteco Alto* label only to features of Ernesto's speech that resembled cognates in other varieties, which supports the hypothesis that *Mixteco Alto* is a signpost pointing toward adult sociolinguistic variation.

### 4.4.4 Discussion

The foregoing analysis has shown how metalinguistic labels can assist in the identification of sociolinguistic variables in a relatively new contact setting between underdocumented Indigenous languages. Tracing the discursive applications of *Mixteco Alto* reveals that both rising contour tones and [ts]/[t] are in the process of becoming enregistered as salient markers of sociolinguistic difference along the spatial axis. Campbell-Kibler writes that most of our well-known studies of enregisterment are retrospective: they "examin[e] varieties that have successfully become established as stable cultural objects," which "allows the analysis to look back on the processes that supported the varieties'

development while already knowing the ultimate outcome (to date)" (2012: 301). In contrast, I argue that the *Mixteco Alto* label provides initial insight into the process of enregisterment in real time, in a community in which a striking number of distinct Mixtec varieties have recently come into contact. This section articulates several outstanding questions which arise from these findings and lays out avenues for future research.

*Mixteco Alto* indexes salient variables, but it remains to be seen what those variables' sociolinguistically meaningful variants are. When comparing varieties, it is possible to distinguish several different cognate sounds on a purely phonetic basis—e.g., an /R/ contour versus level /H/ and /L/ tones, as in Table 4.2. Not every phonetic distinction will necessarily be significant to listeners, however; the way that these sounds are sorted into discrete variant categories is a socioperceptual process. For instance, is the meaningful distinction in the voiceless coronal variable heard as a binary between [ts] and "other," grouping together all other cross-varietal cognates ([t͡ʃ], [t͡ɕ], [t], [ɾ])? Or are there additional finer-grained perceptual splits between some or all of these phones? Further study is needed to identify the phonetic distinctions to which listeners are attuned, as well as to understand whether listeners from different villages categorize these sounds in different ways.

This analysis has also revealed the relevance of *San Martín* as a locally meaningful social category which is ideologically linked to the [ts] variable and perhaps to /R/ contours as well. Because a large number of Mixtecs from this municipality reside in Ventura County, it is logical that their speech patterns would attract higher levels of folk-linguistic awareness among those from other municipalities. As demonstrated in Section 4.4.2, however, *San Martín* is an ideologically constructed category, not a purely geographical one. This finding echoes the importance of Johnstone's (2004) call for sociolinguists to treat

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place as a culturally defined identity marker, rather than taking geographical or political boundaries for granted as sociolinguistic covariates. This call should also be heeded in the field of Mixtec dialectology, which has tended to treat region or village of origin as a straightforward explanation of why individuals speak the way they do as opposed to an identity category that has been shaped by ideological processes.

Once one considers *San Martín* as a socially constructed classification, additional questions arise: Who counts as a speaker of the *San Martín* style, and who does not? What are the discursive processes responsible for the fact that Isabel differentiates the speech of her mother, a woman from a village in the San Martín Peras municipality, from the speech of "los de San Martín?" Are the boundaries of *San Martín* fixed, or are they fluid? Are there conditions under which a given variety could be classified within this category at one moment and outside it at the next, or is there widespread agreement about which varieties belong inside? Does the network of villages located inside *San Martín* have a perceived core and periphery (Milroy 1987)? In addition to the linguistic differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) accomplished by the exclusion of some varieties from this category, what are the effects on those varieties that are subsumed within it? Despite their similarities with regard to /R/contours and [ts], these varieties still differ structurally in other ways; to what degree does their adequation (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) under the *San Martín* label contribute to the erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000) of these differences, if at all? Perception experiments, such as sorting tasks (Llamas, Watt, and MacFarlane 2016), are one way that these questions might be explored.

An important next step will be clarifying the degree to which *San Martín* is enregistered, that is, how broadly it circulates as a cultural object among diverse segments of the diaspora

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community and how consistently listeners associate it with particular variables like /R/ contour tone and [ts]. Such evaluations may not be universal: Rodríguez-Ordóñez cautions that "[w]hen examining linguistic saliency or awareness, one must be careful not to overgeneralize. Just because a linguistic feature may be described as 'cognitively prominent' does not mean that an entire group of speakers is aware of it. … Similarly, not all speakers are aware of the ideologies around them" (2019: 11). Future inquiry into awareness of these variables and their links to the *San Martín* label will need to survey Mixtecs from the full range of municipalities represented in Ventura County.

More work is also needed to elucidate the relationships between the language-ideological labels *San Martín*, *Mixteco Alto*, and *Mixteco Bajo*, as well as the links between these labels and particular variables. Beyond Ita Ndivi and her family, how consistently are level cognates of /R/ contours and non-affricated cognates of [ts] said to sound like *Mixteco Alto* by other speakers of Peras varieties? On the other hand, is the opposite pattern found among those whose varieties lack these features—e.g., do any speakers of non-Peras varieties use the *Mixteco Alto* label to describe /R/ contours and [ts]? I argued in Chapter 3 that the indexical value of *Mixteco Alto* differs depending on the speaker. Therefore, it is theoretically possible that both [t] and [ts] (and perhaps other variants) could be said to sound *Alto*-like, if those evaluations were made by speakers of different varieties. Future investigations of metalinguistic discourse and ideologies of linguistic differentiation in the Mixtec diaspora will need to carefully untangle the multiple indexical uses of these labels.

This analysis has identified the /R/ contour and [ts] affricate as locally salient variables, but given the linguistic diversity of the Mixtec diaspora community, it is likely that more such variables exist already or are in the process of emerging. As I have demonstrated in this

chapter, exploring other discursive uses of the *Mixteco Alto* and *San Martín* labels may be a fruitful method for uncovering additional variation, including that at higher levels of linguistic structure. Given the nature of the language-socialization interaction between Ita Ndivi and Ernesto, in which the former used a wordlist to teach her brother individual Mixtec lexical items, these data in this chapter are biased toward phonological variation. Studying occurrences of the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label in a broader set of contexts may point to morphosyntactic or lexical variables as well. This discursive ethnographic approach could be pursued alongside other methods, such as eliciting performances of *San Martín* or *Mixteco Alto* speech, which would be likely to include any variables that have become enregistered. Another strategy might involve a modified, speaker-centered version of the perceptual dialectology "draw-a-map task" (Preston 1989): ask an individual to name as many villages as they can think of, locate them in relation to their own home village, then ask about the speech of people from these different villages and regions.

In this section I have demonstrated that the difference between /R/ contours and level tone, as well as the difference between [t] and [ts], have risen to the level of speaker awareness, but it remains to be seen whether these variables have accrued higher-order indexical meanings. Multiple methods may be used to investigate a variable's indexical significance, including some drawn from the study of language attitudes, such as having listeners evaluate or comment on audio-recorded speech samples that include salient variables (Lambert et al. 1960). Another approach might include asking participants to sort varieties into categories, such as *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* or *San Martín* and other locally relevant categories, and asking them to metalinguistically characterize each category. In addition, ethnography can be of assistance by identifying the stereotypes and moral

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discourses to which variation is linked (and which variation helps to construct) (Eckert 2012). Finally, as previously mentioned, eliciting imitations of particular speakers often reveals salient variables; it will almost certainly include evaluative judgments of the speakers, and by extension entire social groups, who use those variables as well (Niedzielski and Preston 2000).

Indexical meanings are not just abstract linkages; they can have tangible social effects. What are the local meanings attached to speaking or not speaking like "los de San Martín" or in an *Alto*-like manner, and what consequences follow from speaking in this way? How do speakers evaluate those whose varieties do or do not have [ts], for example, and how does this affect interpersonal or intergroup relationships? Numerous social factors may affect how these variables are perceived by individual speakers, such as age, gender, generation of immigration, degree of Mixtec fluency, and degree of Spanish and/or English fluency; future variation-focused studies will need to thoroughly grapple with the intersecting axes of speaker and listener identity in this "superdiverse" community.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented two broad sets of findings, both of which are related to the metalinguistic label *Mixteco Alto*. First, I argued that this label represents a strategy for understanding children's intradialectal variation via the metalinguistic terminology of adult interdialectal diversity. I showed that the perception that a child's speech resembles spatial variation does not necessarily correspond to true spatial variation. Instead, the geographical axis of linguistic differentiation, which is highly salient to the Mixtec diaspora community, is resemiotized to account for age-graded variation. It remains to be seen whether members

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of the Mixtec diaspora use the spatial frame to account for additional dimensions of variation as well.

This chapter has also shown that the *Mixteco Alto* label acts as a guide for identifying salient phonological variation across Mixtec varieties. The term was applied to the difference between [ts] and [t], as well as the difference between rising contour tones and level tones. These two variables, at least one of which is also linked to the locally emergent metalinguistic category of *San Martín*, provide a promising starting point for future research on variation in the Mixtec diaspora. Such research will need to occur alongside additional documentation of locally spoken varieties, as well as further investigations of community members' language attitudes and perceptual-dialectological understandings of how this variation patterns among social groups.

In the following chapter, I examine the discursive and material consequences of the *Mixteco Alto* labeling practice, with a particular focus on its surprising link to language shift.

# Chapter 5

## *Mixteco Alto*, language shift, and language maintenance

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I discussed the language ideology that multilingual children in the Mixtec diaspora sometimes speak their heritage language 'like those who speak *Mixteco Alto*'—in other words, in ways that are marked as different from their families. This chapter traces the repercussions of that language ideology for the linguistic ideologies and language use patterns of one family, with a focus on two siblings: a 20-year-old Mixtec woman named Ita Ndivi and her seven-year-old brother Ernesto, an emergent speaker of Mixtec who is said to sometimes talk 'like those who speak the *Alto* language'. Despite the seemingly neutral evaluative stance implied by the *Mixteco Alto* labeling practice, this chapter argues that it can unintentionally contribute to language shift among youth in the diaspora community. Even for children whose families encourage Mixtec language maintenance, the negative emotional impact of having their speech labeled as '*Alto*-like' can inadvertently work in lockstep with external societal pressures to avoid speaking Mixtec.

Section 5.2 first outlines the connections between language shift, affect, and linguistic insecurity and then discusses language socialization as a means through which families, as well as youth themselves, can exercise their agency to promote language maintenance. Section 5.3 contextualizes the data on which this chapter is based: an unusual language socialization interaction in which Ita Ndivi repurposed a language-documentation wordlist to create a unique socialization environment for Ernesto, as well as my subsequent playback interview with Ita Ndivi about this interaction. In Section 5.4, I draw on data from the playback interview to introduce Ita Ndivi's theorization of the causal link between the

*Mixteco Alto* label, linguistic insecurity, and language shift. Her argument is that by virtue of marking children's speech as divergent from that of their families, such ideologized labeling of perceived linguistic difference can have profoundly negative impacts on children's emotional relationship to and desire to speak their heritage language, even if the label was intended as a neutral description.

Inspired by previous scholarship on Indigenous survivance and youth agency in resisting language shift (e.g., Davis 2017; Lee 2007, 2009; Nicholas 2009; Vizenor 2008; Wyman 2012; Wyman, McCarty, and Nicholas 2013), the remainder of the chapter shows how Ita Ndivi took power into her own hands to promote Ernesto's maintenance of Mixtec. Vizenor has defined Indigenous survivance as the "active resistance and repudiation of dominance, [and] obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (2008: 11). Davis (2017) argues that it is important for linguists to reconceptualize Indigenous language futures in terms of survivance, not within a frame of hopelessness and inevitable loss. A focus on survivance allows Indigenous communities and linguists to ask questions like the following: "What do examples of language maintenance under such extreme conditions teach us about potential strategies for continued language reclamation in our communities?" and "What incredible levels of dedication and persistence are demonstrated by individuals, families, and communities engaging in language reclamation?" (Davis 2017: 53-54). Section 5.5 addresses these questions by investigating what Ita Ndivi's creative language maintenance efforts reveal about Mixtec youth's role in the process of linguistic and cultural transmission in diaspora. Using close interactional analysis, I show how Ita Ndivi acted agentively to recenter Mixtec in her younger brother's linguistic repertoire by repurposing the tools and skills that were available to her through her participation in linguistics research. These tools

allowed her to reinforce Ernesto's Mixtec skills, provide cultural and linguistic socialization, and foster his pride in their home language, while also interactionally constructing him as a legitimate speaker. I also show that even as Ita Ndivi worked to safeguard Ernesto's Mixtec against the encroachment of Spanish and English, she also tried to ensure that the Mixtec he learned would locate him as a member of their family and hometown community instead of resembling 'those who speak *Mixteco Alto*'. Thus, through this interaction, Ita Ndivi simultaneously responded to both societal pressures and family-internal discourses that contribute to shift away from Mixtec.

## 5.2 Language shift, maintenance, and socialization

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, a complex interplay of school, peer, familial, and economic pressure, anti-Indigenous racism, birth order, and parents' and older siblings' post-migration L2/L3 language acquisition has led to large-scale, rapid-onset language shift in the Mixtec diaspora. Many youth living in Ventura County have become Spanish-English bilinguals, especially those in the 1.5 and second generation of immigrants. These youth generally have less facility in Mixtec than their older family members do. Many, though not all, have full receptive capabilities (cf. Beardsmore 1986; ten Thije and Zeevaert 2007; Valdés 2005). Language shift is especially widespread among younger siblings, a pattern which is common among the broader Latinx immigrant community as well (Parada 2013).

It is no accident that much of the literature on language shift focuses on children. As the next generation of potential speakers, "children are the gauge by which stages of language loss and the reversal of language shift are assessed" (Meek 2007: 23). To understand language shift, it is therefore fundamental to understand the language socialization processes

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through which ideologies, values, and moral messages about language are transmitted to children (Kulick 1993; Pye 1992).

Despite children's importance, Meek (2007) has observed that the responsibility for ensuring that children are socialized in ways that promote revitalization and maintenance over shift falls squarely on adults. For this reason, children are too often "portrayed as passive observers rather than active participants in a shifting sociolinguistic landscape, especially children who are in the process of acquiring language" (Meek 2007: 23). The analysis in this chapter shows that Mixtec youth's own affective relationships to their heritage language can be a crucial determinant of their code choice and can go on to shape the outcomes of language maintenance. In what follows, I provide an overview of the links between families' metalinguistic commentary, youth linguistic insecurity, and language shift. I then briefly review the literature on language socialization before connecting it to language maintenance and youth resistance to shift.

### 5.2.1 Shift, affect, and linguistic insecurity

As a process of rupture and change, language shift can be profoundly emotional (Odango 2015). Shift can trigger complex affective responses in a community, both after it has occurred and during its spread. Certain affects can even have a causal effect on shift, such as linguistic insecurity. Meyerhoff has defined linguistic insecurity as "speakers' feeling that the variety that they use is somehow inferior, ugly, or bad" (2006: 292). As originally conceived, linguistic insecurity had to do with perceptions of correctness linked to social class hierarchies (Labov 1966). It involved unfavorable comparisons of one's own style of speech to the prestige variety promoted by hegemonic institutions and in "Standard"

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literary norms. Later definitions are more expansive, foregrounding a general fear of judgment for one's style of speaking (Preston 2013). Linguistic insecurity based on social class and region of origin has been extensively documented in English-speaking contexts, such as the United States (Niedzielski and Preston 2000).

The notion of linguistic insecurity is also invoked by scholars of minoritized languages, including those which are grappling with language shift. In such instances, insecurity may be externally imposed according to hierarchies of linguistic value, as when speakers feel insecure about their ability to speak a dominant language or ashamed of speaking their heritage language (e.g., Zentella 1997). On the other hand, insecurity can stem from community-internal pressures, especially in cases of shift. It is not uncommon for young people, regardless of linguistic competence, to avoid using their heritage language in front of speakers they perceive to be more fluent because they do not want to be ridiculed, criticized, or laughed at (Abtahian and Quinn 2017).

Linguistic insecurity is widely documented among bilingual and multilingual youth, including heritage language learners. Many such youth have been the recipient of negative commentary about their speech from teachers, peers, or family members (Goble 2016; Odango 2015; Santa Ana 2004; Urciuoli 2008). Young people in a wide range of North American and Central American Indigenous communities, all of which are affected by shift to some degree, have reported being teased or criticized for the way they speak their heritage languages (e.g., Bielenberg 2002; Bonner 2001; Lee 2007; McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda 2006; McCarty et al. 2009; McCarty and Wyman 2009; Nicholas 2009; Reynolds 2009; Wyman 2012). Of course, the perception of youth's language as incorrect or corrupted stems from local linguistic and cultural ideologies. Features or practices marked as

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"incorrect" could be the result of several different phenomena, such as stigmatized variables or varieties (Skilton 2017), an emergent contact effect, or an actual interlanguage phenomenon by a non-fluent speaker (Abtahian and Quinn 2017: 138). In many cases, youth in language-shifting communities experience linguistic insecurity as a result of older speakers' negative attitudes toward variation that they attribute to contact with the dominant language (Abtahian and Quinn 2017; McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda 2006; Palakurthy 2019). Even purportedly neutral commentary on children's speech can convey implicit value judgments. Meyerhoff notes that if an adult describes children as "mixing up" two similar-sounding words, for example, "this is not just a descriptive observation. It includes normative and evaluative information about the variation, too," which youth are likely to recognize (2019: 231-232), as is the case for the metalinguistic labeling practice described in this chapter.

Whatever the reason, having one's speech singled out is often an emotionally negative experience which can have significant consequences for youth linguistic practices, including their language choice. Linguistic insecurity can lead to reductions in the use of particular structures or registers which are perceived to be more difficult, as Zentz (2014) shows for the high-politeness register of Javanese: young people's insecurity about their ability to correctly navigate this register corresponds to a contraction in its use. Another possibility, described by McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda (2006: 670) for Navajo, is that insecurity can cause youth to downplay the extent of their linguistic skills and even "hide" them in conversations with older speakers. Linguistic insecurity can also destabilize language revitalization efforts if L2 and heritage learners are reluctant to speak for fear of embarrassment. In communities which valorize the speech of elders as more "pure" or

"correct" (e.g., Meek 2007; Palakurthy 2019), heritage learners may experience a kind of "linguistic performance anxiety" that can "drive them to minimize intergenerational communication," thereby impeding opportunities to practice and gain fluency (Abtahian and Quinn 2017: 143). At its most extreme, linguistic insecurity can itself be a contributing factor to language shift: "fear of being laughed at by fluent speakers is an intensely strong motivator away from even attempting to use the language. All observations suggest that this dynamic of fear significantly restricts comfortable interaction between generations of speakers and/or learners" (Abtahian and Quinn 2017: 144). This situation can have a chilling effect on opportunities for youth to practice the language and ultimately prevent it from being passed down to the next generation (cf. McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda 2006).

Individuals whose language abilities have been transformed by shift—including those who may no longer be speakers—may at times have to contend with challenges to their identities (Goble 2016), such as questions about their ability to authentically claim group membership. Even when the forces of shift are powerful, however, youth's emotional ties to their heritage language and culture often remain strong. It has been observed in several Indigenous communities that linguistic insecurity does not necessarily dissuade young people from engaging in traditional cultural practices or from viewing their heritage language and culture in a positive light (Lee 2009; Messing 2009; Wyman 2009). For example, Bielenberg (2002) and Nicholas (2009) demonstrate that although the Hopi youth in their studies were scared to be made fun of if they spoke their language imperfectly, they nonetheless felt a strong desire to maintain it. Likewise, Lee (2007) writes that the Navajo young people in her research felt shame at being teased for perceived non-fluent mistakes, but nevertheless were emotionally attached to the idea of learning their language and

expanding its domains of use. As these examples show, youth often maintain complex and contradictory emotional relationships with their heritage languages (cf. Messing 2009).

To summarize, language attrition is often intertwined with the affective experience of linguistic insecurity, which can be triggered by family or community dynamics in addition to external pressures. Because young people are so central to both language shift and language maintenance, the future trajectory of a threatened language can often depend on dynamics within families (Fishman 2004). As the previous examples illustrate, familial language ideologies and metalinguistic practices can have a direct impact on youth's language choice. Despite the importance of the family in language shift, however, Canagarajah cautions that it "is not a self-contained institution that can adopt its own strategies and devices for language transmission… It has to negotiate its linguistic responsibilities with other social and economic pressures" (2008: 170-171). I do not intend to suggest that speakers of marginalized languages bear sole or even primary responsibility for language shift. In the case of Mixtec shift in diaspora, that dubious distinction goes to the trifecta of white supremacist settler-colonialism, xenophobia, and neoliberal capitalism. Within the field of linguistics, however, Davis (2017) has demonstrated that dominant discourses of language endangerment and shift tend to grammatically assign agency (and thereby blame) to speakers, such as the notion that a community "chooses" to "abandon" their language. The vast majority of language shift takes place under coercion (Roche 2020), where such "choices" are severely constrained. To suggest otherwise amounts to an "erasure of colonial agency" in the active, targeted suppression of Indigenous languages (Davis 2017: 54). This does not mean that all linguistic stigma has its origins outside the family; it is simply necessary to emphasize that family language ideologies, including criticism of young

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people's speech, are embedded within a structuring system of larger power relationships and hierarchies. With this caveat in mind, a general pattern can nevertheless be observed in which the "metapragmatic regimentation of heritage language use" by family can play a role in discouraging children's speech, thereby inadvertently contributing to language shift (Guardado 2018: 201)—at times even against the express goals of those who make these comments. This can be the case even if such metalinguistic commentary is not intended to be negative, as I argue below for *Mixteco Alto*.

### 5.2.2 Resisting shift: Language socialization and youth agency

Just as families' metalinguistic commentary can inadvertently influence language shift, so too do families endeavor to prevent shift by transmitting their cultural and linguistic traditions. For Indigenous migrants who are dislocated from their homelands, such as Mixtecs and Zapotecs living in California, Blackwell (2017) has argued that "Indigenous identity and language [are] a matter of cultural survival." She further notes that "many migrants aim to build translocal notions of Indigenous place that tie themselves and their children back to their pueblos of origin, its feast days, and civic responsibilities and cultural practices" (2017: 160). Mesinas and Pérez (2016) found that among Zapotecs in Los Angeles, parents' and children's degree of cultural involvement, Indigenous self-identification, and language maintenance were positively correlated. High levels of cultural involvement have also been shown to help second-generation Mixtec youth build strong Indigenous identities, including those who had never visited their parents' hometown(s) in Mexico (Kovats 2010). The deliberate and careful facilitation of Indigenous immigrant youth's affective relationships to their villages, cultures, and languages of origin has been

called "resilient [I]ndigeneity" (Casanova 2019), a notion which resonates with Vizenor's (2008) concept of survivance. These values are transmitted through processes of cultural socialization, which is accomplished hand in hand with language socialization (Ochs 1982; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Schieffelin 1990).

Young people are the proverbial canary in a coal mine for assessing linguistic vitality (Krauss 1992; Meek 2019). To understand why and how language maintenance or shift occurs in a given community, it is necessary to understand the ideologies and practices through which children are linguistically socialized. Language socialization is often analytically divided into "socialization through the use of language" (i.e., cultural socialization by linguistic and other semiotic means) and "socialization to use language" (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986: 163). In reality, the two are inextricably intertwined. Thus, novices can be simultaneously socialized into both culturally appropriate communicative practices (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984) and the grammatical structures that are used to accomplish them (Ochs and Schieffelin 1995).[25]

Socialization practices are not immutable, but can change in response to cultural and ideological transformation (Crago, Annahatak, and Ningiuruvik 1993). Language socialization is therefore a fundamentally ideological process (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002). For instance, caregivers' ideologies can be directed at specific aspects of children's speech. In settings of language contact and shift, older generations may express disapproval of children's hybrid forms, especially when these are perceived to represent shift away from the heritage language (Zentella 1997). Furthermore, caregivers' ideologies of linguistic

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[25] While the prototypical socialization encounter involves children acquiring language through interaction with more proficient members of their community (e.g., caregivers, parents, and older siblings), socialization in fact takes place throughout the lifespan, as we learn how to act appropriately as a member of a community or group (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002).

value can shape "family language policy" (King and Fogle 2013; King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008) in multilingual societies. For example, Rindstedt and Aronsson (2002) describe Quichua-Spanish bilingual parents in Ecuador who choose to speak exclusively Spanish with their children, despite strong pro-Quichua attitudes, because they deem it the best strategy to ensure their children's future educational success. Socialization can therefore have significant consequences for young people's linguistic repertoires and identity development. The application of the *Mixteco Alto* label to children's non-adult-like speech, discussed below in Section 5.4, is an element of their linguistic socialization which can have negative repercussions for children's relationship to their heritage language.

There is a small but growing body of work on socialization and parental ideologies in Indigenous Mesoamerican languages, such as Mixe (Santiago Jiménez 2010), Zapotec (Ausberger 2004; Bernal Lorenzo 2016; Pérez Báez 2013; Toledo Bustamante 2018; Martínez and Mesinas 2019), and Mayan languages (Arcos López 2013; de León 1998, 2007; Menjívar 2002; Pye 1986). In contrast, the Mixtec languages have received very little scholarly attention, despite being the third most commonly spoken Indigenous language group in Mexico (INEGI 2010b). There are only two studies of which I am aware, only one of which (Rojas Santos 2011) examines socialization in detail. (The other is Velasco 2014, who takes a birds-eye view of Mixtec mothers' educational and linguistic ideologies in New York.) Rojas Santos (2011: 64) describes the extended family as the primary domain of Mixtec language socialization, both in migratory contexts and in the village of Mesón de Guadalupe, Oaxaca. In this community, grandparents play a major role in ensuring that children continue to speak Mixtec, which helps to safeguard the continued vitality of the language (2011: 54).

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Parents, grandparents, and other adult caregivers are often the primary agents of socialization, but in many communities, older children, such as siblings and cousins, take on an important role (Bhimji 2005; de León 2007; Leonard 2007; Rindstedt 2001; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Schieffelin 1990). The dynamics of sibling interaction in transnational multilingual families have a complex connection to heritage language shift and/or maintenance (Kheirkhah and Cekaite 2018). In some multilingual immigrant families, older siblings can introduce the dominant language into the home domain (Shin 2005), while in others they act as "an anchor maintaining the heritage language" (King 2013: 61). Due to the rapid pace of language shift in the Mixtec diaspora, it is not at all rare for siblings' linguistic repertoires to differ within a single family, with older children generally speaking Mixtec with more ease than their younger siblings. The languages that siblings use to communicate with one another differ from family to family, though I have observed that it is quite common for siblings to speak primarily Spanish and English with one another rather than Mixtec. In the Ventura County community, older siblings frequently provide childcare while their parents are at work. As part-time caregivers, they are in a position to enact a de facto "implicit language policy" (McCarty et al. 2009: 302) which may differ from or reinforce the patterns of language use preferred by their parents. Older siblings can thus exert a significant degree of control over their younger siblings' linguistic practices and language ideologies.

This fact echoes the growing body of scholarship that highlights Indigenous youth as agents of language maintenance (Bielenberg 2002; Lee 2007, 2009; McCarty and Wyman 2009; Messing 2009; Nicholas 2009; Wilson and Kamanā 2009; Wyman 2009, 2012; Wyman, McCarty, and Nicholas 2013). As the next generation of speakers, young people

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are poised to enact both explicit (Tulloch 2004, 2013) and implicit (McCarty et al. 2009) language planning and policy. Such research rightly celebrates youth's power, but it is also important to note that the agency which they exercise in this regard is by and large "constrained agency," defined by VanderStouwe as "the agentive manipulation of and negotiation around constraints, whether self-imposed or external, that limit the capacity of a subject or group of subjects to act" (2016: 4). Young people do not have the capacity to move their families back to Oaxaca or Guerrero so that they and their siblings are once again immersed in Mixtec as the language of everyday community life—that is, if shift is not already advanced in their hometowns—nor to unilaterally reverse five hundred years of colonial oppression once they arrive. But within these constraints, they do have control over their microinteractional patterns of language use, as well as the attitudes, values, and ideologies they communicate to their younger siblings. As this chapter illustrates, it is possible for older siblings to agentively create opportunities for Mixtec language socialization in order to (at least partially) counter their younger siblings' language shift.

In the Mixtec diaspora, many youth feel "great yearnings for ancestral language survival" (Wilson and Kamanā 2009: 375). This is especially common among those who have participated in the Tequio Youth Group at the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP, see Chapter 2), which aims to foster resilient Indigeneity in young people by counteracting hegemonic anti-Indigenous discourses (cf. Barillas Chón 2010) in Ventura County. While teaching a sociocultural linguistics class that was jointly organized by MICOP and the UCSB SKILLS program (Chapter 2), I witnessed more than one teenager resolve to resume speaking their Indigenous language at home so as to be a role model for their younger siblings. This includes Ita Ndivi, the focal participant in this

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chapter, whose participation in the SKILLS program encouraged her to create Mixtec-language educational resources for children like her younger brothers. Such resourcefulness is an instantiation of Indigenous survivance. According to Wyman (2012: 13), the concept of survivance is often deployed "to highlight how Indigenous peoples appropriate and adapt rhetorical conventions to resist and/or comment on hostile circumstances while expressing connection to unique Indigenous identities." This precisely describes Ita Ndivi's agentive decision to adapt a documentary wordlist into a language socialization tool, as I discuss in Sections 5.3 and 5.5.

## 5.3 Participants and data

The data for this chapter are drawn from two linked recordings. The first is a language-socialization interaction between Ita Ndivi, a 20-year-old Mixtec woman, and her seven-year-old brother Ernesto. The second is a playback interview (Gumperz 1982) in which Ita Ndivi and I listened to and commented on the socialization interaction.

### 5.3.1 Participants

Ita Ndivi and Ernesto are two of six siblings. Their family's migration trajectory was fairly typical of Mixtec families in California, especially those from her parents' municipality of San Martín Peras, Oaxaca.[26] The four oldest children—Ita Ndivi, her two older siblings, and one younger sibling—were born in the municipality of San Martín Peras, Oaxaca. The children and their parents migrated seasonally within Mexico to states like

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[26] Ita Ndivi and her family lived in Ventura County for the first few years I knew her, but in 2018 they moved to another agricultural town in the Central Coast region. Nonetheless, throughout this study they maintained familial and community ties in Ventura County and visited frequently.

Sinaloa and Baja California before moving to California over a decade ago to work in the agricultural fields. Ita Ndivi lived with her grandmother in San Martín Peras for several years before joining her parents in Ventura County approximately five years prior to when this study began. Her two youngest brothers, Ernesto and Mateo, were born in California.

Ita Ndivi and Ernesto's parents were Mixtec-dominant; their father had learned some Spanish by working in the fields. Although their father encouraged his children to learn Spanish and English, in part so they could help interpret for the family, he reminded them of the importance of continuing to speak Mixtec and maintaining connections to their heritage. Mixtec was thus the primary language of their household and the exclusive medium of parent-to-child communication. Despite this family language policy, however, not all of the children spoke Mixtec to the same degree, as Ita Ndivi and Ernesto's individual linguistic biographies illustrate.

Mixtec was Ita Ndivi's L1, as it was for all four of the eldest siblings, whose early years were spent in Oaxaca. She learned some Spanish at her village elementary school but only became truly comfortable speaking it when she worked in the strawberry fields of Baja California as a pre-adolescent. When she moved to California, she enrolled in high school and began to learn English. Despite facing anti-Indigenous discrimination and bullying in both Mexico and the US, Ita Ndivi was very proud to be Mixtec. For this reason, she made a conscious choice to continue to speak Mixtec daily to her family and her partner, at home and in public.

Both Ita Ndivi and Ernesto were trilingual, but the order in which they learned their languages differed. Ernesto had full receptive competency in Mixtec, which he heard every day from his family. However, the first language he spoke was Spanish, which he learned

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from his older siblings (cf. Parada 2013). He quickly learned English once he started school, but like Ita Ndivi, he also encountered anti-Indigenous stigma and negative stereotypes about the Mixtec language. Even as an elementary school-age child, he was strongly affected by this anti-Indigenous racism (cf. Barillas Chón 2010). At seven years old, Ernesto could understand everything which was said to him in Mixtec, but he was reticent to speak it, preferring instead to talk to his family—even his parents—in Spanish.[27] Ita Ndivi and some of her other siblings spent a lot of time with their youngest brothers, however, encouraging them to practice the language and serving as positive, proud speaker role models. At the time of recording, Ita Ndivi characterized Ernesto as 'still learning' Mixtec. Therefore, while Mixtec was his receptive L1, it could be characterized as his productive L3.

## 5.3.2 Data

In March 2019, I conducted a Mixtec elicitation session with Ita Ndivi, using a modified Swadesh list based on Campbell's (2019) wordlist for Mesoamerican contexts (**Appendix III**). The primary goal of this session was to gather a descriptive baseline for the phonological system of Ita Ndivi's variety in order to be able to transcribe it. Additionally, I had tailored the wordlist to elicit tokens of the prenasalized alveolar stop /$^n$d/ for a separate sociophonetic project. The elicitation session followed a familiar format: Ita Ndivi and I each had a paper copy of the wordlist, on which we wrote down our preliminary transcriptions in the practical Mixtec orthography she had learned during the SKILLS class (Chapter 2). We then created an audio recording wherein I supplied a prompt word in

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[27] Ita Ndivi's youngest brother, Mateo, who was five years old at the time of recording, had a much more positive orientation toward Mixtec, perhaps because he had not yet begun to attend school: she reported that he was especially enthusiastic to practice speaking Mixtec when he was helping her with kitchen tasks.

Spanish and she pronounced its Mixtec equivalent three times. Once the session had finished, she asked to take her wordlist sheet home with her, to which I of course assented.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Ita Ndivi was one of the participant-researchers whom I had asked to audio-record everyday interaction, with a goal of understanding language ideologies and multilingual youth identity practices. In April 2019, entirely unprompted by and unbeknownst to me, Ita Ndivi used the wordlist sheet that she had taken home to conduct her own elicitation session with her brother Ernesto. Because Ernesto was still learning Mixtec, however, the recording she made with him turned out to be quite different than the wordlist session that she and I had recorded. As an emergent speaker, he was either unable or reluctant to provide most of the Mixtec lexemes being elicited, so Ita Ndivi reframed the interaction as an opportunity for language socialization. She pronounced most of the Mixtec words first, then prompted Ernesto to repeat after her. In moments where his pronunciation did not match hers, she often had him repeat it again. This interaction is analyzed in detail in Section 5.5. I argue there that by reappropriating the wordlist as a Mixtec teaching tool, Ita Ndivi agentively worked against the encroachment of language shift in her own family.

Several months later, I recorded a playback interview with Ita Ndivi (see Chapter 2). During the playback interview we listened to the socialization recording together, pausing it whenever she wanted to add context or make a comment on her brother's pronunciation or on the process of child language acquisition in the diaspora. The following section draws on data from this playback interview (which was also discussed in Chapter 4) to analyze Ita Ndivi's hypothesis about the causal connection between the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label and language shift—namely, her argument that the negative emotions felt by children

whose speech is singled out with this label can ultimately stifle their willingness to speak

Mixtec in the home.

### 5.4 *Mixteco Alto* and language shift

The playback interview that I conducted with Ita Ndivi was designed to elicit her

commentary on Ernesto's Mixtec acquisition process. One notable aspect of her remarks,

which I discussed in Chapter 4, was her description of Ernesto's non-adult-like

pronunciations as sounding 'like *Mixteco Alto*'—even though he was learning a Baja

variety. According to Ita Ndivi, this phenomenon was common among younger Mixtec-

heritage children living in the United States, not just her brothers. Examples of her

metalinguistic commentary can be found in Examples 1 and 2 below, which are partially

reproduced from Section 4.3.

**Example 1: "Lo aprenden en una manera mixteco alto" (reproduced from Section 4.3)**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:17:01 - 00:17:28)*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Cuando les hablas? | | *When you talk to them?* |
| 2 | | Pues el tono diferente? | | *Like the different tone?* |
| 3 | | Lo hacen como que, | | *They do it like,* |
| 4 | | (0.5) | | |
| 5 | | sí. | | *yeah.* |
| 6 | | Como que suena diferente. | | *Like it sounds different.* |
| 7 | | Porque hay palabras que, | | *Because there are words that,* |
| 8 | | también es bien diferente? | | *it's also really different?* |

   *(9 lines omitted)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 18 | están aprendiendo en mixteco bajo <u>pero</u>, | |
| | *they're learning in Mixteco Bajo <u>but</u>,* | |
| 19 | lo com- | *they und-* |
| 20 | lo, | *it,* |
| 21 | lo aprenden en una manera mixteco alto. | *they learn it in a Mixteco Alto way.* |

Ita Ndivi attributed this perception of children's speech as *Alto*-like to other members of her

family as well, as shown below:

**Example 2: 'They talk like those who speak the Alto language' (reproduced from Section 4.3)**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:14:34 - 00:15:41)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 32 Ita Ndivi: | algunas familia mía, | *some of my relatives,* |
| 33 | cuando lo ven — | *when they see it —* |
| 34 | y dicen, | *and they say,* |
| 35 | "Oh, | *"Oh,* |
| 36 | est- | *it's-* |
| 37 | hablan como los que hablan el lenguaje alto," | |
| | *they talk like those who speak the Alto language,"* | |
| 38 | dicen verdad? | *they say, right?* |

Crucially, as used in these data, the *Mixteco Alto* label casts children's speech in terms of "difference," not "deficit" (Jones 2013; Labov 1972b). Nowhere in the above examples does Ita Ndivi judge children's *Alto*-like pronunciations as incorrect or worse than those of adults. In Example 1, she simply describes them as "diferente" ('different', lines 2, 6, 8), not once but three times. Nor does she imply that Mixtec speakers other than her would feel otherwise: when she uses constructed dialogue to voice her relatives in Example 2, it is not accompanied by any "voxing" (Du Bois 2006), or marked voice qualities, that would indicate a negative evaluative stance (Slobe 2018; Troiani 2020). Therefore, the *Mixteco Alto* label in these data does not carry a stigma of "wrongness," but rather a generally value-free assessment of linguistic difference from self, as I argued in Chapter 3.

However, when applied to children in the midst of language acquisition, *Mixteco Alto* implies both difference and distance from the language practices of their immediate family. This is precisely because for many youth, family is the primary domain in which they hear and speak Mixtec; English and Spanish tend to dominate most school and peer interaction. Therefore, if Ernesto's Mixtec pronunciation is said to sound 'like *Mixteco Alto*', this evaluation is most likely to come from his own family. In an intersubjective process of distinction (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), this label may thus inadvertently mark children as

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saliently different from their family members. And family is important in Mixtec diaspora

communities (Rojas Santos 2011; see also Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004a; Stephen 2007;

Vogt 2006 on the role of family in structuring patterns of Mixtec diasporic settlement).

Furthermore, beyond the nuclear family, Mixtecs and other Indigenous Mexican immigrants

tend to maintain strong economic, social, and political ties to their home villages, even after

living for decades in the United States (Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Mines, Nichols, and

Runsten 2010). Many Mixtecs participate in binational civic and social organizations

referred to by scholars as hometown networks (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004b; Martínez-

Saldaña 2004; Stephen 2004; Velasco Ortiz 2004), which often play a key role in forming

collective identity (Rivera-Salgado and Rabadán 2004). An individual's obligation to their

hometown network often requires them to fulfill numerous *cargos*, or obligations, which

demand a significant commitment of time, money, and labor. It has been argued that the

cargo system is a mechanism through which the vitality of the Mixtec language is

maintained (Rojas Santos 2011). For the parents of children born in the United States,

ensuring that their children speak their family's hometown variety may be an affectively and

materially important component of linguistic and cultural socialization—a way of

maintaining communal ties in diaspora, across both borders and generations (Arnold 2016).

Therefore, the significance of speaking like one's family is also tied to a broader sense

of community belonging. For US-born children, who often experience deep affective

tensions around their use or non-use of Mixtec, an assessment that they speak Mixtec

differently than their parents, and therefore their entire hometown community, may increase

feelings of pressure. Although the label *Mixteco Alto* appears to project a neutral assessment

of difference, when located within this broader context, it seems that children experience

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being heard as different through a negative affective lens. In this section, I outline a hypothesis put forth by Ita Ndivi during our playback interview: that when children's pronunciation is said to sound like *Mixteco Alto*, it can trigger negative emotions that contribute to their language shift away from Mixtec.

### 5.4.1 The *Mixteco Alto* label and family belonging

The *Mixteco Alto* label may not have overtly negative ideological connotations, but it can nonetheless invoke complex emotions, including for listeners who judge someone else's speech to sound like *Alto*. This is illustrated in Example 3 below, which occurred shortly after Ita Ndivi's constructed dialogue for her family members in Example 2. In between the two, she collectively referred to herself and her family using the first-person plural pronoun, saying "nosotros hablamos el lenguaje bajo" ('we speak the *Bajo* language'). Throughout Example 3, Ita Ndivi continues to use the first-person plural to narrate how strange she and her family feel when they hear children, including her brother Ernesto, speak 'like those who speak the *Alto* language'.

**Example 3: 'We want it to be our language because we're the same, a family'**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:16:02 - 00:16:55)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Lo- nos sentimos raro @cuando @hablan el — | |
| | | *It- we feel strange @when they @speak the —* | |
| 2 | | en este. | *in this.* |
| 3 | | Están aprendiendo el lenguaje? | *They are learning the language?* |
| 4 | | Y luego empiezan hablar como, | *And then they start to talk like,* |
| 5 | | una manera, | *in a way,* |
| 6 | | de como hablan, | *that they talk,* |
| 7 | | eh los que hablan, | *uh those who speak,* |
| 8 | | el lenguaje alto? | *the Alto language?* |
| 9 | | Y sí nos sentimos como raro? | *And yeah we feel kind of strange?* |
| 10 | Anna: | [Mhm.] | |
| 11 | Ita Ndivi: | [Por]que, | *Because,* |
| 12 | | (0.5) | |
| 13 | | eh, | *uh,* |
| 14 | | l- les decimos, | *we tell them,* |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 15 | "Estás hablando de una manera como, | |
| | *"You're (sg.) speaking in a way (that's) like,* | |
| 16 | hablan los que hablan el lenguaje, | |
| | *how the people who speak the (Alto) language talk,* | |
| 17 | (0.5) | |
| 18 | um, | *um,* |
| 19 | alto" le decimos. | *Alto" we tell them.* |
| 20 | Y luego, | *And then,* |
| 21 | "Tienes que hablar de esa manera porque así hablamos nosotros." | |
| | *"You (sg.) have to speak in that (other) way because this is how we talk."* | |
| 22 | Sí nos sentimos raro? | *Yeah we feel strange?* |
| 23 | Y a veces le decimos, | *And sometimes we tell them,* |
| 24 | "Es así"? | *"It's like this"?* |
| 25 Anna: | [Mhm.] | |
| 26 Ita Ndivi: | [Y lo] — | *And it —* |
| 27 | Les enseñamos verdad? | *We teach them, right?* |
| 28 | Porque, | *Because,* |
| 29 | (0.4) | |
| 30 | queremos que sea, | *we want it to be,* |
| 31 | nuestro lenguaje porque son- | *our language because they're-* |
| 32 | somos, | *we're,* |
| 33 | % iguales una familia y, | *% the same, a family, and,* |
| 34 | (0.5) | |
| 35 | sí, | *yeah,* |
| 36 | nos gustaría mucho que, | *we'd like it a lot for,* |
| 37 | pues, | *well,* |
| 38 | mi hermano hable — | *my brother to speak —* |
| 39 | hablara muy bien conmigo? | *to speak really well with me?* |
| 40 | De lenguaje que, | *In a language that,* |
| 41 | hablo yo? | *I speak?* |
| 42 | Y, | *And,* |
| 43 | del tono, | *the tone,* |
| 44 | y todo. | *and everything.* |
| 45 | Que entendieran, | *For them to understand,* |
| 46 | (0.5) | |
| 47 | pues, | *well,* |
| 48 | lo que hablamos verdad? | *what we speak, right?* |

As *Bajo* speakers, when Ita Ndivi and her relatives hear their youngest family members talking differently than they do themselves, it triggers an emotional response: "nos sentimos raro" ('we feel strange'). This sentiment is first uttered in line 1, then echoed in line 9 and again in line 22, the repetition emphasizing the uncanniness of the sensation of her brother speaking as though he were from elsewhere. She paints a picture in lines 3 through 8 of what the experience is like: children are going about the process of learning "el lenguaje" (line 3),

meaning their family or community's variety of Mixtec, which she calls *Bajo*. At some

point, however, 'they start to talk' differently (4), like 'those who speak the *Alto* language'

(8), an inchoative formulation which conveys a sudden perception of strangeness. The

change in children's language is something that Ita Ndivi and her relatives apparently

remark on to the youth in question, even singling them out on an individual basis. In lines

14-19, she uses constructed dialogue (Tannen 1986) to voice a collective assessment of a

singular recipient's speech: 'we (1PL) tell them (3PL), "You're (2SG) speaking in a way

that's like how people who speak the *Alto* language talk."' This descriptive comment is

followed by a deontic claim that this child 'has to' talk in another way instead, which is

justified by an assertion of familial or community similarity: "así hablamos nosotros" ('this

is how we talk', line 21). The implication is that because the child who is being addressed in

this constructed dialogue is also a member of the family, they should speak in a way that

reflects this fact. Sometimes the preferred way of speaking is explicitly taught through

correction or demonstration (lines 23-24, 27). The normative statement "'Es así'" ('It's like

this', line 24) implies, if not a standardly "correct" manner of speaking, at least a preference

for conformity to a locally expected norm. Ita Ndivi frames such statements as an act of

collectively 'teaching' (27) children to speak "nuestro lenguaje" ('our language', 31). These

lessons are grounded in a shared desire for children's language use to mirror other, non-

linguistic aspects of familial sameness ('we want it to be our language because we're the

same, a family', 30-33).[28] By matter-of-factly invoking what is actually a culturally and

[28] Interestingly, the statement in lines 30-33 that 'we want it to be our language because we're the same, a family' implies that her family's speech patterns are unified, which in fact they are not. Ita Ndivi and Ernesto's parents are from different villages and therefore speak slightly different varieties. The siblings also do not all share the same variety: due to differing migration trajectories, Ita Ndivi speaks her mother's village variety, while her older siblings speak more like their father.

ideologically determined belief—that all family members should speak the same—Ita Ndivi

naturalizes her own individual desire for Ernesto to talk like she does (36-39). She wants

him to speak to her 'really well' (39) in the language that she herself speaks (40-41), i.e., by

mastering all of its distinctive characteristics, "tono y todo" ('tone and everything', 43-44).

Ultimately, for children to become part of the collective 'we' mentioned throughout the

transcript, the hope is that they will learn to both speak and understand (45) "lo que

hablamos" ('what we speak', 48).

Language binds collectivities (Milroy 1982), particularly in minoritized language

communities, in which it is often intimately linked to group identity (Edwards 2010). In

diaspora, young people's ability to maintain Mixtec is also associated with maintaining ties

to family, hometown community, and culture, as the participant-researchers frequently

emphasized during ethnographic interviews. For instance, one young woman, Isabel,

lamented that her loss of Mixtec fluency meant she could no longer easily communicate

with her grandparents during her mother's regular phone calls with extended family in her

hometown in Oaxaca. The desire for children to carry on the language of their family

therefore takes on a heightened significance in the context of rapid-onset language shift,

especially when it takes place alongside contact between multiple varieties of the heritage

language. I therefore speculate that if a parent is already worried that their child's ability to

speak Mixtec is under threat from Spanish and English, it makes sense that they would not

want them to learn what they perceived to be "someone else's" Mixtec, as Ita Ndivi

discusses in Examples 1 through 3. Many US-born children already face significant barriers

to gaining lasting Mixtec fluency. For them to learn their heritage language in an *Alto* way

Nonetheless, when juxtaposed with the notably different speech of imagined *Mixteco Alto* speakers, their varieties are apparently similar enough to be grouped together.

would mark them as different from their family and might work at cross-purposes with familial goals of linguistic cohesion. Commenting on children's speech, as illustrated in Example 3, is therefore a way of trying to ensure that linguistic ties are maintained.

The metalinguistic assessment that a child is speaking in an *Alto* manner does not explicitly declare that child's speech to be "wrong," nor does it demonstrate an orientation to a prestigious standard (Milroy 2001; Silverstein 1996). Nonetheless, as Example 3 reveals, it still signals an affective tension. Adult speakers who feel 'strange' about the way their younger relatives speak may end up communicating their emotional discomfort to the children. In Example 4, Ita Ndivi explains how this feeling of 'strangeness' can go on to influence children's language choices.

**Example 4: 'That's why children sometimes don't want to speak it'**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:17:31 - 00:17:55)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Sientes como que, | *You feel like,* |
| 2 | dice "Oh, | *you say "Oh,* |
| 3 | quiero, | *I want,* |
| 4 | quiero que aprendes este lenguaje," | *"I want you (sg.) to learn this language,"* |
| 5 | no estás enseñando pero, | *you're not teaching but,* |
| 6 | (0.4) | |
| 7 | cuando le enseñas a, | *when you teach,* |
| 8 | esa personita como que, | *this little person, like,* |
| 9 | (0.4) | |
| 10 | uh se siente raro también en hablarlo? | |
| | *uh they (sg.) also feel strange when speaking it?* | |
| 11 | Porque cuando una persona te dice "Oh, | *Because when someone says to you "Oh,* |
| 12 | es que estás hablando ese lenguaje que ellos hablan." | |
| | *you're (sg.) speaking that language that they speak."* | |
| 13 | (0.5) | |
| 14 | Y, | *And,* |
| 15 | (0.4) | |
| 16 | eh, | *uh,* |
| 17 | por eso es que los niños a veces no lo quieren hablar porque, | |
| | *that's why children sometimes don't want to speak it (Mixteco) because,* | |
| 18 | no lo hablan igual que nosotros sienten verdad? | |
| | *they feel like they don't speak it the same as us, right?* | |

When an adult tells a child, 'I want you to learn this language' (line 4), it may not necessarily involve explicitly teaching them how to do so (5). Still, it is a statement made from a position of authority, in which the speaker is entitled to assess the child as not speaking in the desired manner. This can cause a 'little person' (8) to feel "raro" ('strange') when they speak Mixtec, just as adults do when they hear children's non-adult-like speech (Example 3). The strangeness is reinforced through the use of the medial demonstrative *ese* and the unspecified third-person plural pronoun *ellos* in line 12, which iconically convey linguistic distance: "estás hablando ese lenguaje que ellos hablan" ('you're speaking that language that they speak'). When children feel like "no lo hablan igual que nosotros" ('they don't speak it the same as us', 18), Ita Ndivi believes, these feelings of distance from family can sometimes make children not want to speak Mixtec at all (17).

In Example 5, Ita Ndivi continues to theorize the link between *Mixteco Alto* and children's shift away from Mixtec.

**Example 5: "Mejor no lo hablo"**
*(20191219_IN_playbackinterview, 00:18:00 - 00:18:44)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Pero a veces las personas como, | *But sometimes people like,* |
| 2 | por ejemplo yo no lo digo de mala forma con mis hermanos cuando lo digo, | |
| | *for example I don't say it in a bad way with my brothers when I say it,* | |
| 3 | "Oh es que hablas el lenguaje que hablan los — | |
| | *"Oh you (sg.) speak the language that they speak —* | |
| 4 | los de, | *those from,* |
| 5 | (0.9) | |
| 6 | uh, | *uh,* |
| 7 | los que — | *those who —* |
| 8 | los de otro pueblo," | *those from another village,"* |
| 9 | o le digo eso? | *or I say that to them?* |
| 10 | (0.5) | |
| 11 | Para que lo aprendan de otra manera como nosotros. | |
| | *So that they (pl.) learn it in a different way like us.* | |
| 12 | Pues aprendan nuestro lenguaje pero, | *Well, they learn our language but,* |
| 13 | a veces, | *sometimes,* |
| 14 | (0.4) | |
| 15 | lo toman como, | *they take it like,* |
| 16 | de una manera, | *in a way that's,* |

| 17 | | (0.6) | |
| 18 | | mal? | *bad?* |
| 19 | | Porque sienten como que "Ay, | *Because they feel like "Ugh,* |
| 20 | | es que no lo hablo bien, | *I don't speak it well,* |
| 21 | | y no lo puedo hablar, | *and I can't speak it,* |
| 22 | | y mejor no lo hablo." | *and it's better that I not speak it."* |
| 23 | | #Parece. | *#It seems.* |
| 24 | | Eso sienten. | *They feel that way.* |
| 25 | | Verdad? | *Right?* |
| 26 | Anna: | Mh[m.] | *Mhm.* |
| 27 | Ita Ndivi: | [Y,] | *And,* |
| 28 | | (0.7) | |
| 29 | | por eso es que no lo hablan pienso. | |
| | | *that's the reason that they (pl.) don't speak it, I think.* | |
| 30 | | Pero, | *But,* |
| 31 | | sí es difícil algunas veces para ellos para hablarlo? | |
| | | *yeah it's hard sometimes for them to speak it?* | |
| 32 | | Por eso es que no lo hablan muy bien pero, | |
| | | *That's why they don't speak it very well but,* | |
| 33 | | como ahora, | *like now,* |
| 34 | | poco a poco lo estamos en- | *little by little we're te—* |
| 35 | | enseñando? | *teaching it?* |

While Example 4 recounted adult-child interactions in general terms, in Example 5 Ita Ndivi

shifts to talking about her two younger brothers specifically. She reveals that while she does

make comments to them about their speech, such as "hablas el lenguaje que hablan los … de

otro pueblo" ('you speak the language that those from another village speak', lines 3-8), she

does not mean these things 'in a bad way' (2). The reason she says things like this is so that

Ernesto and Mateo learn Mixtec "de otra manera como nosotros" ('in a different way like

us', 11), the contrastive stress emphasizing the importance of acquiring "nuestro lenguaje"

('our language', 12), their family's shared variety.

In lines 12 through 18, however, Ita Ndivi recognizes that metalinguistic commentary

like this can have unintended consequences when recipients interpret it in a negative way.

She uses constructed dialogue in lines 20-22 to imagine the internal self-talk of a child who

has just been told that they speak like someone from elsewhere: "es que no lo hablo bien, / y

no lo puedo hablar, / y mejor no lo hablo" ('I don't speak it well, / and I can't speak it, / and

it's better that I not speak it'). These lines have a poetic rhythm (Jakobson 1960), thanks to the rhetorical devices of parallelism and repetition, which are frequently used in some Mixtec discourse styles (Anderson 1993). Repetition in discourse can produce an emotional effect (Tannen 1987). In this case, it serves to convey a sense of despondency or even despair that escalates with each additional repetition. The child's initial perception of not speaking the language well (20) is upgraded to a totalizing feeling that they are unable to speak it at all (21), before finally culminating in resignation—the feeling that it would be better to simply not speak it (22). Ita Ndivi believes that this negative emotional experience spurs children to avoid speaking Mixtec (29), although she acknowledges that there may be additional causes that make it 'hard' for children to speak the language 'very well' (31-32). In sum, Ita Ndivi theorizes that children's embarrassment at being told they sound like *Mixteco Alto* speakers can ultimately contribute to their shift away from Mixtec entirely. She ends on a hopeful note, however, with the reminder that she and her family are still teaching her brothers to speak Mixtec 'little by little' (34).

### 5.4.2 Language shift and the affect of difference

I argued in Chapter 4 that the *Alto* label provides a seemingly neutral way to interpret age-graded variation in terms of spatial variation, unaccompanied by prescriptive judgments of nonstandardness. Nonetheless, Examples 3 through 5 reveal that marking a child's speech as reminiscent of "neutral" variation still carries an emotional, evaluative force, which can negatively affect children's desire to maintain the Mixtec language. Such community-internal affective pressures are by no means the only or even the primary factor contributing to children's language shift. In the Mixtec diaspora, language shift is coerced by an

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intersecting web of colonizing, xenophobic, and exploitative capitalist forces (cf. McElhinny and Heller 2017) which stigmatize Mixtec and promote Spanish and English. The *Mixteco Alto* labeling practice is but a small part of a broader ideological landscape that often inhibits children's Mixtec acquisition. Even so, as Ita Ndivi acknowledges above, it is important not to discount the ways that metalinguistic commentary, even from supportive family members, can inadvertently dissuade a child from continuing to speak Mixtec.

Despite Ernesto's preference for speaking Spanish at home, the *Mixteco Alto* labelings that Ita Ndivi produces (and reproduces) in the examples above do not hint at any ideologies about cross-linguistic transfer. That is, although the *Mixteco Alto* label is used to classify linguistic difference, it does not locate the source of this difference in Ernesto's Spanish or English fluency. A child who is perceived as speaking in a *Mixteco Alto* way is still speaking Mixtec, in spite of the very real threat of language shift. While they may not be heard as talking like their immediate family members, they nonetheless sound like a Mixtec person—simply one from elsewhere in the Mixteca region. Underscoring the likenesses between non-adult-like forms and *Mixteco Alto* is therefore an adequating move (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Children's linguistic repertoires may have changed dramatically in diaspora, but *Mixteco Alto* indicates that while their speech may be different from adults', it is still sufficiently Mixtec.

As Ita Ndivi tells it, however, for Ernesto it is not the shared *Mixteco* portion of the label that is foregrounded, but the *Alto*—the element which sets him apart from his family and their larger community. As mentioned above, Mixtecs in diaspora sustain long-lasting commitments to their home villages, a "pattern of allegiance" that "attests to the discipline of loyalty exercised by the hometown network on the Indigenous immigrants" (Mines,

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Nichols, and Runsten 2010: 50). For an American-born child like Ernesto, whose formative linguistic and cultural socialization took place outside of his family's hometown, language may be a means through which his family constructs and maintains his relationship to a village he has never set foot in. The stakes of Ernesto speaking in a *Mixteco Alto* way are therefore high, because they have the potential to implicate his collective belonging at the level of both family and community.

The ideological importance of speaking one's home village variety has been called "sociolinguistic loyalty," a term coined by Stanford (2009) to describe the dynamics of a similarly multivarietal community of Sui (Tai-Kadai) speakers in southwestern China. Sui varieties correspond to both region and clan. In Sui society, it is considered proper for adults to speak their patrilect (i.e., the variety of the village where they were raised) throughout their lives, even if they permanently relocate to another village through marriage, exemplifying what Stanford calls "acts of loyalty" to their "community of descent" (2009: 304). If a Sui speaker were to use a variety other than their patrilect, it would be considered "embarrassing," "inappropriate," and even disrespectful to their family of origin, because it would imply disloyalty (2009: 293). Speakers' use of appropriate clan variants is "monitored" throughout their lives.[29] Most relevant for the present study, Stanford asked interviewees what would happen if a child spoke in this incongruous way, such as if she spoke Tɔŋ, her matrilect, instead of her patrilect. According to one woman, "'[t]hey'd say that the child isn't a member of this village. Then the child would feel very broken-hearted'" (2009: 303). Another interviewee predicted that "'Sui people would say, "Oh, you always speak like Tɔŋ. You're a Tɔŋ person!" Then that child would feel embarrassed and wouldn't

[29] Meek (2007: 26-27) describes a similar scenario for family dialects in Kaska, in which speakers' use (or non-use) of their family's variety had significant consequences for land claims negotiations.

do it again. She'd speak like the father [instead]. Otherwise, people in the village would laugh. She'd be laughed at; she'd feel embarrassed. She wouldn't speak that way again'" (2009: 293). Metalinguistic comments like these position the addressee's speech practices as so problematic that they disqualify them from belonging to their own village. These comments are imagined to bring about intensely emotional responses, which in turn push children to modify their linguistic behavior. Noting that a child sounds like they are from elsewhere is therefore a way of socializing them into expected community norms, even though this can come at an affective cost to the child.

By steadfastly maintaining their patrilect across the lifespan, even when in contact with numerous other mutually intelligible varieties, Sui speakers are "continually (re)constructing collective loyalties to the community of descent" (Stanford 2009: 304). I argue that the *Mixteco Alto* label likewise reveals older family members' desire to help the children of diaspora build similar relationships with their hometowns. For young children, who can neither grow up in their parents' village nor fulfill its economic or political obligations, language plays a crucial symbolic role in "(re)constructing collective loyalties" to their "community of descent." In both the Sui and Mixtec communities, the aim of metalinguistic commentary on children's speech is to get them to talk like their families. The effect of these remarks, however, can differ significantly. In the Sui case, "embarrassed" children adjust their speech to fall in line with their patrilectal variety. But in the Mixtec diaspora, labels like *Mixteco Alto* can spur multilingual children to shift away from Mixtec altogether—the opposite of what they may have been intended to do.

As a linguist and an outsider to the Mixtec community, I initially imposed my own interpretive framework on the *Mixteco Alto* label, but this interpretation turned out to be

incorrect. Because of the term's use as a marker of generic linguistic difference, as explained in Chapter 3, I simplistically viewed it as cause for celebration. I saw it as a means of understanding widespread linguistic variation through a "difference" lens, not a "deficit" one (Jones 2013; Labov 1972b), which I took to be unquestionably positive. It was only once Ita Ndivi and I collaborated on transcription, translation, analysis, and the playback interview that it became evident to me how much more complicated this label can be when it is applied to emergent child speakers. This situation illustrates the importance of collaborating with community members at every step of the research process, including the analysis stage. Without Ita Ndivi's emic perspective, I would have never made the connection between the *Mixteco Alto* metalinguistic label and the phenomenon of language shift.

Ita Ndivi's analysis reveals that the marking of linguistic difference can be a contributing factor to language shift, just like ideologies of deficit (Jones 2013), purism (Hill and Hill 1986), or prescriptive standardness (Lagos, Espinoza, and Rojas 2013). Comments which seem on the surface to be neutral assessments of difference, at least to an outsider, can nonetheless trigger linguistic insecurity in the addressee. When it comes to maintaining threatened languages, difference-based ideologies are not necessarily any less problematic than deficit-based ones, especially when they imply, even if inadvertently, that a speaker is not as "sociolinguistically loyal" to their "community of descent" (Stanford 2009) as they are expected to be.

The following section illustrates one way that Ita Ndivi works to realize her desire for Ernesto to speak as she does: by engaging in creative language maintenance practices, such as those found in the socialization recording.

**5.5 How a Swadesh list became a tool for sibling language socialization**

Just as language ideologies are hugely influential in the process of language shift, so too can they have a decisive effect on the success of language maintenance and revitalization (Austin and Sallabank 2014). Intergenerational language transmission is accomplished in interactions between caretakers and novices, that is, through language socialization. Socialization practices differ across cultures and communities; they are fundamentally shaped by caregivers' beliefs about how children learn language (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984), or what Riley (2011) calls "language acquisition ideologies." Caregivers may have strong ideologies about how children go about acquiring language, what forms of language (features, varieties, styles, etc.) are appropriate for them to master, and which family language policy will ensure the desired outcome for their child. Language acquisition ideologies may also affect caregivers' perceptions of their own agency. For example, because parents in the San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec diaspora in Los Angeles assume that their immigrant children will naturally acquire the language of the place where they were born, they do not actively socialize their children into speaking Zapotec, which contributes to language shift (Pérez Báez 2013: 37). Citing De Houwer (1999), Pérez Báez argues that these parents lack an "impact belief," meaning that they do not believe that "their language practices have the power to alter the language acquisition process of their children" (2013: 38). An adult relative may notice that a child speaks in an undesirable or possibly inappropriate manner, but without an impact belief they may not feel that they can do anything to change the situation.

In contrast, Ita Ndivi's impact belief was strong. Not only did she believe it was possible for her US-born brother Ernesto to learn to speak Mixtec, but she personally assumed

responsibility for helping him do so through interventions like the socialization interaction analyzed here. Furthermore, assuming that Ernesto and Ita Ndivi's family members' attitudes and actions are portrayed accurately in Section 5.4 above, it seems that their family possessed a similar impact belief: in Example 3 she quotes them as trying to get a child in the family to modify the way they talk ('We tell them, "You have to speak in that (other) way because this is how we talk"'), while in Example 5 she makes reference to an active, collective process of socialization by using the phrase "poco a poco lo estamos enseñando" ('little by little we're teaching it [to them]'). Despite the linguistic relatedness of Mixtec and Zapotec, the language acquisition ideologies of these two diaspora communities in California differ significantly in this regard, a difference which likely contributes to distinct home language socialization practices and divergent trajectories of language maintenance.

In the following section, I analyze a creative instance of language maintenance in which Ita Ndivi reappropriated the Swadesh list, a tool which was not originally designed for language teaching, for the purposes of fostering language maintenance in the diaspora. I show how she rekeys the list (Goffman 1974) from an elicitation script to a tool for language socialization. Section 5.5.2 illustrates how she creatively expands upon the text of the wordlist to create an environment for Ernesto's grammatical, phonological, lexical, and pragmatic socialization, thereby agentively working towards her goal of intergenerational Mixtec maintenance. While this interaction by no means represents a traditional Mixtec language socialization genre, it is nevertheless a compelling example of creativity and agency that shows the resourcefulness of youth in diaspora who are determined to maintain their family's heritage language.

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### 5.5.1 Rekeying: From elicitation to socialization

A linguistic elicitation session, especially one which is guided by a wordlist or other stimulus, is a very particular kind of discourse genre. Like other researcher-centered genres, such as interviews (Briggs 1986), it has its own set of "metacommunicative norms." For instance, elicitations often take place in a contact language—Spanish, in the case of my initial elicitation session with Ita Ndivi—which may influence the form of the data (Duranti 1981). In addition, because the goal is typically decided by the researcher, elicitation is by definition not a naturalistic type of interaction. It may even be planned or rehearsed to some extent, for example, by working through a preliminary transcription of a wordlist before the recording begins. The linguistic forms and interactional structures collected through elicitation are therefore not necessarily representative of those used in other genres (Duranti 1981), including language socialization routines and interactions.

In most elicitation interactions, the participants have differing epistemic statuses vis-à-vis the language being elicited. Typically, the elicitee ("the speaker" or "the signer") is highly knowledgeable about the language, while the eliciter ("the linguist") is less so.[30] Such was the case for my wordlist recording with Ita Ndivi. Furthermore, as a speech event elicitation is characterized by a well-defined production format (Goffman 1981), or distribution of speaker roles, in which the elicitee is both author and animator of the target language. That is, they are simultaneously "the agent who puts together, composes, or scripts the lines that are uttered" and "the sounding box from which utterances come" (Goffman 1981: 226).

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[30] The eliciter may be very familiar with the language in an analytic sense and may even speak it to some degree, but the fact remains that most documentary linguists are not native speakers of the languages on which they conduct fieldwork.

In contrast, Ita Ndivi's interaction with Ernesto differed on several accounts. Because Ernesto did not speak Mixtec as readily as his sister did, it was not possible for them to record a traditional elicitation session. Instead, the frame of their interaction (Goffman 1974)—the activity that took place—turned out to be quite different than the wordlist that she and I had recorded, due to a change in the epistemic status of the participant roles in these parallel interactions. In Ita Ndivi's wordlist elicitation session, she was the elicitee and the language expert, while I, the eliciter, was the novice. When Ita Ndivi was the eliciter, however, she took on the role of expert due to the novice status of the elicitee, Ernesto. The two interactions also differed with respect to production format. As opposed to Ita Ndivi's elicitation, in which she fulfilled both the author and animator roles, Ernesto was either unable or unwilling to produce all but a few of the Mixtec translations of the words on the list. Instead, Ita Ndivi pronounced the words as prompts for Ernesto to repeat, making him the animator but not the author.

The result of these differences between my interaction with Ita Ndivi and her interaction with Ernesto is a transformation that Goffman called *keying*, in which "[a] given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (1974: 43-44). As participants' epistemic relationship to Mixtec changes, the production format shifts accordingly. In turn, the activity or interactional frame switches, or is keyed, from elicitation to socialization. In the latter, the expert is empowered to prompt, evaluate, and even correct the novice's linguistic production, whereas in the former such correction would in many cases be inappropriate. However, the shift from elicitation to socialization is not totalizing; the interaction between Ita Ndivi and Ernesto is still "patterned on" the "primary

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framework" of elicitation, as I show below. It may be most accurate to say that, throughout their interaction, the "interaction arrangements" of language socialization are frequently "embedded" within the overarching elicitation frame (Goffman 1981: 153).

From the beginning of the recording, Ita Ndivi deliberately acknowledges the dual purpose of her interaction with Ernesto. Example 6 shows the first portion of the recording, in which Ita Ndivi set up and contextualized the interaction. At the time these data were recorded, Ita Ndivi had over a year of experience with linguistic research. I had conducted several ethnographic interviews and wordlist recordings with her as a participant, she had been trained as an interviewer for a community language survey (Bax et al. in prep.) and had conducted several interviews with members of the community, and she had received additional training in ethics, consent, and recording as part of the present project (Chapter 2). She was therefore very familiar with the format of research interactions, having served as both interviewee and interviewer. To frame her interaction with Ernesto, Ita Ndivi used an interactional script that strongly resonated with (Du Bois 2014) my previous interviews with her. She listed metadata right at the start of the interaction, including the date, the participant's name, and the purpose of the recording.[31] Below, she explains that she has two purposes: both elicitation and language teaching.

**Example 6: 'Like I always teach my little brother to speak Mixteco'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:00:01 - 00:00:48)*

| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Hoy, | *Today,* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | | el día de hoy estamos a, | *today we are on,* |

[31] Although the goal of Ita Ndivi's activity was to collect tokens of Mixtec, she framed the interaction using Spanish. This likely happened for several reasons: it ensured that I would be able to understand the interaction; it echoed our own recordings, which used Spanish as a contact language, thereby allowing her to recycle familiar structures for listing metadata; and the wordlist itself was written in Spanish. It is interesting to note that several of the other interactional recordings that Ita Ndivi gathered were entirely in Mixtec, meaning that she took particular care to design this interaction with my use in mind.

| 3 | | (2.4) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | | a domingo, | *on Sunday,* |
| 5 | | (2.6) | |
| 6 | | veintiuno de abril, | *April 21ˢᵗ,* |
| 7 | | (0.3) | |
| 8 | | dos mil diecinueve. | *2019.* |
| 9 | | (0.4) | |
| 10 | | Hoy este, | *Today um,* |
| 11 | | (0.6) | |
| 12 | | quiero, | *I want,* |
| 13 | | (1.0) | |
| 14 | | hacerle, | *to do,* |

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15          como siempre le enseño a mi hermanito a,
            like I always teach my little brother to,
16          a decirle mixteco y ahorita le voy a decir,
            to speak Mixteco and now I'm going to say to him,
17          (0.5)
18          para que me diga,            so that he tells me,
19          cómo se dice,                how to say,
20          (0.5)
21          de,                          some of,
22          todo en mixteco.             everything in Mixteco.
23          Y,                           And,
24          cada esto siempre lo % hablo,  each of these [words] I always say it,
25          le hablo a él para que,      I say to him so that,
26          (0.5)
27          lo pratique en su día cuando yo estoy con mis papás.
            he practices it throughout the day when I am with my parents.
28          (1.0)
29          Se llama,                    His name is,
30          (0.4)
31          Ernesto [APELLIDO].          Ernesto [LASTNAME].
32          (0.7)
33          Verdad?                      Right?
34          te llamas Ernesto?           Your name is Ernesto?
35          (0.4)
36 Ernesto: Sí.                          Yes.
37          (0.3)
38 Ita Ndivi: Okay.
```

This example highlights Ita Ndivi's agentive role in the research process. Lines 10-22 reveal

the fact that it was her own choice to create this recording; she is doing so because she

'wants' to (line 12). She contextualizes this interaction within an ongoing process of

'teaching [her] little brother to speak Mixteco' (15-16), which she 'always' does (15, 24),

especially when she is living with him at her parents' house (27). Lines 18-22 foreground

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elicitation as the primary framework of the recording, which she has created 'so that he tells [her] how to say some of everything in Mixteco', thereby locating Ernesto as the author of the Mixtec utterances to come. In lines 24-27, however, she again notes that this interaction fulfills the additional function of socialization: she is the author of the words that she 'always say[s] to him' to give him an opportunity to 'practice' (i.e., animate) them. By underscoring the dual purposes of this recording, Ita Ndivi calls attention to her own agency in the processes of both research and language maintenance.

Lines 29-36 also serve to familiarize Ernesto with the turn-taking structure of the interaction to come (cf. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). After stating his name, the final piece of metadata (lines 29-31), Ita Ndivi selects him to speak next by asking him to confirm its correctness (33-34), which he does in line 36. This prepares him for the prompting routine found in the rest of the recording, which is discussed in more detail below.

The following two examples illustrate the basic interactional structure of these data. In the first type of interactional sequence, Ernesto was able to provide a Mixtec translation for a few of the wordlist items, such as 'tortilla' in Example 7:

**Example 7: "Tortilla"**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:00:56 - 00:01:05)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Uno. | *One.* |
| 2 | | Tortilla. | *Tortilla.* |
| 3 | | (0.6) | |
| 4 | Ernesto: | Um, | |
| 5 | | (0.2) | |
| 6 | | **Xìjtă.** | ***Tortilla.*** |
| 7 | | (1.3) | |
| 8 | Ita Ndivi: | Dos. | *Two.* |
| 9 | | Frijol. | *Bean.* |

These exchanges more closely resembled traditional elicitation. Ita Ndivi uttered the cardinal number which corresponded to an item on the wordlist (line 1), followed by the Spanish elicitation prompt (2). Ernesto then supplied the corresponding Mixtec lexeme (6). When Ita Ndivi was satisfied with his answer she often simply moved on to the next item on the list, as in line 8, though at times she verbally acknowledged that his pronunciation was correct, for example, with an affirmative utterance like "uh huh" or through a confirmatory repetition of the Mixtec word accompanied by audible smile voice (Aubergé and Cathiard 2003).

However, Ernesto was either not able or not willing to provide the Mixtec translation of the vast majority of the words on the list. When this was the case, the structure of the interaction shifted, as in Example 8:

**Example 8: 'Bean'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:01:03 - 00:01:15)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Dos. | | *Two.* |
| 2 | Frijol. | | *Bean.* |
| 3 | (2.8) | | |
| 4 Ernesto: | Mm, | | |
| 5 | (1.7) | | |
| 6 Ita Ndivi: | **Ndujchǐ.** | | ***Bean.*** |
| 7 Ernesto: | Oh, | | |
| 8 | **\*Dujchi.** | | ***\*Bean.*** |
| 9 Ita Ndivi: | **Ndujchǐ.** | | ***Bean.*** |
| 10 Ernesto: | **\*Dujchǐ.** | | ***\*Bean.*** |

This example is representative of the interaction that unfolded for most items on the wordlist. After the elicitation prompt, which here occurs in line 2, there was a long pause from Ernesto (lines 3 and 5), perhaps punctuated by a vocalization indicating uncertainty (line 4) while Ita Ndivi waited for him to retrieve the Mixtec form. Once enough time had passed for Ita Ndivi to assume Ernesto did not know the translation, she shifted gears into a socialization frame by opening up a different kind of prompting routine, which she does

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above in line 6. Prompting is a common tactic used for language socialization in many cultures, in which "community members give direct instruction in speech behavior by modeling utterances for children to repeat" (Moore 2011: 213). Caregivers use prompting for numerous reasons, such as to socialize children into interactionally appropriate routines or to correct their pronunciation (Demuth 1986). In this recording, Ita Ndivi relies on two distinct classes of prompts. First, she reads the Spanish name of each item on the wordlist as an elicitation prompt, the aim of which is to cue Ernesto to code-switch or translate into Mixtec. When he does not do so, she provides the Mixtec word for him as a repetition prompt (line 6), which he reproduces (in line 8). The expectation of repetition was part of the metacommunicative norms of this elicitation-based interaction, into which Ernesto had to be socialized (as in Example 6; see also Example 9 below). The structure of this conversation was therefore itself an implicit prompt. However, there were moments in which Ita Ndivi also relied on explicit prompting strategies, such as imperatives, which are frequent language-socialization prompts across languages and cultures (e.g., Eisenberg 1986; Schieffelin 1990; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986). In several instances she used an imperative form for 'say', *kajchǔn*. She also employed other directives, including questions like 'How would you say that?', both in Spanish and in Mixtec.

As a Mixtec learner, Ernesto's pronunciations did not always match Ita Ndivi's repetition prompts. In line 8, his production of 'bean' differed from hers with respect to both final rising tone and the initial prenasalized stop. In these moments, she frequently initiated a repair sequence (Schegloff 2000). Such repair always took the form of an exact repetition of the prompt word, as in line 9. Exact repetitions are a mode of implicit feedback (Demetras, Post, and Snow 1986) which let Ernesto know that his pronunciation was not

satisfactory (Chouinard and Clark 2003). As a socialization strategy, repetition is a kind of "recast," defined as "the teacher's correct restatement of a learner's incorrectly formed utterance" (Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada 2001: 720). As the definition suggests, recasts are common in language-learning classrooms, but they are also found across L1 acquisition situations. Recasts are a more implicit style of correction (Lyster 1998), as opposed to explicit feedback such as 'no' or 'that's not right', which Ita Ndivi did not use in this interaction.

Throughout the recording, Ita Ndivi constantly shifted footing (Goffman 1981), moving fluidly between the elicitation and socialization frames. After each elicitation prompt, she (re)occupied the role of eliciter by leaving a long pause to allow Ernesto time to retrieve the target word, then moved into the role of teacher or language expert in order to supply the Mixtec repetition prompts or to provide feedback on his pronunciation. In this complex interaction, the metacommunicative norms of both the elicitation and socialization frames were laminated, in Goffman's sense, allowing Ita Ndivi to accomplish both her immediate goal of working with me on linguistic research and her long-term goal of ensuring that her younger brother continued to speak Mixtec.

In addition to examining the multiple roles that Ita Ndivi played in this interaction, it is also worth examining Ernesto's participation. Although he spoke quietly and often hesitated to use Mixtec, he was not simply a passive recipient of linguistic knowledge. As the language socialization literature has argued, "[a]lthough they are often referred to as novices, learners are not … empty vessels into which language and culture are simply poured" (Burdelski and Cook 2012: 175, citing Kulick and Schieffelin 2004). Instead, Ernesto was an active participant in his own socialization, sometimes revealing higher levels

of linguistic proficiency than it might seem at first glance. For example, it is clear that many

of the wordlist items were not new to Ernesto. Ita Ndivi was not teaching him these terms

for the first time so much as reinforcing words with which he already had receptive

competence. After hearing the Mixtec word for 'bean' in Example 8 above, for instance, he

utters an "oh" of recognition (line 7). Likewise, Example 9 below demonstrates his

familiarity with the meaning of the word *ìxǎn*, 'masa' or '(corn) dough'.

**Example 9: 'I thought it was *table*'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:03:09 - 00:03:18)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Dieciseis. | *Sixteen.* |
| 2 | | Masa. | *Dough.* |
| 3 | | (1.8) | |
| 4 | | **Ìxǎn**. | ***Dough.*** |
| 5 | Ernesto: | **Ìxǎn**. | ***Dough.*** |
| 6 | | Yo pensé #las mesa. | *I thought [it was] #the 'table'.* |
| 7 | | (0.4) | |
| 8 | Ita Ndivi: | No. | *No.* |

After the elicitation prompt 'masa', there is a long pause in which Ernesto does not

volunteer a translation. Once Ita Ndivi supplies the Mixtec term *ìxǎn*, he repeats it exactly,

followed by an account of why he did not come up with that word on his own (line 6): he

misheard the elicitation prompt as *mesa*, the Spanish word for 'table', which is

phonologically similar to *masa* (/ˈme.sa/ versus /ˈma.sa/). This explanation is evidence that

Ernesto was not simply parroting *ìxǎn* in line 5. Only once he had heard and processed the

meaning of *ìxǎn* was he able to realize that the prompt word had in fact not been *mesa*, but

*masa*. Ernesto's receptive abilities are further discussed in Section 5.5.2.

Ernesto also displays a degree of productive Mixtec competence by retrieving all or part

of certain Mixtec words without assistance, such as 'tortilla' in Example 7, as well as words

like 'deer' (*usû*) and 'water' (*tsìkwĭi*; Section 4.4.2 discussed his pronunciation of this

word). He is also quite attuned to subtle differences in tone, even though his tonal

production does not always match his sister's. When he is prompted to attempt a second pronunciation, as in Example 8, he is generally able to correct the tone to more closely adhere to the repetition prompt (Example 8, line 10), even without Ita Ndivi explicitly drawing attention to the tone as a trouble source.

While the flow and content of this interaction were constrained by the wordlist, both participants demonstrated some degree of agency. Ita Ndivi in particular frequently moved beyond those constraints to accomplish her socialization goals. There were numerous points at which she deviated from the basic interactional script of elicitation, going beyond simply correcting Ernesto's pronunciation or providing Mixtec repetition prompts in order to enhance the linguistic and cultural socialization situation. The following section analyzes the strategies that Ita Ndivi used to transform the elicitation recording into a socialization interaction. I show how she further enriches the interaction by providing linguistic and personal context for some of the wordlist items, which allows her to use it as a tool to socialize Ernesto into linguistic knowledge of both Mixtec and Spanish, as well as to cultivate his identity as a Mixtec speaker.

**5.5.2 Socialization beyond the wordlist**

As mentioned in Section 5.3.2, the wordlist was originally designed to aid in preliminary phonological description of Ita Ndivi's variety of Mixtec and then modified to maximize the number of tokens of a particular phoneme of interest. Most of its elicitation prompts were monomorphemic nouns or adjectives, although two subsets of items also targeted possessive and personal pronoun paradigms. In short, the wordlist was not created with teaching in mind. When Ita Ndivi took her copy of the list home with her, however, she saw pedagogical potential in the elicitation genre which I had never considered. By expanding on

the metacommunicative routines of elicitation, Ita Ndivi leveraged the wordlist to construct a language socialization situation for her younger brother. The primary activity involved Ernesto repeating his sister's utterances instead of constructing novel ones. Nonetheless, according to Ochs, "when a child repeats the utterance of a copresent speaker … the child is learning to communicate. [They are] learning not to construct sentences at random, but to construct them to meet specific communicative needs" (1977: 133).

The previous section illustrated how Ita Ndivi built an environment in which Ernesto could practice and be evaluated on segmental and tonal pronunciation. In this section, I analyze moments where Ita Ndivi departed from the elicitation script in order to socialize Ernesto into additional linguistic information beyond the original 62 wordlist items, such as morphosyntactic structures. In addition, Ernesto was unfamiliar with several wordlist items in both Spanish and Mixtec, including a culturally-specific Mixtec lexical item. Instead of simply making him parrot her own pronunciation of these words, Ita Ndivi took care to define the items in Mixtec and ensure that he understood their meanings, promoting Ernesto's bilingual competence through the primary lens of Mixtec. She also created an opportunity to teach Ernesto a politeness routine which was not found on the wordlist. Finally, throughout the interaction Ita Ndivi subtly socialized Ernesto into a normative orientation to the Mixtec language, in part by doing identity work to co-construct him as a fully competent multilingual speaker of Mixtec.

Within the field of language socialization, it has long been argued that children's acquisition of grammatical competence is not simply a mechanical unfolding of an automatic process. Instead, grammar is actively socialized within an interactional environment that is imbued with cultural and moral values (Ochs and Schieffelin 1995).

Like other aspects of linguistic structure, information about grammar "[comes] to the young learner in the give and take of everyday life, mostly embedded in early adult-child discursive interaction" (Küntay and Slobin 2002: 5). Although the wordlist itself provided very little morphosyntactic information about its target items, Ita Ndivi chose to supplement certain items with grammatical context in order to scaffold Ernesto's comprehension.

One of these items was the adjective *vìxì* 'sweet'. As shown below in Example 10, once Ita Ndivi supplied this repetition prompt, Ernesto repeated it exactly. Instead of moving on to the next item, however, she provided an example of this word in grammatical context—in this case, as an adjectival modifier to the inanimate noun *ñà'a*, yielding the noun phrase *ñà'a vìxì* 'sweet thing', which Ernesto treated as another repetition prompt.

**Example 10: 'Sweet thing'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:05:22 - 00:05:33)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Ita Ndivi: | Dulce. | | *Sweet.* |
| 2 | Treinta. | | *Thirty.* |
| 3 | (0.9) | | |
| 4 | Dulce. | | *Sweet.* |
| 5 | (1.0) | | |
| 6 Ernesto: | % | | |
| 7 Ita Ndivi: | **Vìxì**. | | *Sweet.* |
| 8 Ernesto: | **Vìxì**. | | *Sweet.* |
| 9 | (1.2) | | |
| 10 Ita Ndivi: | **Ñàˈa vìxì**. | | *Sweet thing.* |
| | INAN | sweet | |
| 11 | (0.5) | | |
| 12 Ernesto: | **Ñàˈa vìxì**. | | *Sweet thing.* |
| | INAN | sweet | |

This expansion served to clarify the lexical category of *vìxì*. The Spanish prompt word *dulce* is lexically ambiguous, corresponding to either the noun 'candy' or the adjective 'sweet'. Because Mixtec also lacks morphology which consistently distinguishes nouns from adjectives, *vìxì* does not have any overt markers of its adjective status. With her expansion in line 10, Ita Ndivi may have been attempting to prevent Ernesto from interpreting *vìxì* as

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similarly ambiguous to *dulce*. Clark (2010) has demonstrated that adults often introduce new vocabulary to children in lexical category-specific syntactic frames. Here, I argue that line 10 relies on one such syntactic frame, allowing Ita Ndivi to introduce *vìxì* as an adjectival modifier in a noun phrase, which therefore corresponds to 'sweet' instead of 'candy'. Furthermore, because these syntactic frames differ across lexical classes, the frame itself embeds specific information about the behavior of each class. In particular, this noun phrase frame gives Ernesto an opportunity to learn about adjectives and word order. By collocating the wordlist item *vìxì* with the noun *ñà'a*, Ita Ndivi illustrates the fact that Mixtec adjectives are generally located post-nominally, similar to Spanish (Macaulay 1996; Penner 2020).

In addition to word class, Ita Ndivi also expanded on the wordlist to provide semantic and syntactic information about aspects of the possessive paradigm. El Paredón Mixtec marks possession either with an enclitic pronoun or a full nominal possessor, both of which occur after the possessed noun phrase. Example 11 is taken from a part of the wordlist which was created to elicit the full possessive pronominal paradigm of the noun *mano* 'hand'. After several iterations with human possessors, such as *ndaˈă-ñá* 'her hand' and *ndaˈă-rà* 'his hand', the target of this item was the animal pronoun *-rí*. The prompt *pata* ('paw') was therefore substituted for *mano*. The full wordlist item was written as *su pata (del perro)* 'its paw (referring to a dog)'. To clarify the meaning of *-rí* and contrast it to human pronouns, however, Ita Ndivi modified the prompt with context that more closely corresponded to Ernesto's home life: their family does not have a dog, but rather a hen named Sofía.

**Example 11: "Su pata de Sofía"**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:08:36 - 00:09:04)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Su pata. | *Its paw.* |
| 2 | | (2.0) | |
| 3 | | Su pata. | *Its paw.* |
| 4 | | (1.3) | |
| 5 | Ernesto: | Uh, | |
| 6 | | (4.7) | |
| 7 | Ita Ndivi: | **Xàˈǎ-r[í.]** | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| | | foot=zo | |
| 8 | Ernesto: | [**X**]**à'ǎ-rí.** | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| 9 | | (0.4) | |
| 10 | Ita Ndivi: | Su pata de, | *The paw of,* |
| 11 | | S- Sofía. | *S- Sofía.* |
| 12 | | (0.8) | |
| 13 | | **Xàˈǎ-rí**. | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| 14 | Ernesto: | **Xàˈǎ-rí**. | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| 15 | | (0.6) | |
| 16 | Ita Ndivi: | **Xàˈǎ Sofía**. | ***Sofía's foot.*** |
| | | foot    Sofía | |
| 17 | Ernesto: | ***Xàˈá So[fía,]** | **Sofía's foot.* |
| 18 | Ita Ndivi: | [Sofía e]s nuestro, | *Sofía is our,* |
| 19 | | (0.1) | |
| 20 | Ernesto: | Gallina. | *Hen.* |
| 21 | Ita Ndivi: | Gallina verdad? | *Hen right?* |
| 22 | | **Xàˈǎ-rí**. | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| | | foot=zo | |
| 23 | Ernesto: | **Xàˈǎ-rí**. | ***Its (animal's) foot.*** |
| | | foot=zo | |

After markedly long pauses from Ernesto in lines 2, 4, and 6, in which he does not provide a

guess for the Mixtec translation of *su pata*, Ita Ndivi supplies *xàˈǎ-rí* as a repetition prompt

in line 7, using the pronominal form of the animal possessor and substituting *xàˈǎ* 'foot' for

the possessed noun instead of *ndaˈǎ* 'hand'. Ernesto produces this in line 8. Instead of

moving on, Ita Ndivi says, "Su pata de Sofía" in lines 10-11, then gives *xàˈǎ-rí* as a

repetition prompt once more. The addition of *Sofía* to the prompt gives Ernesto semantic

context about the pronoun *-rí*—namely, that it is used for animals—by grounding it within

his lived experience. The added context is particularly important since a similar pronominal

distinction between humans and animals is not found in Spanish, in which the third-person

possessive adjective *su* is employed regardless of species, as well as because *xàˈă* 'foot' can be used for both humans and animals. The connection between *-rí* and the animal semantic domain is reinforced by having Ernesto repeat the pronominally-possessed form in lines 13-14.

In line 16 Ita Ndivi provides another formulation of the Mixtec prompt, this time with a full nominal possessor instead of the pronoun: *xàˈă Sofía*, which is a literal translation of "Su pata de Sofía" (lines 10-11). This new form includes additional information about the syntax of Mixtec possession, allowing Ernesto to infer that full nominal possessors occur after the possessum, just as pronominal enclitics do. While Ernesto's lexical tone in line 17 does not match his sister's exactly, she does not attempt to repair it, instead orienting toward the recording device (and therefore me) in line 18 to provide context about Sofía's identity. Ernesto co-constructs this explanation by supplying *gallina* 'hen' in line 20. Ita Ndivi ratifies his contribution in 21, then has him repeat the pronominal form once more. Unlike in other repetition sequences, such as that in Example 8, Ernesto's pronunciation is accurate in both lines 14 and 23. Therefore, the second and third *xàˈă-rí* repetition prompts in lines 13 and 22 are not simply recasts or corrections, but rather opportunities to reinforce the new syntactic and semantic information introduced by this item.

In addition to grammatical content, Ita Ndivi used the wordlist to teach her brother the meanings of unfamiliar lexical items in both Mixtec and Spanish. In Example 12 below, he indicates uncertainty about the meaning of both the Spanish word *nopal* 'prickly pear cactus' and its Mixtec translation *viˈntsiă*. Ita Ndivi defines these terms by inserting a side sequence (Jefferson 1972) into the elicitation structure that allows her to provide

information about the relationships between *viˈntsiǎ* and other target-language vocabulary, which is a common strategy for lexical socialization (Clark and Wong 2002).

**Example 12: 'It's the tree that has spines on its back'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:04:18 - 00:04:39)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1  Ita Ndivi: | Veinticuatro. | *Twenty-four.* |
| 2 | Nopal. | *Prickly pear cactus.* |
| 3 | (1.4) | |
| 4  Ernesto: | Nopal? | *Prickly pear cactus.* |
| 5  Ita Ndivi: | Mhm. | |
| 6 | (1.4) | |
| 7  Ernesto: | Mm, | |
| 8 | (0.2) | |
| 9  Ita Ndivi: | **Viˈnts[iǎ.]** | *Prickly pear cactus.* |
| 10 Ernesto: | *[Vi]ˈinti[a.] | *\*Prickly pear cactus.* |
| 11 Ita Ndivi: | [**Xí]ñún "viˈntsiǎ."** | *Do you know "prickly pear cactus."* |
| | IPFV.know.2SG prickly.pear.cactus | |
| 12 Ernesto: | M-mm. | *No.* |
| 13 Ita Ndivi: | **Tún íin** – | *It's the one (tree) that has –* |
| | WD    IPFV.be.stuck. | |
| 14 | **ijñǔ sàjtǎ soˈo-va nî**, | *spines on its back, like that, I mean.* |
| | spine back like.that-DM I.mean | |
| 15 | (0.3) | |
| 16 Ernesto: | O[h.] | |
| 17 Ita Ndivi: | [**Tún kw]iji ndátùùn nî.** | *Well, it's the green one (tree), I mean.* |
| | WD    green   well    I.mean | |
| 18 Ernesto: | Mm. | |
| 19 | (0.2) | |
| 20 Ita Ndivi: | **Xíñún tún.** | *Do you know it.* |
| | IPFV.know.2SG WD | |
| 21 | (0.7) | |
| 22 | **Xíñún tún.** | *Do you know it.* |
| | IPFV.know.2SG WD | |
| 23 | (1.0) | |
| 24 Ernesto: | Uh huh. | |
| 25 Ita Ndivi: | Oh. | |

The rising appeal contour in line 4 demonstrates Ernesto's unfamiliarity with the elicitation prompt *nopal*. Once Ita Ndivi has supplied the translation prompt *viˈntsiǎ*, she checks to see whether it has helped him understand its Spanish counterpart (line 11). It has not, so she defines the term by relating it to other items within its semantic domain (Clark 2010), describing it as having 'spines on its back' (14) and being 'green' (17). The repeated use of

the pronoun *tún* to refer to *viˈntsiă* (13, 17, 20, 22) provides additional semantic information about *viˈntsiă*: in El Paredón Mixtec, *tún* (which is related to the full noun *ijtŭn* 'tree') corresponds to the noun class that includes wooden items, trees, and certain plants. Finally, Ita Ndivi twice checks for understanding (lines 20 and 22) before continuing on with the wordlist.

The expansion in Example 12 demonstrates that Ita Ndivi's immediate socialization goal has shifted from simply prompting Ernesto to accurately repeat the Mixtec target word to ensuring that he actually understands its meaning—and ensuring that he links *viˈntsiă* to its Spanish translation as well. This is the first of several instances in which Ita Ndivi engages in simultaneous Spanish and Mixtec lexical socialization. What is particularly notable is that she does so while using the Mixtec language, despite Ernesto's preference for Spanish. The cross-linguistic lexical socialization nurtures his bilingual competence, while the use of Mixtec as the matrix language projects a subtle normative positioning of Mixtec, not Spanish, as the primary code of knowledge acquisition.

Example 13 also features an instance of bilingual socialization through a Mixtec frame. The target word was *ìjĭn* 'skin'. When Ernesto repeated it, however, he pronounced it with a mid tone instead of a low tone on the initial syllable, inadvertently producing the word *ijĭn* 'salt' on both his first and second attempts. In general, Ita Ndivi believed that tone was challenging for children to acquire, as described in Chapter 4. In Example 13, however, she does not locate the trouble source in Ernesto's ability to produce adult-like Mixtec tones, but rather in a possible lack of understanding of the Spanish prompt word *piel*. Unlike Example 12, for which neither a prickly pear cactus nor a picture of one was available, in this case Ita Ndivi is able to explain the meaning of *ìjĭn* by using her body as a resource for pointing and

labeling. Cross-linguistically, pointing gestures are frequently used to establish joint attention (Brown 2012), which is necessary common ground for lexical socialization (Clark 2001). Once both novice and adult are oriented to the same "locus of attention," the new vocabulary item can be introduced "with the aid of deictic terms that 'point' yet again" at the target object or action (2001: 114). As Brown (2012: 34-35) explains, "[t]he joint attentional focus makes the connection between label and object obvious; its embedding in an interactive activity motivates the child to learn and remember the label." In this example, Ita Ndivi relies on both linguistic and embodied communicative resources to teach Ernesto the meaning of *piel*, using her body as both the source and object of a pointing gesture.

**Example 13: 'Do you know what *piel* is?'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:05:56 - 00:06:15)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Treinta y dos. | *Thirty-two.* |
| 2 | | Piel. | *Skin.* |
| 3 | | (1.0) | |
| 4 | Ernesto: | [Um:,] | |
| 5 | Ita Ndivi: | **[Ì]j[₂ǐn.]** | **Skin.** |
| 6 | Ernesto: | *[₂I]jǐn. | *Salt.* |
| 7 | Ita Ndivi: | **Ìjǐn.** | **Skin.** |
| 8 | Ernesto: | *Ijǐn. | *Salt.* |
| 9 | Ita Ndivi: | **Xíñún ndzíaa** piel. | *Do you know what skin is?* |
| | | IPFV.know.2SG which skin | |
| 10 | Ernesto: | M-mm. | *No.* |
| 11 | Ita Ndivi: | **Ñóˈo.** | **This.** |
| | | DEM | |
| 12 | Ernesto: | Oh. | |
| 13 | Ita Ndivi: | **Ñóˈo ndǎti** piel **ti.** | *This is skin {surprised he doesn't know}.* |
| | | DEM just skin ?INTERJ | |
| 14 | Ernesto: | Ohh [we–] | |
| 15 | Ita Ndivi: | [Pi]él **rà,** | *Skin um,* |
| | | skin DM | |
| 16 | | **ñà ìjǐn va nî.** | *well it's skin, I mean.* |
| | | INAN skin well I.mean | |
| 17 | Ernesto: | O[h.] | |
| 18 | Ita Ndivi: | [Ì]jǐn **véni.** | <u>*Our*</u> *skin (as compared to animals).* |
| | | skin ?1PL.INCL | |
| 19 | | (0.3) | |
| 20 | | Enfermedad. | *Illness.* |

Even after Ernesto pronounces 'skin' as 'salt' for a second time in line 8, Ita Ndivi does not provide explicit feedback on tone. Instead, she asks him in Mixtec whether he knows the Spanish word *piel* (line 9), which he does not (line 10). Ita Ndivi then utters the Mixtec demonstrative *ñóˈo* 'this' (11); in the playback interview, she recalled pointing to her own skin as she did so, thereby pairing a linguistic deictic with an embodied one. In line 13 she recycles the deictic *ñóˈo* in a "direct offer" (Clark and Wong 2002) of the unfamiliar lexical item, saying 'this is *piel*' while again pointing at her own skin. She then explicitly juxtaposes *piel* (15) and *ìjĭn* (16), which gives Ernesto another opportunity to link the Spanish word with the correct Mixtec tonal pronunciation. Her final remark (18) specifies that *ìjĭn* only refers to 'our skin' (the skin of humans, that is, as opposed to animal leather, which she clarified to me in the playback interview).

It is interesting that after explaining the word's meaning, Ita Ndivi does not prompt Ernesto to repeat *ìjĭn* in order to correct his tonal pronunciation. It appears that her socialization goal has shifted over the course of this sequence, with Ernesto's production of adult-like tone becoming less important than his full comprehension of the target word, as well as its Spanish translation. Even in this interaction which was created to practice Ernesto's Mixtec, Ita Ndivi found a way to facilitate his bilingual competence by socializing him into Spanish—albeit through the use of Mixtec, just as she did in Example 12.

Likewise, Example 14 features an explicit statement of semantic equivalency between *chile* and its Mixtec translation *yaˈă*. As opposed to Example 13, in which the equivalency was provided in Mixtec, in the excerpt below this is accomplished in Spanish, perhaps in order to be certain that Ernesto understands which word belongs to which language.

**Example 14: "En mixteco es *ya ˈ ǎ*"**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:10:05 - 00:10:32)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Chile. | *Chile.* |
| 2 | | Cincuenta y uno. | *Fifty-one.* |
| 3 | | Chile. | *Chile.* |
| 4 | Ernesto: | Um, | |
| 5 | | (0.6) | |
| 6 | Ita Ndivi: | En mixteco chile. | *In Mixteco chile.* |
| 7 | | (5.5) | |
| 8 | | Chile. | *Chile.* |
| 9 | | (0.2) | |
| 10 | Ernesto: | Chile. | *Chile.* |
| 11 | | (0.6) | |
| 12 | Ita Ndivi: | **Yaˈ[ǎ.]** | ***Chile.*** |
| 13 | Ernesto: |     **[Ya]ˈǎ.** | ***Chile.*** |
| 14 | Ita Ndivi: | **Xǐñǔn *xiki–** | ***Don't you know *how–*** |
| | | NEG.IPFV.know.2SG *[error] | |
| 15 | | **xaa káˈa-na xíˈin yaˈǎ.** | ***how they say chile.*** |
| | | how IPFV.say=3PL with chile | |
| 16 | | (1.2) | |
| 17 | Ernesto: | [Mm.] | |
| 18 | Ita Ndivi: | [En mi]xteco es "chile." | *In Mixteco it's "chile."* |
| 19 | | Eh digo en mixteco, | *Uh I mean in Mixteco,* |
| 20 | | es, | *it's,* |
| 21 | | **"yaˈǎ"** y, | ***"chile"* and,* |
| 22 | | "chile" es en español. | *"chile" is in Spanish.* |

Ita Ndivi repeats the elicitation prompt *chile* three times, including once with the

specification "en mixteco" ('in Mixtec', line 6). After a 5.5 second pause, she repeats *chile*

once more (8). As evidenced by Ernesto's utterance of *chile* in line 10, he interpreted line 8

as a repetition prompt—that is, as the Mixtec target word—instead of a reiteration of the

elicitation prompt. She addresses this misconception using a "cross-code recast" of *chile* to

*yaˈǎ* in line 12 (Guardado 2018). Cross-code recasts are a socialization strategy which is

"meant to prompt a code switch through a subtle code correction in the form of a repetition

in the 'correct' language" (2018: 191). This strategy alerts Ernesto that *chile* is not a Mixtec

word, a fact which is further emphasized by the overt assignment of lexemes to their source

languages in lines 19-22 ('in Mixteco it's *yaˈǎ* and *chile* is in Spanish'). This cross-code

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recast thus "regiments" the boundary between Mixtec and Spanish (2018: 192). In addition, this excerpt also includes a gentle moral judgment about Ernesto's Mixtec vocabulary skills, which is communicated with the negative question 'Don't you know how they say *chile*?' (lines 14-15). During the playback interview I learned that Ernesto was frequently present in the kitchen while Ita Ndivi cooked (including with chiles), during which time she often took the opportunity to talk to him in Mixtec about the cooking process. Her negative question above was an affective expression of surprise at his unfamiliarity with the term, accompanied by light shaming (cf. Lo and Fung 2012) which implied that he should have already known this commonly used household word.

Certain items on the wordlist did not have an exact single-word counterpart in Spanish and therefore required more contextualization to elicit the desired target. For example, the term for 'sibling' in Spanish has two forms which vary depending on the gender of the sibling: *hermana* ('sister') and *hermano* ('brother'). In contrast, the kinship system of most varieties of Mixtec takes both the sibling's gender and the ego's gender into account, yielding three distinct monomorphemic words for 'different-gender sibling', 'sister of a woman', and 'brother of a man' (Bradley 1981). In Example 15, Ita Ndivi explains the meaning of the Mixtec-specific target word *ñañì* 'brother of a man' by grounding it (Clark 2001) in the context of his relationship to one of his own brothers, just as she did for 'Sofía's foot' in Example 11.

**Example 15: "Hermano de un hombre"**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:05:33 - 00:05:55)*

| 1 | Ita Ndivi: | Treinta y uno. | *Thirty-one.* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | | Hermano de un hombre. | *Brother of a man.* |
| 3 | Ernesto: | Um, | |
| 4 | | (0.3) | |
| 5 | | Niño? | *Boy?* |
| 6 | | (0.2) | |

| 7 Ita Ndivi: | Uh como, | *Uh like,* |
|---|---|---|
| 8 Ernesto: | Mm – | |
| 9 Ita Ndivi: | uh, | |
| 10 | tú eres hermano de Mateo verdad? | *you are Mateo's brother, right?* |
| 11 Ernesto: | Mhm. | |
| 12 Ita Ndivi: | **Xaa kajchǔn xíˈàn kaà?** | ***How would you say that?*** |
| | how POT.say.2SG with=INAN DEM | |
| 13 | (2.1) | |
| 14 | **Tùˈun mí-e nî.** | ***In our language, I mean.*** |
| | language SPEC=1PL.INCL I.mean | |
| 15 | (0.5) | |
| 16 | **Ña[ñ][ɜì.]** | ***Brother (of a man).*** |
| 17 Ernesto: | [**N** –] | ***Br—*** |
| 18 | *[ɜ**N**]aˈni. | ***Brother (of a man).*** |
| 19 Ita Ndivi: | **Ña[ɜñî Mateo] kajchǔn.** | ***Say "my brother Mateo."*** |
| | man's.brother.1SG Mateo POT.say.2SG | |
| 20 Ernesto: | *[ɜ**ñaˈn**-] | ***Brot—*** |
| 21 | ***ñaˈnì.*** | ***Brother (of a man).*** |
| 22 Ita Ndivi: | Uh huh. | |
| 23 | (0.8) | |
| 24 | Treinta y dos. | *Thirty-two.* |

When she first supplies the elicitation prompt 'brother of a man', Ernesto is confused as to its meaning, likely because Spanish and English lack a similarly gender-specific term. Perhaps as a request for clarification, he says the Spanish word *niño*, meaning 'son' or 'boy' (line 5).[32] Instead of simply giving Ernesto the Mixtec repetition prompt, Ita Ndivi attempts to gently guide him into using (or at least thinking about) his Mixtec lexical knowledge. In line 10 she places the term in the context of his own familial experience, saying, "Tú eres hermano de Mateo verdad?" ('You are Mateo's brother, right?'). Once he ratifies this in line 11, she code-switches to Mixtec to ask him, "Xaa kajchǔn xíˈàn kaà?" ('How would you say that?', line 12). There is a full two-second pause before she says, "Tùˈun mí-e nî" ('In our language, I mean'). She then answers her own question with the repetition prompt *ñañì* (line 16), which he repeats, though not identically. Before he has finished his turn, she prompts him yet again, this time to use the word in context. Line 19 employs a prompting strategy

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[32] It is also possible that line 5 represents an attempt to pronounce *ñañì*, albeit one which sounds phonetically identical to *niño*.

called "elicited imitation" (Hood and Schieffelin 1978; Ochs 1982), in which "a speaker provides a model utterance followed by a directive to repeat it" (Burdelski 2012: 285; cf. Schieffelin 1990). Here, the model utterance is the possessed form *ñañî Mateo* 'my brother Mateo' and the directive is the imperative *kajchǔn* 'POT.say.2SG'. Although none of Ernesto's pronunciations match the target form, Ita Ndivi treats them as acceptable and moves on (lines 22-24).

This example additionally illustrates Ochs and Schieffelin's argument that "the acquisition of languages is simultaneously coupled with language socialization practices that construct novices as certain kinds of situationally organized persons, with certain emotions, moral understandings, and beliefs" (2012: 16). Even as Ita Ndivi explains the meaning of *ñañì* to Ernesto, she also socializes him into a particular relationship with Mixtec by constructing him as a full, legitimate speaker of the language. Within the structure of the interaction, Ita Ndivi's utterance in line 14 ("Tùˈun mí-e nî" 'In our language, I mean') is not in fact required as a specification of which language Ernesto should reply in. The desired language was implied by her earlier code-switch into Mixtec to ask, "Xaa kajchǔn xíˈàn kaà?" ('How would you say that?') in line 12 (Goffman 1974: 309; Guardado 2018). Although line 14 may appear redundant, I argue that it is a means through which Ita Ndivi constructs Ernesto's identity as a speaker. This identity work is accomplished via the first-person plural inclusive possessive pronoun *-e*, which functions as an "affiliative" (Baquedano-López 1997: 34) projection of collective ingroup belonging (cf. Klein 2015: 25). The phrase 'our language' both asserts and reinforces Ernesto's status as a legitimate speaker of Mixtec by aligning him with his sister, who is confident and proud to speak the language. Through this utterance Ita Ndivi reminds Ernesto that although they are bilingual

in Spanish, and although Spanish is the matrix language of the elicitation interaction, the affective designation of *tù'un mí-e* ('our language') uniquely belongs to Mixtec.

In Section 5.4.1, Ita Ndivi expressed concern that even if children growing up in diaspora manage to acquire Mixtec, they sometimes speak it in a *Mixteco Alto* way, which inadvertently linguistically alienates them from their family. The phrase *tù'un mí-e* in Example 15 echoes the desire that she voiced in Example 3: "queremos que sea nuestro lenguaje porque somos iguales una familia" ('we want it to be our language because we're the same, a family'). Example 15 illustrates one way that Ita Ndivi works to reinforce Ernesto's identity not just as a speaker of "Mixtec," broadly defined, but as a fully competent speaker of their family's local variety.

The final example below comes from the end of the recording, once all 62 items on the wordlist had been elicited. Although there were no remaining prompts, Ita Ndivi continued to socialize her brother. In Example 16, she teaches him how to say 'thank you' in Mixtec by using prompting, a common strategy for the socialization of formulaic politeness routines (Burdelski 2012; Burdelski and Cook 2012; Schieffelin 1990).

**Example 16: 'Say "thanks to you"'**
*(20190421_IN_07, 00:12:31 - 00:13:02)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1  Ita Ndivi: | Y, | *And,* |
| 2 | pues eso fue todo, | *well that was everything,* |
| 3 | ya terminamos, | *we're done,* |
| 4 | el día de hoy. | *today.* |
| 5 | (0.3) | |
| 6 | Muchas gracias. | *Thank you very much.* |
| 7 | (0.4) | |
| 8  Ernesto: | De nada. | *You're welcome.* |
| 9  Ita Ndivi: | Okay. | |
| 10 | **Táxaˈví-ún**. | ***Thank you.*** |
| | gracias=2SG | |
| 11 Ernesto: | **Txaˈví-ún**. | ***Thanks. <RAPID SPEECH >*** |
| | gracias=2SG | |
| 12 Ita Ndivi: | **"Táxaˈví mí-ún" kajchǔn**. | ***Say "thanks to you."*** |
| | gracias SPEC=2SG  POT.say.2SG | |

| 13 Ernesto: | **Txaˈví mí-ún**. | *Thanks to you. <RAPID SPEECH>* |
| | gracias SPEC=2SG | |
| 14 | (0.4) | |
| 15 Ita Ndivi: | Oh. | |
| 16 | **Vàˈa-va**. | *Good.* |
| | good-DM | |
| 17 | **Kùtoˈvún loˈo**? | *Did you learn a little?* |
| | PFV.learn=2SG little | |
| 18 Ernesto: | Uh huh. | |
| 19 Ita Ndivi: | **Ndzíaa-ya kùtoˈvún sa**. | *Well, what did you learn.* |
| | which=INAN PFV.learn.2SG well | |
| 20 | (0.8) | |
| 21 Ernesto: | Um, | |
| 22 | (1.1) | |
| 23 | um, | |
| 24 | (1.1) | |
| 25 Ita Ndivi: | **Xíñún ndzíaa kùtoˈvún**. | *Do you know what you learned.* |
| | IPFV.know.2SG which PFV.learn.2SG | |
| 26 | (0.5) | |
| 27 | **Loˈo-va**? | *A little bit?* |
| | little-DM | |
| 28 Ernesto: | Uh huh. | |
| 29 Ita Ndivi: | Oh. | |
| 30 | **Kamu vàˈa-va sa**. | *Okay, well, good then.* |
| | okay good-DM well | |
| 31 | **Táxaˈví-ún**. | *Thank you.* |
| | gracias=2SG | |
| 32 | (1.5) | |
| 33 Ernesto: | Oh. | |
| 34 Ita Ndivi: | **Txaˈví-ún**. | *Thanks. <RAPID SPEECH>* |
| | gracias=2SG | |

In lines 1-9, Ita Ndivi formally closes the elicitation portion of the interaction, again using a sequence that resembles my own recording sessions with her (Section 5.5.1). She thanks Ernesto in line 6, he responds "de nada" ('you're welcome') in line 8, and she replies "okay" in line 9, thus completing the thanking sequence. In the next line, she code-switches into Mixtec to say "táxaˈví-ún" ('thank you'). Unlike line 8, however, in which Ernesto supplies the appropriate second pair part (Schegloff 2007) of the Spanish thanking routine, his next utterance is not the standard second pair part of *táxaˈví-ún*. Instead, he treats line 10 as yet another repetition prompt. This demonstrates that the local interactional function of Ita Ndivi's code-switch is not in fact thanking her brother—an action which has already taken

place in Spanish—but rather reopening the socialization space. Ernesto repeats "txaˈví-ún" in line 11 with the reduced vowels characteristic of rapid Mixtec speech (DiCanio et al. 2015). Ita Ndivi then uses the performative verb *kajchǔn*, also found in Example 15, to introduce a longer, slightly more polite variant of 'thank you' (line 12). Line 13 clearly illustrates Ernesto's receptive Mixtec competence: instead of parroting the entirety of line 12, he says only the target phrase "Txaˈví mí-ún." His repetition is a selective one, having been "shaped … to satisfy his obligations as a conversational partner" (Ochs 1977: 131), which include appropriately recognizing and responding to his sister's prompts. Ita Ndivi positively evaluates his repetition by saying "Vàˈa-va" ('Good', line 16), thereby embodying the role of linguistic expert (cf. Cazden 1988).

In the rest of the interaction, Ita Ndivi pivots away from lexical socialization to ask Ernesto what he has learned. All of her remaining utterances are in Mixtec. Although Ernesto's responses are minimal, whether out of shyness or reticence, they are sequentially appropriate nonetheless. To close the recording, Ita Ndivi says, "Táxaˈví-ún" twice more (lines 31 and 34), this time actually thanking Ernesto for his participation as well as reinforcing the politeness routine. The fact that the closing routines of the interaction unfold in Mixtec is significant because it tacitly communicates a normative message, or what McCarty and colleagues (2009: 302) have called an "implicit language policy." Positioning Mixtec as the matrix language of this interaction serves as a metonymic reminder to Ernesto that Mixtec is the primary language of his relationship with Ita Ndivi, and indeed his entire family.

**5.5.3 Discussion**

Although wordlists can be useful for language documentation, within the context of language maintenance and revitalization, they do not necessarily provide an ideal means for heritage learners to engage with the language (Ahlers 2009: 238). In its original form, I would not have recommended that Ita Ndivi use the wordlist in **Appendix III** as a socialization tool. Certain items were difficult to explain, such as the difference between inclusive and exclusive first-person plural pronouns, and there were other items that Ernesto found confusing, like 'brother of a man' in Example 15.

Furthermore, due to the highly structured nature of this interaction, Ita Ndivi was by and large unable to impel Ernesto to produce novel Mixtec utterances (for instance, responses to her off-script questions and prompts, as in Example 16). To be sure, repetition plays an important role in language socialization (Ochs 1977), and Ita Ndivi's own non-scripted Mixtec discourse provided Ernesto with grammatical information whether or not he actively recycled those structures in his own speech. Still, it is notable that he responded minimally, albeit appropriately according to the structure of the interaction, when asked to generate responses to his sister's Mixtec questions. In the Navajo community, as McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda have written, "youth may possess greater Native language proficiency than they show, 'hiding' it out of shame or embarrassment" (2006: 670). While Ernesto clearly understood Ita Ndivi's queries, and likewise did when his parents spoke to him in Mixtec, he may have been likewise "cloaking" his Mixtec abilities in this socialization encounter (Mendoza-Denton 2008: 110). It is possible that his reticence to speak was connected to the 'children talk like *Mixteco Alto* speakers' ideology. As discussed in Section 5.4, metalinguistic commentary on US-born children's speech can be a sensitive subject,

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sometimes to the point of preventing youth from wanting to speak Mixtec at all. The nature of this socialization interaction, in which Ernesto's language abilities were the subject of focused attention, may have unintentionally created a similar sense of pressure and scrutiny. Although the *Mixteco Alto* label was not directly invoked in this recording, perhaps its effects were visible nonetheless.

Creating a socialization space with a documentary wordlist and an audio recorder may not have been an ideal learning experience for Ernesto, but it is a remarkable illustration of Ita Ndivi's resourcefulness. It demonstrates how Indigenous youth can be key agents of language maintenance in their communities. My instructions upon giving Ita Ndivi the recorder were deliberately underspecified, a broad request that she document her interactions with friends and family. She exercised her agency by taking this request as an opportunity to create a socialization space, repurposing the research encounter in the service of her own maintenance goals. Her choice to put her previously acquired research training and interviewing skills to use for this goal was likewise agentive, as was the decision to reimagine the documentary wordlist as a socialization tool.

The wordlist was intended to be used in the elicitation genre, but by shifting her footing between the roles of eliciter and linguistic expert, Ita Ndivi rekeyed the interactional frame to focus on socialization. Because the wordlist was not optimized for pedagogical use, she chose to supplement it with cultural and linguistic context to aid Ernesto's learning. Ita Ndivi employed numerous socialization strategies in service of this goal: prompting, physical demonstration and pointing, overt juxtapositions of Spanish and Mixtec forms, comprehension checks, cross-code recasts, grounding vocabulary in his personal experience,

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and providing relational context (Clark and Wong 2002) and definitions for unfamiliar words in both Mixtec and Spanish.

The use of these strategies allowed Ita Ndivi to model how to be a competent and polite Mixtec speaker, as well as a competent multilingual, although with the implicit language policy that Mixtec is—or at least ought to be—the primary language of their family. Through her choice of pronouns, she also nudged Ernesto to think of himself as a legitimate speaker of Mixtec. This effort takes on added significance in light of the *Mixteco Alto* labeling ideology discussed in Section 5.4. Ita Ndivi projects Ernesto's membership not just within the broad umbrella category of Mixtec speakers, but specifically within the same group to which she, their family, and the rest of their hometown community belong. When coupled with the subtle promotion of Mixtec as the primary language of home life, this older sister's identity work on behalf of her younger brother acts in opposition to some of the forces of language shift.

A final point has to do with the significance of the research encounter itself. Meek has argued that "every interaction by children and adults is a potentially transformative socializing event because practices and beliefs are emergent" (2007: 36). In the long term, the very practice of recording Mixtec for research purposes could potentially have a transformative effect on Ernesto's beliefs about the language. According to Ochs and Schieffelin, "language-acquiring children acquire values associated with each code through participation in social activities involving code selection … [and] cultural values attached to particular codes do impact the acquisition (or nonacquisition) of those codes" (1995: 92-93). Ita Ndivi's choice to record herself speaking Mixtec with Ernesto is a signal of the inherent value of the language, one which could positively influence his desire to continue speaking

it in the future. By recording this interaction in particular, Ita Ndivi showed her brother that not only is Mixtec a language worth practicing, but also one worth preserving and sharing with a wider audience—a language to speak proudly, even when those outside his own family are listening.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has put forth two main arguments, one my own and the other Ita Ndivi's. First, I presented Ita Ndivi's explanation of the affective consequences of labeling children's non-adult-like speech as 'sounding like *Mixteco Alto*'. Although the *Mixteco Alto* label may not be overtly stigmatizing, Ita Ndivi argued that it nonetheless contributes to youth's linguistic insecurity, which can in turn motivate shift away from Mixtec (cf. Abtahian and Quinn 2017; Wyman 2013). These findings differ from those of previous studies because the *Mixteco Alto* label does not have to do with the concept of "correctness" *per se*. Instead of rendering an aesthetic judgment about children's Mixtec pronunciation or casting their speech aside as "illegitimate" or "impure," the *Alto* label simply locates them as representing the variety of a different hometown. By all accounts it is a (purportedly) neutral assessment of difference which does not appear to be linked to prestige. Because the *Alto* label functions as an assessment of family (non)resemblance, however, Ita Ndivi believed that it discursively alienated young children and in some cases made them avoid speaking Mixtec entirely. This hypothesis, which in its current form stems from the observations and language ideologies of a single participant-researcher, provides a clear direction for future interviews with other language-shifting youth about their affective experiences of language loss and metalinguistic labeling.

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*Mixteco Alto*'s reported emotional effects do not fully explain shift and maintenance in the Mixtec diaspora, however. Language shift in this community is complex and multicausal. Throughout my teaching and research with Mixtec young people, no two individuals gave exactly the same explanation for why they and their siblings did or did not undergo shift. One young woman who mentioned that her family often made comments about her Mixtec nevertheless blamed her shift to Spanish and English on heavy bullying at school rather than family-internal factors. Some youth simply did not report being the object of any family commentary. Ita Ndivi herself ascribed Ernesto's reticence to speak Mixtec to additional factors beyond just *Mixteco Alto* comments, such as stigma from classmates. Still, as discussed in Section 5.4, she clearly attributed a certain degree of causality to this metalinguistic labeling practice. Ita Ndivi's observation is a natural point of entry for further investigating the ideological and metalinguistic factors that drive Mixtec shift in diaspora.

This chapter also identified certain steps that Ita Ndivi took to counter her brother's linguistic insecurity and to interrupt or reverse his language shift in progress. Using Goffman's concepts of keying (1974) and production format (1981), Section 5.5 showed how she exercised her agency by transforming the elicitation session genre into an opportunity for language socialization. Analysis of the socialization interaction showed how Ita Ndivi served as a speaker role model for Ernesto in a way that reinforced his Mixtec skills, provided cultural socialization and normative linguistic lessons, and modeled pride in Indigenous language skills. Through the structure of the interaction, she also worked to project and manifest a desired possible subject position for Ernesto as a confident and competent Mixtec speaker, not just a receptive trilingual. Based on their work with a community of Zapotec speakers in Los Angeles, Martínez and Mesinas write that

"[Zapoteca] women's efforts to make connections between their own hometowns and their children's lives can be seen as forms of translocal place-making" (2019: 141). I have argued that the same is also true of Ita Ndivi's efforts to ensure that her brother spoke their hometown Mixtec variety—that is, that he did not talk 'like those who speak *Mixteco Alto*'. These efforts are is themselves a form of "translocal place-making" that nurture second-generation immigrant children's connection to their parents' hometown.

Ita Ndivi chose to exercise her agency in this way in part due to a strongly positive "impact belief" (De Houwer 1999) in her own capacity to influence Ernesto's language use. She created the socialization encounter by repurposing the tools at her disposal—interviewing skills and experience, an audio recorder and microphone, and a linguistic wordlist. Machado-Casas (2012) has coined the phrase "pedagogías del camaleón/pedagogies of the chameleon" to refer to the survival strategies of Indigenous Latinx immigrants in the Southern United States as they "use fluid multicultural identities to camouflage and protect themselves from marginalization, xenophobia, and anti-[I]ndigenous sentiments" (2012: 543). I propose a similar metaphor for the data analyzed here: *magpie pedagogy*, or alternatively *magpie language maintenance*. Magpies famously collect a wide variety of useful non-organic objects and build them into the structure of their nests. In her interaction with Ernesto, Ita Ndivi acted in a similarly discerning and resourceful manner by taking stock of the tools and skills in her possession, envisioning new purposes for them, and using them to build a nurturing home for the next generation of language users.

Because this interaction was closely constrained by the wordlist, it is not an illustration of traditional Mixtec language socialization. Whether in the Mixteca or in the diaspora, scant scholarly attention that has been paid to Mixtec language socialization (with the exception of

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Rojas Santos 2011). For this reason, a great deal of foundational ethnographic research (cf. Sherzer 1977) would be required to ascertain whether Ita Ndivi's interaction with Ernesto builds on, echoes, or transforms more traditional socialization practices and beliefs. Still, these data establish a reference point for any future analyses of Mixtec socialization.[33] It may be especially fruitful for subsequent research to compare socialization practices in the Mixteca region with those that take place in diaspora—both contexts in which the threat of language shift looms, but in very different sets of circumstances. Mixtec has survived despite nearly five hundred years of colonization. Families' language socialization processes and particular linguistic ideologies have surely played a fundamental role in these languages' resilience. How was this resilience brought about in the past, and how is it being accomplished today? How can longstanding strategies of resistance and survivance be borrowed, recontextualized, and built upon in diaspora, magpie-style, to ensure that the Mixtec languages continue to thrive? This chapter offers starting points for understanding the intersecting ideological dynamics of shift in the Mixtec diaspora, in addition to illustrating the remarkable creativity of individual young people who are determined that their language should survive.

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[33] One place to begin may be through the investigation of baby talk or child-directed speech. Based on my ethnographic data, it appears that Mixtec mothers sometimes use phonological substitutions in speech to children: for instance, *se'i* 'my child' becomes *che'i* in baby talk (this tonal transcription may not be not exact), at least in the Santiago Petlacala variety.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

## 6.1 Main findings

This dissertation has analyzed metalinguistic labels and related language ideologies in the diasporic Mixtec community in Ventura County, California. I presented three interconnected analyses of the discursive uses and social consequences of the "imagined dialects" (Campbell-Kibler 2012) of *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto*. These labels and the relationship between them provide insight into three aspects of the sociolinguistic landscape of this community: the onomastic strategies speakers use to make sense of dialectal diversity, salient sociolinguistic variation (both intradialectal and interdialectal), and language shift and maintenance.

Chapter 3 outlined three types of metalinguistic labeling strategies that Mixtec speakers in the diaspora employ to talk about the remarkable linguistic diversity in Ventura County's Mixtec community. The first is to use descriptive terms like *tono* to locate generic difference, while the second is to refer to linguistic varieties by the names of villages or municipalities where they are spoken, thereby mapping linguistic difference onto geographical origin. The third strategy is the use of language names, both in Mixtec (*Tu'un Savi* and *Tu'un Nda'vi*) and in Spanish (*Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*). As I discussed, although the terms *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* are geographical classifications and not linguistic ones (referring to 'Highlands Mixtec' and 'Lowlands Mixtec', respectively), they have been adopted by both linguists and speakers as classificatory labels. Many Mixtecs in Ventura County self-identify as speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*, but this is a broad umbrella term that comprises numerous distinct village varieties. The vast majority of Mixtec varieties

spoken in Ventura County come from the Mixteca Baja region, while Mixteca Alta varieties are exceedingly rare. Nevertheless, I demonstrated that self-identified speakers of *Mixteco Bajo* use the label *Mixteco Alto* as a way to refer to varieties which they perceive as distinctly different from their own. This is true even if those varieties are entirely remote from the Mixteca Alta region, such as those from Guerrero. Therefore, I argued that *Mixteco Alto* projects an "imagined speech community" (Pratt 1987), which may not in fact include many speakers of Alta varieties at all. Furthermore, in part because the referent of *Mixteco Alto* can shift depending on the speaker, I argued that this label is only "partially enregistered" (Campbell-Kibler 2012: 281): it does not denote any single particular variety, nor does it consistently index particular social practices, linguistic features, personae, or normative evaluations. That is, it is neither an assessment of incorrectness nor one of higher or lower status; rather, it is fundamentally an assertion of linguistic difference from self.

This resemiotization of *Mixteco Bajo* to one's own linguistic variety and *Mixteco Alto* to other varieties (especially those for which the village name is unknown) is accomplished by a series of linked semiotic processes. The erasure of the third dialect macro-category *Mixteco de la Costa* allows the binarization of *Alto* and *Bajo*, which relies on the modifiers' antonymic relationship (i.e., 'high' and 'low'). This binarized distinction is then projected onto the lower level of 'other' versus 'self' through the process of fractal recursivity (Irvine and Gal 2000). Some self-identified *Bajo* speakers also project this distinction onto the Mixtec endonyms *Tu'un Savi* 'language of the rain' and *Tu'un Nda'vi* 'language of the humble', preferring to self-identify as speakers of *Tu'un Nda'vi* because of the reinterpretation of *Bajo* 'low' from a geographical term to a status-based term, which is then perceived to correspond with *nda'vi* 'humble'. However, this ideological mapping is not

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universal, since many speakers of Baja varieties in Ventura County identify as speakers of *Tu'un Savi*. The ideologized use of these variety labels is thus an excellent example of what Law (2014: 159) calls "the dynamic and variable nature of language boundaries," that is, the fundamentally contested and contingent nature of linguistic differentiation. In short, *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* are "convenient fictions … [that] provide a useful way of understanding the world" for the extremely diverse multilingual and multivarietal Mixtec diaspora in Ventura County (Makoni and Pennycook 2005: 147). These terms are truly indexical; their varietal referents may differ entirely from speaker to speaker. To understand any given utterance of these terms, it is therefore necessary to take their discursive context of use into account.

Chapter 4 examined the discursive ecology of *Mixteco Alto* by showing how speakers employ this label to account for sociolinguistic variation beyond the spatial axis, as well as by investigating its use as a marker of meaningful spatial variation. I first demonstrated that the *Mixteco Alto* label is sometimes used to explain non-adult-like forms uttered by children who are in the process of acquiring Baja varieties of Mixtec. Calling children's pronunciations *Mixteco Alto* functions as a strategy for understanding age-based variation by recasting it in terms of geographical variation, which is extremely salient in the diaspora community. This use does not imply influence from Spanish or English, nor is it attached to judgments of "incorrectness" *per se*. It simply locates children as speaking in a way that differs from their family, but which resembles pronunciations one could plausibly hear among the diverse varieties spoken in Ventura County.

Second, I argued that the *Mixteco Alto* label offers a viewpoint on the real-time process of sociolinguistic variable formation in this setting of contact between multiple mutually

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intelligible varieties of Mixtec. Because *Mixteco Alto* describes speech which is noticeably and nameably different from the speaker's own, it points the way to features which are salient sites of variation across adult Mixtec varieties. Ita Ndivi, a self-identified *Bajo* speaker of the El Paredón variety from the municipality of San Martín Peras, Oaxaca, identified two particular features of her younger brother's non-adult-like speech as sounding like *Mixteco Alto*: level pitch where her variety has a rising tone, and the stop [t] where her variety has the affricate [ts].

Rising tones are ideologically prominent in at least three varieties belonging to the Southern Baja dialect group (Josserand 1983), including Ita Ndivi's own self-identified *Mixteco Bajo* variety. They are contrasted with level tones in cognates from several varieties from other dialect groups, none of which are in fact from the Mixteca Alta region. This includes varieties from the Central Baja, Guerrero, and Mixtepec subgroups, as well as at least one other Southern Baja variety. However, my comparison of cognate forms revealed that rising tones are robustly (but by no means exclusively) associated with varieties from the San Martín Peras municipality, which is the home municipality of a significant plurality of Mixtecs in Ventura County. Ita Ndivi's usage of *Mixteco Alto* therefore reflects an emergent ideological mapping: her own variety of *Mixteco Bajo* has rising tones and is from San Martín Peras, while *Mixteco Alto* can be used to name varieties from other municipalities that have level tones in cognate forms where San Martín Peras has /R/.

A similar pattern was discussed for the affricate [ts]. When Ita Ndivi's brother pronounced this sound as [t], she identified it as sounding like *Mixteco Alto*. Comparing cognates revealed that certain varieties, such as that from Tlahuapa (from the municipality of Alcozauca de Guerrero, Guerrero) and San Sebastián del Monte (from the municipality of

Santo Domingo Tonalá, Oaxaca) have [t] where the El Paredón variety has [ts], meaning

that these varieties may well have been perceived by Ita Ndivi as *Mixteco Alto* (although

neither are from Alta subgroups). Like rising tone, there was a strong correspondence

between varieties from San Martín Peras and the [ts] variant, although there were exceptions

(for example, [ts] is also found in a few varieties from other municipalities). Moreover,

metalinguistic discourse from additional community members strengthened the claim that

the affricated [ts] variant is ideologically associated with the speech of "los de San Martín"

('those from San Martín [Peras]'). Further illustrating the complexity of the language-

ideological landscape, however, this comment was made by a heritage speaker of a Peras

variety, but one which had [t] instead of [ts]. Like *Mixteco Alto*, the boundaries of *San*

*Martín* as an ideological category are therefore non-isomorphic with the geographical

borders of San Martín Peras.

The partial enregisterment of *Mixteco Alto*, with its shifting indexical meaning of

'variety which differs from the speaker's own', allows for the possibility that speakers of

different varieties may use it to label multiple variants of the same variable. For example, a

rising-tone speaker could call a level-tone speaker's pronunciation *Alto*, whereas the latter

could hear rising tones as *Alto*. Future research is needed on the discursive uses of *Mixteco*

*Alto*—as well as *San Martín*—among speakers of a range of varieties to fully understand the

labels' circulation and the scope of variation that they can be used to describe.

According to Mansfield and Stanford (2017), a frequent roadblock to conducting

variation-focused sociolinguistic research in understudied languages is the identification of

salient variables which differ along some axis of social meaning. This chapter demonstrated

that one way to approach this question is through careful discourse analysis of metalinguistic

commentary, even if it does not at first glance appear to concern the social dimension of variation which one is interested in studying. Ita Ndivi applied the term *Mixteco Alto* to age-graded variation, but upon further investigation the term provided insight into locally salient geographical variation as well. Any future study of variation in the Ventura County Mixtec diaspora should consider treating rising tone and [ts] versus [t] as variables of interest.

Ways of naming and talking about linguistic difference can reverberate in unexpected ways. While Chapters 3 and 4 dissected the shifting discursive uses of metalinguistic labels, Chapter 5 began by exploring the social and emotional consequences of describing someone's manner of speaking as *Mixteco Alto*. Like other acts of linguistic differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019), the practice of calling someone's speech *Mixteco Alto* can have material effects, such as a dramatic change in an individual's linguistic repertoire. This chapter explained Ita Ndivi's hypothesis that adults' use of *Mixteco Alto* to refer to child family members' non-adult-like pronunciation, as described in Chapter 4, can unintentionally provoke linguistic insecurity in those children and even make them not want to speak Mixtec, thereby augmenting existing pressures toward language shift.

In reflections on her own younger brothers' process of Mixtec acquisition, Ita Ndivi noted that they seemed discouraged by relatives' designation of their speech as *Alto*-like, even when it was not intended to convey a stigmatizing or deficit-based evaluation. She explained that metalinguistic comments such as this are employed as a language socialization tactic to regiment children's speech because adult speakers feel 'strange' upon hearing young relatives talking in a way that sounds like a different variety of Mixtec, and therefore want to motivate the children to speak more like their family members. According to Ita Ndivi, although this commentary may not be meant as a criticism, it can nevertheless

trigger intensely negative emotional responses in children due to the alienating effects of being positioned as a linguistic outsider to one's own family and hometown community. She argued that these emotions can even discourage children from speaking Mixtec entirely, prompting them to favor Spanish and English instead. In short, by deterring children's comfortable use of Mixtec, the *Mixteco Alto* label can have precisely the opposite effect from what was intended. Instead of guiding children to maintain the desired hometown variety, saying that their speech sounds like *Mixteco Alto* can instead precipitate language shift.

These findings demonstrate that family's language acquisition ideologies (Riley 2011), as reflected in metalinguistic commentary on children's speech, can influence the trajectory a language takes in diaspora, for instance by facilitating or hindering children's affective relationship to and use of the heritage language in the home. To be sure, this trajectory is affected by hegemonic ideologies as well; families working in the interest of language maintenance are by no means the primary responsible party for shift away from their language. Nonetheless, this chapter demonstrated that well-meaning, family-internal discourses of "difference" can unintentionally advance children's language shift, just like the more commonly analyzed set of "deficit" discourses can (Jones 2013; Labov 1972b).

The second portion of Chapter 5 illustrated Ita Ndivi's intervention into language shift in her own family by analyzing an unusual language socialization interaction she created for her seven-year-old brother Ernesto, who had receptive capacity in Mixtec but was still learning to speak it. This was accomplished by reimagining and repurposing the tools which were available to her thanks to her participation in linguistics research, including training in interview methods, an audio recorder, and a documentary wordlist. She first built a

socialization environment by transforming the elicitation speech genre, then expanded upon it to enrich the linguistic and cultural lessons she was able to teach her brother. During these "off-script" moments, Ita Ndivi used several socialization strategies, including prompting, recasts, and physical demonstration, to teach Ernesto a politeness routine and additional grammatical structures that were not included on the original wordlist. In addition to socializing Ernesto into linguistic structures on and off the wordlist, there were subtler moments of identity socialization as well. For example, Ita Ndivi introduced several new lexemes in both Mixtec and Spanish, but did so while using only Mixtec to define and explain their meanings. This socialized Ernesto into the normative understanding that while the siblings both command more than one language, it is Mixtec which ought to be the matrix language of their lives. Ita Ndivi also discursively constructed Ernesto as a ratified, successful speaker of their family's variety of Mixtec, which helped to build his connection to their parents' hometown as a member of the US-born second generation and also worked to foreclose the possibility that his speech could be heard to resemble *Mixteco Alto*.

Although language shift in the Mixtec diaspora is spurred by long-established and powerful social forces, even the most entrenched social structures are subject to transformation in the moment-to-moment of everyday interaction (Ahearn 2001), including through deliberate interventions by youth who are determined to interrupt the course of language shift in their own families. Chapter 5 demonstrated the power of young people like Ita Ndivi to make agentive choices to promote the longevity of their heritage languages within their local spheres of influence.

**6.2 Outstanding questions and directions for future research**

This dissertation has presented several language ideologies and strategies of linguistic differentiation, including the self-other relationship between *Bajo* and *Alto* (and their respective links to *Tu'un Nda'vi* and *Tu'un Savi*), Baja-speaking adults' explanation of children's non-adult-like speech in terms of *Mixteco Alto*, and the connection between *Mixteco Alto* and language shift for children. However, the full range and scope of these ideologies still need to be investigated. The Mixtec diaspora community in Ventura County is extremely complex and heterogeneous. In addition to speakers of over three dozen distinct Mixtec varieties (Bax et al. in prep.), the community includes trilingual and bilingual speakers, receptive multilinguals, Mixtec-dominant individuals, Spanish-dominant individuals, English-dominant individuals, former or childhood Mixtec speakers, individuals who have competency in more than one Indigenous language (e.g., both Zapotec and Mixtec) or more than one variety of Mixtec, and more. The findings presented here represent the language ideologies and practices found in only a small subset of the community. It would be far too hasty to claim them as representative before further research has taken place. While the *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* labels certainly circulate widely within Ventura County, as well as in other areas of the California diaspora (Morán-Lanier 2020), more work is needed to understand whether they bear the same ideological weight for other groups of speakers. Given the situated, particular nature of language ideologies, it is highly likely that there will be ideological differences along various lines of social difference, for instance among speakers from different hometowns in Oaxaca. Of particular interest is the use of the Spanish exonyms *Mixteco Bajo* and *Mixteco Alto* by Mixtec-dominant individuals. The self-identified *Tu'un Nda'vi* speaker discussed in Chapter 3,

Salvador, was Mixtec-dominant, yet his daughter Isabel still presented him as claiming the Spanish-language *Bajo* speaker label for himself. Whether this is a common use among other speakers who share his linguistic profile remains to be seen. Finally, while these broad labels are used by at least some speakers in the Mixteca region (Cynthia Montaño, p.c. 5/15/2020), another topic for future research concerns whether their indexical values and language-ideological uses resemble those in California.

Many questions still remain about the extent to which these language naming practices "reflexively (re)shape linguistic and social structures" (Gal and Woolard 2001: 3) in the Mixtec diaspora. For example, the full scope of *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo*'s effects on intra-group and inter-group dynamics in the diaspora community remains to be examined. Are there emergent feelings of solidarity among individuals who identify as speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*? On the other hand, are individuals' claims to speak *Mixteco Bajo* ever contested by other self-identified *Bajo* speakers from different villages? In addition, one clear direction for future research is the preferred glossonyms of individuals from the Mixteca Alta—that is, whether they self-identify as speakers of *Mixteco Alto* or if they use other metalinguistic strategies to talk about their languages.

By studying the discursive processes by which geolinguistic labels are used to rationalize and name patterns of variation, this dissertation has begun to answer Auer's call for linguists to "be attentive to how humans achieve localizations and, by doing so, construct language spaces" (2013: 14-15). It is not yet known how the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* metalinguistic labels contribute to ideological and social processes of "place-making" (Auer 2013)—that is, what ideas about the Mixteca Alta and Mixteca Baja regions are circulated via these labels, and how are they related to ideas about the languages called *Mixteco Alto*

and *Mixteco Bajo*? Similar questions apply for the *San Martín* metalinguistic label and the municipality of San Martín Peras. Understanding the indexical value of sociolinguistic variables which are linked to (and used to construct) these "language spaces" will be a crucial next phase of this research, as discussed in Chapter 4.

　　More broadly, the ideological process of place-making may go on to affect the dynamics of language contact in diaspora. The evaluation of one variant, metalinguistic category, or linguistic region as more prestigious than another, for example, could influence the results of intervarietal contact. The Mixtec contact situation in Ventura County has only arisen within the last few decades. It is an open question what linguistic outcomes will arise from the large-scale contact between so many regional varieties, as well as their contact with Spanish, English, and other languages. Based on studies conducted in other settings of dialect contact, such as Kerswill and Williams (2000), it has been observed that "in situations of intense contact between speakers of mutually intelligible dialects, dialect differences will be leveled—leading to the emergence of a uniform koiné—within one to two generations" (Skilton 2017: 99). Whether a similar process of koineization will take place in the Ventura County Mixtec community remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that the results of dialect contact will depend to a large extent on the social and semiotic value of variable forms—in other words, on language ideologies (Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2019), such as the metalinguistic labels this chapter has begun to document. Studies of language contact are often retrospective, requiring scholars to reconstruct the dynamics of social and linguistic change based on their known outcomes. Examining the emergence of meaningful variation and the enregisterment of metalinguistic labels in the Mixtec diaspora, however, provides an

opportunity to observe the semiotic dynamics of an extremely complex multivarietal and multilingual contact situation in real time.

The connection between language ideologies and language contact is necessarily also linked to questions of individual and collective identity. By understanding the implications of metalinguistic labels like *Mixteco Alto*, *Mixteco Bajo*, and *San Martín* for processes of individual and group identity construction, it will also be possible to explore how these ideological categories influence linguistic convergence or divergence (Giles 1973; Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis 1973). For instance, would a self-identified *Mixteco Bajo* speaker exhibit more divergence from an interlocutor whose variety they have labeled *Mixteco Alto*, or converge more with someone they deem to be another *Bajo* speaker? The interactional effects of these metalinguistic labels are a rich topic for future research.

Chapters 3 and 4 in particular yielded several findings about Mixtec variation and its perception and categorization. These findings lay the groundwork for future studies, whose next steps will include exploring the role that enregisterment of both individual variables and metalinguistic categories can play in determining the outcomes of dialect contact on both an intersubjective and a societal level.

## 6.3 Implications and reflections

### 6.3.1 Community research collaboration and language maintenance

This dissertation, especially the remarkable language socialization interaction analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5, would not have been possible without the labor, generosity, and thoughtful collaboration of the Mixtec young women who worked with me as participant-researchers. Ita Ndivi, in particular, was highly involved with the research process for the

analyses presented in this dissertation. She collaborated with me at multiple stages of research, including data collection, data processing, and analysis (particularly during the playback interview discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). The core argument presented in Chapter 5, that the *Mixteco Alto* label is a possible contributor to youth language shift, is hers. As I discussed in that chapter, without Ita Ndivi's insight, I would have likely overlooked the negative emotional consequences of the *Mixteco Alto* label for young learners of Mixtec, at least without conducting additional ethnographic research with younger children. Her immense contribution to this research proves Leonard and Haynes' point that "members of a given speech community have important insights about their language that may not be immediately clear to the linguistic researcher, but that may be revealed as part of ongoing conversations about a project" (2010: 289). Collaboration with community members can reveal insider perspectives that can greatly enrich analyses of the ideological dynamics of shift and maintenance.

By presenting Ita Ndivi's theorization of the link between *Mixteco Alto* and language shift, Chapter 5 responded to the call put forth by Odango (2015) to incorporate youth perspectives and theories into academic discussions of shift. However, there is a gap between the research process and the research product in this regard. In their current form, these results have been compiled for and presented to purely academic audiences, but Odango's exhortation to include youth voices envisions a more important purpose for research of this type: "the development of a literature that can inspire other people in their life-long work in reclaiming their ancestral/heritage languages" (2015: 52). As a next step, I plan to have a conversation with Ita Ndivi and the other participant-researchers about the findings presented here in which I will ask their thoughts on presenting this work to a

broader audience—both the connection between *Mixteco Alto* and language shift and the use of the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* labels in general. (I had originally intended to schedule this conversation during the spring of 2020, but the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has changed the timeline.)

Ita Ndivi, in particular, considers herself an agent of cultural change. She has repeatedly emphasized that one of her life goals is to "motivar a las personas indígenas" ('to motivate Indigenous people'), especially young women, to accomplish their dreams and to be proud of their Indigenous identities. Speaking from his own perspective as a receptive bilingual and heritage speaker of Tagalog who has worked hard to reclaim the language as an adult, Odango underscores the importance of reminding youth from Indigenous and other marginalized communities "that singular desire can lead to action that inspires other people in similar scenarios [of language shift]. For a person to know that she or he is not alone in her or his experiences with the ancestral/heritage language is positive encouragement to keep moving forward, regardless of the challenges that remain ahead" (2015: 51). Ita Ndivi's "magpie" language maintenance work, born out of her desire to interrupt language shift in her family, has the potential to inspire other young people to attempt similar interventions if it is made visible to a wider audience of youth in the Indigenous Mexican diaspora. In fact, she has already begun to create material for this audience by posting inspirational videos to her social media channels about being a proud Indigenous woman and a proud speaker of Mixtec. Some of these videos were recorded with the microphone which Ita Ndivi used to collect data for this project, further demonstrating her ability to mobilize her participation in linguistics research to fulfill the overarching goal of maintaining her language in diaspora.

Ita Ndivi's theory of language shift suggests that addressing linguistic insecurity among youth can be an important focus of Mixtec language maintenance and reclamation efforts in Ventura County (cf. Abtahian and Quinn 2017). The revalorization of Indigenous languages is already a priority of certain Indigenous-led organizations in California (e.g., ECO 2013), including the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), which has launched a range of programming to strengthen youth's positive relationships with their heritage languages and cultures as well as to combat bullying and stigma encountered at school. Such efforts primarily speak out against the linguistic insecurity caused by external forces of oppression. However, these findings suggest that it is also important to address linguistic insecurity that arises from within the Mixtec community, even if it stems from metalinguistic commentary which is not intended to be critical.

Whether focused on internal family discourses or external sources of discrimination, linguists' efforts to support Mixtec language maintenance in California should center the perspectives of those who are most immediately implicated in shift: the youth themselves. Youth have long had a seat at the metaphorical table in Indigenous Mexicans' activism and advocacy in Ventura County, such as through MICOP's Tequio Youth Group, which has supported youth campaigns to ban anti-Indigenous slurs in local schools (Moragas 2012) as well as the organization of a youth mental health conference (Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project 2019), among others. There is ample energy for language-focused work among youth, as evidenced by the enthusiasm with which young people have participated in the sociocultural linguistics classes that have been offered in partnership with MICOP since 2016 through UCSB's School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society (SKILLS) program. While teaching this class, I have observed individual young people resolve to only

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speak Zapotec with their siblings or vow that their future children will learn Mixtec. Many youth in this community already have visions of their languages growing and thriving. Linguists can provide appropriate resources to help them realize these visions, starting by gaining a better understanding of what youth are already doing, as I have done in this project. For example, it may be helpful to ask youth about what their current family language policies are and why they believe this is the case, what obstacles they perceive toward speaking Mixtec in the home, and what resources they need to overcome these obstacles. For those resources which linguists are able to provide to support youth language maintenance, it will be important to confirm that all materials reflect and label dialectal variation in a clear and consistent way, avoiding any ambiguity that might result from the *Mixteco Alto* or *Mixteco Bajo* labels.

## 6.3.2 Metalinguistic labels and the discourse of linguists

### 6.3.2.1 Discourses of difference

The finding that the metalinguistic identification of difference can be detrimental to language maintenance has implications for the discursive practices of linguists and linguistic anthropologists. The last two decades have seen a reflexive turn in certain corners of these disciplines, especially among socioculturally-oriented scholars and those who work in language revitalization and reclamation (e.g., Bauman and Briggs 2003; Costa 2013; Davis 2017; Debenport 2010; Dobrin, Austin, and Nathan 2009; Duchêne and Heller 2007; England 2003; Errington 2003, 2008; Heller and McElhinny 2017; Hill 2002; Whitely 2003). This work has involved placing our own professional discourses under the analytic microscope in order to examine the ideologies and worldviews that they subtly presuppose

and reproduce, as well as the effects of these discourses on the very languages and communities with which we work. Certain discourses have been shown to be detrimental to both current and potential speakers, such as the "enumeration" of endangered languages (Moore, Pietikäinen, and Blommaert 2010; Muehlmann 2012a, 2012b) and the designation of certain languages as "dying" or "extinct" (Leonard 2008, 2011; Odango 2015; Perley 2012).

In addition to the professional discourses we create, it is important to be reflexive about the way linguists interact with speakers (e.g., Briggs 1986). For example, Ahlers (2009) recounts how, when she was working with an older speaker of Elem Pomo, they were visited by a senior linguist who had extensive knowledge of related Pomo languages, which he confidently demonstrated to the speaker: "He attempted to elicit a paradigm from her, and when she couldn't produce some of the forms, he produced the forms himself on the basis of his knowledge of the sound changes among related languages. It was an amazing performance of his competence as a linguist; the immediate result, however, was silence from [the consultant], who later stated how impressed she was that he knew her language, but also how intimidated she was by the expression of that knowledge" (2009: 238). This linguist's performance of professional expertise effectively silenced the speaker, thrusting her into a state of linguistic insecurity. By rendering speakers shy or self-conscious, linguists' own metalinguistic commentary, and especially their assertion of professional expertise over speakers' own knowledge, can therefore cause harm.

Paralleling the connection between *Mixteco Alto* and language shift that was discussed in Chapter 5, metalinguistic remarks to speakers that linguists often assume are harmless or even beneficial—such as noting that an individual's speech is different from the variety with

which we are most familiar—can in fact have adverse effects. Early on in this research, I had this experience first-hand with a former speaker of Mixtec whom I call Isabel. Isabel's first language was Mixtec, but she shifted away from actively using it once she started middle school. While she was receptively trilingual, she often expressed linguistic insecurity to me about her ability to speak Mixtec. During one of our interviews, a bird ran by right outside the window. I asked her if she knew the word for 'bird' in her mother's variety of Mixtec. She did — *saa*. I mentioned what, to me, was a fun and puzzling tidbit: that 'bird' is *laa* in some other varieties, which demonstrates a fairly unusual s~l correspondence. However, Isabel's immediate response was to doubt herself: she said that she had probably remembered the word incorrectly and the "correct" answer was much more likely to be the form I had produced (which was from a different variety altogether). My comment was meant as nothing more than a "fun fact," a simple identification of linguistic difference. However, because Isabel read it as an assertion of my expert status, it made her feel that she was not speaking her own language, with which she already had a tenuous and complex relationship, "correctly." "Just noticing" difference or variation as a linguist may seem innocuous, but it is nonetheless a form of metalinguistic labeling. And as this dissertation has demonstrated, it is important to be careful about metalinguistic remarks, especially when working with heritage speakers or others who are particularly vulnerable to linguistic insecurity and shift.

### 6.3.2.2 Discourses of place

My findings also echo scholars like Johnstone (2004) and Auer (2005, 2013), who have urged sociolinguists to treat place as an ideologically contested and culturally constructed

category, rather than naturalizing it as if it were an objective fact. The findings presented in this dissertation have shown that such a shift in perspective is important for all linguists who work with languages that exhibit geographical variation, not just those whose research is sociolinguistic in nature. Within the descriptive and dialectological literature on Mixtec, a speaker's home region or village has generally been assumed to correspond to their patterns of speech in a straightforward manner. However, most of that research has not made visible the interactional and discursive processes through which individual speakers come to be seen as representing the variety of an entire village. Furthermore, many individuals have complex migration histories through which they may have come into contact with other varieties; it is also not uncommon for marriages to take place between individuals from different villages, meaning that their children grow up hearing two varieties. Locating an individual as a speaker of a particular variety is not in fact a self-evident task, but rather has to do with contingent notions of identity and belonging and local discourses of linguistic differentiation (Belew 2018; Leonard and Haynes 2010).

This dissertation has shown that the place-based categories and labels that speakers assign both to others and to themselves, such as *San Martín* and *Mixteco Bajo*, do not necessarily match up with similarly-named dialectological categories. Future research on Mixtec variation and dialectology must carefully consider discursive context, as well as individual speakers' linguistic and migratory biographies, to ascertain the referent of metalinguistic labels like *Mixteco Bajo*, *Mixteco Alto*, and *San Martín*, instead of assuming the unambiguous correspondence of these terms to varieties associated with particular geographical zones. Highlighting these details will have the added benefit of making visible the layered linguistic life histories of many speakers, which can illuminate patterns of

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linguistic contact and influence that more traditional classificatory approaches all too easily gloss over.

Furthermore, this research calls into question linguists' own categories of linguistic differentiation for the Mixtec languages—or at the very least, the received names for them. Josserand's (1983) subgroups are the most extensive Mixtec comparative work that exists to date, but they are nonetheless limited, having been proposed on the basis of segmental correspondences only. While they represent an astonishing amount of dedication and scholarship, her twelve dialect groups nonetheless do not systematically take mutual intelligibility or historical connections between villages into account. Nearly 40 years after her work was completed, these groups have not been substantially revised to incorporate new linguistic evidence, nor new data about social ties and patterns of interaction between village varieties both in the Mixteca and in the growing diaspora. Although the names of subgroups like *Southern Baja*, *Northeastern Alta*, and so on can be useful for discussing varietal classification, my findings underscore the need for linguists to be more specific and deliberate with these labels when talking about interdialectal variation, both in scholarly contexts and with members of the community. *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* may mean one thing in a dialectological context but quite another when used to signal the self-other distinction outlined in Chapter 3. We must take care to avoid conflating these two usages or assuming that community members and linguists are necessarily using these terms in the same way.

### 6.3.3 Material consequences of the *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* labels

Finally, while labels like *Mixteco Alto* and *Mixteco Bajo* simplify the sociolinguistic landscape, such simplification can have unintended material consequences. As Sériot writes, "[t]he moment a language has a name, it becomes … a linguistic referent, which can easily be confused with a real material one" (1997: 167, translated and cited by Migge and Léglise 2013: 120). There are high-stakes situations in which it is very important to correctly ascertain which variety of Mixtec an individual speaks, such as assigning them a medical or legal interpreter who speaks the correct variety. Because "the delineation of sociolinguistic space is always situated" (Vaughan 2018: 127), it is fully possible to imagine a situation in which, for example, a client and an interpreter who speak two distinct varieties might be inappropriately matched because they both self-identify as speakers of *Mixteco Bajo*. On the other hand, that client could be inappropriately assigned an Alta-speaking interpreter by a Baja-speaking staff member who referred to the client's unfamiliar Baja variety as *Mixteco Alto* (cf. Marie Uliasz 2018). Companies and organizations that provide translation and interpretation services, such as the one discussed in Chapter 3, must be very careful to avoid erasing their clients' dialectal diversity via overly broad uses of the *Bajo* and *Alto* labels. In California, Marie Uliasz reports that some organizations that advocate for Indigenous immigrants have attempted to prevent interpreter-client mismatches by "distribut[ing] 'I Speak' cards to Indigenous language speakers that list the language they speak and their hometown (to help identify their linguistic variant)" (2018: 50). It is equally important for other organizations and individuals that serve Mixtec speakers, such as schools, public service providers, hospitals, and speech-language pathologists (Bax and Enevoldsen 2020) to be made aware of this need.

To be clear, such efforts are already underway at Indigenous-run community organizations like MICOP. Their social media pages often post videos in which staff members inform the community about important topics, such as COVID-19 safety, while speaking Mixtec; such videos are always prominently labeled with the name of the village variety being spoken. Their own interpreter training program also strives to build capacity in as many varieties as possible. For example, in 2017 I collaborated with MICOP's Indigenous medical interpreters' network on a project to create translations of anatomical diagrams into several different varieties of Mixtec, each of which was clearly labeled with its village of origin. Indigenous community leaders are well aware of the need to support speakers of a wide range of varieties and languages, and they have already begun to make significant inroads toward that goal. What I am suggesting is that linguists can help amplify this message.

As highly educated scholars with institutional clout and access to policymakers, linguists can act as "accomplices" (Arnold 2019) to the Indigenous Mexican community in a number of ways. For example, we can design materials to explain Mixtec (and Zapotec) linguistic diversity to non-Mixtec service providers in the local area, as well as local government officials. Materials like this could emphasize the consequential differences between two varieties of "the same language" and impress upon readers the importance of matching clients with interpreters who speak the same village variety. In addition, linguists can write opinion pieces for local newspapers to educate the public about Indigenous languages, serve as expert witnesses, submit public comments at city council meetings, and lobby local and state governments—for instance, to fund interpreter training programs to support speakers of a wider range of varieties (Marie Uliasz 2018). Until there is widespread public awareness

of the extent of linguistic diversity among Indigenous Mexican immigrants, it will be crucial to continue to educate non-Mixtec public officials, teachers, and healthcare providers about the differences between village varieties. By working in partnership with Indigenous-led efforts to expand language access for the over 200,000 Indigenous Mexicans who live in California, linguists can use our influence as scholars to materially improve the living conditions of a marginalized speech community.

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# Appendix I

## Transcription conventions

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| , | continuing intonation | % | glottalization |
| . | final falling intonation | @ | laughter |
| ? | final rising intonation | # | inaudible syllable |
| — | truncated speech | < > | non-verbal element |
| (0.0) | timed pause | : | lengthening |
| [ ] | overlapping speech | xx | prosodic emphasis |
| * | non-match with adult form | | |
| **xx** | **Mixtec** | xx | Spanish |
| *xx* | *translation of Mixtec* | *xx* | *translation of Spanish* |

# Appendix II

## El Paredón Mixtec orthography

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| < nd > [ ⁿd ] | < x > [ ʃ ] | < ó > high (H) tone | < ǒ > rising (R) tone |
| < nch > [ ⁿdʒ ] | < y > [ j ~ ʒ ] | < o > mid (M) tone | < ô > falling (F) tone |
| < ñ > [ ɲ ] | < j > [ h ] | < ò > low (L) tone | < - > clitic boundary |
| < ' > [ ʔ ] | < r > [ ɾ ] | | |
| < kw > [ kʷ ] | < Vn > nasal vowel | | |
| < ch > [ tʃ ] | | | |

All other orthographic symbols have their expected IPA value.

# Appendix III

## Documentary wordlist

Lista de palabras: Mixteco de _____    (adaptado de E. Campbell, 2019)
Hablante: _____

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | tortilla |
| 2 | frijol / bean |
| 3 | calabaza / squash |
| 4 | pajarito / bird |
| 5 | árbol / tree |
| 6 | agua / water |
| 7 | cielo / sky |
| 8 | huevo / egg |
| 9 | sal / salt |
| 10 | comal / griddle |
| 11 | río / river |
| 12 | conejo / rabbit |
| 13 | venado / deer |
| 14 | hormiga / ant |
| 15 | zopilote / vulture |
| 16 | masa / corn dough |
| 17 | miel / honey |
| 18 | semilla / seed |
| 19 | huarache / sandal |
| 20 | jícara / gourd |
| 21 | ejote / green bean |
| 22 | hueso / bone |
| 23 | sol / sun |
| 24 | nopal / prickly pear cactus leaf |
| 25 | rocío, sereno / dew |
| 26 | humo / smoke |
| 27 | palabra / word |
| 28 | frío / cold |
| 29 | crudo / raw, unripe |
| 30 | dulce / sweet |
| 31 | hermano de un hombre / brother (of a man) |
| 32 | piel / skin |
| 33 | enfermedad / illness |
| 34 | ceja / eyebrow |
| 35 | mano / hand |
| 36 | tu mano / your hand |

| | |
|---|---|
| 37 | mi mano / my hand |
| 38 | su mano de él / his hand |
| 39 | su mano de ella / her hand |
| 40 | nuestras manos (de todos) / (all of) our hands |
| 41 | nuestras manos (de mí y otro, no de ti) / our hands (of me and other(s), excluding you) |
| 42 | sus manos de ustedes / you all's hands |
| 43 | sus manos de ellos / their hands |
| 44 | su pata (del perro) / (the dog's) paw |
| 45 | Mixteco (idioma) |
| 46 | ustedes |
| 47 | ustedes cantan |
| 48 | ella canta |
| 49 | él canta |
| 50 | día |
| 51 | chile |
| 52 | arco iris |
| 53 | perro |
| 54 | bonito |
| 55 | cerro |
| 56 | cola |
| 57 | ancho / wide |
| 58 | lodo / mud |
| 59 | ombligo / bellybutton |
| 60 | ardilla |
| 61 | chivo |
| 62 | polvo |