

# University of Alberta

Spanish-Indigenous Bilingual Education in Chenalhó, Chiapas in Southeast  
Mexico  
by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, this research investigated the situation of the Tsotsil language spoken in Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico, by focusing on the implementation of a Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual elementary school. It was possible to discover that the Tsotsil language is still alive and that most parents who participated in this research transmit it to their children. However, there are students who prefer Spanish instead of their native language Tsotsil, due to the negative attitudes they have towards it such as “it is the language of old fashioned people while Spanish is the language of fashionable and modern people.” Nonetheless, most students portrayed positive attitudes towards both languages. The barriers that have affected the promotion of Tsotsil are: a monolingual approach and curriculum that favour Spanish, lack of resources in both languages, lack of training for instructors to teach with a bilingual approach and negative attitudes toward the native language.

Key words: Spanish, indigenous, language, Tsotsil, elementary bilingual education, barriers, Chenalhó

## **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study was the language barrier. Children's and their parents' native language is Tsotsil, and mine is Spanish. Although I took intensive Tsotsil lessons in order to communicate with them in Tsotsil, it was still difficult for me to converse with them fluently in Tsotsil. However, this problem was solved, thanks to my interpreters; the girls of grade six who helped me translate. Fortunately, the participants and I always managed to communicate; nonetheless, I wish I would have been more proficient in Tsotsil, so that I could have spoken more with the participants of the study in their native language.

Another limitation is the time I spent at the research site. I was living in Chenalhó for an academic term, a significant time to collect data in the bilingual school; however, I wish I could have spent more time in the town in order to learn more about the Tsotsil language and culture. Spending more time with the community would have been a good opportunity to give more back to them, to show my gratitude for their contribution to this research. I feel it would have been useful to have more participants to take part in the study, such as students from all grades. The groups that participated were three elementary bilingual classes (two first grades and one sixth grade), because I wanted to focus on how students began and ended their elementary studies in terms of their linguistic skills and language attitudes. However, it would have been interesting to work with learners from all grades to enrich the findings of the work. I would suggest that researchers interested in replicating this work consider and address the limitations I state here.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into five different chapters. The first one contains the introduction to the study in which the background, personal reflections, research problem area, research questions and rational and significance of the study are stated. Also, the importance of indigenous languages is mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter two contains the review of the literature, which is composed by the predicament of endangered languages and examples of them. Moreover, there is a section focused on Mexico, its indigenous groups, its languages and the reduction of these. There is also a section on bilingualism and bilingual education in Chenalhó, Chiapas.

Chapter three contains the research approach that was used in this work. This chapter focuses on postcolonial theory as it is the theoretical framework in which this study was grounded. The debate about the prefix “postcolonialism” is discussed as well as the topic of language viewed from a postcolonial perspective. Moreover, the reasons for conducting a qualitative study and using critical ethnography as a strategy of inquiry are justified. The data collection, analysis and interpretive methods are explained as well. This chapter is finished by the ethical considerations that were addressed to conduct this study.

Chapter four presents the collected data and the description of the journey in the research site and the characteristics of the participants of the study. Also, the purposes of the bilingual school where this research was conducted as well as the participants’ attitudes towards the Spanish and Tsotsil languages are stated.

Chapter five, which is the last chapter of this dissertation, presents the analysis of the data, that is, the value of languages, language loss and standardisation of indigenous languages, the topic of intercultural bilingual education and the barriers for the implementation of it. The chapter also provides a general discussion of the analyzed findings and it concludes that there is hope for change in the educational system in Chenalhó, Chiapas.

## **DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**KOLAVAL! ¡MUCHAS GRACIAS! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!**

I would like to thank many people from the bottom of my heart for being part of this process and for having contributed to my educational career. There are many people who have shared their knowledge and experience with me. I have no words to express my gratitude to my wonderful supervisor Dr. Ingrid Johnston who was fundamental in this process. She was an exceptional guide and supporter who encouraged me and helped me during my program; I feel grateful to her for each of her contributions. I am honoured to have had a supervisor like her. Also, I feel grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. José da Costa, Dr. Bill Dunn and Dr. Yvonne Lam who generously gave their time and expertise to better my work. I thank them for their contribution and their good-natured support. I would like to give special thanks to the incredible Dr. Susan Rippberger for her guidance, constructive feedback, and her trust in this research. Also, I would like to thank her for having made the time to fly to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada to be personally present for the defence of my doctoral dissertation. Her research and insights supported me and expanded my own work. Thank you very much, Dr. Rippberger!

I also feel grateful to the people in Chenalhó, first and foremost to the students who participated in the study, who I call my little children: they were the ones who inspired me to do this research and to work hard to achieve my goal. Thanks, also to the teachers who trusted me and somehow saw hope for improvement in the educational system through the research I conducted. I feel

like an advocate and spokesperson for them and their educational needs, and in the pain they have suffered through the discrimination they have been victims of, which has had an impact on the way they perceive themselves, their languages and cultures. Now, I have a better understanding of the reasons they have for calling themselves “Los olvidados”, which means “The forgotten;” they feel excluded from their own society and country. Phrases such as “talk about us,” “don’t forget about us, Karla” and “come back” increase my commitment to the Tsotsil community I worked with.

Thus, I am as a spokesperson, sharing with academia what the Tsotsil community taught me while I was living in Chenalhó. I feel I have to share part of the experience I had with them to remind society that they are there, that they exist, that they want and need to be heard, and that they need support from people, from us, from people in the educational field. This research is dedicated to them. I would like to thank them for sharing their sad and painful stories, for being there for me and sharing their time, knowledge and *little or big* resources such as food, affection and attention with me, along with so many other beautiful things. I have been able to confirm Barrientos’ ideas that those “the ones who have the least are the ones who share the most” (Barrientos, 2006). The participants of the study have greatly contributed to me as a student, as a researcher, as a teacher, and as a human being in general. They have contributed to my vision of linguistic and cultural rights, of the importance of respect not just with regard to diversity, but respect for mother earth and nature.

Conducting this study has helped me to gain a better understanding of my research topic, so I am grateful to the participants from whom I have gained more knowledge on bilingual education. This knowledge makes me feel empowered and responsible for taking action to contribute to creating and to helping to implement quality bilingual programs that preserve and promote indigenous languages and cultures in Mexico. Again, I dedicate this work to my indigenous children, teachers, the school principal and students' parents. I promised them that I would talk about them and their situation and the type of education that is delivered in the focus school. This is the least I can do (to raise awareness), and the first step in making change through education. This is the least I can do for the participants of the study for having given me so much while I was living with them. As Madison (2005) points out, research is not just about receiving, but also about giving. It is a reciprocal process and I feel that a way to give back to them is by raising awareness and consciousness about bilingual education and cultural and linguistic issues. I would also like to thank the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) for having me provided me with a scholarship during my doctoral program at the University of Alberta. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my familia and amigos who assisted, advised, and supported this research and writing efforts over the years. Special thanks to Rob Bioletti who was always there to help me and motivate me during the process of this study. Rob Bioletti was an exceptional supporter who believed in my work. This dissertation would not be the same without his contributions. I highly appreciate all the time he spent with me, researching and writing the drafts of this

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Background and Personal Reflections

In order to be fully committed to advance research in a certain area, I believe it is very beneficial to bridge the research with one's own personal history and identity. These reflections can motivate the researcher by making the investigation more meaningful on a personal level, and consequently result in more profound results. Thus, I agree with Madison (2005) that:

It is important to honour your own personal history and the knowledge you have accumulated up to this point, as well as the intuition or instincts that draw you toward a particular direction, question, problem, or topic-understanding that you may not always know exactly why or how you are being drawn in that direction. Ask yourself questions that only you can answer: "What truly interests me?" "What do I really want to know more about?" "What is most disturbing to me about society?" You might probe even more deeply and ask yourself, as in the words of the writer Alice Walker (2003), "What is the work my soul must have?" (p. 238), and go from there. (p. 19)

I feel committed to contributing toward making a better and more just society where indigenous people's cultural and linguistic diversity are honoured, respected and preserved. In part, such respect and preservation can be achieved through quality bilingual education. Since I grew up in Chiapas, southeast Mexico, where indigenous people have a very significant presence (LRAN, 2009) and they, as well as non-indigenous people interact daily, I frequently witnessed

the differences between these two groups. Even when I was younger and not totally aware of political and economic issues taking place in my state and was not even able to name them as such, I could notice the inferior role indigenous people had in comparison to non-indigenous. Now that I am older I can better “understand” the economic, political and cultural struggles embedded in that situation of difference.

Reflecting on my early experiences, I have realized how such a reality has shaped my way of thinking, my desire for social justice, which is closely related to the motivations I have for pursuing my doctoral studies. My worldview has been shaped by the experiences I have lived and witnessed. As Turner (2006) states, it is possible for indigenous people to be “word warriors” (p. 95) or people who fight for human rights via intellectual pursuits; I would add, so it is for non-indigenous people. I believe that one of the most valuable weapons people can have is knowledge, so those interested in helping indigenous people “ought to be intimately familiar with the legal and political discourses of the state, and therefore able to use them to assert, defend, and protect the rights, sovereignty, and nationhood of indigenous communities” (Turner, 2006, p. 95). For that reason, I felt encouraged to continue learning about indigenous peoples’ situation with regards to their language, culture and worldviews by conducting research on Spanish-Indigenous elementary bilingual education in Chenalhó, Chiapas, in southeast Mexico.

The damage caused to indigenous people in Mexico has been significant. Their feelings of inferiority and embarrassment due to the discrimination they

have suffered have made them want to abandon their language and culture (Lam, 2009). That is, they want to walk away from who they are, the Totonacs in Central Mexico (Lam, 2009). I believe change is possible and meaningful change can start in the educational field, for example, through quality bilingual education where teaching can involve the creation of a milieu, which is conducive to learning – “one that cares for and respects students’ individuality with respect to their culture and linguistic identity (native language), and makes provision for self-reflection, knowing and meeting, in particular, the language and literacy needs of individual learners (Fevrier, 2008, p. 6). I think indigenous people’s situation can improve and this can in part be achieved through education; that is why I felt compelled to explore my research topic.

I decided to investigate the situation of the Tsotsil language, which is a Mayan language spoken by approximately 429, 168 indigenous people in Mexico (INEGI, 2010), as it is the language I was exposed to the most in Chiapas other than Spanish. After learning more about different endangered languages in distinct parts of the world, my idea about the importance and need to take action to prevent language loss was reinforced. In addition, my curiosity to investigate the current situation of the Tsotsil language increased as well as my sense of responsibility to help one of the communities from the state I come from. In short, I am aware that my worldviews (Creswell, 2007) have influenced my interest for researching Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual education in southeast Mexico. My paradigms guided me as an investigator, “not only in choice of method but in

ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 105) to guide my research investigations.

### **Research Problem Area**

Mexico is one of the countries with the largest indigenous populations in Latin America with approximately 10 million, which represents between 12% and 15% of the Mexican population (Chacón, 2005). Unfortunately, these indigenous communities’ languages and cultures have been disappearing. According to McCaa and Mills (1998), “native languages are under assault in Mexico. Education appears to be the "villain” and bilingualism its weapon. Paradoxically, if native languages are to thrive in the next millennium, their salvation likewise will be education and bilingualism their hope” (para. 2).

Francis and Reyhner (2002) argue that even among the most ethnolinguistically conscious bilingual teachers, language attitudes are marked by conflicting ideas and ambiguity, driven by the mechanisms of cultural and linguistic denigration that operate at the institutional, community-wide and regional levels. Bilingual teachers in Mexico prefer to use Spanish in the classroom, for example, for written language functions (Francis & Reyhner, 2002). This practice contributes to the idea that indigenous language’s oral “dialectically fragmented” condition is evidence of its inherent deficiency as a language for academic purposes, especially for reading and writing (Francis & Reyhner, 2002). Thus, I felt encouraged to investigate if this was the case for one of the indigenous languages spoken in Chenalhó, Chiapas in southeast Mexico: the Tsotsil language.

## **Research Questions**

I explored:

In what ways does the current Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual program in an elementary bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas, aid or hinder preservation of the indigenous language?

Given this general research question, my sub-questions were:

1. To what extent does this bilingual program respect and promote the native language and culture?
2. Which historical and current contexts have influenced the teachers' and students' attitudes and experiences of teaching and learning the Spanish and Tsotsil languages?
3. What are the students' and their parents' attitudes toward indigenous language retention in one elementary bilingual school in Chiapas, Mexico?

## **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

### **Importance of Indigenous Languages**

Reasons that motivated me to conduct this research are my ideas about the importance and value of languages and my interest in human rights. Nettle and Romaine (2000) state that “every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been a vehicle to. It is a loss to every one of us if a fraction of that diversity disappears when there is something that can have been done to prevent it” (p. 14). Any language as well as the speakers of that language are valuable and deserve respect because they contribute to the cultural richness of its nation (Rippberger, 1992). Thus, I feel nobody has the right to take away

someone else's mother language because through our mother tongue, "we come to know, represent, name, and act upon the world" (McCarty, 2003, p. 148).

Vygotsky (1978) postulated that language is one of the elements that define a person's cultural identity, as language is the basis for thinking and communication. According to the National Geographic Enduring Voices Project (n.d):

Language defines a culture, through the people who speak it and what it allows speakers to say. Words that describe a particular cultural practice or idea may not translate precisely into another language. Many endangered languages have rich oral cultures with stories, songs, and histories passed on to younger generations, but no written forms. With the extinction of a language, an entire culture is lost. (para. 3)

Thus, I believe it is important to give attention to the preservation of languages, and in particular indigenous languages. There is knowledge that is encoded only in oral languages. This is particularly evident in oral languages in regard to Aboriginal people and their relationship to nature, since they "have interacted closely with the natural world for thousands of years, [so] often have profound insights into local lands, plants, animals, and ecosystems" (National Geographic Enduring Voices Project, n.d., para.4). One reason, then, that it is valuable to study indigenous languages is because it benefits environmental understanding and conservation efforts (National Geographic Enduring Voices Project, n.d). Creating and implementing bilingual programs takes into account

indigenous students' sociocultural realities (CET, 1992) as well as what is meaningful to them (their land, plants, animals, etc.). The indigenous student should be a "knower of his [sic] sociocultural reality which enables him to incorporate into the productive life of the community and as a socially participative individual" (CET, 1992, as cited in Paciotto, 2004, p. 536). Such attention addresses the interrelations of in-and out-of-school curricula. According to Brisk (1999) "a successful bilingual program develops students' language and literacy proficiency, leads them in successful academic achievement, and nurtures sociocultural integration" (p. 2). She defines sociocultural integration as "the ability to function in the larger society as well as in the heritage community (Brisk, 1998)" (p. 2). Teaching with a bilingual-bicultural perspective respects and promotes children's sense of the uniqueness of their own culture, language and realities are promoted (Naqvi, 2009).

On the importance of maintaining indigenous languages, Scollon and Scollon (1981) argue that "each language carries with it an unspoken network of cultural values. Although these values generally operate on a subliminal level, they are, nonetheless, a major force in the shaping of each person's self-awareness, identity, and interpersonal relationships" (p. 89). Reyhner (1995) adds that:

These values are psychological imperatives that help generate and maintain an individual's level of comfort and self-assurance, and, consequently, success in life. In the normal course of events these

values are absorbed along with one's mother tongue in the first years of life. (para. 3)

Woodbury (1997) supports the protection of endangered languages because:

Much of the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life of a people is experienced through language. This ranges from prayers, myths, ceremonies, poetry, oratory, and technical vocabulary, to everyday greetings, leave-takings, conversational styles, humor, ways of speaking to children, and unique terms for habits, behavior, and emotions. When a language is lost, all this must be refashioned in the new language – with different word categories, sounds, and grammatical structures – if it is to be kept at all. Linguists' work in communities when language shift is occurring shows that for the most part such refashioning, even when social identity is maintained, involves abrupt loss of tradition. (para. 6)

Woodbury's (1997) words show the importance of revitalizing endangered languages because they are a valuable marker in one's identity. As Woodbury (1997) points out, when a community loses its language, it often loses a great deal of its cultural identity. It is true that language disappearance may be voluntary or involuntary; however, it always involves pressure of some kind, and it is often felt as a loss of social identity or as a symbol of defeat (Woodbury, 1997).

Another reason why indigenous languages are important is the history they carry. People's history is passed down through their language. Thus, when the

language is lost, it might imply that valuable information about the early history of the community is also lost. Woodbury (1997) states that:

The loss of human languages also severely limits what linguists can learn about human cognition. By studying what all of the world's languages have in common, we can find out what is and isn't possible in a human language. This in turn tells us important things about the human mind and how it is that children are able to learn a complex system like language so quickly and easily. The fewer languages there are to study, the less we will be able to learn about the human mind. (para. 11)

In this respect the National Science Foundation (NSF) (2008) argues that the study of threatened languages has implications for cognitive science because “languages help illuminate how the brain functions and how we learn” (para. 6). Peg Barrat (n.d., as cited in NSF, 2008) suggests that “we want to know what the diversity of languages tells us about the ways the brain stores and communicates experience” (para. 6). This perspective is supported by National Geographic Enduring Voices Project (n.d.), which states that “studying various languages also increases our understanding of how humans communicate and store knowledge. Every time a language dies, we lose part of the picture of what our brains can do” (para. 5).

I agree with McCarty (2003) that “language loss and revitalisation are human rights issues” (p. 148) since the desire and efforts to revitalise native languages cannot be divorced from larger struggles for democracy, social justice,

and self-determination (May, 2001). For these reasons, UNESCO (2003) considers it is important to maintain and perpetuate language diversity. This is shown in UNESCO's Constitution, which describes language diversity as a basic principle:

To contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language, religion, by the Charter of the United Nations (UNESCO Constitution Article 1). (p. 4)

Because of the value and importance of languages, and, in this case, indigenous languages, I thought it was important to investigate the factors that are leading to the loss of indigenous languages and seek for ways that help prevent such a loss.

### **Research Significance**

Language loss is a problem that has been and is still taking place around the world (McCarty, 2003). Some indigenous languages in Mexico have been and are still being threatened, which may result in their disappearance. Cultural, economic and political forces have worked to standardise and homogenise languages (McCarty, 2003). One of the factors that has contributed to endangerment of indigenous languages in Mexico is the establishment of Spanish-indigenous schools (Del Carpio, 2008). Students use Spanish at "bilingual" schools even when they are supposed to use both their native language and the

national language. There is a need to integrate indigenous languages and make them part of quality bilingual programs that support all the points of the “continuum of biliteracy” (Hornberger, 1998, p. 452).

Schooling is not the only factor that encourages indigenous people to speak Spanish. They also face economic pressures and have the need to communicate with Spanish monolinguals (Lam, 2009). For that reason, it is understandable that indigenous people want to learn Spanish in addition to their native languages and parents want their children to do so as well. I believe it is important to help indigenous people maintain their languages to avoid a terminal shift to Spanish monolingualism. For that reason, I decided to research the situation of the Tsotsil language spoken in Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico. I was interested in verifying if elementary bilingual schools in this region are explicitly or implicitly encouraging indigenous students to shift to Spanish and abandon their native language.

Research has the potential to contribute to the maintenance of the Tsotsil language and also benefit its speakers (Del Carpio, 2008). It is possible to implement innovations that improve bilingual programs while at the same time revitalize or strengthen indigenous languages. By doing so, indigenous people and their language(s) would be honoured and recognized. “Rooted in principles of social justice, this vision holds the promise of creating a more critically democratic, linguistically and culturally rich society for us all.” (McCarty, 2003, p. 160)

I believed that by researching the bilingual program used at an elementary school in Mexico, the analyses could provide some insights into the current situation of the indigenous language and motivate its preservation through the creation and implementation of quality bilingual programs that promote the use of both the Spanish and Tsotsil languages. Successful models such as the Hawaiian, Oyster and Maori language programs can be used as models that promote the use of minority languages (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010).

I felt educators and researchers should lead the bilingual or multilingual agenda for our indigenous children, in this case, create the policy, and influence our policymakers. I am aware that I brought my beliefs and feelings about this topic into the study; however, I tried not to ignore insights which were inconsistent with these views, that is, I was open to the possibility that my beliefs could be incorrect by checking and handling all data carefully and in the same way (whether or not they supported my hypothesis) and by including different perspectives both for and against my beliefs (more on this in the trustworthiness of data section).

### **Overview of the Research Project**

This research explored the ways through which the Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual program used in an elementary bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas aided or hindered preservation of the Tsotsil language. Also, I was interested in exploring the extent this bilingual program promotes and respects the native language and culture. In addition, I looked at teachers', students' and students' parents' attitudes towards both the Spanish and Tsotsil languages.

This study addresses students' parents, teachers, policy makers, curriculum designers and school administrators because all of them play an important role in the educational field and they are and should be responsible for creating and implementing quality bilingual programs for elementary students. In addition, the possibilities for change increase when a community works together rather than an individual works alone (Bonner, Koch & Langmeyer, 2004).

This research was grounded in a theoretical framework based on postcolonial theory, which allowed me to explore the history of colonialism and its repercussions for Mexican indigenous people's culture, language(s) and attitudes. By doing so, I obtained new insights and broaden my understanding of the phenomena.

Keeping in mind the purpose of this study, the study was favourably disposed to qualitative research methods. Merriam (1998) maintains that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of the world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). Also, qualitative approaches allow room to be innovative and creative (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (1998) suggests that "qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Among those forms of inquiry, we can find critical ethnography (Bailey, 2007), which is the form of qualitative strategy pertinent to this research (Thomas, 1993).

The data was collected at an elementary Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas in southeast Mexico. The participants of this study were three elementary bilingual classes (two first grades and one sixth grade) with up to 28 students in each group. The school principal, students' parents and teachers also participated in the study.

My time in the field was five months; an academic term from August to December 2010 while conducting my fieldwork to gather data from the participants. I used different methods of data collection that were interactive and humanistic (Creswell, 2003) such as interviews, focus group interviews (Berg, 2009) and both participant and passive observations (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Also, I employed informal conversations, reflective field notes (Rippberger, 1992) and examination of documents (Paciotto, 2004).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to analyze them through content analysis (Berg, 2009). I identified the units of analysis that I used for coding the data (e.g., phrases, themes). After that, I open coded the transcript data using the unit of analysis (Berg, 2009) by following Berg's suggestions. I identified the common themes that emerged from the interviews and I categorized them into coding frames (Berg, 2009). The written documents were analyzed through content analysis as well. In addition, the findings were based on my observations and field notes (Rippberger, 1992). I interpreted the results of the data based on the review of the literature, the theoretical framework, and my professional and research experiences, knowledge and skills (Frevrier, 2008). I was aware that as a researcher I had the responsibility to ensure that the data

analyses were conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner. To do so, I followed Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, which is the confidence in the 'truth' of the findings; transferability, which is showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts; dependability, which consists in showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated and confirmability, which is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008).

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

We as human beings have a unique tool by which we can build our thoughts and can create, imagine and relate with other people (INALI, 2008). Also, we can dream through this beautiful tool called language, which allows us to communicate our feelings, ideas, concerns and hopes. In addition, it allows us to learn from others and share our learning experiences with other people as well as to learn about our history and project our future. Language is a human incomparable resource (INALI, 2008).

Every language is unique and is the result of the particular history of the people who speak it. A language is more than sounds, words and structures, that is, it is a worldview, which accompanies the existence of peoples and contains their living experience (INALI, 2008). According to Cifuentes and García (1998), ethnographic scholars have argued that languages constituted one of the best evidences to delimitate the frontiers among peoples, saying that from all the cultural aspects that identify and characterize a community, language is one of the most profound. Cifuentes and García (1998) state that ethnographic scholars

suggested that “languages always change and this can be within a period of time that can involve a few generations or thousands of years in which a community can switch one language by another” (p. 34). There are many languages around the world. However, sadly, this linguistic diversity has and is still disappearing (McCarty, 2003).

### **The Predicament of Endangered Languages**

To be told that a loved one is dying or dead is one of the most unpleasant experiences of life. To talk about a dead language or a dying language sounds academic and without much sentiment. Yet languages have no existence without people. A language dies with the last speaker of that language. For humanity, that is a great loss. It is like an Encyclopedia formed from that language and culture, being buried (Baker, 2006, p.43).

In the twenty-first century, “the world’s linguistic and cultural diversity is under assault by the forces of globalisation – cultural, economic and political forces that work to standardise and homogenise, even as they stratify and marginalise” (McCarty, 2003, p. 147). Blair and Laboucan, 2006; Javoie, 2010, and Hornberger, 1998 all point to the fact that the plight of endangered language is a crisis and that “indigenous languages are under siege...around the world – in danger of disappearing because they are not being transmitted to the next generation” (Hornberger, 1998, p. 439).

According to UNESCO (2003):

A language is *endangered* when it is on a path toward extinction.

Without adequate documentation, a language that is extinct can never be revived. A language is in danger when its speakers cease to

use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next.

That is, there are no new speakers, adults or children. (p. 3)

UNESCO (2003) suggests that “even languages with many thousands of speakers are no longer being acquired by children; at least 50% of the world’s more than six thousand languages are losing speakers” (p. 3). Therefore, UNESCO estimates that “in most world regions, about 90% of the languages may be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the 21st century” (p. 3). As a result, “speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity (Bernard, 1992, Hale 1998)” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 4).

Terms such as threatened languages, endangered languages (Hale et al., 1992) and linguicism (Phillipson, 1992) are phrases that “describe the plight of the world’s vanishing linguistic resources in their encounter with the phenomenal growth of world languages” (Hornberger, 1998, p. 439). Unfortunately, many languages are “currently undergoing severe obsolescence and are at risk of disappearing” (Blair & Laboucan, 2006, p. 206) in different parts of the world.

According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) “languages are today being killed at a much faster pace than ever before in human history, and relatively much faster than biodiversity. As a consequence, linguistic diversity is disappearing” (p. 5). Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues that “language and languages are an essential – maybe the most essential aspect – of being human” (p. 6). Thus, “linguistic rights

are vital to all peoples, whatever the size of their population. This right needs to be preserved especially for small groups” (Linguistic Rights, 2010, para. 1).

“It is a very realistic possibility that 90% of mankind’s languages will become extinct or doomed to extinction (Krauss, 1995, p. 4)” (Baker, 2006, p. 45). One of the reasons for such extinction is that world’s languages are no longer being reproduced among children.

Albarracín (2003) argues that a language is considered to be in danger of extinction when it is spoken by less than 30% of its children. She goes on saying that the disparagement of speaking an indigenous language makes many parents decide not to transmit the language to their children. Such interruptions of intergenerational transmission are considered to be one of the main causes for language extinction. “In the past, speaking an official [indigenous] language could mean to be an object of physical punishment, which is an experience that many adults do not want for their children” (Albarracín, 2003, para. 8). Hecht (2009) agrees that the lack of intergenerational transmission of a language between parents and children is one of the main factors that restricts and limits linguistic vitality. If the hegemonic language is introduced as a way of daily communication in the familiar and intraethnic communication during children’s socialization the minority language might be in imminent danger of disappearance (Hecht, 2009). The fact that the minority language is spoken mostly by adults and elders and only by a few children, which implies a lack of new native speakers is considered to be foreshadowing of the future demise of the minority language (Hecht, 2009).

Also, economic, social and political factors influence the situation of languages. In addition, assimilation, urbanization, centralization and uniformity pressures make and will make people prefer majority languages (Baker, 2006). Baker (2006) argues that if many languages are vulnerable,” language planning measures to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity are urgently required (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998) as is an ecology of languages (Muhlhausler, 2002)” (p.45).

### **Examples of Endangered Languages**

An example of Aboriginal languages in risk of disappearing are the languages spoken in Alberta, Canada (Blair & Laboucan, 2006). This is the case for “Dene Sutine, Dene Tha, Dene Za, Kainai, Siksika, Pikuni (Blackfoot), Nakota (Stony), Saulteaux, and Michif” (Blair & Laboucan, 2006, p. 206). These researchers point out that “few of the endangered Indigenous languages in Alberta, as in most of Canada, are spoken by children at home; it is therefore, reasonable to expect that these languages could be close to extinction within a generation” (p. 207). According to Javoie (2010) the indigenous languages in British Columbia, Canada are predicted to disappear within the next 6 years “if immediate steps are not taken to improve language education” (para. 1).

Unfortunately, there are many indigenous languages around the world that are undergoing similar pressure , for example, the Brazilian language Shawandawa, also called Arara (Hornberger, 1998), 16 languages in Ethiopia (Grenoble & Whaley, 1996) and 48 minority language groups in the European Union (Nelde et al.,1996). Also, of the 175 indigenous languages still extant in the United States, only 20 are being transmitted as child languages (Krauss, 1996).

Sadly, California is considered to be the state with the most threatened languages in North America. There were approximately 100 indigenous languages spoken at the time of Europeans arrived. Nowadays, there are only 50 still alive, which are spoken mostly by only elders and almost 100% of California's native languages are no longer learned by children (Hinton, 1994).

According to Thomason (1988), "given the continuing spread of the languages of politically and economically dominant groups at the expense of the languages of less powerful cultures, it is safe to assume that the number of human languages is rapidly decreasing" (p. 17). Woodbury (1997) suggested that it is important and urgent to seek ways that promote the revitalization of endangered languages. As McCarty (2003) explains, indigenous languages are valuable because "when even one language falls silent, the world loses an irredeemable repository of human knowledge" (McCarty, 2003, p. 148).

Trueba (1989) states that "language is the primary instrument with which we express and transmit culture, maintain it, teach it, and adapt it" (p. 14). Also, as Peacock (1986) explains, "thought occurs through language and language is a property of groups; thus thought itself...in the highly symbolic forms developed by humans is a property of the group" (p. 14).

#### Focus on Mexico

Issues of language retention and loss are particularly pertinent in Latin America, which has approximately 400 indigenous groups with an estimated population of 40 million. Mexico has the largest indigenous population in the subcontinent with approximately 10 million, which represents between 12% and 15% of the Mexican population (Chacón, 2005). More recent data indicate that

there are approximately 6,695,228 inhabitants aged five years old and older who speak an indigenous language (INEGI, 2010), which represents 6.8% of the population ranked in these ages.

In 1998, Cifuentes argued that most of the speakers of indigenous languages were located in the states of Nayarit, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Veracruz towards the north and Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Chiapas and Oaxaca towards the south. Most of the people in these communities usually live in small places located in inhospitable terrain with unmaintained trails where mountainous systems predominate as well as small valleys, which results in the lack of modern means of communication. This is where the highest degree of monolingualism is found (Cifuentes, 1998). Also, there are indigenous inhabitants who live in urban areas and metropolitan zones or close to them. Cifuentes (1998) argues that the indigenous people who live in cities such as Mexico City, Puebla and Guadalajara or in the surroundings tend to be bilinguals. In the census conducted by INEGI in 2010, it was found that the four states in the south of Mexico previously mentioned continue to have the highest percentages of indigenous languages speakers: Oaxaca with 33.8%; Yucatán with 29.6% , Chiapas with 27.3% and Quintana Roo with 16.2% (INEGI, 2010). The same census in 2010 found that indigenous languages are spoken all over Mexico; however, in nine states the percentages are lower than 1%. This is the case of states such as Aguascalientes, Coahuila Zaragoza, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Colima, Jalisco, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Nuevo León.

Spanish Colonization

Mexico has had ethnic groups for thousands of years and many still remained after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Rippberger (1992) argues that:

The period of Spanish colonization (the early 1500s through the early 1800s), brought dramatic and permanent changes to all aspects of Indian life... Amerindians were drastically reduced in number, and were forcefully subjugated by the Spanish invaders. Indian groups while less powerful militarily and economically, have persistently resisted the subjugation. (p. 39)

“During the times of conquest and colonization in Mexico, unpleasant social confrontations, such as disappearance, mobilization and assimilation had a violent impact on the preservation of indigenous languages” (Recio, 2010, p. 2). Indigenous populations greatly decreased in number (Organización Editorial Mexicana, 2008) and “were persecuted, tortured and enslaved in order to abandon all existing cultural models prior to the arrival of Spanish conquerors” (Recio, 2010, p. 2). For these reasons, the period of Conquest of Mexico is considered to be “one of the greatest disasters of mankind” (Recio, 2010, p. 2).

Although these indigenous communities in Mexico have always had a strong presence in certain regions of the country, they have been excluded from society as well as from the benefits they can get from it (Chacón, 2005). Ramonet (2002) argues that “indigenous people have been victims of a kind of silent genocide. They have been forgotten by everybody; they are invisible and have been condemned to sit and watch as their languages and their age-old values were slowly destroyed” (p. 137).

### Zapatista Uprising

There have been socio-political movements organized by indigenous people themselves to show their fatigue with regard to the disadvantaged position they have been given in society and to defend their rights. An example of this is the Zapatista uprising that occurred in 1994 in Chiapas in southeast Mexico. Such an uprising has moved beyond national borders (Aridjis, 2002) and eventually extended to other parts of the world.

This revolutionary movement has shown that indigenous people in southeast Mexico no longer have fear. They have stood up to claim the recognition of their identity as “collective subjects” by right (Ramonet, 2002). Also, indigenous people want the government to recognize that they have a strong connection to the land, their communities, their roots, their history and their languages.

Since the Zapatista Movement, the government of Mexico has been giving more attention to native people (at least in theory) and this can be seen in the creation of the Law of Linguistic Rights of Indigenous People in 2003 (Government of Mexico, 2003). The movement also brought negative international attention to Mexico, which probably contributed to compel the Mexican government to construct such a law in order to repair its international image.

### **Indigenous Languages in Mexico**

Mexico is considered to be one of the ten countries with the most linguistic diversity along with Brazil in America; Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire in Africa; India and Indonesia in Asia, and Papua New Guinea and Australia in Oceania. This

linguistic diversity in Mexico is expressed mainly by the indigenous languages spoken there (INALI, 2008).

The Mexican government recognizes 62 indigenous languages, with Spanish as the official language (Government of Mexico, 2003). Recent census indicates that there are 68 linguistic groups in Mexico (INEGI, 2010) rather than 62. Although some indigenous languages in Mexico have more speakers than others, the Law of Linguistic Rights gives equal validity to all 62 languages (Government of Mexico, 2003). Along with Spanish, this law has granted indigenous languages the status of "national languages" (INALI, 2008). This implies that speakers of indigenous languages have the right to conduct their activities as well as to receive all the services provided by the government such as education, textbooks, healthcare, official document services and to ask for and receive information in public offices in their own language. In addition, having indigenous languages as national languages provides their speakers the right to legal counsel who know the native language and culture (INALI, 2008). "The Mexican State has the responsibility of guaranteeing the recognition and respect of these rights as well as the development, preservation and strengthening of the national indigenous languages according to the General Law of Linguistics Rights for Indigenous People" (INALI, 2008, p. 3). The Mexican government has promoted and established bilingual primary and secondary education in some indigenous rural communities. However, it has been difficult to provide indigenous people with all of the services previously stated.

Although the Mexican Constitution recognizes the existence of Aboriginal people (Lastra, 2001) in Mexico and supposedly protects them, many non-indigenous Mexicans ignore or socially discriminate against these groups. Such an attitude can be reflected in the way indigenous languages are referred to as dialects. For a long time, the term dialect has been given to the languages spoken by indigenous people with a contemptuous and offensive connotation (INALI, 2008). Also, it is believed that dialects are not written languages; they are not adequate to be used for teaching and that they are not helpful for the development of science (INALI, 2008). “These misconceptions come from the beliefs that there are languages that are more superior, valuable and useful than others as if there were superior and inferior peoples (INALI, 2008, p. 2).”

### **Reduction of the Use of Indigenous Languages**

There has been a strong reduction of the use of indigenous languages in Mexico (National Institute of Indigenous Languages in Mexico, 2010), which is why “it is necessary to work on public policies that achieve that the revitalization, the strengthening and the developing of national indigenous languages are treated in institutions” (National Institute of Indigenous Languages, 2010, p. 3).

The National Institute of Indigenous Languages in Mexico (2010) argues that:

Nowadays there are approximately 6 million indigenous Mexicans who speak their languages. By doing so, they contribute the strengthening of diversity to humanity. This means that today in Mexico we have speakers’ willingness to continue strengthening and learning indigenous languages to learn about their most profound ways of thinking, their knowledge about nature, their

solution to conflicts and the rules for life. These are necessary aspects for a better development in the Nation. However, despite indigenous peoples' great efforts, their languages continue to disappear (p. 3).

Language loss has been spreading in Mexico. Many indigenous languages have vanished and others are about to become extinct. Crawford (1996) points out that "often language death is the culmination of language shift, resulting from a complex of internal and external pressures that induce a speech community to adopt a language spoken by others" (p. 55). The discrimination that indigenous people have suffered can be considered one of the pressures that has made them shift to Spanish. UNESCO (2003) states that language endangerment "may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation" (p. 3). This may also be caused by:

Internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace. (p. 3)

Ethnographic research has found that indigenous languages are usually considered as low-prestige languages and are “confined to the community and family oral communicative space, while larger social domains are ‘occupied’” (Paciotto, 2000, p. 50) by the national language. This has been the case of Mexico’s indigenous languages where native languages are associated with low-prestige people and with socially disfavoured identities so that its own potential speakers prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt some other languages (Dorian, 1998).

This is the situation of most native languages in Mexico such as Otomí (Lastra, 2001) and Totonac in Central Mexico (Lam, 2009) where indigenous speakers have decided to switch to Spanish, the official language of the country. UNESCO’s (2003) reasons for language endangerment described above are also applicable to Mexican indigenous communities and their languages. For example, among the reasons for these people to switch to Spanish is the discrimination they have suffered by non-indigenous Mexicans (Lam, 2009). Such discrimination has had a great influence on how indigenous people perceive themselves. This marginalization can be seen in the way Totonacs (an indigenous community in central Mexico) describe themselves as “‘gente de calzón’ (people of indigenous dress), while they describe non-indigenous Mexicans as ‘gente de razón’ (people of reason)” (Lam, 2009). The previous terms show how Totonacs perceive themselves as inferior in relation to non-indigenous Mexicans. The Mexican indigenous communities and their languages are a valuable part of Mexico’s cultural diversity. If a language disappears, the ideas and culture unique to it could

be affected as well in the long-term (Woodbury, 1997). Therefore, it is important to encourage indigenous people, especially elders, to be aware of their importance and value because they are carriers of knowledge and culture. By doing so, they might feel more inclined to transmit their native language to younger generations.

### Bilingualism

One of the factors that has led to the increase of the use of Spanish by Indigenous people in Mexico is the establishment of schools in Indigenous areas, which is why this research aimed to investigate in what ways bilingual education in Chenalhó, Chiapas has preserved and promoted the native language or contributed to its decline in favour of Spanish. This section is dedicated to the writings of scholars who have discussed the topic of bilingualism, factors that lead to it as well as the types of bilingualism that exist as these are essential components of this research.

Bilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that has received much scholarly attention because of its importance in communications, “ but also because of political and demographic considerations that have led many sociologists to brand some languages as major and others as minor in multilingual settings” (Salle, n.d., para. 1). On the other hand, defining bilingualism has been a subject of much debate as scholars such as Bloomfield (1933) and Diebold (1964) have provided polarised definitions that show that defining the point at which the learner of a second language becomes bilingual is either arbitrary or difficult to determine.

Genesee (2008) suggests that “language acquisition is an everyday and yet magical feat of childhood. Within three to five years, virtually all children become

fully competent in at least one language. We accept this as totally normal” (para. 1). He states that we are rarely concerned on whether or not it will happen although it is the most complex accomplishment of early childhood. Even more outstanding are those children who simultaneously acquire proficiency in two, or more, languages during the preschool years. “Within the same time frame as it takes monolingual children to learn one language, bilingual children learn two languages and become adept at using them in socially diverse and appropriate ways” (Genesee, 2008, para. 1).

Knezek (1997) states that “humans speak a wide variety of different languages, and very young children of any race or ethnic background can learn to speak and understand any of these if exposed to appropriate models at the proper time in development” (para. 3). Children learn to speak the language of those who raise them, which:

In most cases, are their biological parents, especially the mother. But one’s first language is acquired from the environment and learning. Adopted infants, whatever their race and whatever the language of their actual parents, acquire the language of the adoptive parents who raise them just as if they had their own children (Salle, n.d., para. 5).

In situations where “the child’s parents / foster parents are bilingual, or from different linguistic backgrounds, learning a second language becomes either a deliberate activity or one imposed on the child by extraneous social, political or religious factors acting on him” (Salle, n.d., para. 6).

### **Factors of the Need for Bilingualism**

The need for bilingualism might arise from different reasons at both the individual and societal levels. Gutiérrez (2009) defines individual bilingualism as “the ability to indifferently use with the same competence and in the same situations two different languages” (para. 3). However, in bilingualism as a social fact, there is neither equality between the two languages in presence nor equality of status and use. The coexistence between the two languages involves tension (Gutiérrez, 2009).

There are different determinants of the need for bilingualism, for example, historical factors and events such as conquests and colonialisms, which made the newcomer wield much influence in all spheres of life. Because “the most powerful groups in any society are able to force their language upon the less powerful” (Romaine, 1995, p. 23), all official transactions are done in the foreign language. Examples of this are most African countries as well as Latin American countries.

Another determinant of the need for bilingualism is geographical proximity (De Mejía, 2002), which naturally leads to the need for communication among the members of the two communities. Since language might pose as a barrier to effective communication, members of the two communities each learn the other’s language, which leads to bilingualism (Salle, n.d.). An example of this is in Europe “where the need for foreign language learning has been traditionally promoted in the light of the geographical proximity of many nation-states speaking different language varieties” (De Mejía, 2002, p. 209). Altarriba and Heredia (2008) point out that in Scandinavia, for instance, proficiency in two or

more languages is encouraged and expected due to geographic proximity among countries.

Bilingualism might also arise from migration. “Either collective or individual migrants fleeing from war or searching individual attainment have settled in foreign linguistic communities. For purposes of communication and job hunting, they have been compelled to learn the languages of host communities, thus becoming bilingual” (Salle, n.d., para. 10). The massive displacement of people into a new territory can be done, not to implement a dominion or to establish a new political order, but on the contrary, to put themselves at the service of the local population. This usually raises a collective situation of bilingualism. Examples of this are the large amounts of Irish, Italian or Hispanic speakers who have migrated to the United States and have become bilinguals (Gutiérrez, 2009; Ramírez, 1985). Also, this situation can be observed in immigrants in Canada and most western European nations (Tiersman, 2010).

Salle (n.d.) states that bilingualism might also arise from public or international relations. She provides the example of countries such as Cameroon and Nigeria where the need arises for citizens to interact at the national level, which makes them use a *lingua franca*. Gutiérrez (2009) declares that a country with different linguistic communities can establish a federal political system that does not imply the legal predominance of none of the languages in presence. This is the case of Switzerland, Canada and Belgium, for example. A nation is bilingual, but its different territories and the individuals that constitute them might not necessarily be bilingual. “In a federal and plurilinguistic country, only the

administrators in the federal government need to be bilingual” (para. 12).

However, the relationships among different people provoke a certain amount of individuals who become bilinguals, which is not the result of a political or social pressure, but a consequence of these relationships. The contact among communities with speakers of different languages is one of the factors that leads to bilingualism, that is, there exists frequent contact among people from different countries. This increases the number of people who need to learn and use a second language (Gutiérrez, 2009).

### **Types of Bilingualism**

In this section, the different types of bilingualism are described using Baker’s (2006) categories. There are factors that determine the types of bilingualism, including age; for example, **simultaneous** or **infant** bilingualism is when children learn two languages from birth. Also, when a child learns “a language after three years of age, it is termed **consecutive** or **sequential** bilingualism” (Baker, 2006, p. 4). The other factor that determines the type of bilingualism is development:

Incipient bilinguals have one well developed language, and the other is in the early stages of development. When a second language is developing, this is **ascendant** bilingualism, compared with **recessive** bilingualism when one language is decreasing, resulting in temporary or permanent **language attrition** (Baker, 2006, p. 4).

Culture is another important factor, as bilinguals become more or less bicultural or multicultural. “Bicultural competence tends to relate to knowledge of language cultures, feelings and attitudes towards those two cultures, behaving in

culturally appropriate ways, awareness and empathy, and having the confidence to express biculturalism” (Baker, 2006, p. 4).

There are bilingual people “who live in bilingual and multilingual **endogenous** communities that use more than one language on an everyday basis” (Baker, 2006, p. 4). There are other bilinguals who “live in more monolingual and monocultural regions and network with other bilinguals” (Baker, 2006, p. 4).

Baker (2006) argues that when there is an absence of a second language community, the context is **exogenous**. Also, some contexts may be **subtractive**, for example, “where the politics of a country favors the replacement of the home language by the majority language” (Baker, 2006, p. 4). In contrast, there are contexts, which are **additive**, that is, someone learns a second language at no cost to their first language, as happens in prestigious bilinguals (Baker, 2006).

The other type of bilingualism is **elective** bilingualism, which is “a characteristic of individuals who choose to learn a language, for example in the classroom (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994; Valdés, 2003)” (Baker, 2006, p. 4). These types of bilinguals usually come from majority language groups and add another language without losing their own (Baker, 2006). The people who learn another language to function effectively because of their circumstances are called **circumstantial** bilinguals, for instance, immigrants (Baker, 2006).

“Circumstantial bilinguals are groups of individuals who must become bilingual to operate in the majority language society that surrounds them. Consequently, their first language is in danger of being replaced by the second language – a **subtractive** context” (Baker, 2006, p. 4). According to Baker (2006), the

difference between elective and circumstantial bilingualism is important as it raises differences of factors such as prestige and status, politics and power among individuals. Another type of bilingualism described by Baker (2006) is functional bilingualism that relates to “when, where, and with whom people use their two languages (Fishman, 1965)” (p. 5). Thus, language cannot be separated from the context in which it is used.

**Minimal** and **maximal** bilingualisms deal with the speaker’s level of competence in a second language. “A classic definition of bilingualism such as ‘the native-like control of two or more languages’ (Bloomfield, 1933) appears too extreme and maximalist (‘native like’)” (Baker, 2006, p. 8). The term ‘native like’ is questionable and ambiguous (Baker, 2006). On the other hand, Diebold (1964) gives a minimal definition when he uses the term **incipient** bilingualism to mean the initial stages of contact between two languages (Salle, n.d.). This definition “allows people with minimal competence in a second language to squeeze into the bilingual category” (Baker, 2006, p. 8), for example, tourists or businessmen who know a few phrases in a second language can be considered incipient bilinguals.

Bilinguals whose competences in both languages are well developed, for instance, a person who is “approximately fluent in two languages across various contexts may be termed an equilingual or ambilingual or, more commonly, a **balanced bilingual**” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). Nonetheless, Fishman (1971) pointed out that infrequently will anyone be equally competent across all situations. Most of the time bilinguals use their languages with different purposes and with diverse people. “The implicit idea of balanced bilingualism has often been of

‘appropriate’ competence in both languages” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). For example, “a child who can understand the delivery of the curriculum in school in either language, and operate in classroom activity in either language would be an example of a balanced bilingual” (Baker, 2006, p. 9).

There are different views with regards to bilinguals. For example, the monolingual or fractional one, which “evaluates the bilingual ‘as two monolinguals in one person’” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). The second view, the holistic one, states that “the bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but that he or she has a unique linguistic profile” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). The third view is called multi-competence view, which argues that “bilingualism and multilingualism are normal with different consequences for how language is studied (e.g. acquisition, use, storage, thinking, integration/interconnection/separation, (Cook, 2002a))” (Baker, 2006, p. 9).

### **Bilingual Education: Myths and Benefits**

This section is dedicated to the myths and benefits with regards to bilingual education. According to Cummins and Corson (1997), “the term bilingual education usually refers to the use of two or (more) languages of instruction at some point in the student’s school career. The languages are used to teach subject matter content rather than just the language itself” (p. 11).

There have been both positive and negative ideas with regard to bilingual education. For example, “one of the myths about language is that one nation should have one unifying language, a colonial concept that masked the colonizers’ own diversity” (Benson, 2005, p. 253). Other myths that persist contrary to research results are that “a new language is learned/used to the detriment of the

first, or that bi- or multilingualism causes cognitive confusion” (Benson, 2005, p. 253). There is the idea that “the first language should be ignored or pushed aside so that the second language can be learned” (Benson, 2005, p. 253), which has been disproved by Cummins (Benson, 2005).

In this respect, Cummins (2003) argues that bilingualism has positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development because “when children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively” (para. 11). Also, “they have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality” (para. 11).

Another advantage is that “children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language” (Cummins, 2003, para. 12). In addition, the promotion of the children’s mother tongue in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue, but also children’s skills in the majority school language (Cummins, 2003). As well, “spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children's academic development in the majority school language” (Cummins, 2003, para. 14). Cummins (2003) suggested that “well-implemented bilingual programs can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge in a minority language without any negative effects on children's development in the majority language” (para. 14). He elaborates:

Bilingual children seem to ‘pick up’ conversational skills in the majority language in the early years of school... However, educators are often much less aware about how quickly children can lose their ability to use their mother tongues, even in the home context. The extent and rapidity of language loss will vary according to the concentration of families from a particular linguistic group in the school and neighbourhood. Where the mother tongue is used extensively in the community outside the school, then language loss among young children will be less. (para. 15)

When children are implicitly or explicitly told “‘leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door’, children also leave a central part of who they are – their identities – at the schoolhouse door. As a result, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction” (Cummins, 2003, para. 16). Thus, it is not enough for instructors “to passively accept children’s linguistic and cultural diversity in the school” (para. 16). Cummins (2003) emphasizes that:

Teachers must be proactive and take the initiative to affirm children's linguistic identity by having posters in the various languages of the community around the school, encouraging children to write in their mother tongues in addition to the majority school language (e.g. write and publish pupil-authored bilingual books), and generally create an instructional climate where the

linguistic and cultural experience of the whole child is actively accepted and validated. (para. 16)

It is fundamental that children's cultural and linguistic experience is built and supported in the home rather than be undermined. "Every child has the right to have their talents recognized and promoted within the school" (para. 18).

Cummins (2003) suggests that:

The cultural, linguistic and intellectual capital of our societies will increase dramatically when we stop seeing culturally and linguistically diverse children as 'a problem to be solved' and instead open our eyes to the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources they bring from their homes to our schools and societies (para. 22).

### **Previous Research about Bilingual Education in Mexico**

There have been various investigations about bilingual education in Mexico. Some of them have led to the development of instructional programs and materials (Modiano, 1978). For instance, Bravo's (1972) action research resulted in the design of a program of Spanish as a second language for young children. This included the training of teachers, the publication of three graded language texts for children with three accompanying programs for cognitive and psychomotor development. Another action research program, conducted by Arana (1972) led to the development of a corpus of some 85 Indian reading specialists trained to develop introductory reading materials in their respective languages to adapt these tongues for instructional use in the classroom in the various areas of the primary curriculum. Modiano's (1978) "action research projects have led to

the preparation of a series of textbooks on local Indian history for children in grade one and two in Chiapas, Mexico” (p. 410).

More recent studies on bilingual education have used an ethnographic and interpretivist analysis. For example, Rippberger (1996) investigated bilingual education from the perspective of the Mayan women in the indigenous communities of Chiapas. Her research is useful for my own study as it focuses on ethnography in bilingual education and her findings contribute to the understanding of the topic I am interested in.

Rippberger’s (1996) ethnographic account offers a “pluralist assessment of educational equity and opportunity, challenging the government’s goal of assimilation through education” (para. 8). Her ethnographic data comes from observations, interviews, and social interactions with Tsotsil and Tzeltal Mayan women and girls in Chiapas. The researcher found that “as teachers, women tend to encourage the maintenance of the Indian culture within the classroom, modeling an Indian core of values in the way they treat children and run their classrooms” (para. 125). Unfortunately, “as women help students succeed academically, their success brings them to greater acculturation to the mainstream culture, separating them from their original Indian culture” (Rippberger, 1996, para. 125). However, as many native people become bicultural, they develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for their original indigenous culture, and seek to preserve it (Rippberger, 1996).

Both action research (Modiano, 1978) and ethnographic research (Paciotto, 2004) in Mexico have contributed to the improvement of bilingual

education. For example, the findings of action research have led to the development of materials and instructional programs (Modiano, 1978) that increase the quality of bilingual education. On the other hand, ethnographic studies have provided information about the current situation of certain Mexican indigenous languages and its speakers (Paciotto, 2004). Therefore, both types of research have been beneficial although it has not always been possible to implement all of the innovations proposed by action research because of all these projects depend upon funding at the federal level (Modiano, 1978).

### **Barriers to Bilingual Education**

Bilingual teachers' language attitudes are marked by conflicting ideas and ambiguity, driven by the mechanisms of cultural and linguistic denigration that operate at the institutional, community-wide and regional levels (Francis & Reyhner, 2002). According to García, Kangas, & Torres, (2006), instructors prefer to use Spanish because of ideological beliefs that the children will be left behind in Mexican society if they learn in their native language. Consequently, the expansion of bilingual educational programs in rural areas, especially among school-age children, has increased the number of Spanish speakers. It might be argued that this is not problematic since bilingual speakers have access to both cultures associated with the languages they speak. However, the danger lies in speakers of the indigenous language becoming monolingual in Spanish.

### **Children's Parents**

Baker (2006) argues that "parents, members of the public and politicians are sometimes prejudiced and believe that acquiring two languages from birth must be detrimental to a child's language growth" (p. 98). In the past, there was

the idea that simultaneous acquisition would muddle the mind or retard language development (Baker, 2006). In contrast, “both simultaneous dual language acquisition and early childhood second language learning are as feasible as later second language learning if not more so, given the demonstrated language capabilities of infants and children” (Grow Language, 2010, para. 2). Babies are biologically ready to learn, store and distinguish among languages from birth onwards (Baker, 2006).

Infant bilingualism is described as “normal and natural, with evidence that it is typically beneficial in many ways: cognitively, culturally, communicatively, for higher curriculum achievement and to increase the chances of employment and promotion” (Baker, 2006, p. 98). Babies have the capacity to differentiate between two languages and effectively store them for both understanding and production therefore “infant bilingualism is very viable (Deuchar & Quay, 2000; Genesee, 2001, 2003; Genesee *et al.*, 2004; Meisel, 2004)” (Baker, 2006, p. 98).

Although infant bilingualism is possible, negative attitudes exist towards the use of two languages in bilingual schools. For example, Paciotto (2004) has found that indigenous children’s parents’ attitudes are both positive and negative towards bilingual education. For example, Paciotto (2004) states that mothers included in the research “viewed schooling as important for children to help the family in case, for example, of illness and to speak to the *mestizos* (non-indigenous Mexicans) or to defend themselves, or to learn how to speak better”. Paciotto (2004) found that:

Spanish literary and oral skills were the basis for why they [parents] send kids to school; they do it in order for them to help the community members that don't know [how to speak] and also to help in their homes to speak with the mestizos; to help people answer when they don't know some words. (p. 541)

Parents who participated in Paciotto's (2004) study consider Spanish as "a way to enable the families and community to protect themselves from the inevitable incursions of the external world, and to appropriate basic services beneficial to the survival of the household" (Paciotto, 2004, p. 541). Thus, these parents think it is beneficial for the children to learn Spanish, but not at the expense of their native language. In contrast, in the same study, there were parents who wondered why instructors teach in the indigenous language if the children already know it (Paciotto, 2004). "Parents think that what their children need now because of their economic situation is to learn Spanish, in order to defend themselves in the other world [mestizo]" (Paciotto, 2004, p. 543). Negative attitudes toward the teaching and transmission of the indigenous language have also been a barrier to bilingual education.

### **Assimilation**

The viewpoint of bilingual education in Mexico has been, historically, and continues to be that of assimilation of the indigenous groups. Rippberger (1993) suggests that:

When bilingual education was introduced by the federal government in the 1930s, its purpose was to help Indians improve their lives through education. Specifically, bilingual education helped to

“Mexicanize” the Indian, not to preserve Indian culture. In essence, the program was to help Indians ‘improve’ themselves by becoming non-Indian. (p. 56)

Thus, the classroom is seen as the place of change in indigenous cultural identity. In the past, for the Mexican government, “the process of becoming educated is a means of assimilating the diverse Indian groups into the national” (Rippberger, 1992, p. 63) non-indigenous culture. This was reflected by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico, an institution that creates and promotes bilingual education as a means to national cultural unity. SEP’s purpose was “to help Indian children assimilate, learn to speak Spanish, and learn to read and write in Spanish. Without these skills, Indian children are unable to function in settings other than their Indian community” (Rippberger, 1992, p. 65). Thus, I agree with a bilingual administrator who took part in Rippberger’s research (1992) that bilingual education is a process of *Spanish-ization* (assimilation to the Spanish language and culture) rather than integration of both the indigenous and national languages and cultures.

### **Competition between Languages**

When indigenous and national languages “compete” for space, and when the “boundaries” between using one or the other are not clear, this imbalance puts the indigenous language at a disadvantage (Francis & Reyhner, 2002). Examples of such imbalance are schools in indigenous areas. For example, Francis (1997) contends that in a bilingual school in the state of Tlaxcala, Central Mexico, the native indigenous language was not used as a medium of instruction or for

academic tasks in class. The Tlaxcala study suggests that “native literacy could be developed impinging on the development of second language (L2) orality and literacy; on the contrary, it could potentially strengthen L2 academic proficiency owing to the transferability of academic skills from one language to the other” (Paciotto, 2000, p. 6).

In northern Mexico, in the Sierra Madre Occidental of Chihuahua, the Tarahumara language, the indigenous language spoken in that area, is still “strong and the primary language of many communities, at the same time, it appears to be undergoing a fast shift in areas of intense and increasing contact with the Spanish-speaking populations” (Paciotto, 2000, p. 6). Elementary school teachers who were “mostly mestizos and Tarahumara assimilated to the mestizo culture” (Paciotto, 2004, p. 537) and were working in the uplands of the Sierra were interviewed and the results show that “bridging home and school environment and maintenance of the native language are not strong enough motives to introduce Tarahumara literacy in the classroom” (Paciotto, 2004, p. 6). Since the focus school in Paciotto’s research is supposed to be a bilingual school where both the indigenous and the Spanish languages are spoken, the use of mostly Spanish is not seen as the best medium of communication. Tarahumara is considered to be a low-prestige language and is confined to the community and family oral communicative space. In contrast, the written and larger social domains are occupied by Spanish (Paciotto, 2004). Unfortunately, the study did not indicate whether the teachers were fluent in the Tarahumara language, which would have

been helpful to analyze the teachers' preference for either language as a means of communication.

This is the situation of most indigenous languages in Mexico. Thus, I felt encouraged to research the Tsotsil language spoken in Chenalhó, Chiapas because it has a high number of speakers in comparison to other indigenous languages in Mexico. I believed it would be interesting to know if language loss was also taking place in Chiapas, and if that were the case, to explore how the language might be revitalized.

### **The Specific Research Interest: Bilingual Education in Chenalhó, Chiapas Chiapas and its Native Peoples**

Chiapas is one of the states in Mexico where the presence of native people is significant. In this state, there are eight linguistic communities, namely tzeltales, tsotsiles, choles, zoques, tojolabalels, kanjobales, mames and chujs (Guitart, 2006). These groups enrich Chiapas both culturally and linguistically. Therefore, I would suggest it is important to preserve them, their languages and cultures. This can be done in part through quality bilingual education based on a cultural orientation of plurality, plurilinguism and pluriculturalism (Hamel, 2001) that allows them to be themselves.

According to Ramírez (2008), many indigenous groups in Chiapas still preserve part of their traditions, values and native languages. However, these cultural aspects have been shifting because indigenous people have had changes imposed upon them with the purpose of inserting them into new social, religious, political and economic organizations that aim for acculturation (Ramírez, 2008). Nowadays, in the context of Chiapas, some indigenous cultural beliefs and

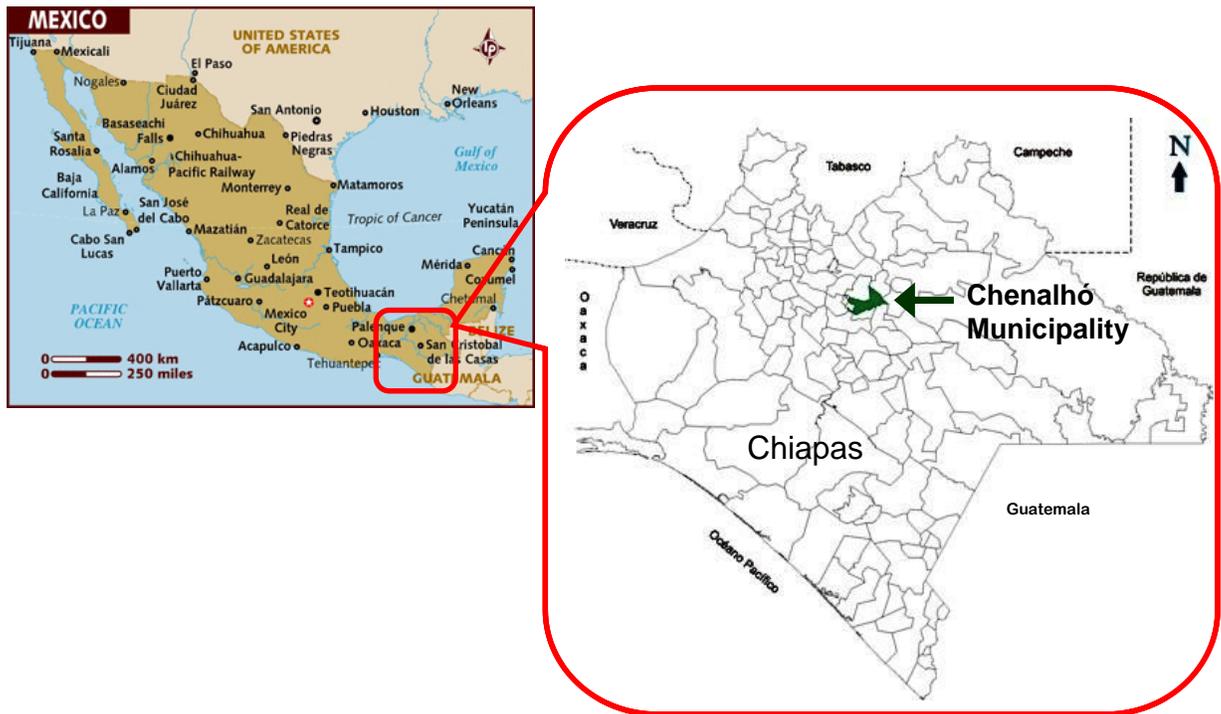
traditions have been transforming and have been combined with Mestizos' to a point that leads to confusion (Ramírez, 2008).

Although the presence of native groups in Chiapas is important, they have been and still are in a disadvantaged social position (UNESCO, 2003). This can be reflected in the type of education they receive, which according to Galván (2007) does not respect or promote respect for diversity. Also, it does not strengthen the linguistic richness in Mexico (Galván, 2007). Sadly, the viewpoint of bilingual education has not greatly changed from the past into the present. An example of this is the bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas which is where this research was conducted (more on this later).

### **Background on Chenalhó**

Chenalhó is a Tsotsil word that means *agua de la caverna* (water of the cave) (National Institute for the Federalism and the Municipal Development, 2005) or *agua que mana de la cueva o roca* (water that comes from the cave or rock) (Guiteras Holmes, 1961). Chenalhó is one of the 15 municipalities in Chiapas, southeast Mexico, which mainly consists of Tsotsil speakers (Arias, 1985). According to Agenda Estadística Chiapas (Valls, 2006), there are 27,331 inhabitants in Chenalhó, of whom 23,002 are indigenous. This municipality is located in the region known as “Los Altos” or the Highlands of Chiapas, some 34 kilometres north of the touristic colonial town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The location of Chenalhó is shown in

Figure 1.



Adapted from [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) and [www.e-local.gob.mx](http://www.e-local.gob.mx)

Figure 1. Location of Chenalhó Municipality

## Economics

According to Guiteras Holmes (1961), all *Pedranos* (people born and raised in Chenalhó) cultivate the land. “The land is the most important element in their culture as well as its cultivation because “it is not only a need, but an inherent obligation to the meaning of the human condition” (Guiteras Holmes,

1961, p. 39). Chenalhó is an area rich in high-altitude coffee, timber, sheep and cattle, corn, beans, and other vegetable crop production (Del Carpio, 2008). However, this area is poor in terms of health care, education, and clean water. The land in Chenalhó is owned by Tsotsil families and can be bought and sold among them with the purpose of doing business with people from their same region (Del Carpio, 2008). Although the lands usually stay in the hands of the Tsotsils, the modest money they can earn from agriculture, which is one of their main economic bases, forces some *Pedranos* to move to cities to find a job outside their community, for which Spanish is necessary (Del Carpio, 2008). Their main destinations are Villahermosa, San Cristóbal, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Del Carpio, 2008).

### **Access to Chenalhó**

Nowadays, it is easy to access Chenalhó from San Cristóbal de las Casas. There are taxis and buses that go to Chenalhó every 20 minutes, so the contact between non-indigenous Mexicans living in San Cristóbal and *Pedranos* has increased, which also increases the exposure of *Pedranos* to Spanish and diminishes the use of their native language (Del Carpio, 2008). For example, when *Coletos* (people born and raised in San Cristóbal) go to Chenalhó and talk to *Pedranos*, they use Spanish and not Tsotsil because they know *Pedranos* are expected to speak the official language of the country. In addition, when *Pedranos* go to the city to sell their products, they know they must use Spanish (Del Carpio, 2008). Otherwise the possibilities for them to sell their products to *mestizos* are not very high because most *mestizos* in the city (and out of it) do not speak any Tsotsil (Del Carpio, 2008).

## Education and Language

In 1961, Guiteras Holmes stated that 80% of the population in Chenalhó did not speak Spanish. In contrast, in 2003, the National Institute for the Federalism and the Municipal Development found that of the Tsotsil population, 14,834 (64.49%) were monolingual Tsotsil speakers. Also, there were and still are other Tsotsil-speaking indigenous groups such as *Magdaleneros* and *Marteños* that live in areas close to Chenalhó. These people speak Tsotsil, although they say they speak a different variety with the purpose of differentiating themselves from *Pedranos* (Torres, 2001). People from these groups as well as non-indigenous Mexicans have moved to Chenalhó; however, most of the inhabitants in this indigenous community are still born-and-raised *Pedranos*.

According to the teachers interviewed in the study, in Chenalhó there are two pre-schools (one monolingual in Spanish and one bilingual in Spanish and Tsotsil), two elementary schools (one monolingual in Spanish and one bilingual in Spanish and Tsotsil), one secondary school and one high school, both of which are monolingual in Spanish. If *Pedranos* desire to attend university they have to move to cities such as San Cristóbal de las Casas or Tuxtla Gutiérrez where Spanish is required.

In the past, most people from Chenalhó were monolingual speakers of only Tsotsil. Nowadays, many young people can also speak Spanish and one of the factors that has contributed to this situation is the establishment of Spanish-Indigenous language schooling (Lam, 2009). Thus, as stated earlier, I was interested in researching the implementation of the current Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual program in an elementary

bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas, to determine in what ways such a program aided or hindered preservation of the indigenous language, as well as the extent in which it respected and promoted the native language and culture. Also, I was interested in learning about the historical and current contexts that have influenced the teachers' and students' attitudes and experiences of teaching and learning both languages. In short, it was my intent to know if elementary Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual education was contributing or might contribute to language loss in Chiapas.

### **Reasons for Bilingual Education**

Examples of biliterate educational practices in contexts of indigenous language revitalization are Quechua in the South American Andes, Guarani in Paraguay, and Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Hornberger, 2006). Hornberger (2006) states that the "biliterate use of indigenous children's own or heritage language as medium of instruction alongside the dominant language mediates the dialogism, meaning-making, access to wider discourses, and taking of an active stance that are dimensions of voice" (p. 277). I agree with Hornberger that if indigenous voices are activated they can be a powerful force for both enhancing the children's own learning and promoting the maintenance and revitalization of their languages.

Rippberger (1992) argues that:

"Minority children confront a foreign culture in school. Without knowing the language or culture of the dominant group they are expected to function academically, and compete with students who

are fluent in the dominant language and comfortable with the dominant culture” (p. 12).

As a result, children feel as they do not belong. Hornberger (2006) maintains that the children’s shyness and reticence are because the language used in school is foreign to the children. This has been the case of Quechua children in Peru. There are other reasons that contribute to such a situation such as participation structures, the teacher’s personality and the environment in the classroom. However, language is crucial for communication. Hornberger (2006) points out: “Who after all, can speak out in a language which they do not know?” (p. 278). A good example is a young girl who was observed in both classroom and home settings. She almost never spoke in class, but at home “she was something of a livewire” (Hornberger, 2006, p. 278). She lost her voice at school where Spanish was used, but she found it at home where the use of her own language in familiar surrounding was key. Thus, it is necessary to create “real bilingual – bicultural schools inspired both by the interest and the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor needs of the children as well as the needs of their social groups” (CET, 1992, as cited in Paciotto, 2004, p. 536). Also, it is important to recognize that “children of visible minority backgrounds are ‘not blank slates’ (August & Shanahan, 2006); and they bring a variety of proficiencies into the classroom setting” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 45). For this reason, educators “need to be made aware of the potential impact different languages and cultures bring to the classroom, and how they can be integrated positively into the learning experience of all their pupils” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 45).

“Language can be an instrument of cultural and linguistic oppression, (it) can also be a vehicle for advancing human rights and minority community empowerment” (McCarty, 2003, p. 289). According to Naqvi (2009):

It is not simply enough to acknowledge the cultural and familial frames of reference that students bring with them to school. Schools must attempt to infuse these perspectives into both the social and academic fabric, while remaining ever vigilant to protect against the ways that larger social discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ may serve to isolate and marginalize students. (p. 44)

Thus, teachers working at elementary bilingual schools should be encouraged to use both the students’ indigenous language and Spanish, and not only Spanish. By doing so, the possibilities for elementary bilingual students to feel marginalized and isolated would be fewer while the possibilities for them to feel comfortable and safer would be higher, which are important elements that may positively impact students’ learning processes.

### **Schools as Communities**

Dewey (1897) argued that any individual is part of a society, which emphasizes the importance of being part of a community. Each member of such a group contributes to his/her community in relation to others. It is important to remember that the school is a social institution and education a social process (Dewey, 1897). We are human beings and part of our nature is the need to be part of a community, so school is not a place to be isolated, but to be involved and integrated. By doing so, students’ opportunities to develop their social skills might

increase. Living in a community guides youth to know how to contribute to the society they live in.

According to Sergiovanni (1994), reforms have attempted to make schools more inclusive and subject matter more representative and democratic. Meanwhile, children and teachers increasingly report feelings of isolation, alienation, and hopelessness (Conley, 1991). Thus, it would be interesting to investigate if such feelings are higher in elementary bilingual schools where students' native language may not be used (or not as much as the national language). This might interfere with students' learning processes and personalities, and also the way they view school. That is, they might think about the school as a place where they feel intimidated, oppressed and a location they cannot be themselves. The purpose of schools is to help students learn in an environment where they feel comfortable and safe. Thus, the use of students' native language during school is important because it can add or enrich (May, 1998) their learning and connections to their communities.

### **Intercultural Bilingual Education**

Ramírez (2008) suggests that indigenous people in Mexico have asked in different ways for their right to receive education according to their cultural characteristics. In the 1970s different organizations in Mexico and other parts in Latin America started to explicitly demand to the governments that education be intercultural. According to Ramírez (2008), "intercultural education can be seen as a teaching and learning method that aims to promote cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies" (p. 4). This type of education emerged in Mexico as a response from the national government due to the demands made by different

indigenous groups (Ramírez, 2008). Mexican indigenous groups requested the recognition of their cultural characteristics such as language, culture, and identity.

Ramírez (2008) points out that:

In the 1980s, intercultural education attempted to promote cultural pluralism through indigenous education as a model that aimed to promote the respect and recognition of the ethnic diversity of the country as authors such as Aguirre (1992), Apel (1996) and Dietz (2003) have analyzed (2008, p. 4).

Ramírez (2008) states that Mexico is considered to be the pioneer country in Latin America to recognize cultural plurality and has been characterized by the creation of important institutions and centers of study specifically interested in indigenous peoples. Examples of these institutions are the National Indigenist Institute (INI) and the General Direction of Indigenous Education (DGEI) among others. Nonetheless, “it was not until 1993 that some legal advancements were made such as the constitutional recognition to the right to own forms of autodetermination that also included the possibility to formulate educational programs that took into account indigenous people’s sociocultural conditions” (Ramírez, 2008, p. 4).

Nowadays, Mexico is a multilingual and pluricultural country, where cultural diversity is recognized in Article Four of its Constitution (Mexican Constitution, 1997):

Article 4: The Mexican Constitution has a pluricultural composition originally based on its indigenous peoples. This Law will protect

and promote the development of their languages, cultures, uses, traditions, resources and specific forms of social organization. Also, this Law will guarantee to its members the effective access to the jurisdiction of the State. In agrarian trials and procedures, indigenous peoples' practices and traditions will be considered in the terms established by the Law.

These “principles were reinforced in 1993 with the General Law of Education” (Ramírez, 2008, p. 5). This Law states the pluricultural character of the nation and establishes the commitment of the Law to protect and promote the languages, cultures, traditions, resources and specific forms of social organization of indigenous peoples (Ramírez, 2008). However, considering “the concrete social situation of the Mayan indigenous people at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the legal recognition of the need for education according to their cultural characteristics might not be enough to guarantee indigenous peoples' physical and cultural survival” (Ramírez, 2008, p. 5). Unfortunately, many indigenous communities in Chiapas and in different parts in Mexico continue to suffer great social inequalities and face socio-cultural marginalization problems (Ramírez, 2008).

### **The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico**

Teachers in Spanish-Indigenous bilingual schools in Mexico are provided in theory (because I witness that not all of them receive) a workbook called Organisation of the Academic Work: Workbook for Indigenous Elementary Education (SEP, 2003). This workbook is created by the General Direction of Indigenous Education from the Subsecretariat of Basic Education and Normal;

Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). This workbook contains ideas and activities that can help teachers in their daily practice to conduct an Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) (SEP, 2003). The purpose of the workbook is to encourage teachers to reflect on the purpose of education, which is “Enseñar a vivir” (Teaching to live) (SEP, 2003).

SEP (2003) argues that:

The task of bilingual educators is not the achievement of a work day or the achievement of a program of studies, but the willingness to conduct an education that guarantees that indigenous children and youth take ownership of the fundamental knowledge and skills, habits, attitudes and values that shape them as good, intelligent, honest, clean, hardworking women and men, but especially as women and men committed to the development of their own culture and country (p. 5).

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) states that the previous goal implies an important responsibility and many efforts, but it is worthwhile as the achievement of such a goal, without a doubt, is the best reward that passionate educators can aspire to obtain.

Intercultural bilingual education involves both “the actions performed by educators as well as the education that students receive” (SEP, 2003, p. 13). The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) reminds teachers that developing an intercultural bilingual practice allows us to improve students’ education and that “the way we perceive education; it is the way we act on it” (2003, p. 13). SEP

(2003) also reminds teachers of the characteristics of intercultural bilingual education saying that it is not a rigid and homogeneous recipe that others offer to teachers to develop their activities, but an opportunity to build together an education pertinent to indigenous children's characteristics and needs. Also, intercultural bilingual education aims to respond to the educational needs derived from the current diversity that exists in classrooms and schools. This diversity is the product of ethnic, sociocultural and economic factors and others (SEP, 2003).

According to the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP, 2003), intercultural bilingual education privileges the use and teaching of indigenous languages as well as Spanish in all the activities that are part of the educational process considering both languages as objects of study as well as ways of communication (SEP, 2003). In addition, this type of education promotes the modification of ways of rapport established in the community, in the school and in the classroom and the inclusion of pedagogic and didactic resources in order to guarantee that students achieve the goals of the national elementary education and achieve an effective oral and written bilingualism. Intercultural bilingual education also aims to have students to know and value their own culture (SEP, 2003).

Education is a process that involves relations and interactions among people (SEP, 2003). It is a complex process where people departing from their gender, social status, personal history, language, motivations, desires and their different roles of power or oppression among other factors establish a system of relations that impact whether positively or negatively the achievement of the educational goals (SEP, 2003). The intercultural approach should lead to the

adoption of attitudes and practices that recognize that being different is not a defect, but something valuable where communication is based on respect and tolerance and where harmonious coexistence among people and the natural world is promoted (SEP, 2003). These attitudes and practices should guarantee the legality, equality and democracy for everyone. The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) also argues that the intercultural approach should lead to the adoption of attitudes and practices that consider a new educational dimension in which the sense of change consists of what is actually important to individuals and society.

The intercultural approach is more than a pedagogic or didactic proposal or a proposal for only linguistic development, that is, it is a way to perceive that the educational process involves people with their own characteristics, needs and interests (SEP, 2003). “The educational intervention is not restricted to the irrational completion of a plan or program of studies, that is, the aim is to go beyond the institutional goals to achieve a better quality of life” (SEP, 2003, P. 15).

The recognition of adopting an intercultural approach is only the start to transform and improve the school and society (SEP, 2003). This implies commitment to change, improvement of the ways of interaction, incorporation of new ways of teaching and scholarly organization in the educational practice that guarantee the achievement of educational purposes and individuals’ and society’s full development (SEP, 2003).

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) states that to respond to the conditions of indigenous people's language and culture, education should have bilingualism as a basic characteristic considering that each language as a product of a culture is a carrier of symbols of such a culture. "This represents a pedagogic and didactic potential for the teacher as well as a basic need for students' identity formation" (SEP, 2003. P. 16). The intercultural approach aims for the full development of students' bilingualism and the commitment to guarantee improvement in the intervention and results of the educational process as a whole. This new type of education for indigenous children and the youth is called intercultural bilingual education (SEP, 2003).

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) emphasizes that "intercultural bilingual education is not an alternative and different educational model from the national educational proposal. In contrast, it derives from it and promotes its theoretical and methodological approaches". Also, "intercultural bilingual education incorporates the academic and technical resources as well as materials" (SEP, 2003, p. 17). This type of education has its own characteristics, that is, "its own academic and operative aspects; however, it can be achieved by taking advantage of the possibilities of flexibilization of the national curriculum in order to adequate it to the students' cultural and linguistic characteristics" (SEP, 2003).

### **Intercultural Bilingual Schools**

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) points out that intercultural bilingual education should be equal, effective, formative, integral, inclusive, innovative, permanent and should be for everyone. An intercultural

bilingual school within Mexico develops and exerts its own autonomy and it impulses a pedagogical culture in direction to the achievement of students' basic competences based on the appropriation of meaningful and permanent learning. Also, a school with this approach promotes "pedagogical innovation and encourages an educational intervention that effectively responds to the cultural and linguistic diversity present in the classroom, especially to students with special educational needs" (SEP, 2003, p. 19).

An intercultural bilingual school adapts organizational and academic rules to make the educational proposal congruent with the needs found in the school as well as with the conditions in which the educational process is developed. In addition, a school with this approach considers "cultural diversity as a resource for the enrichment and potentiality of education and it becomes an instrument to promote development and the compensation for social and cultural inequalities" (SEP, 2003, P. 20). Besides, an intercultural bilingual school promotes equality of learning opportunities without segregating students in terms of their differences. This can be done through identification, definition and complementarity among local, state, national and global knowledge.

Following the above, a school with an intercultural bilingual approach encourages parents' and members' of the community participation in the development of educational processes in order to take advantage of their knowledge and skills (SEP, 2003). Also, a school with such an approach encourages "the recognition of planning and evaluation as continuous and permanent processes in order to achieve the goals of intercultural bilingual

education that supports the academic staff to work in the development of programs and planning and evaluation processes” (SEP, 2003, p. 20).

### **Intercultural Bilingual Classrooms**

According to the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003), “in the classroom teaching and learning processes are observed, which are based on the use and teaching of both indigenous and Spanish languages in different activities” (SEP, 2003, p. 21). Both languages are considered as objects of study as well as ways of communication (SEP, 2003). The teaching and learning processes are based on the definition of learning objectives congruent with indigenous children’s characteristics, needs and demands with basis on the purposes established in the national framework. Besides, such processes “consider the adoption and use of globalized and didactic approaches that incorporate local, regional and national cultures” (SEP, 2003, P. 21).

The teaching and learning processes are also based on the selection and use of educational materials congruent with the purposes and contents pertinent to indigenous children’s characteristics. Also, the creation of materials that respond to specific needs is encouraged (SEP, 2003). Among the aim of these processes is to help students develop useful skills for their present and future life as well as to acquire habits and values of the indigenous and national cultures in Mexico (SEP, 2003).

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) states that educational success is observed in students who have acquired meaningful and permanent learning because they gain competencies that allow them to effectively communicate in their indigenous language and in Spanish with different purposes

and in different contexts. Also, these competencies allow students to coexist in diversity, strengthen their local, regional and national identity as well as to recognize the historical sense of social processes and phenomena (SEP, 2003). In addition, such competencies allow students to take care of their health, preserve their environment and take advantage of its resources. These competencies allow “students make ownership of basic elements that help them quantify the natural and social world and solve daily life problems” (SEP, 2003, p. 21). SEP (2003) suggests that such competencies also allow students to express their desires, thoughts and feelings through artistic ways of expression.

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) (2003) emphasizes that students need to learn social knowledge and this can only be achieved if teachers communicate with students in the language they actually understand. It is important that “students in bilingual schools are spoken to and taught in their mother tongue whether it is an indigenous language or Spanish so that students take ownership of the academic contents and this contributes to their integral formation” (SEP, 2003, p. 41). Sadly, in reality, these ideas have not been fully applied in Spanish-Indigenous bilingual schools in Mexico as it is in part the case of the school where this research was conducted (more on this in the Data Analysis section).

### **Summary**

Languages are valuable tools for what they are, what they represent and all the history they carry. Unfortunately, many languages have and are still disappearing around the world due to cultural, economic and political forces that work to by indigenous people themselves to show their fatigue with such a

situation and to defend their rights, for instance, the Zapatista uprising in 1994 in Chiapas.

This Review of the Literature also addressed the topic of bilingualism, factors that lead to it as well as the types of bilingualism that exist as these are important components of this research. In addition, the myths and benefits for bilingual education were discussed. In this section it is also discussed the importance of halting the perception that culturally and linguistically diverse children as an issue to be solved and instead considering those differences as resources children bring from their homes to schools and societies.

The contributions from previous research related to Spanish-Indigenous bilingual education are also addressed, for instance, the findings of action research (Modiano, 1978) have led to the development of materials and instructional programs that increase the quality of bilingual education. On the other hand, ethnographic studies have provided information about the current situation of certain Mexican indigenous languages and its speakers (Paciotto, 2004).

The barriers for bilingual education such as children's parents' attitudes, the view point of bilingual education as assimilation of the indigenous groups as well as the competition between indigenous and national languages are explained. Also, information about Chenalhó, Chiapas, which is where this research was conducted, is mentioned, for example, its location, economy, access, education and language. In addition, the reasons for bilingual education and the importance of promoting schools as communities were stated.

One of the sections was dedicated to intercultural bilingual education in Mexico. This type of education is seen as a teaching and learning method that attempts to promote cultural pluralism in Mexico. Finally, the Secretariat of Public Education's (SEP) approach and purposes for intercultural bilingual education are described as well as the ideal classrooms and schools with this intercultural bilingual approach.

The following chapter will focus on the research approach pertinent to this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **Theoretical Frame**

#### **What is a Theory?**

According to Maxwell (2005), a theory “is a set of concepts and the proposed relationships among these, a structure that is intended to represent or model something about the world” (p. 42). An important function of theory is to provide a model or map of *why* the world is the way it is (Strauss, 1995). Maxwell (2005) considers that a theory is:

A simplification of the world that aims at clarifying and explaining some aspect of how it works. Theory is a statement about what is going on with the phenomena that you want to understand. It is not simply a “framework”, although it can provide that, but a *story*

about what you think is happening and why. A useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon, one that gives you new insights and broadens your understanding of that phenomenon (p. 42).

I agree with Maxwell (2005) that the use of existing theory has both advantages and risks. For example, one of the advantages is that “high-level theory gives you a framework for making sense of what you see” (p. 43). Nonetheless, “no theory will accommodate all data equally well; a theory that neatly organizes some data will leave other data dishevelled and lying on the floor, with no place to put them” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 43).

A useful theory is one that *illuminates* what you see (Maxwell, 2005). “It draws your attention to particular events or phenomena, and sheds light on relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood” (Maxwell, 2005, p.43). It should be noted that all areas in a research cannot be illuminated by one theory. That is, no theory can illuminate everything (Maxwell, 2005). However, Becker (1986) suggests that the use of existing literature, and the assumptions embedded in it, can deform your research, causing you to overlook important ways of conceptualizing your study or key implications of your results. For this reason, Becker (1986) recommends identifying the ideological components of the established approach, and seeing what happens when you abandon these assumptions. As Becker (1986) points out, it is important that you as a serious scholar “use the literature, don’t let it use you” (p. 149).

### **The Proposed Research**

Following both Maxwell's (2005) and Becker's (1986) cautions, this research was grounded in a theoretical framework based on postcolonial theory, which allowed me to explore the history of colonialism and its repercussions for Mexican indigenous people's culture, language(s) and attitudes. By doing so, I obtained new insights and broadened my understanding of the phenomena.

### **Postcolonial Theory**

According to Ghandi (1998), "postcolonialism has taken its place with theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism as a major critical discourse in the humanities" (p. 8). Due to its different and interdisciplinary usage, "this body of thought has generated an enormous corpus of specialised academic writing" (Ghandi, 1998, p. 8); however, postcolonialism remains a "diffuse and nebulous term" (Ghandi, 1998, p. 8).

Slemon (2001) points out that "there is no single post-colonial theory, simply because no one critic can possibly represent, or speak for, the post-colonial critical field – a field that is so broad and hotly contested" (p. 101). Young (2001) suggests that "postcolonial theory is not even a theory in the strict sense of the term" (p. 64). In other words, postcolonial theory is not "a set of assumptions or principles designed to explain phenomena" (Burns et al., 1999, p. 15). In this respect, Young (2001) argues that:

What (postcolonial theory) has done is to develop a set of conceptual resources. As in feminism, there is no single methodology which has to be adhered to: rather, there are shared political and psychological perceptions, together with specific social

and cultural objectives, which draw on a common range of theories and employ a constellation of theoretical insights. (p. 64)

### **Debate about the Prefix “*post*”**

The term *postcolonialism* has been problematic because it refers to an era after colonialism and to a set of critical attitudes taken toward colonialism. “As the design of *Postcolonial Discourses* suggests, postcolonialism is region-specific and employs Western as well as native modes of expression” (Castle, 2001, p. 508). The term *postcolonialism* has been criticized for reinstating all cultures into a hyphenated relationship with colonialism by focusing on the “grand narrative” of European domination, excluding all other stories and voices from the past (Ghandi, 1998). Pennycook (1998) points out that:

Colonialism and postcolonial struggles...have produced and reduced nations, massacred populations, dispossessed people of their land, culture, language and history, shifted vast numbers of people from one place to another. And they are also the ground which European/Western images of the Self and Other have been constructed, the place where constructions of Superiority and Inferiority were produced. (p.19)

Pennycook (1998) suggests that colonialism should not be seen as a forgotten era in the past, but as the context in which current ideas were framed. The identification of postcolonialism with the “end” of colonialism is “falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory” (Ghandi, 1998, p. 174). Postcolonialism, used in this way, suggests a linear movement of historical development and “progress” towards a new and better world (Ghandi, 1998).

The critiques of *postcolonialism* considered in this temporal frame are ones that I found helpful for my research. The indigenous community I was interested in, the Tsotsil community, located in Chiapas, Mexico, is a great example that strengthens the debate around the term *postcolonialism*, that is, I do not think that the *post* should suggest *progression* towards a better world because the reality lived by the Tsotsil community has not significantly and positively changed from the colonial into the postcolonial era (Del Carpio, 2008). In other words, during the colonization of Amerindian groups in Mexico, the indigenous people were not only exploited economically and politically, but many came to accept a sense of inferiority. According to Rippberger (1992), “the supposed inferiority of the indigenous population along with the supposed superiority of the non-Indian group persists” ( p. 11). In this respect, Hymes (1971) maintains that “not the least of the crimes of colonialism has been to persuade the colonized that they, or ways in which they differ, are inferior – to convince the stigmatized that the stigma is deserved” (p.3).

Mexican indigenous groups had the Spanish language imposed upon them at the expense of their own (Margulis & Nowakoski, 1996), a practice that has been repeated in “bilingual” schools in indigenous areas today (Del Carpio, 2008). For these reasons, the *post* should not suggest progression because the past has not significantly changed into a better and more just present for indigenous people. That is, we have not moved towards a really positive *postcolonial* era.

### **Language and Bilingual Schools**

According to Margulis and Nowakoski (1996), “language is often a central question in postcolonial studies. During colonization, colonizers usually

imposed their language onto the peoples they colonized, forbidding natives to speak their mother tongues” (para.2). As a result, some postcolonial writers and activists advocate a complete return to the use of indigenous languages. For example, Ngugi is a Kenyan writer who abandoned using English as the primary language of his work in favour of Gikuyu, his native tongue. Ngugi (n.d.) believes that:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples’ languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life (para. 6).

However, there are others who think that the language imposed on the colonized is a more practical alternative to enhance inter-nation communication (Margulis and Nowakoski, 1996). This perspective reflects the purpose of Spanish-indigenous bilingual education in Mexico, which has historically, and

continues to be, one of assimilation of the indigenous groups (Francis & Reyhner, 2002). Iwanska (1977) argues that imposed homogeneity can only be destructive to the identity and self-respect of indigenous people. Calvo and Donnadiou (1982) pointed out that the bilingual education serves to reproduce and further marginalize indigenous communities within the Mexican society. Also, it is considered that the education delivered in schools located in indigenous areas is based on communication in Spanish as well as in the teaching of it (Informador, 2011). This may affect the preservation of students' indigenous language. Based on these understandings about bilingual education, I strongly believed that it was important to investigate if elementary Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual education in Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico had reproduced or was reproducing the marginalization of indigenous elementary students through the imposition of the colonizer's language over the native language in *bilingual* schools. If so, this might contribute to language loss in Chiapas. Thus, this research aimed to gain a better understanding of bilingual education through postcolonial theory. This research might contribute to preventing language loss by strengthening the indigenous language through quality bilingual education.

### **Research Traditions**

Keeping in mind the purpose of this study, I believe that this research is favourably disposed to a qualitative research method. Merriam (1998) maintains that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of the world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). Also, qualitative approaches allow room to be innovative and creative (Creswell, 2009).

Merriam (1998) suggests that “qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Among those forms of inquiry, I was particularly drawn to critical ethnography (Bailey, 2007).

### **Strategy of Inquiry: Critical Ethnography**

For Denzin and Lincoln (1994) a strategy of inquiry “comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world” (p. 14). The form of qualitative strategy that I consider pertinent to this research is critical ethnography, which Thomas (1993) defined as following:

Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action. It expands our horizons for choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas (p. 2).

This strategy of inquiry has been influenced by different social sciences such as anthropology, history, philosophy, education (Thomas, 1993) as well as sociology (Anderson, 1989). According to Thomas (1993), most people do not question their reality, what Schutz (1972) called “taken for granted” reality where people feel there is no need for further analysis. Thus, critical scholarship encourages the need for commonsense assumptions to be questioned (Thomas, 1993).

Thomas (1993) argues that “critical ethnography is not in opposition to conventional ethnography. Rather it offers a more direct style of thinking about the relationships among knowledge, society, and political action” (p. 7). The main premise is that one can be both scientific and critical and that “ethnographic description offers a powerful means of critiquing culture and the role of research with it” (Thomas, 1993, p. 7).

### **Questions Addressed in Critical Ethnography**

Critical ethnography “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” (Madison, 2005, p. 5), that is, “a sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings” (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

I believe that the conditions for existence within the indigenous community I was interested in are not as they could be. For this reason, I identified with critical ethnography because within that tradition, “the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Thus, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from “what is” to “what could be” (Madison, 2005). In other words, critical ethnography emerges when members of a culture of ethnography become reflective and ask not only “What is this?” but also “What could this be?” (Thomas, 1993).

### **Resisting Domestication**

Madison (2005) points out that for the critical ethnographer, resisting domestication means the use of “the resources, skills, and privileges available to

her to make accessible – to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of – the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach” (p. 5).

Fine (1994) suggests that there are three positions in qualitative research. The first is the ventriloquist where he or she “transmits” information in an effort to neutrality and is absent of a political or rhetorical stance” (p. 17). In this type of positionality, the ethnographer wants to be invisible. The second type involves the positionality of voices where “the subjects themselves are the focus, and their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely present but not addressed” (p. 17). The third position, which is the type I used in this research, is activism, in which “the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives” (p. 17). In this case the alternatives were to address the issue of quality bilingual education where the indigenous language (Tsotsil) is given as active a role as Spanish.

### **Dialogue and the Other**

“Critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with the Other as never before” (Madison, 2005, p. 8). I was seeking understanding of the world in which the participants and I lived and worked and I believed that critical ethnography allowed me to do so as it “is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other’s world” (Madison, 2005, p. 8) – and I would add in the researcher’s own

world as well. It is a reciprocal giving and receiving. Thus, I believe that the positive changes that could lead to making a difference in this world, not only benefit the Other, but oneself as well. Bakhtin (1984) argues that “to be means to be for another, through the other, for oneself” (p. 9). Thus, I agree with Madison (2005) that “the ethnographic moment of dialogue and Otherness is that communion with an Other brings the self more fully into being and, in doing so, opens you to know the Other more fully”(p.9). Interestingly, “the Other is sometimes one’s self seen from another perspective. This means that a shift in perspective means a shift in the other” (Maaning, Van Maanen & Miller, 1993, p. 5).

### **Researcher’s Skills**

According to Yin (1998) and Merriam (2001), there are researcher skills associated with conducting qualitative research studies. Among the skills is an inquiring mind and the willingness to ask questions before, during and after data are collected, and to challenge oneself about why something appears to have happened or be happening (Berg, 2009). The second skill is to listen, to include observation and sensing in general, and to assimilate large amounts of new information without bias (Berg, 2009). Third is adaptability and flexibility to handle unanticipated events and to change data-collection strategies if they do not seem to be functioning effectively and to use alternative sources of data that may be more fruitful (Berg, 2009). Fourth is an understanding of the issues being studied to interpret and react to these data once collected. The fifth skill is unbiased interpretation of the data (Berg, 2009), which can be achieved by

reflection and awareness of the researcher's own personal biases (described in the reflexivity section below).

A very important consideration with regards to attributes of the researcher is his or her own demeanour and attitude in the field (Madison, 2005), for example when doing interviews. Madison (2005) argues it is important to be aware that rapport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between interviewer and interviewee. Thus, it is fundamental for the researcher to be mindful of rapport so that the participant feels he or she is being respected and genuinely heard. Thus, I was aware that "being a good listener is an art and a virtue" (Madison, 2005, p. 31).

Another important consideration is positive naivety which implies "acknowledging that you do not know and that you must rely with humility on others and trust upon the knowledge of knowers" (Madison, 2005, p. 32), who in this case were the participants of this research. I attempted to grasp what I did not know with integrity, intelligence and conviction.

Madison (2005) reminds the researcher about the importance of being aware of power differences and status. She argues that "if you are oblivious to or refuse to accept the power and privilege you carry with you as a researcher, you will be blind to the ways your privilege can be a disadvantage to others" (p.33). Thus, I felt encouraged to reflect humbly on the power and privilege I carried with me as a researcher in order to use those positively.

### Reflexivity

It is important for the critical ethnographer to integrate and systematize two forms of reflection-self-reflection, for example, reflection on the researcher's

biases (Anderson, 1989). The other kind of reflection is upon “the dialectical relationship between structural and historical forces and human agency” (Anderson, 1989, p. 16). Thus, reflexivity in critical ethnography involves “a dialectical process among five areas; the researchers’ constructs, the informant’s commonsense constructs, the research data, the researcher’s personal biases, and the structural and historical forces that informed the social construction under study” (Anderson, 1989, p. 17). I attempted to consider all these aspects of reflexivity when conducting this research.

### **Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretive Methods**

#### **Participants and Research Site**

The research was conducted at an elementary Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas in southeast Mexico. I wanted to focus on how students began and ended their elementary studies in terms of their linguistic skills and language attitudes. For this reason, the participants of this study were three elementary bilingual classes (two first grades and one sixth grade) with up to twenty-eight students in each group. Since parents play an important role in the transmission of a language and their attitudes toward the Tsotsil and Spanish languages may influence their children’s attitudes, students’ parents were invited to participate in this research. In addition, the students’ teachers (one per class; three instructors in total) participated. Because schools in indigenous areas in Chiapas, Mexico are staffed by both indigenous and non-indigenous teachers (Modiano, 1971, 1973), the two teachers from grade one were indigenous and the teacher from grade six was non-indigenous. Also, the school principal took part in the study.

My time in the field was five months; an academic term from August to December 2010 while conducting my fieldwork to gather data from the participants.

### **Methods**

Methods are “a set of procedures or a process for achieving an end, a goal, or a purpose” (Madison, 2005, p. 19), which I achieved through different methods. Creswell (2007) argues that in terms of data collection, questions should be “broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (p. 21). The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting (Creswell, 2007). Thus, researchers often address the “processes” of interaction among individuals (Creswell, 2007). Also, they focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. In my research I hoped to understand which historical and current contexts had influenced the participants’ attitudes and experiences of teaching and learning the Spanish and Tsotsil languages.

### **Interviews**

“Interviewing may be defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information” (Berg, 2009). In this respect, Madison (2005) says that “the interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story. Interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together” (p. 25).

### **Interviews with Teachers**

I used semi-standardized (Berg, 2009) interviews to collect data from the school principal and teachers once consent had been given. The questions in this type of interview “are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent, order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions” (Berg, 2009, p. 107).

I interviewed teachers at school twice during the term. The first time was at the beginning of the term to explore the teachers’ purpose for the courses and their attitudes and experiences towards both languages. Also, they were asked about the implementation of the bilingual program. Among the questions teachers were asked were what their native language is, how they learned it, and whether or not they were bilingual in both the indigenous and Spanish languages. If they were bilingual, they also were asked how they learned them and their opinion about both languages. Also, instructors were asked whether or not they used both languages in the classroom and outside of it. If so, they were also asked about their reasons for doing so and in which situations they used each language. Moreover, instructors were asked about the purpose of the bilingual school and the expectations they had of the students. Similar questions were asked to the school principal who was interviewed once during the term as he was unavailable during most of the study.

The second interview conducted with teachers was at the end of the term, in which they were asked similar questions to the ones in the first interview to

compare their answers. This helped determine if their attitudes had changed after executing the school's bilingual curriculum.

### **Focus Group Interviews with Students and their Parents**

I used focus group interviews (Berg, 2009) for the students. According to Berg (2009), "the focus group is an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals, formed by an investigator and led in a group discussion on some particular topic or topics (Barbour, 2008; Schutt, 2003)" (p. 158). I held two semi-standardized focus group interviews in each class. These took place near the beginning and near the end of the term. Similarly to the teachers, students were asked about their attitudes and experiences towards both languages. For instance, they were asked how they learned their native language and what language(s) they used at home and in the school. Also, students were asked about their opinion on both the indigenous and Spanish languages and which language(s) they identified with.

The same interview style was used for the students' parents who were interviewed near the beginning and near the end of the term. Parents were asked their opinion about their children learning both languages. For example, they were asked the reasons they had for sending their children to a bilingual school (Paciotto, 2004) rather than a regular (monolingual) school. Also, they were interviewed about the language they used at home when talking to their children (Lam, 2009) as well as their attitudes toward the Tsotsil and Spanish languages; for example, they were asked whether or not they wanted their children to know the indigenous language. In addition, parents were asked whether or not they had observed any changes in language use (Lam, 2009) in their children.

All the participants were asked probing questions as relevant information became apparent during the observations. The focus group interviews for the students were conducted in the school when the teachers allowed their students to do so. As for the parents, they were asked what their preferred interview location would be and arrangements of place and time were made when necessary. Also, all of the interviews were recorded and conducted in Spanish and in Tsotsil when necessary. Since indigenous children in Chiapas are more proficient in their mother tongue in early learning programs (Ball, n.d.), but can understand Spanish and can communicate in it (at a basic level), I was hoping to be able to communicate with them in Spanish. However, to ensure that communication took place (especially with first-grade-students), I took intensive Tsotsil lessons before collecting data. Also, I had two students from grade six who were speakers of Spanish and Tsotsil who volunteered to be interpreters during the interviews with both the students and the students' parents.

## **Observations**

### **Participant Observations**

I conducted participant observations when interacting with the students in the playground while they played. I paid attention to the language(s) they used when talking to each other (when their instructor was not present). This helped me verify if the language they used in the classroom was the same outside of it and if the presence or absence of their instructor influenced the students' language choice.

As for the school principal and the teachers, I observed and interacted with them when they talked to their colleagues in the teachers' room or during recesses

in the playground. Such participant observations also helped me develop and strengthen my rapport with the participants. The school principal, teachers and students made me feel part of their community. The interactions I had with them helped me become familiar to them. They cared for me and seemed to enjoy my presence and made me feel like at home. Also, they invited me to participate in their special events, so I never felt left out, but comfortable and loved.

In addition, the locations in which participants were observed provided insights into their bilingual skills; their attitudes toward and use of their linguistic repertoire and other information on their involvement at the school (Watson-Gegeo, 1988).

### **Passive Observations**

I conducted passive observations (Watson-Gegeo, 1988) when observing teachers and students in the classroom. I paid attention to what the teachers did and the language(s) they used and the language(s) they required the students to use and in what situations they did so. This helped me understand how teachers implemented the bilingual program and whether their teaching practices aided the preservation and/or promotion of the indigenous language or supported assimilation of the indigenous groups (Francis and Reyhner, 2002) by prioritizing Spanish. This has been the case of bilingual schools in different parts in Mexico such as Tlaxcala (Central Mexico) and Chihuahua (Northern Mexico) (Paciotto, 2000).

I passively observed the parents when they interacted with their children in different public locations such as the market, the park, the street, etc. Since home is a crucial place for the survival of a language (Lam, 2009), I also observed the

children's and their parents' language use at home (Hornberger, 2006). I strived to establish a good rapport (Madison, 2005) with all of the participants in the study so that they felt comfortable, respected and trusted (Madison, 2005). This facilitated gathering data from the participants and gaining access to different settings.

### **Field Notes**

I wrote field notes of all my activities, verbal exchanges, observations, and thoughts while in the community (Rippberger, 1992). I completed my field notes, if necessary, "immediately following every excursion into the field, as well as following any chance meeting with inhabitants outside the boundaries of the study setting" (Berg, 2009).

### **Written Documents**

I used the program of study provided to the bilingual school by the Secretariat of Education in Mexico to understand what the program entailed and to compare if what it stated was what was practiced by the teachers. Also, I used other curricula and official documents (Paciotto, 2004) such as the Law of Linguistic Rights for indigenous people in Mexico (Government of Mexico, 2003) and the Mexican Constitution. In addition, documents used by the Secretariat of Education in Chiapas (SECH) such as the workbook "the Organisation of the Academic Work: Workbook for Indigenous Elementary Education" (SEP, 2003) was considered in the study.

I selected the documents that needed to be included in this research according to their purpose, content and the audience they addressed. For example, I selected documents that described the purpose of Spanish-Indigenous bilingual education in Mexico and that described how such an education should be implemented. This helped me compare if what was stated in theory was what actually happened in practice. Also, I chose documents that contained information regarding Mexico's linguistic situation and the linguistic rights of its indigenous people, for example, laws and policies with regards to Mexican indigenous languages and cultures.

To identify the appropriate document I followed Scott's (1990) criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. To ensure the authenticity of the documents, I paid attention to who the authors of the texts were. With regards to credibility, I questioned "the "sincerity" of the authors and "accuracy of the account" (Gun'ko, 2007, p. 66). I tried to be aware of the difficulty to assess the authors' sincerity because, as Scott (1990) argued, official documents are based on political views, so sometimes the one who writes the document does not have much liberty to express their own views in its production. Also, laws are usually created collaboratively; therefore it is not possible to determine the credibility of one single author.

Gun'ko (2007) points out that "representativeness refers to assessing the 'typicality' of documents" (p. 67). Thus, I made sure that the documents contributed to the purpose of the study. In addition, I followed Gun'ko's (2007)

suggestion of examining the document's context, authorship, content, vested interests, presentation, and genre (Wellington, 2000).

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to analyze them through content analysis, which "is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings" (Berg, 209, p.338). I identified the units of analysis that I used for coding the data (e.g., phrases, themes). After that, I open coded the transcript data using the unit of analysis (Berg, 2009), by:

1. Asking a specific and consistent set of questions
2. Analyzing the data minutely
3. Frequently interrupting the coding to write a theoretical note
4. Never assuming the analytic relevance of any traditional variable such as age, sex, social class, and so on until the data show it to be relevant (Berg, 2009, pp.354-355)

I identified the common themes that emerged from the interviews and I categorized them into coding frames. In addition, the findings were based on my observations and field notes.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

I was aware that as a researcher I had the responsibility to ensure that data analysis was conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner. To do so, I followed Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For example, I included reporting of pieces of data in the form

of direct citations from the recorded conversations with the participants in the study and information obtained in the documents and observations. By doing so, the reader can determine the accuracy of my interpretations of the data. Also, I provided information about the practices of the government and non-indigenous Mexicans with regard to indigenous people and their languages. I was aware that my beliefs and assumptions could interfere with the findings of the study, that is, there is the possibility of personal bias. Thus, I reflected on my “cultural baggage” and “insider’s knowledge” (Gun’ko, 2007). Also, I had two external auditors. One of them was a female Spanish-speaker person who holds a PhD in Social Psychology from the Complutense University in Madrid. My other auditor was a male English-speaker person who is a Canadian engineer working for the government. It was important to have these two auditors as they “cannot know the data as well as researchers immersed in the study and may not share the same point of view. This may lead to different understandings of the data” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 10), which can be helpful. Using Lincoln’s and Guba’s (1985) criteria helped me to be consistent with regards to my analysis, reflections and suggestions for improvements.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since social scientists “delve into the social lives of other human beings” (p. 60), they have “an ethical obligation to their colleagues, their study population, and the larger society” (Berg, 2009, p. 60). Therefore, I was aware that it was important to ensure the rights, privacy, and welfare of the participants that were the focus of my study. For that reason, they were clearly and fully informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved in it (Trochim, 2008) so that

they could decide whether or not they wanted to take part in this research. Also, I made sure they knew that their decision to participate was entirely voluntary. Since the children were minors, their parents were informed about this research and asked for written permission (when they were literate, otherwise oral permission was sought) for the children to participate in the study. Students' parents were given the consent form letter for them to read and sign if they agreed to their children's participation. For the parents who were not literate, the information stated on the consent form letter was read to them and oral consent was provided.

I explained to all participants that the information obtained through the interviews and observations were kept confidential by me. Moreover, I let the participants know that their names would be anonymous at all times and they would be given a pseudonym in any resulting publications. Also, the school principal, teachers, students and their parents were informed that their privacy would be respected at all times and that sensitive probing questions might be asked during the interviews. In addition, they were informed of their right not to speak on any topic with which they felt uncomfortable and that they were free to change or retract anything that they had said.

Even though I was at the research site for five months, I tried to be unobtrusive; that is, while I observed in the classroom I tried not to interfere with the instructors' teaching practices or speak to them or the students. In addition, minimal risk to participants was anticipated because they were not be exposed to any emotional or physical danger since they were not required to answer sensitive

questions or observed when they did not wish to be. Although the participants were interviewed in Spanish, no mental stress was placed on them because most of them were familiar with this language. Also, I ensured I had some manageable knowledge of the indigenous language to make sure communication took place and this decreased the possibility of stress on participants. In addition, I had two students from grade six who were speakers of Spanish and Tsotsil who volunteered to be interpreters. This allowed participants to decide which language they wanted to use to answer my questions.

Furthermore, I was aware of my own ambivalent role as an insider/outsider in this research community. As a Mexican who has lived in this area I was familiar with the languages spoken by my participants and with the school system and thus may have been viewed as an “insider” by the school principal, students, teachers and parents. In this way they may have felt comfortable with my presence as an observer and interviewer. However, I was also an outsider to the particular school community I was observing. I may well have been viewed as a researcher with North American experience who had a particular agenda to fulfil. My position therefore needed to be carefully negotiated so I could reassure the participants that I did not have any authority over them and that they did not feel compelled to take part in this research.

In conclusion, I ensured that the participants were clearly informed about the purpose and procedures of this research (Trochim, 2008) and I was careful to leave the decision to participate up to them. Also, I ensured I protected the participants from harm (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and that their identity remained

confidential by using pseudonyms in any descriptions of research findings. In addition, all data obtained during the research has been kept confidential and I followed and fulfilled the University of Alberta Review Board requirements to conduct this research.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA**

Language loss has been spreading all over the world and this has been the situation in Mexico as well. One of the factors that has contributed to the disappearance of linguistic diversity in Mexico is the establishment of Spanish-indigenous schools (Del Carpio, 2008). Students use Spanish at “bilingual” schools even when they are supposed to use both their native language and the national language. Hornberger (1998) argues that there is a need to integrate indigenous languages and make them part of quality bilingual programs that support all the points of the “continuum of biliteracy” (p. 452). Sadly, indigenous people also face economic pressures and have the need to communicate with Spanish monolinguals (Lam, 2009). For that reason, it is comprehensible that indigenous people want to learn Spanish in addition to their native languages and parents want their children to do so as well. I believe it is important to help indigenous people maintain their languages to avoid a terminal shift to Spanish monolingualism. For that reason, I decided to research the situation of the Tsotsil language spoken in Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico. I was interested in exploring the

extent to which elementary bilingual schools in this region are explicitly or implicitly encouraging indigenous students to shift to Spanish and abandon their native language.

The research question that was explored in this study was: In what ways does the current Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual program in an elementary bilingual school in Chenalhó, Chiapas, aid or hinder preservation of the indigenous language? Given this general research question, my sub-questions were: To what extent does this bilingual program respect and promote the native language and culture? Which historical and current contexts have influenced the teachers' and students' attitudes and experiences of teaching and learning the Spanish and Tsotsil languages? What are the students' and their parents' attitudes toward indigenous language retention?

The following section describes the journey I took in order to be able to obtain answers for such research questions.

### **My Journey in the Research Site**

#### **My First Day and Impressions**

In order to be able to collect data that helped me gain a better understanding of my research topic, I went to a bilingual school in Chenalhó in Chiapas, southeast Mexico which is where this research was conducted.

It was a small school with different classrooms, a teachers' room, restrooms and a basketball court, which was always being used by students or teachers during the break.



Figure 2. One of the Classrooms in the School

Fortunately, I was able to access the bilingual school easily after I explained to the principal the purpose of my research and what it involved, that is, the participation of teachers, students and students' parents. After my formal meeting with the principal, he asked me to return to the school the following day in order to introduce myself in one of the daily meetings the principal and instructors have before classes start.

I returned to the school as requested and I was formally introduced to all of the staff although I had already informally chatted with most of them in my previous informal visits to the school. The principal advised teachers about the purpose of my presence in the school during that term. He also reminded the teachers that the aim of my being there was not to judge, but to work on my

research project (a professional reason), which is what I told him in our first meeting. The principal mentioned the names of the teachers (Rosario, Vicente and Federico -pseudonyms) to let me know which teachers I would be working with as I was unfamiliar with the grade one and grade six teachers.

Teachers have meetings in the staff room everyday around 8:30 a.m. because classes start at 9:00 a.m. and finish at 1:00 p.m. Before the meeting begins, instructors sign the attendance list to show they were present at school that day. They have to sign again before they leave to show they were there all day long. During the meetings, the principal and teachers discuss different topics with regards to the school, students and future events. For example, in the first meeting at which that I was present, they talked about the upcoming events that month as well as options of scholarships for students. Also, the principal reminded teachers about the importance of punctuality and discipline. My first impression was that there was democracy there and everybody's opinion was considered. For example, when they had to decide about the time and details for the next event, each instructor was given the chance to propose a time as well as to vote for the teacher they wanted to be the speaker for the next event in the school. Also, they were given the opportunity to say why they thought that teacher should be the speaker. My first contact with all of the teachers and the principal was comfortable as there was a relaxing atmosphere in the room and each of them welcomed me nicely. All of them were polite to me.

### **Welcome Activity for Students and my Formal Introduction to Them**

Any normal day starts with a meeting as described earlier. After the meeting, all students from grade one up to grade six are brought together at the

basketball court. Teachers organize their students in line and all of them are grouped together.

In these activities, students were welcomed and motivated to start the day; that is why I call these sessions “welcome activities.” During these activities, the principal makes the announcements for that day and the week. This was done by the principal or the grade six teacher who is also the *subprincipal* as they call it. The feeling of seeing all students, teachers, the principal as well as some students’ parents together at the basketball court was fantastic as they looked like a large family full of happiness. I always enjoyed seeing this wonderful scene at the basketball court and having green trees and hills behind the children thanks to the school’s location.

I was officially introduced to the students in a “welcome activity” after my first meeting with the teachers. While the teacher talked at the beginning of the activity, I stood behind one of the lines where first graders were lined up so I could take notes while observing. When necessary, my notes were completed right after my observations.

That day (my first official day at the school) I was excited as all this was the beginning of an adventure where everything was new and I felt I was learning every second I spent there. For example, I enjoyed my first observation of the welcome activity at the basketball court. Below there is an example of some of my field notes, which were written in combined English and Spanish. I chose the language as well as symbols such as happy or sad faces that I felt helped me better express my emotions and what happened in front of my eyes. Also, I invented my

own abbreviations as there were words I would always be using and I needed to write quickly when observing. For example, I abbreviated teacher as T, teachers as Ts, student as S, students as Ss and principal as P. Among other aspects, I always paid attention to the language that was used in all events and at different locations, so I also abbreviated Spanish as Span and English as Eng in my field notes when observing. Here is an example:

*Day 1  
August 13, 2010*

*Time: 9:00 a.m.*

*Location: Basketball court*

*Event: Welcome activity*

*Language used: Span*

*Participants: P, Ts, Ss and some Ss' parents*

*Summary of context: It's the beginning of the day. I just left the Ts' room after meeting with them where I was introduced to them. Now, I'm at the basketball court observing the kids. I was told I'll be introduced to them in the welcome activity they are about to start. => I'm excited.*

*Observation:*

*9:00 a.m.: It's nine in the morning and it is a sunny day! Students look happy and smiley. I am so excited to observe them and curious about what they are going to do next. Children are running and playing around. The grade six T leaves the Ts' room and whistles 3 times. All Ss run towards the basketball court. Ts ask their students to *hacer flanco derecho/izquierdo/tomar distancia*. Although they are very young (first graders, for example), they perfectly know what to do, they follow their teacher's instructions. Wow!*

*9:07a.m.: The subprincipal (T Federico) welcomes all of the students in Span. He loudly says '¡BUENOS DÍAS!!!', 'GOOD MORNING!!!' and the children shout very loudly saying '¡BUENOS DÍAS, MAESTRO!!!.GOOD MORNING, TEACHER!!!' with a lot of enthusiasm=> => 'Estos niños sí tienen energía' (These kids DO have energy!). I love how they start the day with so much energy!!!!*

*I think it is a great way to start the day. Teacher Federico reminds Ss about the "Bicentenario" festivities and the patriotic month, so he says 'today, we are going to practice for the celebration that will be held the following week.' Kids listen to the teacher.*

*It's my turn!!!! I'm so excited!! (stop writing for a bit to go to the front)...*

*9:14 a.m.: Then, teacher Fernando said 'I'm going to introduce teacher Karla Del Carpio who will be with us this term to do her research, so let's welcome*

*her!' He asked students to receive me with a round of applause. Children clapped with a lot of enthusiasm. => The feeling was fantastic!!! I felt like part of their community!!!=> =>)*

*9:18 a.m.: The word is given to the principal who reminds Ss about the importance of being responsible and respectful. He says "No child can hit another one, respect....any child who hits will be penalized." Also, he said that the garbage cans would be placed in the school as soon as possible so that those that were robbed are replaced.*

*It seems like there is democracy, involvement and teamwork in the school. Me gusta estar aquí (I like being here!).*

*9:25 a.m.: Each instructor took their students to their classroom.*

*9:28 a.m. Classes start (Time flies!!)=)*

### **On Mondays: The homage**

As in all elementary schools in Mexico, every Monday morning (after the teachers' meeting in this case) there is a homage, which is the formal event where the school principal, students and teachers sing the national Mexican anthem. A student "escort" marches and a small program is organized and delivered by a group of students selected by their teacher. For example, if the teacher in grade 3 is responsible for the homage, the teacher needs to select and prepare a few students from his class to deliver the program. The same teacher selects the girls from his class to participate in the escort to march with the Mexican flag during the homage. The teacher and students responsible for the homage are different every Monday. This is decided each Monday in the teachers' meeting so those in charge of the event have one week to organize and practice the delivery of the programme for the homage.

During the programme, the presenters (the students) need to talk about an important historical date which took place in the past during that month, for example, Mexico's Independence (on September 15<sup>th</sup>). By doing so, students learn about historical national important events and they are also provided with the

opportunity to work on their public oral skills as they have to talk in front of all of the students, teachers and the school principal at the basketball court, which is where the event takes place every Monday morning before classes start.

### **The Main Characters of this Story**

Undoubtedly, the participants of this research play an important role in this research. I am deeply grateful to them as it is thanks to them in part that I was able to gain a better understanding of my research topic. The following section and subsections describe the teachers, their teaching style and my relationship with them as well as examples of the volunteering work I did while conducting this research.

### **Teachers**

#### **Rosario: Grade One Teacher**

Two grade one classes took part in this research as well as one grade six class. One of the two first-grade classes was run by a female teacher whose pseudonym is Rosario. She was very friendly with me from day one and enjoyed being observed. She even invited me to go to her classroom to observe her. Rosario is in her late thirties and has been working as a teacher in bilingual schools in different towns for 13 years. The languages spoken in such schools are Spanish, Tsotsil or Tzeltal. Rosario has been teaching for four years in the bilingual school where I conducted this research. Also, she is from Carranza, which is another town in Chiapas. Rosario has 22 students in her class and most of the children are indigenous born and raised in the municipality of Chenalhó.

Rosario's mother tongue is Tsotsil and she learned it with her family in her hometown Carranza. She also speaks Spanish, but identifies herself with her

native language. Rosario completed a Bachelor's degree in pedagogy at the National Pedagogical University (UPN) in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. She said that she did not actually get trained to become a teacher in bilingual schools. She and her classmates were sent for practicums at other schools, but she thinks it was not enough.

During the five months I was collecting data in the school, I realized that Rosario enjoys learning and has a strong desire to be more prepared and educated and that is why she would like to complete a Master's degree. However, there are some difficulties to do so. This can be seen in the following quote:

Rosario: I'd like to do a master's, but I haven't been able to work on my project. I need a project. What has stopped me to do so is my little girl. Also, I got my bachelor's degree a little while ago. After 3 or 4 years I finished. I finished university, but I didn't get my degree. I got it last year.  
 Karla: Why would you like to do a Master's?  
 Rosario: To not be left behind...we're stuck...Young people are advancing, they finish university and continue....and us?

Rosario portrays her willingness to be more prepared, but now that she has children it is difficult. Nonetheless, she is a teacher who learns on her own and likes to find ways to improve her teaching methods; that is why she said she wanted to be observed by me because she wanted me to provide her with more ideas to improve her teaching methods. This situation reminded me of the possibilities of unpredictability and flexibility when conducting qualitative research (Morse (2004) and Berg (2009)). I did not plan to provide any teacher with feedback as it was not the purpose of this research. However, Rosario always insisted on me giving her feedback. Basically, what she wanted was to gain more ideas of activities and materials to work with her students.

Here is an example of my field notes about Rosario after she asked for my opinion about what she does in the classroom, my reaction to it and the questions that arose for me after her request:

*August 15th, 2010*

*Time: 10:00 a.m.*

*Location: Rosario's classroom*

*Event: Class*

*Language used: Span*

*Participants: T and Ss*

*Summary of context: Rosario's classroom is noisy. Some Ss are walking around the room and some others are on task. Rosario monitors and helps a few Ss. I'm sitting at the back of the room and Rosario comes to me and:*

*She asks me in Spanish "¿Cómo ves mi trabajo" ("How do you see my work", that is, what do you think about my work?). She wanted to hear my opinion of how she teaches and her activities. I responded to her "¡es interesante!" (it's interesting!). I felt uncomfortable when I was asked about that. What was I supposed to say? If my opinion would have been negative, of course, I wouldn't have said it. Maybe she unconsciously thought I was there to evaluate her work. From what she told me before class, I think she really wanted me to give her my opinion and advice about teaching so that she can learn more and improve her teaching methods. I feel her attitude is good as she cares for her learners. I think that this can be a good opportunity for me to establish a good rapport with her. However, I never thought I would've been asked to provide any teacher with feedback as it is not the purpose of this research. Nonetheless, this is a good example of the difficulties a researcher can experience and be challenged. The questions I have now are: What do you say when you're asked about your opinion by your participant? What if your opinion is negative? Do you lie? (In this case, it was positive, so there was no need to lie).*

I did not know what to do at first as my comments could influence what she did in class and this could have an impact on the results of this research. However, when this happened, I remembered the importance of reciprocity when doing research (Madison, 2005). It is not only about receiving, but also about giving. It is not only about being helped, but also about helping. In this case, Rosario was helping me every day by participating in this research, that is, by

answering all of my spontaneous questions in our informal conversations, by responding to my questions in our formal interviews, by providing me with copies of the materials she used in class, by letting me observe her both actively and passively, by allowing her students to talk to me in the classroom if they wished to do so, by introducing me to her students' parents and by inviting me to participate in the events that took place in the school such as parades, dances, festivals and meetings with teachers and parents. In summary, Rosario was greatly helping me, so the least I could do is to fulfill her only request, which was, "please provide me with some ideas, so I can be a better teacher."

I approached this situation through Madison's (2005) ideas about reciprocity. I am also a language teacher and have been teaching for ten years, so I felt that Rosario was helping me as both as a researcher and as a teacher. Therefore, I was happy to provide Rosario with comments. I have to admit that Rosario is one of the best teachers I have ever observed. She puts her heart into what she does. She cares for her students and she makes sure that all of the children learn and have fun in the classroom. She spent many hours preparing her materials to teach and for different activities. For instance, Rosario made drawings of different objects on colored pieces of cardboard. The objects drawn had similar shapes of letters, which Rosario used when teaching the alphabet, so it is easier for children to remember the names of each letter by relating them to an object. For example, Rosario used the drawing of a "serpiente" (serpent) to teach the letter "S" or the drawing of a "tubo" (water pipe) to teach the letter "T." These

drawings are posed on the whiteboard or given to students for them to copy them on their notebooks.



Figure 3. Sample of Rosario's Drawings of Objects with Shapes of the Letters of the Alphabet

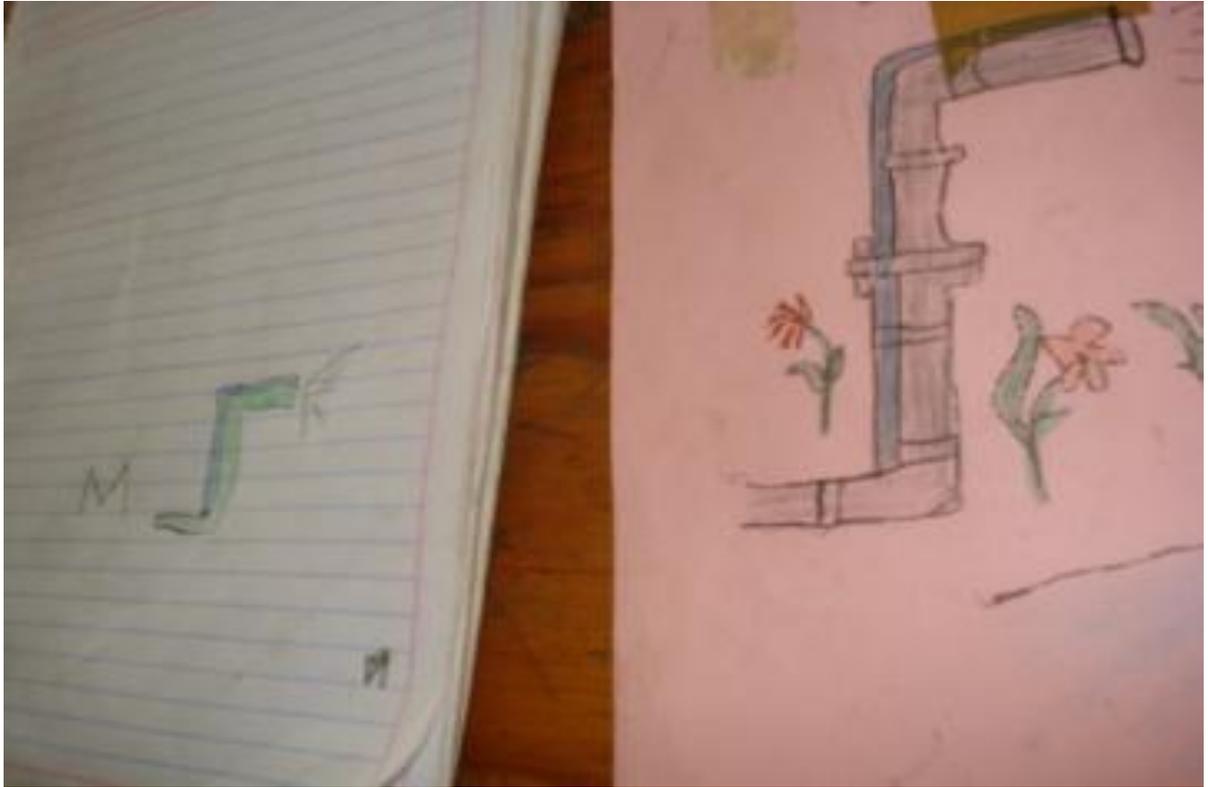


Figure 4. Drawing of Object with the Shape of the Letter F Made by First Grader

Also, Rosario had students practice the shapes of the letters of the alphabet by using clay, which is an activity students enjoyed while squeezing or rolling the clay to create letters.



Figure 5. Letters made with Clay by First Graders

The walls on Rosario's classroom are lively and colorful as she likes decorations, which are created by her or her students. Some of these decorations, posters, for example, are created when students practice the new topic they had just learned, for example, animals' names. The following pictures show the process of the creation of a poster made mostly by the students who were asked to select and cut their favorite animal from a textbook they no longer use.



Figure 7. Poster with Students' Cuttings of their Favorite Animals

Also, Rosario always asked her students to perform diverse dynamics and games, so there was always variety in class. Also, Rosario considers her students' requests. For example, students were working on an activity on numbers where suddenly one of them says "Martinillo!" (which is the Alouette song in Spanish) implying he wanted to sing. As a result, Rosario followed his request. This can be seen in the following example of my field notes:

*September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Time: 10:10 a.m.*

*Location: Rosario's classroom*

*Event: Class*

*Language used: Span*

*Participants: T and Ss*

*Summary of context: It's a chilly day. Rosario and her Ss are wearing many layers. The room door is closed. As usual, Rosario's classroom is noisy =) Rosario has been reviewing the numbers from one to ten. Ss are practicing.*

*10:20 a.m. Students say "cinco" ("five"). Some Ss count in Spanish "uno, dos, tres, cuatro..." ("one, two, three, four..."). Ss are on task. T monitors and helps Ss work. Ss speak mostly Tsotsil. While all students are working, one of them says out loud "Martinillo", which is the name of a song they know. T responds in Spanish saying "¡Ah, quieren cantar Martinillo!" ("So you want to sing Martinillo!"), she goes on saying "Cantemos, pues" ("Let's sing, then!"). Both T and Ss sing outloud. =) They seem to be having fun.*

*T asks Ss what other song they know. She says "Ahora vamos a cantar 'La araña'" ("Now, let's sing 'the eensy weensy spider song'"). They all sing and clap while singing =) Spanish is used in the instructions. Ss use Tsotsil to address their classmates and their teacher. Students speak Tsotsil among themselves. There were only 2 girls (sitting behind me) speaking in Spanish.*

I noticed that Rosario stayed after class to talk to the parents who wanted to know about their children's performance in school although there were not many parents who requested such information. Thus, it was easy to let Rosario know my positive comments on her class. For example, about how interesting it

was to see how she took attendance through a large piece of cardboard and sticky notes or how much fun it was to see students working with multiple recycled materials when learning math or how nice it was when students learned the animals' names and they were asked to make different animals' sounds.



Figure 8. Attendance List: Poster with Sticky Notes with Students' Names

I did not make comments on her language use or her students' as I did not want these to influence her language use or attitudes and I could obtain insights that helped me learn more about my research topic.

### **Language of Instruction**

Rosario uses both Spanish and Tsotsil when teaching. Spanish is used both orally and written. In contrast, Tsotsil is mostly used only orally. However, Tsotsil does play a very important role in the two first grade classes I worked with

when collecting data. Also, first graders speak mostly in Tsotsil as it is the language they are more familiar with when entering grade one. It is common that students speak mostly in their native language at first as it is the language mostly spoken by their parents at home.

The following is an example of one of my observations and field notes on one of Rosario's lessons on which students practiced the vocabulary related to animals' names. This example provides an idea of how Rosario teaches and the languages she and her students use:

*September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010*  
*Passive observation*

*Time: 9:15 a.m.*

*Location: Rosario's classroom*

*Event: Class*

*Language used: Both Span and Tsotsil, mostly....*

*Participants: T and Ss*

*Summary of context: The homage has just finished and the T, Ss and I have just walked into the classroom. The room is noisy. Ss are moving their chairs, some are talking, and others are sitting. T sits down and starts the lesson.*

*9:20 a.m. T takes attendance in Tsotsil (using the 2 white posters). She asks Ss to make a circle (instructions are given in Tsotsil). T models what Ss need to do. Many examples are provided. In this activity, children need to say hello to a classmate and then give him or her a hug. At the beginning, students are shy, but then they get more comfortable and start saying hi to other children. They seem to be having fun. Ss go back to their seat. It was a good warm-up activity. Ss are relaxed =) It was cool!*

*9:35 a.m. Ss go to the T's desk to show her their notebooks.*

*T mimics the sound an animal makes, for example, how the animal breathes.*

*Students imitate the teacher. Then, T calls for another animal name, Ss make another sound and so on. T's voice is loud. Ss are sitting "en sus sillas alrededor del salón" ("on their chairs around the room").*

*T asks a question and a student responds in Tsotsil. Most of what I observe is conducted in Tsotsil. T makes a sound and Ss say the name of the animal, "ratón" ("mouse"), for example.*

*Summary:*

*1.- T says the animal name*

*2.-Ss make the sound*

OR (viceversa)

1.- T makes the sound

2.- Ss say the name

9:40 a.m. In Tsotsil: T shows flashcards made by her (these are different from the ones I saw before). T walks around the circle and shows the flashcard. Ss make the sound made by the animal to show they do recognize/know what the animal is. Now, T says in Spanish “¿Cómo hacía el viento?” One S addresses the T in Tsotsil, T responds in Tsotsil as well.

9:45 T posts the flashcards on the board. She says in Span “Lo van acopiar, sólo donde está verde” (“You’re going to copy only where it’s green”). Letter S - is like a snake (on the flashcard).

Letter F: (Looks like a pipe)

9:50 a.m. Ss start working on the task. T monitors and says in Span “Quiero verlos trabajar” (“I want to see you working”). One student says in Span “maestro solo este” (“Teacher, only this one”).

T responds “Ahorita, quiero verlos trabajar, primero este (se refiere a un dibujo pegado en el pizarrón)” (“Now, I want to see you working, this one first-refers to a picture on the board”). T keeps monitoring and helping Ss do their work. T says to one S “eso, así” (“yes, like that!”). Then, she switches to Tsotsil. In her speech she says “... (said in Tsotsil) pero (said in Span)... (said in Tsotsil).”

T posts another flashcard “Una nariz” (“a nose”) (She says it in Tsotsil “narizone”). Ss copy. T keeps monitoring. Most Ss are on task.

Some Ss go to the board to observe the pictures closely. T spends time working with one girl. T takes the S’ hand to make the letter within the picture.

One S says “Maestra ya terminé” (“Teacher, I’m done”). T responds “Ahorita” (“Hold on”). Then, T responds by saying in Span to another student “Ya viste ya se me adelantaron” (“You see, he has ...”).

She smiles. She puts one more picture on the board for Ss to copy.

Ss go to the T’s desk to show her their work. T gives feedback to those Ss. One S says “conpermiso, maestra” (“Excuse me, teacher”). Some Ss went outside, but most kids are in the classroom.

10:10 a.m. Ss surround my chair to have a picture taken. They asked me for it.

T goes around the room to mark Ss’ work. T says to one student “falta” (“It’s still missing”) to indicate that the S is not done, yet. S keeps working.

10:15 a.m. T says in Spanish “Círculo, ahora vamos a jugar el círculo” (“Circle, now we’re going to play in a circle!”). Then, she explains in Tsotsil. Ss stand up. T helps Ss make a circle. All Ss participate. T says “... (Tsotsil) turn (Span)... (Tsotsil).” After that, T says “Agarrense, vamos a jugar, EL RELOJ” (“Grab each other’s’ hands, we’re going to play the CLOCK game”).

T asks Ss “¿Cómo hace el reloj?” (“How does a clock go?”). T says “tic tac tic tac.” Ss repeat.

Then, Ss turn while holding hands and go faster saying “tic tac tic tac”. Then, T says “Agarrense de dos” Ss make groups of 2 hugging each other.

T says “El reloj se detiene a las 5:00” Ss listen, wait, process the info and make groups of 5. Ss have fun. The room is very noisy. T says “callense, otra vez el reloj” (“Be quiet, the clock goes again”). Now, they go in the opposite direction.

They go fast and say “tic tac tic tac” aloud. Some Ss are mischievous and “jalan a otros” (“pull others”). T says “NO” “No se vayan a golpear” (“Don’t hit each other!”). Ss keep turning. They smile and laugh. It’s such a crazy environment =) Note: I noticed that when T sees Ss are tired or bored from working on an activity, she asks them to play or do something fun =) T confirms what she told me in an informal chat I had with her.

10:30 a.m. Now, Ss get in groups of 4. Instructions in Tsotsil. Then in Span. It’s a follow up activity. “Van a buscar un animal que más les guste” (“You’re going to look for the animal you like the most”).

In groups they need to pick an animal from the poster in which each of them posted their favorite animal the previous class.

Note: Two girls from a group give me roses... How sweet!!! =)

In groups, they need to choose what is the animal all the members of the group like. Ss need to negotiate in their group - to get an agreement.

1. Some students say “caballo” (horse) (in Spanish) others “Choy” in Tsotsil (shrimp). T says “Se tienen que poner de acuerdo, pues, porque vamos a investigar, ¿dónde vive el animal? ¿qué come? Vamos a ir a buscar libros todavía” (“You guys need to get to an agreement as we’re going to investigate where the animal lives? What does it eat? We’re still going to search for books.”)
2. T gives a book to each group. Ss need to cut one animal from the book. “Sólo uno van a recortar, el leopardo quieren entonces sólo el leopardo van a recortar” (“You’re going to cut just one animal from the book. If you want the leopard then you only cut the leopard”).

Ss flip the pages from the textbook to find the animal they all decided they like the most.

I like the activity because Ss socialize with classmates, discuss, share their ideas and need to get agreement.

3. Ss come talk to T Rosario. They speak in Spanish (about a bottle of water).

T monitors and speaks Tsotsil.

10:40 a.m. Some Ss are not on task. The room is messy now.

4. 10:45 a.m. T gives each group a big paper sheet.

Ss need to paste their cutting on the poster.

T puts on the wall the bond papers.

5. Ss need to think and agree on what the animal eats.
6. T says “Cada equipo va a pasar a decir qué come cada animal” (“Each group is going to the front to say what each animal eats”). T asks to Ss in Span “¿Qué come el jaguar?” (“What does the jaguar eat?”).

Group 1: Ss are in front of the class. T says pointing out to the animal they posted “¿Cómo se llama este?” (“What do you call this one?”). Ss say jaguar. She writes the name of the animal.

Then, T asks Ss in Span “¿Qué come?” (“What does the jaguar eat?”). Ss answer “venado or gente” (“deer or people”).

*T asks Ss to ask me what the jaguar eats. I responded “El jaguar come a los niños que no trabajan” (“The jaguar eats children who don’t work”) =) Both Ss and T laugh. T writes my answer.*

*She moves on to the next group asking about the animal they chose. They say “conejo” (“rabbit”). T says it in Tsotsil “t’ul” (“rabbit”) and writes the word “conejo” in Span.*

*T asks them “¿Qué come el conejo?” (“What does the rabbit eat?”). They said “culix” (in Tsotsil) (“cabbage”).*

*She writes the answer in Span. Then, she asks students where the rabbit lives (in Span). A S says “Vive aquí” (“he lives here”). Another S says “vive en la selva” (“he lives in the jungle”) and one child says “te’tik” (“in the forest”) in Tsotsil. T responds in Tsotsil saying “Sí, ta te’tik tetik” (“Yes, in the forest”).*

*Many Ss are distracted while T asks and writes on “the large poster. ¡Qué risa tengo!!! (I’m laughing hard!) It’s not easy to control the kids” (I’m laughing as it’s hard to control them!)=)*

*T asks Ss in Span “¿Dónde vive el pato?” (“Where does the duck live?”). Ss answer in Tsotsil. T writes the answers on the large poster.*

*11:10 a.m. Now each group needs to copy what the T wrote on the sheet that belongs to their group. T gives instructions in Tsotsil and keeps asking about horses. Only some Ss are on task. Others are outside.*

*I noticed that sometimes T has typos, for example, the lack of accents on words like ¿Quien falto? (Who is missing?) ¿Dónde vive? (Where does he/she live?)*

*T asks one S in Tsotsil “¿Dónde vive el caballo?” (“Where does the horse live?”). T says the word “corral” in Tsotsil first and then in Span.*

*11:30 BREAK TIME-Ring bells*

In the previous notes, it can be seen that both Rosario and her students use Spanish and Tsotsil in class. It is common that in the first years of schooling, students’ native language is used, but its use diminishes as they advance. When I asked Rosario about the indigenous language class that students are supposed to have, she said:

Rosario: Yes, we’re supposed to include the indigenous language class in our schedule. I usually speak more Tsotsil...in grade one...you speak 100% Tsotsil regardless. I have some kids who speak Spanish, but they understand it (Tsotsil). In grade two, I diminish the use of Tsotsil like 20%.

Karla: So little by little you diminish the use of Tsotsil?

Rosario: That’s right! In grades two and four, the use of Tsotsil is reduced like 50%. In grade 6, only Spanish is spoken.

Karla: Oh, Ok, so the bilingual school is bilingual mainly in grade one because the kids don’t speak much Spanish, so they speak more Tsotsil.

The more they advance, they speak more Spanish and the use of Tsotsil is decreased.

Rosario: Exactly!

### **My Rapport with Rosario and Volunteering Work**

Rosario was the only female teacher in the school, so I think this also facilitated my rapport with her. In several occasions, she told me she was happy I was there because she was the only female staff member (I was treated as a teacher, which is how teachers started calling me from day one). Rosario and I developed a good relationship through our chats, active observations, interviews, daily interaction, festivals and the activities I volunteered to do for her class and for the school. I wanted to make sure teachers (especially those who participated in the study), knew I was there not only to ask for help for my research, but also to help them when necessary. This sense of reciprocity was always present during my stay. I volunteered to work in different activities, for example, I worked with Rosario on a small project called “Mi vida en una semana” (My life in a week) in which her students needed to create a brochure or booklet. To do so, children needed to write a short story and draw pictures to describe their activities in a regular week. To make the brochure, I bought many colorful sheets, crayons and markers for students to use. Also, I took and printed a picture of every child and gave it to each of them so that they pasted it on the cover page of their brochure. Once the brochures were ready, children placed them at the school library, which does not have many materials and it is rarely visited. By working on the activity, which Rosario called a project, students worked on their writing skills and her creativity was stimulated. Also, Rosario and I thought this would encourage them to visit their library more often and develop that habit. Besides, students

contributed to their library with their own artistic work, which might increase the possibilities for them to feel connected to the library and their desire to visit it.

Here is an example of my observations and the field notes I wrote with regards to this project. My description was firstly written in Spanish. The English translation can be found below the Spanish notes:

*November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010*

*Small project*

*Time: Noon*

*Location: Rosario's classroom*

*Event: Project*

*Language used: I'll use Spanish this time*

*Participants: T, Ss and me*

*Summary of context: Rosario and I talked about this small project 2 or 3 days ago. She told me that she would like her students to contribute and visit the library more often as she believes it is important. I am in her classroom and ready to start working with Rosario and the kids. I'm excited => Kids are loud and T walks around the room. T starts giving instructions for the activity.*

*Today, November 17<sup>th</sup>, I'll start working on a project with Rosario's students... => it's like a brochure with the kid's activities. The name of the project is "My life in a week." I took a picture of each child. This picture will be pasted on their brochure... I brought colorful sheets, markers and I will bring a picture of each of them (of their little faces)... this brochure will be part of the library, which nobody visits and has been forgotten that's why teacher Rosario and I decided to do this activity... I'd like to do the same with the other 2 classes I've been working with so that students contribute to their library and they have something meaningful there... a good reason to go to the library. Besides, the activity is fun =>*

*Extra Note: Classes will end on December 21<sup>st</sup>... the entire course*

I should say that I never felt that working on small activities or projects distracted me from the purpose of my research. On the contrary, I felt that I gained a better understanding of what happened in the school, of how the bilingual program worked and the needs and issues that took place there. Also, the activities helped me to establish and reinforce my rapport with the teachers and

the students. In addition, I conducted my observations and interviews as planned. I carefully planned my agenda for the week in advance to make sure there was no time conflict and the projects did not interfere with my schedule for interviews and observations. I always tried to be aware of the purpose of my visit in the school.

Madison (2005) reminds researchers of the importance of humility and this is the approach I took. I was humble at all times and tried to portray that through my actions with integrity, intelligence and conviction (Madison, 2005). I had the impression that Rosario felt comfortable with my presence in her classroom and in the school as she realized my aim was to learn about my research topic and to contribute rather than to judge her work or the students'. This facilitated her cooperation and honesty in the interviews I recorded as well as in the informal chats I had with her. Also, Rosario trusted me, which I highly appreciate as she shared with me her feelings about working there and her issues and frustrations at school. I agree with what Madison (2005) says about the importance of establishing a good relationship with the participants of the study so that they feel comfortable, respected and trusted (Madison, 2005). This definitely makes a difference when collecting data. Also, it makes a difference in participants' feelings of comfort as well as in the experience of doing research, that is, research becomes more enjoyable. However, I always kept in mind the purpose of my visit to the school, therefore I tried to ensure that the rapport I established with Rosario and the other participants did not limit my ability to be honest in my observations and my discussion of the findings.

### **Vicente: Grade One Teacher**

The other teacher who participated in this research is Vicente (pseudonym). He is an indigenous teacher in his late fifties and he teaches grade one with 21 students in his class. Vicente has also taught grades two, three and four. He is from Chiapas. He has taught for 11 years in the school where this research was conducted. He entered the educational system in the 90s and was the Municipal President in Chenalhó from 2005 to 2007. Vicente did his secondary studies in Chenalhó and moved to San Cristóbal to do his high school. He commenced, but did not finish, a Bachelor's degree on elementary education at the National Pedagogical University (UPN) where he learned about cultural rescue, indigenous communities and how to work with students.

### **Mother Tongue**

Vicente's first language is Tsotsil. He learned Tsotsil through his parents and siblings as Tsotsil was always spoken at home. Also, Vicente mentioned that he is fluent in Spanish although sometimes he makes small mistakes.

This can be seen in the last sentence of the following quote:

Karla: What did you learn at UPN?

Vicente: About cultural rescue, how to work with students, how they should dress and also about indigenous communities and how people talk.

Karla: Did you learn how to teach there?

Vicente: Yes, as well. How to *learn* students.

In general, indigenous teachers whose first language is Tsotsil have a good command of the Spanish language and they speak it with a Tsotsil accent.

However, I noticed they also make mistakes, for example, Vicente mixes the verbs to teach and to learn as shown in the previous quote. Similarly, the other teacher in grade one, Rosario, whose first language is Tsotsil also makes mistakes

in Spanish. For example, she interchanges the definite feminine and masculine articles in front of the feminine and masculine nouns. Also, she does not contract the prepositions and articles when necessary. For example, in Spanish, when you say “I go *to the* market”, it is necessary to contract the preposition “a” (“to”) with the masculine singular definite article “el” (“the”), which becomes “al.” Rosario does not do this, which is not a significant mistake. Here is an example of her speech in Spanish:

A ver pongan atención *el (instead of al)* animalito que más les guste, me lo van a recortar (‘Let’s see, pay attention to the small animal that you like the most and cut it’).

Nonetheless, both Rosario and Vicente are fluent in Spanish and their small mistakes do not interfere with communication.

### **Tzeltal and Learning of other Indigenous Languages**

Vicente also speaks Tzeltal, which is another Mayan language spoken in Chiapas. I asked Vicente who taught him both Tsotsil and Tzeltal and this is what he responded:

Karla: Who taught you Tsotsil and Tzeltal?

Vicente: Tzeltal, as I said I was working in indigenous affairs... I was working as a teacher and I was sent to a zone where Tzeltal is spoken, so I had to learn it.

Karla: Just on your own?

Vicente: Yes

Karla: Was Tsotsil spoken in your house?

Vicente: Yes, that’s how I learned it... from the moment I was born. It is common that teachers learned other indigenous languages as they are sent to different regions where these are spoken although they do not speak them at first. The teacher in grade six and the principal of the school mentioned this as well. For example, the principal whose first language is Tsotsil also learned Tzeltal as it was the language spoken at one of the schools he worked in the past.

As Vicente speaks three languages, I asked him what language he identifies himself with and the language he speaks to his students in grade one.

This is what he said:

Karla: What language do you identify with?

Vicente: Tsotsil because I am Tsotsilero, yes.

Karla: Ok and what's the language you use the most in the classroom when teaching or talking to the students?

Vicente: Tsotsil because the kids speak Tsotsil as well. If I talk to them in Tzeltal, they don't understand.

Through my observations, I noticed that Vicente speaks Tsotsil to his students inside and outside of the classroom. He portrays positive attitudes towards Tsotsil and Spanish (more on this later).

### **Teaching Style**

Vicente's teaching style is mainly focused on grammar. During the time I observed him, not many games or a variety of activities were conducted, that is, students were mostly asked to work on written activities. However, Vicente maintained students' attention when teaching. His explanations were clear and visual. Also, sometimes he asked students to come to the board to practice the new topic.

Vicente spoke mostly Tsotsil in the classroom and he also wrote Tsotsil when teaching. For example, when teaching the numbers, he wrote them in words in Tsotsil.

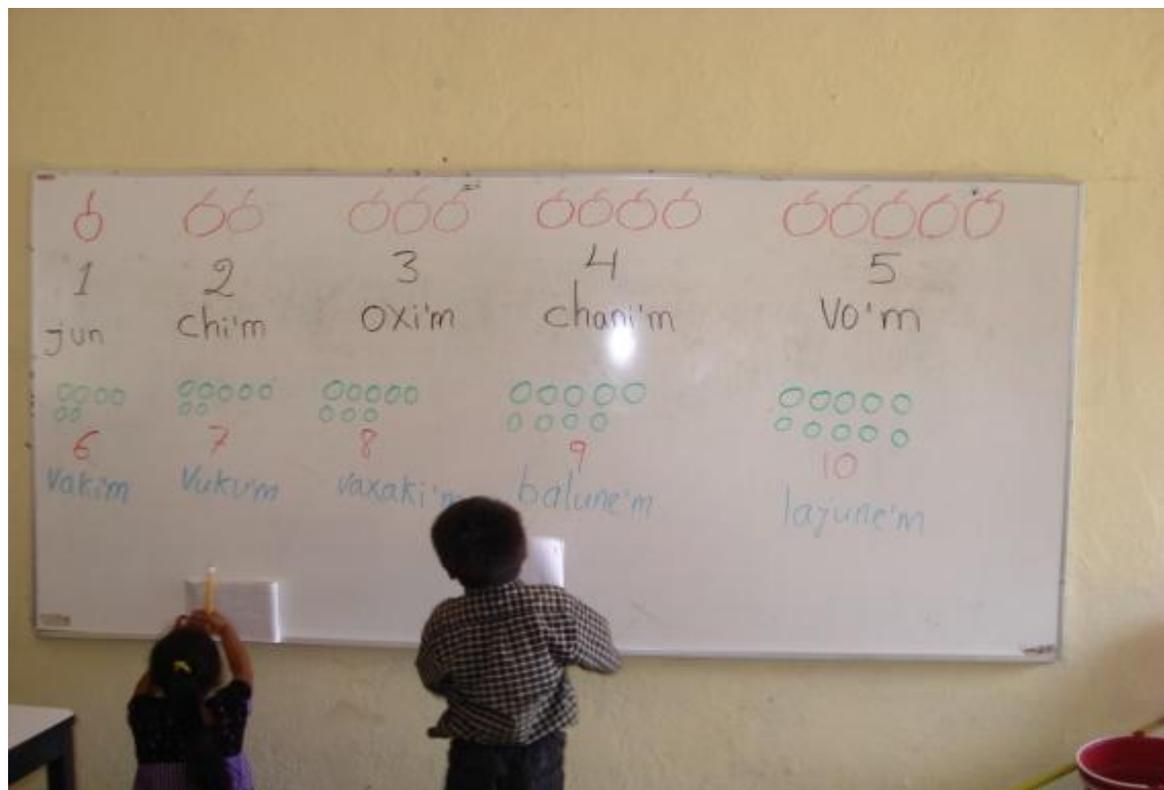


Figure 9. Students Copying the Numbers in Tsotsil from the Board

Sometimes, I had the impression that the teacher wanted to conduct activities that would be fun for the children, but he did not know what to do. Among the few times I observed that students had an activity where they could move, interact and have fun is when they practiced the dance that they were responsible for one of the school's festivals, in which they danced a typical song from Chenalhó. Vicente told me that he decided students should dance a typical song from Chenalhó as he believes it is important that children learn about the native culture so that they preserve it. This was also reinforced with the language Vicente mostly talked to his students inside and outside the classroom; Tsotsil.

Vicente was always patient, tolerant and showed affection to his students as they always approached him and hugged him. He responded to students with a

hug as well. Vicente was quite shy and sometimes serious, not just with me, but with his colleagues as well, so I respected that and tried to be as unobtrusive as possible as I did not want to bother him. Rosario said that since Vicente also teaches grade one like her, she would like to share her materials with him, but she was afraid he might feel offended or disturbed. Although Vicente is quiet and not very friendly with his colleagues, he is friendly and affectionate with his students. Here is an example of the field notes I wrote when observing one of his lessons:

*September, 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010*  
*Passive observation of class*

*Time: 9:16 a.m.*

*Location: Vicente's classroom*

*Event: Class*

*Language used by teacher: Mostly Tsotsil*

*Participants: Ss and T*

*Summary of context: The "welcome activity" at the basketball court is over. Ss and Ts walk towards their classrooms. There is a lot of noise everywhere. I follow teacher Vicente as I will be observing his class today. He, his Ss and I walk into the room. Ss run towards their chairs and have a sit. The room is noisy. T walks towards his desk and starts the class.*

*9:22 a.m. T greets his students in Spanish saying "Buenos días" ("Good morning!")*

*T starts giving announcements saying that all teachers will meet during the break that day.*

*T takes attendance and reminds Ss they should answer "presente" ("here"). The next girl whose name is called says "¡Presente, maestro!" ("Here, teacher!") and the rest of Ss did so as well.*

*T says in Spanish "¡Escuchen bien lo que les voy a decir!" ("Listen carefully, what I'm going to say!"). T introduces a new student. T asks in Tsotsil if there's any homework to hand it "oy tarea?" ("Is there any homework?"). One girl said in Tsotsil "mu'yuk" ("no, there isn't any"). T checks some Ss' notebooks on his desk. Some kids come to talk to me and they call me "maestra" ("teacher") =)*

*9:30 a.m. T reviews the last topic they learned the day before: Numbers. T looks at his drawings on the board, which he did not erase the previous class. First, he asks Ss in Spanish and then in Tsotsil. Children say the numbers out loud. Then, T erases the board. T draws the vowel O and A and asks Ss what vowels those are. Ss say them out loud (right answers are given). T draws a star on the board and*

asks Ss what it is. Ss respond and give the right answer. T asks Ss what object they use to sweep the floor. One S answers in Spanish saying “escoba” (“broom”). T draws a broom on the board (Drawing in my notebook). T introduces the word “enequen” to introduce the letter E to Ss. T underlines the letter “e” in that word. (Drawing in my notebook).

9:50 a.m.: T shows Ss a musical instrument; a “maraca”. He plays it for a short time. Ss get excited. T underlines the first “E” of the words he just taught “estrella” (star), “escoba” (broom) and “enequen” (agave plant). T asks Ss to copy the pics and words in their notebook (Ss are given plenty of time for this). Ss are on task ¡Qué raro!!! (That’s weird!) =) hehe! Most of the time Ss are distracted except for this time =) hehe! All Ss are working. T monitors. T stops walking when a student needs help. Some Ss are done and show their work to the T. T marks the exercise.

**Important:** Again: There is a pattern to teach. T has been teaching the vowels (the day before he taught O and A). Today he introduced the vowel “E” through drawings and words: Estrella (star). T always underlines the new vowel.

10:05 a.m. Ss are still on the same activity. It’s ok as there are Ss who seem to be still working on the task. I can hear Ss playing the drums (la banda de guerra) outside. They are practicing for “the Patriotic Celebration” on Sept 15<sup>th</sup>.

After observing:

**Notes:** I’ve noticed that T is patient, tolerant, affectionate and respectful with his Ss. I remember he told me the first day I observed him that he is losing the sight in one of his eyes, so he thinks he might be asked to retire in the near future. He told me this with a sad tone and resignation. However, he is still trying to do his best =) Ss respect him and love him. I have noticed that T doesn’t ask Ss to play (no class dynamics) in the classroom.

I have observed that this is what he usually does in class (my own summary):

1. T draws shapes on the board to introduce words that have the new vowel he will teach that day
2. T reads the words out loud and Ss repeat
3. Ss copy the drawings and words from the board
4. Ss colour their drawings
5. Ss hand in their assignment and T marks it

**Note:** Ss are not given a context where the new words are used. They are taught in isolation, for example, words as “estrella” (star), and “enequen” (agave plant) are not contextualized. However, T Vicente is very patient when teaching =)

The previous field notes reflect Vicente’s teaching style as well as his behaviour with his students. Also, the notes show some of Vicente’s issues and concerns such as his difficulty to see, which worries him as it might be the reason for him to be asked to retire. Despite all this, Vicente tries to do the best he can.

### **Federico: Grade Six Teacher**

The only teacher of grade six also took part in the study. His name is Federico (pseudonym) and he is a non-indigenous instructor who was born and raised in Chenalhó. Federico is characterized by being a friendly teacher who is always in a good mood. He always jokes and creates a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom as well as in the teachers' room. For example, when nobody takes the initiative to talk in the teachers' room, Federico breaks the ice with a funny joke. It was easy to approach him and to establish a good relationship with him during my stay in the school.

### **Languages**

Federico's parents are non-indigenous and they taught him Spanish, which is the language he considers his first language. Also, Federico speaks Tsotsil as it is the spoken language in Chenalhó, which is the town where he was born and raised. All this can be seen in the following quote from the first interview I conducted with him:

Karla: What's your first language?

Federico: Spanish

Karla: Do you also speak Tsotsil?

Federico: Yes, Tsotsil is my second language

Karla: How did you learn Tsotsil?

Federico: Well...I am from here from Chenalhó and we practiced Tsotsil here because we interacted with the people here...the town is known by being indigenous and we live here, so we learned the language as well.

I also asked Federico about the language he identifies with and this is what he said:

Karla: What is the language you identify with?

Federico: Well...I'm working with Tsotsil here, but I speak Spanish with colleagues.

Karla: Ok. But, what language do you identify yourself with? (emphasis on you)

Federico: Spanish because it's the one I learned from my parents, from my mom's belly. I was born with Spanish.

Federico has worked in both monolingual and bilingual schools for 9 years. He began teaching in a monolingual school and then he changed to the bilingual system due to personal reasons as described in the following quote:

Karla: Have you always worked in bilingual schools?

Federico: The first year I started teaching, I was in a monolingual school and then I switched to bilingual schools here in Chiapas. I was in the "Sierra Madre de Chiapas."

Karla: How was over there?

Federico: It was very far and it was very cold. Due to the location of Chenalhó, I saw it under my own interests. I felt schools in indigenous communities were the closest ones, so I got involved in this environment, so I'm working here now.

Federico is new in the bilingual school where this research was conducted. It was the first term he was teaching there. As the other two teachers who participated in the study, Federico studied at the National Pedagogical University (UPN) in San Cristóbal de las Casas where he earned his degree in education.

Federico had 29 students in his grade six class. His students are from different communities in Chenalhó and all of them have Tsotsil as their first language. I observed that Federico always promotes respect in the classroom. Also, he insists on the importance of having good manners (politeness), so students are always quiet when he explains a new topic. Besides, when students want to step out of the classroom, they ask for permission in formal Spanish.

Federico always provides students with many examples when teaching. Also, I observed that he adapts the contents of the textbooks to students' realities so that students can relate what they are learning to their own contexts, which

Freire (1986) has stressed is an important aspect of teaching. Federico emphasised that the textbooks provided to bilingual schools do not consider indigenous students' realities as the textbooks are the same as those designed for monolingual schools (more on this later).

In summary, the three teachers who participated in this research share both similarities and differences. For example, Rosario and Vicente, the two instructors of grade one, are both indigenous and have Tsotsil as their native language, which is the language they both identify with. Also, they have Spanish as their second language. Both use Spanish and Tsotsil, but mostly Tsotsil when teaching. In contrast, Federico is the non-indigenous instructor of grade six and identifies with Spanish, which is his first language. Tsotsil is his second language and he speaks mostly Spanish when teaching. In terms of teaching style, Rosario is a teacher who likes to use games, songs, and different activities when having her students practice. In contrast, Vicente is more passive and he usually asks his students to work on written activities. Federico always tries to adapt the contents of the textbooks and his explanations to students' realities. Also, he always promotes respect in the classroom.

### **Students**

There were both girls and boys involved in the study. They are Tsotsileros (Tsotsil people and Tsotsil speakers) from different communities in Chenalhó. There was diversity in the classrooms, for example, there were first graders who were energetic and mischievous as can be expected from young children. Also, there were students who were shy and introverted and did not participate much. Some first graders enjoyed working and were dedicated. In contrast, there were

others who did not like to work, that is, they got distracted easily and enjoyed playing rather than completing the activities assigned by the instructor. This reminded me what O'Block (2004) argues with regards to classroom diversity and instructors' challenges to teach to students "each with their own learning styles, interests, and abilities" (para. 1). O'Block (2004) states that providing optimal learning for diverse groups can seem overwhelming. However, "there is a simple approach that can be used which can enable all students to succeed, and that approach is simply by using variety and choice. Not only does this approach address the multiple learning styles of students, but it also aides in making them independent learners" (para. 1). I observed this approach in Rosario, one of the teachers in grade one who attempted to use different activities in class. The diversity students bring into the classroom makes it more interesting and exciting (O'Block, 2004). Therefore, teachers should honor and respect the uniqueness of each student by offering variety and choice in their classrooms. In addition, "this addresses the diverse needs of the students and also helps them become independent learners. After all, is that not the goal of education?" (O'Block, 2004). The children I observed in grade one provided teachers with opportunities to implement different activities when teaching as Rosario did. However, sometimes teachers do not know how to deal with such diversity, that is, they would like to use games or activities, but they do not know what to do in the classroom, which is Vicente's case, the other teacher of grade one.

### **Students' Curiosity: Questions and More Questions!**

Although I always tried not to be seen during my passive observations in the classrooms and sat at the back of the room behind all of

the students, those first graders who enjoyed playing instead of working came to me and took the role of researchers. This was funny. It was no longer me who observed them, it was **they** who observed **me**. During my first observations, which is when I was new to first graders, they surrounded the chair in which I was sitting, and started observing me from head to toe. Also, they approached me to see what I wrote on my notebook. Although they were not able to read, they pretended to do so by moving their mouths and making noises. I enjoyed and smiled when this happened. Children were always curious about what I was doing. Later, when they became more familiar with my presence, they approached me and they did not only observe me, they also interviewed me. They had many questions for me such as “Why are you here?”, “Why are you always taking notes?”, “You’re a teacher, right?”, “Where are you from?”, “Do you live with your family?”, “Do you have a sister?”, “Where is she?” etc. Children were always nice to me and were always asking me questions. Their questions confirmed my ideas about children’s curiosity (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). According to the Illinois State Board of Education (n.d.), young children are full of questions as they are naturally curious. “Asking questions and listening to answers are vital to their learning. The way you respond can affect what and how a child learns” (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d., para. 1). Therefore, I always responded the children’s questions politely and with a smile.

They definitely became my little inspectors and interviewers. I was fascinated about working with them. Luckily, teachers enjoyed it when their students talked to me, that is, they smiled and did not get upset.

At the beginning, children surrounded my chair and looked at me like little inspectors. They had many questions for me and their sense of curiosity was always present. This situation (asking and responding questions) definitely helped me develop a nice rapport with them as they knew more about me and they realized I was an ordinary person just like them. We became familiar with one another.

After the first week of being at the school, many first graders always ran towards me to say hello and to give me a hug and a kiss when they saw me walking into the school. They fought for my hands in order to hold them. It was unbelievable how affectionate they became to me and vice versa.

Also, during recess, first graders and sixth graders wanted to spend time with me. They walked with me around the school or we went to the little store close to the school in order to get some snacks. We talked and I practiced my Tsotsil with them. Also, both first grade teachers and students shared their lunch with me. I was amazed about the fact that although their economic situation was hard and their lunch was small, they were always willing to share with me what they had. I never rejected their invitation to eat some of the food they had for lunch as I felt honoured and grateful. For me, it was a gift and a lesson that reminded me that “the ones who have the least are the ones who share the most” (Barrientos, 2006). Their generosity reinforced my idea about the beauty and

satisfaction of giving. I followed their example and I shared my lunch with them as well. Also, once in a while, I brought treats to the classes I worked with. Students and teachers were fascinated by receiving chocolates or candies.

This also happened with students in grade six. They were happy when receiving a treat. In general, sixth graders were friendly, despite the fact that some students were introverted and did not speak much Spanish. Fortunately, I got along with all of students from both grades one and six. Students always showed me respect and treated me as a teacher as they called me “Teacher Karla.” I noticed that in general, sixth graders were quiet when their instructor taught them in class. Also, students participated when they were asked to do so.

Since both first and sixth graders saw me taking pictures in different occasions and it is not common for them for that to happen as they do not have a camera, they enjoyed it when I took pictures of them. It was funny that they themselves asked me to take pictures of them. They said “Teacher, Karla, picture, picture, picture!” or “Quiero un foto” (“I want a picture”). They ran to a certain spot and they themselves posed for a picture to be taken. They were like stars smiling and putting their hands up. I was grateful and enjoyed taking pictures of them. Since this was the situation with the pictures, I asked teacher Rosario and some grade six students to help me create a collage with their photographs to be hung on to the wall outside one of the classrooms so that everybody could see it and could keep some of their pictures as well. Students always went to the wall where the collage was hung up in order to see the pictures.



Figure 10. Students Looking at the Final Collage

### **Tsotsil and How It Was Learned**

Most students' first language is Tsotsil and their second language is Spanish. Most of the students learned Tsotsil through their families, especially through their mother at home which is the place where they learn and use the native language. Here are examples of first graders who remarked on this during the focus group interviews:

- Karla: Alright. What's your mother tongue?  
 All 5 students: Bats'i k'op (*Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)  
 Karla: What language are you spoken at home?  
 All 5 students: Bats'i k'op (*Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)  
 Karla: What's your mother tongue?  
 Student: Bats' i k'op (*Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)  
 Karla: Who taught you Bats'i k'op?  
 Student: My mom  
 Karla: What language do you speak at home?

Student: Bats'i k'op  
 Karla: What's your mother tongue?  
 Student: Tsotsil  
 Karla: Who taught you Tsotsil?  
 Student: Mamá (*Mom* said in the Spanish language)  
 Karla: What language are you spoken at home?  
 Student: Ali Bats'i k'o p (*Mmm Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)  
 Karla: What language do you speak at home?  
 Student: Bats'i k'op

Most sixth graders declared that Tsotsil is their first language; they learned it at home and use it there as well. Also, a few students argued they learned Tsotsil at school. All this can be observed in the following quotes:

Karla: What's your first language?  
 Franklyn: Tsotsil  
 Karla: How did you learn Tsotsil?  
 Franklyn: Through our dad, our family, my mom, my grandma, my grandpa' ... through everybody! (*excited tone*)  
 Karla: What language do your parents speak the most at home?  
 (*Interpreter was required*)  
 Student: Tsotsil  
 Karla: How about Spanish?  
 Student: No  
 Karla: What's your mother tongue?  
 All 5 students: Tsotsil  
 Where did you learn Tsotsil?  
 3students: At home  
 2 students: At school

### **Language Use**

I observed that students from grade six have an adequate command of Spanish, although this is not always the case as there are sixth graders who still struggle to communicate in Spanish. However, it is more common to find this situation with first graders. Some of them understand very little Spanish and tend to use more Tsotsil, which can also be seen in the previous quotes. Here is an example of one of the focus group interviews I conducted with them at the

beginning of the term in which they only responded once in Spanish while the rest of the answers were given in Tsotsil:

Karla: What's your mother tongue?  
 All 4 students: Ta Bats'i k'op (*In Tsotsil said in the Tsotsil language*)  
 Karla: Where did you learn it?  
 Students:  
 All 4 students: Ta jna (*At home said in the Tsotsil language*)  
 Karla: Who speaks Tsotsil at home?  
 3 students: Mamá (*Mom said in the Spanish language*)  
 Student: Mamá y papá (*Mom and dad said in the Spanish language*)  
 Karla: Do your parents speak Spanish?  
 All 4 students: Jech (*yes said in the Tsotsil language*)  
 Karla: What language do you speak at home?  
 All 4 students: Bats'i k'op (*Tsotsil said in the Tsotsil language*)

### Spanish

In some cases, students' parents also speak Spanish as well as Tsotsil. However, children in grade one tend to use more Tsotsil as it can be seen in the previous quotes. Nonetheless, there are also young children who said their first language is Spanish, which can be seen in the following quote, despite the fact the child mixes his answers. To clarify his responses, I was helped by an interpreter to make sure he understood the question in which he contradicted himself:

Karla: What's your mother tongue?  
 Angel: Spanish  
 Karla: What language is spoken at home, Angel?  
 Angel: Spanish, but they also speak Tsotsil  
 Karla: What is the most spoken language at home?  
 Angel: Tsotsil more  
 Karla: When do people in your house speak Spanish?  
 Angel: When we eat, we speak Spanish.  
 Karla: Is Spanish spoken in your house?  
 Angel: No (*he contradicts himself, so I asked an interpreter to ask him in Tsotsil what the language he speaks at home was*)  
 Interpreter: Angel, what's the most spoken language in your house?  
 Angel: Spanish is more used in my house. Tsotsil is only a little bit spoken.

In some cases both Spanish and Tsotsil are used by students' parents. The following is an example of one of the interviews with one of the students:

Student: My mom speaks Spanish and my dad also speaks Spanish  
 Karla: What language are you spoken at home?  
 Student: Tsotsil  
 Karla: What language do you speak at home?  
 Student: Castilian  
 Karla: What language does your mom talk to you when you're going to eat?  
 Student: Tsotsil  
 Karla: How about your dad?  
 Student: Spanish  
 Karla: So Spanish and Tsotsil are spoken at home?  
 Student: Spanish

### **How was Spanish Learned?**

Students have learned Spanish either from a family member at home or in other locations or from their teacher at school, which was the most common answer. Here are a few examples of this; the first one is a quote from a first grader and the last two quotes are from sixth graders.

Karla: How did you learn Spanish?  
 Student 1: Ah?  
 Karla: How did you learn Spanish?  
 Student 1: At school. I learned Spanish at home. The instructor taught it to me and my auntie as well (*said in Spanish*)  
 Karla: Where did you learn Spanish?  
 Student 2: At home.  
 Karla: How about you? What language did your parents talk to you in at home?  
 Student 3: Tsotsil, I learned Spanish here at school.

### **Students' Parents**

Most families in Chenalhó are large with up to 5 children in the family with young parents, which is applicable to the parents who participated in the study. Most of them are from Chenalhó or from small towns close to it as they

have moved to Chenalhó for work reasons. This can be seen in the following quotes from three different parents:

Karla: Where are you from?

Doña Magdalena: From here, from Chenalhó. I've always lived here.

Karla: And were you born here in Chenalhó?

Don Víctor: Yes, I was born here. I studied here in different schools. I finished junior high school here. I'd like to stay here.

Karla: Where are you from?

Doña Rosalba: I'm from Yabteklum, which is half an hour away from Chenalhó.

Karla: How long have you been living here?

Doña Rosalba: 3 months. I came here to work. There's no work in Yabteklum. It's hard to find a job.

### **Language**

Most parents' first language is Tsotsil and Spanish their second. They learned Tsotsil at home through their family and Spanish by interacting with other people in Chenalhó or other places. I found that many parents feel that their knowledge of Spanish is limited, which is true in some cases. All this can be seen in the following quotes:

Karla: What's your mother tongue?

Doña Magdalena: Tsotsil

Karla: Where did you learn it?

Doña Magdalena: Here, my parents are here, my grandma is here. Also, I learned Spanish here. I don't speak it very well, but I learned it here.

Karla: So your parents taught you Tsotsil?

Doña Magdalena: Yes because they don't speak Spanish.

Karla: How about your grandma'?

Doña Magdalena: No, she doesn't speak Spanish.

Karla: How did you learn Spanish?

Doña Anita: In the street. I went to San Cristóbal for a year and I heard Spanish there. I went to San Cristóbal...I am (*instead of was*) working there with a teacher.

Most parents are fluent in Tsotsil while some of them have difficulties in communicating in Spanish or feel more comfortable speaking in their first language; Tsotsil. In such cases, I was helped by two girls in grade six, Ana and

Karla (pseudonyms), who helped me translate from Spanish into Tsotsil when interviewing some parents. Here is an example of a conversation in which I interviewed a parent whose pseudonym is Rita and whose knowledge of Spanish is limited; therefore Anita (one of my interpreters) helped me. Here is part of my conversation with Rita in which a little Spanish was used by her at the end of the conversation:

Karla: Do you also speak Spanish?

Ana (interpreter): Only a little bit, I still don't know it.

Karla: How did you learn Spanish?

Ana (interpreter): I learned Spanish here. When other people talk to me, I answer with a little bit of Spanish. I don't speak Spanish very well. I only speak Tsotsil. I don't know it well... I don't know Spanish.

Karla: Just a little bit of Spanish? You learned your Spanish by talking to other people?

Doña Rita: I sent my kid to kindergarten... as I'm spoken Spanish there, I learned there as well.

In the previous quote, it can be observed that Rita only answered in Spanish once while most of the conversation needed to be translated from Spanish into Tsotsil. In some cases, students' parents learned Tsotsil at home because that was the most spoken language at home or the only language spoken by their parents. Here are two mothers' examples:

Karla: What is your mother tongue?

Doña Ernestina: Tsotsil

Karla: How did you learn it?

Doña Ernestina: I learned it from my mom and dad.

Karla: Do your parents speak Spanish?

Doña Ernestina: A little bit

Karla: Mostly Tsotsil?

Doña Ernestina: Yes, they speak mostly Tsotsil.

Karla: What's your mother tongue?

Doña Rosy: Tsotsil

Karla: How did you learn it?

Doña Rosy: I was born here, so we are San Pedranos.

Karla: Alright, you're Pedrano. Who taught you Tsotsil?

Doña Rosy: My parents, they speak only Tsotsil. No Spanish.

### **The School Principal**

The school principal is a Tsotsil person from Chenalhó, but has been living in San Cristóbal de las Casas for 10 years as he studied high school there. He talked to me about the schools he went to, how he became a bilingual teacher and some of the places he has worked at. This is what he said:

Principal: I went to elementary and secondary schools here in Chenalhó. I went to high school in San Cristóbal. I stayed there. The call for proposals to be bilingual teachers came out, so I applied for it. I took a course called 'Inducción a la docencia' in Tuxtla. It was a three-month program to be well prepared to teach to students. It was a program from SEP. After that, I was sent to Bochil in the Municipality of Simojovel. I worked there for 3 years. I taught grade 3 and I was the principal at the same time. I was a principal since I entered the system.

Karla: Really?

Principal: Yes, but I had to do both teacher and principal. Now, it's different I only work as a principal. I have the position of technical principal. I was sent to K'ank'uk' before.

Karla: So you've been sent to different regions such as Bochil, then Simojovel...

Principal: Then Chalchihuitan and now in Chenalhó. This is my second year as a principal in this school.

Also, I asked the school principal if he prefers to work as a teacher or as a principal and he said that he likes both, but did not state the reason. He talked instead about the issues a principal faces. In addition, I asked him if all of the schools he has worked at were bilingual and he said yes. The following is part of the conversation I had with him.

Principal: I like both to be a teacher and a principal. As a teacher, you work from 9:00 to 2:00. But, as a principal you have no schedule. If there's a project you need to do it, you have to do it. Here people are used to calling you at any time. People want you to be in all of their meetings even if they have nothing to do with education. There's always conflict with the teachers. Sometimes teachers don't want to go to meetings, sometimes they disagree with what you propose, so there's conflict that's why it's difficult to be a principal.

Karla: Ok and were the other schools you worked in were bilingual?

Principal: Yes, all of the schools I worked in were bilingual. In K'ank'uk', they speak Tzeltal. I learned Tzeltal. We speak Tsotsil here, but they speak Tzeltal there.

I went on and I asked the principal how he was able to teach in the bilingual school in K'ank'uk' as the spoken language there was Tzeltal and not Tsotsil, which is the principal's native language. He said that it is by being there and by being helped by a student and some parents that he was able to learn the Tzeltal language. Here is what the principal said:

Karla: How were you able did you teach there?

Principal: In Tzeltal because ...for example, the students didn't understand the textbook in grade 4, so I had to translate it into their mother tongue (Tzeltal). It was difficult at the beginning. I spoke Spanish at the start, but I had a student who was bilingual in Spanish and Tzeltal...I think his mom worked in San Cristóbal, so he helped me. I asked him how to say certain words in Tzeltal, so I was learning like that. Also, there were parents who were bilinguals, so I wrote down the words they said.

Karla: Were your classes taught in Spanish?

Principal: At the beginning they were in Spanish, but then I realized students didn't understand, so I had to learn Tzeltal. In fact, I don't speak Tzeltal fully, but I could ...

Karla: How long were you there for?

Principal: I was in K'ank'uk' for 8 years. I have 15 years of service. I entered the system in 1995.

The fact that teachers are sent to regions where the local language spoken there is different from theirs has been a common practice (Galván, 2007), that is, there are instructors who do not speak the native language spoken in the community they work. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the education students receive from the indigenous education subsystem is a type of education that respects and promotes respect to diversity and that strengthens the linguistic richness in Mexico (Galván, 2007). Also, the fact that there are teachers who do

not speak students' native language makes both the teaching and learning process difficult as it is hard for complete communication and understanding to take place.

### **Number of Teachers and Students**

The principal of the school provided me with information about the number of teachers and students there. Also, he talked to me about why there were fewer students enrolled the year (2010) in which data for this research were collected. The following is part of the conversation I had with the school principal:

Karla: How many teachers are there in the school?

Principal: 8 teachers. We have 2 groups for grade one, 1 for grade two, 2 for grade three and 1 for grade four, five and six.

Karla: How many students are there in this school?

Principal: 214 students. We have fewer students this period because two new schools were established.

To learn more about the number of schools in Chenalhó, I asked one of the instructors about it. It was a confusing conversation where I had to go back and forth, so at the end I summarized what he told me to make sure I understood what he said. Here is the summary:

Karla: Ok, there's a kindergarten here, right?

Federico: Yes, a bilingual kindergarten.

Karla: I want to make sure I understood all this; There is a bilingual kinder, this bilingual school, and... (*Federico completes my sentence*)

Federico: Two more elementary schools that are monolinguals; one from the state and one is federal, there's also another kinder that is federal and is monolingual, one secondary school and one high school that is called "CECY

## **Purposes of Bilingual School**

### **Teachers**

#### **Program and Languages**

Instructors were asked about the purpose of the bilingual school. Vicente, one of the teachers from grade one, mentioned that the purpose is to achieve the goals of the program of studies they are given. Also, the purpose is to learn both Spanish and Tsotsil, especially grammar. Here is what Vicente declared:

The purpose is to achieve the goals according to the program. The program has been changed. They call it “Reforma Educativa”...the plan is 2009....before it was 1993...but now Felipe Calderón is in the presidency, so now we use the new curriculum 2009. The purpose is to teach to the kids... for example, here in the elementary bilingual school, it is bilingual...it is **bi** (*emphasis on bi of bilingual*) it means 2 languages, Spanish and Tsotsil...students will learn grammar also in Spanish in grade one...I have given them...I have given the students exercises in these first months...little by little they get the shapes of the letters...they learn grammar in Spanish in grades 2 or 3..they learn grammar in Tsotsil as well.

Vicente also mentioned that it is difficult to achieve the goals of the term as it is challenging for him to work with first graders as there are students who do not understand immediately and do not pay attention.

I was able to confirm what Vicente stated through my passive observations in his classroom, that is, sometimes it was hard to control some young children, to get their attention and to get them to work as they are mischievous and energetic, which is understandable to an extent. Some of the first graders were distracted very easily. They stopped working just by hearing a simple noise and started to play with the children sitting next to them, which was distracting for the children who were working and felt tempted to join the children playing. However, Vicente was always patient, which is important, especially when teaching young learners (Farley, 2011). When Vicente was not able to control them, he waited for the children to calm down, especially after recess which is when they went back

into the classroom after playing intensely. This situation reminded me what Farley (2011) says with regards to the difficulty to teach first-grade students since they are at an age “where they may find it difficult to respect classroom rules, such as not talking during class” (para. 1), which happened in Vicente’s class very frequently. In grade one, “many students are still getting accustomed to a structured learning environment” (Farley, 2011, para. 1). Also, she says that “students who chatter may not be misbehaving intentionally, but may just need time to adapt to classroom policies” (para. 1).

### Literacy

Vicente argued that the purpose of the school is literacy so that when students get to grade 2, they have the basis for reading or writing. He wants students to know the alphabet at least. I asked Rosario what she thought the purpose of the term (August-December) was and she responded similarly to Vicente:

Karla: Interesting! I’m learning lots! And what do you think it’s the purpose for this term (August-December)?

Rosario: To have students learn how to read and to write.

After her response, I asked her if students were asked to write in both Spanish and Tsotsil and she responded affirmatively. Also, I asked her if she had noticed it was more difficult for students to write in one language than in the other and she said:

Rosario: It’s always difficult to write in both languages. It’s a process that takes time, especially when learning the shapes of the letters. Well...they learn more how to write in Spanish...the programs says we need to teach students how to read and write...it’s logic...it says that the kids should read by now by using this textbook, but...how? They don’t even know how to read.

Karla: What do you focus on the most? To read and write in Spanish or to read and write in Tsotsil?

Rosario: Both

Karla: I see

Rosario: Because if they don't understand the letters (the alphabet) in Spanish, I try to find an equivalent in Tsotsil. Spanish and Tsotsil are used. Both languages help.

Rosario finds that both Spanish and Tsotsil are useful for teaching and

learning. According to Rosario, children are asked to write in both languages as

Tsotsil is also evaluated.

Federico, the teacher of grade six, was also asked about the purpose of the term and he, like the other teachers talked about literacy, but focused more on the Spanish class. To respond, he read a small paragraph from the plan and program teachers are provided with. This is what he read and said:

The main purposes, for example, for the Spanish class, is that the child reflects consistently on the functions of orthography, analyzes and enjoys literary texts, participates in the reading and writing of original texts, participates in conversations and presentations (*teacher stops reading the plan and program*)...that's what grade six is about...those are the purposes for grade six...we need to work in the Spanish class so that we can achieve the goals because if we don't work as the plan and program states, how are going to be able to achieve the goals?

In the last interview, Federico repeated that the purpose of the term was to get students to read and write. Also, he mentioned that the aim is to help students develop their ability to reflect as well as to understand what they do. Besides, this teacher also talked about the purpose of the Spanish and Natural Sciences class.

This is what he stated:

In this first part of the two semesters, the purpose was that teachers had more fluency in Spanish and better comprehension of texts in the Spanish class. In the Natural Sciences, the purpose was that kids learned about sexual problems and development stages. It's important they know the good and bad things of life. The main purpose was that they can defend themselves in certain circumstances they face in life.

Federico emphasized the Spanish class in the two interviews I conducted to him. He portrayed the idea that Spanish is important in the bilingual school, which coincides with what the school principal told me when he was interviewed.

## **Principal**

### **Literacy and Emphasis on Spanish and Mathematics**

The school principal was asked about the purpose of the bilingual school and talked about literacy. He argued that the subjects that are prioritized in school are Spanish and Math and that the indigenous language class is not actually implemented, which was confirmed by many students in the interviews. Here is part of the interview with the principal when he talks about the purpose of the bilingual school:

Karla: What's the purpose of this bilingual school?

Principal: To teach students to read and write, we want it to be useful for their life when they are adults. That's the purpose of the school. Here, we prioritize Spanish and Math. The indigenous language is part of the subjects, but we don't use it. Students speak Tsotsil, but they have difficulties to write it because we have glottals, the alphabet, and grammar. But, yeah, we don't work on the indigenous language. For us, the important things are Spanish and Math.

After I listened to the principal's answer, I was curious about the reason(s) to prioritize Spanish and Math, so I asked him to provide me with more details.

The principal declared:

For example, Spanish is important as it's the basis. If students know how to read and write, they can work on the other subjects. The other subjects are complements. If students don't know how to read and write, they simply don't understand the content of the other subjects. When I got here, I thought students would have an advanced level because they are in the municipality. But, no, their results are similar to the students in marginalized areas. We have students in grade three or four who hardly know how to spell. The level of achievement here is very low. Therefore, we prioritize and spend more time on... We have the plan and program,

which indicates the schedule and the number of hours for each subject every week, but we don't work on all of the subjects, we prioritize Spanish and Math because students are left behind, so we can't work on a different subject.

It is considered that Spanish is important because by knowing it, students can understand the content of other subjects, which are designed and delivered in such a language. The school principal was asked whether the purpose of the school was to use both Spanish and Tsotsil and this is what he remarked:

That's how it should be, but as nobody comes to visit us and all that. But, yeah, the indigenous language should be rescued. Supposedly, we're bilinguals to speak both languages. In fact, we have percentages.

According to the plan and program for grade one and two, teachers should be speakers of the indigenous language because the entire class should be taught in the indigenous language. In grade three and four, they should speak 60% in the indigenous language. Finally, in grade five and six, they should speak 100% in Spanish.

Karla: So the emphasis is on Spanish and Math?

Principal: Yes, that's right!

The previous quote shows that the more students advance the more Spanish they are exposed to and expected to use, which also means that the more they advance the less they are exposed to and expected to use the native language. This exemplifies the reality of other bilingual schools in Mexico, which instead of promoting and using both Spanish and the native language, Spanish is prioritized in order to "Mexicanize the Indian" (Rippberger, 1993, p. 56). However, the teacher in grade six who participated in this research believes that it is important to use both languages when teaching so that students understand what is being taught. I noticed that in most lessons Spanish is used by Federico when teaching. Nonetheless, sometimes he does use Tsotsil. This is further detailed in the following section.

### **Acquisition of Knowledge and Preparation for Secondary School**

Teacher Federico from grade six mentioned that the purpose of the school is to get students to understand the contents from the plan and program teachers are provided with, that is, to teach students what it is stated on such plan and program and that students actually understand what it is being transmitted by using both Spanish and Tsotsil as it is a bilingual school. Federico says that there are teachers who struggle to teach students because they do not speak the students' native language. The teacher said that by using both languages, students actually understand what it is being taught. This might help students find fewer obstacles in the future, for example, in secondary school. Here is what Federico declared:

Federico: The purpose is...well...this is school is bilingual and aims that indigenous kids have a better understanding of the contents of the plan and program. Sometimes, the monolingual teacher who doesn't speak the children's first language has problems to transmit knowledge...when the teacher says something in Spanish the child is like "What is that?" so the purpose is that the child ends school with complete understanding ...that the kids are not closed. When the kid gets to secondary school, we don't want the kid to find obstacles where he doesn't know...

Karla: Topics he didn't see?

Federico: No! Topics that he did see in school, but he didn't work on, so the purpose in the indigenous environment is to use both languages the mother tongue, which is Tsotsil and Spanish so that kids learn more so that the content is well developed and they don't face failures in the future.

During my observations in Federico's class, I noticed that he used both Spanish and Tsotsil, but more Spanish when teaching. Sometimes he used Tsotsil when giving examples and instructions to students and to translate the instructions for activities on the textbook. Spanish was not only used in the Spanish class, but in all of the subjects. When Federico wrote on the board, he always did so in Spanish although Tsotsil is a written language as well. When observing this, I

remembered what Francis and Reyhner (2002) say with regards to this, that is, indigenous languages are perceived as deficient for academic purposes, especially for reading and writing.

The following is an example of Federico's language use, and his activities in one of the Mathematics lessons. I also wrote a list of the activities that took place while observing Federico and his students:

*October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009*  
*Passive observation of class*

*Time: 11:10 a.m.*

*Location: Fernando's classroom and basketball court*

*Event: Math Class*

*Language used by teacher: Both, but mostly Span*

*Participants: Ss and T*

*Summary of context: I'm sitting at the back of the room and teacher Federico is about to start his math class. There are some Ss on their chairs and there are also some who are walking around the room. There is noise in the room. T and some Ss are outside looking for bottle caps for the class.*

*T and the Ss who were outside with him walk into the classroom. T starts his class saying in Spanish "quadrilaterals, page 23." Students open their textbook and search for this page. Then, T asks Ss to go to the basketball court to practice. =) Students bring their materials (notebooks, textbooks and pencils) with them. They walk towards the basketball court, which is located in front of their classroom. It's noisy. Once the T and Ss are at the basketball court, he uses some chalk to draw a big circle with a circumference, a diameter and an axis of asymmetry on the ground.*

*Sequence of events:*

- *T introduces the topic in Tsotsil.*
- *T explains that a circumference can have different diameters. He speaks in Span.*
- *T reads from the textbook and then translates it into Tsotsil. Ss read their textbook.*
- *T speaks Span and he asks Ss to draw another diameter.*
- *T says in Span "kids, this will be on the test" and shows them the circle.*
- *Ss are on task. Sometimes, T switches from one language to another.*
- *T explains in Spanish "2 radios come from the circumference"*
- *T explains the difference between a circle and a circumference.*
- *T translates this into Tsotsil. "Flat surface; circle" "The line around the circle; circumference". They are not the same.*

- *T asks Ss in Tsotsil “Lek oy?” (Ok?). Ss respond.*
- *T uses Span to let Ss know what the homework is. T says ‘tarea, página 26’ (‘homework; page 26, kids’).*

The previous example exhibits that both languages are used by Federico when teaching. However, that was not always the case. For example, in the Spanish and the Natural Sciences classes, he only spoke Spanish. The following is a brief example of this:

*October 20, 2010  
Passive observation of class*

*Time: 10:00 a.m.*

*Location: Fernando’s classroom*

*Event: Natural Sciences Class*

*Language used by teacher: Span*

*Participants: Ss and T*

*Summary of context: I’m sitting at the back of the room which is surrounded by windows, so I can see outside through them and through the door, which is opened. It’s a nice day! It’s sunny. About the class, they are quiet and the T is about to start the class. All Ss are sitting. T is standing close to the desk and he starts the class by asking a question to Ss in Spanish.*

- *‘¿Qué debemos comer para mantenernos sanos?’ ‘What should we eat to stay healthy?’*
- *Ss respond in Spanish*
- *T says that the topic to be learned is about the immune system.*
- *Ss open their textbooks.*
- *T provides Ss with examples of what the immune system is about. This is done in Span. He says ‘We have to eat cereals, tubers, potatoes.’ T always gives easy examples to help Ss understand =)*
- *T says in Span ‘These help us be energetic.’ It’s like a lecture, but in a nice way =) T asks questions to Ss. T talks about viruses that greatly affect us.*
- *T writes on the board in Span: ‘4 stages of development: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age.’*
- *Ss copy from the board. Room is quiet.*
- *T says students that the homework is to investigate what each stage is about. He says ‘¿Qué es la infancia?’ ‘What is childhood?’ for example.*

*Notes: Ss have regular classes after the exam. I have copies of the exams designed by teacher Rosario and teacher Vicente. Teacher Abel didn’t give me a copy.*

## Languages of Instruction

Following the above, teachers in grade one, Vicente, for example, argued that in his class the percentage of Tsotsil used is higher than the percentage of Spanish. Vicente personally tries to speak more Tsotsil than Spanish to his students. This is what he said:

Yes, in Tsotsil. In the first years, around 20% is spoken in Spanish, but I speak more... I speak around 60% or 70% to my students in Tsotsil and around 30% or 40% in Spanish because my students are little. In higher grades, more or less...but as I said here we speak both languages...that is the purpose.

This is also reinforced with what he said in the same interview. He mentioned that both at the beginning and at the end of the course, he spoke more Tsotsil than Spanish to his students. He mentioned that Tsotsil is used in his classes as teachers are told to use more Tsotsil than in Spanish in grade one. When students pass to grade four, they start using more Spanish. Here is part of the interview I conducted to Vicente:

Karla: What language did your students speak the most at the beginning of the term? Vicente: Tsotsil before and Tsotsil now. We've been told that we need to use 60% in Tsotsil and 40% in Spanish. The kids speak more Tsotsil.

Karla: When students pass to grade two the 60% that is for the Tsotsil language is diminished?

Vicente: No, it remains the same because it's the first cycle.

Karla: How about in grade 4?

Vicente: It's different there. Spanish is used more.

Karla: So the more students advance, the more Spanish they use?

Vicente: Yes, that's right!

Vicente stated that he believes that at the beginning and at the end of the course, his students spoke and still speak a significant amount of Tsotsil. I

observed that Vicente used both languages when teaching. However, his use of Tsotsil was more significant when teaching. In contrast, his use of Spanish was less, which could be why as he says his students speak more Tsotsil other than it is the language they are more familiar with.

I asked Rosario if she thought her students speak more Spanish after a few months of the term in which students are also spoken in such a language. This is what Rosario declared:

Rosario: Yes. When I speak Spanish, I see some faces that show they do understand, they go like “Oh yeah!” I see the difference. I talk to them in both languages.

Karla: Have you noticed that your kids use more Spanish now than before?

Rosario: No. They speak Tsotsil among themselves. They talk to me in Tsotsil as well even if I ask them to talk to me in Spanish.

Karla: Why do you think that is?

Rosario: Because they know I speak Tsotsil that’s why they do it.

Karla: And since it’s the language they manage the most, it’s easier for them?

Rosario: Yeah. In contrast, as they know they don’t speak Spanish very well, they won’t be able to pronounce it, so they stop.

I noticed that first graders in both teachers’ classrooms do speak more Tsotsil than Spanish to address their instructors inside and outside of the classroom. Also, students speak Tsotsil among themselves regardless of the place.

First-graders write in Tsotsil as well, albeit very seldom. Vicente commented that children learn how to put the glottals in Tsotsil even though according to Vicente it is hard to write in such a language. I observed that a few times, although not many, both Vicente’s and Rosario’s students wrote some activities in Tsotsil, for example, when they learned the numbers or animal names. Teachers wrote on the board in both Spanish and Tsotsil and students copied that.

### **Language Used by Students in School**

I asked students what language(s) they spoke in the classroom and other locations in the school and some said Spanish, others Tsotsil and some both languages.

### Tsotsil

Most first graders mentioned they speak mostly Tsotsil. Here is an example of one of the interviews I conducted to Vicente's students in grade one:

Karla: What language(s) do you speak in the school?

*Ana translates*

All 5 students: Bats'i k'op (*Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)

Karla: Mu'yuk Spanish? (No Spanish?)

One child says: "no"

*Ana translates*

Karla: So he's saying that they speak more Tsotsil in the school?

Ana says: Yes, they said they speak more Tsotsil in the school.

Karla: Ok, they speak more Tsotsil in the school.

Although students do use Tsotsil at school, not many students declared that. Most students argued they use Spanish.

### Spanish

There were sixth graders who answered they liked to speak Spanish in the classroom as it is the language they like to learn.

For example, in one of the focus group interviews, one of the students told me that she likes to speak Tsotsil with her friends and Spanish with her teacher as she likes Spanish. This can be seen in the following quote:

Karla: Oh, ok. How about you Ana?

Ana: I like to speak Tsotsil with my friends, but I like to speak Spanish with the teacher

Karla: How come?

Ana: Because I like Spanish!

Karla: Maybe because you're in school?

Ana: Yes ...and the teacher doesn't speak much Tsotsil.

The teacher in grade six speaks both Spanish and Tsotsil, but mostly Spanish, which is the language some six graders speak as they like it and want to learn it as can be seen in the following quote:

Ana: But, we also like to speak a lot of Spanish.

Karla: How come?

Ana: Because...mmm (*she doesn't know what to say and speaks in Tsotsil...Esmeralda helps her*)

Esmeralda: Because we want to *PRENDER* (*instead of APRENDER - to learn*)

We want to learn it (*Ana says the correct word...APRENDER-to learn*)

Karla: Are your classes in both languages?

Students: In Spanish

Students, especially sixth graders, like to speak Spanish as they want to improve their skills in such a language. I asked them what language(s) their classes were taught in and they said they were taught in Spanish, which was confirmed in the six grade classes I observed. This is an example of one of the interviews with six graders:

Karla: What languages are your classes taught in?

Juan: In Spanish.

Karla: Do you have activities in Spanish in the classroom?

Juan: Yes, to read and to write.

Karla: What activities do you have in Spanish?

Juan: When speaking.

Karla: What language do you speak when having activities in the classroom?

Juan: Spanish.

### **Language used by the Teacher according to Students**

Teachers' choices of language use in the classroom strongly influence students' language choice, which can be seen in the following example of an interview I conducted to sixth graders:

Karla: What language do you speak in the classroom?

Students: Spanish (*all of them said Spanish*)

Karla: How come?

Students: That's the language used by the teacher.

Karla: What language do you use to respond to the teacher?

Students: Spanish.

Karla: Do you have classes in Tsotsil?

Students: A little bit of Tsotsil.

Here is another example in which a sixth grader says that she speaks Castilian (Spanish) in the school as well as her teacher:

Karla: What language do you speak in the school?

Aide: Castilla (Castilian).

Karla: How about your teacher?

Aide: Castilla.

Karla: What language does your teacher talk to you?

Aide: Castilla.

In order to verify if students are spoken in Spanish in class, I asked them what language was used in the classroom through different ways both directly and indirectly. For example, I asked them directly what language(s) they were taught in in the classroom and I also formulated this question differently to know whether or not the answer would be the same. For example, I asked them what language(s) they were spoken to in their Mathematics or Natural Sciences classes. Students responded that these classes and the others are taught in Spanish. They argued that they speak Spanish in the classroom. In addition, I asked them what language they used to speak with their teacher and they said Spanish or Tsotsil. Some students speak Tsotsil with their teacher because their command of the Spanish language is poor, which is the case of some sixth graders, Elias, for example. This is mentioned by Franklyn another student in grade six who says:

Franklyn: Elias speaks little Spanish and not very well that's why Elias speaks Tsotsil with the teacher.

Karla: Does the teacher speak Tsotsil?

Franklyn: So so.

All this was confirmed when conducting observations. It is true that the teacher in grade six speaks some Tsotsil in the classroom, but mainly Spanish. According to students, the teacher in grade six speaks mostly Spanish and writes only in Spanish. Here is an example of one of the conversations I had with sixth graders in which they stated that the teacher speaks mostly Spanish.

Karla: What language does the teacher speak when teaching?

Students: A little bit of Tsotsil. Mostly Spanish.

Karla: Does the teacher write on the board in both languages?

Students: No, just in Spanish.

This was confirmed in the observations I conducted in the grade six class. The teacher speaks both Spanish and Tsotsil, mostly Spanish and writes only in Spanish on the board.

### **Students' Language Use outside the Classroom and Other Locations**

I asked students about the language they speak outside the classroom and most of them argued that they speak Tsotsil with their friends and family members in different locations. In general, Tsotsil is the language of familiarity. The use of students' mother tongue is key in familiar surroundings (Hornberger, 2006). However, it was also found that there are a few students who speak Spanish and it is the language they also use when talking to friends. The following is an example of one of the interviews with Karina and Ana, students from grade six:

Karla: What language do you speak outside the classroom?

Karina: Tsotsil, we speak Spanish with the teacher.

Ana: But we speak Tsotsil with our friends (*she completes Karina's sentence*).

Karina: I have a friend who I speak Spanish with. She's in the classroom right now.

Karla: How come do you speak Spanish with her?

Karina: Because she also speaks Spanish.

Karla: Does she also speak Tsotsil?

Karina: Yes.

I observed students from grade one and grade six during the break and I found that they used both Spanish and Tsotsil, but mostly Tsotsil, when playing at the basketball court, which is the most visited place during the break. The following is an example of one of the interviews with first graders in which Ana helped me translate during the conversation:

Karla: Please, Anita, ask them what language they use when they play at the basketball court?

*Ana translates my question into Tsotsil.*

3 students: Tsotsil

2 students: Spanish

Karla: Please, Anita, ask them about their reason for their language choice.

Ana: How come do you speak Spanish or Tsotsil? (*said in the Tsotsil language*)

Children respond in Tsotsil and Ana translates into Spanish saying:

“Because that’s how they are used to”

Karla: I see. Now, please, ask them what language they use at home.

*Ana translates the question.*

2 students: Spanish

3 students: Tsotsil

Some students stated they use Spanish or Tsotsil at home. However, most students answered they speak Tsotsil at home. This can be seen in one of the interviews I conducted to first graders:

Karla: Mmm...what language do you speak mostly at home?

All 5 students: Tsotsil

Karla: How about with your mom?

All 5 students: Tsotsil

Karla: How about Spanish?

Student: No...I have a little brother.

Karla: Oh yeah? And what language does your little brother speak?

Student: Mmm...Tsotsil.

Karla: Oh yeah? And what language do you speak to your little brother?

Student: Tsotsil.

Also, I asked children about the language they used in different locations, in the street, for example. Some students mentioned that they speak both Spanish and Tsotsil. For instance, they mentioned that they speak Spanish when they are spoken to in Tsotsil. The following is an example of an interview with a sixth grader:

Karla: What language do you speak with people in the street?

Javier: Tsotsil and Spanish. There are people who speak Spanish, so I answer in Spanish when they talk to me.

Karla: Are those people “jkaxlantik”? (*mestizos* said in the Tsotsil language)

Javier: Yes.

Karla: Ok, they are *mestizos*, so you talk to them in Spanish.

Javier: Yes.

Karla: What language do you use among your friends when playing?

Javier: Tsotsil because that’s the language we understand the most.

I asked another sixth grader when she used Spanish and she stated that she uses it in places in which she is spoken in such a language, that is, she responds in Spanish as well:

Karla: Where do you speak Spanish?

Ana: Here at the school and other places. If somebody talks to us in Spanish, we respond in Spanish.

Karla: So if somebody talks to you in Spanish, you respond in Spanish as well?

Ana: Yes, that’s right.

Javier and Ana’s answer exemplifies many sixth graders’ language use. Since most of them speak both languages despite their proficiency level in their second language (Spanish), they speak Spanish when they are spoken to by some indigenous people or *mestizos* in Chenalhó, that is, they linguistically accommodate the person they talk to and the place they are at. For example,

Marisa y Ernesto mentioned that when they go to the City of San Cristóbal de las Casas, they speak Spanish as it is the most spoken language there.

Amongst themselves, students speak mostly Tsotsil although there are students who speak Spanish among themselves. In the case of first graders, I observed they speak mostly Tsotsil amongst themselves in different locations such as in the classroom, at the basketball court, at the store, in the street and at home. For instance, Víctor from grade one argued that when he plays with his friends in the street he speaks Tsotsil, which reflects what many first graders mentioned when they were asked about the language(s) they use in different locations. Here is what Víctor said:

Karla: What language do you speak when playing with your friends in the street?

Víctor: Bats'i k'op (*Tsotsil* said in the Tsotsil language)

Also, Martha, another first grader argues that she speaks Tsotsil in locations such as the market and the main plaza:

Karla: What language do you speak in the market?

Marta: Bats'i k'op

Karla: What language do you speak in the main plaza?

Marta: Bats'i k'op

Tsotsil is mostly spoken among friends and in informal and familiar domains such as the market, the plaza, the street and at home. Also, Tsotsil is spoken in school, especially in the first grades of schooling. On the other hand, Spanish is used mostly in school and also in locations where there are mestizos and some indigenous people who speak Spanish.

### **Language Use by Students' Parents**

I also asked students about the language their parents use in different contexts, for example, in meetings at school, at the market or at church. Students responded that their parents speak Tsotsil and sometimes Spanish. The following is an example of one of the interviews with a student from grade six:

Karla: What language do your parents use when there are meetings in the school?

José: Tsotsil

Karla: In the market?

José: Tsotsil.

Karla: At church?

José: Both. In the morning the mass is in Tsotsil and in the evening the mass is in Spanish.

Karla: Is the priest from here?

José: Yes.

Karla: Is he bilingual?

José: Yes.

Meetings in school are conducted in Tsotsil as most students' parents are Pedranos (born and raised in Chenalhó) and have Tsotsil as their first language. As well as students, their parents linguistically accommodate the person they talk to. For example, Doña Rosy, a first grader's mother, stated that she speaks Spanish with mestizos and Tsotsil with indigenous people. Here is part of the conversation I had with her:

Karla: When do you speak Spanish?

Doña Rosy: When people talk to me in Spanish otherwise I speak Tsotsil. I speak Spanish with mestizos. I speak Tsotsil with the indigenous people like me. If I know them, I talk to them in Tsotsil. Mestizos speak Spanish so I respond in Spanish. If I talk to mestizos in Tsotsil, they don't understand.

Karla: So you speak both languages?

Doña Rosy: That's right!

Similar to Doña Rosy, Doña Pascualita, a sixth grader's mother speaks both languages. She speaks Spanish with mestizos and Tsotsil with Pedranos. This is what Doña Pascualita declared:

Karla: Do you speak both Spanish and Tsotsil?  
 Doña Pascualita: Yes.  
 Karla: Who do you speak Tsotsil with?  
 Doña Pascualita: I speak Tsotsil with the people from here from Chenalhó.  
 Karla: How about Spanish?  
 Doña Pascualita: With people who speak Spanish.  
 Karla: With 'jkaxlantik' (*mestizo in the Tsotsil language*)?  
 (*Pascualita laughs*)  
 Doña Pascualita: Yes, with 'jkaxlantik' (*she laughs*)

I also asked Doña Pascualita if her children speak Spanish and she said that they do speak it; however, they are more familiar with the Tsotsil language as it is the language her children are spoken to by their father. This is part of the conversation with her:

Karla: Do all of your kids speak Spanish?  
 Doña Pascualita: Yes, more or less.  
 Karla: Do some of them have problems to speak Spanish?  
 Doña Pascualita: Well...they do their best...they're more used to speaking Tsotsil due to their dad.

I observed that Pascualita's child does speak Spanish; however, he is more fluent in Tsotsil as it is the case for many students at the bilingual school where this research was conducted.

Most parents identify themselves with the Tsotsil language; however, there are a few who identify with both Spanish and Tsotsil. This can be seen in the following quotes from my interviews with some students' parents:

Karla: What language do you identify yourself with?  
 Doña María: Tsotsil because that's the language I grew up with.  
 Karla: What language do you identify with?  
 Doña Laura: Tsotsil.

Karla: How come?

Doña Laura: Tsotsil because I like it and that's the language I speak.

Karla: What language do you identify yourself with?

Don Javier: Spanish, no no, mmm yes, Spanish. Half with Tsotsil and half with Spanish. Both languages are important to communicate, not just one of them. I was 12 when I learned Spanish.

“Language is an important factor in people's identity, which ties us to the past and projects us to the future... it's a motor of identification” (Educar, 2011, para. 3). Language creates and reflects a particular identity. Therefore, I also asked students' parents about how they felt about being indigenous and they portrayed a positive attitude towards their ethnicity, which can be observed in the following quote:

Karla: What do think about being indigenous?

Don Víctor: Proud because I'm indigenous and I speak like 50% Spanish...there are some mestizo friends here who ask me if I am mad at them because they are mestizos...I respond 'no' I ask them why and they say because you're indigenous as they vulgarly call it you're *indio* (*Indian*)...I say, I am *indio* (*Indian*), but from my heart and I feel more proud than you because I speak both Spanish and Tsotsil. They ask me these kinds of questions, I answer. I tell them if I talk to you in Tsotsil, you don't understand...you guys only speak Spanish...it's like if I talked to you in English...you don't understand...yes, you're right, they say.

Karla: So you have an advantage. You have something they don't.

Don Víctor: That's right! That's right!

Don Víctor's response shows a positive attitude toward being indigenous as well as being bilingual. This theme continues in the following section on attitudes towards Spanish and Tsotsil.

## **Attitudes**

### **Parents' Attitudes towards Spanish and Tsotsil**

I asked students' parents about their opinions about both Spanish and Tsotsil in order to see if such attitudes influence their language choice when talking to their children. When parents were asked about their attitudes towards

Spanish, they provided me with reasons for them to want their children to learn it. These reasons are described in the following paragraphs.

### **Communication**

Parents feel it is important for their children to speak Spanish so that they can understand it and communicate with people who speak it with *mestizos* or indigenous people in the community who also speak Spanish, for example. This can be seen in the following quote from my conversation with Doña Magdalena whose child is in grade one:

Doña Magdalena: I like Spanish as well because sometimes my child runs into his friends and they talk to him in Spanish, but he doesn't understand very well.

Karla: Are your child's friends from Chenalhó?

Doña Magdalena: Yes, they are from Chenalhó and they speak Spanish to my child, but he doesn't understand very well.

Karla: That's why you want your child to learn Spanish so he can understand when his friends talk to him?

Doña Magdalena: That's right!

Similarly, Doña Celia whose child is in grade one believes that Spanish is important for communication:

Doña Celia: Spanish is good because you can communicate with anybody. If you don't speak Spanish, we can't understand each other even if we want to talk. For example, my mom, if you want to talk to her in Spanish, she doesn't understand. It's better to speak both languages.

Doña Magdalena, a mother of a six grader also argued that she believes Spanish is important for communication; however, she mentioned she likes Spanish better as it is more necessary. This is what she said:

Doña Rita: It's important that my kids learn Spanish to communicate. Spanish is more necessary, I like Spanish better, but I didn't learn it.

There are parents who like Spanish as they think it is important and it is useful when talking to teachers, lawyers and people in politics such as the governor, which is what Doña Anita told me.

**“I Want my Children to Learn Spanish!”**

There were some parents who as soon as they heard my question that probed their opinion about the Spanish language, they responded “I want my children to learn Spanish!” For example, Doña Rita declared:

Doña Rita: I want my children to learn Spanish. If the teacher speaks Spanish...even if kids speak Tsotsil, I want my kids to speak Spanish as well so that they know it when they are older. I want my kids to learn more Spanish. That’s all I want. I like both schools (monolingual and bilingual), but I want my kids to learn Spanish. I want my kids to speak Spanish. But, I speak Tsotsil, so I want my kids to speak it as well.

Since there are parents who want their children to learn more Spanish, I asked them what language they would like the teacher to speak to their children:

Karla: What language would you like the teacher to speak to your child?  
Doña Anita: More Spanish. My child already knows Tsotsil, but he doesn’t understand Spanish, so I want the teacher to speak more Spanish so he learns it.

Also, I asked parents what school they preferred for their children; the monolingual Spanish School or the bilingual Spanish and Tsotsil School. Doña Rita responded:

Doña Rita: I liked the monolingual Spanish school better before because we learned more Spanish there. Now, the teachers are indigenous, so my kids don’t learn more Spanish. Teachers speak both Spanish and Tsotsil, so kids don’t learn more Spanish.

Karla: What language do you want your kids to learn?

Doña Rita: Spanish so that my kids speak Spanish. If teachers speak Spanish everyday well...kids learn it as well.

In general, most parents portray positive attitudes towards the Spanish language and they want their children to learn it. For this reason, they want the

teachers to speak in Spanish at school so that students familiarize themselves with it and learn it. Teacher Rosario from grade one confirmed that parents want their children to learn Spanish. This is what she said with regards to that:

Rosario: It's important not to forget the indigenous language, but parents do want you to speak mostly in Spanish so that when the kids go to secondary school, they understand. But, there's something parents haven't understood, yet. Learning to speak Spanish is not just about speaking. It's important to understand and to know what each word means... the reason. It's hard. You learn to speak, but to read a book and understand sophisticated words, no. It's hard to catch the meaning or reflect... even for me. I learned to speak Spanish in a monolingual school in Carranza, but I learned to speak Spanish until I was 12 years old.

### **“To Help Me when Visiting the Doctor!”**

Since there are parents whose command of Spanish is very limited, they want their children to learn Spanish to help them communicate with Spanish speakers, for example, when seeing the doctor who only speaks Spanish, which impedes communication between the patient and the doctor therefore parents want their children to learn Spanish so they can help them translate. All this can be seen in the following quotes from my conversation with Doña Rita in which I was helped by an interpreter:

Doña Rita: If I get sick and if I go to the hospital, as they always speak Spanish there, I want my kids to speak Spanish so that they can understand me and they tell the doctor.

Karla: So you want your kids to be your interpreters?

Doña Rita: Yes

Karla: If you visit the doctor here in Chenalhó, do they speak Spanish?

Doña Rita: They speak Spanish here. They don't speak Tsotsil at the clinic.

Karla: What do doctors do to understand you?

Doña Rita: They ask you 'do you have a stomach ache?' You point where it hurts or if they see you are pale...doctors understand...doctors don't understand much Tsotsil.

Karla: What do you do then?

Doña Rita: I speak Tsotsil to the doctors. I just tell them that I have a stomach ache and then they check me.

Karla: So if you have a stomach ache, you point out to your stomach and show them with your hands where it hurts?

Doña Rita: Yes...if you're sick, doctors check you, but if you're very very sick, they give you medications.

Karla: It's a difficult situation, right?

Doña Rita: For example, if I'm sick and if I speak Tsotsil to the doctor and if he doesn't understand...what am I going to do? (*sad tone*)

Karla: It's sad.

Doña Rita: Yes (*sad tone*). My husband doesn't speak Spanish and I don't speak Spanish. Last night at 11:00 p.m., I went to the doctor, but he didn't check me because the doctors don't speak Tsotsil.

Karla: You went to the doctor last night?

Doña Rita: Yes, they told me to go to the drugstore because people there understand Tsotsil there. But, as I don't have money, we are poor, so we can't buy medications. (*sad tone*)

Karla: So nobody helped you?

Doña Rita: No. (*very sad tone*)

Karla: Does your daughter speak Spanish?

Doña Rita: Yes, she speaks both languages. She talks to me in Tsotsil. If a nurse or gringos talk to her, she can answer in Spanish. My daughter translates Spanish into Tsotsil for me. When I get sick, my daughter takes me to the doctor, but she can't take me anymore as she's pregnant and she can't walk now. She's due on the 24th.

Speaking Spanish for Tsotsil speakers is also a need and Doña Rita's situation is a good example of that. It makes sense that she wants her children to learn Spanish so that they help her communicate when she is sick and she needs to visit the doctor:

I've told my son to learn more Spanish so that when I'm sick he can help me translate. I've also told my kids to do their best at school so that they can get into secondary school so that they can learn more Spanish. I like Spanish better because if I get sick, I need Spanish...doctors don't understand Tsotsil.

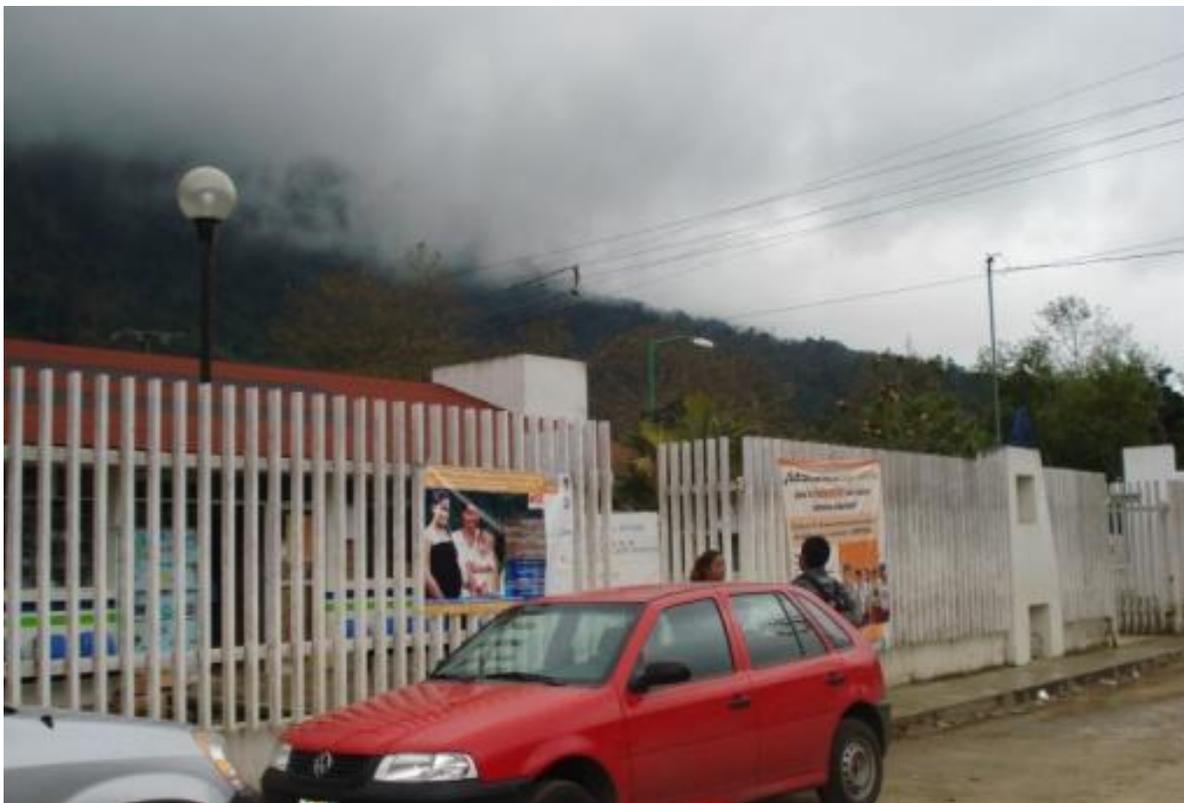


Figure 11. Entrance of the Clinic in Chenalhó

This situation has also been found in other parts in Mexico, that is, there are parents who view schooling important for children to help the family, for example, in case of illness (Paciotto, 2004). However, I often heard during the interviews that parents want their children to learn Spanish, but not at the expense of the Tsotsil language. They want children to preserve the language, cosmovision and values from the Tsotsil culture. For example, parents told me that they want their children to be humble and respectful with others. For instance, when they are walking in the street and they run into someone who is older than them; especially, when running into elders it is common for Tsotsiles to greet each other in the Tsotsil language by using titles such as “auntie” or “uncle” even though the people they say hello to are not their relatives. By greeting and using these titles,

they show respect. Some parents told me that there are girls who are indigenous and speak Spanish, but now they pretend not to speak Tsotsil anymore. The following is a quote that shows what Doña Aurora declared about this:

Doña Aurora: There are some girls here who speak Spanish...they walk very upright in the street...we know them...we know they are indigenous as well. We know them and they think that they don't speak Tsotsil anymore. I've told my kids not to be like that. If they speak Spanish, they should also speak Tsotsil. There are old people here who tell you in the street 'Batkun jun tot (*goodbye Uncle*) or Batkun jun me (*goodbye Aunt*).'  
I like both languages. There are some people who speak Spanish very well here who pretend not to speak Tsotsil. They do know Tsotsil, but they pretend not to.

Karla: They don't want to speak in Tsotsil?

Doña Rita: Right. They give you their back when you say hi to them. They pretend they don't know Tsotsil because they speak Spanish. I've told my kids not to learn that. If my kids see people in the street, I want them to say hi...respect is important. I want my kids to work hard to learn Spanish, but I don't want them to be a snob. I don't want them to walk like those people or that they stop talking to elders. I want my kids to respect people.

Doña Rita's comment shows that she wants her children to learn Spanish; however, they want them to preserve the values from their indigenous culture as well.

### **To Continue with Schooling**

As schooling in secondary school and higher levels is instructed in Spanish, some parents argued that they want their children to speak Spanish so that they can continue with their studies once they complete their elementary education. For example, Don Luis mentioned that:

Don Luis: Spanish is very important so that they can continue with their studies. Spanish is mostly used in higher levels ... Tsotsil is not used there. Also, if they go look for a job if they speak Spanish, there are opportunities.

### **Language of Opportunities**

Spanish is considered to be the language that provides students with opportunities for a better future. For instance, some parents argued that if their children speak Spanish, it is easier for them to find a job in the city. This can be seen in what Don Javier, whose child is in grade one, told me with regards to this:

Don Javier: Spanish is important, for example, if we go look for work in Mexico City or Cozumel, we need to speak Spanish so that people understand us and we can find a job. If we speak Tsotsil, they don't understand so we can't find a job. Spanish is more important so that we can communicate with mestizos and find a job.

Karla: So you think Spanish is useful to find a job?

Don Javier: Yes, that's the main reason.

Don Javier's statements show that he considers Spanish important due to work reasons. He also mentioned that Tsotsil does not help you to find a job.

However, Tsotsil is useful to communicate with indigenous people. Similar to Don Javier, another parent (Doña Rosy) mentioned that she wants her children to speak Spanish so that they can find a job in the city and can move out from Chenalhó as life (according to Doña Rosy) is hard there. Therefore, she wants her children to go somewhere else to study, to work or to visit at least.

### **Tsotsil and Spanish Together**

#### **Both are Useful for Employment, Communication and Self-Defense**

In contrast to what the two parents mentioned earlier, there was a mother who argued that both Spanish and Tsotsil are important even to find a job as both of them are useful and bilingual people can defend themselves better. Also, if students speak both languages, they do not have difficulties to communicate with others. This is what Doña Magdalena mentioned:

Doña Magdalena: I want him to learn both Spanish and Tsotsil. Both are necessary. I don't know very much Spanish...there's some Spanish that is

very difficult...that I don't even understand, so I like it when they teach both.

Karla: So that your kids don't have the same problems?

Doña Magdalena: Yes. I want them to learn both. Both are important.

Karla: How come?

Doña Magdalena: Because if my child finds a job, he knows both of them and can defend himself.

Karla: What would you say if you were told that your child would only learn one language? If they told you that your child would only learn Spanish, no more Tsotsil, what would you say?

Doña Magdalena: I would say that he should teach my child both languages. Both are important.

According to another parent, if children speak both Spanish and Tsotsil, they can communicate in different contexts such as at home and school. The following is part of my conversation with Doña Dina in which she argued:

I want my kids to learn both languages, if they know Tsotsil they can communicate at home. Teachers speak both Spanish and Tsotsil. If teachers ask them something in Spanish, kids know how to answer, they understand.

Therefore, speaking both languages allows children to communicate in different domains. For example, according to Doña Mercedes, if children speak Tsotsil, they can communicate with their mother and if they speak Spanish, they can communicate with 'others' (mestizos), for example. Doña Ernestina stated that they do not want their children to forget the Tsotsil language as it is the language spoken in Chenalhó; rather she wants her children to speak both Spanish and Tsotsil. Don Lorenzo argued that Tsotsil is important as it is part of their culture. Also, children may need Tsotsil if they find a job somewhere where it is spoken. In addition, children need Tsotsil in order to communicate with Tsotsil speakers. On the other hand, Spanish is also important for communication to take place. Here is what Don Lorenzo declared:

Don Lorenzo: Tsotsil is part of our tradition. Also, the kid might find a job some day in “X” place where Tsotsil is spoken...so kids can communicate easily. Mmm...I’ve seen that there are people who only teach Spanish to their children even if their parents are indigenous like me. But, they don’t communicate with indigenous people anymore.

Karla: Communication gets lost?

Don Lorenzo: Aha, communication gets lost. Why?...because if you talk to a child in Tsotsil, he doesn’t respond, he stays there like a mute even if he’s indigenous as well....I don’t see that well.

Karla: How come?

Don Lorenzo: Because there is not communication, communication gets lost, so I want my children to speak Tsotsil, and Spanish even English if possible.

Karla: The more languages the better?

Don Lorenzo: That’s right....there’s more communication. I want my kids to learn different languages, even English. For example, I teach to my little child the words I know in English. I want him to know English because it’s important... I wish I knew more English...I only know like 10 or 15 words that I learned at school.

Also, there are parents who want their children to preserve the native language so that younger generations can communicate with older generations, for example, young children with their grandparents who sometimes only speak Tsotsil. Moreover, parents think Tsotsil should be preserved as it is the language they were taught by their grandparents. According to Don Javier, Tsotsil is important as it is a means of communication:

Tsotsil is important, for example, if we eliminate Tsotsil, we couldn’t communicate here. There are many indigenous people who don’t speak Spanish, so they wouldn’t be able to communicate here in Chenalhó.

### **“Tsotsil is Part of our Culture”**

Also, there are parents who stated that Tsotsil is a nice language as it is the language they speak and it is part of their culture. Some parents want their children to speak Tsotsil because that is the language parents speak in Chenalhó, so they feel their children should speak it as well.

Doña Pascualita stated that her husband has focused more on the teaching of Tsotsil to their children by speaking mostly in the native language at home. Therefore, their children are fluent in Tsotsil. However, she believes it is important to learn both Spanish and Tsotsil.

There are parents who have sent their children to the bilingual school so that they learn and understand both languages, Doña Lupita, for example:

I sent my child to this school to learn more Tsotsil. Kids and teachers know more. I want my children to learn both languages so that they can translate from one language into the other...I want them to understand both.

### **“To Defend Yourself”**

Another parent mentioned that she wants her children to speak both Spanish and Tsotsil so that they understand what they are told and defend themselves if they are insulted. This is what Doña Roselba told me:

My kids understand Spanish, but some of my kids don't speak it. My kids speak mostly Tsotsil. I talk to them in Tsotsil. If I talk to them in Spanish, they answer in Tsotsil. I want my kids to learn both languages because...let's say if there's a person who offends my child in Spanish, they don't understand and they don't know how to defend themselves. I only speak Spanish and Tsotsil. There are people who come here and talk to me in Tzeltal. I asked another person 'What did he say to me?' and the woman told me it was an insult. Therefore, I want my kids to speak both Spanish and Tsotsil so they can understand and defend themselves.

There are parents who would like future generations to learn Tsotsil and Spanish. For example, some parents argued that they would like their grandchildren to learn both languages. For this reason, they said they would teach their grandchildren Tsotsil at home with parents and grandparents and they would have them learn Spanish at school.

### **Students' Attitudes towards Spanish and Tsotsil**

**“Tsotsil is No Longer Used and Spanish is Better!”**

Students were asked about their attitudes towards both Spanish and Tsotsil. Some students showed more positive attitudes towards Spanish than towards the native language. For example, Juan Lorenzo from grade six argued that he does not like Tsotsil as he believes it is no longer used, that is, many people from other places such as San Cristóbal go to Chenalhó, but they do not speak Tsotsil. This is part of my conversation with Juan Lorenzo:

Karla: What do you think about the Tsotsil language?

*Silence*

Juan Lorenzo: I don't know.

Karla: Do you like Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: No, because they don't speak it any more. For example, there are people from San Cristóbal who come here...they don't understand Tsotsil that's why I like to speak Spanish better.

Karla: Ok, and what language would you like to teach to your children when you're older?

Juan Lorenzo: Spanish

Karla: How about Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: No, I don't like Tsotsil

Karla: How come?

Juan Lorenzo: Because there are more people who speak Spanish

.....

Karla: What language(s) do you like the most?

Juan Lorenzo: Español es más chingón (Spanish is more cool). Everybody speaks Spanish.

*A girl laughs*

Karla: Who is everybody? (*Question for Juan Lorenzo*)

Juan Lorenzo: People in the secondary school, people who walk in the street...

Karla: Ok. What language(s) do you like the most? (*Question for one of the girls in the group, Juan Lorenzo answered again*)

Juan Lorenzo: Spanish

Karla: Do you want to learn more Spanish?

Juan Lorenzo: Yes

Karla: How come?

*Sandra responded*

Sandra: I prefer Spanish ...just because...because of my friends. They speak both languages.

After I heard Juan Lorenzo's answers, I asked him whether or not he would like the Tsotsil language to survive and this is what he said:

Juan Lorenzo: No, because Spanish is better. It's more cool!

Karla: You don't like Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: No

Karla: Do your parents and your siblings speak Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: Yes

Karla: Do you like Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: No, I don't like Tsotsil. Spanish sounds more cool.

Juan Lorenzo preference for the Spanish language in the second focus group interview I conducted at the last of the term confirmed what he told me in my first conversation with him. Again, he told me he prefers Spanish. This time he mentions he does like Tsotsil, but not very much. He likes Spanish better as he believes Tsotsil is old fashioned. However, he also contradicted part of what he declared in his first interview, that is, he said he did not like Tsotsil as it is no longer spoken. In contrast, in the last interview he said Tsotsil is old fashioned as many people in Chenalhó speak it. The following is part of the conversation I had with Juan Lorenzo:

Karla: Do you like Tsotsil?

Juan Lorenzo: Yes, I do, but little.

Karla: How come?

Juan Lorenzo: Because Tsotsil is old fashioned (*he laughs*)

Karla: Why do you think Tsotsil is old fashioned?

Juan Lorenzo: Because many people speak Tsotsil here

Karla: Are there many people who speak Tsotsil here in Chenalhó?

Juan Lorenzo: Yes, most of the people here.

Karla: So are all those old fashioned people?

Juan Lorenzo: Yes

Karla: How can you tell/see when somebody is old fashioned?

Juan Lorenzo: *Silence*... In their way of speaking

Karla: You don't like it?

Juan Lorenzo: No

Karla: What's fashionable now?

Juan Lorenzo: Spanish

From my observations while I was in Chenalhó, I observed that Tsotsil is more used than Spanish, which was confirmed by Juan Lorenzo in his second interview. For Juan Lorenzo, Spanish is “cool” and fashionable while Tsotsil is old fashioned. Juan Lorenzo speaks both languages and he has a good command of the Spanish language.

### **Influence from People and Television**

A student told me that she would like her children to learn Spanish because that is the language in which TV programmes are broadcast, which shows the influence that media has on the audience.

Also, there are students who liked Tsotsil in the past, but now they prefer Spanish as they speak it more and they are influenced by some of their classmates who speak Spanish, that is, their classmates speak Spanish so they are told they need to learn it as well. This can be seen in what Lourdes told me when I asked her whether or not she liked Tsotsil:

Karla: Do you like Tsotsil?

Lourdes: Not any more. I’m used to Spanish. I liked Tsotsil before, but not anymore.

Karla: How come?

Lourdes: I don’t know. I spoke more Tsotsil in the past. I have classmates such as Karla, Maricela and Ana, they speak Spanish. They say I should learn more Spanish.

Karla: Do you like it when you hear people speaking Spanish?

Lourdes: Yes

Karla: Do you like it when you hear people speaking Tsotsil?

Lourdes: A little bit. Not anymore.

Karla: How come?

Lourdes: I don’t know. My life has changed.

Parents play an important role on students’ language attitudes and language choice. For example, there was a first grader who mentioned that she

likes Spanish because her father “says so.” I asked her to provide me with more details, but she did not do so.

Influences from parents and classmates and also the media have an important impact on students’ attitudes towards languages, their language preference and use.

### **“We Want to Learn Spanish!”**

When students were asked with regards to their opinion about the Spanish language, some of them pointed out that they want to learn it as it is a nice language. According to one of the students in grade six, they use Spanish when reading and Tsotsil when speaking. The following example shows the previously stated, but also exemplifies that there are students in grade six who struggle when speaking in Spanish:

Karla: What do you think about the Spanish language?

Miriam: We want to learn it!

Teresa: It’s nice.

Karla: Do you want to learn Spanish?

Claudia: I want to learn more Spanish (*she wants to answer, but she can’t say it in Spanish as her Spanish is very limited*). Ana translates.

Claudia: I like Spanish

Karla: When do you use Spanish?

Another student: When we read we use Spanish, when we talk we use

Tsotsil.

Spanish is the language to read and write. In contrast, Tsotsil is only used orally.

### **“That’s what my Heart Wants!”**

As mentioned earlier, there are students who want to teach Spanish to their children in the future. Students’ indigenous comosivision and background can be seen in one of the reasons they mentioned for them to want their children to learn

Spanish, that is, they think their heart dictates what they should do in life. I often heard “that’s what my heart wants or says” as an answer when students or students’ parents were asked to provide me with a reason about something they were previously asked. This can be seen in the following quotes:

Karla: When you guys have kids, what language would you like to teach them?

*They laugh...Franklyn translates*

Emilio: Spanish

Karla: How come?

Emilio: That’s what my heart wants.

Karla: What language do you like the most?

Emilio: Both languages.

Karla: So if you like both languages, how come do you want to teach Spanish to your kids?

Emilio: Because I like Spanish.

Karla: Do you like Spanish better then?

Emilio: Yes.

Karla: How come?

*No answer given*

Franklyn interferences and says: Emilio is still learning Spanish! (*to let me know why Emilio didn’t answer*).

Emilio probably wants his children to learn Spanish so that they do not have to face the same difficulties as him when they need to communicate in such a language. Students portrayed positive attitudes towards the Spanish language.

They said they like it:

Karla: What do you think about the Spanish language?

Juan: I like it.

Ramiro: I like Spanish.

Marcos: I like Spanish.

Lupita: I like Spanish.

Karla: Would you like to keep both languages?

All 4 students: Yes.

Karla: Do you think it’s important to speak Spanish?

Juan: Yes, because if we go to other places...if we don’t know Spanish, we don’t know what to do there.

## **Communication**

A sixth grader told me she would like her children to learn both languages as there are some people who speak Tsotsil and do not understand Spanish, so she would like her children to learn Spanish and Tsotsil so that they can communicate using both languages.

Students also believe it is important to speak Spanish so that communication in different locations and not only in Chenalhó where Tsotsil is mostly spoken takes place. Students think both languages are helpful to communicate with different people and places. Although there are students who find Tsotsil useful as a means of communication, they mentioned they prefer Spanish because they think Tsotsil is difficult to write. Two students from grade six were asked whether or not they liked the Tsotsil language and this is what they declared:

Karla: Do you like Tsotsil?

Audeliana: No. There are some people who speak Tsotsil and there are some people who speak Spanish. If somebody talks to me in Tsotsil, I respond in Tsotsil. If somebody talks to me in Spanish, I respond in Spanish.

Karla: Alright. What language do you prefer?

Audeliana: Spanish

Karla: How come?

Audeliana: *No answer given*

Another girl from the same focus group pointed out that:

Carolina: We want others to speak Spanish, that everybody speaks Spanish, no more Tsotsil because it's hard. Sometimes we write in Tsotsil and it's hard.

Karla: Does the teacher help you write in Tsotsil?

Carolina: He did in the past, but not anymore.

Karla: How come?

Carolina: I don't know.

It is understandable that students think that writing Tsotsil is difficult as they do not work on their writing skills in Tsotsil. In contrast, most of their assignments inside and outside of the classroom are due in Spanish.

### **Preservation of Tsotsil**

Students were asked whether or not they thought it was important to preserve the Tsotsil language or whether they wanted to lose it. A sixth grader responded:

Amaranta: We don't want to lose Tsotsil because that's the language our parents speak, so we don't want to lose it.

Since there are students who believe it is important to preserve the native language, they would like to teach it to their children as it is the language most people in Chenalhó speak. According to Franklyn (a sixth grader), if children do not speak Tsotsil, they would not be able to communicate within their community. Some students argued that they want to learn Spanish and Tsotsil as they like both of them. These are some of the common responses students provided me with when they were asked about their opinion of the Tsotsil language:

Jaime: Yes, we like Tsotsil!

Ernesto: Because all of us speak Tsotsil here.

Julio: I like Tsotsil a lot because that's the language I am spoken by my friends and my students.

Karla: Students? Do you have students?

*Ernesto laughs...and corrects himself saying: I meant **my classmates** ...laughter*

Karla: Do you think it's important to learn Tsotsil?

*Laughter*

Karla: What language are you going to teach to your kids when you're older?

Student: Tsotsil...*no reason provided*

Student: Spanish...*no reason provided*

Student: Spanish and Tsotsil...that's the way it is.

Student: Spanish and Tsotsil...I don't know why.

Student: Spanish...that's the language I want them to learn...also Tsotsil.

Karla: Would you like to abandon your indigenous language?

Student: No, because we like to speak Tsotsil.

Student: I like it as well.

3 students: So do I.

Mario, one of the sixth graders I interviewed told me that he would like the Tsotsil language to be preserved so that he can communicate with his classmates or friends who also speak Tsotsil. Otherwise, if Mario speaks a different language that is not spoken by the people he knows, communication would not take place.

This is what Mario told me:

Mario: I'd like the Tsotsil language to be preserved because if one day I forget my language and my classmates or my friends don't know how to speak the language I speak, they won't understand me anymore.

Karla: So you want to continue speaking Tsotsil so that you can communicate with your classmates and your friends?

Mario: Yes, that's right.

I noticed that most first graders have positive attitudes towards their native language. This could be due to the fact that at that point (in grade one), Tsotsil is the language they are more familiar with as it is the language mostly spoken at home as Ana stated. When I asked them what language they liked better most children responded in Tsotsil saying "Bats'i k'op" (Tsotsil). One of the girls pointed out that she likes "Tsotsil because it is better!" I asked her about the reason for such a statement and she responded that "Tsotsil is better because it's indigenous here in Chenalhó!", that is, Tsotsil is the indigenous language spoken by the local people in the town, so it might be more useful for them than Spanish. Also, there are students who mentioned that they like Tsotsil better as it is the language their parents speak. In contrast, in grade six, I found that there was more variety in their answers, that is, both positive and negative attitudes towards the

native language. For example, Daniela, a sixth grader, told me she does not want her children to learn Tsotsil just because she does not like it and she prefers Spanish. I asked her again if she would like her children to learn Spanish and Tsotsil and she provided me with the same answer “No, Tsotsil, I like Spanish better!”

With regard to positive attitudes towards Tsotsil, when I asked students about the preservation of the Tsotsil language, I also asked them about their perception about being indigenous. Luis (a sixth grader), for example, argued that he feels very proud of being *Tsotsilero* and that he would not like to be *mestizo*. I asked him about the reason for that and he only said “that’s the way it is”, which was a common response (other than “that’s what my heart says/wants”), which was mentioned when students were asked to provide me with a reason. There are students who believe Tsotsil is more fun than Spanish as it is the language they speak and understand because that is the language their parents taught them.

The students who mentioned they like both Spanish and Tsotsil stated that they want their children to learn both languages so that they can communicate in both Tsotsil and Spanish speakers. Also, they believe that both languages are nice “because what you say in Spanish and Tsotsil is different”, that is, each language represents different worldviews.

### **Language of Identification**

In addition, I asked students what language they identified with, some of them said Spanish, Tsotsil and some argued they identify with both languages.

Karla: So what language do you identify yourself with?

Karina: Tsotsil, that’s the language we speak here.

Ana: With both languages.

Esmeralda: With both languages.

Matilde: Tsotsil.

Rosa: Spanish because we want to learn Spanish...that's how the teacher speaks.

Franklyn, a sixth grader, pointed out that he identifies with Tsotsil as it is the language he understands the most. Others argued that they identify with Tsotsil because it is the language spoken by their parents.

## **Teachers' Attitudes towards Spanish**

### **Communication**

As well as students and their parents, teachers argued that Spanish is important in order for communication to take place, for example, outside the indigenous community. At the beginning of the term Vicente, one of the teachers in grade one, stated that:

Spanish is good...it's important to learn it...it's important for communication to take place. There are kids who don't speak Spanish so they can't communicate, there is not communication. Well, they can communicate only with people in their community, but outside their community, outside their place, there is not communication. To me, it is important to learn Spanish, it's very important.

Similarly, at the end of the term when Vicente was interviewed again, he mentioned that Spanish is important for the same reason: communication. Also, he stated that the indigenous language is important, which was confirmed with my observations in his classes along the term. In the last interview, Vicente pointed out:

It's good that students learn Spanish so that communication takes places. If young people go somewhere else, they can communicate with people. But, the indigenous language is important as well.

Rosario, the other teacher in grade one, mentioned that Spanish is necessary to communicate. When she told me about her opinion of the Spanish

language, she also commented on what her students' parents tell her about it, which coincides with what they told me when they were interviewed. This is what Rosario argued:

Rosario: Well...now here... parents here say 'I want you to speak Spanish to my daughter!' They don't understand that the indigenous language is also another language. Both Spanish and students' mother tongue are important. Spanish is dominating us. It's true. If you don't know how to speak Spanish, you can't communicate with other people, so Spanish is necessary as well...Spanish is very necessary.

Karla: What language(s) do parents want their kids to be taught?

Rosario: Spanish, they prefer Spanish to be taught.

Karla: How come?

Rosario: Because they want their kids to be able to communicate in Spanish, when they go out, when they grow up, it's easy for them to communicate in Spanish.

### **“Spanish Opens Doors”**

Federico, the teacher of grade six, suggested that knowing Spanish is good as it is Mexico's national language and it is the language that opens doors to students. The following is part of the conversation I had with Federico in which he mentioned that:

Spanish is good because it's the national language in Mexico. If we only teach Tsotsil, the child wouldn't have doors open anywhere. If a child went to San Cristóbal to continue studying or to ask for support, he would be limited.

Through my observations and interviews with Federico and his students, I realized that Federico always portrayed positive attitudes towards Spanish as he finds it more useful than the native language. He believes that since Spanish is spoken in higher levels of schooling after elementary education, Spanish is more helpful for students to learn, that is, Spanish is more advantageous than Tsotsil. According to García, Kangas and Torres (2006), instructors prefer to use Spanish because of ideological beliefs that the children will be left behind in Mexican

society if they learn in their native language (García, Kangas, & Torres, 2006), which represents Federico's ideology. Consequently, the expansion of bilingual educational programs in rural areas, especially among school-age children, has increased the number of Spanish speakers, which is not problematic since bilingual speakers have access to both cultures associated with the languages they speak. However, the danger lies in speakers of the indigenous language who become monolingual in Spanish.

**“Spanish and Mestizo Lifestyles have and still are Dominating Us!”**

When I interviewed teacher Rosario, she mentioned that she believes that Spanish and Kaxlanes' lifestyles have and still are dominating indigenous people, that is, they are losing their traditions such as their typical clothing and now they are also losing their native language, which is all they have left. This is what Rosario argued:

Rosario: Spanish has dominated. The lifestyle of 'kaxlanes' has already dominated us because we wear their clothes now whether it fits us or not. Our typical clothing is different; however, we don't wear it any more.

Karla: Why do you think that is?

Rosario: Spanish has and is still dominating. Technology, TV and internet have made that...society...even indigenous people are dominated by all that. We are dominated. We just have our language that is all we have left. But with school...with the program we're sent, which says we should use 100% Spanish. We are becoming extinct.

Karla: Does the program put a disadvantage on the indigenous language and culture?

Rosario: Exactly! Now, the girls are asked to wear uniforms. We are asking them to wear modern skirts. They were used to wearing their '*nahuitas*' (indigenous traditional skirts) and their typical clothing. However, the school is promoting that all this disappears.

Karla: Does this happen in monolingual schools?

Rosario: Even more, more in monolingual schools. Here at least it's still allowed to wear typical clothing. But, in a monolingual school kids need to wear uniforms.

Karla: Everyday?

Rosario: I don't know if it's every day, but I've seen they wear uniforms. In contrast, here, this is the first year we ask students to wear uniforms.

To a certain extent, Spanish and mestizos (kaxlanes) are seen as a threat against Tsotsil and its speakers as well as their traditions such as the wearing of indigenous' typical outfits. According to Ramírez (2008):

A significant number of Indigenous Mayan communities preserve part of their traditions, values and native languages. However, these cultural characteristics have been changing because indigenous peoples have historically been imposed changes with the purpose of inserting them in new social, religious, political and economic organizations that aims for acculturation (p. 3).

Rosario mentions that schooling is one of the agents that leads to the disappearance of the native language and traditions. For example, recently students as well as teachers in the bilingual school are asked to wear uniforms like children in monolingual schools, which is a typical tradition in schools attended by mestizo children.

Bilingual schools are very similar to monolingual schools in terms of approach and materials, for example, which are some of the factors that have impeded the delivery of quality bilingual education that promotes the use of the native language and culture other than Spanish and its speakers.

### **Barriers to Quality Bilingual Education**

According to Williams (2007), even in schools that are specifically for indigenous children, bilingual education is poorly implemented. In the bilingual

school where this research was conducted, many factors were found, which are considered to be barriers for the implementation of quality bilingual education. In the following paragraphs, such barriers will be described.

#### Attitudes

As earlier mentioned, parents want their children to learn Spanish (Paciotto, 2004), which is positive. However, the problem arises when parents want this to happen at the expense of the students' native language. I asked Vicente, the grade one teacher, whether or not he thought the school promotes the indigenous language and culture and this is what he responded:

The school is a promoter, the thing is that there are some parents who don't want the Tsotsil language to be preserved...but us as teachers we shouldn't forget our identity...that's why we speak our language. We keep on working to preserve it.

I observed that Vicente does care about preserving Tsotsil, which is the language he speaks the most when teaching and when talking to his students inside and outside the classroom.

Similar to what Vicente stated about students' parents' attitudes with regards to the native language, Federico, the teacher of grade six, argued that some parents do not see the point in teaching children the indigenous language if they already know it. This is what Federico mentioned:

We've faced some problems; there are parents who say "My kid already knows the indigenous language, so why are you going to teach him/her how to speak it?" We're not going to teach the student how to speak Tsotsil because he/she already knows it, but we're going to teach him/her that the indigenous language has grammar structures like Spanish. But, we don't do so. We're also failing there. We just use Tsotsil for translation.

This was confirmed when I observed Federico's class. He mostly uses Tsotsil when translating what he says in Spanish.

With regard to students, there are both positive and negative attitudes towards the native language. There are children who like Tsotsil, some like both Spanish and Tsotsil and others prefer just Spanish as Lorenzo, a child from grade six who thinks Spanish is “more cool and fashionable than Tsotsil”. This attitude can be considered as a possible barrier for bilingualism, which may affect the preservation of the indigenous language in the future.

### **Purposes of the School**

An important barrier to quality bilingual education is the purpose of the bilingual school. As earlier stated, teachers such as Vicente and Rosario, teachers of grade one, suggested that among the purposes of schooling is to teach students how to read and write as that is what the plan and program (the curriculum) states. However, this new plan and program, which started to be implemented in 2009 is the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools. Students learn how to read and write basically in Spanish rather than in both languages. Also, the teacher in grade six emphasized literacy in Spanish as one of the main purposes of the school and his reason to do so other than his personal attitudes in favour of Spanish is that the plan and program states that students should learn how to read and write in such a language, which was also mentioned by teacher Vicente. In addition, the subjects that are mainly prioritized are Spanish and Mathematics as they are considered to be the most helpful and fundamental subjects. These as well as other reasons will be discussed below as they are considered to be obstacles for bilingual education to take place.

### **Monolingual Approach and Lack of Training**

Vicente suggested that the approach in which instructors are trained to become teachers at bilingual schools is basically monolingual. Therefore, they do not know how to teach using a bilingual approach. This was also mentioned by Federico, the teacher in grade six, who said he does not know how to teach using both languages as they are not trained to do so (Williams, 2007). However, Federico contradicted himself as later in the interview as he stated that they do “receive some training on how to interact with the children in the indigenous language, considering the indigenous language as one of the subjects” rather than the medium for delivering content.

To learn more about this, I asked Vicente whether or not the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) provided teachers with training for teachers working in indigenous regions. This time he responded affirmatively. He said there are courses on how to teach Tsotsil, the Tsotsil alphabet or how to teach in general, for example. In addition, he declared that these courses take place for 2 or 3 days every 6 or 7 months. However, teachers from the school have not been asked to attend any of these courses recently.

Rosario told me that they do have workshops or sessions, but they are not necessarily for bilingual teachers. For example, they took an introductory course, which aimed to familiarize teachers with the new program called “Programa 2009.” Teachers were taught about the content of the program and how to teach with it. Rosario said that the program they are currently using is different, that is, they no longer use the old program therefore teachers attended a one-week workshop in which they analyzed the new program of studies. The workshop was

for both monolingual and bilingual teachers. Rosario argued that bilingual teachers were not advised on how to teach with a bilingual approach. She said they were only given some ideas for activities to teach in general and it is they who need to do the rest.

To summarize, the workshops bilingual teachers receive is not necessarily to teach indigenous students whose mother tongue is not Spanish.

### **The Teaching of the Indigenous Language Class and the Curriculum**

Among the questions I asked teachers during the interviews were regarding the number of subjects they were currently teaching during the term. The teacher in grade six suggested that there are nine subjects including the indigenous language class. This is what he declared:

Federico: Well...in grade six we have Spanish, Math, Geography, History, Civics, Artistic Education, Sports...I think they are like 9...9 subjects, oh and the indigenous language as well.

Karla: And do you teach it as well?

Federico: Mmm...I teach it as a point of reference when students have questions...Mmm (*tone of uncertainty*) as a complement. The mother tongue also has its grammar; its adjectives, its articles, its past, present and future sentences, so it's useful.

When Federico was asked whether or not teachers receive training to teach in the indigenous language, he mentioned that Tsotsil is considered to be one of the subjects as well. However, in reality he mentioned that it is difficult to teach it because parents are more interested in other subjects such as Math, Spanish, Natural Sciences, Civics or History than the teaching the indigenous language. He also argued that it is not only parents who find other subjects more important than Tsotsil, that is, teachers agree with that as well and play an important role in such a situation. Federico mentioned that:

It's also on us that we don't teach the indigenous language as such although it's necessary. We as teachers have had courses from the *supervision* that say that we should teach the indigenous language as such. We don't have a plan and program for the indigenous language that indicates the contents and when to teach what. We're supposed to do that; to work on it.

This is one of the main barriers for quality bilingual education to take place, that is, the lack of a *plan and program* (a curriculum) for the teaching of the indigenous language makes teachers' task difficult as they are not guided as how and what to teach in the Tsotsil language class. Federico argued that teachers do not have and need guidance, that is, a plan and program that states, for example, the topics that should be covered in the indigenous language class and one that contains the topics for the rest of the subjects. The current curriculum only states the number of hours, which are not many, for the indigenous language class during the term. In the following quotes can be seen what Federico said with regards to the number of hours per each class according to the plan and program they have:

Federico: The plan and program states the number of hours for each subject, for example, (*he opens the plan and program and reads*) I have 6 hours per week for the Spanish class, 240 hours per year, that is, 10 months of work. For the indigenous language...for the mother tongue, I have 2.5 hours per week, 100 hours per year. For Math 5 hours per week, 200 hours per year, for Natural Sciences 3 hours, 120 hours per year, for Geography 1.5 hours per week, 60 hours per year. It's the same number of hours for History, for Civic Formation and Ethics, one hour per week, 40 hours per year. For the Sports class one hour per week, 40 hours per year, for Artistic Education one hour per week, 40 hours per year...all of these subjects, which are 9, ...I need to cover 22.5 hours per week, which are 900 hours per year...considering my students' needs, for example, for the Spanish class, to keep the 6 hours...I need to distribute them in the week, for example, (*teacher looks at the schedule he posted on the wall*) on Monday and Tuesday I teach Spanish from 9:00 to 10:30, on Wednesday from 9:00 to 10:30 and Thursday from 9:00 to 10:30...the four days in which Spanish is taught for an hour and a half makes a total of 6 hours a

week. For Math, from Monday to Thursday from 10:30 to 11:30 and on Thursday, I also teach Math after the break from 12:00 to 12:30 to make a total of 5 hours a week. I teach Natural Sciences on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 12:00 to 1:00, which makes a total of 3 hours a week. The indigenous language takes place on Friday from 12:00 to 1:00.

Karla: Just once a week?

Federico: Yes, to reinforce some of the topics seen in the Spanish class.

In Federico's quotes it can be observed that the number of hours for the indigenous language class in the curriculum are not many in comparison to the ones for other subjects such as Spanish and Mathematics.

In reality, the number of hours that are supposed to be used for the indigenous language class are used for other subjects, that is, the Tsotsil class does not actually take place. This was confirmed by observing Federico's classes and interviewing him and his students. For example, I asked Franklyn, one of Federico's students, whether or not they were asked to complete assignments in Tsotsil and this is what he declared:

Franklyn: No, we don't have homework in Tsotsil. We don't have a textbook for the Tsotsil class.

Karla: How many hours do you have for your Tsotsil class per week?

Franklyn: We don't have a textbook for that class, so we don't have a schedule for that class.

Karla: What do you do then?

Franklyn: We use that time for another class.

Karla: So you haven't had any indigenous language class up to now?

Franklyn: No. We had some Tsotsil from grade 1 to grade 5, but not anymore. We don't have a textbook. We use the time for another subject.

Karla: What does the teacher say about it?

Franklyn: We won't have the indigenous language class because we don't have a textbook for it.

Karla: Do you write in Tsotsil sometimes?

Franklyn: Yes, when the teacher wants. We don't have a textbook. When we want to write in Tsotsil, we tell the teacher and we write in Tsotsil.

Karla: Is it often when you write in Tsotsil?

Franklyn: No

Karlita, another sixth grader as well as other students mentioned that they do not have the indigenous language class although their schedule says that it should be on Fridays from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. This hour is spent in the learning of other subjects such as Spanish and Mathematics. Karlita pointed out that:

The time and day for the indigenous language class is stated on our schedule, but there's no time to learn it, we learn more about other subjects. We're supposed to have the class for the indigenous language, but we don't learn it that much.

Other subjects especially Spanish and Mathematics are prioritized over the indigenous language class as these are thought to be more useful than the indigenous language class as Tsotsil is no longer used in higher levels of education, at junior high schools, for example. Besides, the rest of subjects are taught mostly in Spanish in the school where this research was conducted, especially in higher grades such as in grade six. Use of Tsotsil is made when some translation is necessary. The latter can be observed in the following quotes from an interview with sixth graders:

Karla: What language do you speak when having activities in the classroom?

Students: Spanish.

Karla: What language do you speak in the Natural Sciences class?

Students: Spanish.

Karla: In your Civic class?

Students: Spanish.

Karla: What language is mostly spoken when you are taught?

Students: Spanish...everything is in Spanish.

Karla: So your classes are only taught in Spanish?

Students: Yes.

This was confirmed when observing Federico, the teacher of grade six who prefers students are more familiar with Spanish so that they do not face problems in the future, that is, during their future studies.

## Textbooks and Materials

Another barrier for quality bilingual education is that textbooks and materials are the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools in Mexico, that is, the textbooks and materials for bilingual schools are not adapted for bilingual institutions. Rosario, one of the teachers of grade one, provided me with her opinion about the textbooks for her students and she said she does not like the textbooks as they do not entice students' attention. Here is what Rosario pointed out:

Students have this textbook. But, as you can see (referring to the textbook), it doesn't grab students' attention. The textbook has nothing. It only has assignments to do, to investigate about what you know...to do a presentation. I don't like the textbook because it is not relevant for students.



Figure 12. Recycled Textbooks for Grade One

Also, the textbooks are written in Spanish instead of both Spanish and Tsotsil. As mentioned earlier, the textbooks that are provided to monolingual schools are the same as those that are given to Spanish-indigenous bilingual schools. In this respect, Rosario argued:

Rosario: All of the textbooks are in Spanish. These are national textbooks.

Karla: All the schools get the same textbooks?

Rosario: Yes, both monolingual and bilingual schools. The textbooks are the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools.

Karla: And you as the teacher have to figure out how to adapt them?

Rosario: Yes, you figure out how to explain the contents in the native language. It's true it's hard for us to translate the contents. Kids don't understand, that's why I'm trying to....that my students...the ones that I have can understand ...I'm trying...I'm using only Tsotsil, only Tsotsil. In January, more Spanish, Spanish and Spanish...I'll speak more Spanish to them.

Teachers face difficulties in adapting materials that are only written in Spanish as the textbooks are the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools. Later in the interview I had with Rosario, I asked her again about the language in which textbooks were written and her answer was the same: Spanish. Students were also asked about their textbooks. Franklyn from grade six, for example, mentioned that “all of them are written in Spanish and there is nothing in Tsotsil.” Rosario confirmed this when she said:

Rosario: The textbooks are written in Spanish, everything is in Spanish. We only have one textbook that is written in Tsotsil. In the past, we had 3 textbooks for the Spanish class; Spanish for reading, Spanish for exercises and Spanish to cut figures.

Karla: And the kids had all of these textbooks?

Rosario: Yes. We knew how to work with those materials in sessions. It was easy for me. Now, it's different.

Karla: When did they change the textbooks?

Rosario: This is the second period.

Karla: In what year they changed the textbooks?

Rosario: Last year.

Karla: in January 2009?

Rosario: Yes.

Karla: So you need to adapt everything .

Rosario: Exactly! These textbooks are new and we're just beginning to get familiar with them. We were familiar with the previous materials. There was a book for the teacher that said 'First session, first reading, emphasize such...ask them this and that...' After reading, we worked on an activity, we cut...but not anymore.

As Rosario argued, teachers need to figure out how to explain in Tsotsil the contents of such textbooks because they are written only in Spanish, which does not necessarily reflect the promotion of the native language. Also, this reality makes Rosario feel she needs to speak more Spanish to her first graders so that they become more familiar with it, which can facilitate the understanding of the textbooks. Also, the fact that the textbooks are new and teachers are still beginning to familiarize themselves with them makes their jobs more challenging.

Vicente, the other teacher of grade one, argued that students are provided with a textbook for each subject. Similar to Rosario, Vicente stated that since the textbooks are national ones, that is, they are the same for all the schools in Mexico whether or not they are monolingual or bilingual, they are only written in Spanish. These textbooks are provided to teachers by the federal government. I asked Vicente again if the textbooks were the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools and this time he mentioned that the only difference that exists between both types of schooling is the languages that are used. Here is what Vicente pointed out:

Yes, the textbooks are the same. The only difference in schools is that we use two languages here. In contrast, in monolingual schools they don't. They only use the national language and textbooks. In contrast, us, we look for ways to adapt the textbooks.

Vicente as well as Rosario argued that they need to adapt the textbooks to students' realities as they are written in Spanish and they are for all schools in Mexico, that is, they are not created considering indigenous children's needs. This has been one of the barriers for quality bilingual education to take place.

### **Lack of Materials**

Other than the fact that textbooks sent to the bilingual school are only written in Spanish, I was told by Vicente that there is also a lack of materials (Williams, 2007), that is, not all students receive such textbooks. In addition, students had not received the package of materials they were supposed to be provided with by the government or other institutions at the beginning of the term. Also, the materials that teachers are provided with are not many; therefore they need to get more materials on their own. Here is what Vicente said:

Karla: Do you receive enough textbooks for all the students?

Vicente: No, there are students who don't receive the textbooks. They are a few textbooks only. I don't know why.

Karla: I see. What materials is the school provided with?

Vicente: The school is provided with materials by the government, mainly with textbooks...and a few other materials like notebooks, rulers, geometric tools and a few backpacks...but they are just a very few materials.

Karla: How about markers?

Vicente: No, no markers. We need to buy them. But, the kids get colors. Teachers need to get more materials by themselves.

Karla: Oh they receive colors. What about notebooks?

Vicente: Yes, they get notebooks as well.

Karla: At the beginning of the course do kids get a package?

Vicente: Yes, each child does. But we haven't received anything, yet. We were going to receive a package from the Institution in charge of the Development of the Family (DIF), but we don't know where it ended up. It's support from a religious group, but we don't know where the government from the state went to help. Before, we received a package from DIF.

Karla: That's the material kids use now?

Vicente: Yes

Karla: From DIF?

Vicente: Yes, from DIF.

Karla: And the package from the government?

Vicente: We haven't received that one, yet. There is a scholastic package...we haven't received it, yet.

In this respect, Rosario argued that “a lot is still missing in the school!” such as materials (Williams, 2007) for both teachers and students. However, she is optimistic and tries to overcome the situation by creating her own materials for teaching. Also, she asks her students to make different materials when learning a new topic; posters, for example. Later, these are used to decorate the classroom. Rosario sees this situation as an opportunity to encourage her students to be more creative to make their own materials. She also declared that she uses materials that have been helpful in previous terms.

It's not the same if I just ask them to colour...that's too direct... no...they build their materials. Right now, to teach Spanish, I'm using these materials...that I've used in the past...they have worked that's why I still use them.

Sadly, indigenous children have a lower quality of education than non-native people. (Williams, 2007), which can be seen in the lack of supplies they and their teachers are provided with. This unfortunately is not only a barrier for quality bilingual education, but also for education in general. Since this situation has been common not only in terms of education, but in many aspects of life where it can be seen the difference between natives and non-natives. Indigenous people call themselves “los olvidados” (the forgotten people) and they say that “para todos todo, para nosotros nada” “for everyone everything, for us nothing” (EZLN, n.d., as cited in La calle es nuestra, 2007, para.1), which can be seen in

part in the fact that the school and its staff are not provided with enough supplies in a timely manner.

### **Textbooks and the Curriculum do not Consider Students' Realities**

Very similar to what Rosario argued with regards to the textbooks, Federico, the teacher of grade six, mentioned that the textbooks are the same for both types of schools. This time he added that the “plan and program 1993” they used in the past contained the topics that should be covered during the term. However, they were not necessarily related to students’ contexts therefore he needed to adapt the topics to students’ realities. All this can be seen in the following quotes:

Karla: Are the textbooks used in both monolingual and bilingual schools the same?

Federico: They’re the same. The textbooks used from Baja California (in the north) to Chiapas, which is in the south, are the same. We’re using the same textbooks.

Karla: There’s no difference?

Federico: No. You need to adapt them to your environment.

Karla: Aha, to your context.

Federico: Right. For example, in the Spanish class, we have stories such as “Imperial Rome”, but if the topic is not related to this environment... well...I can make modifications and talk about a story in Chenalhó, Chiapas or San Cristobal. A story that they have lived... or they have heard... maybe that’s an introduction.

Karla: So that kids feel identified?

Federico: Exactly! The plan and program 1993, the one we used before, had the topic about ‘stop lights’ and they don’t have them here, there are no stop lights here, kids don’t know them...maybe those who have travelled to San Cristóbal know them... they know that red means ‘stop’, yellow means ‘prevention’ and green means ‘continue,’ but there are no stop lights here and there are kids who have never even travelled to San Cristóbal.

Karla: So you try to adapt the contents to the kids’ realities?

Federico: Of course! I adapt the plan and program to the kids’ level. Also, you don’t... you don’t use sophisticated language...sophisticated words because kids go like...they don’t even speak Spanish very well...if you talk to them with words they don’t understand, it’s more difficult.

Karla: Aha, it’s important to use basic vocabulary.

Federico: That's right! For example, when we learn English, if you talk to me with words...basic words such as 'good morning, good afternoon, sit, come in' ...I understand.

Karla: Basic language.

Federico: Aha, I do recognize...I understand

I observed that Federico always attempts to adapt the contents of the textbooks to his students' contexts so that they can identify with the topic and better understand it. According to Freire (1986, as cited in Ramírez, 2008) the educational system should be based on students' contextual reality, which is not necessarily reflected on the textbooks at the bilingual school where this research was conducted.

### **The More Students Advance, the More Spanish they are Exposed To**

In Rosario's previous quote it can be seen that she was planning to speak more Spanish to her students in the second half of the course (beginning in January) to help them understand the textbooks. In the rest of the conversation, Rosario mentioned that she would do so as soon as she sees that her students know how to spell in Spanish. I asked Rosario if the more students advance in school, the more they use Spanish and she said:

Rosario: Yes, when I'll see they know how to spell, I'll try to use more Spanish...to have them read and understand.

Karla: It must be difficult...also for the kids.

Rosario: It is difficult, it's difficult but it's nice at the same time. It's nice to learn 2 languages or more just like yourself who knows many languages.

Rosario seems to have a positive attitude towards the learning of languages. However, the approach in the school is that the more children advance, the more Spanish they are spoken and expected to use. In contrast, Federico privileges the Spanish language more. I asked him if he taught the native language

to his students and he argued that he uses it only as a point of reference when students have questions or when clarification is required. Federico uses Tsotsil only as a complement.

As was previously stated, the use of Spanish increases in higher grades, which was mentioned by the three teachers who participated in this research. The use of both Spanish and Tsotsil is mainly in the first two grades of school as students are more familiar or only monolingual in their native language; Tsotsil. In higher grades, the use of Spanish is increased.

### **Teacher's First Language is Different from Students'**

Another barrier for quality bilingual education is that teachers are hired although they do not necessarily speak the students' native language. Federico, the teacher of grade six, mentioned that teachers in Spanish-indigenous bilingual schools are provided with work as long as they speak Spanish and any indigenous language from Chiapas. Federico also pointed out that when new teachers enter the educational system, they face difficulties, for example, they are sent to remote areas. However, with time they are sent to areas closer to the teachers' place of origin. All this can be seen in the following quotes from my conversation with Federico:

Federico: Bilingual teachers are hired although they don't speak the kids' language. For example, you would be hired as a bilingual teacher here if you spoke Tzeltal and Spanish.

Karla: Even if I don't speak the students' language?

Federico: Yes, even if you don't speak the students' language. They would send you very far as it would be your first year of service... you would be in a far place to gain merits ... and little by little you would get closer to your place of origin... where the language you speak is used... like us..., for example, now I am where my first language is spoken. Here in Chenalhó, there are teachers who speak Tzeltal or any other languages from Chiapas,

but they are here not because they want to, but because their...their time of service is very little, so they can't get to their place of origin now.

Federico's comment shows the process teachers need to go through at the beginning and later in their career. Teachers do not get to decide where they want to teach, that is, the educational system decides where to send them, which is usually to remote areas at the beginning of their career. Teachers who have been working in the public educational system for many years are those who work in cities or places close to them.

### **Cancelled Classes**

During my stay in the school, I realized that it was common that classes were cancelled for different reasons, such as weather conditions, holidays, meetings, and others. This was raised when Rosario, the teacher of grade one, talked to me about some of the topics she covered during the term. Here is what she mentioned:

Rosario: I taught my students the syllables, how to count...mmm... my purpose was that they know how to identify the letters, that they know how to spell or read. I have one kid that almost reads sentences. I have one or two students like that. That's what I wanted, but there are different factors such as time, the weather conditions, celebrations and parades that are reasons for not having classes. All this affects them. What my kids learned is to get familiar with words.

Karla: Did they learn the numbers in Spanish or Tsotsil?

Rosario: In Spanish. They already knew how to count in Tsotsil.

Karla: So when they came to school they already knew how to count in Tsotsil and learned how to count in Spanish?

Rosario: Yes.

I noticed that many Friday classes were suspended for the reasons previously stated. Since it is common that the temperatures in Chenalhó are low and there are many rainy days, students' parents do not send their children to school if they consider the climate might affect the children's health. Also, when

teachers noticed that it was going to rain an hour or half an hour before classes finished on a regular school day, students were asked to leave before then so that they did not get wet while walking home.

Figure 13. The Basketball Court after Rain



Teachers had to spend hours when preparing students for festivals, that is, students needed to be given time for rehearsals to practice dances, poems or songs when getting ready for future events in the school. Therefore, there were occasions where students did not have a couple of hours of classes, that is, the length of time for classes was reduced due to rehearsals.

In addition, when teachers had to attend meetings in San Cristóbal de las Casas or there were national holidays, students did not have entire days of classes

at school. This affected teachers and students; that is, teachers were not able to cover all of the topics they were supposed to and students had no time to learn these topics or practice the topics they were taught before.

### **Teachers' Desires for Modifications**

After teachers talked to me about some of the difficulties they face with the textbooks that are only written in Spanish, for example, I asked them what they would change about the educational system if they could do so. The answers were: the textbooks, resources (materials), guidance and the curriculum they were using.

### **Textbooks and the Curriculum**

Rosario, the teacher of grade one, mentioned that there are many “things” she would like to be changed including the textbooks. Here is part of the conversation I had with her:

Rosario: Many things...*she laughs*. The textbooks they sent us. I'd change the textbooks to be more understandable for bilingual education.

Karla: How do you think that can be possible?

Rosario: It's difficult...to have the textbooks to be more reachable for the kids.

Karla: Easier for them?

Rosario: Easier for them to understand.

Karla: Would you like the textbooks to be written in both languages? Or only in Spanish?

Rosario: Mmm...I would say it's ok to have them in Spanish, but I'd like them to be easier to understand because parents want their kids to learn Spanish, so it's ok to have the textbooks in Spanish. For them Spanish is important. I can't ask to change everything for bilingual education because

the textbooks are national for everybody, for both monolingual and bilingual education.

Similar to Rosario, Federico, the teacher of grade six argued that he would like the textbooks to consider students' realities and the curriculum to guide teachers about the contents that should be taught in the indigenous language class.

This is what Federico said in regards to this:

For the indigenous language, I'd like to have a list of contents and to be specified of when to teach Tsotsil. For example, today we're going to work on the development and fluidity of the mother tongue. A different topic could be grammar structure, so that the indigenous language had a sequence as the Spanish language in the Spanish class.

Later in the interview, Federico pointed out:

Federico: The plan should specify the contents for the Tsotsil class. We need guidance. Also, among the changes I'd like are that the textbooks focus more on the indigenous reality because they contain things that don't consider this environment, they are out of orbit, so I'd like that the textbooks were more realistic as these textbooks are for Mexico.

Karla: For the Mexican Republic in general?

Federico: Exactly! They are not focused on one place in specific, for example, Chiapas requires this... or Oaxaca needs this or Veracruz has these needs. We have to adapt the textbooks. This is what I'd like to have the textbooks changed.

Karla: To have the textbooks focused on the students' realities?

Federico: Exactly!

When teaching, Federico prioritizes Spanish over the indigenous class.

This could be due to the lack of a curriculum that guides them of what and when to teach Tsotsil as it is suggested in his previous quote.

### **More Guidance and Materials**

Teacher Vicente argued that he would like to be provided with a plan to know how to work with students, that is, a guide with ideas of activities or games to be done in class with students. I observed that Vicente does not ask students to play games in the classroom, which is related to his desire to be provided with

ideas of what to do. In addition, he mentioned that if you want to buy board games you need to buy it with your own money:

Vicente: Games need to be bought by us. Kids don't help out economically very often, they're kids.

Karla: Do you get any economic support from school?

Vicente: Well...we get a cheque, but it's for a very small amount.

Karla: So every teacher gets that cheque?

Vicente: Yes, it's included in our salary, but it's very little money.

Vicente's situation shows the need for teachers to get training with regards to how to teach by using a variety of activities and fun games. He seems to portray interest to use games in class; however, he needs ideas of what to do. Also, getting more materials or more funding to get them would make it easier.

Rosario also would like to be provided with more resources. For example, she suggested that the new program states the use of internet and the library for some activities; however, the school does not have any of that. Besides, she said that teachers criticize colleagues who use some of the resources that the school does have such as TVs. The following shows part of my conversation with Rosario:

Karla: What are the improvements would you like to have in the school?

Rosario: We're running the new program, but it's hard to implement it because of the lack of materials and what the plan asks you to do such as the use of internet and a well-stocked library. There isn't that. It wants us to use TV programs. Well, we do have TVs, but you're criticized, so you avoid using them. If you use them, they say you want to show off...that you have "degrees" and so on. That's what they say when joking. This attitude doesn't let you grow as a teacher. Also, when mothers come to pick up their children, I talk to them, I joke with them and teachers don't like that.

This situation shows the difficulties some teachers such as Rosario go through. She would like to use the few resources, TVs, for example that the

school has; however, the negative attitudes from other teachers demotivate her to do so.

This chapter presented the data collected from August to December 2010 at a Bilingual School in Chenalhó, Chiapas. Data from two first grade teachers, one sixth grade teacher and the three teachers' students were included. Also, data from students' parents and the school principal are part of this chapter. The participants' attitudes as well as the barriers that impede the implementation for quality bilingual education were also presented. The following chapter contains the analysis of the data presented here.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the data analysis of this research, which aims to analyse how the current Spanish-Indigenous bilingual program in Chenalhó functions, barriers to its implementation, the participants' attitudes towards both Spanish and Tsotsil as well as the current situation of both languages. The data

analysis was supported by the findings obtained through passive and active observations, individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes and the analysis of written documents. Also, the analysis is based on the literature review of this dissertation and the work of different scholars. This chapter also presents my conclusions and suggestions.

### **Value of Languages**

According to Nadal (2006), the importance and value of languages has been forgotten. We need to remember, as Cocom argues in his poem, that “languages are the home of our soul” (cited in Nadal, p. 164).

Table 1. Cocom’s (n.d.) Poem about Language

<b>Tsotsil</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>English</b>
A t’ane’ u naajil a pixán	Tu idioma es la casa de tu alma	Your language is the home of your soul
Tumen ti’ kuxa’an a laats’ilo’ob.	Ahí viven tus padres y tus abuelos.	Your parents and grandparents live there.
Ti’e uuchben xa’anilnaaj, U k’a’sal a ka’ajtalil	En esa casa milenaria, hogar de tus recuerdos,	In that millenarian house, home of memories,
Ku p’aatal a t’an	permanece tu palabra.	your word remains.
Le beetike’,	Por eso,	That’s why
Ma’a uok’tik u kíimil a wíinklil	no llores la muerte de tu cuerpo	don’t cry for the death of your body
Mix a yok’tik u kíimil a pixán.	no llores la muerte de tu alma.	don’t cry for the death of your soul.
A wíinklil,	Tu cuerpo	Your body

Máantadz ku p'aatal ti'u yich a	Permanece en el rostro de tus	remains in the face of your
páalal:	hijos;	children;
A pixane'	Tu alma	Your soul
Máandatz ku léembal ti' xux	estremece en el fulgor de las	trembles in the brilliance of the
ek' o' ob.	estrellas.	stars.

According to Crawford (1996) languages can be murdered. An example of this is in the Americas since the arrival of Columbus. “Nevertheless, this crime is more difficult to commit than many believe. The one sure-fire way to murder a language is to murder its speakers” (Crawford, 1996, para. 9). “Genocide of language communities occurred with Tainos in the Caribbean, the first peoples to be encountered by Columbus” (Crawford, 1996, para. 9). However, more often, “languages die in a more complex and gradual way, through the assimilation of their speakers into other cultures” (Crawford, 1996, para. 10). Sadly, the pace of language shift appears to be accelerating dramatically, which is a major cause of concern (Crawford, 1996). External forces, which are frequently blamed, especially direct attempts to suppress a language, cannot alone be responsible, for the simple reason that people resist (Crawford, 1996). He declares that:

Language is the ultimate consensual institution. Displacing a community's vernacular is equivalent to displacing its deepest systems of belief. Even when individuals consent to assimilation, it is enormously difficult to give up one's native language. This is especially true as we grow older, because language is tied so closely

to our sense of self: personality, ways of thinking, group identity, religious beliefs, and cultural rituals, formal and informal. Such human qualities are resistant to change at the point of a gun; witness the survival of indigenous tongues through centuries of colonialism. (para. 11).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) argues that “languages are part of the heritage of humanity - but we are killing them as never before” (para. 10). She considers that “the most important direct agents in language murder are the media and the educational systems. Behind them are the real culprits, the global economic, military and political systems” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, para. 26).

### **Language Loss and Standardization of Indigenous Languages**

According to Flores (2006), the coexistence of different languages within the same space generates multilingualism, but also the fragmentation and dispersion of languages, because, as stated by Warman (2003) “although ‘Mexico is the country with the highest number of indigenous languages spoken in the American Continent any of its languages reaches the number of those who speak quechua, aymara or guaraní’ (Warman, 2003: 35)” (Flores, 2006, p. 54). Flores (2006) declared that if “it is considered that the minimum amount of speakers that a language should have is 100,000 (Bernardez, 1999: 25)” (p. 54) in order not to be considered as a threatened language, the only two languages in Chiapas that escape such a threat are the Tsotsil and Tzeltal languages (Flores, 2006).

Following this criteria, the other languages in Chiapas are “in risk of disappearance or they have already disappeared, which is the case with the six

languages of the frontier between Chiapas and Guatemala: chuj, mochó, kanjobal, jacalteco, lacandón and mam” (Flores, 2006, p. 54).

There are many indigenous languages in danger of extinction not only in Mexico, but in other parts of the world as they “are under siege... in danger of disappearing because they are not being transmitted to the next generation” (Hornberger, 1998, p. 439). For example, native languages spoken in Alberta, Canada are in risk of disappearing (Blair and Laboucan, 2006). This is the case for “Dene Sutine, Dene Tha, Dene Za, Kainai, Siksika, Pikuni (Blackfoot), Nakota (Stony), Saulteayx, and Michif” (Blair & Laboucan, 2006, p. 206). Javoie (2010) states that the indigenous languages in British Columbia, Canada, are predicted to disappear within the next six years “if immediate steps are not taken to improve language education” (para. 1). Other languages around the world are undergoing similar pressure (Hornberger, 1998); for instance, the Brazilian language Shawandawa (Hornberger, 1998), 16 languages in Ethiopia (Grenoble & Whaley, 1996) and 48 minority language groups in the European Union (Nelde et al., 1996 as cited in Hornberger, 1998). Also, of the 175 indigenous languages still extant in the United States, only 20 are being transmitted as child languages (Krauss, 1996).

UNESCO (2003) states that “even languages with many thousands of speakers are no longer being acquired by children; at least 50% of the world’s more than six thousand languages are losing speakers” (p. 3). Therefore, UNESCO estimates that “in most world regions, about 90% of the languages may be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 3). One of

the reasons for linguistic extinction is that world's languages are no longer being reproduced among children. Economic, social and political factors influence the situation of languages. In addition, assimilation, urbanization, centralization and uniformity pressures make and will make people prefer majority languages (Baker, 2006). These pressures are also applicable to the participants of this study. Baker (2006) argues that if many languages are vulnerable, "language planning measures to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity are urgently required (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998) as is an ecology of languages (Muhlhausler, 2002)" (p. 45). Such language planning measures are necessary in the bilingual school in Chiapas, which is where this research was conducted.

The following sections will describe how the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico describes intercultural bilingual education and will show the issues and barriers that were found in the bilingual school site of my study. My aim is to show the difference between theory (what SEP states) and what happens in reality in the bilingual school where this research was conducted.

## **Education**

### **Intercultural Bilingual Education According to the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico**

Ramírez (2008) suggests that indigenous people in Mexico have asked in different ways for their right to receive education according to their cultural characteristics. In the 1970s different organizations in Mexico and other parts in Latin America started to explicitly demand of the government that education be intercultural. According to Ramírez (2008), "intercultural education can be seen

as a teaching and learning method that aims to promote cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies” (p. 4). This type of education emerged in Mexico as a response from the national government due to the demands made by different indigenous groups (Ramírez, 2008). Mexican indigenous groups requested the recognition of their cultural characteristics such as language, culture, and identity. Ramírez (2008) points out that:

In the 1980s, intercultural education attempted to promote cultural pluralism through indigenous education as a model that aimed to promote the respect and recognition of the ethnic diversity of the country as authors such as Aguirre (1992), Apel (1996) and Dietz (2003) have analyzed (2008, p. 4).

The workbook “*The Organisation of the Academic Work: Workbook for Indigenous Elementary Education*” (SEP, 2003) states that intercultural bilingual education involves both “the actions performed by educators as well as the education that students receive” (SEP, 2003, p. 13). SEP (2003) reminds teachers that developing an intercultural bilingual practice allows us to improve students’ education and states that “the way we perceive education; it is the way we act on it” (2003, p. 13). SEP (2003) also reminds teachers of the characteristics of intercultural bilingual education, saying that it is not a rigid and homogeneous recipe that others offer to teachers to develop their activities, but an opportunity to build an education together that is pertinent to indigenous children’s characteristics and needs. Also, intercultural bilingual education aims to respond to the educational needs derived from the current diversity that exists in

classrooms and schools. This diversity is the product of ethnic, sociocultural and economic factors and others (SEP, 2003). The issue is that teachers are not trained to deal with such a diversity therefore they do not know how to challenge the historical assimilationist approach (Rippberger, 1993) used in bilingual schools in Mexico. An example of this is my research school where teachers do not receive enough training in order to implement quality bilingual education.

According to SEP (2003), intercultural bilingual education privileges the use and teaching of indigenous languages as well as Spanish in all the activities that are part of the educational process considering both languages as objects of study as well as ways of communication (SEP, 2003), which is not necessarily what happens in the bilingual school where this research was conducted, as most of the time Spanish is the language of instruction and used for academic tasks. SEP (2003) also says that intercultural bilingual education promotes the modification of ways of rapport established in the community, in the school and in the classroom and the inclusion of pedagogic and didactic resources in order to guarantee that students achieve the goals of the national elementary education and achieve an effective oral and written bilingualism.

Intercultural bilingual education also aims in theory to have students know and value their own culture (SEP, 2003). The three teachers in my research, especially the two native teachers who participated in the study, do value their own language and culture and consider that both Spanish and Tsotsil are important. However, Spanish is prioritized, particularly for written purposes. Hamel (2001) points out that the “high valuation of Spanish as a written and

codified language helps explain why teachers emphasize the acquisition of literacy from grade one even when students do not manage oral Spanish, yet. In fact, teachers attempt to teach Spanish through writing (Hamel, 1988b0)" (Hamel, 2001, p. 22). Students are not necessarily encouraged to know and value their own culture especially in higher grades of elementary schooling, for example, in grade six. Also, students are supposed to be taught their native language in the indigenous language class as stated by SEP; however, such a class is not offered in the school in my study, so students do not actually learn how to read and write in their mother tongue. Also, students are not taught about the importance of their own culture. Teacher Vicente from grade one did consider that it was important to pass and preserve the native culture to new generations and this was reflected in his selection for a traditional Tsotsil dance from Chenalhó when students needed to participate in one of the festivals of the school. In contrast, the other teachers chose national dances for their students to perform. Therefore, it would seem that the purpose of intercultural bilingual education to have students to know and value their own culture (SEP, 2003) is not totally achieved in all grades of elementary schooling. The different reasons for implementing quality bilingual education will be analyzed in the following sections.

### **Instructors' Teaching Style and Language Use at the Bilingual School**

From the three teachers who participated in this study, two (Rosario and Vicente) are indigenous speakers of the Tsotsil language and work with first graders. The other teacher (Federico) is mestizo, has Spanish as his mother tongue and works with sixth graders. As stated in Chapter Four, teacher Rosario showed motivation to continue being more prepared and educated so that she can become

a better teacher. Rosario cares about her students and makes sure her students learn. She puts her heart into teaching and always tries to ensure that her students have fun while learning. Rosario is creative and uses different materials such as clay, cardboards, colors, sheets, soda cans and caps, fruits and many other objects. Her classroom is lively and colorful, which helps create a nice atmosphere, which is important in students' learning process (Classroom Management, 2011).

Rosario's students are asked to perform a variety of activities and games when practicing the topics they are taught. Rosario tries to provide students with a context when teaching, which according to Freire (1986) is important. Rosario uses both languages when teaching; for example, students learn the alphabet in Spanish and are provided with examples of words that start with each letter in both Spanish and Tsotsil. Also, Rosario speaks both languages when giving instructions about the activities students need to perform. However, Spanish is used both orally and written while Tsotsil is mostly used only orally, which has been a common tradition in bilingual schools. For example, in northern Mexico, in the Sierra Madre Occidental of Chihuahua, the Tarahumara language, the indigenous language spoken in that area, is still "strong and the primary language of many communities, at the same time, it appears to be undergoing a fast shift in areas of intense and increasing contact with the Spanish-speaking populations" (Paciotto, 2000, p. 6). She interviewed elementary school teachers who were "mostly mestizos and Tarahumara assimilated to the mestizo culture" (Paciotto, 2004, p. 537) who were working in the uplands of the Sierra. Results of her study show that "bridging home and school environment and maintenance of the

native language are not strong enough motives to introduce Tarahumara literacy in the classroom” (Paciotto, 2004, p. 6). Since the focus school in Paciotto’s research is supposed to be a bilingual school where both the indigenous and the Spanish languages are spoken, the use of mostly Spanish is not seen as the best medium of communication. Tarahumara is considered to be a low-prestige language and is confined to the community and family oral communicative space. In contrast, the written and larger social domains are occupied by Spanish (Paciotto, 2004). This is also the situation in the bilingual school in my study, that is, Tsotsil is mostly used orally while Spanish is used for written purposes and it is mostly the language of instruction.

### **The Use of Two Languages in Bilingual Education**

García (1996) states that “bilingual education encompasses both the use of two languages in instruction, as well as the teaching of a second language to speakers of another language, even when the instruction takes place in the second language” (p. 409). Cummins and Corson (1997) agree with García (1996) saying that “the term bilingual education usually refers to the use of two or (more) languages of instruction at some point in the student’s school career. The languages are used to teach subject matter content rather than just the language itself” (p. 11). Unfortunately, this is not the case in my research school. As stated earlier, Spanish is the language used most often to teach subject matter content other than its own teaching. In contrast, Tsotsil is used as a point of reference, for clarification and for giving instructions after these have been given in Spanish. In the first grades of elementary schooling, both Spanish and Tsotsil are used; however, the language most commonly used when writing is Spanish despite the

fact that Tsotsil is also a written language. In higher grades of schooling, in grade six, for example, Spanish is definitely the most used language by the teacher for both written and oral purposes.

Ethnographic research has found that indigenous languages are usually considered as low-prestige languages and are “confined to the community and family oral communicative space, while larger social domains are ‘occupied’” (Paciotto, 2000, p. 50) by the national language. My study showed similar findings.

Native languages in Mexico are associated with low-prestige people and with socially disfavoured identities so that its own potential speakers prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt some other languages (Dorian, 1998). This was also found in some of the participants in the study, among in the sixth graders in particular.

### **The Tsotsil Language and Its Use**

The Tsotsil language is both an oral and written language. Tsotsil speakers recognize five different variants within their languages. These variants depend on the places where these are spoken, for example, in San Miguel Huixtán, San Pedro Chenalhó, San Juan Chamula, San Andrés Larráinzar and Zinacantán (Summer Linguistics Institute, 2010). When Tsotsil speakers communicate with those who speak their variant they call them “jchi’iltic” (our fellows). Tsotsil speakers call their language Bats’i k’op, which in Spanish means “verdadera lengua” (Summer Linguistics Institute, 2010), which is translated in English as “true or real language.” The indigenous students; especially first graders who

participated in this research used the term Bats'i k'op when they were asked about their native language and the language they speak at home.

Despite the fact that Tsotsil is also a written language as Spanish, in the bilingual school where this research was conducted, Tsotsil is mostly used orally by both teachers and students. The language of instruction and for written activities is mostly Spanish, which is similar to what Paciutto found when investigating the Tarahumara language (Paciutto, 2004). Although both teachers of grade one are indigenous and tend to use both languages in the classroom, Vicente uses more Tsotsil than Rosario. Vicente declared that:

In the first years, around 20% is spoken in Spanish, but I speak more and more...I speak around 60% or 70% to my students in Tsotsil and around 30% or 40% in Spanish because my students are little. In higher grades, more or less...but as I said here we speak both languages...that is the purpose.

Rosario uses both Spanish and Tsotsil when speaking, but mostly Spanish when writing. In contrast, Vicente uses both languages and mostly Tsotsil when speaking and sometimes he also uses Tsotsil when writing. For instance, when he taught the numbers, he wrote them in words in Tsotsil on the board so that students copied them. In contrast, the teacher in grade six only uses Spanish when writing and sometimes he uses Tsotsil when speaking in class.

### **Writing System**

If Tsotsil were also used for writing purposes in bilingual schools, I believe its status could be improved and this could have a positive impact on how students perceive the indigenous language as well.

According to Flores (2006), language extinction can be challenged if there is a consensual writing system that promotes a process of standardization of indigenous languages. “The dialectal variants of each language and the different writing proposals that have been made up to now have emphasized their fragmentation” (Flores, 2006, p. 54). Consequently, their risk of extinction has increased. There has been a debate with regard to such standardization, for example, some linguists believe it is not possible to standardize indigenous languages spoken in Chiapas before a dialectological study is conducted (Flores, 2006). Others think that “the writing of the indigenous languages is not priority as their orality is consubstantial” (Flores, 2006, p. 55). However, Enrique Pérez, who is a Tsotsil speaker and principal of a Centre of Languages acknowledges writing to be a unifying agent (Flores, 2006). He proposes that “a dialectal variant or a mix of them is imposed in order to preserve indigenous languages” (Flores, 2006, p. 55). However, he is aware that this would also imply a process of exclusion in which the variant to be extensively written would be imposed (Flores, 2006).

The fact that Tsotsil has a consensual writing system, which can be seen in the textbooks that students who want to learn Tsotsil as a second language are requested to buy, for example, is an asset for the Tsotsil language. However, the fact that Tsotsil is a written language does not necessarily mean that it will be used or taught, which is what happens in the bilingual school where this study was conducted, that is, it is not taught in reality.

### **Contents to be Taught are not Always Contextualized**

A barrier for education in general can be the fact that students are not always provided with contexts when they are taught. For example, Vicente

provided his students with examples in isolation. He taught vocabulary and the words were not contextualized, which can be seen in one of my fieldnotes when observing one of his lessons:

*Note: Ss are not given a context where the new words are used. These are taught in isolation, for example, words such as “estrella” (star), and “enequen” (agave plant) are not contextualized.*

On the contrary, the mestizo teacher of grade six provides students with many examples that consider the students’ realities. For example, when teaching, Federico adapts the contents of the textbooks to students’ contexts so that they can relate what they are learning to their own environment. However, Federico mostly speaks Spanish in the classroom and only writes in this language as well. Tsotsil is used only to clarify instructions or as a point of reference to make sure students understand what they need to do.

### **Viewpoint of Bilingual Education has been and still is that of Assimilation**

The existence of a set of indigenous cultures with different languages, which were unknown by conquistadors, was perceived as a problem (Flores, 2006). It was aimed to have one language and culture in order to have a unified nation, which was viewed as a symbol of progress (Flores, 2006). Liberal intellectuals and conservatives declared their faith in the indigenous peoples’ progress through education. However, they (the liberal intellectuals and conservatives) did not pay any attention to the existence of indigenous cultures. Their premise was that “the teaching of Spanish was necessary in order to unify Mexico” (Flores, 2006, p.45). Unfortunately, the viewpoint of bilingual education

in Mexico has been, historically, and continues to be that of assimilation of the indigenous groups (Rippberger, 1993). Rippberger (1993) suggests that:

When bilingual education was introduced by the federal government in the 1930s, its purpose was to help Indians improve their lives through education. Specifically, bilingual education helped to “Mexicanize” the Indian, not to preserve Indian culture. In essence, the program was to help Indians ‘improve’ themselves by becoming non-Indian. (p. 56)

Thus, the classroom is seen as the place of change in indigenous cultural identity. In the past, for the Mexican government, “the process of becoming educated is a means of assimilating the diverse Indian groups into the national” (Rippberger, 1992, p. 63) non-indigenous culture. For example, the Mexican Rural School in the 30’s aimed for national unification and had three purposes: “linking the school with the community life, multiplicity of activities in the school process and the national spirit achieved through a common language” (Flores, 2006, p. 47). The House of the Indigenous Student was the first institution to exemplify the “Mexicanized Indian” (Flores, 2006, p. 47). This institution aimed to prepare indigenous people so that they served as intermediaries between the national and indigenous societies (Flores, 2006).

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico is an institution that has created and promoted bilingual education as a means to national cultural unity. SEP’s purpose is “to help Indian children assimilate, learn to speak Spanish, and learn to read and write in Spanish. Without these skills, Indian

children are unable to function in settings other than their Indian community” (Rippberger, 1992, p. 65). A bilingual administrator who took part in Rippberger’s research (1992) stated that bilingual education is a process of *Spanish-ization* (assimilation to the Spanish language and culture) rather than integration of both the indigenous and national languages and cultures.

This process of *Spanish-ization* also takes place in the school where this study was conducted. This can be seen in what the school principal declared with regard to the percentage that should be dedicated to each language according to the plan and program of studies:

Principal: That’s how it should be, but as nobody comes to visit us and all that. But, yeah, the indigenous language should be rescued. Supposedly, we’re bilinguals to speak both languages. In fact, we have percentages. According to the plan and program for grade one and two, teachers should be speakers of the indigenous language because the entire class should be taught in the indigenous language. In grade three and four, they should speak 60% in the indigenous language. Finally, in grade five and six, they should speak 100% in Spanish.

Karla: So the emphasis is on Spanish and Math?

Principal: Yes, that’s right!

What the school principal mentioned was also reinforced by teacher

Rosario:

Rosario: Yes, we’re supposed to move the indigenous class forward according to our schedule. I usually speak more Tsotsil...in grade

one...you speak 100% Tsotsil regardless. I have some kids who speak Spanish, but they understand it (Tsotsil). In grade two, I diminish the use of Tsotsil like 20%.

Karla: So little by little you diminish the use of Tsotsil?

Rosario: That's right! In grades two and four, the use of Tsotsil is reduced like 50%. In grade six, only Spanish is spoken.

Karla: Oh, okay, so the bilingual school is bilingual mainly in grade one because the kids don't speak much Spanish, so they speak more Tsotsil. The more they advance, they speak more Spanish and the use of Tsotsil is decreased.

Rosario: Exactly!

The previous quotes show that the more students advance the more Spanish they are exposed to and expected to use, which also means that the more they advance the less they are exposed to and expected to use the native language.

### **Lack of Teachers' Training and Need to Understand the Benefits of Bilingualism**

In my study, I noticed that teachers had not been made aware of the advantages or benefits of bilingualism. Nonetheless, they did not portray the idea that "the first language should be ignored or pushed aside so that the second language can be learned" (Benson, 2005, p. 253) either, a concept which has been disproved (Benson, 2005). Teachers have not been made aware that bilingualism has positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development because "when children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of

language and how to use it effectively” (Cummins, 2003, para. 11). Also, “they have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality” (para. 11).

Most students who participated in this research argued that “Bats’i k’op” (*Tsotsil* in the Tsotsil language) is their mother tongue and that they learned it through their family; especially through their mother at home which is the place where they learned and use the native language. Therefore, for some students the school is the first formal encounter with the Spanish language. There are some first graders who have a very basic command of Spanish, which shows the need for the use of the native language, which happens only in the first grades of schooling while the students get familiar and learn Spanish. Cummins (2003) shows that “children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language” (para. 12). The promotion of the children’s mother tongue in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue, but also children’s skills in the majority school language, and as Cummins (2003) points out “spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children's academic development in the majority school language” (para. 14). He suggests that “well-implemented bilingual programs can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge in a minority language without any negative effects on children's development in the majority language” (para. 14). This is not necessarily what happens in the bilingual school where this study was carried out, that is, literacy and subject

matter knowledge does not take place in the Tsotsil language or in a balanced use of both Spanish and Tsotsil, but mostly in Spanish.

According to Cummins (2003):

Bilingual children seem to ‘pick up’ conversational skills in the majority language in the early years of school...However, educators are often much less aware about how quickly children can lose their ability to use their mother tongues, even in the home context. The extent and rapidity of language loss will vary according to the concentration of families from a particular linguistic group in the school and neighbourhood. Where the mother tongue is used extensively in the community outside the school, then language loss among young children will be less. (para. 15)

When children are implicitly or explicitly told “‘leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door’, children also leave a central part of who they are – their identities – at the schoolhouse door. As a result, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction” (Cummins, 2003, para. 16). Thus, it is not enough for instructors “to passively accept children’s linguistic and cultural diversity in the school” (para. 16). Cummins (2003) emphasizes that:

Teachers must be proactive and take the initiative to affirm children's linguistic identity by having posters in the various languages of the community around the school, encouraging children to write in their mother tongues in addition to the majority school language (e.g. write and publish pupil-authored bilingual books), and generally create an instructional climate where the linguistic and cultural experience of the whole child is actively accepted and validated. (para. 16)

Rosario, one of the teachers in grade one, does have posters and materials, which are created by both herself and her students; however, these are written in Spanish, not in both languages. In general, students are encouraged to write in Spanish. Again, Vicente, the other teacher in grade one, does ask his learners to write in both languages, but not very often although he definitely portrays positive attitudes towards his native language, Tsotsil. The fact that teachers promote literacy in mostly Spanish and not in both languages can be due to the lack of training that prepares them to do so. Vicente suggested that the approach in which instructors are trained to become teachers at bilingual schools is basically monolingual. Therefore, they do not know how to teach using a bilingual approach. This was also mentioned by Federico, the teacher in grade six, who said he does not know how to teach using both languages as they are not trained to do so (Williams, 2007). However, Federico contradicted himself, as later in the interview he stated that they do “receive some training on how to interact with the children in the indigenous language, considering the indigenous language as one of the subjects.” Vicente argued that the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico does provide instructors with training, but they have not been asked to attend any of the courses that were offered recently. On the other hand, Rosario declared that they do have workshops or sessions, but they are not necessarily for bilingual teachers. For example, they took an introductory course which aimed to familiarize teachers with the new program of studies implemented in 2009. Teachers were advised about the content of such a program and how to teach with it. Rosario said that the program they are currently using is different

from the one they had used for years therefore teachers attended a one-week-workshop in which they analyzed the new curriculum. The workshop was for both monolingual and bilingual teachers. Rosario argued that bilingual teachers were not advised on how to teach with a bilingual approach. She said they were only given some ideas for activities to teach in general and it is up to them to do the rest.

The workshops bilingual teachers receive are not necessarily aimed at teaching indigenous students whose mother tongue is not Spanish. Also, the fact that teachers are not made aware of the advantages of bilingualism, shows one of the common problems in bilingual schools, that is, the lack of information for bilingual teachers in indigenous areas. Instructors such as Vicente would like to be offered more ideas about the different activities he could conduct in class with his first graders. By having such training, there would be more variety in his classes and students might be more motivated to learn. Again, this shows the need for training so that teachers can implement a more efficient bilingual education that considers students' language and culture. Cummins (2003) suggests that:

The cultural, linguistic and intellectual capital of our societies will increase dramatically when we stop seeing culturally and linguistically diverse children as 'a problem to be solved' and instead open our eyes to the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources they bring from their homes to our schools and societies (para. 22).

This can be done through quality bilingual education that supports the preservation and promotion of the indigenous language. Research has been shown that this is possible. For instance, examples of biliterate educational practices in contexts of indigenous language revitalization are Quechua in the South American Andes, Guarani in Paraguay, and Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Hornberger, 2006). Hornberger (2006) states that the “biliterate use of indigenous children’s own or heritage language as medium of instruction alongside the dominant language mediates the dialogism, meaning-making, access to wider discourses, and taking of an active stance that are dimensions of voice” (p. 277). If indigenous voices are activated they can be a powerful force for both enhancing the children’s own learning and promoting the maintenance and revitalization of their languages (Hornberger, 2006). Unfortunately, the teachers who participated in the study seemed to be unaware of this.

### **Not all Teachers Receive Appropriate Materials**

It is true that the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico creates some materials (although they are not many) such as texts for teachers working in Spanish-indigenous bilingual schools. These materials aim to provide instructors with ideas and activities that can help them in their daily practice to conduct an Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) (SEP, 2003). However, the problem is that not all teachers are provided with such materials. For instance, when I was collecting data in the bilingual school, I witnessed that there were teachers who did not even know about the existence of certain texts. For example, one time I was in the teachers’ room, I found a workbook called *Organisation of the*

*Academic Work: Workbook for Indigenous Elementary Education* (SEP, 2003) in the principal's desk. I went through it and I found it helpful and interesting. I left the office and did not take the workbook as the principal was not there to ask if I could borrow it. I went to teacher Rosa's class and asked her if she had the workbook I earlier described and she said she was not even aware of its existence as she was never provided with one. Sadly, that was not the first time I heard that response. I asked the principal about such a workbook and if all teachers had it and he said there were not enough. However, I had the impression it was not a priority for him to make sure all teachers receive such materials.

I believe that providing all teachers with the few materials created by SEP, which are focused on bilingual education such as this particular workbook and also sharing its content through workshops would help teachers better understand the purpose of bilingual schooling. Also, they would have more ideas about what to do in the classroom. According to this workbook, the purpose of education is "Enseñar a vivir: (Teaching to live).

SEP (2003) argues that:

The task of bilingual educators is not the achievement of a work's day or the achievement of a program of studies, but the willingness to conduct an education that guarantees that indigenous children and youth take ownership of the fundamental knowledge and skills, habits, attitudes and values that shape them as good, intelligent, honest, clean, hardworking women and men, but especially as

women and men committed to the development of their own culture and country (p. 5).

The latter are the tasks and purposes that bilingual educators have according to SEP; however, the educational system is still far from encouraging children to feel committed to the development of their own culture.

### **Being Different is not a Defect**

Education is a process that involves relations and interactions among people (SEP, 2003). It is a complex process where people departing from their gender, social status, personal history, language, motivations, desires and their different roles of power or oppression among other factors establish a system of relations that impact, either positively or negatively the achievement of the educational goals (SEP, 2003). The intercultural approach should lead to the adoption of attitudes and practices that recognize that being different is not a defect, but something valuable where communication is based on respect and tolerance and where harmonious coexistence among people and the natural world is promoted (SEP, 2003). These attitudes and practices should guarantee the legality, equality and democracy for everyone.

The intercultural approach is more than a pedagogic or didactic proposal or a proposal for only linguistic development; that is, it is a way to perceive that the educational process involves people with their own characteristics, needs and interests (SEP, 2003). “The educational intervention is not restricted to the irrational completion of a plan or program of studies, that is, the aim is to go beyond the institutional goals to achieve a better quality of life” (SEP, 2003, p.

15). The teachers who participated in this research mentioned that one of the purposes of the school is to teach students what is indicated on the plan and program of studies, namely to teach students how to read and write in the case of first graders. The completion of such a plan and program is important to teachers, which shows the relevance of having a curriculum that considers students' realities as well as the preparation of teachers to be familiar with it and know how to implement it.

### **Plan and Program of Studies**

Unfortunately, the plan and program used in the bilingual school does not necessarily consider students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and needs. This new plan and program, which started to be implemented in 2009 is the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools. Students learn how to read and write mostly in Spanish rather than in both languages. The teacher in grade six emphasized literacy in Spanish as one of the main purposes of the school. Both her and teacher Vicente emphasized that the plan and program state that students should learn how to read and write in Spanish. In addition, the subjects that are mainly prioritized are Spanish and Mathematics as they are considered to be the most helpful and fundamental subjects.

The current curriculum indicates the subjects and the number of hours that should be dedicated to each of them. For example, the teacher in grade six declared that there are nine subjects that should be taught during the term. The plan and program also states the number of hours that should be spent on the indigenous language class. However, by observing different classes and asking

instructors and students, I found that the indigenous language class is not taught in reality. Here is what Federico argued:

Federico: Well...in grade six we have Spanish, Math, Geography, History, Civics, Artistic Education, Sports...I think there are like 9...9 subjects, oh and the indigenous language as well.

Karla: And do you teach it as well?

Federico: Mmm...I teach it as a point of reference when students have questions...Mmm (*tone of uncertainty*) as a complement. The mother tongue also has its grammar; its adjectives, its articles, its past, present and future tenses, so it's useful.

#### Subjects such as Mathematics and Spanish are Higher Priority than Tsotsil

When Federico was asked whether or not teachers receive training to teach in the indigenous language, he mentioned that Tsotsil is considered to be one of the subjects as well. However, in reality he mentioned that it is difficult to teach it because parents are more interested in other subjects such as Math, Spanish, Natural Sciences, Civics or History than the teaching of the indigenous language. He also argued that it is not only parents who find other subjects more important than Tsotsil, that is, teachers agree with that as well and play an important role in such a situation. Federico mentioned that:

It's also on us that we don't teach the indigenous language as such although it's necessary. We as teachers have had courses that say that we should teach the indigenous language as such. We don't have a plan and program for the indigenous language that indicates the contents and when to teach what. We're supposed to do that; to work on it.

This is one of the main barriers for quality bilingual education to take place, that is, the lack of a curriculum for the teaching of the indigenous language makes teachers' task difficult as they are not guided as to how and what to teach in the Tsotsil language class. Federico argued that teachers do not have guidance and they need it. They need a curriculum that states, for example, the topics that should be covered in the indigenous language class similar to the plans and programs that contain the topics for the rest of the subjects.

The current curriculum only states the number of hours that should be spent on each subject. The plan and program does not declare the same number of hours for all subjects. The two subjects that are prioritized are Spanish (6 hours per week/240 hours per year) and Math (5 hours per week, 200 hours per year). In contrast, fewer hours are assigned for the indigenous language (Tsotsil) class, that is, 2.5 hours per week, 100 hours per year. According to the instructor in grade six, he teaches the indigenous language on Friday from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. However, during that time, he reinforces some of the topics seen in the Spanish class. By observing Federico's classes and interviewing him and his students, I found that the number of hours that are supposed to be used for the indigenous language class are used for other subjects, that is, the Tsotsil class does not actually take place. For example, Karlita, a sixth grader pointed out:

The time and day for the indigenous language class is stated on our schedule, but there's no time to learn it, we learn more about other subjects. We're supposed to have the class for the indigenous language, but we don't learn the indigenous language that much.

Teachers in the study, Federico, for example, feels he needs guidance about the contents to be taught in the indigenous language class as the plan and program does not indicate them. This is what Federico pointed out that:

Federico: For the indigenous language, I'd like to have a list of contents and to be specified of when to teach Tsotsil. For example, today we're going to work on the development and fluidity of the mother tongue. A different topic could be grammar structure, so that the indigenous language had a sequence as the Spanish language in the Spanish class.

Later in the interview, Federico said:

Federico: The plan should specify the contents for the Tsotsil class. We need guidance. Also, among the changes I'd like are that the textbooks focus more on the indigenous reality because they contain things that don't consider this environment, they are out of orbit, so I'd like that the textbooks were more realistic as these textbooks are for Mexico.

Karla: For the Mexican Republic in general?

Federico: Exactly! They are not focused on one place in specific, for example, Chiapas requires this... or Oaxaca needs this or Veracruz has these needs. We have to adapt the textbooks. This is what I'd like to have the textbooks changed.

Karla: To have the textbooks focused on the students' realities?

Federico: Exactly!

The fact that Federico prioritizes Spanish over the indigenous class when teaching could be due to the lack of a curriculum that guides him about what and

when to teach Tsotsil. In addition, the textbooks, which are only written in Spanish and do not consider indigenous students' contexts are a limitation for quality bilingual education.

Federico provided an example of one of the topics included in the previous plan and program teachers were given: stop lights. The following example shows the disconnection between students' realities and the contents of the Plan and Program. Federico mentioned:

Exactly! The plan and program 1993, the one we used before, had the topic about 'stop lights' and they (students) don't have them here, there are no stop lights here, kids don't know them...maybe those who have travelled to San Cristóbal know them...they know that red means 'stop', yellow means 'prevention' and green means 'continue,' but there are no stop lights here and there are kids who have never even travelled to San Cristóbal.

I observed that Federico always attempts to adapt the contents of the textbooks to his students' contexts so that they can identify with the topic and better understand it.

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) is aware that the recognition of adopting an intercultural approach is only the start to transform and improve the school and society (SEP, 2003). This implies commitment to change, improvement of the ways of interaction, incorporation of new ways of teaching and scholarly organization in the educational practice that guarantee the

achievement of educational purposes and individuals' and society's full development (SEP, 2003).

SEP (2003) states that to respond to the conditions of indigenous people's language and culture, education should have bilingualism as a basic characteristic considering that each language as a product of a culture is a carrier of symbols of such a culture. "This represents a pedagogic and didactic potential for the teacher as well as a basic need for students' identity formation" (SEP, 2003. P. 16). The intercultural approach aims for the full development of students' bilingualism and the commitment to guarantee improvement in the intervention and results of the educational process as a whole. This new type of education for indigenous children and the youth is called intercultural bilingual education (SEP, 2003). Nonetheless, bilingualism only takes place verbally as a means to communication, not for literacy or as a medium of instruction.

SEP (2003) emphasizes that "intercultural bilingual education is not an alternative and different educational model from the national educational proposal. In contrast, it derives from it and promotes its theoretical and methodological approaches". This approach has mainly aimed at assimilation of the native groups. According to Hamel (n.d.), "from the 70's the integrationist policies have not been explicitly expressed in Mexico as the Law of Education in 1973 stated respect for indigenous cultures" (p. 5). However, assimilationist policies continued and were encouraged by "an education of Spanishization and other indigenist programs" (Hamel, 2001, p. 5).

It is true that multiculturalism has been recognized in Mexico (Hamel, 2001), which can be seen in the plan and program designed by SEP. Nonetheless, such multiculturalism has been considered “the indigenous problem that should be overcome through integration” (p. 5). This idea still predominates in Mexico and in most Latin American countries (Hamel, 2001).

### **Difficulties for Teachers to Work with the New Program of Studies**

According to Hamel (2001), teachers’ training should consider their socioeconomic and political insertion as well as their “set of beliefs, practices and skills” (p. 21) as points of departure. It is fundamental that teachers receive training as they are the most difficult piece to change in an educational system (Hamel, 2001). “In repetitive occasions, we have observed that experienced teachers rapidly assimilate any new method or textbook into their old rooted practices” (Hamel, n.d., p. 21).

Although the three teachers who participated in the study have been teaching for several years (Federico has been teaching for 9 years, Vicente for 11 years and Rosario for 13 years), it has been difficult for them to assimilate the new plan and program they are currently using and that was provided to them in 2009. They face difficulties because in reality they are not trained to know how to implement it. SEP recognizes that the achievement of the purposes stated on the new plan and program requires them to face old and new challenges in the educational system (Plan of Studies, 2009). An example of an old challenge is the improvement of “academic management” (Plan of Studies, 2009). The Plan of Studies also states that:

Examples of new challenges are those rooted in national and international transformations experienced in Mexico in the last 15 years such as modifications in the national demographic profile, requirement for better capacity of competitiveness, solid social claims for efficient and transparent public services such as technology and communication in different productive and cultural activities among others. In this context, in order to favour the achievement of the purposes stated, diverse strategies and actions will be designed: teachers' implementation; the improvement of academic management and technological equipment as well as the strengthening and diversification of supportive materials: bibliographical, audiovisual and interactive resources (Plan of Studies, 2009, p. 1).

The plan and program also declares that the design and implementation of a new curriculum is fundamental in the transformation of the school; however, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) recognizes that this is only one step towards service quality. For this reason, "SEP along with the educational authorities of the state will provide the required support so that the school principals and teachers have the necessary resources and conditions in order to conduct the given task" (Plan of Studies, 2009, p. 11), which constitutes the *raison d'être* of elementary education, that is, to provide those in school age in all Mexico with "formal opportunities to acquire, to develop and to implement the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, not only to continue learning throughout their lives,

but also to face the challenges that are imposed by society, which is in permanent change” (Plan of Studies, 2009, p. 11). Another *raison d’être* of education is that students actively and responsibly evolve; “function with themselves and with nature; that they are worthy members of their community, of Mexico and of the world so that they actively participate in the construction of a more free and democratic society, but mainly, of a more just society” (Plan of Studies, 2009, p. 11).

### **Textbooks do not Consider Students’ Realities**

The teachers who participated in the study argued that the textbooks provided to the bilingual school do not consider indigenous students’ realities as they are the same as those designed for monolingual schools. Both textbooks and materials are not adapted for bilingual schools. Rosario, one of the teachers of grade one, argued that she dislikes the textbooks as they do not entice students’ attention and they are not relevant for them. Also, Rosario and Vicente (the other teacher of grade one) stated that the textbooks are written in Spanish instead of both Spanish and Tsotsil. This represents a challenge for teachers in the first grades of schooling as they need to figure out how to explain the contents in the native language, which is the language children are more familiar with at the beginning of their elementary studies. Students, Franklyn from grade six stated that all textbooks “are written in Spanish and there is nothing in Tsotsil.”

In addition, Rosario argued that it is hard for teachers to translate the contents from the textbooks and that “kids don’t understand.” This makes Rosario use more Tsotsil in the first half of grade one. Also, she mentioned that in the second half of the term, she would start using more Spanish.

Another difficulty that teachers currently face other than having the textbooks written only in Spanish, which does not necessarily reflect the promotion of the indigenous language, is that textbooks have been changed, that is, they are new textbooks and teachers are still starting to familiarize themselves with them. The fact that the textbooks are written only in Spanish makes Rosario feel she needs to speak more Spanish to her first graders so that they become more familiar with such a language, which can facilitate them the understanding of the textbooks.

When teacher Vicente mentioned that the textbooks were the same for both monolingual and bilingual schools, he also stated that the only difference that exists between both types of schooling is the languages that are used. Here is what Vicente pointed out:

Yes, the textbooks are the same. The only difference in schools is that we use two languages here. In contrast, in monolingual schools they don't. They only use the national language and textbooks. In contrast, us, we look for ways to adapt the textbooks.

Vicente as well as Rosario argued that they need to adapt the textbooks to students' realities as they are written in Spanish and they are for all schools in Mexico, that is, they are not created considering indigenous children's needs, which has been one of the barriers for quality bilingual education to take place.

With regards to the textbooks, Hamel (2001) says that "schools basically follow the curriculum of monolingual Hispanic elementary schools and use the official textbook as the main pedagogical source in the four fundamental subjects

(Spanish, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences)”(Hamel, 2001, p. 12). In addition, there is a lack of pedagogical resources/materials in Spanish-indigenous bilingual schools (Williams, 2007), which is the case of the school where this research was conducted.

### **Lack of Materials for Students and Teachers**

Teacher Vicente said that there is a lack of materials in the school (Williams, 2007), that is, not all students receive textbooks. In addition, students had not received the package of materials they were supposed to be provided with by the government or other institutions at the beginning of the term. The materials that teachers are provided with are not many therefore they need to get more materials by their own. In this respect, Rosario argued that “a lot is still missing in the school!” In contrast, SEP states on the plan and program of studies that they would provide support to both school principals and teachers so that they have the necessary resources and conditions to achieve the goal of education, which partly contradicts the reality experienced in the bilingual school. According to Williams (2007), indigenous children have a lower quality of education than non-native people, which can be seen in the lack of supplies they and their teachers are provided with. This unfortunately is not only a barrier for quality bilingual education, but also for education in general.

Also, as earlier mentioned, the plan and program of studies 2009 states that one of the *raisons d'être* of education is to prepare students to actively participate in the construction of a more free and democratic society, but mainly, of a more just society (Plan of Studies, 2009). My questions are, “How can the current plan and program that is currently being implemented in the bilingual

school where this research was conducted prepare students to construct a society with those characteristics when students do not necessarily experience them within that school? How can a more just society be constructed when students are not treated fairly, that is, they are taught with an assimilatory approach that favours the national language and culture? Some teachers want to preserve the native language and culture, but they do not know how to implement a quality bilingual education that considers both the national and indigenous languages and cultures as they are not trained to do so, despite the fact that the Secretariat of Public Education is aware of the importance of training them.

### **Diversity in Classrooms and Students' Native Language**

As I expected, there was diversity in the classrooms where this research was conducted; for example, there were first graders who were energetic and mischievous as can be expected from young children. Also, there were both first and sixth graders who were shy and introverted and did not participate much. It was observed that some of these shy children had a very basic command of the Spanish language, which could be the reason for them not to talk in class. Hornberger (2006) maintains that the children's shyness and reticence are because the language used in school is foreign to the children. This has been the case of Quechua children in Peru (Hornberger, 2006). There are other reasons that contribute to such a situation such as participation structures, the teacher's personality and the environment in the classroom. However, language is crucial for communication. Hornberger (2006) points out: "Who after all, can speak out in a language which they do not know?" (p. 278). A good example is a young girl who was observed in both classroom and home settings. She almost never spoke

in class, but at home “she was something of a livewire” (Hornberger, 2006, p. 278). She lost her voice at school where Spanish was used, but she found it at home where the use of her own language in familiar surrounding was key. Thus, it is necessary to create “real bilingual – bicultural schools inspired both by the interest and the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor needs of the children as well as the needs of their social groups” (CET, 1992, as cited in Paciotto, 2004, p. 536). Also, it is important to recognize that “children of visible minority backgrounds are ‘not blank slates’ (August & Shanahan, 2006); and that they bring a variety of proficiencies into the classroom setting” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 45). For this reason, educators in the bilingual school where this study was conducted and educators in general “need to be made aware of the potential impact different languages and cultures bring to the classroom, and how they can be integrated positively into the learning experience of all their pupils” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 45).

Educators also need to be made aware that “language can be an instrument of cultural and linguistic oppression, (it) can also be a vehicle for advancing human rights and minority community empowerment” (McCarty, 2003, p. 289). According to Naqvi (2009):

It is not simply enough to acknowledge the cultural and familial frames of reference that students bring with them to school. Schools must attempt to infuse these perspectives into both the social and academic fabric, while remaining ever vigilant to protect against the ways that larger social discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ may serve to isolate and marginalize students (p. 44).

Thus, teachers working at the elementary bilingual school where this research was conducted should be encouraged to use both the students' indigenous language and Spanish, and not only Spanish. By doing so, the possibilities for elementary bilingual students to feel marginalized and isolated would be lessened while the possibilities for them to feel comfortable and safer would be higher, which are important elements that may positively impact students' learning processes.

### **Language Attitudes**

Attitudes of individuals are also an important factor in the creation and implementation of quality bilingual education. In addition, attitudes also play a fundamental role in the situation of a language, for example, in its maintenance, restoration, shift or death (Baker, 2008).

According to Schiffman (1997), before the 1960's language attitudes were not considered as important. "The behaviorist approach to language study saw language as behavior, not as *cognitive* or *mental activity* and anything psychological was denounced as mentalism" (Schiffman, 1997, para. 3).

Schiffman (1997) mentioned that "the study of attitude (esp. toward non-standard language) was seen as *dignifying stereotypes* and popularizing 'unscientific' ideas about language; best to leave this alone. Pseudo-egalitarianism: ignore it and it'll go away" (para. 4).

Also, Schiffman (1997) stated that:

In early 1960's in French Canada, beginning of a change. Study of bilingualism, immersion schooling (St. Lambert experiment), led to an interest in attitude change i.e., to see whether changing schooling patterns

(bilingual schooling etc.) led to a change in outlook among dominant sectors of society toward minority sector (i.e. French Canadians). The Lambert and Peal studies focussed strongly on attitude change.

Schiffman (1996) suggests that language attitudes are a part of *linguistic culture* (Schiffman 1996) and since language policy is often rooted in linguistic culture, attitudes cannot be ignored. Crystal (1992) defines language attitudes as “the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others” (para. 2). She provides an example of a language attitude saying that “mother tongue speakers may feel secure about their language and take pride in using it. If so, they may want their orthography to be very distinctive from other languages used in the country” (Crystal, 1992, para. 3). Baker (2008) argues that “attitudes of individuals towards a particular minority language may affect language maintenance, language restoration, language shift or language death in society” (p. 3). An individual’s own attitudes and preferences will influence their choice of language. “In a minority/majority language situation, older people may prefer to speak the minority language. Younger folk (e.g. second-generation immigrants) may reject the minority language in favor of the majority language because of its higher status and more fashionable image” (Baker, 2008, p. 6).

Chien-Huei (2005) points out that:

Other than social policy and language programs, attitude is another influence on individual’s language use or choice. An attitude can be viewed from various dimensions and its relation with language can also be measured in many ways. Ladegaard (2000)

points out three components of an attitude. They are knowledge, emotion, and behavior. Each component has different recognizable features and experiment to elicit language attitude results (p. 216) (p. 2388).

Since language attitudes play an important role in the preservation and promotion of languages, these were considered in the study. An aim was to discover the participants' attitudes towards both the Spanish and Tsotsil languages. Students' parents were asked about their opinions with regards to both languages in order to see if such attitudes influence their language choice when talking to their children. When parents were asked about their attitudes towards Spanish, they provided reasons for wanting their children to learn it.

Parents felt Spanish is important so that their children can understand and communicate with people who speak it. If you speak it, there are no limitations in terms of communication. For example, one parent, Doña Celia, argued that:

Spanish is good because you can communicate with anybody. If you don't speak Spanish, we can't understand each other even if we want to talk. For example, my mom, if you want to talk to her in Spanish, she doesn't understand. It's better to speak both languages.

Spanish is also perceived as necessary by another parent, Doña Rita, who explained "It's important that my kids learn Spanish to communicate. Spanish is more necessary, I like Spanish better, but I didn't learn it."

There are parents who prefer Spanish as they think it is important and it is useful when talking to teachers, lawyers and people in politics such as the

Governor. Pérez (2009) mentioned that Spanish is perceived as a language of prestige, a means for social mobility, and as a buffer against discrimination.

Penalosa (1986, as cited in Pérez, 2009) suggested that:

The designation of indigenous identity is not based on racial genetics, but instead based on speaking an indigenous language. For example, when a speaker of Maya acquires the Spanish language, he or she may then have the option of participating in the larger society (p. 22).

Spanish is considered the prestigious language, so parents want their children to learn it. For this reason, they want teachers to speak it in school every day. Also, parents such as Doña Rita prefer the elementary monolingual school because children learn more Spanish there. In contrast, in the bilingual school, she said “Teachers are indigenous, so [my] kids don’t learn more Spanish. Teachers speak both Spanish and Tsotsil, so kids don’t learn more Spanish.” There are also parents who mentioned that their children already know the native language, so what children need now is to learn Spanish because of their “economic situation and in order to defend themselves in the [mestizo] world” (Paciotto, 2004, p. 543). Teachers also mentioned that parents want their children to learn Spanish so that when they go to secondary school, they understand the language better.

Baker (2008) pointed out that “in language minority families, children sometimes act as interpreters or language brokers for their parents and others” (Valdés, 2003)” (p. 113). One of the parents (Doña Rita) who participated in the study argued that she wants her children to learn Spanish so that they help her communicate with Spanish speakers and when seeing the doctor as her command

of Spanish is very limited. She cannot easily communicate with the doctor because her Spanish is poor and the doctor does not speak Tsotsil, but only Spanish. This situation makes Doña Rita want her children to learn Spanish to help her communicate, but also to help them avoid facing the same situation in the future.

Baker (2008) suggests that:

In first and second generation immigrant families, parents may have little or no competency in the majority language. Therefore, their children act as interpreters in a variety of contexts... Rather than just transmit information, children act as information and communication brokers (Tse, 1995, 1996a, 1996b), often ensuring the messages are ‘culturally translated’ (p. 114).

During the interviews conducted with parents, I observed that some of them have difficulty speaking Spanish, which is when an interpreter was used. In situations like these where parents have a limited command of the majority language, children can be important language brokers. Children may be needed and taken as interpreters in different contexts such as “at stores, hospitals, the doctor’s, dentist’s, optician’s, school and many other places where parents visit” (Váldez, 2003, as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 114), which is one of the reasons for parents in Chenalhó to want their children to learn Spanish.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Children as Language Brokers**

Baker (2008) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of having children to act as language brokers. She argues that pressure is placed on children

in language brokering: linguistic, emotional, social and attitudinal pressure. Baker (2008) points out that:

First, children may find an exact translation difficult to achieve as their language is still developing. Second, children may be hearing information (e.g. medical troubles, financial problems, arguments and conflicts) that is preserve of adults rather than children. Third, children may be expected to be adult-like when interpreting and child-like at all other timers; to mix with adults when interpreting and ‘be seen and not heard’ with adults on other occasions, Fourth, seeing their parents in an inferior position may lead to children despising their minority language. Children may quickly realize when language brokering that the language of power, prestige and purse is the majority language. Negative attitudes to the minority language may result. Fifth, bilinguals are not necessarily good interpreters. Interpretation assumes an identical vocabulary in both languages. Since bilinguals tend to use their two languages in different places with different people, an identical lexicon may not be present. Also, proficiency in the two or more languages is not enough. Some reflection on language...such as an awareness of the linguistic nature of the message may also be required (p. 114).

However, Baker (2008) declares that language brokering has positive outcomes as well. For example, it can bring “parental praise, reward and status within the family for playing a valuable role” (P. 114). Children may gain esteem

from others and raise their self-esteem as well. In addition, children learn adult information quickly and learn to act with some authority and trust. “Early maturity has its own rewards in the teenage peer group” (Baker, 2008, p. 114). Children used to acting as interpreters learned to take the initiative, for instance, children “may give the answer to a question rather than relaying the question to the parent. This puts children in a position of some power, even of censorship” (Baker, 2008, p. 114).

Another advantage is that “when parents become dependent on their children for language brokering, it may make the family more close, trusting and integrated” (Bakers, 2008, p. 115). In addition, “the cognitive outcomes for child language brokers may be valuable...children may learn that it is hard to translate exactly the inner meaning of words and metaphors. This may lead such children to be more introspective about their languages” (Baker, 2008, p. 114). In addition, the character formation of children who act as language brokers is positively affected. Children negotiate between two different social and cultural worlds, try to understand both, and provide bridges between these two worlds. “Their understanding of different cultures may be deepened by the responsibility. This handling of dialogue may lead to increased maturity, astuteness, independence and higher self-esteem” (Baker, 2008, p. 115).

It is clear that parents’ desire to have their children learn Spanish in this particular school so that they can act as language brokers for their own needs has both positive and negative implications for these students.

### **Interpreters in Public Institutions**

These parents and indigenous people (in general) who have a limited command of the Spanish language have the right (in theory) to be helped in their native language in public institutions. According to Chapter Three: *Distribution, Concurrence and Coordination of Responsibilities* of the Law of Linguistics Rights for Indigenous People (Government of Mexico, 2003), native people should have an active participation in the government, academic spaces and research. In addition, it declares the relevance of having staff that are familiar with indigenous languages and cultures in public institutions. Unfortunately, there are regions such as the highlands of Chiapas where the public institutions are run by non-speakers of the native languages spoken there, which frequently impedes communication to take place. For instance, there are Tsotsil women such as Doña Rita who are ill and visit the doctor at the local public health clinic, but the doctor cannot help them as he/she does not know the native language spoken by the patients. Sadly, these women, Doña Rita, for example, return home without being helped and with a high degree of sadness and frustration. Thus, as the Law of Linguistics Rights states, it is important that public institutions have staff familiar with the local languages, not only in theory but also in reality.

**It is Important to Learn Spanish, but not at the Expense of Tsotsil**

There were students' parents in Chenalhó who argued that they wanted their children to learn Spanish, but not at the expense of their native language. As some parents say Tsotsil is a nice language as it is the language they speak and it is part of their culture. According to Hamers and Blanc (2000):

All definitions of culture agree that language is an important part of culture. There is a consensus that culture is a complex entity

which comprises a set of symbolic systems, including knowledge, norms, values, beliefs, language, art and customs, as well as habits and skills learned by individuals as members of a given society (p. 198 ).

Hamers and Blanc (2000) go on to say that culture is among other things:

A system of techniques for giving shape and power to human capacities; the values, tools and ways of knowing of a culture equip members of a society with amplification systems. A culture is seen as a deviser, a repository and a transmitter of these amplification systems; their significance for the individual's cognitive, affective and social development is that they provide devices for the internal organization and shaping of experience. These 'amplifiers' will be crucial elements in the building up of an individual's social representations, that is, representations of external reality shared with other members of the society (p.199).

### **Tsotsil Cosmovision**

There were also students' parents in Chenalhó who argued that they want their children to preserve Tsotsil as well as their indigenous cosmovision and values. They are aware of the importance of all these. Lomelí (2002) declares that “indigenous people in Mexico are entities with their own characteristics such as their own identity, history, language and especially with their own cosmovision” (p. 40), which he defines as “a complex relation between the indigenous thought and their circundant reality, the specific manner to understand and to conceive their surrounding” (Lomelí, 2002, p. 40).

Through cultures, we create a certain image of who we are. Also, we acquire the resources and instruments that are necessary to be competent in our society. In addition, we socialize by “interiorizing a set of behavioral patterns, norms, codes, registers, values and beliefs” (Guitart, 2006, p. 88). “Cultures are definitely more than outfits, songs, foods and dances. They are also certain implicit ways of shared life (modes of feeling, understanding and acting)” (Esteban, 2006b)” (Guitart, 2006, p. 88). For Guitart (2006), cultures have values that orientate and give sense to life (religion, language); reasons that explain reality and rules that regulate our actions.

With regard to indigenous people, their cultures belong to the world of beliefs and convictions that allow them to move in the world. These are forms of shared life (Guitart, 2006) as they respond to certain objectives and communitarian procedures, which are common among indigenous people with regards to valuing, believing and acting (Guitart, 2006, p. 88). The challenge for interculturality is “to put into relation these implicit forms of shared life (forms of feeling, understanding and acting)” (Guitart, 2006, p. 88). It is not about a simple mosaic of cultures, of a variety of folklore of foods, outfits and types of music, which are distinct and exotic among themselves, but about dialogue, resignation and, about efforts to see the Other as equal (Guitart, 2006, p. 88).

For the Tsotsil people, including the Tsotsil participants who took part in this research, respect is fundamental, not only for people, but also for nature. For example, their gods are related to natural phenomena, so they respect “Mother Earth as she allows human beings to exist. Their cosmovision includes the

concept that all things and living beings have a soul” (van’t Hooft & Millar, 2005, p. 28). Religion plays an important role in the Tsotsil society. The Tsotsil religion is a mixture of Catholicism and indigenous Mayan beliefs (van’t Hooft & Millar, 2005).

Tsotsil people treat their animals with respect, that is, “they treat sheep of an indigenous breed as part of their family, like ‘rural children’, each with its own name” (van’t Hooft & Millar, 2005). Part of Tsotsil people’s cosmovision includes the prohibition to kill sheep as they are considered to be sacred animals that accompany the (Catholic) patron of the people, Saint John the Baptist. Inside local churches, Tsotsil people have a statue of this Saint with a lamb at his feet. “Women responsible for taking care of the animals, visit the shrine regularly with requests to the Saint related to the health and productivity of their sheep” (van’t Hooft & Millar, 2005, p. 28).

### **The Land**

For indigenous people including the indigenous participants of the study, the land is fundamental in their cosmovision, that is, for them the land is more than an economic source, more than a source for making money and for exploitation (Guitart, 2006). The land has a deep religious and cultural meaning for them. The land is a fundament of the indigenous identity. The land is a living being that feeds their children and that knows what should be respected and venerated.

According to González and Rosso (2011), for indigenous people the land is an essential element. They say “without the land, we are nothing” (González & Rosso, 2011, p. 127). The land is above all a source of food and at the same time

the generator of the cultural identity of all indigenous peoples. “The cult and veneration to Mother Earth, the ‘Pachamama’ (the goddess of the Earth), is a common characteristic of diverse indigenous communities” (González & Rosso, 2011, p. 127) in Latin America.

Rigoberta Menchú who is a quiché indigenous woman and winner of the Nobel Prize of the Peace argues that:

Us, the indigenous people have more contact with nature... because it is our culture and our custom... The land is the Mother of the Man because it feeds him... that is why we ask the land for a good harvest. In fact, our parents teach us to respect the land (González & Rosso, 2011, p. 127).

For indigenous people the land is not something to be bought and sold. It is their source of life and their *raison d'être*. They cultivate it and respect it, which is also applicable for indigenous people in Chenalhó.

### **Main Statuses for Indigenous People in Chenalhó**

According to Guiteras (1996), there are three main statuses in relation to age and intrinsic obligations with regards to society that correspond to the youth, adulthood and aged. The youth status implies to receive teachings, maturity implies to receive economic and organizational responsibilities and elderly has to do with experience and consequently with wisdom (Guiteras, 1996). Wisdom possession means access to the supernatural dominion. “Knowledge grows gradually every day that passes, every year that goes by, the youth has no supernatural powers, which are expected to be obtained in the maturity stage through individual efforts” (Guiteras, 1996, p. 68). Elders possess supernatural

powers intrinsically. “This gradual way to acquire power, which always carries prestige, evidence the value that experience gives to it” (Guiteras, 1996, p. 68). Men in Chenalhó are expected to seek prestige by serving their community through political and religious positions (Guiteras, 1996). “Prestige is desired, but is also feared. The man who achieves success when having a position puts his life in risk. He aims to protect people from evil, which implies he is exposed to it (Guiteras, 1996). Chenalhó is a society where all men have equal access to all the positions of prestige and there are no inherited positions (Guiteras, 1996).

According to Lomelí (1996):

Each indigenous group has their life traditions, essential characteristics in their culture, which constitute them as elements of social cohesion and spiritual consistency that are frequently related to myths and particular beliefs. All these groups preferably speak their language, are aware of their indigenous being and fight to maintain it despite the contempt and marginalization they suffer (p. 51).

The latter can be seen in the fact that most students’ parents who participated in the study want their children to maintain the indigenous language and cosmovision. They want their children to be humble and respectful with everyone, for example, when greeting people, elders, for example, in the street. Unfortunately, according to some of the parents, this tradition is disappearing, that is, there are girls who are Tsotsil and speak both Spanish and Tsotsil, but pretend not to speak the native language anymore. This can be seen in the fact that they do

not like to greet people in the street in the Tsotsil language. Greeting elders saying “Batkun jun tot” (*goodbye Uncle*) or “Batkun jun me’ (*goodbye Aunt*)” is a common tradition for them. Doña Aurora, a parent, comments on this situation:

There are some girls here who speak Spanish...they walk very straight in the street...we know them...we know they are indigenous as well. We know them and they think that they don’t speak Tsotsil anymore. I’ve told my kids not to be like that. If they speak Spanish, they should also speak Tsotsil. There are old people here who tell you in the street ‘Batkun jun tot’ or ‘Batkun jun me’. I like both languages. There are some people who speak Spanish very well here, they walk straight and pretend not to speak Tsotsil. They do know Tsotsil, but they pretend not to.

Karla: They don’t want to speak in Tsotsil?

Doña Rita: Right. They give you their back when you say hi to them. They pretend they don’t know Tsotsil because they speak Spanish. I’ve told my kids not to learn that. If my kids see people in the street, I want them to say hello...respect is important. I want my kids to work hard to learn Spanish, but I don’t want them to be snobs. I don’t want them to walk like those people or that they stop talking to elders. I want my kids to respect people.

Doña Rita’s comment shows that she wants her children to learn Spanish; however, she wants them to preserve the values from their indigenous culture as well. Lomelí (1996) points out that “despite the attacks indigenous people have suffered along their history, they constantly revitalize their old identity ties. Their

forced coexistence with the dominators allowed them to develop new forms of solidarity and communitarian life” (p. 54). “The dynamic of interchange and adaptation to the dominant culture still allowed them to preserve their own traditions” (Lomelí, 1996, p. 54). According to Guiteras (1996), Tsotsil people’s beliefs related to the conception of the world can be divided among “deities, beings, forces, heaven, earth and the underworld and those related to the origin of the world, and all that which is part of it, of the human being and life after death” (p. 54). In addition, there are beliefs with regards to the behavior that both men and women should follow in order to preserve the universe harmony and its continuity (Lomelí, 1996).

Parents such as Doña Rita believe it is important for children to learn Spanish, but also to preserve the indigenous language and cosmovision as these are part of their culture. She wants her children to be humble and respectful, as in the native culture, this is very important.

### **Spanish: the Language of Opportunities**

Baker (2006) argues that:

A key issue in language status is whether the language minority is in the ascendancy (superordinate) or is subordinate. The economic status of a minority language is likely to be a key element in language vitality. Where, for example, a minority language community experiences considerable unemployment or widespread low income, the pressure may be to shift toward the majority language (p. 55).

“The social status of a language-its prestige value- will be closely related to the economic status of a language and will also be powerful factor in language revitalization” (Baker, 2006, p. 56). The economic situation in the town of Chenalhó is difficult, so many Pedranos (people born and raised in Chenalhó) need to go to the city to work in places where Spanish is necessary. According to parents in my study, Spanish is necessary to find a job outside the community. For example, Don Javier declared that:

Spanish is important, for example, if we go look for work in Mexico City or Cozumel, we need to speak Spanish so that people understand us and we can find a job. If we speak Tsotsil, they don't understand so we can't find a job. Spanish is more important so that we can communicate with mestizos and find a job.

Karla: So you think Spanish is useful to find a job?

Don Javier: Yes, that's the main reason.

Don Javier's statements show that he considers Spanish important for work. However, he feels that Tsotsil is useful to communicate with indigenous people. Similar to Don Javier, another parent (Doña Rosy) mentioned that she wants her children to speak Spanish so that they can find a job in the city and can move out of Chenalhó, as life there, according to Doña Rosy, is difficult. Therefore, she wants her children to go somewhere else to study, to work or to visit at least. This is one of the main reasons that parents want their children to learn Spanish so that they do not face problems in getting a job in the future.

Also, some parents argued that Spanish is necessary as it is the language spoken in higher grades of education, in secondary school, for example.

Therefore, if children want to continue with their studies, they need Spanish.

Baker (2006) suggests that:

When a majority language is seen as giving higher social status and more political power, a shift towards the majority language may occur. Where a minority language is seen to co-exist with unemployment, financial poverty, social deprivation and few amenities, the social status of the language may be negatively affected (p. 56).

### **Both Tsotsil and Spanish are Useful**

Spanish has high social status and it is the language of power. Although a few parents mentioned they prefer Spanish more than Tsotsil, most of them argued that they like both languages. Also, parents argued that if their children speak both languages, they have more possibilities to communicate with people, for example, with mestizos and indigenous people in different contexts, which is one of the advantages of bilingualism. For example, if children speak Spanish, they can communicate in the school and many places outside their community where this language is required. If children speak Tsotsil, they can communicate with their family at home. As Baker (2006) argues “bilinguals use their two languages with different people, in different contexts and for different purposes” (p. 12). Parents (without being aware of that) want their children to experience functional bilingualism.

Parents find it important to preserve Tsotsil so that communication in the community can take place. Don Lorenzo stated that he has observed that there are indigenous parents who only teach Spanish to their children, which makes it difficult for them to communicate with indigenous people because of the language barrier. This in the future could have a great impact on the situation of the indigenous language. There are people in Chenalhó such as elders who only speak the indigenous language, so if younger generations stop learning the indigenous language, communication between these two generations would be difficult. This aspect of intergeneration communication is one important reason for transmitting the native language to younger people.

Lam (2009) found that Upper Necaxa Totonac communities of east-central Mexico have shifted to Spanish. These communities have wanted to assimilate to the majority culture due to “social and economic conditions in the last forty years that have greatly increased access to and the communicative need for the majority language” (Lam, 2009, p.13). There are Totonac parents in these communities that are either Spanish monolinguals or Spanish-dominant bilinguals, so Spanish is the only language transmitted to grandchild generation (Lam, 2009). As she argues:

Even many of the grandparents, who are fluent native speakers of Totonac, have ceased to use that language with the grandchildren because the children do not understand Totonac well; only those few grandparents who cannot or will not speak Spanish at all use Totonac with the grandchildren (p. 6).

In contrast, most students' parents who participated in the study argued that they want the native language to be transmitted to communicate with elders, who in some cases only speak this language. Also, some students' parents are monolingual, speaking only Tsotsil or having a very poor command of the Spanish language. The transmission of the indigenous language to younger generations is fundamental for its preservation so at least in Chenalhó this is happening in most cases. Also, some students' parents believe Tsotsil should be preserved as it is the language they (the parents) were taught by their grandparents.

There are also students' parents who want their children to learn more languages other than Tsotsil and Spanish: English, for example. Don Victor teaches his young child the words he knows in English. He believes that the more languages his children learn the better so that they can communicate with more people, which is one of the benefits of speaking other languages (Marcos, n.d.). This shows a positive attitude towards the learning of languages. According to Marcos (n.d.), people should not isolate themselves behind one tongue. "In this multi-cultural world that shrinks more and more each year, we will have a much better chance of understanding other people if we understand at least one other language" (Marcos, n.d., para. 2). As always, "political and economic concerns play a major role in the nation's perception of the value of learning a second language" (Marcos, n.d., para. 3). "There is now a growing appreciation of the role that multilingual individuals can play in an increasingly diverse society, and

there is also a greater understanding of the academic and cognitive benefits that may accrue from learning other languages (Marcos, n.d. para. 3)".

### **Advantages of Second Language Learning**

Some parents in my study want their children to speak both languages so that they are able to understand what they are told and they can defend themselves in case they are insulted. For example, Doña Roselba stated that speakers of Tzeltal (another Mayan language) come to Chenalhó and one day she was insulted by one of them. However, it was not until she asked someone about what she had been told that she realized that she had verbally been insulted. Therefore, she believes children should know both Spanish and Tsotsil so that they can defend themselves from others, which is one of the benefits of being bilingual (Marcos, n.d.).

There are many benefits of studying second languages (Marcos, n.d.), and parents like Don Victor are an example of those who encourage language learning at home. Among the benefits of second language learning is the opportunity to expand access to people and resources. "Individuals who speak and read more than one language have the ability to communicate with more people, read more literature, and benefit more fully from travel to other countries" (Marcos, n.d., para. 6). Also, "introducing students to alternative ways of expressing themselves and to different cultures gives greater depth to their understanding of human experience by fostering an appreciation for the customs and achievements of people beyond their own communities" (Marcos, n.d. para. 6). In addition, Villano (1996) argues that knowing a second language can also give people a competitive advantage in the work force by opening up additional job opportunities.

In addition, Marcos (n.d.) declares that some studies have found that students who learn foreign languages score statistically higher on standardized college entrance exams than those who do not. For instance:

The College Entrance Examination Board reported that students who had averaged four or more years of foreign language study scored higher on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than those who had studied four or more years of any other subject (College Entrance Examination Board, 1992; Cooper, 1987). These findings, which were consistent with College Board profiles for previous years (College Entrance Examination Board, 1982; Solomon, 1984) and with the work of Eddy (1981), suggest that studying a second language for a number of years may contribute to higher SAT scores (Marcos, n.d., para. 8).

Bilingualism and multilingualism have many benefits to society, which suggests that bilingual schools in Mexico should encourage the teaching and learning of indigenous languages as well as Spanish.

Long before their children begin school, parents can begin to facilitate second language learning and also teach their children the importance and value of their mother tongue as well. “If a child has a number of positive experiences with another language, he or she can become quite receptive to learning other languages” (Marcos, n.d., para. 11), which does not mean they have to abandon their native language. “Throughout the school years, parents can show their children that the ability to speak a second language is valued by encouraging an

interest in other languages and cultures” (Marcos, n.d. para. 11). Parents can show their respect for other cultures and ways of speaking by inviting people who speak other languages into their homes and by attending cultural events featuring music, dance, or food from other countries (Marcos, n.d.).

Second language study offers many benefits to students in terms of improved communicative ability, cognitive development, cultural awareness, and job opportunities. The latter is one of the main reasons that many students’ parents in Chenalhó want their children to learn Spanish as it is the language that would facilitate their children to find work in the city.

Baker (2006) argues that parents may believe that there are economic, employment or educational advantages of speaking a majority language (e.g. Spanish, in this case) to their children and not the minority language, which is partly also applicable to students’ parents who participated in the study. However, most of these parents want their children to speak both their native language and Spanish and they reinforce this by speaking Tsotsil to their children at home. This is an important factor in language retention as a lack of family language reproduction is a principal and direct cause of language shift (Baker, 2006). Parents and grandparents definitely play an important role in the transmission and preservation of the native language.

### **Students’ Attitudes towards Spanish and Tsotsil**

#### **Spanish**

The lower status of minority languages and cultures can negatively affect their maintenance and acquisition. In this case, Spanish is the prestigious and dominant while Tsotsil is the minority language. There are students who

participated in this research who argued that they prefer Spanish because their perception of Tsotsil is not positive. Juan Lorenzo (a sixth grader) believes that his native language is not used in many places other than in his community, so he prefers Spanish as it is the language more people speak and it is used in many contexts. This student believes that Spanish is more “cool and fashionable” than Tsotsil. In addition, Juan Lorenzo believes that Tsotsil and its speakers are old fashioned. His arguments are an example of negative attitudes towards the native language. Similarly, other research has found that minority languages, Creole, for example, spoken in Saint Lucia (Fevrier, 2008) is perceived negatively while English represents “enlightenment and progress, and Creole represents backwardness” (Fevrier, 2008, p. 194). In the context of my research, Spanish is the language of progress while Tsotsil is considered the old fashioned language as described by Juan Lorenzo.

Negative attitudes towards the Tsotsil language could lead to endangerment of such a language in the future. UNESCO (2003) states that a community’s negative attitude towards its own language is one of the internal forces that leads to language endangerment, which “may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation” (p. 3). These attitudes may also be caused by other pressures:

Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to

believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace. (p. 3)

As Paciotto (2000) found, indigenous languages are usually considered as low-prestige languages and are “confined to the community and family oral communicative space, while larger social domains are ‘occupied’” (p. 50) by the national language. This has been the case of Mexico’s indigenous languages where native languages are associated with low-prestige people and with socially disfavoured identities so that its own potential speakers prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt some other languages (Dorian, 1998), as is the case with is Juan Lorenzo.

According to Díaz-Couder (1998), prejudices with regards to Amerindian peoples are mostly:

The result of a portrait of deprivation, lack of economic and material resources, lack of adequate hygiene and health conditions, lack of education (and therefore culturally deficient) even lack of language («they don’t even speak Spanish» or «what they speak is not a language, it’s a dialect»). Therefore, deprivation seems to be one of the main characteristics of being indigenous (para. 1).

Díaz-Couder (1998) points out that a common educational mantra is the following: “Indigenous peoples = Indigent peoples”. Attending to the specificity of indigenous people becomes the fight against their poverty. Being « Indian » is

to be poor; to stop being poor is to stop being « Indian » (para. 2). This unsustainable ideological equation makes it indispensable to fight poverty, which becomes a legitimate justification to extinguish indigenous cultures (Díaz-Couder, 1998).

#### Mass Media

Mass media are among the agents that significantly affects people's attitudes to language use and retention. For example, a student mentioned that she likes Spanish as it is the language people use in the media. Crawford (1996) discusses the influence from mass media on Native Americans and he states that:

Television and video cassette recorders have had a noticeable cultural impact among Native Americans. In more remote areas this has happened only in the last decade. With increased electrification and satellite dishes popping up everywhere, Indian children are suddenly watching MTV, listening to heavy metal, and playing video games — none of which makes any use of their native language (para. 26).

The latter is also applicable to the students in this research, that is, they are exposed to the media in which Spanish is mostly spoken. Although there are television programs such as local news in Tsotsil that are broadcast on one of the local channels in Chiapas, this is not enough to motivate young people to change their attitudes from negative into positive attitudes towards their native language as the language they are mostly exposed to in the media is Spanish. Also, young people might not be interested in watching the news, but in programs related to

their interests and age and these types of programs are broadcasted in Spanish in both local and national channels in Mexico.

According to Crawford (1996), “we speak like those we admire or aspire to emulate” (para. 27), which is common for children and teenagers including the participants of the study, so the fact that Spanish is spoken by the people they might admire on television, may make them want to use the language spoken by such people. The students may want to identify with non-Indian role models (Crawford, 1996) and what they do.

### **Desire to Learn Spanish**

#### **Students are Influenced by their Parents’ Language Choice and Attitudes**

Most students are definitely influenced by their parents’ attitudes and language use. One of the students argued that she likes Spanish as it is the language used by her parents, which also influences her desire to learn it. Chien-Huei (2005) states that “parents play an important role in maintaining their children’s ethnic language ability as well as in participating for the success of school and learning” (p. 5). Luo and Wiseman (2000 as cited in Chien-Huei, 2005) found out that “parents, especially mothers, serve as important language model for shaping children’s language behavior when they have good family relation (p. 320)” (p. 2388). Luo and Wiseman (2000 as cited in Chien-Huei, 2005) found that “when children saw their parents and other family members attach importance or encouragement to maintain the ethnic language, they showed favor in it as well” (p.2388). The conclusion from their study stated that maintenance of proficiency in an ethnic language was principally associated with adult language practice in the home.

On the other hand, children's ethnic language maintenance affects the closeness among family members (Chien-Huei, 2005). If children do not understand the ethnic language spoken by their parents and the parents cannot speak the dominant language, "there would be alienation in relationship and communication breakdown among them" (Chien-Huei, 2005). Wong Fillmore (1991) declares that "talk is a very crucial link between parents and children because parents impart their cultures to their children" (p. 343). "When children have close relation with their parents, they see parents as their language model. They see what language their parents use and make decisions about their use of language based on what they perceive" (Chien-Huei, 2005, p. 2389). Some of the children who participated in this study declared that they like Spanish or Tsotsil because of their parents' language choice and attitudes.

### **Students are Influenced by their Classmates**

Those students who prefer Spanish over the Tsotsil language have also been influenced by their classmates as declared by some of the participants. For example, there are girls who speak both languages and they tell their classmates to learn Spanish, which does not imply they are inviting them to abandon their native language. The problem arises when there is a misunderstanding of this message, that is, when they believe that they should learn Spanish at the expense of the Tsotsil language, which is how Lourdes (a sixth grader) has understood it. She declared that she used to speak more Tsotsil, but her classmates who speak both languages have told her to learn Spanish, so she does not like Tsotsil anymore.

In general, students showed curiosity about the Spanish language, which is positive, that is, being curious about learning languages might motivate them to continue learning Spanish and other languages as well, but not at the expense of their mother tongue.

### **Proximity to Cities**

Students like Spanish because of different reasons; for example, they like the fact of being able to communicate outside their community, for instance, when going to the city of San Cristóbal, which is located approximately 40 and 50 minutes from Chenalhó. The roads between the city of San Cristóbal and Chenalhó have definitely facilitated mobility in and out of the town and allowed for the establishment of regular transportation. The proximity of Chenalhó to the city is also another aspect that makes not only students, but also their parents, want to learn Spanish. Such proximity also facilitates linguistic and cultural contact.

When indigenous language communities no longer live in isolation, which has happened on some reservations (Crawford, 1996), it is easy to be influenced by others' language and culture, which also has an impact on the native language and culture (Crawford, 1996). As Dan McLaughlin of Navajo Community College suggests, "You pave roads, you create access to a wage economy, people's values change, and you get language shift" (Crawford, 1996, para. 27).

### **Attitudes towards Tsotsil**

#### **Language of Identification**

Fortunately, there are also students who identify with their native language and want to maintain it, which is essential as young generations play an important

role in the preservation of a language. Students who participated in the study relate Tsotsil with their parents and their home. This is one of the reasons for them to want to preserve their native language. Also, they like Tsotsil as it is the language spoken by their friends and classmates (those who prefer Tsotsil). They argued that if they do not speak Tsotsil anymore, they would not be able to communicate with Tsotsil speakers, that is, communication or understanding among people would not be possible. As Mario (a student from grade six) stated:

I'd like the Tsotsil language to be preserved because if one day I forget my language and my classmates or my friends don't know how to speak the language I speak, they won't understand me anymore.

Since most of the population in Chenalhó is indigenous, students believe Tsotsil is useful in Chenalhó.

There were also students who said they found Tsotsil more fun than Spanish as it is the language they speak and understand better, thanks to their parents. The fact that they can communicate in Tsotsil more easily and they feel more comfortable with such a language, as it is their mother tongue, makes them prefer it to Spanish.

In addition, there were students who claimed to be proud of being indigenous, which influenced their preference for Tsotsil and the language they identify with. Teacher Rosario also declared she felt proud of being indigenous. Marcos (2005) found that indigenous women often feel proud of whom they are. As Susana, one of the participants in Marcos's research (2005) declared "being indigenous and a woman is a pride, being indigenous women means that we have

thought, that we have dignity, but it is difficult, very difficult because there is suffering, discrimination and poverty” (p. 1). Indigenous people have their own way of seeing the world. Esther, one of the women in Marcos’s research explained

We speak our language, we have our custom, our medicine, our form of praying and our form of dancing. We have our way of respecting our elders, that our grandmothers and grandfathers taught us. They also taught us to resist and to get organized. Not because we are indigenous, and for speaking our language, and for being dark-skinned, can we be looked-down. Being Indian is a great pride (Marcos, 2005).

This pride was found in most participants in the study, and helped to increase the possibilities for maintaining and preserving the Tsotsil language and culture.

### Identity

Guitart (2006) states that identity is one of the recurrent topics in contemporary discussions in Social Sciences as it is part of the agenda with many sociopolitical movements that demand the value of ethnic, gender, cultural and national differences. “The aims of social movements are directed towards a reorientation, revalorization, resignification of sociocultural identity, of the recognition of rights and duties, of cultural production and social integration and cohesion” (Guitart, 2006, p. 71). According to Guitart (2006), identity performs two contradictory, but complementary functions, that is, identity distinguishes us

and separates us from the other. Monreal (2006) argues that when we talk about identity we refer to:

Forms of being and to those values that give meaning to people's lives from their subjectivity, a sense that is more important than other objectives such as money and power. It (identity) is not about something that society values in every moment, but about something that you value as a person, as a social group or community and that has more meaning (p. 121).

### **Mestizos and their Language and Culture are Dominating Indigenous People**

Teacher Rosa in my study explained that she feels mestizos' lifestyle, language and traditions have and still are dominating indigenous people. Since this has been the situation of indigenous people in Chiapas, they have resisted "the loss of their homes and lands, the attack on their traditions and resources, and the worsening poverty and insecurity generated by neo-liberal economic policies" (MADRE, 2011, para. 7). Sociopolitical movements such as the Zapatista uprising is an example that shows indigenous peoples' fatigue against such a situation. "In fact, on the day that NAFTA went into effect (January 1, 1994), the Zapatista movement rose up to demand democratic reform as a basis for economic and racial justice" (MADRE, 2011, para. 7). Resistance in Chiapas takes many forms. Indigenous communities are reclaiming lands, participating in mass demonstrations, and demanding their human rights through lobbying on the national and international level. The Zapatistas have established autonomous communities, providing their own public services, including schools and health clinics. Civil society groups have organized popular education workshops and

established economic cooperatives, offering a local alternative to the dominant economic model (MADRE, 2011).

Indigenous people such as teacher Rosario are aware that they are losing their traditions which includes the wearing of their typical clothing and their native language. Because her school has promoted the use of Spanish rather than the use of both languages, she is concerned that indigenous people are in danger of losing their identity. Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) describes this situation saying that “we are ruining the planet, and ourselves” as we have done more than any other part of this planet’s ecosystem to harm and destroy its health. “We are today killing both biodiversity and linguistic and cultural diversity, and through this forced homogenisation ruining the planet” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, para. 5).

It is true that indigenous cultures have been and still are under pressure from the forces of modernization and globalization (Freund, 2009). This is also the case for Mexico’s indigenous communities including the Tsotsil community in Chenalhó, Chiapas. An example of this is that nowadays, the school where this research was conducted asks students to wear uniforms (modern skirts for girls, blue pants for boys and t-shirts for both) once or twice a week. In the past, Rosario argued that students used to wear their typical ‘*nahuitas*’ (indigenous traditional skirts), in the case of girls, for example, but now it is more rare for that to happen and school is promoting the disappearance of indigenous outfits. In monolingual schools attended by indigenous children in Chenalhó, the wearing of typical clothing is even rarer as it is mandatory for them to wear uniforms.

Freund (2009) has found:

More and more villages with only one person that continues to wear traditional indigenous costume. In the Tehuacan Valley there were at least two villages and in the Otomi region of Tenango de Doria another three villages. Further down the road in the Tepehua regions only 80 women are known to wear their traditional costume (para. 1).

As Freund (2009) declares “embroidery and weaving has a very long tradition in Mexico and in many cases where traditional costume has disappeared the women continue to embroider and sell traditional blouses and skirts” (para. 2). However, this is not applicable in all indigenous areas in Mexico. For example, Del Carpio in her doctoral study (n.d) conducted research in “La Ilusión” (the Illusion) an indigenous community in Simojovel, Chiapas and she found that indigenous girls no longer want to embroider or wear their typical clothing. A fourteen-year old participant in her study declared that “they do not want to wear or embroider typical clothing so that their mothers do not wear their indigenous outfits anymore” (Del Carpio, n.d., p. 233). Xvel, a sixteen-year old stated that they do not wear their traditional clothing because they are embarrassed and they feel their traditional outfits do not fit them. Also, she stated that “older people wear them because that is still their tradition” (Del Carpio, n.d., p.199). According to Giddens (1991, 1995), ways of dressing serve as an indicator to interpret actions and constitute an important element in one’s appearance. Clothing, social identity and the way of dressing are related and they are an indicator of gender, social class and occupational category. This is probably one

of the reasons why indigenous girls and boys stop wearing their typical outfits because by wearing them “they show they are indigenous and being indigenous is a reason for discrimination” (Del Carpio, n.d., p. 199).

According to Freund (2009):

In Mexico, years of government neglect and a persistent racism have created an economic desperation which has forced generations of men and women to flee the poverty of their communities. These indigenous people immigrate to the big cities of Mexico and the USA. Traditional dress marks them as indigenous, and in a society where being an “indian” puts you at the bottom of the social ladder, that is not good. So for decades, as people leave the communities, they leave behind their ancestral knowledge of how to weave, embroider and the social identity that the Mexican indigenous textiles and language provide (para. 6).

Unfortunately,” it is not only indigenous dress that is under pressure but all sorts of other customs which provide the rich cultural base that is formed by Mexico’s over 60 ethnic groups” (Freund, 2009, para. 9). “Pottery, woven palm and other grasses, medical healing and shamanistic practices, that have served these communities for thousands of years are rapidly passing into extinction” (Freund, 2009, para. 9). Freund (2009) states that “in some of the northern Mexican groups one in three of four people still speak the indigenous language” (para. 9). Indigenous people like teacher Rosario consider that technology, television, and internet have dominated indigenous people and their traditions and the school programs do not help to preserve the native language.

### **Types of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism in my Research School**

Baker (2006) states that “bilingual education is a simplistic label for a complex phenomenon.” She goes on saying that:

At the outset, a distinction is needed between (1) education that uses and promotes two languages and (2) relatively monolingual education for language minority children. This is a difference between (1) a classroom where formal instruction fosters bilingualism and (2) a classroom where bilingual children are present, but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum (p. 213).

The latter is the situation that bilingual children in the bilingual school where this research was conducted have experienced. According to García (1996), “some types of bilingual education promote *additive* bilingualism. In additive bilingualism students come into school speaking their mother tongue and a second language is added. The result is clearly an individual who is bilingual” (p. 4). Nonetheless, there are other types of bilingual education that involve subtractive bilingualism, that is, students are instructed in both their mother tongue and a second language. “Eventually, however, instruction in the mother tongue with the second language becoming the sole medium of instruction and ultimately the only language of the student (Lambert, 1980)” (García, 1996, p. 4). It can be said that in part the type of bilingual education that those students who participated in the study receive is subtractive to an extent, that is, in the first grades of schooling they are instructed in their native language (Tsotsil) and the second language (Spanish). However, even in the first grades of schooling, there is not a balanced

use of both languages. When students get to grade six, classes are instructed in mostly Spanish. Despite this, most students still speak their native language after grade six.

Children in the bilingual school in Chenalhó are not part of a strong educational program (García, 1996) that supports additive bilingualism. In contrast, they are part of a weak program (García, 1996), which engages in subtractive bilingualism. He argues that “often, bilingual education for the language majority promotes additive bilingualism, whereas that for the language minority develops subtractive bilingualism” (p. 4). “Yet, bilingual education with additive bilingualism as a goal can be beneficial for the minority, as well as the majority” (Fishman, 1976 as cited in García, 1996, p. 4).

It can be said that first graders who participated in the study are incipient bilinguals, that is, they have a well-developed first language (Tsotsil) and the second language (Spanish) is in the early stages of development (Baker, 2006). Since in these students the second language is still developing, they are experiencing an ascendant bilingualism (Baker, 2006). This is also the case of a few six graders, those who needed an interpreter when being interviewed, for example. These students seemed to struggle when speaking in Spanish and preferred to speak in Tsotsil, which also shows that Tsotsil is spoken and is fundamental for some students (which does not mean it is not for the other students who speak both languages). (Bilinguals whose competencies in both languages are well developed, for instance, a person who is “approximately fluent in two languages across various contexts may be termed an equilingual or

ambilingual or, more commonly, a balanced bilingual” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). Nonetheless, Fishman (1971) pointed out that infrequently will anyone be equally competent across all situations. Most of the time bilinguals use their languages with different purposes and with diverse people. “The implicit idea of balanced bilingualism has often been of ‘appropriate’ competence in both languages” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). For example, “a child who can understand the delivery of the curriculum in school in either language, and operate in classroom activity in either language would be an example of a balanced bilingual” (Baker, 2006, p. 9). Although sixth graders are not delivered the curriculum entirely in both languages, it is possible to say that some of them are balanced bilinguals, that is, they have an appropriate competence in both languages (Baker, 2006). This is the case of Karla and Ana, for example, who served as interpreters to help me interview some participants. Karla and Ana as well as other sixth graders are fluent in both languages.

### **Objectives of Bilingual Education**

It is true that behind bilingual education there are varying and conflicting philosophies and politics about the objectives of this type of education. In this respect, Ferguson et al. (as cited in Baker, 2006) provides examples of the varying purposes of bilingual education. Some of these objectives such as assimilation, unification, communication with the outside world, the spread of the use of a colonial language, and the strengthening of elite groups can be addressed by the type of bilingual education that is implemented in my research school. That is, the fact that the Spanish language and culture are prioritized can lead to the achievement of such objectives.

Bilingual education also aims at aiding employment, which is one of the reasons why parents want their children to learn Spanish. Also, Ferguson argues that bilingual education aims at preserving ethnic and religious identity. The latter was one of the aims for the two teachers of grade one to use Tsotsil in class. For example, teacher Vicente argued that he wanted his students to dance typical dances from Chenalhó when having festivals at the school so that these traditions can be maintained.

Baker (2006) declares that bilingual education has four major contemporary perspectives: as part of language planning, politics, economics and cost-efficiency and as pedagogy. Bilingual education is not just about education. There are sociocultural, political and economic issues ever present in the debate over the provision of bilingual education” (Baker, 2006, p. 214). As there are different aims for bilingual education, there are also diverse types of such education, which will be described below.

### **Immersion Programs**

Hamel (2001) describes three different forms of immersion programs. The first type is those of **total submersion** where the indigenous language is considered as an obstacle to learn Spanish and to civilize students. It is common that teachers do not speak students’ native language. These students many times face a situation of forced assimilation (Hamel, 2001). The underlying concept is a monoculturalism that neither recognizes nor takes into account “the fact that students belong to another culture other than the national culture and that they speak their own language. The only valid culture is the culture of the national

dominant majority” (Hamel, 2001, p. 9). The second type is **relative immersion** where the native language is tolerated and it is used in the first years as the language of instructions in a not very systematic way while students acquire enough Spanish to continue with programs in Spanish (Hamel, 2001). In addition, neither the indigenous language nor Spanish are assigned a specific space, that is, there are no specific domains that guide teachers to know when to use each language. This is the type of bilingual education that students in the school where this study was conducted receive.

Also, in this type of a program, “the native language has to surrender to give space to the dominant language” (Hamel, 2001, p. 9). This is the idea that prevails in teachers and students’ parents who believe that it is important that students learn Spanish because of its benefits. However, the hypothetical fact that indigenous children who do not learn Spanish does not have to imply that they do not deserve to have the same opportunities and benefits than mestizo students.

There are also **systematic transition** programs, which aim at shifting “the child from the home, minority language to the dominant, majority language. Social and cultural assimilation into the language majority is the underlying aim” (p.213). The mother tongue is used as an instrument of early alphabetization to later transit to the second language (Hamel, 2011). Some basic functions of the mother tongue are maintained, which allows the teaching of certain subjects and contents in such as language (Baker, 2006).

The educational rationale is based on perceived priorities: children need to function in the majority language in society, which is one of the reasons for

students' parents and teachers to want children to learn Spanish in the bilingual school in Chenalhó. The argument used is that if competency in the majority language is not quickly established, such children may fall behind their majority language peers (Mitchell et al., 1999). This idea also prevails in Chenalhó, but mainly teachers such as Federico want his students to know Spanish so that they do not face problems in the future, so the purpose is to “help” such students to avoid problems in the future and to “help” them have better opportunities in life in terms of education and work, for example. “Arguments about equality of opportunity and maximizing student performance are used to justify such transitional programs” (Baker, 2006).

The three teachers who participated in the study are “bilingual” speakers of both Spanish and Tsotsil; especially the two indigenous teachers whose native language is Tsotsil. They are fluent in both languages although sometimes they make small mistakes when speaking Spanish. In contrast, Federico, the mestizo teacher is not proficient in the Tsotsil language as observed in his classes and declared by his students when they were interviewed. Baker (2006) points out that:

While majority language monolingualism is the aim of transitional bilingual education, teachers or their assistants need to be bilingual. The temporary home language requires, for example, a Spanish speaking teacher who may be more sensitive and successful in teaching English to Spanish speaking children than English-only teachers. The former can switch from one language to another and

be more sympathetic to the language of the children. However, a bilingual teacher can become the unwitting promoter of transition from one language to another, and assimilation into the majority culture (p. 222).

Unfortunately, the three models described above consider “cultural and linguistic diversity as a problem to be solved in an explicit and systematic way” (Hamel, 2009, p. 9). The assimilation programs have been deficient. Among the reasons is that it is considered that “from a basic mastery of literacy, which is expected to be achieved after two or three years, academic and cognitive performance of students who come from ethnolinguistic minorities would take place more or less at the same pace as the cognitive performance of those children from the dominant culture” (Hamel, 2001, p. 10). For these reasons, the ethnic language and culture does not receive any curricular support.

### **Models of Linguistic and Cultural Maintenance**

Among the programs that correspond to the linguistic and cultural maintenance models, there are two types: balance and revitalization. These are distinguished by the population they address and their curriculum (Hamel, 2001). Both intend for students to be fully able to speak in the two languages, which is called additive bilingualism. Also, they aim that students are able to successfully act in both cultures departing from their native culture (Hamel, 2001). Baker (2006) states that when bilingual education seeks to develop a student’s home language skills to full proficiency and full biliteracy, this type of education is referred to as Enrichment Bilingual Education for language minority children. “The term ‘Enrichment Bilingual Education’ is also used for language majority

children who are adding a second language in school” (Baker, 2006, p. 214).

“Enrichment bilingual education aims to extend the individual and group use of minority languages, leading to cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity” (Baker, 2006, p. 214). This unfortunately is not the type of bilingual education that students in Chenalhó receive because the more they advance through the grades of elementary schooling, the less they are instructed and exposed to their native language.

Sociocultural theory, which is the basis of many bilingual programs, “consists of a model of linguistic and cultural conflict. Indigenous minorities (or majorities) or immigrants suffer discrimination and systematic subordination” (Hamel, 2001, p. 10). Programs pretend to support the fight for more equality in terms of opportunities departing from the recognition of structural asymmetry (Hamel, 2001).

According to Hamel (2001), there have been enrichment models that have been developed for school children that belong to the dominant language. The most well-known program is the second language immersion program in Canada. Hamel (2001) explains that the effect of the immersion program consists of the fact that certain monolingual students, members of the dominant Anglophone majority are exposed to a program entirely conducted in French, generally from the start of elementary school. These programs have obtained successful results in obtaining additive bilingualism in which one language does not substitute for the other (Hamel, 2001). Those students who have been part of these programs, after six years, have not only acquired a very advanced competence in all abilities in

French (the second language), but they also have not shown any delays in comparison to their English speaking peers in terms of literacy despite the fact that they did not receive instruction in English (Hamel, 2001, p. 11). In general, enriching programs are based on a conception of cultural pluralism and achieve that students have an additive bilingualism (Hamel, 2001).

The context of indigenous people in Latin America is different from the Canadian context (with regards to Francophones and Anglophones, for example); however, it would be worthwhile to run pilot immersion programs in indigenous languages for students whose mother tongue is Spanish and live in regions where the presence of indigenous people is significant. “An example of this is the pilot program that is run in Juchitán (Oaxaca, Mexico) with indigenous children who are literate in Spanish” (Hamel, 2001, p. 11).

### **General Discussion**

The indigenous people, Tsotsil, who were the focus of this study are “in constant change, in movement, in change” (Guitart, 2006, p. 75). Therefore, it is important that the educational system for indigenous people also renews itself so that it can address native people’s characteristics, needs, and issues. Although native groups share similarities, they also share differences, which means their needs are diverse as well. However, all indigenous peoples deserve the same respect. As one of the (Tzeltal) indigenous participants in Guitart’s (2006) study declared:

We don’t believe that there are more superior...or inferior (indigenous people)...what a stupidity! Each person should be respected along with their knowledge, which is significant, with

their ways of living and understanding life, different...mmm...their ancestral practices or their own visions. Cultures, I think, are simply...not better or worse even though there are bad practices, of course (p. 88).

All cultures deserve the same respect and consideration. However, this does not mean that there will not be conflicts, discrepancies or arguments.

#### The Other

Living in a multicultural society also brings possibilities for conflict. “Sharing experiences with very distinct people is also a possible fountain of incomprehensions, misunderstandings, incapacities to read the “implicit forms” of the Other, his/her worlds, cosmovisions and ways of doing” (Guitart, 2006, p. 89). She explains “When beliefs are in deep contradiction is when ‘intercultural tension’ emerges” (p. 89). The tension between the mestizo and the indigenous person has been based on undervalued, racist and stereotyped messages, which can also be observed in Chenalhó. These messages as well as practices have led to sociopolitical movements such as the “Zapatista Army of National Liberation” (EZLN) uprising in Chiapas in 1994 in order to fight for indigenous peoples’ rights in the Highlands of Chiapas. Guitart (2006) states that “it is through concrete, efficient and constant dialogue under an equality of conditions that we will be able to put into contact these certain implicit forms of shared life” (p. 89). Critical thinking exists in dialogue, therefore this type of dialogue can serve as the bridge between the mestizo and the Other (the indigenous). For example, dialogue between mestizo teachers and their indigenous students can lead to communication resulting in a better education.

## **The Situation of Indigenous People**

The situation of indigenous people and their languages in Mexico, as in most of Latin America, are in part rooted in their history. Mexico has had ethnic groups for thousands of years and many still remained after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. “During the times of conquest and colonization in Mexico, unpleasant social confrontations, such as disappearance, mobilization and assimilation had a violent impact on the preservation of indigenous languages” (Recio, 2010, p. 2). Indigenous populations greatly decreased in number (Organización Editorial Mexicana, 2008) and “were persecuted, tortured and enslaved in order to abandon all existing cultural models prior to the arrival of Spanish conquerors” (Recio, 2010, p. 2). For these reasons, the period of Conquest of Mexico is considered to be “one of the greatest disasters of mankind” (Recio, 2010, p. 2).

Although these indigenous communities in Mexico have always had a strong presence in certain regions of the country, they have been excluded from society as well as from the benefits they can get from it (Chacón, 2005). Ramonet (2002) argues that “indigenous people have been victims of a kind of silent genocide. They have been forgotten by everybody; they are invisible and have been condemned to sit and watch as their languages and their age-old values were slowly destroyed” (p. 137).

According to Flores (2006):

Since the Europeans’ arrival to the New World, the languages in America were considered to be inaccessible to them because the translators of African and Asian languages who came with Columbus were not able to understand them. Also, their structures

were not similar to those proposed by Nebrija or the structure of the Latin language, which was considered the language of high culture and the model aspired by the Castilian spoken back then. For this reason, the indigenous languages were considered “barbarians” (p. 40).

Flores (2006) argues that the colonizers discriminated against the indigenous languages because they did not understand them; for example, the Aztecs had a writing system to register history, which was different from Latin writing. When indigenous people learned Spanish, they were considered a threat because “they threatened the system of social stratification that considered Spanish as superior and the Indian as inferior” (Brice, 1992, p. 73). The Spanish language was considered the most positive inheritance of Spain, therefore it was desired that such a language be preserved and maintained its purity (Flores, 2006). In 1835, a Language Academy was created in order to maintain the purity of the legitimate Castilian (Spanish) and to avoid the emergence of corrupted Spanish (Brice, 1992, p. 106).

In 1857, the Mexican Constitution proclaimed that education should be secular and free. The aim of elementary education was to promote national unification. This idea prevailed during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Flores, 2006). According to Flores (2006), there were also authors in favour of “the implementation of bilingual education and was convinced about the psychological advantages of the use of native languages in instruction” (Flores, 2006, p. 45). Ramírez emphasized the importance of

acknowledging the cultural and economic differences of Mexico before the implementation of any bilingual education. In addition, he believed that any type of education that did not take into account the students' professional opportunities was useless (Flores, 2006). He insisted that the government in Mexico recognize some indigenous languages in order to strengthen the interest and participation of those native peoples who preserved their history and languages in silence (Brice, 1992, p. 112).

Although politicians such as Porfirio Díaz had a romantic appreciation of the Indian, "laws that favoured indigenous education were not implemented due to the lack of resources for it as it was thought that such an education could generate an imbalance between civil peace and financial stability" (Flores, 2006, p. 46). Just the idea of having "indigenous languages coexist in an equitable way with the Spanish language provoked indignation" (Flores, 2006, p. 46). Justo Sierra, Porfirio Díaz' secretary, mentioned several times that "poliglossia was a 'formidable barrier for the unification of the country' (Sierra *apud* Brice, 1992, p. 124)" (Flores, 2006, p. 46). Justo Sierra never denied that the "purpose of elemental instruction was the disappearance of indigenous languages. The preservation of these languages was denied as they were considered as simple 'archeological documents' (Sierra *apud* Brice, 1992, p. 125)" (Flores, 2006, p. 46). The transmission of the Spanish language was considered to be the transmission of the Good News to those who were "less unfortunate" (Flores, 2006, p. 47), that is, those who did not know Spanish, but only an indigenous

language. This background information contextualizes the situation of indigenous people as well as their languages and cultures.

### **Repetition of Historical Practices**

Sadly, historical practices have been and still are repeated within the bilingual school. The Colony in Mexico in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was characterized by social and racial labels that defined two worlds in which levels of human coexistence were not possible. The conquistadors became the Mexican Indians' redeemers leading to the imposition of a culture brought from another region of the world that was considered to be more advanced by its habitants (Bastiani, 2006). From this perspective, levels of human coexistence could not emerge because indigenous languages were not recognized as real with their own and systematic rationality, that is, as languages and not dialects. Mexican indigenous groups had the Spanish language imposed upon them at the expense of their own (Margulis & Nowakoski, 1996), a practice that has been repeated in "bilingual" schools in indigenous areas today (Del Carpio, 2008). In my research school, both languages are used; however, Spanish is prioritized although Tsotsil is also a written language.

Today, the right for cultural and linguistic difference constitutes a generalized request from diverse social groups in the world, from indigenous people from Latin America, for example, who have received and continue to receive an unfair and inhuman treatment despite the fact that modern political constitutions promote and respect their rights (Bastiani, 2006). The Conquest was a way of division to defeat and to control in terms of "people and territories as today's division in Latin America.

In terms of education, linguistic frontiers have been constructed by educational policies, which have imposed Spanish as the dominant language. Consequently, indigenous languages have been displaced (Bastiani, 2006). This phenomenon can be observed in communities where the presence of native people is significant and have schools where it is said that they are to offer bilingual intercultural education:

But in practice, the mother tongue is not used as a pedagogical resource, the oral use of indigenous languages is not promoted and bilingualism is not encouraged or promoted either. In contrast, the education that is offered is built as the main bridge to break linguistics structures and to create new frontiers that separate indigenous groups from their own structures. By doing so, the mother tongue is left in second term and Spanish is imposed as the only language to be used (Bastiani, 2006, p. 35).

The school should be an institution constituted in the social and pedagogical space that promotes the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures, which should be reflected not only on the new plan and program, but also on the constant preparation of teachers, that is, instructors need to be trained so that they learn how to implement quality bilingual intercultural education. In addition, teachers need to be provided with materials and resources that help them when teaching. This would be beneficial for the teachers in my research school as they are aware that they need more resources so that they can deliver a better education.

According to Bastiani (2006), schools are still far from the achievement of the instauration of intercultural education that transforms the educational process in real acts of cultural and linguistic exchange, that is, in acts of intercultural coexistence. It is important to remember that it is fundamental “to build a democratic and just society that respects indigenous peoples’ cultural and linguistic differences in all the world although these peoples are considered ‘minority’” (Bastiani, 2006, p. 33). If students in my research school, for example, were taught in both Spanish and Tsotsil and were provided with real bilingual education, this could help the achievement of having a more just society.

### **Postcolonial Theory**

The situation of the Tsotsil students who participated in the study, the state of the Tsotsil language and the type of bilingual education students there receive, makes me wonder to what extent we are living in a *PostColonial* Era. Margulis and Nowakoski (1996) point out that “during colonization, colonizers usually imposed their language onto the peoples they colonized, forbidding natives to speak their mother tongues” (para.2). Students who participated in this research are not forbidden to use their native language at the bilingual school; however, their teachers’ practices and the curriculum do not encourage them to preserve or promote the Tsotsil language and culture. What the school does in effect in promoting the Spanish language and culture is similar to what colonizers did in the past.

I observed and experienced in my research that sometimes the educational system imposes on students what they are required to learn without actually considering the learners’ age, identity, needs, interests, languages and cultures.

Also, I do not feel that students have a very active role in that respect. In other words, their opinion(s) are not very frequently considered. I see the omission of such elements as very similar to what colonizers have done to the colonized. That is, colonizers imposed on the colonized a new language and culture where the colonized people were not asked whether or not they desired them.

#### Debates about the Prefix “*post*”

Findings from my study add to the debate on the problematics of the term, *postcolonialism* which has been criticized because it refers to an era after colonialism and to a set of critical attitudes taken toward colonialism. The term has also been criticized for reinstating all cultures into a hyphenated relationship with colonialism by focusing on the “grand narrative” of European domination, excluding all other stories and voices from the past (Ghandi, 1998). Pennycook (1998) points out that:

Colonialism and postcolonial struggles...have produced and reduced nations, massacred populations, dispossessed people of their land, culture, language and history, shifted vast numbers of people from one place to another. And they are also the ground which European/Western images of the Self and Other have been constructed, the place where constructions of Superiority and Inferiority were produced. (p.19)

The educational system in Mexico seems to reinforce such ideas and separates us even more. For example, the fact that Tsotsil students are not instructed in both the native language and Spanish during all years of elementary

schooling reinforces the power of mestizos and their language. Willinsky (1998) states that “it is hard to know what to do about a world beset by struggles of ethnic nationalism, hardening of racial lines, and staggering divides between wealth and poverty” (p.1). Thus, it is important that teachers reflect on what they are to teach the young about such a world (Willinsky, 1998). Also, as Willinsky (1998) suggests, teachers should wonder how they can help their students understand why differences of color and culture, gender and nationality continue to have such profound consequences. Not paying attention to these issues is assuming that there are no differences or that such differences are simply a fact of life. “We are schooled in differences great and small, in borderlines and boundaries, in historical struggles and exotic practices, all of which extend the meaning of difference” (Willinsky, 1998, p.1).

It is true that there are differences and that we live in a divided world; however, I think that such differences can also be used as a resource to bring people together and education can be one of the tools to achieve such a goal. By separating students through education, for example, we are repeating colonial practices. Pennycook (1998) suggests that colonialism should not be seen as a forgotten era in the past, but as the context in which current ideas were framed. The identification of postcolonialism with the “end” of colonialism is “falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory” (Ghandi, 1998, p. 174). Postcolonialism, used in this way, suggests a linear movement of historical development and “progress” towards a new and better world (Ghandi, 1998).

The Tsotsil community who participated in this research strengthens the debate around the term *postcolonialism*, that is, I do not think that the *post* should suggest *progression* towards a better world because the reality lived by the Tsotsil community has not significantly and positively changed from the colonial into the postcolonial era (Del Carpio, 2008). In other words, during the colonization of Amerindian groups in Mexico, the indigenous people were not only exploited economically and politically, but many came to accept a sense of inferiority. “The supposed inferiority of the indigenous population along with the supposed superiority of the non-Indian group persists” (Rippberger, 1992, p. 11). In this respect, Hymes (1971) maintains that “not the least of the crimes of colonialism has been to persuade the colonized that they, or ways in which they differ, are inferior – to convince the stigmatized that the stigma is deserved” (p.3). Such stigma has affected some indigenous children’s perceptions of their native language; for example, Juan Lorenzo believes that Spanish is “more cool and fashionable.” In contrast, he considers those who speak Tsotsil as old-fashioned. If quality bilingual programs were created and implemented in reality, such perceptions could be in part modified by education. There would be more possibilities to move towards a real *postcolonial* era where indigenous children’s identity, language and culture would be respected, preserved and promoted.

The Tsotsil language should be taught in reality at the bilingual school, that is, it should not only be stated on the Plan and Program of Studies. This does not imply that the teaching and learning of Spanish should be forbidden, as the teaching and learning of languages is important in people’s life *because the*

*acquisition of a “second language produces a deep awareness of difference (linguistic and cultural) while at the same time providing bridges to move across those differences”* (The Report of the LSA Foreign Language Review Committee, 2004). Therefore, I think that the acquisition of Spanish and the reinforcement of native children’s first language enrich their knowledge and many aspects of their lives. Thus, the learning of both languages can and should be a meaningful experience rather than a situation where students feel that they have to abandon their own identity, language and culture. To learn Spanish for indigenous children in Mexico has many benefits; however, this does not imply they have to lose their indigenous language.

Teachers who participated in this research as well as the school principal, curriculum designers and coordinators need to be made aware of the importance of taking into account students’ first language, culture and identity in the design of the curriculum, lesson plans and the materials for classes. I believe that curriculum designers should take part in the students’ learning process, at least by observing them, to better understand what needs to be improved in the curriculum and in the educational system in general. Educators should be made aware that the diversity of students’ cultural background can be used as a means to create classroom harmony (Williams, 2007).

According to Kukis (2008), cultural differences can lead to inclusive teaching. Cultural diversity is important for long term survival and diverse instruction can help students to be open to new ideas and different points of views. “If necessity is the mother of invention, then diversity may well be the

mother of creativity” (Kukis, 2008, para.4), so teachers should see students’ diversity as a tool to teach the second language and to reinforce the first language creatively and an opportunity to bring people together. Teachers should not forget that cultural diversity is a fact of life and efforts to build a common culture inevitably privilege the dominant culture. Kukis (2008) states that teaching and learning are a function of culture of student, culture of instructor and culture of department, college and institution.

According to Modiano (1971), “the major goals of the national government to Mexicanize the Indians and bring them into the monied economy are being achieved to at least some extent by the schools” (p. 11). Calvo and Donnadiou (1982) point out that the bilingual education serves to reproduce and further marginalize indigenous communities within the Mexican society. Nonetheless, I believe change is possible, and meaningful change can start by considering students’ own language and culture in the classroom. This can help create classroom harmony and it could lead to a *sense of community* where all cultures are valued and respected and students feel integrated rather than isolated. This could be a good step towards real *postcolonialism* in schools where cultural and linguistic differences are valued rather than ignored. In my opinion, schools should be communities where students feel they have an active role and their opinion and efforts are appreciated, which can be done through inclusive teaching. I agree with Sergiovanni (1994) that it is better “to understand, design, and run schools as social rather than formal organizations, and in particular, as communities”. Sergiovanni (1994) argues that there is a universal need for a sense

of belonging, of being connected to others and to ideas and values too often goes unfulfilled in schools as they are currently conceived (Sergiovanni, 1994). Thus, he suggests that both reformers and theoreticians accept that “schooling is first and foremost about relationships between and among students and teachers, and that community building must be the basis for school reform efforts that seek to improve teaching and learning; all else will come more naturally when authentic communities flourish “(Sergiovanni, 1994).

I believe it is possible to create and implement innovations in the elementary bilingual school where this study was conducted. One of the first steps towards change is to stop seeing bilingual and cultural diversity as a problem and from there start to address the barriers that have impeded the implementation of quality bilingual education. By doing so, the Tsotsil language and culture would be preserved and promoted and formally used as language of instruction and for academic tasks in all six grades of schooling instead of only being informally and mostly orally used in the first grades. This could first help Tsotsil to have a higher status in school and then this could have an impact on other contexts in mestizo society as well. As a result, this could reinforce the positive attitudes of participants towards the Tsotsil language and invite those who dislike Tsotsil to reflect on their negative attitudes towards it and potentially modify them.

### **There is Hope for Change: Changes in Latin America**

Although we are still far from implementing quality bilingual programs, it does not mean it is an impossible task. Changes even when they happen at a slow pace do take place. This can be seen in the examples of political and economic changes that have taken place in Latin America during the last 20 years (Hamel,

2001). For example, one of the most advanced laws with regards to indigenous education was approved in Colombia despite the fact that the native population there is 1%. Another example is the Law of Education in 1994, which establishes interculturality in all Bolivia (Hamel, 2001). This Law is based on citizens' participation. In Guatemala, the country with the highest percentage of indigenous population, peace agreements should be signed after 35 years of war, which opens an enormous political, cultural and educational space for the Mayan peoples. In Mexico, the country of institutional indigenism, an insurrectional indigenist movement took place organized by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), which conquered forums of discussion and gained recognition (Hamel, 2001). Also, EZLN participated significantly in national political debates. Another change in basically all countries with indigenous population in Latin America is that nowadays we have institutions and programs in charge of indigenous education that at least in theory, support the preservation and development of indigenous languages and cultures (Hamel, 2001). In the past, the existence of indigenous peoples was denied in many countries; in other nations, such an existence was considered an obstacle for modernization and objects of efforts for assimilation (Hamel, 2001).

Hamel (2001) argues there are discrepancies between the official discourse (the Law) and daily reality; however, the fact that there have been changes with regards to indigenous people in Latin America cannot be denied. There have been advancements that open a space for the creation of new indigenous rights, the implementation of real intercultural bilingual education and the transformation of

national states (Hamel, 2001). Such changes provide hope that significant innovations can happen in practice, for example, with regards to the type of bilingual education indigenous children in Chenalhó receive.

### **Conclusions**

I definitely learned more about the Tsotsil people in Chenalhó with regard to the situation of their language, culture and worldviews by conducting this research on Spanish-indigenous elementary bilingual education. I believe that the damage caused to indigenous people in Mexico has been significant. Their feelings of inferiority and embarrassment due to the discrimination they have suffered have made them want to abandon their language and culture (Lam, 2009). That is, they want to walk away from who they are, for example, as the Totonacs in Central Mexico have done (Lam, 2009). However, the participants in the study have not yet arrived at that point, that is, they still use their native language in different contexts (at home, in the street, in the market, etc.) in Chenalhó and continue to maintain some of their traditions although some have been modified due to Mestizos' influence. For example, it is common for some of them to dress like mestizos' instead of wearing their typical clothing. The tradition of making and wearing traditional clothes has been disappearing, that is, many young people no longer want to preserve this tradition (Del Carpio, 2011). The school has been one of the agents that have influenced younger generations to abandon their traditional clothing. Tsotsil people such as teacher Rosario feel that all Tsotsil people have being left with is their language, which parents still speak at home and in different contexts and transmit to their children. However, there are students who prefer Spanish instead of their native language Tsotsil due to the

negative attitudes they have towards it such as “the language of old fashioned people while Spanish is the language of fashionable and modern people.” Nonetheless, most students portrayed positive attitudes towards both Spanish and Tsotsil. They speak and would like to continue speaking Tsotsil and are also curious about learning more Spanish, which is a positive attitude towards bilingualism. Parents also want their children to learn Spanish as it can provide students with benefits in their lives such as work and education opportunities which can help them have a better future in terms of economic progress. Also, Spanish is useful according to parents because their children can communicate with other people outside their community. However, this does not mean that parents want their children to abandon their native language as they believe speaking Tsotsil also has benefits for their children, for example, communication with older generations who mostly or only speak Tsotsil such as parents and grandparents. If children speak both Spanish and Tsotsil, they can also act as language brokers (Baker, 2006) and can help their parents who only speak Tsotsil. It is true that speakers of Tsotsil have faced economic, social and political pressures (Baker, 2006) that make them to want to speak Spanish. However, most parents and their children want the Tsotsil language to be preserved, which means they also need help from others, from mestizos in the government, in the media and in the educational system, for example, in order for such preservation to take place.

In terms of education, the plan and program of studies do not necessarily aid the use, preservation and promotion of the Tsotsil language and culture.

Although people in the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico recognize Mexico's cultural and linguistic diversity in theory, significant work still needs to be done so that such recognition takes place in reality. That is, the approach being used in the bilingual school and most bilingual schools in Mexico have aimed at the assimilation of indigenous people into the dominant (mestizo) society (Rippberger, 1993). The Plan and Program used in the bilingual school do not necessarily consider students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and needs. This can be seen in the barriers that I found for the implementation of quality bilingual education, such as the lack of materials in both languages. The teaching of the indigenous language class does not take place for different reasons, for example, the curriculum does not contain a list of contents that should be covered in such a class. As a result, teachers feel they do not have guidance and do not know what to teach in such a class, therefore they spend the time that is supposed to be spent on the Tsotsil language class covering or reinforcing topics from other subjects. In addition, the subjects that are prioritized are Spanish and Mathematics. Also, literacy takes place in Spanish while Tsotsil is mostly used orally and not for academic purposes in the classroom, which reinforces the "superior" role of Spanish. Teachers do not receive enough training in order to teach in the Spanish-Tsotsil bilingual school, that is, the training they receive is for teachers in Spanish monolingual schools, therefore they do not know how to deal with such linguistic and cultural diversity. This shows the need for them to be trained and be made aware of the importance and value of such diversity and how to teach with a bilingual approach. Moreover, they need to be made aware of the benefits of

bilingualism. Sadly, the more students advance in terms of grades, the more they are exposed to Spanish and less to their native language during their learning process in the school. In addition, the suspension of classes during the term prevents teachers from covering or practicing all topics they are to supposed to teach, which also affects students. Another barrier is that teachers such as Federico (the instructor of grade six) are not fluent in the Tsotsil language. Also, he believes it is important to teach in mostly Spanish so that students do not face problems in higher levels of schooling.

It is true that to preserve and to promote a language is a challenging task and that the creation and implementation of quality bilingual education is not enough. However, it is important to remember that schooling is one of the factors that have influenced language shift. McCaa and Mills (1998) argue that “native languages are under assault in Mexico. Education appears to be the "villain" and faulty bilingual education its weapon. Paradoxically, if native languages are to thrive in the next millennium, their salvation likewise will be education and bilingualism their hope” (para. 2). Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) states that the denial of the right to one’s language and culture in schools has certainly had a negative impact on the educational situation of indigenous children and adolescents. Therefore, it is also the responsibility of the educational system to take action to compensate the damage that has been caused to indigenous people, their languages and cultures.

Bastiani (2006) states that we need linguistic policies that define the communicative forms and practices so that language preservation cannot only be

an aspiration. In Mexico, the Law of Linguistics Rights for Indigenous People has been created, which is an asset to the government that at least in theory recognizes Mexico's cultural and linguistic diversity. This is also applicable to the creation of Spanish-indigenous bilingual schools in Mexico although quality bilingual education has not yet necessarily been realized.

Bastiani (2006) points out that we also need a democratic exercise that dignifies indigenous identities and their languages, that is, an exercise where "hyper psychological" images stop being inserted such as "<our Indians>, <our traditions>, <our languages>, <our glorious past>" (p. 35). "Such ideologies continue to offend indigenous people. Instead of this, we need pertinent, intercultural and democratic actions for multicultural societies in Chiapas and in Mexico in general" (Bastiani, 2006, p. 35).

Change is possible and meaningful change can start in the educational field, for example, through quality bilingual education where teaching can involve the creation of a milieu, which is conducive to learning – "one that cares for and respects students' individuality with respect to their culture and linguistic identity (native language), and makes provision for self-reflection, knowing and meeting, in particular, the language and literacy needs of individual learners" (Fevrier, 2008, p. 6). Indigenous people's situation can improve, and this can in part be achieved through quality education. By doing so, we would construct a more just society for indigenous peoples.

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