

movement, and will never be as popular as singing and dancing. It is more likely that the languages and documentation of traditional culture will be cultivated by a small group of apprentices, each working more or less alone, with older tradition bearers (see Hinton 1994). The mainstream of ever-changing Tlingit culture will continue to bypass the ancestral language and traditional world view, but parts of it will survive through the efforts of dedicated learners. We suspect that living language transmission is now at an end for the Native languages of Southeast Alaska, but that language learning will be one of the many markers or "badges" of ethnicity that members of the culture elect to use as an expression of membership and pride.

#### 4 **Mayan efforts toward language preservation**

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##### I **Introduction**

Mayan languages are among the most vigorous of indigenous American languages. They are spoken by over 6 million people in Guatemala alone (Tzian 1994), with significantly large numbers of speakers in southern and central Mexico (Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo, San Luís Potosí, and Veracruz) and Belize. Although Mayas suffered great losses of population and territory as a result of the Spanish invasion of the sixteenth century, their population has largely recovered, and they form absolute majorities in almost all of the communities where they presently live. The great majority of Mayas speak one of the twenty-nine extant Mayan languages, almost always as a first language, and many Mayas are monolingual in a Mayan language, especially among the older population. In spite of these demographic signs of vitality, however, language shift and loss among Mayas is growing at an alarming rate, and Mayan community leaders are increasingly concerned about the future viability of their languages and community structures.

Because of the strengthening of signs of language shift, especially in, but not restricted to, the smaller language communities, Mayan languages must certainly be counted among the world's endangered languages. Mayas in Guatemala have begun to take steps to fortify their language and try to prevent language loss on a grand scale. Whether these efforts will ultimately be successful is of course still unclear, but it may be instructive to examine the measures that are being proposed and followed in a situation where language shift and loss is still in its earlier rather than final stages.

I would like to acknowledge my intellectual debt to the many Mayas I have worked with in Guatemala, especially the past and present members of Oxlujuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (Waykan, José Gonzalo Benito Pérez; Saqijix, Candelaria Dominga López Ixcoy; Lolmay, Pedro Oscar García

Matzar; Ajpub', Pablo García Ixmatá; Pala's, José Francisco Santos Nicolás; B'aayil, Eduardo Pérez Vail; Pakal, José Obispo Rodríguez Guaján; Nikte', María Juliana Sis Iboy; and Saq Ch'en, Ruperto Montejo Esteban).

## 2 Background

Mayas live in a complex society. In Guatemala, they speak twenty different languages natively, some with as few as several hundred speakers and others with over a million speakers. These languages are all historically related, but the differences among them are as great and small, roughly, as the differences among European languages. Thus, several languages are mutually intelligible with practice, much like Spanish and Portuguese, or Dutch and Frisian, but others are as distant and incomprehensible to others as are Russian and English. The Guatemalan languages correspond to five of the six different branches of the Mayan language family; the branches are roughly comparable to the European Romance, West Germanic, North Germanic, Slavic, and Baltic branches. The Guatemalan Mayan languages, according to their branches, are given in table 4.1.<sup>1</sup> Of these languages, the largest is K'ichee', with over a million speakers.<sup>2</sup> Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, and Mam are also very large, with between 400,000 and 700,000 speakers each. The smallest language, and that most in danger of imminent death, is Itzaj, with fewer than 100 older speakers (Hofling

Table 4.1 Mayan languages

<i>Ch'ol</i>	<i>Q'anjob'al</i>	<i>Mam</i>	<i>K'ichee'</i>	<i>Yukatekan (Maya')</i>	
<i>Ch'orti'</i>	<i>Q'anjob'al</i>	<i>Mam</i>	<i>K'ichee'</i>	Uspantek	Mopan
	Akatek	Teko	Kaqchikel	Q'eqchi'	Itzaj
	Popti'	Awakatek	Tz'utujil	Poqomam	
	Chuj	Ixil	Sipakapense	Poqomchi'	
			Sakapultek		

<sup>1</sup> I use new spellings for the names of Mayan languages, in which these names are spelled according to Mayan orthographic conventions. The names, in Mayan and traditional spellings are: Akatek = Acatec, Awakatek = Aguacatec, Chuj = Chuj, Ch'orti' = Chorti, Itzaj = Itzá, Ixil = Ixil, Kaqchikel = Cakchiquel, K'ichee' = Quiché, Mam = Mam, Mopan = Mopán, Popti' = Jakaltec, Poqomam = Pocomam/Pokomam, Poqomchi' =

Pocomchi'/Pokomchi', Q'anjob'al = Kanjobal, Q'eqchi' = Kekchi, Sakapultek = Sacapultec, Sipakapense = Sipacapense/Sipacepeno, Teko = Teco/Tectitec, Tz'utujil = Tzutujil/Tzutuhil/Zutujil, Uspantek = Uspantec.

<sup>2</sup> The figures used here are conservative and are cited from Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' 1995. Other less conservative population projections can be found in Tzian 1994.

1991). Teko and Mopan are also spoken by relatively few people and are gravely endangered, while Poqomam, although not as small or as immediately endangered, has been steadily losing speakers during the past 500 years. Popti' (Jakaltec) is undergoing significant shift, especially in the town center. Uspantek, Sipakapense, Sakapultek, and Awakatek are all spoken in one municipality each, and must be considered to be endangered due to small size alone. The remaining languages, Akatek, Chuj, Poqomchi', Ch'orti', Ixil, Tz'utujil and Q'anjob'al, have populations that range from around 20,000 to well over 100,000 speakers, and for the moment seem to be viable. However, all Mayan languages, including K'ichee', show signs of active shift, in which an increasing number of children, especially in the urban centers, are not learning the Mayan language as a first language, and in some cases, not at all. Two dissertations (Brown 1991 and Garzon 1991) document various aspects of language shift in Kaqchikel, including prestige factors and language dominance in urban compared to rural schools.

Literacy in a Mayan language is not a widespread tradition in this century. There have been two periods in Mayan history when literacy was common enough for substantial literary production to take place. The first of these was between AD 200 and about 1,200, and saw the development and florescence of Mayan hieroglyphic writing, the only true writing system developed independently in the Americas. An enormous literature was produced, only part of which has survived, due to the Spanish policy of destroying Mayan books in an effort to combat Mayan beliefs. The second period was the sixteenth century, when Mayas learned to read and write using a Spanish-based alphabet and produced such classics as the "Popol Vuh" (K'ichee'), the "Annals of the Cakchiquels" (Kaqchikel), and the "Books of Chilam Balam" (Yukatek Maya'). After the sixteenth century, literacy (and literary production) generally declined, except perhaps in the Yucatán, but there have probably always been at least some individuals who know how to read and write in a Mayan language.

Until recent decades bilingualism in Spanish and a Mayan language was relatively low. As late as the 1970s, there were several areas of Guatemala, most notably Alta Verapaz and Huehuetenango, where monolingualism in a Mayan language typically was greater than 85 percent for the Mayan population. Since the sixteenth century there have always been bilingual individuals, who acted as language and culture brokers for their communities, but their numbers were relatively low. Also typically,

the non-Maya population (known locally as *Ladinos*) has been almost universally monolingual in Spanish; thus, the burden of translation and interpretation has been almost entirely borne by bilingual Mayas. Today, bilingualism among Mayas is growing rapidly, especially due to greater educational opportunity and changes in economic structure. In many families an increased attention to the acquisition of Spanish by children has resulted in the emergence, for the first time, of significant numbers of Mayas who do not speak a Mayan language.<sup>5</sup> Language has always been considered to be an immutable marker of identity by Mayas, and for the first time they are being confronted with a situation in which it can no longer be assumed that Mayas speak Mayan.

Social complexity and heterogeneity exist in many spheres besides language. While Mayas have been characterized as being an essentially peasant society that practices subsistence agriculture augmented by plantation wage labor, economic variability is in fact much greater than this characterization would convey (see Smith 1988). There are large numbers of Mayas engaged, as their primary economic activity, in the production of handcrafts, in construction, or in commerce, and smaller but noteworthy numbers who are professionals, especially teachers and governmental or NGO staff. Although all Mayas are "poor" in the national or international economic context, there is measurable wealth differentiation on the basis of land ownership and/or real monetary income. Religious affiliation and practice varies from traditional Mayan to traditional Catholic, to combinations of Mayan and Catholic practice, to fundamentalist and evangelical Christian. Formal educational levels have typically been very low, but are increasing rapidly. Twenty years ago, for instance, it was almost unheard of for a Maya to have any university education, but today there are three Guatemalan Mayas with doctorates, several more studying at the doctoral level, several others with master's degrees, and a quite large number with *licenciaturas* (college degrees). Diversity in educational level has thus increased dramatically as educational opportunities have grown. Mayas have also been characterized as a largely rural population, but in fact large

5 While there were undoubtedly Mayas who did not speak a Mayan language in the past, this usually was accompanied by a shift in identity. There seem to be many young Mayas today, in contrast, who clearly identify as Mayas but who do not

speak a Mayan language, or who learn one late, as a second language. For a related situation among the Tlingit, see also Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer; and among the Mohawk, see Jocks, this volume.

numbers live in municipal centers, which are small urban centers, and in the departmental or national capitals. Finally, Mayas have probably always accorded differential status to community members on the basis of age, community service, and leadership capability, but the parameters of status differentiation have increased as people become more diverse in education, work, and experience.

One aspect of the Mayan experience that has remained relatively constant over the last 500 years is that, although a numerical majority in Guatemala, they have been politically, economically, and socially marginalized since Spanish contact. They own and occupy the most marginal lands, they have been subjected to some of the worst discriminatory practices that can be found anywhere in the world, they have almost no voice in formal politics at the state level, they have been ruthlessly exploited for their labor and at the same time accused of being non-productive, and they have been the victims of ethnocidal civil wars at moments of crisis in Guatemala's history, the most recent in 1980-1984. Mayan languages and cultures are customarily regarded as defective by the dominant *Ladino* population, the facts of an extremely illustrious Mayan history that included high levels of artistic, literary, architectural, and scientific achievement are barely mentioned in public education, and popular images of Mayas characterize them as servile, lazy, stupid, and brutish. The prevailing intellectual concept of Mayas, taught in the national university and quoted widely in the press, holds that the "Indians" of Guatemala are not in fact Mayas, who were all dead long before Spanish contact, but instead are some sort of hybrid (and by implication, impure, and valueless) creation of the colonial period. This attempt to deny Mayas their own heritage and a considerable source of cultural pride is being particularly invoked at the present moment, seemingly in reaction against an emerging Mayan intellectual position, led by Demetrio Cojtí (see Cojtí Cuxil 1991, 1994), which clearly states that the "Indians" of Guatemala are Mayas, that while they are in no way the "product" of colonialism, they are still suffering *Ladino* colonialism, that assimilation to a *Ladino* state and *Ladino* cultural ways is not and should not be their collective goal, and that certain measures of political autonomy and control over identity and community are theirs by right.

This position is part of a widespread movement in reaffirmation of Mayan identity and cultural values, a movement with popular, technical,

and intellectual aspects. One of the first areas of concern within the movement is language because Mayas consider that language has always been one of their strongest cultural symbols. This perhaps helps explain why Mayas, unlike many other peoples, seem to be concerned about language loss while shift is in its early rather than later stages.

### 3 **Language shift**

The signs of language shift and loss among the larger Mayan languages are clear. Many children, especially in the urban centers, no longer speak a Mayan language as their first language. They may have passive knowledge of the language depending on family and playgroup exposure, but they are unable to use the language actively and may exhibit embarrassment and an unwillingness to even try to use it. Some of these children acquire an active knowledge of the local language as they become more fully incorporated into the community (as adolescents or young adults), but it is not at all clear whether this is a general pattern that can be relied on to prevent language loss, or merely a sporadic pattern within some families.

Language loss seems to proceed in a fairly classic manner. Older siblings are more likely to speak a Mayan language than younger siblings. Mothers in families that are undergoing shift usually speak enough Spanish to encourage its use in the household, and seem to be instrumental in the decision to use Spanish rather than a Mayan language in the family. The availability of formal education greatly encourages language shift, because families that are interested in their children receiving the benefits of formal education are concerned that they speak enough Spanish to begin school without a language disadvantage. Older siblings who may have begun school without being able to speak Spanish are particularly instrumental in teaching their younger siblings Spanish, in order to spare them the frequent ridicule that accompanied their own first days in school. Finally, there is a general attitude that Spanish, as a foreign language, requires considerable household attention so that children will learn it well, but Mayan languages will be naturally picked up by Mayan children and therefore need no special attention. The evidence, increasingly, is that Mayan children do not "pick up" a Mayan language naturally when they no longer hear it at home, in school, or even in their playgroups. This is of increasing concern to many Mayan adults.

Language shift and loss have occurred to varying extents in different parts of Guatemala. Factors such as size of the language population, the relative isolation of the community, and differences between rural and urban settings play a large role in determining the pace of language loss. Thus, rural communities are more likely than urban communities to show more language maintenance, small languages have suffered more loss than large languages, and proximity to major urban centers, especially Guatemala City, and to the Mexican border or frontier areas has resulted in greater shift. Therefore, for instance, the large and very important urban center of Quetzaltenango, originally a K'ichee'-speaking city, has many K'ichee' families in which no one speaks the language, going back three generations. In addition, the eastern part of Guatemala, relatively sparsely populated by Mayas, has whole towns that once were "Indian" in the census figures and no longer are, presumably as a result of complete language shift several generations ago, accompanied by a total shift of identity as well. The examples of Quetzaltenango and the east aside, the more usual pattern seems to be that language shift, where it is occurring in large numbers, is a relatively recent phenomenon, affecting mostly children and, in some places, young adults. Most people report that in their home communities the urban centers are undergoing shift, but that the outlying villages show few signs of shift yet.

### 4 **Cultural reaffirmation and language maintenance**

Guatemalan Mayas are undergoing a quite remarkable renaissance of cultural pride accompanied by the reaffirmation of cultural values. This is a widespread movement which undoubtedly had its roots in the 1970s, but began to flourish and take on a very coherent form in the last decade, following the devastations of the Civil War in the early 1980s. Language is a focal point for cultural revitalization. Mayan languages constitute one of the principal symbols of an unequivocally Mayan identity, they are still spoken by the overwhelming majority of the Mayan population, and they are the principal communicative devices through which Mayan world-view and philosophy are learned and transmitted. As a consequence, Mayas have begun to articulate a program for the reinforcement of their languages. In its most ideal form, that program involves:



- 1 Mayan control of language decisions;
- 2 the standardization of Mayan languages in at least their written forms, and possibly in their spoken forms as well;
- 3 the expansion of the domains of usage of Mayan languages to the written, and the reinforcement of other domains such as public speech and conversation, or use in the home;
- 4 the use of Mayan languages in the schools as mediums of instruction rather than only as instruments for the acquisition of Spanish;
- 5 the establishment of principles whereby Mayan languages are recognized as official regional languages.

The most important concrete event marking the beginning of a program directed toward language maintenance was the establishment of the Academy of Mayan Languages. After a lengthy process the Academy was approved as an autonomous state institution in 1991, the first government approved and funded institution that is wholly directed by Mayas and devoted to Mayan interests. As such, it possesses great symbolic and political value. Four years before its eventual approval, however, in 1987, the unofficially constituted Academy took its first instrumental action, when it convened a meeting to discuss and establish a "unified" alphabet for Mayan languages and then had that alphabet legalized by presidential decree. This event was of great symbolic and practical importance.

Its symbolic value lies in the fact that Mayas were signaling that they would henceforth be in charge of decisions affecting Mayan language use and standards. Official, legally approved alphabets had been established for Mayan languages several times in the past, but their proponents were never Mayas. At the meeting where the new alphabet was discussed and chosen, non-Mayas were allowed to listen and to speak during the proceedings, but were not allowed to vote. The practical importance of establishing a "unified" alphabet, by which Mayas mean both a single way of writing each language and also that the alphabet used for each language should be as similar as possible to the alphabet for every other Mayan language, is closely connected to the goals of standardization and the expansion of domains of usage for Mayan languages. For literacy to be successful, the first requirement is that there be a single convention for the writing of each language. Although conventional agreements about how languages should be written involve more than alphabets, the choice and interpretation of graphemes is the first step.

The goals of the Academy have always been to promote the use and preservation of Mayan languages, in a context that provides for linguistic self-determination of the speakers. Since its legalization at the end of 1991, the Academy has in part struggled with exactly what its mandate is or should be. Almost immediately the goal was expanded to include the promotion of Mayan culture as well as language, which has led inevitably to a certain confusion about where resources should be used and what kinds of projects should be undertaken by the Academy. During 1992 it was severely criticized for expending considerable effort in a reforestation project, which, while it could certainly be argued convincingly that it would have an impact on Mayan life, had a somewhat more tenuous connection to Mayan culture and an even more tenuous connection to Mayan languages. The fact that the Academy is the only state institution devoted to Mayan interests and directed by Mayas encourages its extension into all aspects of Mayan life; what some Mayas have called an overextension. One point of view holds that the Academy must first fulfill its mandate to promote Mayan languages, and then if it still has resources to devote to other projects, well and good. An opposing point of view holds that languages are situated in a cultural matrix, and that all aspects of culture need attention as part of the task of promoting language.

The internal structure of the Academy is interesting. In a deliberate effort to counteract the tendency of state institutions to become unwieldy bureaucracies with low productivity, the designers of the Academy of Mayan Languages chose to follow a populist model for its structure. Speakers of the twenty different Mayan languages<sup>4</sup> were organized into "language communities," each with an elected governing board. The presidents of the twenty language communities form the advisory board of the Academy, and each year they elect from among themselves an administrative board of seven members. In addition there are provisions for hiring staff in the various "departments" of the Academy, such as linguistics, education,

4 The Academy recognizes twenty-one languages, because it counts a dialect of K'ichee', called Achi, as a separate language, thereby respecting the separate political traditions of the Achi (Rab'inaleeb') community. One of the recognized languages, Akatek, refused to organize itself into a language community governed by the Academy, on

the grounds that their language should not be separated from Q'anjob'al. Linguistically, Akatek and Q'anjob'al are either very closely related languages or very distantly related dialects of the same language, so the point is arguable. They are equally distant from Popti' (Jakaltek), which is always considered to be a separate language.

translation, and so on. This experiment in anti-bureaucratic organization has had mixed results so far. On the one hand, state institutions require a certain weighty bureaucratic apparatus, because of required legal and financial accountability to the state, so it appears to be impossible to avoid all of the bureaucratic pitfalls. In 1994 the Academy had already experienced a major labor dispute and by the end of the year had an almost complete turnover in its technical staff. On the other hand, the populist nature of the community organization and electoral process has resulted, so far, in a situation where the majority of the presidents and board members of the linguistic communities are unsophisticated about the technical aspects of language preservation and promotion. The president of the Academy in 1993, for instance, has been quoted as saying that he did not consider that the Academy's main goal involved linguistic work; it had other, more important things to do. What these community leaders are good at is rallying popular support, which also has its positive and negative sides. Such support will be absolutely necessary for language-preservation measures to reach the communities. However, there is some danger that the leadership will lose sight of the more technical goals of the Academy in pursuing their own political ends, or will compromise certain necessary technical decisions by conceding to popular, but uninformed, opinion.

In addition to conceptual and organizational problems which are still being worked out in the Academy, there is a very grave problem of lack of technically adequate personnel. This reflects, in part, the lack of a sufficient number of such individuals among the general population to fulfill the Academy's needs, but also reflects an unwillingness on the part of those people who are technically capable of doing the work to take an employment chance in a new institution which is not yet organized well and which cannot offer better or more secure employment than they already have elsewhere. Some of those individuals already work for the state in positions where they are unwilling to jeopardize their pensions, others work in situations where they know that they are respected and productive and are unsure about whether they can be equally productive in the Academy, and still others work at higher salaries than the Academy can pay. Reports of labor disputes and quarreling among members of the board have not helped attract new people to the technical positions. As a consequence, the Academy at the present is too woefully understaffed to accomplish most of its linguistic goals.

In spite of criticisms of the Academy on the part of many Mayan leaders, more or less as outlined here, it receives substantial support from those same leaders. Criticism thus far is meant to be constructive and arises from a very real commitment to the goals of the Academy and great enthusiasm for the real possibilities in self-governance and self-determination that the creation of the Academy has opened up. The Mayan leadership hopes to be able to slow language loss measurably, and believes that a language academy is critical to accomplish that.

In addition to the Academy of Mayan Languages, there are a number of other groups and institutions that contribute directly to language preservation. One set of institutions provides linguistic training to Mayas, thereby contributing to the creation of a necessary pool of individuals who will be responsible for the technical decision-making required by standardization. These include principally the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM), Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA), the Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL), and the Universidad Mariano Gálvez (UMG). The PLFM taught basic descriptive linguistics and dictionary-making procedures to about eighty people between 1972 and 1977, and taught intensive descriptive linguistics and Mayan grammar to about forty more individuals in 1988 and 1989. OKMA is a linguistic research group formed by some of the people who were in the 1988 or 1989 classes at the PLFM, and has continued the intensive study of Mayan linguistics and the production of grammatical and scholarly materials about Mayan languages. Both of the universities have *licenciatura* programs in linguistics or sociolinguistics, in which the great majority of the students are Mayas and the aim is to study linguistics as applied to Mayan languages (see England 1995, for a fuller description of these programs).<sup>5</sup> Both universities publish small journals devoted to linguistics, and the URL has a very active linguistics institute which publishes books in and about Mayan languages, many of them designed for children or secondary-school students. In spite of these programs there is still a dearth of adequately trained linguists in Guatemala, but the situation is greatly improved by comparison with a few years ago.

5 I have been involved as a teacher and technical advisor in all of these programs. I was a linguist at the PLFM between 1971 and 1973, teaching linguistics to speakers of Mam, K'ichee' and Kaqchikel and coordinating the Mam group. I taught the

intensive linguistic courses at the PLFM in 1988 and 1989, and have been the technical advisor to OKMA since its inception in 1990. I taught in the Mariano Gálvez in 1990 and in the Landívar in 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1997.

Most languages (but not all) have someone who has received some training in linguistics, and there are now several highly trained linguists.

In education, the National Program in Bilingual Education (PRONEBI, now DIGEBI) was established in 1985. Although often analyzed as an essentially assimilationist program (see Cojtí Cuxil 1991), PRONEBI has produced school materials in Mayan languages and has the potential to reach a very large number of Mayan schoolchildren. The existence of the program means at least that Mayan languages are used by more teachers and heard in school by more children than they were in the past. In an increasing number of communities private "Maya schools" have been established. These schools all have the goal of introducing as much specifically Mayan cultural and language material into the curriculum as feasible. Most of them describe themselves as bilingual, although the actual amount of the curriculum that is taught in a Mayan language is usually minimal. Nonetheless, the Maya schools usually take a positive attitude toward the use of Mayan languages and encourage them to the best of their ability, given the curricular, financial, and pedagogical constraints under which they operate. Finally, the previous administration appointed, for the first time in Guatemala's history, Mayas as the Minister and Vice Minister of Education. The Vice Minister, in particular, was very active in trying to reform the school system so that it takes more account of the educational needs of Mayan children. One of his contributions, for instance, was to establish the principle by which a school district that is primarily Mayan should have a Maya as Supervisor of Education.

There has been an increase in the production of materials in Mayan languages in the last few years. Several regional newspapers that have columns in a Mayan language have been established, the Academy of Mayan Languages for a while had a monthly series of articles in a Mayan language in one of the national newspapers, and several new radio programs in Mayan languages have been initiated. Calendars, appointment books, invitations, posters, and fliers in Mayan languages have been appearing with greater and greater frequency. The URL and PRONEBI have produced some children's literature and school materials in Mayan languages. While there are still almost no basic scholarly materials written in Mayan languages, the publication of grammars and other treatises about Mayan languages has grown, largely due to the efforts of Mayas who have become linguists.

## 5 **Specific successes and problems for language maintenance**

Returning to the five points that comprise a Mayan program for reinforcement of their languages, certain successes and problem areas can be identified.

### 5.1 *Mayan control of language decisions*

The establishment of the unified alphabet in 1987 was a resounding success, in terms of signaling that Mayas would henceforth be in charge of language decision-making. This was not done without some cost; in particular, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)/Wycliffe Bible Translators mounted an intensive campaign against the alphabet changes. Many evangelical Mayas were mobilized to oppose the new alphabet, and eventually a "human rights" complaint was filed against the Academy of Mayan Languages, to no effect. Although largely dissipated now, the effects of the SIL position are still felt in some language communities where conflict about minor and unimportant alphabet changes still occurs (see also Grinevald, this volume, for a discussion of the comparable situation in Brazil). A more serious deleterious effect was to convince many people that reading and writing in a Mayan language is essentially very difficult, so that any alphabet change would make it impossible. The fundamental issue at stake seemed to be precisely that of control.

Mayas are not yet in agreement about what control of language decisions means. There is considerable discussion, sometimes acrimonious, about who, exactly, should be in charge. The principal points of tension involve:

The central Academy versus the individual language communities: do the language communities have independent decision-making power or not? If there is a disagreement about a decision between the experts in the central Academy and the members of the community, who prevails? If the level of expertise is greater in either the central Academy or the linguistic community, should that affect the weight of the decision-making power of one or the other?

The central Academy versus other institutions with linguistic, language, or educational expertise: are other institutions required to wait for pressing practical decisions from the Academy? Are they required to abide by those decisions if they are in disagreement? Do other institutions need to be licensed in some way by the Academy? The Academy calls itself the "maximum director" of issues having to do with Mayan languages, what

does this imply regarding the role and independence of other institutions that also work in this field?

Technical expertise versus popular opinion: are language decisions technical or popular? If the decisions involve writing, do people who are unable to write in a Mayan language have a legitimate opinion? Who is able to represent popular opinion?

Descriptive linguistic versus sociolinguistic expertise: given that there are two different university degrees given in linguistics, one a degree in linguistics and the other a degree in sociolinguistics, which kind of degree is more valid for making decisions? Are there real differences in the preparation of people with these two different degrees? Who are the technical experts? Should specific positions be limited to one or the other kind of expertise?

Speakers versus non-speakers, including other Mayas who are not speakers of the language in question but can offer trained linguistic opinion: should linguists who are not speakers of the languages in question be excluded from any decisions about those languages? Does this include technical or board members of the central Academy? Should foreigners be excluded? Should either of these categories of non-speakers be listened to, even if not allowed to vote on decisions?

Part of the lack of agreement stems from the fact that Mayas are in a completely new situation. They have not had a similar opportunity in 500 years to establish language policy at a national level. As a consequence, there is considerable jockeying for political position within this new arena. With time, procedure and lines of authority will doubtless become clearer. If the eventual model for how to handle decisions is collaborative rather than dictatorial, then greater success in establishing a coherent language policy can be anticipated.

### 5.2 *Standardization of Mayan languages*

The Academy has done almost no work on standardization beyond the establishment of the alphabet. Because of the problems in agreement mentioned previously, the Academy has also been unable, so far, to reform its own alphabet where needed. Two other groups, however, have been making substantial contributions to standardization: the Kaqchikel Linguistic Community and OKMA. The Kaqchikel community publishes a short newsletter in which new vocabulary is introduced; it is involved in a project to create new (largely technical) vocabulary, and also in a two-year project with OKMA to write a complete reference grammar of Kaqchikel which will suggest standard forms beyond the level of writing. The members of OKMA, working in Kaqchikel, K'ichee', Tz'utujil,

Poqomam, and Q'anjob'al, and with the recent addition of Mam, have written pedagogical grammars with some attention to standardization, and writers' manuals; they also are completing the reference grammar project. Standardization will eventually need much larger teams of investigators than OKMA, with only one or two people per language, can provide, but their work may provide a good model of how to proceed. PRONEBI has made a number of ad hoc standardization decisions which in many instances are inadequately thought through. In addition, because their materials are directed toward children and child-language use, standards from adult language are not always applied.

Standardization is the single most technical issue in language reinforcement. Unless it is accomplished, literary production and the expansion of literacy will always be problematic, because people need both good models and a certain amount of technical reference materials to be comfortable with literacy. The reference materials do not yet exist. These include, minimally, complete monolingual dictionaries and reference grammars for each language. Bilingual dictionaries, writers' guides, specialized vocabularies, and so on are also helpful. So far, one monolingual dictionary (K'ichee') and five reference grammars (K'ichee', Kaqchikel, Mam, Tz'utujil, and Poqomam) are being written. They will not yet be totally standardized because not enough research about specific dialect differences has been done. Writing dictionaries and grammars is hard, and very few people have the technical expertise to embark on these projects. Furthermore, they require a long time to complete. The level of technical competence required frightens many people, including leaders in the Academy of Mayan Languages, so it often seems more feasible to do something else, something less demanding. If, however, sufficient Mayas are not provided with the necessary training and opportunities to make these materials and make rational decisions about standard forms of their languages, standardization and the expansion of literacy will not occur.

### 5.3 *Expansion of domains of use*

As mentioned, there are considerably more sources for published material in Mayan languages than previously, although the quantity is still not great and literary production has not by any means reached the level of the sixteenth century. Similarly, more Mayan is being heard in public events, beginning to reverse a trend toward exclusive use of Spanish publicly. Impressionistically, it seems that more Mayas are willing to speak in a



Mayan language in informal public settings, such as on the street or in the bus. Another rather interesting phenomenon is that Mayan leaders, whose families have often been the worst examples of language loss because of higher levels of education and similar social factors that promote language loss, have begun to reassess language use in their homes. Some have children who are too old to benefit greatly from this reassessment, but others, with younger children, have in some cases reversed the trend toward language loss in their own families. This is still an individual phenomenon and cannot be evaluated yet as a general tendency, but there may be significant positive effects for language retention if it can be seen that some of the children of major leaders, most of whom receive high levels of formal education and enjoy a relatively high economic status, are good speakers of a Mayan language as well as Spanish. Another factor that compounds the problem of language maintenance for many leaders is that there is a growing tendency for them to marry spouses from other language groups.

The extent to which the promotion of expanded domains of usage for Mayan languages is reaching ordinary community members is still unclear. Many Mayas are still more concerned about the acquisition of Spanish by their children than the maintenance of Mayan languages. It is still too early to know to what extent the position taken by Maya leadership has real impact in the communities, or to know to what extent community members share that position.

#### 5.4 *Mayan languages in the schools*

The existence of PRONEBI and the Maya schools have ensured that Mayan languages are being used more in the schools than previously. In addition, there are several normal schools with specifically bilingual teacher certification, and there are several other normal schools that attempt to incorporate some material about Mayan languages or courses in a Mayan language into their curriculums. School materials in or about Mayan languages are still much too scarce, so all schools suffer from a lack of adequate materials to meet their needs. PRONEBI schools also have a significant problem promoting their programs to their teachers and parents. Many teachers are highly resistant to using the new materials that PRONEBI provides, often because they are then required to teach something that they have little or no competence in. Most teachers are unable to read and write in a Mayan language, even if they are Mayas. Parents are often unconvinced

that Mayan language should be part of the curriculum; they send their children to school principally to acquire Spanish. Parents of children in Maya schools are typically not as skeptical about the benefits of Mayan language for their children, but then they are preselected for their interest in a specifically Mayan cultural content in the schools.

#### 5.5 *The recognition of official regional languages*

For the first time, the idea of officializing Mayan languages at the regional level is being discussed among national political leaders, especially in the context of the Peace Accords signed by the government and the guerrilla leaders. Mayan leaders find the idea tremendously attractive, but also somewhat daunting. If Mayan languages were to be recognized in any official capacity, it would imply an even greater urgency to the problem of standardization, still in its initial stages. Official scribes, writers, interpreters, and translators would all be necessary, and there is almost no one, at present, who can fulfill these functions. If regionalization should occur in the near future, the entire process of adjustment to its role that the Academy is going through would inevitably be cut very short, because the demands on it for both clear decisions and concrete products would increase dramatically. If it were to prove incapable of meeting the legal demands of regionalization, then Mayan capacity for autonomy and leadership would be severely challenged.

## 6 **Conclusions**

Mayas have in place programs or models for meeting almost any requirement for language maintenance. They have a clearly articulated program devoted to the reinforcement of Mayan languages. There is an official state institution with some funding dedicated to the task of language promotion. There are individuals with the expertise for making the technical decisions required in standardization and language promotion. Several institutions are producing school materials. There are efforts toward increasing the production of literature. There is a heightened level of consciousness about language maintenance and loss among the leadership and possibly in the general population as well. Bilingual teachers are receiving some training in language. There are university programs for the preparation of linguists.

Problems can be divided into two major areas. First, resources are severely limited, so all of the institutions and groups that are currently working for language preservation are understaffed and much less productive than is needed. Serious linguistic research is only taking place in one quarter of the languages, school materials are limited or unavailable, the technical staff in the Academy is miniscule, very few teachers ever receive in-service training in literacy, and so on. With the approval and funding of the Academy, the Guatemalan government supported Mayan languages for the first time, but the resources are still much too limited to accomplish much. This problem is being partially alleviated by the willingness of European governments and the European Economic Community to invest in programs that promote indigenous cultural reinforcement.

Second, the complexity of embarking on a totally new effort in a large and diverse society is overwhelming. Mayas are not in agreement about exactly how to proceed in the formal tasks necessary for language promotion. The process of working out procedures can be very healthy and positive, but there are also risks involved. The risks that seem most salient at the moment are the risk of losing sight of the goals of language preservation in political bickering, and the risk of losing credibility through an inability to produce, especially on the part of the Academy of Mayan Languages. The problems of complexity must be solved by Mayas themselves. There is ample talent among Mayas to meet all of the challenges they face, but it has been repressed so brutally for so long that it requires time to be brought forth.

## 5 **A chronology of Mohawk language instruction at Kahnawà:ke**

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The following is a chronology of developments since the inception of the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) language instruction program into our school system in Kahnawà:ke, Quebec, the mistakes we made, and also the status of the program today.

### 1 **The development of the Kanien'kéha program**

Prior to 1970, the only thing native in our schools was the children. There were no native teachers, no native content, no relevant history, no stories, no songs, no pictures, and least of all, there was no Mohawk language. This had a very negative impact on our self-identity and our self-image, so one of the goals of our program today is to reverse this by immersing children not only in Mohawk language, but also by surrounding them with native teachers, content, history, culture, pictures, and stories.

In September, 1970, due to the efforts of a small group of parents and a sympathetic non-native principal, the Mohawk language was introduced into our schools for fifteen minutes every day for every grade. Three courageous people from the community were asked to take on this challenge and teach. They applied for and received a small grant from the Federal Department of Cultural Affairs to cover a small salary. These people had no training and no materials, but what they did have was the conviction that this was something that had to be done. They also planted a seed: the daily instruction increased from fifteen minutes a day to a half hour over the next several years.

1972 was a milestone year. At this time the University of Quebec began offering a teacher-training program, initiated by our Combined Schools Committee and funded by the Quebec office of the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. Five people from the community enrolled to receive what was originally designed as a specialized teaching certificate. This