

Mayan Languages and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala

Latin American Studies Association
Chicago, Illinois September 24-26, 1998
Ajb'ee Odilio Jiménez Sánchez

Introduction

In contrast with the official statistics, about 60% of Guatemala's approximately 10 million inhabitants are Mayas (Fisher, 1996:9). Besides the Mayas, three other nations that had different origins coexist Guatemala (Cojtí, 1996: 20): Xinca, Garifuna and the Ladino community¹. The coexistence of these communities make Guatemala linguistically and culturally diverse. Mayas belong to a group of people of the same name and that flourished between the years 250 and 900 A.D. The fragmentation of the classic Maya society led to a variety of communities, each of which speak a different Mayan language. Today there are 29 Mayas languages spoken in Mexico, Belize, Honduras and Guatemala. Like any language, Mayan languages are an important element of culture and therefore basic for a group of people struggling for their rights in a society in which they have been socially and culturally marginalized by the dominant group. The Mayan movement in Guatemala strives for a better way of living in a society where there is still social, political, and cultural inequality. The social transformation that Guatemala is undergoing makes Mayas in Guatemala seek ways to broaden their legitimate socio-political participation. Since a main focus of the Mayan movement is language and since Mayan languages have not shared the same socio-political space as Spanish within Guatemalan society, the movement seeks their official recognition and promotes their usage as part of the process of constructing a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural society. In this paper, each of these goals will be examined and the accomplishments in terms of language that have been achieved by the Mayan movement since the signing of the Peace Accords will be analyzed. I will also review the work that many Mayan organizations have been doing to keep their languages alive and to promote their usage.

The Mayan Movement

There has been a cultural and linguistic reaffirmation in Guatemala in recent decades. Since the colonial period, interethnic relations in Guatemala have been characterized by social inequality, exploitation, cultural and linguistic discrimination, and lack of access to education and other social services. The dichotomy Ladino-Maya has been very well marked. These social phenomena have resulted in the creation of various

¹“Ladino” is the Guatemalan term for the non-Mayan society that has been the dominant group since the Spanish conquest.

ways of confronting these problems (injustices) such as the indigenous movements during the colonial period and after independence, and the popular movements born during the 36-year war between the guerrilla and the government. All these movements were basically interested in social equality but were based on class. Many political movements were composed mostly of Mayas but none of them were directly involved in a struggle for cultural and linguistic reaffirmation.

By the beginning of the seventies, annual meetings were being held by Mayas (Cojtí, 1997:96) whose goals were to pursue social justice and to construct an egalitarian society based mainly on the reinforcement of identity, the revitalization and recognition of Mayan culture, as well as the autonomy and development of their own nations (Cojtí, 1997). In spite of the human slaughter--directed specifically against Mayas--that was carried out by the Guatemalan army between 1978 and 1984, the Mayan movement became more active in its struggle and demands. The beginning of the "democratic" period in 1985 and the recognition of some of the many Mayan organizations that arose during the 80's were also crucial in fostering the movement. Now, more Mayas are conscious about our cultural heritage and the importance of being "someone" in the midst of a socio-cultural change in Guatemala. The Mayan movement calls for Mayan participation in political and socioeconomic decisions and, most importantly, seeks recognition and respect as being culturally, linguistically and historically different from the "official" culture. The dominance of Ladino culture for more than five centuries has reduced the practice and maintenance of Mayan culture. As a response to this loss, the Mayan movement in Guatemala, besides seeking cultural and linguistic reaffirmation, is working in accordance with national and international law in order to stop the Ladino population from dismantling Mayan power through cultural and linguistic assimilation. As Fisher puts it, the Mayan movement "...is two-pronged: to work for the conservation and resurrection of elements of Maya culture while promoting governmental reform within the framework of the current (1985) Guatemalan constitution and international law" (Fisher, 1996:13). Since the provisions of the Guatemalan constitution regarding indigenous people's rights are weak or have not been enforced, the movement also bases its struggle on international treaties such as: The Agreement on the Rights of the Child, signed by the Congress in 1990; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ratified in 1983; Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Communities signed by the government and the guerrilla in 1995; the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the International Labor Organization's (ILO's) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries ratified in 1997. In accordance with the ILO's Convention 169, for example, Mayan people should have the right to territorial autonomy; to self-determination "...which may be exercised within

the framework of the Guatemalan state (internal self-determination)” (Cojtí, 1996); the right to economic, social and cultural development; to education; and to language usage, maintenance and revitalization.

Mayan Languages Today

In Guatemala, Mayas speak twenty historically related languages which belong to five of the six branches of the Mayan language family. K’ichee’, the largest, has around a million speakers whereas the smallest language communities have only a few thousand even by liberal estimates². All these languages represent an ethnic pride among Mayan people because they “identify” the speakers with a specific linguistic community. The idea is subjective in that speaking a language is the sign of a community’s existence and it is the basis for their cultural identity. We Mayas unconsciously identify ourselves as “Mam speakers”, “K’ichee’ speakers”, “Mopan speakers” or the like, to show our relationship with the community to which we belong. Although Cojtí (1996) includes history, self-awareness, and the will to be members of a particular community as ethnic identifiers and definers, language is the most important trait that both links Mayas with the great past (Brown, 1996) and that it is still widely presented among Mayan communities nowadays. A good example of what Fisher (1996) calls “in-group allegiances” comes from the Q’eqchi’ community in Alta Verapaz where Ladinos and even other Mayas from a different linguistic community are forced to learn Q’eqchi’ as a key to being accepted in the society and participating in discussions (personal communication with a Poqomchi’ speaker).

Despite the many laws passed since the Spanish contact that attempted to extinguish Mayan languages (Skinner-Kléé, 1995), they are still widely spoken and “...represent a uniquely authentic cultural possession for their speakers. As a banner for ethnic pride, the Mayan languages are appropriate because, unlike many other cultural elements, they have remained largely intact throughout the centuries of foreign incursions and upheaval in Guatemala” (Fisher, 1996:14). However, this is not generally acknowledged in Guatemala. Rather, the linguistic complexity of the country has been considered by Ladinos to be an obstacle for development. The language used in the education system is Spanish and until recently, Mayan languages were used in schools only for the purpose of assimilating Mayas into the dominant culture by forcing them to learn Spanish. Even in the current (1985) Guatemalan constitution, Article 143 considers Spanish “the official

²All these languages have evolved from the Proto-Maya, a language that was probably spoken in the northwestern part of Guatemala approximately 3500 years ago. Estimates vary but an approximate number of speakers for each Mayan language spoken in Guatemala is: K’ichee’ = 1,000,000; Mam = 686,000; Kaqchikel = 405,000; Q’eqchi’ = 361,000; Q’anjob’al = 112,000; Tz’utujil = 85,000; Ixhil = 71,000; Ch’orti’ = 52,000; Poqomchi’ = 50,000; Popti’ = 32,000; Poqomam = 32,000; Chuj = 29,000; Sakapulteko = 21,000; Akateko = 20,000; Awakateko = 16,000; Mopan = 5000; Sipakapense = 3000; Itzaj = 3000; Teko = 2500; Uspanteko = 2000 (OKMA, 1993:10-19).

language of Guatemala” whereas the Mayan languages are only considered as “cultural patrimony” of the country. Although Mayan languages have strongly resisted Spanish influence, it is important to note the increasing language shift that some Mayan languages have undergone especially in the last twenty years (England, 1996:178). Negative ideas about Mayan languages have been instilled among Mayas and as a consequence many parents have refused to teach their children the mother tongue³. Many parents find this reasonable since they have the mistaken idea that Mayan languages “...will be naturally picked up by Mayan children and therefore need no special attention” (England, 1995). Being the “official” language and the language used most extensively, Spanish continues to be dominant, resulting in the segregation of Mayan languages such that the only places for Mayan language use and preservation are at home, with friends in rural areas, with older people, etc. This narrowing of the context of Mayan language use increases language shift and eventually language loss.

Woodbury (cited in England, 1996) proposes that languages are “linked to essential cultural content”. His argument is two-fold. First, what can be transmitted and interpreted by the native speaker is more complete than if another language is used to convey the same message. For example, the use of directionals in Mam and other Mayan languages is a linguistic trait which conveys deictic meanings besides the idea of direction. Only these speakers can communicate and comprehend the metaphorical ideas that are added to messages. Second, if a group of people loses their native language, their cultural heritage is also lost. It is on this last aspect that the Mayan movement has put special attention. As many authors have stated (Brown, 1996; England, 1995, 1996; Fisher, 1996), the increasing language shift among the Mayas has become obvious and it has become of great concern among Mayas as more children grow up without being able to speak a Mayan language. Here is where the Mayan movement plays an important role in regaining linguistic self-determination and more space within the framework established by the Guatemalan constitution. Seeking cultural-linguistic autonomy in a country where there has been great social inequality has also been a focal point for the Mayan movement. The struggle for linguistic and cultural reaffirmation, specifically the revitalization of Mayan languages, is crucial not only to foster Mayan languages through officialization, standardization and modernization, but also seek political and socioeconomic power (constitutional reform, social reform, etc.). It is important to analyze the

³Many parents worry about teaching children Spanish as the only “true” way to succeed in life. Others take Spanish as the starting point to pursue a formal education therefore they implement its usage in the household. Possible causes for this phenomenon are: 1) Spanish has been the language of prestige therefore it has to be taught to children at home; 2) Immigration of Mayan people to urban areas and the proximity of many communities to urban centers has made children grow monolingual in Spanish; 3) Mayas and non-Mayas criticize the “impurity” of Mayan languages due to Spanish influence (Brown, 1996); 4) Parents desire to prevent their children from suffering rejection and inferiority because of their incapability of speaking Spanish.

proposals that have been presented by Mayas and what has been the government's response to these demands. It is also useful to assess the accomplishments that have been achieved by Mayas themselves.

The Mayan Movement and its Struggle in Terms of Language

The Mayan movement is a socio-political struggle that Mayas have undertaken to peacefully "...revive and strengthen their cultural heritage , which has been submerged by centuries of colonialism (external and internal, overt and covert)" (Fisher, 1996:14). Language has also been affected by this internal colonialism and as a result, Mayan languages are still not officially recognized by the Guatemalan government. Therefore, considering that Mayan languages connect people with their past, continue to be widely spoken and are the most important way to transmit the Mayan worldview and other cultural elements to new generations, a central focus of the Mayan movement is the revitalization of Mayan languages. In response to language shift that Mayas are experiencing, the Mayan movement has started a series of actions that aim to revitalize Mayan languages and to promote their use among all the members of the Mayan society by: 1) increasing linguistic consciousness among Mayas as well as decreasing Mayan and non-Mayan disdain toward indigenous languages; 2) expanding the domain and usage of Mayan languages through their maintenance and revitalization at all levels, especially written; 3) creating more "true" bilingual education schools where children can receive instruction in both Mayan and Spanish language; and 4) emphasizing Mayan languages' official recognition. Overall, the aim is not only the construction of a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual society, but also economic and social justice for Mayas and for all Guatemalans.

Although previously there had not been interest on the part of the government in reinforcing Mayan languages, some changes have been made in the last few years. The creation of the Mayan Language Academy of Guatemala (ALMG for its acronym in Spanish)--which, after four years of unofficial operation, was legally empowered in 1991--was a remarkable step for the Mayan movement. It is the first governmental institution in Guatemalan history led only by Mayas and its work is committed to Mayan languages. The main purpose of the ALMG is to promote Mayan languages at the spoken and written levels basically in the community where each language is spoken. To facilitate this task and to carry out projects, the Academy has organized "linguistic communities" in each linguistic area. In addition, the Academy is in charge of regulating the writing system in order to strengthen language use and maintenance.

An important step for the revitalization of Mayan languages was the official recognition by the government of the "unified" alphabet proposed by the ALMG in 1987. The aim was to create an alphabet that

would integrate and reinforce the writing system in Mayan languages, considering that they belong to the same linguistic family. Since Mayas were concerned with the increasing influence of Spanish at the written level, they created an alphabet which would represent Mayan graphemes, making necessary changes for those confusing characters also used in Spanish. The writing system has been and still is one of the most controversial topics in terms of Mayan languages. The main causes go back to colonial times when the Mayan alphabet was totally replaced with Latin characters. Before 1987, many institutions and particular individuals had written in Mayan languages but using various alphabetical systems. This not only caused confusion and made literary production and education in Mayan languages difficult, but was rapidly leading to language loss. The “unified” alphabet was a great step in the process of increasing literature in and about Mayan languages as well as reducing the influence of Spanish, especially in speech.

The signing of the Peace Accords between the government and the guerrilla in 1996 was also crucial for the Mayan movement although there was hardly any Mayan representation in their negotiation. In terms of Mayan languages, in the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Communities signed in 1995, the government commits to: 1) enact a constitutional reform that would list all the languages spoken and which the government must recognize, respect and promote; 2) promote the use of indigenous languages in education so that children can read and write in their native language; 3) promote the use of Mayan languages in the delivery of social services at the community level; 4) inform members of indigenous communities in their own languages about their rights, obligations, and opportunities; 5) promote training programs for bilingual judges and legal interpreters; 6) support the positive valuing of indigenous languages, open new spaces for them in the social media of communication and cultural transmission, and fortify organizations such as the Mayan Language Academy; and 7) promote the officialization of the indigenous languages, creating for this purpose the Committee for the Officialization of Mayan languages composed of members of the linguistic communities and the Mayan Language Academy (Compilation of the Peace Accords, 1997). These commitments show the Ladino willingness to prepare Mayas professionally and institutionally for the new era of linguistic revitalization. Both Mayas and the government have the responsibility to promote Mayan languages in the process of seeking social equality. The government’s will to reinforce the revitalization of Mayan languages is obvious; however, putting all the theoretical work into practice is a difficult task and, to date, very little has been achieved.

The bureaucratic system that characterizes government institutions has negatively affected the work of the Mayan Language Academy. Although an effort to avoid this bureaucratic tendency was made and the “linguistic communities” were created, the Academy has had only limited success in promoting Mayan

languages. All state institutions, including the ALMG, are in some degree contaminated by a bureaucratic system which does not allow them to pursue their goals. For example, frequent changes are made in the administrative board which is elected each year. It is not possible to implement projects in twenty⁴ Mayan communities in one year. Moreover, from my own personal experience, the few linguistic project proposals that are approved have to be carried out in a very short time (4 months, at the most).

The lack of sufficient well-trained professional Mayas in specific fields such as public administration, linguistics, education, translation, etc. required for the ALMG to carry out its functions has also been a problem. The few professional Mayas who have been trained in these fields prefer to work in a different institution because they can succeed better in their field or because they can get a better salary, benefits or job security than in the ALMG. Because of administrative problems, most of the technical staff fled to different institutions in 1994 (England, 1995) and again between 1997-98. The creation of the “Kaqchikel Foundation”⁵ this year as a way to accelerate the process of promoting Kaqchikel language can be seen as a way of seeking some degree of “independence” from the ALMG and also suggests that the ALMG is not capable (in terms of funding and personnel) of meeting the community’s needs.

In spite of the problems that the Academy has undergone, it is admitted among Mayan leaders that its work has contributed in increasing the linguistic identity in each community. More Mayas recognize the existence of “Mayan languages” and not “dialects” in Guatemala and many others have become interested in improving their skills, written and oral, in their native tongue. In terms of standardization, however, the unified alphabet is the only major contribution that the ALMG has made. Most linguistic communities have incorporated the new official alphabet and have started to produce materials according to their resources. The Kaqchikel community is a good example, having taken advantage of every single opportunity they have had to produce more written materials in and about Kaqchikel. This will enhance the contributions to standardization at the written level and eventually at the spoken level. In pursuing this goal, they have been involved in projects to create neologisms and at the same time to publish their work in order that it may be immediately used by the community. On the other hand, there has been disagreement on the “unified” alphabet in at least two Mayan languages: Mam and K’ichee’. They mainly fight over vowels whether they

⁴The Mayan Language Academy recognizes twenty one Mayan languages taking Achi, a dialect of K’ichee’, as a different language.

⁵The Foundation is non-governmental and it is composed of Kaqchikels who had had the experience working with language at the Kaqchikel Linguistic Community.

should keep the system of ten vowels: five long and five short or use only five shorts⁶. The conflict is mainly technical but Mam and K'ichee' "leaders" have turned it into a political issue people and making it confusing for those who have not been trained in linguistics. It is unfortunate that, after confronting many problems in the past on the same issue, the unified alphabet is still not accepted in some linguistic communities. Mayas have to focus more on the technical aspect of language so that they can be prepared and trained to understand the structural grammar of their own languages.

Almost two years after the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Communities was ratified, very little has been done by the government. One of the few state actions has been the creation of the Committee for the Officialization of Mayan languages composed of government representatives, Mayan political leaders, and members from the ALMG and each linguistic community (including Xinka and Garífuna). Their main goal was to discuss and propose to the Congress the specific procedures to officialize indigenous languages. Their proposal, turned in last April, recommends the constitutional recognition of each indigenous language and their officialization in their own territory⁷. Although the committee has already fulfilled its responsibility, the proposal is still in the Congress. Constitutional reforms have not been made and, as a matter of fact, the Congress just started discussing the topic this week. It will probably take a long time until they decide the issue, thus delaying the officialization of Mayan languages. The other components of the Agreement (language promotion, bilingual training, etc), have not yet been implemented by the government. Meanwhile, the Mayan movement keeps working on other aspects of the issue and in pursuing each goal, it fosters the usage, domains and revitalization of the Mayan languages.

Through the Bilingual Education National Program (DIGEBI for its acronym in Spanish, formerly PRONEBI), the government has attempted to increase the usage and maintenance of Mayan languages. The program has produced school materials in Spanish and Mayan languages to be used to promote Mayan languages in the first three years of elementary school. However, DIGEBI still needs to widen its work by increasing the number of schools and incorporating more years of school especially in this very remarkable transitional period for Mayan languages. Despite the written materials it has provided, DIGEBI's contribution has not been very successful. The only advantage is probably the use of Mayan languages by teachers and a

⁶Both linguists and the ALMG recognize ten vowels in both languages: five short and five long. This system has been proven as being not only a historical trait that many Mayan languages still preserve but also a system that works better for speakers when it becomes to reading. Therefore, it is misleading to think that five short vowels will simplify the teaching-learning process at school and will keep the language from "English influence".

⁷After gaining official recognition, they would be used in all state institutions: schools, health centers, courts, the mass media, etc. Promotional programs have to be implemented so that people, Mayas or non-Mayas, increase their domains in the new official language.

large number of schoolchildren at least at the spoken level. DIGEBI has been criticized by teachers as being the promoter of language localism and therefore contributing to the segregation of language. Thus, published materials that reach the schools are often abandoned and wasted because they do not meet the community's linguistic needs. It has also been criticized by the ALMG and other non-governmental institutions for not being technical in the use of the unified alphabet and in the creation of neologisms.

As many have stated and I agree, Mayas within governmental institutions have been hindered in accomplishing their goals because of the bureaucratic system that operates in these institutions. However, many Mayan leaders have been making substantial contributions to the struggle of revitalizing Mayan languages. Our work, especially in non-governmental institutions, has been focused on increasing the production of literature in many Mayan languages. We Mayas believe that writing in and about Mayan languages is one of the tasks that has to be undertaken in order to reduce language fragmentation as well as to strengthen the standardization of Mayan languages, at least at the written level. In pursuing this goal, Many Mayas have published literature such as stories for children, novels, school materials, newspaper articles, translations of official documents (Guatemalan constitution, Agreements, law terms), descriptive and pedagogical grammars, dictionaries, articles on neologisms, etc. The "pro-language movement", as I call it, is mainly concerned with enhancing language prestige among speakers and non-speakers since Mayan languages have not only lost prestige but also have not been written in a long time. Mayan languages would, of course, be strongly fortified if more Mayas write and read in their native language.

The pro-language movement aspires to expand the domains of usage of Mayan languages in order to prevent language shift and loss, to increase literary production in and about Mayan languages, to prepare Mayas for more technically advanced work in terms of language preservation. It is the beginning of a very long path but a number of organizations have made significant contributions and many young Mayan leaders have become involved in this issue at the institutional level. Non-governmental organizations such as the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM), Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA), Mayan Writers Association (AEMG), Centro de Estudios de la Cultura Maya (CECMA) and numerous smaller organizations within each linguistic community are implementing projects to strengthen Mayan languages. I will take the work of OKMA as an example because it is the NGO with which I am most familiar and since OKMA's contribution to the revitalization of Mayan languages has been recognized by scholars within and outside the linguistic community. Being aware of the importance of strengthening written language, OKMA, a group of young Mayan linguists organized in 1990, has published several books analyzing the structure of Mayan

languages.⁸ These publications include: a set of pedagogical and prescriptive grammars as well as a set of grammars of reference for various Mayan languages. (It is significant to note that a number of Mayan presses, e.g, Cholsamaj, Nojib'sa, and Saqb'e, are involved in the publication of Mayan language materials produced by OKMA and other NGOs.) The technical and analytical work that OKMA has carried out serves several purposes: it strengthens written and spoken language; it provides tools for their standardization; it has a multiplying effect in terms of language usage and maintenance; it creates the basis for the elaboration of other materials such as monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and standardized grammars; it shows uninformed people that Mayan languages do have grammatical structure. In addition, OKMA has trained young Mayas outside the university, especially in the field of linguistics. In this respect, OKMA's contribution, besides the publications mentioned above, was to carry out a two-year project in which thirty-six Mayas from nine different linguistic communities were trained and currently doing analytical work which will contribute to the standardization of Mayan written language. They are conscious of the fact that their native languages are not "pure" but on the other hand they seek to strengthen their languages by their analytical work at OKMA⁹.

Other areas where Mayan leaders have been active in promoting Mayan languages is in the teaching of Mayan Linguistics, Bilingual Education, Legal Translation, Sociolinguistics, Politics, etc. to Mayas (and non-Mayas) at the university level. Teaching has become an unavoidable task for the Mayan leaders in the last few years, especially in universities where the percentage of Mayan students is growing. It is also recognized that, in the process of preparing more Mayas in the struggle of Mayan language revitalization, the personnel available do not meet the need completely. As a response to this need, more programs have been implemented in private universities at the "licenciatura" level. As the Mayan movement has become stronger, it has encouraged more young Mayas to enter the university and enroll in programs which will in turn increase the number of well-prepared professional Mayas. Therefore, higher education is taken with pride among Mayas because it enhances their opportunities to achieve their goals in terms of cultural and linguistic reaffirmation. A recent occurrence, perhaps the most important in Mayan higher education to date, was the significant increase in the number of Mayas who enrolled in Rafael Landívar University, taking advantage of the opening of more than four hundred scholarships in fields such as Linguistics, Legal Translation, Bilingual Education,

⁸OKMA's work has been focused on technical linguistics in several Mayan languages: at first in Poqomam, Tz'utujil, Kaqchikel, K'ichee', and Mam, and, more recently, in Poqomchi', Q'eqchi', Q'anjob'al and Popti'. OKMA is involved in a two-year research project (1997-1998) on "Dialectal Differences" in order to propose a standard way to write the languages mentioned above.

⁹I would like to acknowledge here the contribution of Dr. Nora England in forming and guiding the group of researchers who make up OKMA.

etc. In addition, URL has also opened two new Masters programs in Bilingual Education and Human Rights. The training that Mayas are obtaining will enhance their ability to work on the structural analysis of their own languages, work in courts, in bilingual education programs, or in other contexts.

Rafael Landívar University (URL) has also made significant contributions in the publications of various materials in and about Mayan languages. Through its Institute of Linguistics, URL has published valuable material ranging from stories for children to descriptive grammars in several languages. The Institute is currently involved in the elaboration of grammars of reference as well as legal translations in several Mayan languages. The effort being made by URL and other institutions through their publications on technical and analytical linguistics, not only show remarkable steps towards the revitalization of Mayan languages but also meet the speakers' needs especially since more and more young Mayas are enrolled in related programs at the university level.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Mayan movement focuses mainly on the revitalization of Mayan languages as a marker of cultural and linguistic identity. The pro-language movement is concerned with decreasing the effects of Spanish influence as well as with increasing the prestige of Mayan languages through education and publication. The government's efforts toward the maintenance of Mayan languages has been, to some degree, helpful in promoting Mayan languages at the written level. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations and universities have made significant progress by publishing linguistic works and by training more and more young Mayan leaders. Publishing more materials and teaching more Mayas enhances the effort to expand the context of Mayan language usage, thus regaining more linguistic autonomy. Teaching provides a new generation of Mayas with the tools for more challenging tasks in the future. Mayas know that attaining literacy in Mayan languages is a formidable task but in pursuing this, more Mayas have to get involved in writing technical and analytical works about the structure of their language.

The pro-language movement admits that there has been a decrease in the use of Mayan languages which signifies language shift and loss. Nevertheless, remarkable steps both from the government's point of view and from the Mayas' perspective have been achieved. What has been done in Guatemala in terms of linguistics is not only technical linguistic analysis (Fisher, 1996), but also the starting point to consolidate Mayan languages and reduce the linguistic fragmentation that they have undergone. This would give Mayas the basis for a more complete bilingual education program, at least at the primary level, and it would enhance the prestige of Mayan languages among speakers and non-speakers. Furthermore, Mayas have, to some degree,

broadened their usage of Mayan languages. They are now being used in some areas--such as in education, in the courts, the mass media, in government matters, in urban areas, etc--which a few years ago were the exclusive domain of Spanish. Overall, Mayas are willing and are getting prepared for the new era for Mayan languages. More Mayas are now aware of the cultural and political importance to speak their native language in public, make translations, pursue a degree, teach at university level, etc. However, in spite of these accomplishments, much still remains to be done especially on the part of the Guatemalan government with respect its commitments outlined in the Peace Accords.

Bibliography

- Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala. 1992. *Ley de la Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala y su Reglamento*. Guatemala: Maya Wuj.
- Barre, Marie-Chantal. 1985. *Ideologías Indigenistas y Movimientos Indios*, 2nd Edition. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno.
- Brown, R. McKenna. 1996. The Mayan Language Loyalty Movement in Guatemala. In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. by R. McKenna Brown and Edward F. Fisher, pp. 165-177. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio. 1997. *Ri Maya' Moloj pa Iximulew: El Movimiento Maya (en Guatemala)*. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- . 1996. The Politics of Maya Revindication. In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. by R. McKenna Brown and Edward F. Fisher, pp. 19-50. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Comisión de Oficialización de los Idiomas Indígenas de Guatemala. 1998. *Propuesta de Modalidad de Oficialización de los Idiomas Indígenas de Guatemala*. Chimaltenango: Nojib'sa.
- England, Nora C. 1998. Mayan Efforts Toward Language Preservation. In *Endangered Languages*, ed. by Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley, pp. 99-116. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1996a. The Role of Language Standardization in Revitalization. In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. by R. McKenna Brown and Edward F. Fisher, pp. 178-194. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1996b. *Introducción a la Lingüística: Idiomas Mayas*. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- . 1996c. Contributions of Maya Linguists to Identity Politics and Linguistics. Conference paper presented at the University of Iowa, October 1996.
- . 1995. Linguistics for Indigenous American Languages: Mayan Examples. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, Vol. I: 122-149.
- . 1994. *Autonomía de los Idiomas Mayas: Historia e Identidad*. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- Fisher, Edward F. 1996. Induced Culture Change as a Strategy for Socioeconomic Development: The Pan-Maya Movement in Guatemala. In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. by R. McKenna Brown and Edward F. Fisher, pp. 51-73. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Fisher, Edward F. and R. McKenna Brown. 1996. Introduction: Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala. In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. by R. McKenna Brown and Edward F. Fisher, pp. 1-18. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Jiménez, Odilio. 1997. Tensión Entre Idiomas: Situación Actual del Español y los Idiomas Mayas en Guatemala. Paper presented at the 20th International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Guadalajara, Mexico, April 1997.
- Oxlajuuj Kij Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA). 1993. *Maya' Chii': Los Idiomas Mayas de Guatemala*. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- Skinner-Klée, Jorge. 1995. *Legislación Indigenista de Guatemala*, 2nd Edition. Mexico: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano.
- United Nations. 1997. *Recopilación de los Acuerdos de Paz*. Chimaltenango: Saqb'e.