

Mensajes de los abuelitos: Reclaiming Zapotec ways of knowing and community-based biliteracy practices in Oaxaca, México

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Abstract: A challenge facing Zapotec teachers in intercultural bilingual schools in Oaxaca, México is a persistent colonial system of national curriculum that places greater value on Western, monolingual, epistemological knowing-about knowledge over community-based, ontological, Indigenous knowing. The biliteracy teaching methods, shared here by two native Zapotec teachers at two Zapotec bilingual schools, honor community-based *xkialnana*, local ontologies that work to develop student biliteracy/identity development and challenge normalized/official/colonial knowledge acceptance at schools. Amid questions of language planning and policy, translanguaging is both leveraged and critiqued in an effort to achieve decolonial teaching and to keep *mensajes de los abuelitos* alive.

Keywords: decolonial; epistemologies; instrumentalization; ontologies; translanguaging; *xkialnana*

Introduction

In Indigenous Latinx communities across Mexico, serving the educational needs of Indigenous youth and addressing the persistent threat to their language and culture is the focus of intercultural bilingual schools, like the two reported on in this study. It is common to frame this kind of education within the literature on Indigenous language maintenance and revitalization, but in doing so it should not be overlooked that students, their families, and educators in these communities both desire and deserve Indigenous language/Spanish biliteracy development. This article places biliteracy at the forefront and discusses the innovative community-based pedagogy of two Zapotec-Spanish bilingual teachers in two intercultural bilingual schools in the southern Mexican State of Oaxaca. Although the Mexican Constitution mandates intercultural bilingual education and biliteracy is the desire in Indigenous communities, we will see below that colonial/Western ideas of knowledge, coupled with a national education system influenced by the monolingual paradigm that “imposes the Spanish language and ways of learning on indigenous children” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011, p. 181) can lead to insufficient biliteracy instruction in these communities. In this vein, García and Velasco (2012) describe Indigenous educators’ commitment and desire for biliteracy, but contrast this with the negative influences of top-down language and biliteracy education practices. Although the schools described in our current study have also fallen victim to monolingual ideologies that result in insufficient biliteracy instructional time, the purpose of this article is to highlight bottom-up, Indigenous ways of knowing that are being enacted to try to infuse more biliteracy and ontological Indigenous knowledge at schools, through a community-based approach. Resituating Indigenous education contexts in Mexico, from merely maintenance and revitalization, to also contexts of biliteracy efforts demands a questioning of how biliteracy is understood and allowed in Indigenous communities. We first ask and theoretically address the question of what is knowledge and who’s knowledge is accepted when schools are allowed to think and act beyond a Western/colonial frame? Then, through analyzing the community-based biliteracy instruction in a Zapotec community we raise and begin to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways can biliteracy instruction be expanded to allow for community-based, multimodal performances of Indigenous ways of knowing that both disrupt a colonial knowledge frame and keep alive *mensajes de los abuelitos*?
2. How might including these community-based *mensajes de los abuelitos* and leveraging translanguaging practices inform the status and acquisition planning of Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy and address monolingual ideologies and concerns of parents that Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy instruction will impede children’s Spanish development?

What is knowledge and who’s knowledge counts?

In taking up the first question about knowledge and what knowledge means to the Zapotec people, we first acknowledge that this article is mostly written in English and that alone will trigger an English, Western, colonial frame of thinking. We will need to first explain, and then disrupt this thinking by comparing and contrasting how knowledge is talked about in English to Spanish and Zapotec, the languages in this biliteracy context, in order to understand the challenge facing Zapotec teachers in Mexico who wish to incorporate the ontological knowledge of the community. The lexical and semantic boundaries of English limit our discussion of knowledge and the amount and degree of knowing something, be it something rather large, such as a language or a more specific skill, such as literacy of a language, to one

general verb: to know. This limitation is meaningful, as it unfortunately acts to collapse all talk about and subsequent decisions regarding learning, biliteracy instruction, and educational policy into one clumsy and messy category of “knowing.” The Spanish language makes a distinction between types of knowledge, with the two verbs, *saber* and *conocer*. Rocha (2015) points out that “*Saber* is a form of the verb ‘to know’ that can only be used to speak of information or data: knowing about things...*Saber* is to know- about. *Conocer* is to know. *Knowing-about* is epistemological knowledge. *Knowing* is something that at least approaches ontological knowledge” (p. 29).

If someone were to ask us, “¿*Saben cuántos alumnos hablan Zapoteco en la escuela?*” [Do you know [*saber*] how many students speak Zapotec at school?], our response would demonstrate that we know something about that information. On the other hand, if someone were to ask us, “*Conocen los alumnos que hablan Zapoteco?*” [Do you know [*conocer*] the Zapotec speaking students?], my response, as an outsider to the community would differ from that of my two co-authors, who have both grown-up in the community and have taught these students for many years. Although I might know about (*saber*) the students (what they look like, how old they are, etc.), I do not know (*conocer*) them. However, my co-authors know (*conocer*) these students’ families, have taught their siblings, have grown-up with their parents, have shared meals at their houses, etc., and thus *los conocen*.

Xkialnana /*ʃkelnana*/, the Zapotec word for to know or knowledge, differs from both the English “to know” and the Spanish verb *saber*, which due to pressures of performing on high-stakes standardized tests in Western schooling are both understandings of knowledge that privilege the epistemological knowledge of knowing-about content at the expense of deeply knowing the content. Yet, *xkialnana* also cannot be truly understood as just *conocer* either. Although *conocer*, as knowing, more approximates a deeper experienced knowledge, *Xkialnana* is still something more profound. *Xkialnana* describes knowing or the knowledge of something that you already know, that you have learned, and can express-a dictionary of knowledge that one possesses.

Disrupting a colonial knowledge frame: Top-down vs. bottom-up “decolonial” biliteracy efforts

We take the time to make these distinctions of knowledge to make the point that in order for Zapotec teachers to reclaim Indigenous ways of knowing for biliteracy practices in intercultural bilingual schools, we must first recognize that the system of power, the Mexican federal education system, is influenced by a different understanding of knowledge. Disrupting this system means disrupting a persistent colonial and Eurocentric national education curriculum that places greater value on Western, White, monolingual, epistemological knowing-about knowledge over profound, community-based, traditional, ontological, Indigenous knowing; a knowledge that is vital to the maintenance of the Zapotec language and way of life. Documenting the tension between Indigenous ways of knowing and national educational curriculums and the reclaiming of what counts for schooling in Indigenous communities in Mexico, is a direct link to redefining biliteracy in Latinx communities. As Pérez and Enciso (2017) problematize the normalized “right amount of culture in a work in relation to the needs and desires of a presumed White reader” and how cultural authenticity in books often comes at the price and in the form of what is “manageable for a White readership” (p. 3), we document the tension between the “right” amount of Zapotec that can be used in biliteracy instruction and is digestible for parents, teachers, and administrators in Mexico, influenced by the traditional

hegemony of Spanish and by an increasing English hegemony. Through a highly centralized control of national educational curriculum, Mexico has been successful at decreasing the country's illiteracy rate (Santibañez, 2019), but has this come at the expense of a lack of focus and value on biliteracy development in Indigenous communities? And with former Mexican president Peña Nieto's 2017 initiative of Mexico being Spanish-English bilingual in 20 years (Mora-Pablo, Lengeling, García-Ponce, 2019), what space will there be going forward for Spanish-Indigenous language (such as Zapotec) biliteracy development in Indigenous communities in Mexico? Tinajero and Englander (2011) demonstrate that although starting in the early 1990s Mexico experienced a "shift to new discourses that respected indigenous languages and cultures, institutional factors have not been altered sufficiently to improve the conditions of indigenous education or their well-being in Mexico (p. 163). Paciotto (2004) describes a bilingual bicultural program in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua with a stated biliteracy goal in Spanish and Tarahumara and reports that a struggle remains in working within a top-down, federal program to finding a way to include community-based biliteracy acceptable to the needs and desire of community members. Paciotto claims that "the process of transformation of the school from an agency of transmission of mestizo values and knowledge systems to an agency which integrates indigenous values and knowledge systems has yet to be accomplished" (p. 544). Similarly, Azuara and Reyes (2011) describe the experience of Mayan children in the Mexican state of Yucatan and state that the government provided materials written in Maya "do not use the local Maya dialect" and that "biliteracy is not fostered at school" (p. 184). Finally, writing in the same context as our current study, the Isthmus Zapotec or Diidxazá speech community, De Korne (2017) describes palliative biliteracy efforts, claiming

The imagined future of Diidxazá-Spanish biliteracy put forward by language advocates is in line with a positive shift towards self-determination and pluralism in a national context that now recognizes Indigenous languages as national languages alongside Spanish, but unfortunately, it remains starkly separate from some of the goals and concerns which are urgent for many education actors (p. 169).

Similar chasms in other Latinx communities between mandated top-down national curriculum and bottom-up community-based knowledge educational efforts, have been well researched by academics, some in collaboration with Indigenous teachers as is the case with our study. McCarty (2006) writes, "In colonial, neocolonial, and diasporic contexts, how are local epistemologies asserted and new norms established for what and whose literacy 'counts' (p. 1)?" McCarty documents how "asserting Indigenous literacies and education rights collide with larger bureaucratic texts" and how teachers can reclaim their pedagogical power and own literacies by "asserting their role as change agents and recentering the community-based mission of their school" (p. 2). Even as themes of recovering "a historical perspective in our understandings of literacy and literacies" (p. 2) and contesting "the dangerous sterility of universalist or autonomous views of literacy and the reductive pedagogies they impose" (p. 3) abound in McCarty's seminal collection of essays on language, literacy, and power in schooling (2006; see Rockwell's essay on Indigenous Accounts of Dealing with Writing; Nicholas' essay on Negotiating for the Hopi Way of Life Through Literacy and Schooling; McCarty's chapter on The Power Within: Indigenous Literacies and Teacher Empowerment), one could argue that talking about asserting "local epistemologies" (p. 1) might be understood through a decolonization lens.

According to Francisco Antonio (2015), a decolonization approach for advocating for the insertion of Indigenous knowledge in school curriculum can succumb to superficial processes of

formal and administrative decolonizing and thus run the risk of celebrating an epistemological, rather than ontological break from colonial knowledge. Francisco Antonio, an Indigenous Ayuuk professor of biliteracy in Oaxaca, Mexico, calls for a “decolonial” (ontological) way of thinking that values and legitimizes Indigenous categories of thought (2015, p. 1). Francisco Antonio contends that this can lead to decolonial education models, such as the community-based teaching approaches for biliteracy highlighted in our study below, that contest normalized official school knowledge and advocate for a more diverse understanding of what knowledge is and can be at schools (2015; see also Medina & Baronet, 2013). Below, we describe how tapping into community-based knowledge for biliteracy instruction and development not only disrupts the top-down official curriculum, but also may be the essential biliteracy strategy needed to combat monolingual ideologies that drive concerns that Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy development will slow down Spanish literacy development.

Addressing monolingual language policy and planning

By law and in theory, the idea of mother tongue language rights is embraced throughout Mexico (Hamel, 2008; Santibañez, 2016), but its practice is neither common nor easy to facilitate, due to the reality that ultimately students and their schools are held accountable to testing in Spanish. The assertion of local ontologies through community-based *xkialnana* as a decolonial pedagogy is both difficult within the demands of meeting the requirements of the national curriculum and questioned by school personnel and even Zapotec-speaking parents, whose ideologies of educational success are heavily influenced and defined by meeting the benchmarks of epistemological knowing-about literacy knowledge, first in Spanish and then in Zapotec. As described above in other Indigenous educational contexts throughout Mexico, this can lead to insufficient time in the Indigenous language for meaningful biliteracy development. And although the inclusion of Zapotec in the two intercultural bilingual schools, described in the study below, is limited to only about two hours a week, two teachers are combatting this by expanding the notion of biliteracy instruction to include multimodal/multilingual performance, play, and the inclusion of community-based *mensajes de los abuelitos*.

Through this blended-microethnographic study, conducted by a White, Spanish-English bilingual professor of bilingual/multicultural education at a major university in the South-Central of the U.S. and two *maestros Zapatecos originarios* (native Zapotec teachers) in the *pueblo originario* (native village) of La Soledad Salinas, Quiatoni Tlacolula, Oaxaca, México, we describe multimodal biliteracy teaching methods. These methods derive from and honor community-based *xkialnana*, local ontologies that work to facilitate Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy/identity development and in doing so challenge normalized/official/colonial knowledge acceptance at schools, increase the amount of meaningful Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy development at schools, and raise the instrumentalization of Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy in the community. We share these decolonial methods of Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy instruction and discuss the potential role of translanguaging as a solution for both acquisition and status bilingual language planning and policy in our study of two intercultural, bilingual schools below.

Two Case Studies:

Escuela Primaria Intercultural Bilingüe: Ramón López Velarde

Escuela Primaria Intercultural Bilingüe: Luz y Progreso

La Soledad Salinas, Quiatoni Tlacolula, Oaxaca, México

Context, Procedures, and Findings Related to Zapotec/Spanish Biliteracy Challenges

Context. Zapotec speakers, some 450,000 individuals, comprise the third largest Indigenous ethnic group in Mexico (Thompson, 2016). Zapotec is the name of a family of 58 languages and the majority of Zapotec speakers live in the two Mexican states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. The context of this study is the Western Tlacolula Valley and the *pueblo originario Zapoteco* (native Zapotec village) of La Soledad Salinas, Quiatoni, Tlacolula, Oaxaca-situated two and a half hours South-east of the capital city of Oaxaca, a state in southern Mexico. Most residents, especially the youth, of La Soledad Salinas speak Spanish and although 99.25% are Indigenous and 87.71% speak Zapotec, only 10% of the population in this region of Oaxaca is literate in Zapotec (Przymus, Ruiz Jiménez, & Pérez García, in press; Soledad Salinas, n.d.; Zapotec: Western Tlacolula Valley (n.d.). Since the majority of community members speak Zapotec, but are not literate in Zapotec, educational discussions in the two intercultural bilingual schools, described below, center around raising the importance/instrumentalization of the Zapotec language through increasing biliteracy instruction. This is evidenced by the quantity and quality of writing facilitated through the creation of bilingual books, plays, poems, and community-based skills presentations shared below.

Public education for the just over 3,000 people who live in Soledad Salinas consists of one high school, one middle school, and three primary schools. The two primary schools represented in this study are Luz y Progreso, where classes are imparted in the morning (matutino) and Ramón López Velarde, where a different group of elementary school children attend classes in the afternoon (vespertino). Luz y Progreso (Light and Progress) is a public intercultural bilingual school, whose nine teachers serve 199 students. It is estimated that all but two to three teachers speak Zapotec, but the majority of instruction is in Spanish (all but one-two hours per week) due to a lack of resources in Zapotec and ideologies of parents, critical that teaching in Zapotec will slow down their children's progress in Spanish. Co-author, Virgilia Pérez García (Viki) currently teaches first-grade at Luz y Progreso. Ramón López Velarde is also a public intercultural bilingual school and the 10 teachers at Ramón López Velarde serve 213 students. Of the 10 teachers, seven speak Zapotec, but similar to the Luz y Progreso school, Zapotec instruction only occurs about one to two hours/week, usually on Thursdays. Co-author Felipe Ruiz Jiménez (Wihdxya) currently teaches third-grade at Ramón López Velarde.

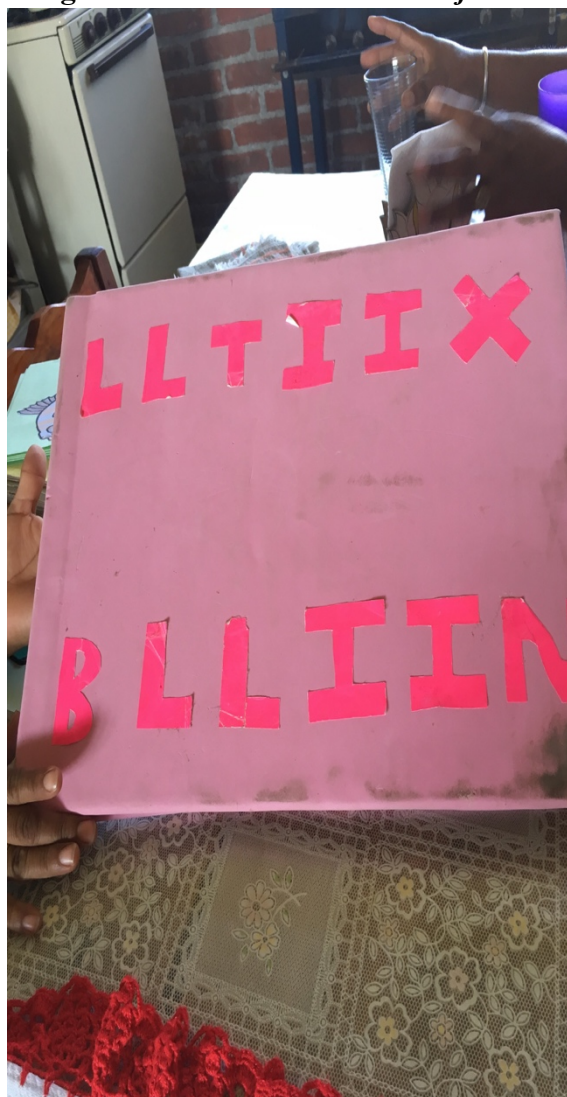
Procedures. I (Przymus) first met Wihdxya and Viki as their English and information technology for education instructor at a major U.S. university during the Fall of 2013. For the entire 2013/2014 academic year, I interacted professionally and personally with Wihdxya and Viki, along with 38 other Indigenous teachers from all across México, who were part of the Agency for International Development (USAID) Project SEED (Scholarships for Education and Economic Development). Our discussions regarding biliteracy instruction in Indigenous communities began during this year when I piloted a translanguaging model for biliteracy development with these teachers, in which I purposefully and strategically created space in every lesson for the teachers to use English, Spanish, and more than 10 different Indigenous languages throughout our English and computer courses (Przymus, 2016). After the teachers returned to Mexico and over the past five years, I have maintained consistent contact with many of these teachers via Facebook and email, often exchanging/sharing both personal and

professional/teaching stories about how they have used translanguaging to promote Indigenous language/Spanish biliteracy in their communities. In the Fall of 2018, I had the opportunity to visit Wihdxya and Viki, share with their families, participate in community activities, observe, listen, and learn. The knowledge shared over the past five years and relayed here can be viewed as a blended-(online/face-to-face)-microethnography, understood as describing “how interaction is socially and culturally organized in particular situational settings, such as classrooms, where key episodes of consequence for people’s lives may be taking place in the course of everyday routines” (Garcez, 2017, p. 435). In calling this study a blended-microethnography we wish to honor both our sustained engagement of bilingual/biliteracy pedagogical discussions online, over an extended period of time (five years) and our embedded in-person engagement during my time spent with Wihdxya and Viki in Oaxaca. In order to address the first research question, both Wihdxya (Felipe’s preferred Zapotec name, which means “the arrival of the rains”) and Viki graciously share their perspectives, examples of personally created poetry and didactic materials, and examples of student work below to bring their community-based biliteracy pedagogy alive.

Expanding biliteracy methods to include multimodal performances of community-based knowledge “*mensajes de los abuelitos*” that contest normalized/official knowledge

Mensajes de los abuelitos. Wonderful examples from U.S. schools of expanding biliteracy methods to include multimodal synthesis of students’ own lives include, Martínez-Álvarez and Ghiso’s (2017) study involving Latinx children’s use of photography to document their worlds and Alvarez’ (2017) study highlighting how children’s language brokering skills in Mexican immigrant families, facilitated their biliteracy development. These two studies provide a similar backdrop for understanding the kinds of biliteracy strategies highlighted below, that also use pictures, art, language brokering between Indigenous elders and students, and translanguaging. Documenting, sharing, and teaching with messages or lessons passed down from grandparents, is a biliteracy method that both engages the community in Zapotec language policy, planning, and practice at school and keeps ontological knowledge alive and at the forefront of students’ education. Throughout our conversations, both Wihdxya and Viki stressed the importance of elders’ knowledge. What is it that grandparents know and what can students learn from them? First, students are tasked with investigating a theme by interviewing parents, grandparents, and neighbors. Second, they collaborate with these community members and their parents to write their findings in Zapotec and in story form. Finally, the students become authors by creating and presenting their own books. Images 3-6 are a series of photos showing a book produced in Zapotec, by Viki’s third-grade students in 2016-2017, that is a collection of *mensajes de los abuelitos* (Przymus, et al., in press). Learning from their grandparents’ knowledge of animals, students practice Zapotec and also discuss their learning in Spanish. Using this knowledge as a base for biliteracy development acts to contest and reject Western knowledge through not simply translating texts from Spanish, but rather by using authentic texts derived from local knowledge. It is essentially in the act of viewing this knowledge, not just the knowledge of the national curriculum, as the important knowledge to learn at school, where the contestation of Western knowledge and the acceptance of local knowledge lies.

Images 3-6. A collection of *mensajes de los abuelitos*.



Page 1: If a toad urinates on your face, you can become blind.



Page 2: The lizard buries her eggs below the ground



Page 3: It is bad luck if a roadrunner passes in front of you, but if he runs alongside you, you will be prosperous.

Mensajes de los abuelitos are also a form of educating students with community and family values. For example, other *mensajes de los abuelitos* gathered by students teach lessons, such as

- Don't sit on the corn, or you will fill with grains
- Don't lay down while eating tortillas, or you will get sick
- Don't sit by the corner of the table, you can get hurt

are forms of teaching children how to act, such as at the table, and behave well.

Multigenerational scaffolding also takes place, when a community-based biliteracy approach is implemented. Some activities directly involve family members' participation at home and at school. In these activities, students are tasked to collaborate with parents and grandparents at home to document a skill or lesson in Zapotec. The elders then go to the school and give a demonstration, such as how to make *atole* (a traditional drink made from corn, sugar, cinnamon, and vanilla). During the school demonstration, students play diverse roles, including direct involvement with the elders in the demonstration and indirect involvement of recording and taking pictures of the demonstration. After guided practice with the elders, some students

get a chance for independent practice to complete the demonstration by themselves, explaining to others how the elders performed the task. Students not involved in the demonstration are tasked with documenting the steps in Zapotec. This kind of community-based pedagogy achieves the goal of preserving local ontologies that contest ideas of official, Western knowledge, all the while preserving these same local *xkialnana*.

The struggle between the requirements (and resulting ideologies) of the official national curriculum, influenced by Western, epistemological knowledge, and valuing local ontologies, is evident here in Wihdxya's original poem, *Rehu nu* (My blood). Themes of pride, local knowledge, resistance, and strength flow through the poem, written and then used by Wihdxya for Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy development. Reading the poem in Zapotec, translating to Spanish, and then illustrating student understanding of the poem through art is a powerful way to develop student biliteracy and assert/infuse local ontologies.

Rehn nu.	(My blood.)
Ngach nak rehn nu	(I am made of yellow blood,)
Rehn nuu naka bee	(I am made of brown blood,)
Nkich nak rehn nu.	(and of course, I am made of white blood.)
Tson yee nak rehn ni nu duurehn nah	(Three colors that are found in my veins,)
Duu rehn ni naadz loh xdoa xi'ch.	(the veins that strengthen my heart,)
Xtiãz loh xdoa ni ranchina nah,	(A heart that beats with love,)
Ni riana xpecha,	(The love of brotherhood,)
Ni ranchina gichlyuh.	(The love for mother earth.)
Nah nak behn diidx zah, nah ranchi xtixa,	(I am the Zapotec that loves his language,)
Ranchi xkialnana, xkialnana ni bchial xkialbañ llob,	(One who loves his knowledge,)
Xkialbaña git,	(The knowledge of having discovered the food
sources of	
Xkialbaña bziaa,	corn, squash, and beans more
Bagoka chii mil ihdz nib a pschial gial mbahñ re.	than ten thousand years ago.)
Tson giahñ mbahñ re bena tuhñ gehñ ngiehñ.	(Three foods that have strengthened brave
warriors,)	
Bena tuhñ behñ gialnan, bena tuhñ behñ nia.	(wise teachers of knowledge,)
Tuhñ nak behñ nia, zek tuhñ sonbahñzan na,	(men who transform into divine beings.)
ria bixtiil nada nlox tuhñ nguia,	(We, the Zapotec, are the divine beings;)
ria bixtiil nzeboka xbeelohna ni nana,	(that is why the White man has not been
	able to exterminate us)
lox xete ni nana, nex kaloxa ria xkichyuhn.	(those that think they know, but ultimately do not,
	because they destroy everything.)
Zehna xkial riena riopa lohxdia nzäy mbahñ	(Today my mind and my heart are alive with
emotion	
ni naka xi'n llob:	because I am proud to be the son of the
corn).	
Xi'n llob ngach,	(Of the yellow corn)
Xi'n llob ngaa,	(Of the brown corn)
Xi'n llob nkich.	(Of the white corn.)

-Felipe Ruiz Jiménez (Wihdxya)

-Translation from Zapotec to Spanish, by Wihdxya,
from Spanish to English by Przymus (Przymus, et
al., in press)

Images 1 and 2, below, show students in Wihdxya's class painting their understanding of the poem. The heart that beats with love, brotherhood, and earth is a recurring image in the art. **Images 1 and 2. Zapotec students illustrating the poem "My Blood" at school.**



The above activity is an example of a teacher combining his love and his knowledge of poetry, ethnicity, and teaching in order to get his students thinking about and questioning their lives and sources of knowledge. This practice of reading in Zapotec, translating from Zapotec to Spanish for deeper understanding, discussing, and demonstrating knowledge of the poem through art is an example of how these teachers leverage the whole linguistic abilities and lived knowledge of their students to make biliteracy instruction deep and meaningful. This kind of activity and the ones above that involve the community beyond the school, act to raise the function, importance, and status of the Zapotec language.

Our second research question asks how this kind of community-based biliteracy approach might inform bilingual language planning and policy questions and address monolingual ideologies and concerns that Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy will impede students' academic success in Spanish.

Making Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy instrumental and leveraging translanguaging practices to inform status and acquisition planning at intercultural bilingual schools

In considering the second research question, regarding how the inclusion of local knowledge and community members in biliteracy activities, along with the leveraging of translanguaging practices might lessen parental concerns about Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy impeding students' Spanish achievement, we believe it is useful to take a language planning and policy perspective. Could linking biliteracy development with local, ontological knowledge, work to improve the overall literacy/acquisition of Zapotec for instrumental purposes and in turn raise the status of the Zapotec language in this community, state, and country? Could this address and in some ways ameliorate the concerns of parents about the usefulness of Zapotec literacy and the myth that spending time to develop biliteracy may slow down their children's academic progress in Spanish? How might the valuing and normalizing of translanguaging practices, already common at home, now at school facilitate biliteracy development (acquisition

planning) and create spaces for using more Zapotec for important functions at school (status planning)?

Traditionally, research on language planning and policy has focused on status, corpus, and acquisition planning (Hornberger, 1994). Corpus planning has to do with decisions regarding the structural consistency of the internal properties of a language, in order to increase its potential longevity and influence. Although there are 58 varieties of Zapotec, members of La Soledad Salinas all use the same, mutually understood variety, and bilingual teachers and administrators, supportive of Zapotec maintenance, are more concerned with issues surrounding acquisition planning, or how Zapotec can best be taught to non-users and non-fluent users, and status planning, activities that raise external perceptions of importance and function of the language. Similar to many bilingual education contexts in the U.S., however, ideologies among many administrators, teachers, and even parents in Oaxaca exist of educational success being measured first by typical development in the dominant language. In Mexico the dominant language is Spanish. Both Viki and Wihdxya related stories of parents saying, “I’ve sent my kids to school to learn Spanish, why are you teaching Zapotec?” Concerned parents have also expressed views that their children will become confused and not learn how to read and write well or will be slowed down in their literacy development in Spanish. These views were expressed several times to me by administrators and teachers, even while immersed in domains (such as family homes) where Zapotec and translanguaging with Zapotec and Spanish were the norm. More activities, like those discussed above, that merge language practices of the home (first space) with official language practices of the school (second space) may be what is needed to support biliteracy development. The expansion of domains, or third spaces at schools, where bilingualism is used for important functions promotes the instrumentalization of languages (Moje et al., 2004; Richard Ruiz, personal communication/lecture PowerPoint slides, September 2013).

Instrumentalization. The community-based biliteracy methods, shared above, are examples of what Ruiz (2013) calls “instrumentalization” of language or “creating conditions for its use and perceptions of its usefulness...in the many contexts in which it is used for significant functions-the family, community agencies, electronic and written media of communication, schools, churches, commercial centers, universities, etc.” (Richard Ruiz, personal communication/lecture PowerPoint slides, September 2013). Instrumentalization is a status-planning approach, as using Zapotec for important functions, raises its importance in the school and larger community. Both Viki and Wihdxya have expressed similar sentiments during our conversations regarding, giving Zapotec importance at school, that can best be summed up with “*Para que tenga valor*” [So that it is valued]. School-wide at Luz y Progreso, the Mexican national anthem is sung in Zapotec each Monday. Important announcements and signs are hung around the walls of the schools in Zapotec and it is encouraged that students help each other create, understand, and use the signs. This schoolscapes approach, or analysis of the linguistic messages that make up the school environment (Brown, 2012), has great potential for raising the status of Zapotec at school and in the community. I have observed other linguistic landscape efforts in other Zapotec communities of Oaxaca of placing Zapotec signs around town with messages such as, “Respect your elders.”

Both Wihdxya and Viki also use play as a biliteracy method that promotes the instrumentalization of Zapotec. Beyond the Zapotec integrated in poetry, Wihdxya also uses drama and has students write and perform their own readers’ theater, based on Zapotec stories that Wihdxya tells them. Viki sings songs in Zapotec with her students, plays games in Zapotec, such as the classic Mexican game *lotería*, gives students Zapotec riddles, and creates guessing

books, such as *Xwia Xwia* (What do you See?, see Images 7-10). Although these are purposeful strategies for using more Zapotec at school, Spanish is also integrated with the Zapotec in order to scaffold students' understanding and facilitate biliteracy.

Images 7-10. A Zapotec guessing book, *Xwia Xwia* (What do you see?).



Playing with language or creatively using all of one's linguistic repertoire (translanguaging), such as a student at Luz y Progreso does here, "*Está bien maestros si **pa ni ba bloxa** ya puedo descansar?*" [Is it ok teachers ***if I have finished*** that I rest?], perhaps gives us a link between status and acquisition planning.

Translanguaging. As all of the above methods contribute to the instrumentalization and status planning of the Zapotec language at school, they also inform the acquisition planning of how to best develop Zapotec/Spanish biliteracy with emergent Zapotec/Spanish bilinguals. These biliteracy methods leverage the bilingualism of Zapotec youth as a resource and utilize a translanguaging stance in verbal interactions between teachers and students, in teacher talk during instruction, and in the ways that these critical bicultural-bilingual pedagogues allow their students to demonstrate knowledge. As stated above, however, this communicative practice of using two or more named languages (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015) can be associated with confusion and although it is ubiquitous in the social practice documented in the community and in the academic activities described above, it is not embraced as a resource for biliteracy development at school. It could be that this ideology of confusion or broken language is linked to the debunked belief that bilinguals are two monolinguals in one; a belief that unfortunately is

strengthened by the continued use of common terms, such as code-switching (Przymus, 2018; Grosjean & Li, 2012; Otheguy, et al., 2015). Przymus (2018) defines and differentiates translanguaging from code-switching stating,

Translanguaging describes the language practice and ability of multilinguals to utilize their full linguistic repertoire, which includes features of multiple named languages, but which are all part of an individual's sole linguistic system (idiolect). From the outside, individuals appear to switch between different codes (code-switching), but they are really just selecting linguistic features that are, although socially recognized as different languages, unified and utilized within one linguistic system (translanguaging) (p. 325; see also Otheguy et al., 2015).

Translanguaging is an important concept that deserves more investigation in the context of Zapotec acquisition planning. Based on my time spent with Wihdxya, Viki, their families, and participating in community events, I observed ubiquitous translanguaging. The seamless use of individuals' full linguistic repertoire, that sound like the integration of the named languages of Zapotec and Spanish, is just a part of daily living, evidenced by Wihdxya using Zapotec to speak to his mostly Zapotec-speaking mother, turning to speak to me in Spanish, and at the same time using both named languages to communicate to his brother and adolescent son. These were not isolated communicative interactions in this community. I observed translanguaging in the tailor shop, in restaurants, and in people's houses, while sharing meals with their families. Although a quotidian part of life outside of schools, within the school walls, translanguaging, such as the student example above, is more of a contested practice.

Ruiz (2010) explicates a similar context of diglossia in the case of Latinx students, by describing the transethnification of U.S. schools. Ruiz describes the acceptance of cultural differences as a dichotomy of school and home, whereas cultural pluralism (holistic language practice in our case) is tolerated in private (at home), but not in public (at schools) and when plurilinguistic practices are tolerated in public, this takes the form of symbolic and ceremonial practice, not personal nor political. We draw connections here to our context where translanguaging practices, across Zapotec and Spanish, are accepted and common in private settings, like homes, but are used infrequently and in symbolic ways, such as singing the national anthem on Mondays, in public places, like schools. A shift in this ideology may come from breaking down the separate language walls and allowing for Zapotec/Spanish translanguaging in knowledge demonstration of content at these two intercultural bilingual schools. This practice may move the use of Zapotec from a symbolic, sentimental role to an instrumental role of biliteracy instruction. Both Felipe and Viki allow for this, at least among younger students in early grades at their schools. Image 11 illustrates student work in Viki's class, regarding a lesson on El Día de Muertos [*The Day of the Dead*] celebration and image 12 is about how to make *memelas de elote*.

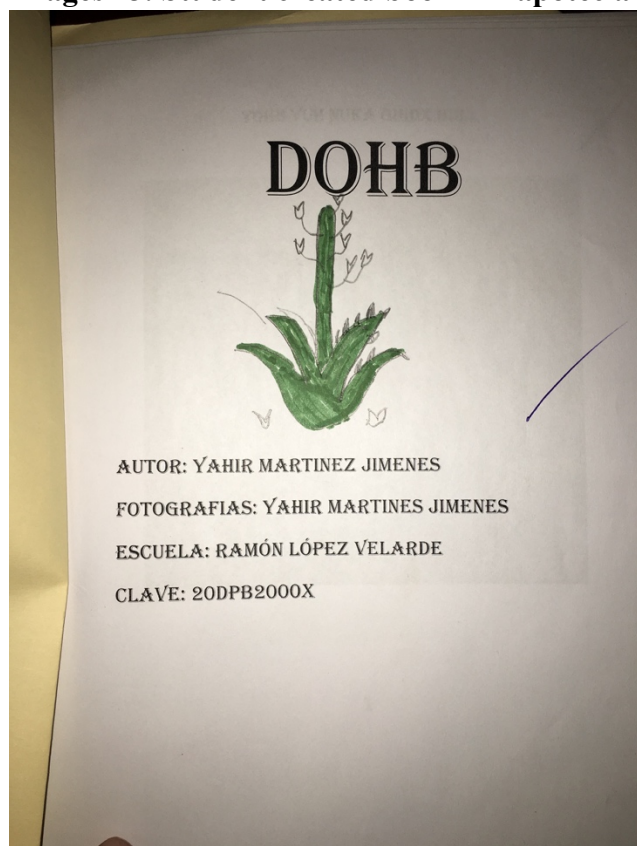
Images 11 & 12. Translanguaging in two student projects.



We can see how linguistic connections are made to deepen biliteracy and content development in both images above where one student (Image 11) entitles the image in Spanish (Día de Muertos) and then both labels and describes the traditional grave site decoration in Zapotec. In Image 12, another of Viki's students labels the process of making *memelas de elote* in Spanish and describes each step in Zapotec. Both of these examples of translanguaging to demonstrate knowledge at school are direct insight into meaningful biliteracy activities that are informed by community-based knowledge. Although *Día de Muertos* is celebrated across Mexico, it is distinct and informed by elders in each Indigenous community. The recipe for making *memela de elote* is an example of how *mensajes de abuelitos* are used to pass down traditions and knowledge, understood in both Zapotec and Spanish, in order to build meaningful biliteracy.

Felipe also leverages his students' dynamic language practices by having them create books, such as in Image 13 of the *dohb* or agave plant; an important source of work and life in Oaxaca. Throughout this book, content is written in Zapotec and scaffolded in Spanish. Being able to read about and write about the planting and harvesting of the agave plant, in both Zapotec and Spanish, makes biliteracy instrumental for the students of this community.

Images 13. Student created book in Zapotec and Spanish.



Even though they both use translanguageing to develop biliteracy early on with their students, both Felipe and Viki state that they strive to transition to one language at a time with older students in order to develop “good” Spanish and “good” Zapotec. Although recent literature in U.S. Spanish/English bilingual education has shown that students produce more language practice and develop greater bilingual content knowledge when allowed to translanguage (García, Johnson, Seltzer, Valdés, 2017; Przymus, 2016), language separation ideologies expressed above remain strongly influenced by the myth that what many call code-switching will lead to confusion and underdeveloped literacy in the dominant language at schools. However, as I refute this ideology by citing the above research, I am aware that I am privileging Western, colonial epistemology over the local ontologies of this Zapotec community, the very problem that we wish to confront with this article. Although, I believe that translanguageing in instruction and use at schools may have a positive impact on the current context of educational inequities among Zapotec communities in México, further research, driven by local Zapotec teachers and researchers, is needed.

Conclusion

In a special issue that takes on the important work of defining biliteracy in Latinx communities, we feel it imperative to call into question, what and whose knowledge counts in schools. In our own work in U.S. schools with Latinx students and biliteracy development via dual-language education programs, similar questions taken up in this study arise regarding the inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum, who gets to be bilingual/biliterate, myths relating bilingualism to confusion, and the role of translanguaging (Przymus, 2018; 2017; 2016; Przymus & Kohler, 2018). In this study we take the time to differentiate Western, colonial, epistemological knowing-about knowledge from local, community-based, decolonial Indigenous (Zapotec) ways of knowing. Both are important for students to both read the word and world (Freire, 1970), but due to influences stemming from an increased focus on high stakes tests, historic nation-wide efforts to raise the Spanish literacy of students across Mexico, and recent Mexican national efforts to increase Spanish/English bilingualism, epistemological knowledge has dominated the focus and instructional time in schools and has left little space for including the ontological knowledge needed for deep biliteracy and identity development.

However, all across México, and specifically among Indigenous Zapotec teachers in Oaxaca, teachers are acting as change agents that honor and incorporate local ontologies and community-based *xkialnana* in the community schools where they live and teach. Authentic, community-based literacy instruction can provide an alternative to the homogeneous approach outlined by the Mexican national curriculum (Meyer, 2016) and may also inform new ways of defining biliteracy and biliteracy methods in Latinx communities beyond Mexico. Spanish/English biliteracy efforts in U.S. Latinx communities and efforts to improve community-school relationships could benefit from involving community elders in instruction, tapping into *mensajes de los abuelitos*, and from opening-up biliteracy instruction to incorporate more multimodal/multilingual performances of content knowledge, such as those described above.

Colonial nations have and continue to exert cultural, political, and knowledge-based agency over Indigenous communities and what we have highlighted here is the power of decolonial, community-based biliteracy instruction for rewriting the narrative of what knowledge counts. In Indigenous and other Latinx communities, across North America, ideologies of the monolingual paradigm and of educational success being intrinsically linked to success first in the dominant language persist. With this study, we provide a counter-narrative and examples of how to disrupt these ideologies. Both the creative strategies shared above for including community-based knowledge and the acknowledgement of the importance of allowing students to use their full linguistic repertoire (translanguaging) are important for dispelling the myths of bilingual confusion, and for shifting the view of continued literacy development in mother tongues from a language-as-problem to a language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984). In advocating for students' human, academic, and linguistic right to use their whole repertoire of prior knowledge that is linked to their first language, Wihdxya and Viki continue to be change agents, advocating for a deeper, more profound biliteracy instruction, finding creative language planning and policy solutions, that keep alive ontological knowledge, *xkialnana*, and *mensajes de los abuelitos*.

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