
Latin America

OFELIA GARCÍA

DINA LÓPEZ

CARMINA MAKAR

As the chapters in this book attest, scholars have studied the relationship between language and identity, not only from different disciplinary stances but also by varying theoretical frameworks. This chapter adopts a constructivist/post-modern framework to highlight the complex situational and contextual character of language and identity in Latin America. Clearly, the link between language practices and identity in Latin America has to be examined within its particular sociohistorical and political context.

We start this chapter by considering some of the complexities in examining Latin America's languages and identities: we then move on to describe how the present constructions came into being and are being narrated today. Latin America, however, is far from a homogenous and monolithic landscape of social, cultural, and linguistic practices. Because of its great complexity, we focus on the region of Latin America that was conquered by Spain, paying only scant attention to an important Latin American country—Brazil—and to other countries where languages other than Spanish predominate. Given this diversity of contexts and practices that characterizes Latin America, we offer two case studies—Guatemala and Mexico—that examine in depth the link between language and identity as it has been played out in the construction of language policy.

Constructions of Latin America and Latin American Identities

Ethnolinguistic identity in Latin America is necessarily situated under the broader context of national identities and the complex interaction among the states and the numerous language practices that make up the region. Mignolo (2005: 2) asserts

that Latin America is "an invention forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions." Latin America today encompasses countries of South, Central, and North America and the Caribbean islands that officially speak Spanish, Portuguese, or French. In an incisive analysis of the ethnolinguistic diversity of the Americas, Ribeiro (1977) identifies three different types of national societies in the region today:

1. The "witness nations" (*los pueblos testimonios*) include Mexico, Central America, and the Andean countries of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. These nations had advanced precolonial civilizations: Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas. These groups had extensively populated the region prior to the arrival of Europeans. Darcy claims that in these countries there has been, and continues to be, a continuous process of ethnic reconstitution.
2. The "new nations" (*los pueblos nuevos*) are Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and the nations of the Caribbean. These countries were formed through the miscegenation of peoples of very different ethnic origins—Europeans, Africans, and Indigenous¹ peoples, under a tyrannical colonial regime.
3. The "transplanted nations" (*los pueblos trasplantados*) include the countries of the River Plate (Argentina and Uruguay), as well as Anglo America. These nations were formed when Europeans arrived in scarcely populated regions and displaced the Indigenous population, many times through violence.

Although many of the narratives surrounding Latin America point to its common background, history, and language, many challenge the "idea" of Latin America and the cohesive Spanish-speaking identity that has been built into transnational representations of the region and its people. Latin America, far from being a stable "category" or representing a continuous or even coherent homogeneity, is marked by many profound differences among the countries that make up the region (Reguillo 2004).

Even the geographical notion of "America" did not appear on world maps until the sixteenth century. Prior to that, these territories were called *Anahuac* (what today is Mexico) and *Tawantinsuyu* (the Andes) (Mignolo 2005). The first Spanish names for the region were *Nuevo Mundo*, *América*, *América del Sur*, and *América Meridional*. The portion under Spanish rule was also called *América Española* and *Hispanoamérica* (Colburn 2002; Mato 2003). In 1836, a French scholar, Michel Chevalier, coined the idea of *Latinness* and its application as an adjective to the region. Ardao (as cited in Mato 2003) insightfully remarks that "to understand this name it is necessary to place it in the context of the ideas and historical facts that made it emerge as one of the two elements of the antithesis Saxon [*sic*] America-Latin America" (Mato 2003: 286). The discussion of identity is central to this debate, given that the concept of *Latinidad*, as asserted by the French to promote a Pan-Latin foreign policy, would eventually erase the identities of Indigenous peoples and descendants of African slaves from the Latin American social imaginary, and with that their cultural histories and language practices (Mignolo 2005).

In most Latin American countries, the state has played a crucial role in the construction and promotion of national identities, thereby assigning marginal status to ethnic and racial groups and language practices outside of the national narrative. The process of constructing national identities was extremely selective and created paradigms of inclusion and exclusion. This top-down approach to the construction of a national narrative started with the adoption of Spanish (or Portuguese, in the case of Brazil) as the national language and the persistent exclusion of the Indigenous populations and their languages that did not fit the project of modernity envisioned by these countries. It becomes clear that the issue of language and identity in the context of nation-building necessarily implies the unequal distribution of social, material, and political resources. Thus, "to speak of national identities in Latin America is to speak of power relations" (Larrain 2000: 6).

It is not surprising then that notions of representation become rife with tension and contradiction as they are embedded in real struggles for meaning and power. The concept of *mestizaje*, the notion that Latin America has been constructed through the blending and mixture of different ethnic and racial groups, is a highly contested social construct that emerges within two opposing discourses (Mallon 1996). Some argue that it is counterhegemonic and that the notion of *mestizaje* disrupts colonial and neocolonial categories of race and ethnicity. Others, however, contend that it has been crucial in providing meaning and legitimization to social representations that have undermined the situation of Indigenous peoples and those of African descent (Colburn 2002; Cornejo Polar 2004). Within this perspective, the concept of *mestizaje* does not challenge racial hierarchies and, in fact, perpetuates them. Scholars have long recognized that *mestizaje* does not have a single meaning within the Latin American context and that it contains within it tensions between sameness and difference and between inclusion and exclusion.

Likewise, the concept of *transculturación*, coined by the Cuban anthropologist Ortiz ([1940] 1978), to refer to the dynamics of interaction of cultures that have come together in Latin America, is equally contested. Ortiz proposes that in this process of acquiring another culture, there is loss or uprooting of a previous culture. If transculturation is symbiotic and linear, then further theoretical devices are needed to refer to conflicts and alterities that are forever present in the Latin American context (Cornejo Polar 2004).

An alternative way of conceptualization of the interaction of cultures has been the term *hybridity* used by Nestor García-Canclini to refer to a parallel process in which the boundaries of identities are negotiated and able to absorb diverse cultural influences that intersect and overlap—thus supporting the creation of in-between identities. García-Canclini's concept of hybridity contests modernity and rethinks tradition. He defines hybridity as those social cultural processes within which structures of identity and power, as well as "discrete practices" that existed separately, fuse to generate new structures, subjectivities, objects, and practices (Cornejo Polar 2004).

The concepts of *mestizaje*, *transculturación*, and *hybridity* continue to shape the discourse on language and ethnic identity in Latin American countries today, although in many ways this same discourse is used to obscure linguistic and

cultural differences and to ensure that speakers of dominant languages—those of European descent—remain in power.

Bonfil Batalla, a noted Mexican anthropologist, explains the situation thus: En América Latina hay muchos más pueblos que estados nacionales. La inmensa mayoría de las llamadas sociedades nacionales contienen en su interior, no uno, sino una diversidad de pueblos distintos. Son, por eso, sociedades plurales. El problema es que esa condición plural no ha sido reconocida por los estados con todas sus consecuencias. . . . Una sola lengua, una sola raza, una misma historia, una cultura común tales eran los requisitos para consolidar un verdadero estado (napoleónico). Y la realidad iba por otros cauces, lo que exigió que el Estado se pretendiera constituir en forjador de la nación unificada, uniforme culturalmente, *inexistente*. La tercera realidad seguía siendo plural: había indios, ante todo; pero también negros y ciertas regiones que desarrollaban su propia identidad. (1992: 19, emphasis added)

[In Latin America there are many more nations than nation states. The immense majority of the so-called nation states contain within them, not one but many different nations. They are, therefore, plural societies. The problem is that the plural condition has not been recognized by the states, thus having many consequences. . . . Only one language, one race, one same history, a common culture: those were the requirements to consolidate a true (Napoleonic) state. And reality took a different course, making it a requirement for the state to try to constitute itself into the creator of the unified nation, culturally uniform, *non-existent*. The stubborn reality continued being plural: There were, beyond everything, Indians; but there were also blacks and some regions that had their own identity.]

Part of the difficulty in defining a Latin American ethno-linguistic identity stems from the contradiction between the real, mostly oral, pluralism of Latin America, and the official, mostly written posture, which constructs Latin Americans as sharing a common origin, history, and culture. The Latin American “linguistic culture,” in the sense defined by Schiffman (1996), is derived from the distance created between the written official position advanced by government policy, legislation, literature, and essays and the daily discourse and linguistic practices of millions of Latin Americans. Despite the difficulties in defining a singular Latin American ethno-linguistic culture, the following traits can be said to characterize the region’s ethno-linguistic landscape:

- An insistence on using Spanish (or Portuguese) as a marker of ethno-linguistic identity and in opposition to Anglo America;
- A surface recognition of the regions’ multilingualism and of Indigenous languages, despite persistent official claims of a monolingual identity;
- A recognition of the region’s distinct linguistic identity from that of Spain or Portugal. In practice, Spanish and Portuguese are transplanted languages that are realized in many places as contact dialects sprung from the interaction through the centuries with Indigenous, African, and other European languages, and more recently with English. There are also significant minorities in both rural and urban Latin America for whom Spanish and Portuguese are second languages. Some Indigenous people are not speakers of these languages.

The Historical Narrative

The geographic region now known as Latin America has always been characterized by enormous linguistic diversity, as Bonfil Batalla reminds us—not only because of the great linguistic diversity of its Indigenous populations but also because of the waves of European and African people who arrived later on and the consequences of enormous language contact.

Before the arrival of the Europeans and the Africans, the area was home to about 170 large linguistic families that some scholars subdivide into approximately two thousand distinct languages—used by a population that numbered between 10 and 45 million Indigenous people (Moreno Fernández 2006). Of the many language practices during the precolonial era, some had higher status—because of their demographic or cultural strength. These more powerful language practices were named by European missionaries and linguists² as Arahaco, Eñahatl, Maya, Quechua, Aimara, Chibcha, Araucano or Mapuche, and Guaraní (Moreno Fernández 2006). The language practices of Indigenous peoples continued to be marginalized throughout the next five hundred years—during colonial rule, independence movements, and modern nation-building.

Europeans found three important civilizations when they reached present-day Latin America: the Mayan, the Aztec, and the Inca. The Mayans occupied the Yucatan peninsula, southern Mexico, and most of present-day Guatemala. The Aztecs were in the central valley of Mexico. The Inca Empire stretched along the Andes from northern Ecuador through Peru to southern Chile. The region was highly multilingual because the linguistic practices of these three groups, and of the many other nations with which they were in contact, were very diverse.

Though the Spanish monarchs aimed to make Spanish a mandatory language of their territories, the linguistic diversity of the New World was too great to allow for the immediate use of Spanish. A policy of bilingualism was begrudgingly authorized in 1570 by King Phillip II in order to impart education and evangelization in what was assigned as “the” language of a vast territory—Nahatl, Quechua, Chibcha, and Tupi-Guaraní. These “constructed” languages were called *lenguas generales* (general languages) and were then extended into territories where the language practices were totally different (Howard 2000; Moreno Fernández 2006).

The extent of the linguistic diversity in the Spanish-American territories continued to be a challenge for the colonial administration. As a result, in 1596 Phillip II instituted a new language policy that designated Spanish as official for administration and a local Indigenous language for evangelization and daily communication purposes. This led to a division of colonial society into a small minority of Spanish-speaking rulers and elites and an Indigenous majority speaking local languages (Howard 2000). By 1782, King Charles III once more mandated that only Spanish be used to evangelize, an impossible task given the very small number of Spanish speakers at the time. For example, at that time in Mexico City there were eight thousand Spanish residents and more than 2 million Indians.

But Spanish was not the only language of European conquerors. Although the majority were speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, there were also speakers of French, Dutch, and English, especially in the area of the Caribbean. And the

immigrant wave of the early twentieth century included, besides Spaniards (who spoke the different languages of Spain), Portuguese, Italians, Germans, and French.

African slaves were brought to the New World on a large scale, especially to Brazil and Cuba, until 1886. Approximately 2 million slaves from the western coast of Africa made their way to the Caribbean and 4 million to Brazil, where they worked on sugar plantations and completely altered the ethn racial composition of the region. These Africans spoke a number of African languages, some of which were transplanted to the New World. As a result of slave trade, some pidgins—languages that come into being when speakers of different language backgrounds need to trade and communicate—were eventually nativized and standardized and adopted as the language of the home by the entire population. The best known example is Haitian Creole, the co-official language, alongside French, of Haiti since 1987 and widely spoken by the vast majority of Haitians.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, as newly independent nations emerged out of the anti-colonial movements in South and Central America, power remained concentrated among the Spanish-speaking minority. All the while, the numerical majority with diverse linguistic and cultural practices continued to be socially and politically marginalized. For example, as the eighteenth century closed, 78% of the population of New Spain was Indigenous (Gifuentes & Ros 1993). Yet the independence movement in Spanish America that took place between 1910 and 1924 included mostly Spanish-speaking elite criollos (Latin Americans born of Spanish parents), led notably by Simón Bolívar, José Antonio de Sucre, and José de San Martín. Only in Mexico did a large number of Indigenous people participate in a revolution that was both for independence and social improvement. Yet independence in Mexico was only achieved when an elite criollo, Iturbide, declared himself emperor of Mexico and of the Capitanía de Guatemala, which included most of present-day Central America.

The cultivation and spread of Spanish for its homogenizing nationalist effects became an important objective of the first independent governments. In 1835, Mexico founded its first Language Academy, followed in 1875 by a Mexican Academy of Language that corresponded to the Real Academia Española in Spain. As early as 1847, Andrés Bello, born in Caracas before independence, wrote *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana* to avoid the degeneration of the Spanish of Spanish America into “irregular dialects” and to maintain “national unity” (Ripoll 1966: 56). When, in 1877 education in Uruguay was declared to be free, required, and under secular control, it was stipulated that Spanish, as the national language, had to be used in all schools of the country. Spanish spread quickly, although not entirely. By 1898, when Spain lost its last colonies, including Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, only 17% of the entire population did not speak Spanish. In one hundred years, Spanish had gone from being the minority language of the powerful elite to the vehicular language for much of the population and the officially sanctioned language of Latin American identity.

During this entire period, native non-European elements of Spanish-American culture were recognized, and sometimes even idealized, during the romanticism of the late nineteenth century. In fact, a budding Spanish-American literature started distinguishing itself from the one in Spain by introducing native groups

such as the *gaucho* (*Facundo* 1845, by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento; *Martín Fierro* 1872, by José Hernández) and the “Indian” (*Tabaré* 1886, by Zorilla de San Martín; *Enriquillo* 1879, by Manuel de Jesús de Galván). But despite this pluralistic recognition, the official ethnolinguistic identity of Spanish America remained mostly European.

The year 1898 is important not only because it represents political independence from Spain and the accompanying fear that the Spanish of Latin America would further become distant from that of Spain but also because it marks the second successful attempt by the English-speaking United States to officially take over the Latin American world. In 1848, through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States had taken half of Mexico’s territory, from present-day Texas to California. In 1898, the previous Spanish possessions of Puerto Rico and Cuba became U.S. possessions. The ethnolinguistic identity of a constructed Spanish America was now threatened on three fronts—(1) the continued presence of Indigenous peoples and of people of African descent who did not speak Spanish or for whom Spanish was a second language; (2) the further political and emotional distance from Spain, *La Madre Patria* (the Motherland); and (3) a new contact with another powerful language, that of the United States.

In the late nineteenth century, the political and literary contributions of the Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos and the Cuban José Martí did much to promote Latin American unity and nationalism, in the face of the threat from Anglo America. In the essay that was to become the ideal of that era, *Nuestra América* (1891), José Martí declares with pride: *El vino, de plátano; y si sale agrio, ¡es nuestro vino!* [“Wine, of banana; and if it comes out bitter, it’s our wine!”] (1968, p. 250). Spanish America’s ethnolinguistic identity now seemed firmly set, openly claiming Spanish, in the face of Theodore Roosevelt’s “big stick” policy, as the differentiating element from the English-speaking “Colossus of the North.”

The cultures of Indigenous peoples and people of African descent became increasingly celebrated, but only in Spanish. In 1982, the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña in his *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* identified Spanish as the only valid language identity of Latin Americans. The silencing of the “other” Latin America—that of the countryside rather than the city, that of the Indian rather than the white European, that of speakers of languages other than Spanish—became the subject of essayists searching for identity as the twentieth century unfolded. In a 1952 essay, the Colombian Germán Archimiegas said:

There are two (Latin) Americas: The visible and the invisible. The visible (Latin) America . . . Of presidents and embassies, expresses itself through official organs, through a controlled press . . . And there is the mute, repressed America, which is a vast reservoir of revolution . . . Nobody knows exactly what these 150,000,000 silent men and women think, feel, dream, or await in the depths of their being. (Quoted in Shapiro 1963: 1)

The Chilean Nobel Prize-winning poet, Pablo Neruda, wrote his *Canto General* (1950) as an elegy to Latin America, and in the act of naming its geography, history, and heroes, he gave voice to the poor and the suffering. In his essay titled, significantly, *Nosotros los indios* (“We, the Indians”), Neruda referred to the contradiction between

idealizing the Indigenous Araucano warriors portrayed in *La Araucana*, the first Latin American epic poem written by the Spaniard Alonso de Ercilla in the mid-sixteenth century, and silencing the Araucano heritage of all Chileans:

Nuestros recién llegados gobernantes se propusieron decretar que no somos un país de indios. Este decreto perfumado no ha tenido expresión parlamentaria, pero la verdad es que circula tácitamente en ciertos sitios de representación nacional. *La Araucana* está bien, huele bien. Los araucanos están mal, huelen mal. Huelen a raza vencida. Y los usurpadores están ansiosos de olvidar o de olvidarse. En el hecho, la mayoría de los chilenos cumplimos con las disposiciones y decretos señoriales: como frenéticos arribistas nos avergonzamos de los araucanos. Contribuimos, los unos, a extirparlos, y, los otros, a sepultarlos en el abandono y en el olvido. (Quoted in Skirius 1994: 259)

[Our recently arrived governors decided to decree that we are not a country of Indians. This perfumed decree has not had parliamentary expression, but the truth is that it circulates tacitly in various places of national representation. *The Araucana* is fine, smells fine. The Araucanos are rotten, smell rotten. They smell as a conquered race. And the usurpers are anxious to forget or to forget themselves. In fact, the majority of Chileans are faithful to the ruling dispositions and decrees. As frenetic upwardly mobile people, we're ashamed of the Araucanos. We contribute, some of us to remove them, other of us to bury them in abandonment and forgetfulness.]

The demand for a voice for the Araucanos, the poor, and the silent America was answered by the Cuban Revolution of the early 1960s. Fidel Castro's revolution reconnected with the nationalist identity that had been espoused much earlier by José Martí. And this socialist reality for *un hombre nuevo* (a new man) created a different definition of ethnolinguistic identity as Latin Americans. Che Guevara explained it thus:

En este continente se habla prácticamente una lengua . . . Hay una identidad tan grande entre las clases de estos países que logran una identificación de tipo "internacional americano," mucho más completa que en otros continentes. Lengua, costumbres, religión, año común, los unen. El grado y las formas de explotación son similares en sus efectos para explotadores y explotados de una buena parte de los países de nuestra América. (1971: 136)

[In this continent practically only one language is spoken . . . There is such great identity between classes in these countries that there emerges, much better than in other continents, an "International American" identity. Language, customs, religion, common master, unite them. The degree and the form of exploitation are similar in their effects for exploiters and those who are exploited in most countries of our America.]

The faith in a new Latin American society based on a socialist revolution and the need to transcend *la hispanidad* and the Spanish language that expressed it was short lived. By the mid-1970s, most Latin American countries were immersed in the silence of dictatorships.

The process in Peru is indicative in this regard. From 1968 to 1975, Peru was ruled by a progressive military regime under Velasco Alvarado. Besides the social reform program that included the expropriation of land and estates, a voice was

claimed for the Indigenous population of Peru. In 1972, Quechua was officialized, and bilingual education was encouraged. But there was a violent reaction from the white and *mestizo* Spanish-speaking bourgeoisie. In 1980, under the regime of Morales Bermúdez, Quechua once again lost official status, and bilingual education was deemphasized.

This process was repeated throughout Latin America. As military dictatorships became entrenched, the gains made by the Indigenous populations in the 1960s and 1970s were repressed. This silencing of the Indigenous population was promoted as a struggle against anarchist guerrillas and for democracy. For example, in Bolivia there were three symposiums on *lenguas nacionales* in Cochabamba between 1973 and 1979. However, after the coup d'état in 1980, teaching in Aymara was prohibited. The government issued a statement indicating that insistence on doing so would be taken as evidence of leftist sympathies.

Nevertheless, since the 1960s, there has been a progressive awareness in Latin America of the role that the cultures and languages of Indigenous groups have had in the gestation of Latin American identities. And this greater consciousness has been accompanied at times by efforts to obtain official recognition for these languages and cultures. The Indigenous groups themselves have been responsible for many brave attempts at what Hornberger (1996) has called (in the title of her book) "language planning from the bottom up." Indigenous communities have developed projects to support their *ethnodesarrollo*—the development of their identity as different social, cultural, and historical units that have been dominated by the states—and their struggle for official recognition by those states.

The efforts for *ethnodesarrollo*, a concept promoted by UNESCO, have been accompanied by the development of many bilingual education programs. A specific example has been the development and teaching of the Zapoteco alphabet (widely spoken in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico) as a symbol of linguistic and social resistance. Castellanos explains:

Impulsamos y fomentamos la escritura del zapoteco porque si no, se muere Escribimos para ganarle espacios at español, . . . para arrebatarle aquellos espacios que día con día se va adueñando. (Quoted in Pardo 1993: 122)

[We push and promote writing in Zapoteco because otherwise it would die. . . . We write to gain spaces from Spanish. . . . to take away from it those spaces that day by day it gains.]

Contemporary Narratives

Today, there are more than 40 million Indigenous people in Latin America (López 2006). It is important to understand these demographic statistics as *estimates*, given the complex nature of self-identification and reporting. It is not unheard of that an interviewee will hide their Indigenous affiliation in order to avoid social and ethnic discrimination.

Indigenous presence is not the same in all regions or Latin American states. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Paraguay,

Indigenous populations do not exceed 5% of the population (Mato 2007). However, in countries such as Guatemala or Bolivia, the Indigenous population makes up more than half of the population. Although this percentage does drop slightly for countries like Peru, Ecuador, and Mexico, these countries have strong Indigenous presence and corresponding language revitalization strategies.

In order to explore the role of language and ethnic identity in these contexts, it is necessary to understand Indigenous communities within the context of precolonial ethnic geodemographic borders rather than using present-day delimitations constructed by nation states, which are a product of history and colonial legacy (López 2006: 10). To illustrate this point, López uses the case of Peru to shed light on the complex relationship between national and regional percentages. In Peru, Indigenous populations make up between 25% and 35% of the population, but in the region around Lake Titicaca, the population reaches 90%. State geopolitical borders conceal the density and demographic significance of Indigenous populations in Latin America.

The largest Indigenous group in Latin America speaks a Quechua language.³ Quechua languages are spoken extensively today in Peru, western Bolivia, and Ecuador. Approximately one-fifth of Peruvians (5 million), living mostly in the southern states, speak a Quechua language as their first language. Quechua languages are also spoken by more than one-fourth of Bolivians (2.8 million). The variety of Quechua spoken in Ecuador is known as Quichua and is spoken by 1.5 million people.

There are at least four other Indigenous language groups that have more than 1 million speakers: Náhuatl, Maya, Aymara, and Guaraní. Náhuatl languages, once spoken in the great empire of the Aztecs, are still the most widely used Indigenous languages in Mexico, spoken by 1.5 million Mexicans. Mayan languages can be grouped into about eight languages in Mexico and about twenty in Guatemala. It is estimated that between 40% and 50% of Guatemala's 13 million people are of Mayan descent and speak Mayan languages—the most widely used is K'iche' (Warren 1998). In Mexico, around 1 million people speak Yucatec, a Mayan language. Aymara is spoken by more than 1.5 million people in Bolivia and another 1.5 million in Peru. Finally, Guaraní is spoken by approximately 75% of the 5 million Paraguayans. Table 22.1 gives estimates for speakers of these languages and the countries in which they are spoken.

Since the 1990s, international agreements linked to general movements of democratization and human rights have led to a shift in social policies throughout Latin America. Eleven countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela—passed laws recognizing their multiculturalism and multilingualism (Hamel 2004), and at least four others (Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama) acknowledged these rights and moved closer toward intercultural-bilingual education models (López & Kuper 1999). Significant advances were made by the development of the United Nations draft *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the adoption by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the Convention (no. 169) *Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries*. This convention has been ratified by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras,

Table 22.1. Indigenous languages and speakers

| Languages | Number of Speakers | Countries |
|-------------------|--------------------|--|
| Quechua languages | 10,100,102 | Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru |
| Guaraní | 4,848,000 | Paraguay Approximately 60,000 in Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil. |
| Náhuatl languages | 1,376,898 | Mexico |
| Mayan languages | 6,064,703 | Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico |

Source: *Ethnologue* (2005).

México, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela, among others, and it is particularly significant given that this agreement is the only international legally binding instrument that specifically tackles the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples (Mato 2007). Other important agreements that helped reshape these policies are the *International Convention for Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965), the *International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), and the *UN Declaration on Rights of Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Minorities*.

Table 22.2 identifies the measures taken by eleven Latin American countries with high Indigenous populations with regards to their multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Peru has established Spanish and Quechua as co-official languages and has granted special rights to Aymara. In Ecuador, Quichua and Aymara have been recognized as belonging to the national culture (King & Haboud 2007), and in Paraguay, where 28.8% of the population is monolingual in Guaraní, Guaraní has been granted co-official status with Spanish (Gynan 2007). These provisions and legal dispositions declaring the protection of national language diversity and linguistic rights are part of larger efforts to acknowledge the multicultural dimension of these countries. However, there has been a gap between policy and practices as evidenced by the strong implicit imposition of Spanish as the only national language of administration, subordinating and weakening Indigenous languages (Godenzzi 2008). In addition, the use of these Indigenous languages in education is supported in these legislations only as an aid to becoming educated in Spanish, but not as an object of education in its own right.

The situation of Latin American linguistic communities today must be explored within the complex intersection of politics, culture, education, and development. The blurring of borders, the evolving trends in ethnic revival, and the historical legacies that are part of today's ways of naming Latin America have given way to an emerging map of ethnolinguistic scenarios that flow in different directions. Our discussion on the present-day narratives of ethnolinguistic configurations in Latin America suggests that language and identity have taken center stage in political movements and social development efforts across many countries. As Indigenous communities mobilize and fight for their rights, Latin American states must grapple with acknowledging and officializing the multiculturalism and plurilingualism that exist within their borders. Indigenous grassroots movements are indeed

Table 22.2 Language Policies and Latin America

| Country | Law(s) | Year |
|-----------|---|--|
| Argentina | Federal Education Law amend to acknowledge multicultural education ILO (International Labor Organization) 169 | 1993 2000 (ratified) |
| Bolivia | ILO 169 Educational Reform The following are recognized as official languages: Aymara, Aranoa, Ayoreo, Baaré, Besiro, Camichana, Cavineño, Cayubaba, Chácobo, Chomán, Pse Ejiá, Guarani, Guarasí we (Pauserna), Guarayo, Itonama, Leco, Machineri, Mojeño-Ignaciano, More, Moseken, Movima, Pacawuara, Quechua, Reyesano, Sirionó, Tacana, Tapieté, Toronoma, Uru-Chipaya, Weenhayek, Yaminawa, Yuki, and Yuracaré Constitution modified by Ley 2650 to acknowledge plurilingualism Law 3204 declares the Besiro Language and intangible cultural heritage Tsimané language is declared Intangible Cultural Heritage | 1991 1994 2000 2004 2005 2007 |
| Brazil | Educational Reform to acknowledge multicultural education ILO 169 | 1996 2002 (ratified) |
| Colombia | Literacy for Indigenous communities will be taught in the mother tongue allowing for progressive acquisition of Spanish. ILO 169 General Education Reform Article 10. Spanish is the official language of Colombia. Languages and dialects of the ethnic groups are also official in their territories. Education in those communities will be bilingual. | 1978 1991 1994 |
| Ecuador | ILO 169 Article 69. The state will guarantee bilingual intercultural education in which the main language will be the Indigenous tongue and Spanish will be used as language of intercultural exchange | 1998 |
| Guatemala | ILO 169 National Education Law National Language Law The official language of Guatemala is Spanish. The state recognizes, promotes, and respects the languages of Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka peoples. Creation of the Bilingual Intercultural Education Division ILO 169 | 1996 1991 2003 1995 1990 1992 |
| Paraguay | Law 68 declares mandatory the inclusion of the two national languages, Spanish and Guarani, into the primary, secondary and higher education curriculum. | 1992 |

Table 22.2 (Continued)

| Country | Law(s) | Year |
|-----------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Peru | ILO 169 General Law for Rural Education of Girls and Adolescents: special attention to bilingual and intercultural education Article 20. Bilingual Intercultural Education Law toward the acknowledgment, preservation, fostering, and promotion of aboriginal languages. ILO 169 | 1993 2001 2003 2003 1990 |
| Mexico | General Law toward Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples State laws that acknowledge and promote linguistic communities and intercultural education for these communities. | 2003 |
| Nicaragua | Law for the official use of Languages of the Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Miskito, Créole, Sumun, Garifuna y Rama acknowledge languages of official use in the autonomous regions of the Atlantic Coast. ILO 169 | 1993 2000 |
| Venezuela | Decree 1795. The use of Indigenous languages, both written and spoken, is mandatory in public and private educational systems within Indigenous regions. Article 41. The Amazon state recognizes the existence of the Indigenous peoples: Baniva, Bare, Curripaco, Guanono, Jivi, Hoti, Kubeo, Maco, Panare, Piapoco, Piaroa, Puhave, Saliva, Sanema, Warequena, Yabarana Yanomami, and Yekuana y Yereal. Organic Law of Communities and Indigenous Peoples | 2002 2005 |

Source: *Databank on Indigenous Legislation, Inter-American Development Bank*.

challenging the hegemonic discourse of one national and monolingual culture that encapsulates the experiences of Latin Americans—be they Peruvians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Argentines, or others.

Case Study: Guatemala

Guatemala presents an illustrative case of the emergence of a strong Indigenous movement during the last two decades of the twentieth century, resulting in various social and political changes vis-à-vis educational and language policy (Stavenhagen 2002). Between 40% and 50% of Guatemala's 13 million residents are of Mayan descent and speak one or more of the twenty-three officially recognized Indigenous languages. Some sources place the percentage of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala at around 60% of the population (Warren 1998). K'iche', Mam, Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi' are the largest Mayan language communities, and they represent more than 80% of the Mayan-speaking population in the world

(Richards & Richards 1996). Xinka and Garifuna—which do not belong to the Mayan language family—are the two other minority languages in Guatemala.

The number of people among these groups who are bilingual (Mayan languages and Spanish) to different degrees is not known. The increase in bilingualism among Guatemalans tends to be among Mayans, who are becoming more fluent in Spanish, whereas *Ladinos* (Guatemalans who are of mixed Mayan and Spanish heritage) tend to maintain their Spanish monolingualism.

As is typical in many Latin American countries with a colonial legacy, Guatemala has a hierarchical social system that privileges those who are Spanish speakers and of Ladino descent. This social hierarchy has placed Spanish as the national language and has precluded the integration of Indigenous ethnic groups in socioeconomic and political life. Herzfeld (1999: 44) points to the uneven power dynamics among social and ethnic groups in Guatemala and all of Central America: "In spite of the fact that in Guatemala the Maya actually constitute a numerical majority, in all Central American countries Indigenous ethnic groups as well as Afro-Central Americans are decidedly a power minority." In the case of Guatemala, this social stratification has had an especially violent history. Indigenous groups bore the brunt of the social and human costs of the thirty-six-year civil war (1960–1996) during which more than two hundred thousand people were killed—making it one of the bloodiest conflicts in the history of this region.

It wasn't until the last two decades of the twentieth century that the Guatemalan government began to address the cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous groups through educational policy reform. In 1985, the Ministry of Education established the *Programa Nacional de Educacion Bilingüe* (PRONEBI). As part of a national effort to recognize a multilingual and multiethnic Guatemala, PRONEBI was charged with administering the planning and implementation of bilingual education to Guatemala's rural Indigenous youth. Richards and Richards (1996) suggest that this educational campaign had an underlying purpose that differed from previous national literacy campaigns that aimed to assimilate or integrate Indigenous communities. PRONEBI put forth a new goal: *alfabetizarse para ser nosotros* (become literate in order to be ourselves).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of Guatemala's Indigenous groups uniting under a common cause and assuming a Pan-Mayan identity to assert their human and linguistic rights (Herzfeld 1999). These groups became active agents of change in educational and language policy reform in Guatemala, successfully pressuring the government to recognize the need for bilingual and bicultural education for the Indigenous majority. According to Warren (1998: 145), these "Mayan culturalists" proposed a "pluricultural model for participatory democracy" that "would define the collective cultural, linguistic, and political rights of Mayan citizens and legitimize their claims to having a cultural and political space in national educational, judicial, and administrative systems." This model was put forth as part of a new vision for Guatemala that would embrace multiple national cultures and challenge the hegemony of the "Hispanic standard" that had been promoted by the Ladino elite since the wars for independence.

Herzfeld (1999) suggests that a sociohistorical perspective and analysis is needed in order to understand why certain ethnic groups, such as the Guatemalan

Maya, succeed in contesting language policies while others like the Afro-Limonese in Costa Rica do not fare as well *vis-à-vis* attempts at language maintenance and revival. Thus, it is essential to keep in mind that the sociohistorical processes of transformation that have taken place in Central America over the past century have had a varying impact on the many ethnic-based movements for linguistic rights and national inclusion. In Guatemala, these efforts took place at a time witnessing the end of a civil war that disproportionately affected Mayan Indigenous groups and the beginning of a peace process that sought to publicly recognize and address these historical injustices.

The 1996 Peace Accords marked a turning point in the way the government addressed issues of multilingualism and ethnic identity through policy and programming. As part of the signed agreement between the Guatemalan government and representatives of civilian groups affected by the violence of the civil war, provisions were made to expand language policies in planning bilingual and bicultural education across the country. According to Helmsberger (2006), this document officially recognized the pluricultural, multilingual, and multiethnic fabric of Guatemalan society. To many, however, the peace accords in Guatemala represented more of a symbolic gesture than concrete policy reform that guaranteed the human and linguistic rights of the Maya. It wasn't until 2003 that the *Ley de Idiomas Nacionales* (Law of National Languages) was passed by the Guatemalan Congress. Through this law, the Guatemalan state guaranteed "the right of the peoples and Indigenous communities to the cultural identity in accordance with their values, their language and their customs" (*Decreto Número 19-2003* as cited in French 2008: 127). However, it remains a matter of debate to what extent these policy documents trickle down to the level of practice and positively affect the daily lives of Indigenous people in Guatemala.

The work of French (1999) suggests the importance of examining the relationships between language, ethnic identity, and national identity in the context of Mayan movements for access to state resources and inclusion into national discourses and politics. She argues that notions about language are ideologically driven and that language ideologies are inextricably tied to ideas about nationhood. The case of Guatemala points to the social and political importance of such issues throughout its colonial and postcolonial history:

What has endured during these different historical periods is a perceived link between language and peoplehood. Discussions and policies centering on either eliminating Maya Indians or accepting them as part of the Guatemalan national community have co-occurred with discussions and policies focused on either eliminating or accepting Mayan languages. (French 1999: 278)

In a more recent work, French (2008: 129) argues that the politics of these opposing language ideologies and their respective projects—that of embracing or eliminating cultural and linguistic differences—share an essentializing notion of language and identity. French posits that both the homogenizing government-sponsored efforts and activists of the Pan-Maya movement "assume that Mayan languages are iconic representations of Maya peoples." These fixed, primordial constructions of identity are used for very strategic political purposes, and in the

case of Pan-Maya movement, they represent the ideal of a unified Maya fighting for collective rights and autonomy. French's (2008: 145) ethnographic research on the bilingual Kaqchikel-Maya communities offers a more fluid and nuanced understanding of identity by focusing her analysis on the diversity of language ideologies which are "linked with locally meaningful understandings of gender, performance, history and place."

Case Study: Mexico

Mexico has been the object of varying historical processes that have shaped the way it emerged after the initial encounter of colonization. The quest for modernization profoundly altered the social landscape of a region that was culturally and linguistically complex to begin with. During the Spanish Colony, there were no clear language policies that established Spanish as the official language. It was not until after Independence in 1810 and the subsequent nationalist efforts of the revolution in 1910 that there were attempts to incorporate the Indigenous populations to the nation's larger project through strong assimilationist measures. Language policy in Mexico today has been largely the result of international agreements and local Indigenous movements that have strived to obtain recognition for their communities and their culture.

Spanish is the official language and the first language of approximately 90% of the population. There is ongoing debate as to the number of languages that are spoken in Mexico. Modiano (1988) estimates the number at approximately one hundred. Others place the number of Indigenous languages closer to 300 (Gordon 2005), whereas Nettle and Romaine (2000) estimate 240 languages. Although there is strong disagreement on the number of living languages, three major language families have been identified: Uto-Nahua, which is found mainly in the northern and central part of the country; Oto-Mangue, in the central area; and Mayan, in the central and southern regions (Modiano 1988). Ninety-three percent of Indigenous speakers live primarily in the thirteen states located in south and central Mexico: Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Hidalgo, Campeche, Guerrero, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, and Yucatán. Despite the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the Indigenous population, the national discourse strives for unity in one voice, leading to what some have called the "Indigenous paradox."

Since 1992, the Mexican Constitution has acknowledged the existence of Indigenous people living in different regions of the national territory. In 2001, under the government of former President Vicente Fox, the Constitution was reformed to acknowledge the pluricultural composition of the country. The adoption of this law responded to the strong political pressure from numerous Indigenous groups spearheaded by the Zapatista Army in the state of Chiapas in 1994. These measures were undertaken after the *Acuerdos de San Andrés* that were put forth by the government of Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000). These agreements established that all Indigenous communities had the right to use, promote, and develop their languages and cultures, as well as their political, social, religious, and cultural traditions. The mother tongue of each community was also identified

as the medium of education. The main goal of this intercultural-bilingual education policy was to reinforce the mother tongue while encouraging the learning of Spanish. In 2003, Indigenous languages were recognized as national languages under the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* (The General Law for Linguistic Rights of Indigenous People).

An increasing number of scholars (Schmelkes 2006) have shown that education is becoming central to the debate on language. Educational policies legitimize language choice, channel language attitudes, and provide fertile ground for the construction of identities. Intercultural-bilingual education programs have become the panacea for other social issues. At an international conference on intercultural education, Schmelkes (2006: 3) concluded that "language trends can be transformed," and education, with an intercultural approach, has an essential role in this process. Intercultural-bilingual education can work toward two important objectives—increased knowledge of languages and cultures and respect and appreciation for those who are linguistically and culturally different.

Oaxaca is the state with the largest Indigenous population and is an important example to illustrate the success of language maintenance policies. According to the Mexico-based Academy of the Mixtec Language, more than half a million people speak Mixtec today. This is a remarkable number given the fact that in 1930, there were less than two hundred thousand speakers. The ethnolinguistic revival sparked by the Zapatista uprising in 1994 is partly responsible for this shift, as well as grassroots development of Mixtec educators and scholars. According to Stanley (2003) more people than ever are speaking the language.

Mexico is currently undergoing dynamic shifts. Increased migration flows from Central America to Mexico and from Mexico to the United States have altered the landscapes in ways that are now redefining communities and ways of making a living. New technologies and access to media are empowering Indigenous communities and also introducing new codes and ways for them to reconstruct their ethnic identity. At the same time, the government and local organizations are responding to these shifts by providing outlets that foster language maintenance and providing stronger support for bilingual-bicultural education programs. The challenge for the future will be how to deal with the new configurations brought about by globalization and immigration, while creating stable contexts within which all these ethnic communities can still find a sense of national belonging in an ever-increasing multilingual/multicultural country.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the discursive construction of Latin America, the sociohistorical context of nation-building processes that have shaped identity formation in these territories, and the contemporary narratives that have emerged around issues of language and ethnic identity—with particular attention to movements for Indigenous rights. The data and figures cited offer a panoramic perspective on the current sociolinguistic landscape of the region. In addition, the two case studies provide a more in-depth profile of two Latin American countries

in order to highlight the situated nature of linguistic practices and ethnic identities.

Though we take a postmodern/constructivist stance toward notions of ethnic identity, we also acknowledge that essentialist categories of ethnicity are often used in strategic ways by both states and grassroots groups to promote particular social and political agendas. For this reason, we have highlighted the role that language policymaking has had in making available (and often privileging) certain cultural and linguistic resources over others. The recent intercultural-bilingual education initiatives proposed and implemented throughout the region (however imperfectly) necessarily invoke notions of identity, which are then performed through different language practices.

We agree with Mallon (1996: 174), who argues that many of the questions around language and its relationship to ethnic identity must be explored empirically. Scholars must ask: "Who and what constructs ethnic boundaries and identities, and under what conditions? What is the role of conflicts within ethnic groups, especially over the control of material and symbolic land, we would add, linguistic resources." Globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of all peoples through mass migration must be factored into these analyses, as these processes are having an impact on language identities and ensuing language practices. Additionally, the relationship between bilingualism and ethnic identity must be further explored, as an increasing proportion of people in Latin America (not just Indigenous populations) speak more than one language (Niño-Murcia & Rothman 2008).

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Can we talk about one Latin American ethnic identity? Why or why not?
2. Why are the origins and naming of Latin American relevant to the discussion of language and ethnic identity?
3. How did modernity shape social identities and social representations in Latin America?
4. What role does education play in promoting certain ethnic and linguistic identities?
5. What are the general emerging trends in language policy in Latin America?
6. What events could have led to Mexico's recent policy of recognizing Indigenous languages as national languages?
7. How did the 1996 Peace Accords impact language policy in Guatemala?

8. What do you believe are the effects of immigration and globalization on language and ethnic identity in Latin America?

Notes

1. Throughout this chapter, we capitalize the Word "Indigenous" to indicate a land-based group and to be consistent with Indigenous scholarship use.
2. We subscribe here to the view of Makoni and Pennycook (2007) that these "languages" were administratively assigned to by missionaries and colonial officers who needed to evangelize, convert, control, and administer these peoples.
3. Although Quechua is often referred to as a single language, it is really a family of related languages with different degrees of mutual intelligibility. The same is true for Nahuatl and Maya.

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