

Collaborative Experiences of Cultural and Linguistic Revitalization in Southern Mexico

Experiencias colaborativas de revitalización cultural y lingüística en el sur de México

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Abstract

In this article, we report several cultural and linguistic revitalization experiences carried out by various community members and academic researchers through explicit collaborations. Our aim objective is to reflect on the implications and impact of research with a collaborative and socially relevant approach, particularly in the field of Indigenous languages, as well as its scope and limitations. To this end, we present completed research and/or intervention projects in support of various Indigenous languages (Zapotec, Tzeltal, Zoque, Ixcatec, Mam, among others) in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, in both school and non-school contexts. Their main characteristic is the existence of direct collaboration between researchers and speaker communities. The main results of these cases show that collaborations take on diverse nuances and that their success is determined by factors ranging from structural issues to community decisions. In the academic sphere, processes of methodological innovation and social relevance become evident.

Keywords: Indigenous languages – collaborative research – language shift – Indigenous peoples – linguistic revitalization.

Resumen

En este artículo se reportan algunas experiencias de revitalización cultural y lingüística desarrolladas por diversos miembros de las comunidades e investigadores académicos, mediante colaboraciones explícitas. Nuestro objetivo es reflexionar sobre las implicaciones e impacto que tienen las investigaciones con enfoque colaborativo y pertinencia social, particularmente en el ámbito de las lenguas indígenas, así como sus alcances y limitaciones. Para tal fin, se presentan proyectos de investigación y/o intervención ya con-

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cluidos, a favor de diversas lenguas indígenas (zapoteco, tseltal, zoque, ixcateco, mam, entre otras) en los estados de Chiapas y Oaxaca, en contextos escolares y no escolares, cuya característica principal es la existencia de una colaboración directa entre los investigadores y las comunidades de hablantes. Los principales resultados de estos casos muestran que las colaboraciones adquieren diversos matices y que su éxito está determinado por factores que van desde cuestiones estructurales hasta decisiones comunitarias y, en el ámbito académico, se evidencian procesos de innovación metodológica y pertinencia social.

Palabras clave: Lenguas indígenas – investigación colaborativa – desplazamiento lingüístico – pueblos indígenas – revitalización lingüística.

Introduction

Preceded by some criticism to the colonial system, some academic research practices have been singled out in recent decades due to their extractivist and colonial nature (Fals Borda, 1992; Bessis, 2025; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Trouillot, 2003), as well as the scope and limitations of critical and decolonial approaches to revert the displacement of indigenous languages and cultures (Rambukwella & Zavala, 2025). This discussion has grown in the last two decades, giving rise to forms of research that include “a whole associated terminology such as collaborative, participative, militant, shared, committed, activist, postcolonial, decolonial ethnography” (Katzner, *et. al.*, 2022, p. 16).

Nowadays, within the social sciences, collaborative research seeks to “build relationships of equality which alter historical hierarchies and mistrust reproduced by the colonial relationships that exist between academic scientific research and indigenous peoples” (Leyva & Speed, 2008, p. 42), and such is the methodological line to which this paper subscribes.

On the other hand, the study of the phenomenon of linguistic displacement has also demanded a collaborative approach that goes beyond mere description, making room for community-managed processes for cultural and linguistic revitalization (Flores Farfán, 2018). In this respect, languages at risk constitute a field of knowledge in which collaborative processes become visible, especially considering that often the speakers of these languages themselves demand such an approach, which has been strengthened by the presence of indigenous researchers who study their own languages (Montero, 2017; Alonso Ortiz, 2020; De los Santos, 2020; Pérez Ríos, 2023).

Thus, a number of experiences of linguistic documentation and revitalization often involve the participation and collaboration of researchers, whether they are members of the community or not. This collaborative process can be observed in the case of the Nahua of the Alto Balsas in the Mexican state of Guerrero (Flores Farfán, 2003), or the Hñähñu of Valle del Mezquital in the state of Hidalgo (Vargas García, 2017). De los Santos (2020) documents something similar in the context of the Chatina language, Córdova Hernández (2022) about the K’anjob’al language of the state of Chiapas, and Peña Godínez (2023) recounts a similar experience with the Zapoteco of Santo Domingo Petapa in the state of Oaxaca, to name a few.

In this sense, this paper aims to contribute to reflection on the importance, the implications, and the pertinence, both academic and communitarian, of collaborative methodologies in the processes of linguistic revitalization. Although we will rely on some experiences we have had as researchers in our work with several indigenous languages in Oaxaca and Chiapas, we will also discuss other experiences that allow us to gauge the scope and impact of this research. We will also analyze the different forms of collaboration and the nuances that this type of projects have in the practice.

To this end, this paper is divided as follows. The theoretical framework is divided in two sections: the first one addresses linguistic displacement and revitalization, the second concerns collaborative methodologies as a qualitative research approach, followed by a brief presentation of our methodology, and the third presents and analyzes our results according to the impact and implications that this type of research has on the communities, as well as its academic relevance. Based on these analyses, we discuss the scope, the limitations, and the obstacles encountered by collaborative research for cultural and linguistic revitalization. Finally, we offer some conclusions with the aim of continuing to reflect on this issue and suggesting paths for similar studies in other socio-cultural contexts.

Displacement and revitalization of indigenous languages

According to the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (UNESCO), 50 % of the approximately 6000 languages spoken around the world are at some risk of disappearing. Crystal (2000) considered that by the end of this century only 10% of these languages will survive. In this context, since 2017 it was estimated that every two weeks a language disappears, leading to the loss of the cultural and intellectual heritage of the communities (UNESCO, 2024). This scenario places indigenous languages as those with the greatest degree of vulnerability in regard to languages with a colonial origin.

In the case of Mexican indigenous languages the outlook is not very encouraging, since the 68 languages registered in Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Languages Indígenas (INALI) catalog of indigenous languages are at some level of displacement. In fact, the latest population census shows that 6 of these languages – Teko, Oluteco, Kiliwa, Kickapoo, Awakateko, and Ayapaneco – are spoken by less than 100 speakers. On the other hand, languages such as Maya, Tseltal or Tsotsil, despite being spoken by over half a million people, are not exempt from this phenomenon.

In view of this situation, Mexico's linguistic policies such as the General Law of the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 2 of the Political Constitution, and Chapter IV of the General Law of Education include several strategies aimed at the promotion, visibility, and revitalization of indigenous languages, although in reality little progress has been made in this respect. Of particular interest is the *Declaración de Los Pinos (Chapoltepek) – Building a decade of actions in favor of indigenous languages* issued in 2020 by UNESCO in coordination with Mexico's government, which urges for collaborative work towards the revitalization of these languages.

It must be underscored that the boards of analysis and debate for the drafting of the *Declaración de los Pinos*, within the international decade of indigenous languages (2022 - 2032) promoted by UNESCO, featured the participation of many Mexican and international researchers engaged in the study, documentation, revitalization, or promotion of indigenous languages, which is relevant for our study since there is a consensus among researchers that one of the fundamental principles of academic work related to linguistic revitalization is to foster synergies among multiple actors, centered in the indigenous peoples as the main agents of these processes.

A number of cases of linguistic displacement and revitalization have been documented in academic articles – such as those mentioned in the introduction to this contribution – and others have been presented at fora, congresses and roundtables, so this issue has increasingly become known to the public, or at least its visibility has increased continuously. Along these lines, in April 2025 Mexico's Secretariat of Science, Humanities, Technology and Innovation (SECIHTI), an agency of the Federal Government, included among its strategic guidelines the diagnosis of the inter-generational transmission and access to rights for linguistic planning, which involves the allocation of a budget to address the problem of linguistic displacement and possible revitalization strategies.

At this point it is important to mention that our idea of revitalization calls for a processual and systematic – and probably not immediate – recovery. It also implies that the language at issue is once more transmitted between generations and that it recovers its spaces of use; that is, that it serves some social functions. In this respect, linguistic revitalization “is a political, identity, territorial, environmental, not just a linguistic, mobilization” (Córdova Hernández, 2019, p. 14). Thus, according to this author, since it is an extremely complex activity, in spite of many political, academic, educational and other efforts, successful cases in Mexico are practically non-existent, especially since the only evidence of success available is the widespread use of the revitalized language, both in traditional and new spaces, and its intergenerational re-transmission.

According to Pérez Báez *et. al.* (2022), revitalization implies “making every effort aimed at fostering the use of a language and reinforcing its vitality” (p.6). Although there have been a number of efforts in favor of the languages, it is important to note that not in all cases the actions undertaken have had a revitalizing scope or objective, since this depends on the threatened situation of each language or linguistic variety, so there are parallel processes such as maintenance, strengthening, diffusion, teaching, encouragement, and others. However, in this study we encompass all these experiences under the category of revitalization, taking into account what we explained above, even cases in which: “the language to be revitalized is at the edge of extinction [and its revitalization] acquires a symbolic aim; that is, the recovery of that language seeks to fulfill a number of functions linked to strengthening an identity” (López-Hurtado, 2015, p. 84).

Revitalization is both a cultural and a linguistic process since language and culture are interdependent, so much so that some believe that when a language is lost a culture is also lost

(Woodbury, 1993; León Portilla, 2013); and the other way around, when a culture is lost the language tends to be lost too (Caniupil, 2019; Machaca, 2019). It must be noted that the loss is not complete; that is, the cultural or linguistic elements do not disappear entirely, but there is a structural loss that makes the continuity, reproduction, and transmission of these elements impossible. In other words, these processes are understood as a continuum and even hybridizations, where language and culture have greater or fewer spaces of use.

On the other hand, studies of indigenous languages in Mexico have a long descriptive tradition. According to Lastra (2013) the first grammar and vocabulary studies date from the colonial era, and similar studies were made in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century there were dictionaries in indigenous languages as well as translations, especially those from the Instituto Lingüístico de Verano (ILV), whose translations of the Bible were made to dozens of indigenous languages. In this period there were many other linguistic studies related to the classification and reconstruction of proto-languages, historical linguistics, comparative studies, and so on.

Also according to Lastra, in recent decades there has been work on sociolinguistics, “which has focused on bilingualism and the asymmetrical position of Mexican languages regarding the official and dominant one, Spanish” (Lastra, 2013, p. 25). Added to sociolinguistics, the contributions of the sociology of language have been of great importance to understand the factors associated to the displacement of indigenous languages and the systematic efforts towards their revitalization, since they allow us to reveal the social use of languages and the ideologies and policies that affect one language or another (Fishman, 1995). Likewise, sociology of language studies show that, even though there may be viable linguistic policies, in this case for the revitalization of languages, these may be hindered by non-linguistic forces (i.e. genocide, colonization, corruption, natural disasters, etc.) (Spolsky, 2019).

In this sense, the study of linguistic policies (Skrobot, 2014; Barriga, 2018; Díaz-Couder, 2018) helps us to understand, from a historical perspective, the role of national States in the displacement and/or revitalization of indigenous languages. Also worth mentioning are the studies of linguistic planning, whose objectives are linked to the function of languages within a community, such as fostering an increase in the number of speakers (Moreno Fernández, 1991). As can be seen, the evolution of linguistic studies in recent years has made the issue of linguistic revitalization linguistics an important line of research within linguistics and education, both in terms of the teaching of the language and in the training of teachers for linguistic activism (Lorenzotti et al., 2015; Kvietok, 2025).

Collaborative research

We understand that collaborative research work has, first, an academic character, and then a communitarian character. This assumption is made taking into account the fact that communities have their own practices, strategies, or projects to address the different sociocultural or

linguistics issues they have to deal with. Even before scholars began to study the phenomenon of linguistic displacement and revitalization, schools, especially in the basic levels, played a determining role regarding the displacement of languages and later in the attempts to revitalize them, through a number of educational policies from 1920 to the present (Gigante y Díaz-Couder, 2015; Martínez y Diego, 2021).

Nowadays research, initiatives, and projects towards the revitalization of indigenous languages have multiplied. Pérez Báez *et. al.* (2022) conducted a census in Mexico, Central America and Latin America, and found 245 efforts of revitalization of 208 indigenous languages. Other studies of this issue have been made at different levels: communities, families, and schools (Sánchez Avendaño, 2012; López-Hurtado, 2015), as well as analyses and proposals of conceptual and methodological elements, as can be seen in the studies of Meyer & Soberanes (2009), Flores Farfán (2018), Flores Farfán *et. al.* (2020) and Córdova-Hernández (2022), as well as the study of specific cases related to efforts of revitalization (Flores Farfán, 2003; Córdova Hernández, 2014; Vargas García, 2017; De los Santos, 2020; Peña Godínez, 2023; Pérez Ríos, 2023). Pérez Báez *et. al.* (2022) identified that linguistic revitalization initiatives are often projects that involve the participation of a number of actors. They also consider that:

Support from within the communities themselves is considered essential in the processes, as well as respectful support from outside the community. Finally, the help of kindred groups is necessary to create networks that share experiences and knowledge that facilitate and speed up the processes. (p. 48 - 49)

Based on this we may argue that cultural and linguistic revitalization demands necessarily a collaborative approach, which can also be said of many areas of the social sciences. Therefore, in recent years there have been a number of methodological proposals in this direction, especially after “the growing influence of the anti-colonial thinking of Afro-descendant and indigenous critics involved in political activism” (Baronnet, 2022, p. 3), among which are the research in co-labor (Leyva y Speed, 2008) and doubly-reflexive ethnography (Dietz, 2011), the shared ethnography suggested by Cayón (2018) after their work with the *makuna* in Colombia’s Amazonia, or the ethnographic research approach after Oaxaca’s communality developed by Pérez Ríos (2022), as well as a series of collaborative experiences collected in *Investigación en movimiento. Etnografías colaborativas, feministas y decoloniales*, coordinated by Álvarez *et. al.* (2020).

We understand collaborative research as processes of research in which there is an explicit agreement between the people being researched and the researchers. This collaboration may arise from the initiative of either one of the parties. For example, in April 2024 one of the authors of this article was received an invitation in writing from a Zapotec municipality in southern Oaxaca to collaborate in a project for the teaching of Zapoteco as an L2 to children of the community, through talks and pedagogical proposals. In another approach, based on the identification

of linguistic displacement in another Zapotec community, the researcher opted for meeting with the community's authorities to propose actions that favored cultural and linguistic revitalization, which was accepted and put into practice.

As we will see below, collaboration acquires different nuances, from who is involved in the processes of collaboration, the scope of such collaboration in terms of time and space; that is, in which spaces and places the collaboration may take place, and the time allotted for it. There are also the conflicts that may arise during the process, as well as the mechanisms to solve them. The use of tools, resources, and other material elements also plays an important role in the collaborative process, as well as the management of the products derived from these dynamics.

Finally, in Mexico's academic environment, collaborations with sectors of society have become compulsory for researchers, since the Secretariat of Science, Humanities, Technology and Innovation (SECIHTI) demands activities of social retribution social that may impact the communities where the research is conducted, so the collaborative approach becomes even an obligation. This also applies to graduate students, who must show proof of their participation in projects that provide society with knowledge and scientific practices as an outcome of graduate programs.

Our methodological approach

This text analyzes and reflects on results of research and participation in cultural and linguistic revitalization projects in several indigenous communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas, through collaborative approaches. Our analyses are made through qualitative outlooks, since we are in investigating the nuances acquired by collaborations based on specific contexts and dynamics, so we refer to one of the characteristics of qualitative researchers, i.e. that "they are sensitive to the effects caused by them on the people that they study" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987, p. 20).

Along with that, we intend to retrieve already completed projects and/or research and do a retrospective exercise in the light of the implications and impacts of the collaborative approaches that characterize the research processes referred to here. In this sense, we will also rely methodologically on the ethnographic approach with a historical perspective developed by Rockwell (2009), as this allows us to position ourselves as researchers with experience in field work and long-term interactions with the people who participate in the research processes de research, as well as retrieve such experiences in the drafting of ethnographic documents.

Our reflection is made based on our situated experiences in communities who speak the Zapoteco, Chocholteco, Zoque, and Ixcateco languages in Oaxaca, as well as in towns where different Mayan languages such as Mam, K'anjob'al, Tojolabal, and Tzeltal are spoken in Chiapas, spaces where we have conducted collaborative field work at different times from 2010 to 2025. Our interlocutors have been children, youths, community authorities, and basic education teachers with an indigenous background.

The experiences of linguistic revitalization selected for this study were those that met, first, the collaborative approach mentioned above, and that have been completed, since that allowed us to analyze the scopes, limitations, and obstacles encountered in the different stages of the projects. Although each experience had different collaborative methodological approaches, for this contribution we drew inspiration from Oscar Jara's systematization of experiences, specifically in the phase of the evaluation of the projects, which "must seek to go beyond merely meeting the objectives proposed [...] to assess also the transformative impact of the processes in the medium term" (Jara, 2018, p. 129). We also believe that:

It is also indispensable to make value judgements on the goals, results, effects, and impacts actually achieved, as well as on the reasons that explain their achievement or failure, in order to correct or restate what must be done in the future. (*Ibidem*).

We used the quote above as our basis to conduct our data analysis. To do it, we reviewed carefully the information available on each experience selected, which we have published in several articles and book chapters, added to our own memory as direct participants in such activities. Thus, it was essential to analyze experiences that involved our direct participation. In order to avoid or reduce possible biases in the treatment of the information, we privileged the information taken from published sources, and only used specific testimony to add to or clarify information contained in the publications.

For our data analysis we established three categories: scopes, limitations, and obstacles, viewed from temporal, spatial, financial, academic, and even linguistic perspectives, taking into account the fact that we included languages at an extreme risk of disappearing, such as is the case of Ixcateco.

Once we established the categories of analysis, we did an evaluation of the projects according to each category. This allowed us to make comparisons and entailed reflexive processes aimed not only at mapping the scopes, limits, and obstacles, but also at re-thinking the processes and development of future projects focused on cultural and linguistic revitalization. This exercise led, somehow, to a self-critical and formative process, especially because we were able to look back at our participations several years away, identifying elements to be improved in future projects, which could be useful for other colleagues in the field of cultural and linguistic revitalization.

The nuances of collaborative research into cultural and linguistic revitalization

First, we will underscore the elements that have originated our projects of collaboration with speakers of indigenous languages. We have identified three: firstly, those that arose from an explicit request of the indigenous community, from one of their members, or from municipal or community authorities. Secondly, some experiences had their origin in an institutional initiative of a school or a government agency such as the National Institute of Indigenous languages

(INALI), and thirdly, experiences that arose from an interest of the researchers themselves, who invited the community to participate in the project.

In the first category we place a request made by the municipal authorities of a Zapotec municipality in southern Oaxaca. The municipality had been working on a project to teach Zapotec as a second language to children of the community. The collaboration was requested to provide accompaniment to their proposal through workshops on Zapotec history and culture, in order to link the linguistic with the cultural. In the case of institutions, we must mention the participation of one of the authors in the *projects of revitalization of languages at risk in the south of Mexico* carried out by INALI, in close collaboration with speakers of Mam, Zoque, Chontal, Zapoteco, Chocholteco and Ixcateco, as well as the collaboration of the Secretariat of Indigenous Affairs of Oaxaca (SAI), the Center of Studies and Development of the Indigenous Languages of Oaxaca (CEDELIO), and the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO).

Finally, regarding southern Zapoteco, one of the authors designed a cultural and linguistic revitalization program that was approved by the community through a Community Assembly. As we will see below, in all the cases, the community plays a main role in the activities implemented.

Added to the ways in which the linguistic revitalization initiatives we have collaborated in have arisen, are the community agents who participate. In all the cases there are two main figures: the speakers of the indigenous languages, and those that we might call apprentices. We have identified practically no cases of intergenerational transmission of the language in the family environment: the projects are based on teaching strategies, something also reported by Pérez Báez *et, al.* (2022) in the international survey of initiatives on linguistic revitalization. We might even venture to suggest that the speakers are the most important figures as carriers of the language: based on their words it has been possible to generate linguistic landscapes and signs in Zoque and Zapoteco, design teaching materials in Ixcateco, Zapoteco and Tzeltal, and recover oral history in Zapoteco, among other actions.

Of particular relevance is the role played by teachers, especially indigenous ones. In the different projects we have participated in, teachers function as cultural managers or language teachers. In a project conducted in three Tzeltal municipalities of Chiapas, the teachers were speakers of the language, so in the design of teaching materials they contributed with lists of words and translations of children's stories, whereas the team of researchers designed interactive tools so that children in the first and second grade of elementary school could learn to read and write bilingually. In this project, the teachers implemented the teaching strategies, and there was collaborative follow-up and updating of the activities conducted.

The apprentices are usually children in elementary school, and to a lesser extent youths in middle or high school. In the case of Zapoteco in a municipality in the south of Oaxaca, apprentices took classes of Zapoteco three days a week after they finished school. In the case of Tzeltal,

the project was endorsed by the Direction of Indigenous Education of Chiapas, so the sessions took place within school hours. The projects focused on linguistic landscapes or signs, as in the case of Zoque, did not include language teaching strategies, but were rather focused on the promotion and visibility of the language. All of the above shows that collaborative and communitarian linguistic revitalization initiatives do not necessarily involve the whole community. In many cases the ones who get involved are school actors and some speakers of the languages.

In terms of spaces, most of the projects analyzed here have been conducted in school environments, which makes sense considering that those who promote them through the community are often indigenous teachers. The school becomes then a symbolic space for linguistic revitalization due to its historical role in the processes of displacement. Thus, it is common to hear statements like “the school is giving us back the language that it took from us” (López-Hurtado, 2015, p. 95). Moreover, the teachers are often speakers of those languages, which favors the pedagogical processes around the languages.

Other initiatives have taken places in spaces outside schools, where the collaboration is extended to other members of the community and acquires other hues. For instance, a workshop for the cultural and linguistic revitalization of southern Zapoteco included mural painting. The community authorities were asked permission to paint over the wall of the community’s warehouse. The participants in the workshop made a collection to raise funds to buy paint and brushes, to which approximately 40 donors contributed around 3,000 Mexican pesos.

Financial issues also come to the surface when speaking about collaborative experiences for cultural and linguistic revitalization. In the case of projects of revitalization of languages at risk in southern Mexico, to which we referred above, there was some funding, albeit limited, by the INALI, which allowed them to launch workshops to teach languages, generate teaching materials, and implement signs.

In the case of the project of bilingual teaching of reading and writing in Tzeltal and Spanish, the project was funded by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (UNESCO), which allowed them to provide technological equipment to eight indigenous primary schools and benefit more than 600 children, as well as generate interactive teaching materials and teacher training in the use of digital tools. In the case of southern Zapoteco, the activities were self-financed: in one municipality through municipal resources and in the other making use of communal resources, that is, resources obtained from productive activities related with the forest exploitation carried on by the community on its own.

The temporal dimension of the collaboration is also worth examining. Although the results of a revitalization project centered in the reactivation of the social use of a language may extend for decades, other results may become apparent sooner, especially those related to the symbolic use of the language or the projects of linguistic landscapes and signs. In the case of the projects financed institutionally, the collaboration was limited to the time frame agreed between the parties. However, the approach intended was that the projects were self-sustainable;

that is, once the collaboration project ended mechanisms were sought so that the participants, members of the communities, could continue the activities autonomously.

Here it is worth underscoring that all the projects, rather than revolving around academic products, privileged community processes of management of their languages. This situation is directly linked with the specific situation of each language treated, while in some cases, such as that of the Chocholteco, progress was made in the recognition of the language as part of the historical heritage of the community and the strengthening of their identity. In other cases, such as that of the Tseltal, there was progress in the creation of animated stories videos in a monolingual format, both in Tseltal and in Spanish.

Scope, limitations, and obstacles identified

As we have shown above and according to what has been reported by a number of researchers working on linguistic revitalization (Flores Farfán, 2003; Meyer & Soberanes, 2009; Sánchez Avendaño, 2012; Vargas García, 2017; De los Santos, 2020; Córdova Hernández, 2022; Pérez Báez, 2022; Peña Godínez, 2023; Pérez Ríos, 2023, among others), it is impossible to conceive linguistic revitalization efforts without a collaborative approach. Linguistic revitalization, in these experiences, requires time, spaces, resources, and especially people concerned with the serious problem of the displacement of indigenous languages and their urgent revitalization. However, collaboration processes are not always successful, since they face some limitations and obstacles.

Scope

Some scope and/or advantages we have identified in cultural and linguistic revitalization projects with a collaborative have to do with the commitment, at least in principle, shown by the parties involved. When there is an explicit collaboration agreement, the people involved tend to collaborate in a responsible and active way, especially when the community authorities are involved and social actors who in the view of the communities are relevant appear. For example, in the project of bilingual reading and writing (Tseltal – Spanish) teaching in Chiapas, the teachers were eager to collaborate in an inter-institutional project between the UNICEF, the Autonomous University of Querétaro, and the Direction of Indigenous Education of that state.

In the academic environment, within the area of linguistic revitalization, the presence of researchers who are members de las communities where the languages at risk are spoken has increased in recent years, so languages from Oaxaqueñas such as Mixe, Mixteco, Zapoteco, Chatino, Triqui, or Chiñanteco, now have spaces devoted not only to the study but also to the revitalization of the languages. These researchers manage to create bridges between the communities and their speakers and other strategic actors such as linguists of institutions engaged in the promotion of actions in favor of the languages, thus strengthening the links of collaboration between different actors.

Collaboration processes result in an inter-disciplinary approach to the phenomenon of linguistic displacement and revitalization, thanks to the convergence of researchers in different areas of knowledge: linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and pedagogy, among others. This synergy may be seen as an advantage that may broaden the scope of the revitalization projects, since the teaching of indigenous languages must also be understood in the light of other social phenomena that take place in the communities and somehow weaken the social use of the languages.

As mentioned above, the SECIHTI demands from its programs adscribed to the National Graduate Programs System (SNP) and the members of the National Research Network (SNII) actions of social impact, universal access to knowledge, and other strategies of linkage to sectors of society, which is why doing collaborative research may also be beneficial within the activities requested. In 2025 SECIHTI launched a call aimed at the communitarian diffusion of scientific activities conducted in the academic field, which opens the doors to the implementation of talks, workshops, and other events about the diffusion, promotion, and visibility of indigenous languages.

Limitations and obstacles

Besides the scope generated by the collaborative projects with communities and speakers of indigenous languages, there are also some limitations and obstacles that undermine their success. Among the most important are academic malpractices; that is, those that may use the terms collaboration or collaborative in a confusing way or as a strategy for personal projects that contribute little or nothing to speakers of the indigenous languages. These malpractices are troublesome not only because they do not make any progress towards linguistic revitalization, but may also hinder future projects by generating mistrust in the communities, and consequently a refusal to collaborate.

In regard to the projects analyzed here, among their main limitations is the scarce linkage of the projects with other areas of community life; that is, it is difficult that the actions proposed go beyond the space and the participants. They do not transcend the general environment of the community. For instance, youths often keep their distance from these initiatives, or only few approach them. Municipal authorities, in turn, are often more concerned with other issues related to infrastructure or public works.

Financial resources are a limitation to be considered, since the researchers who collaborate in this kind of projects often reside in a city which is generally far from the communities, and resources are required to reach them. When the projects have funding mobility is not a problem, but when there are no funds researchers must finance mobility, meals, and other expenses themselves. This places limits on collaboration processes, especially on their continuity and the periodicity of the actions to be implemented.

Along the same lines, community activists or people who devote their time to generate actions in favor of indigenous languages often do it voluntarily, without getting any remuneration or some financial encouragement for their work. In time, this becomes unsustainable as they also have other family, work, or community-related responsibilities. We have even encountered cases of people who begin to collaborate in a revitalization project but are soon forced to migrate to a city in or outside our country.

Time issues also affect collaboration experiences, since some of them have a limited time frame and are dependent on the achievement of certain goals or products. In such cases there is no systematic continuity of the actions implemented, so there is a risk that their impact is temporal or the project loses momentum. In order to overcome this situation, some initiatives generated channels of communication with the participants, whether via *WhatsApp* or *Facebook*, where they continued sharing teaching materials focused on the teaching of indigenous languages.

The very vitality of the languages contemplated in revitalization projects limits efforts to recover them. Languages such as Ixcateco, southern Zapoteco, or Chocholteco, which have very few speakers or are even no longer used at any level of the life of the community, become very hard to revitalize in the sense of recovering their use for communicative purposes. Therefore, strategies restrict themselves to maintain their historical role, and symbolically to strengthen identity.

Finally, many of the people interested in the revitalization of their languages lack any pedagogical or teaching training required to carry out these activities. In fact, that is why they seek collaborations with academic actors to generate workshops on the teaching of languages. In several cases, we observed that language classes are focused on lists of words or polite phrases, and that the teachers involved usually tend to suggest the written production of the languages. However, some of the languages we have addressed are not used even orally, so teacher training is important to understand linguistic revitalization in regard to the particular case of each one of the languages.

Conclusions

Both in the projects or initiatives of linguistic revitalization in which we have participated and in those reported by other researchers (Flores Farfán, 2003; Meyer & Soberanes, 2009; Sánchez Avendaño, 2012; Vargas García, 2017; De los Santos, 2020; Córdova Hernández, 2022; Pérez Báez, 2022; Peña Godínez, 2023; Pérez Ríos, 2023, among others), collaboration is the axis that articulates and makes possible the development of actions in favor of linguistic revitalization. Hence, we concluded that it is scarcely possible to think of actions of linguistic revitalization without a collaborative approach. In that sense, the more solid and well organized the collaboration, the more possibilities of success there will be.

The collaboration experiences analyzed here bring into discussion a diversity of actors. The most important ones are the speakers of indigenous languages who, through their words, allow us to generate teaching materials, linguistic landscapes, signs, oral history and other tools that favor the visibility, maintenance, or strengthening of indigenous languages. Apprentices are also extremely important, since it is on them that we deposit the hope that indigenous languages are used again in the social level of community life, with communicative purposes. Teachers, especially in indigenous areas, play a vital role both as carriers of the language and as those who teach it. We the researchers, in turn, may contribute by accompanying and creating teaching strategies for indigenous languages, as well as doing linguistic documentation linguistics and other studies that allow us to understand the languages in their formal, historical, and social aspects. Government institutions are also important through the funding and promotion of indigenous languages.

This article showed that each language demands specific collaboration strategies according to their vitality, as well as the resources, time, and spaces available. What is common to all the cases is the nuances that collaboration acquires, including elements such as the origin of collaboration, the people who collaborate, the time and spaces allocated to the collaborative actions, and the funding available. These generate some possibilities and scope in the work of revitalization, but also imply some obstacles and limitations.

From a theoretical approach we may conclude that formal studies of indigenous languages are of great importance for linguistic revitalization actions. For instance, it would be difficult to consider generating teaching materials to teach reading and writing in Tsel'tal without previously knowing the grammar of the language. Furthermore, studies beyond the field of linguistics, such as anthropology, sociology, or pedagogy, play an important role in understanding the linguistic dynamics within a broader social area. They help us to understand the factors associated to the displacement of languages and the development of revitalization actions.

We conclude, in general, that collaboration in projects of linguistic revitalization must be explicit and engage effectively in actions that contribute to the revitalization of the languages, addressing issues that range from the visibility or promotion of the languages to the possibility of reintroducing their social use. In this sense, linguistic revitalization may be seen as a *continuum* or a timeline, in which each situation demands a certain type of actions, underscoring that, in some cases, reassigning a social use to a language may even seem to be a utopic endeavor.

Thus, we must continue to work on strengthening synergies among the different social actors related to indigenous languages and keep combining efforts that make cultural and linguistic revitalization possible in different spaces: families, schools, communities, and academic ones. Any action, no matter how small, may turn out to be favorable for a language on the edge of extinction. We must keep in mind, finally, that languages exist thanks to the speakers who

speak them, so the most important factor in all these actions is the people who, in spite of everything else, have resisted within their original languages.

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