

Resisting threats to linguistic diversity: lessons from Zapotec language activism

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June 1, 2019; Philadelphia

National Council on Interpreting in Health Care Annual Membership Meeting



American Council of Learned Societies



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
Humanities



2019 | INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
Indigenous Languages



Gyec muly

Laty rria muly

zhyet riani loguezh.

Bzeinya ricy,

brua ricy.

Tu buny naa?

Dizhsa rgwia,

per nazh dicwat ri ricy.

Wzhiny runua—

cuan ra sa?

Lazhzyet bunyi nua.

Gyec mulyi nai.

- Felipe H. Lopez (2018)

The money cage

The place where you can just scoop up money,

it's far away from home.

I arrived here,

I grew up here.

What kind of person am I?

I speak Zapotec,

but only deaf people live here.

I cry at night—

where is my family?

I live in the foreigners' country.

This place is a money cage. (translation mine)



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Dizhsa rgwia

I speak Zapotec

Tu buny naa?

What kind of person am I?

Dizhsa rgwia

I speak Zapotec

Buny Dizhsa

Zapotec person (Zapotec language person)

7



du'



listen

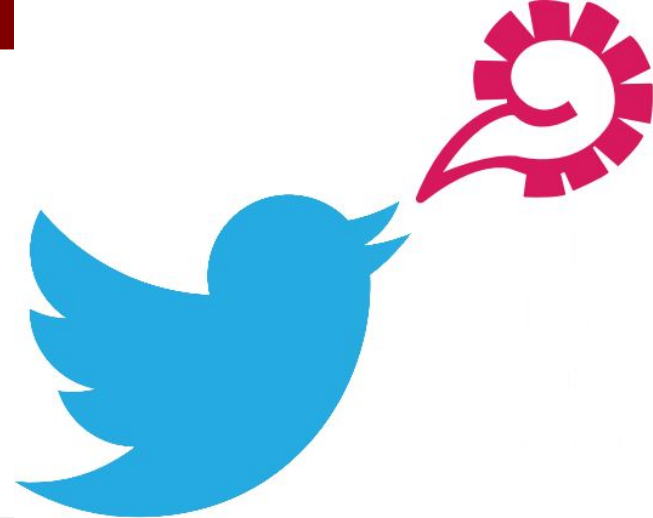
noun yarn

(Spanish) hilo

Speaker: Janet Chávez Santiago



bookmark



du'



listen

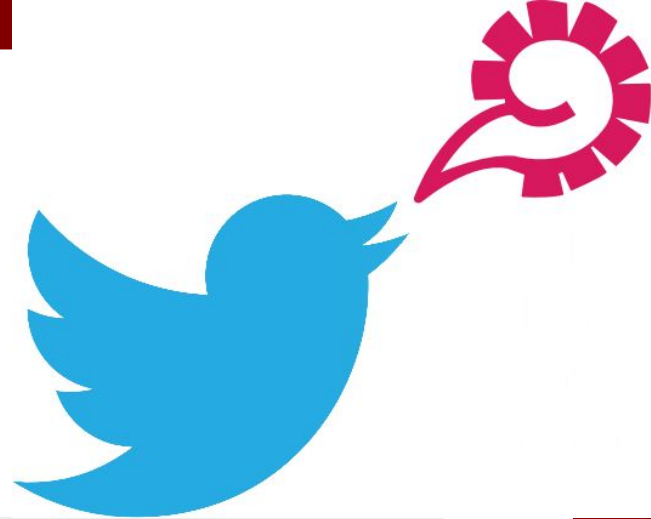
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bookmark



du'



listen

noun yarn

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DIZHSA NABANI

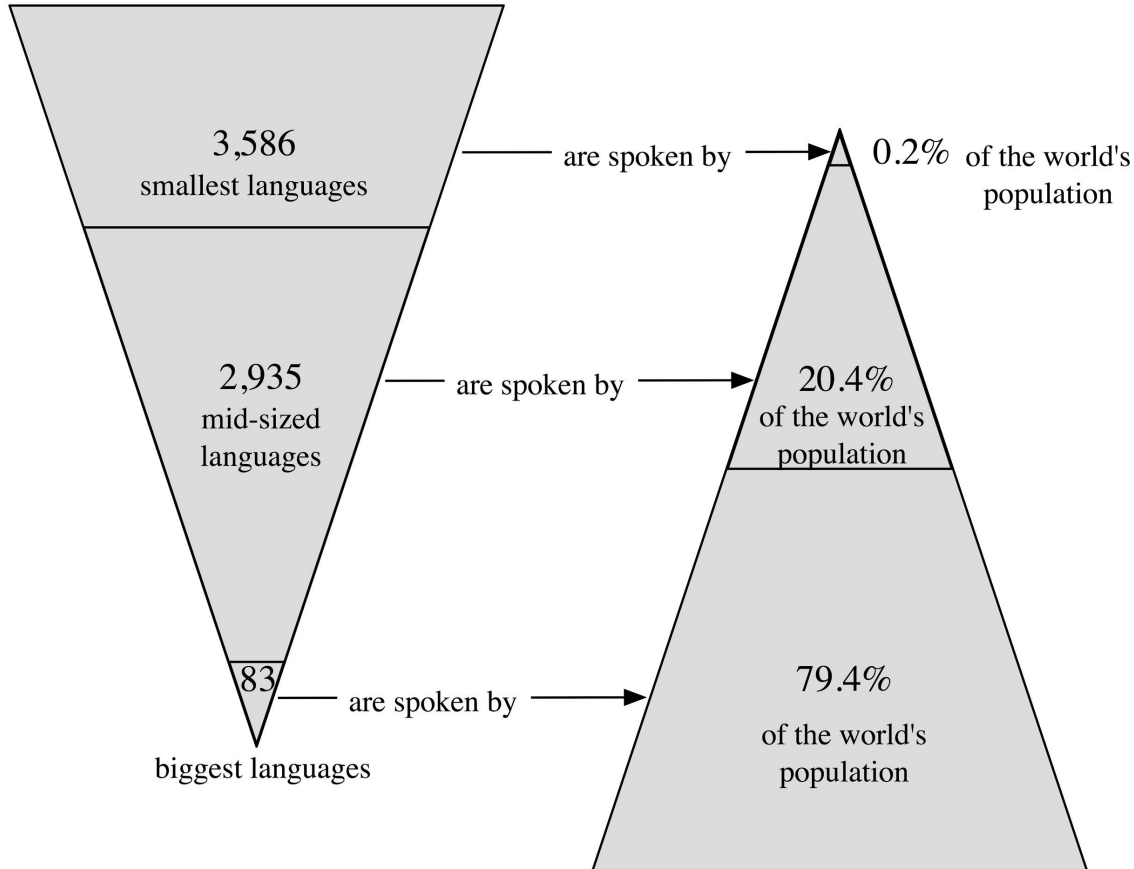
LENGUA
VIVA

LIVING
LANGUAGE



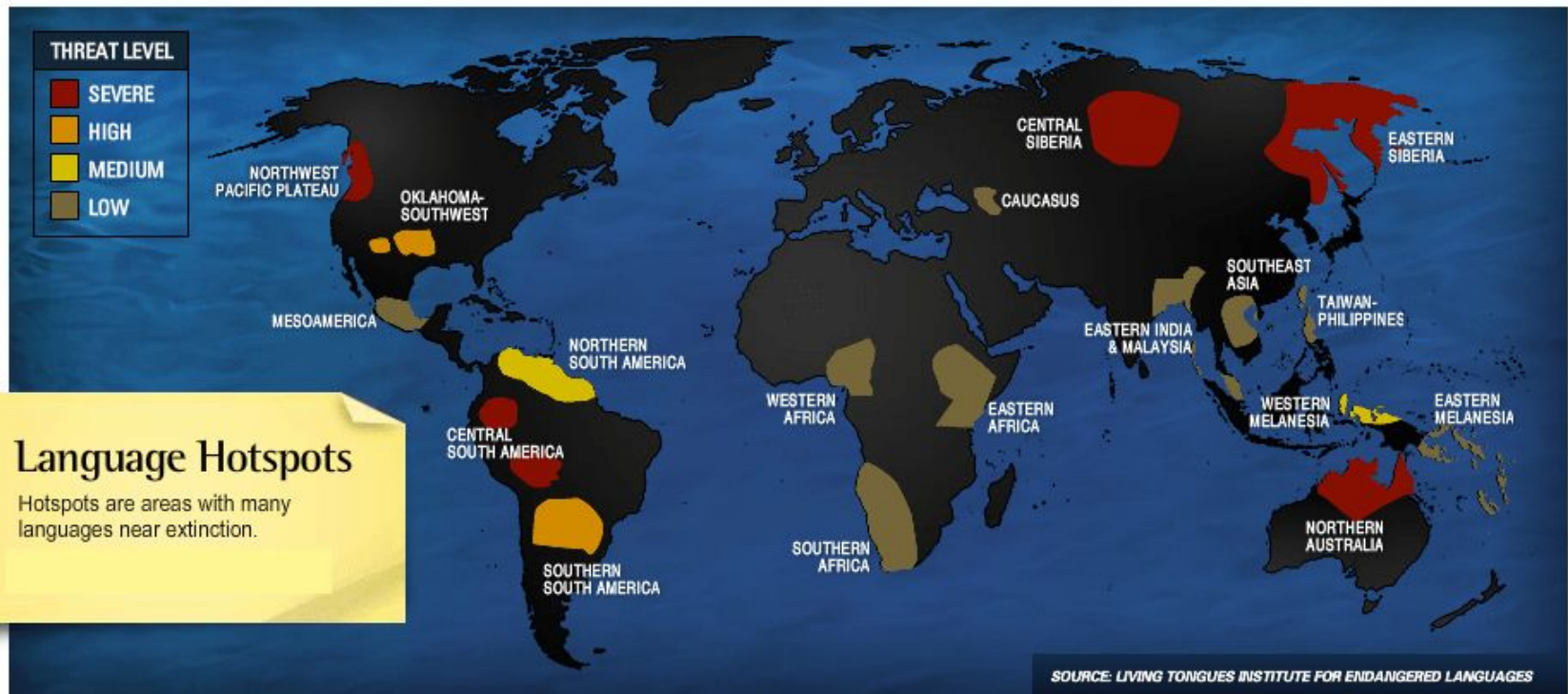
Languages

Speakers



Dr. Gregory D. S. Anderson
and Dr. K. David Harrison,
Living Tongues Institute

Language “hotspots”



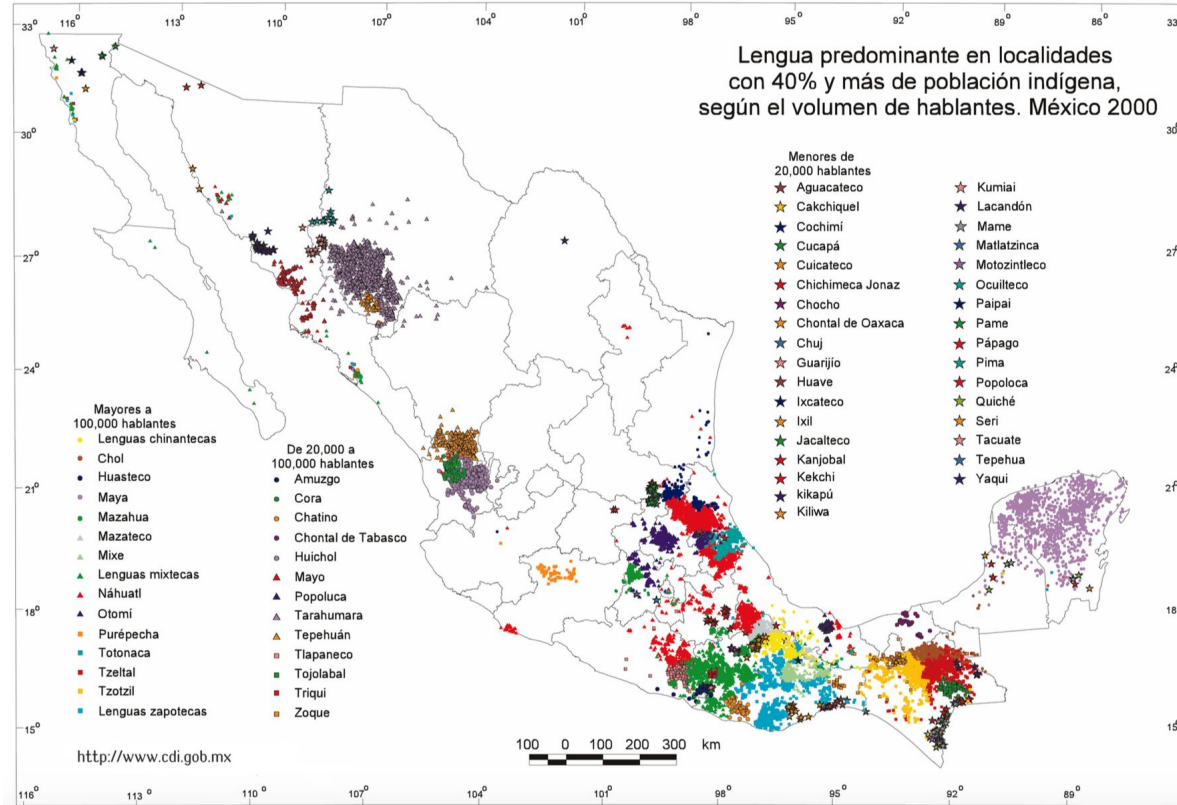
Indigenous languages in Mexico

- 7% of the population speaks an indigenous language in Mexico (INEGI 2015: 60)
- 60% are in danger of disappearing (INALI; Notimex 2019)

Threats against indigenous languages

- Mestizaje was a symbolic ideology for Mexico in the process of nation building after independence
- Mestizo / mestizaje - combined European and Indigenous American descent
- “Our indigenous problem is not to conserve the Indian as Indian, nor to indigenize Mexico, but rather to Mexicanize the Indian.”
-President Lazaro Cardenas in a speech before Mexican Congress, 1940

Distribution of indigenous languages in Mexico



Most widely spoken languages in Mexico

- Nahuatl (1.4 million speakers)
- Yucatec Maya (750,000 speakers)
- Mixtec (500,000)
- Zapotec (400,000)

Oaxaca



Google Maps

Oaxaca



Felipe H. Lopez (in Munro et al. 2007)

Zapotec languages

- Slightly over 400,000 speakers of Zapotec languages
- Communities are shifting to Spanish in more and more contexts
- All Zapotec varieties are endangered
- Many Zapotec varieties are critically endangered
- Most speakers of Zapotec do not write their language
- Discrimination against speakers of Zapotec (and other indigenous languages) has a long history and continues today



1:09-

D I Z H S A N A B A N I

**LENGUA
VIVA**

**LIVING
LANGUAGE**

Zapotec as a minoritized language

- Zapotec is not taught at schools and is seen as lacking scientific, mathematical, and educational value
- Zapotec is not often used in (non-Zapotec) public places
- Zapotec is seen as “traditional,” unchanging, and linked to the past; thus is not seen as having value in modern society
- Spanish is considered versatile, modern, and full of opportunities for economic and social status gains
- Zapotec and other indigenous languages are seen as something less than a language-- “dialectos”
- The written history of Zapotec is denied and Zapotec is claimed to be impossible to write

Experience & ideologies that devalue Zapotec language

Janet Chávez Santiago



When I was in elementary school, in the 90s, I remember children speaking Zapotec in many contexts: playing in the streets, at parties, and during town celebrations— but never at school. Instead, we had to “behave” ourselves by not speaking Zapotec, otherwise teachers could punish us by giving us extra homework or by not letting us eat lunch or even beating us. Teachers made us believe that speaking Zapotec was disrespectful, something to be ashamed of. They devalued our language by calling it a “dialect”.

Janet Chávez Santiago



As a child, I never saw anything written in Zapotec. All my books and books that my parents bought me were in Spanish, so at some point I thought teachers were right, that Zapotec was a language with no value so nobody wanted to write books in my language. By the end of the 90s there was no need to prohibit children speaking Zapotec in the school, because in order to avoid their children being punished, parents had switched to speaking in Spanish to their children at home. These days, there are very few children who speak Zapotec in my town.

-Janet Chávez Santiago,
in Mannix, Lillehaugen, & Chavez 2015



@JanChvzSanti

Zapototec writing



Zapotec alphabetic writing



[illegible]

Administrative texts

Wills / testaments

Bills of sale

Testimonies

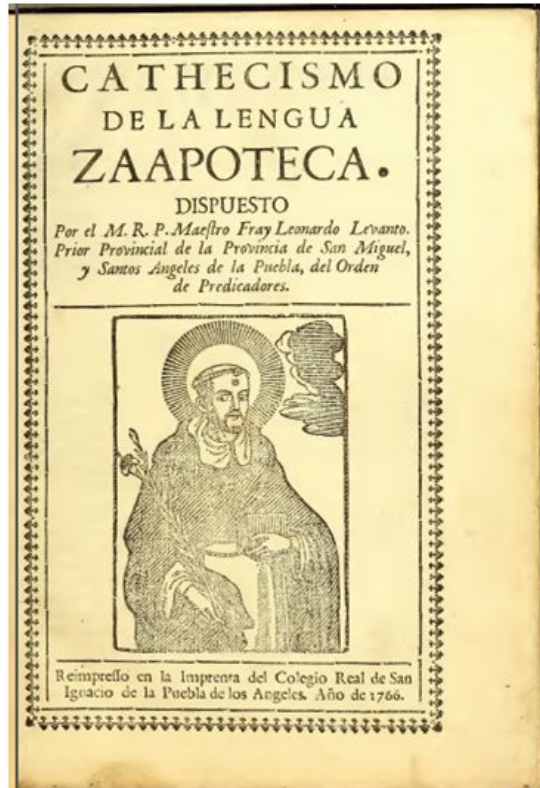
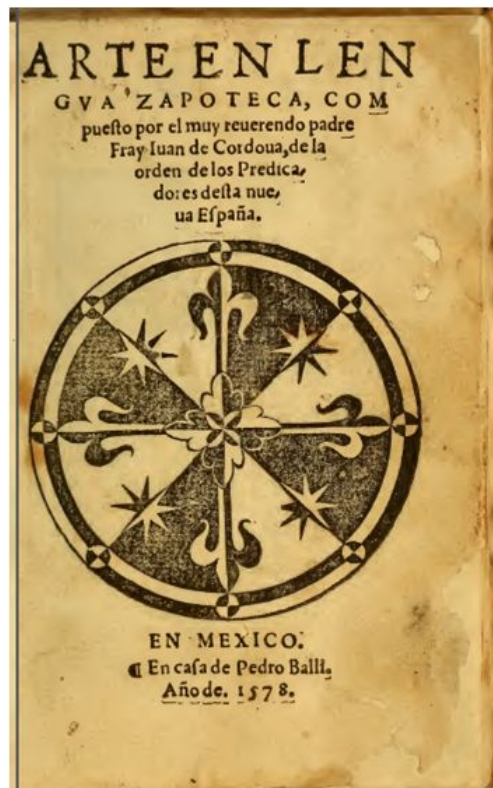
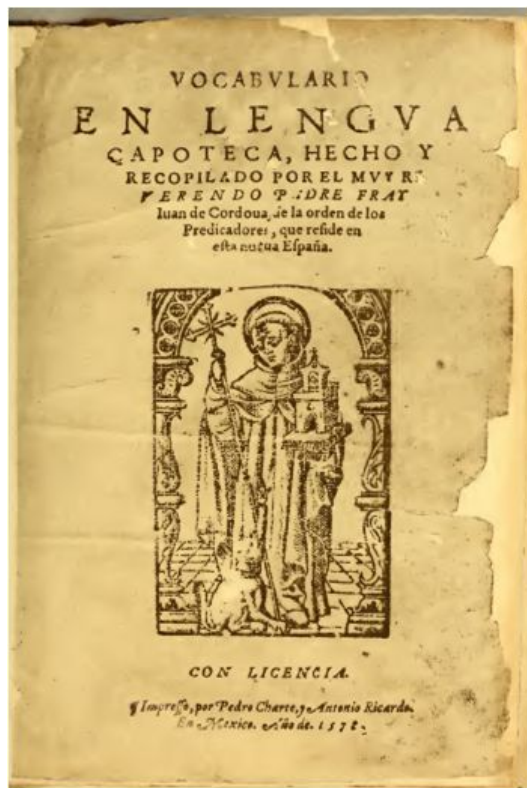
Petitions

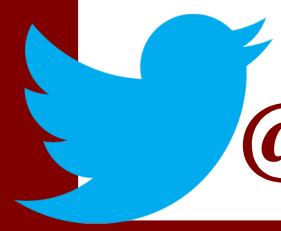
“Possessions”

Letters



Meta-linguistic & religious texts





@TichaProject

<http://ticha.haverford.edu>



About ▾

Colonial Zapotec ▾

Manuscripts ▾

Printed Texts ▾



TICHA

A DIGITAL TEXT EXPLORER FOR COLONIAL ZAPOTEC



@TichaProject

<http://ticha.haverford.edu>

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Zapotec advisory board

Felipe H. Lopez (San Lucas Quiavini) **@DizhSa**

Moisés García Guzmán (San Jerónimo Tlacoachahuaya) **@BnZunni**

Xóchitl Flores-Marcial (Tlacolula de Matamoros) **@xochizin**

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Ian Fisher, *Haverford College* '19

May Helena Plumb, *Haverford College* '16 **@mayhplumb**

...and many other contributors

Access- physical access



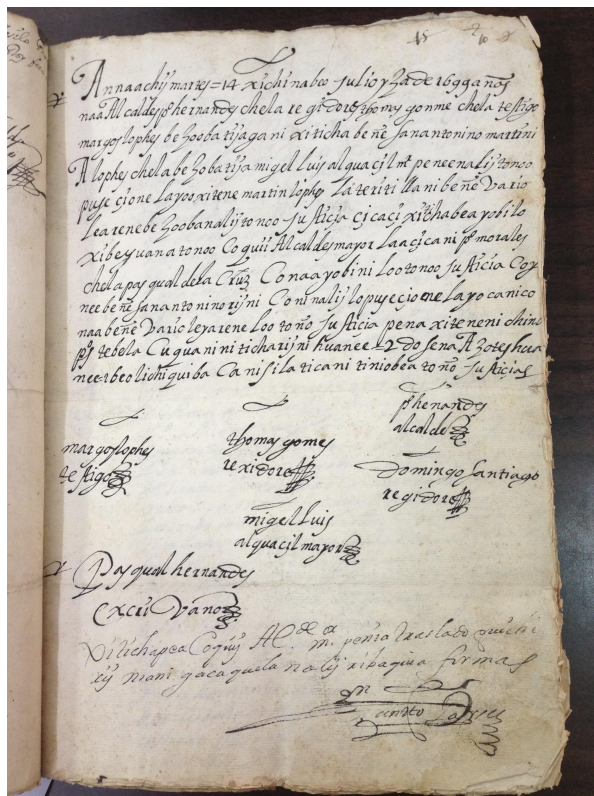
Access to corpus: browse

Available Handwritten Manuscripts

Show **50** entries

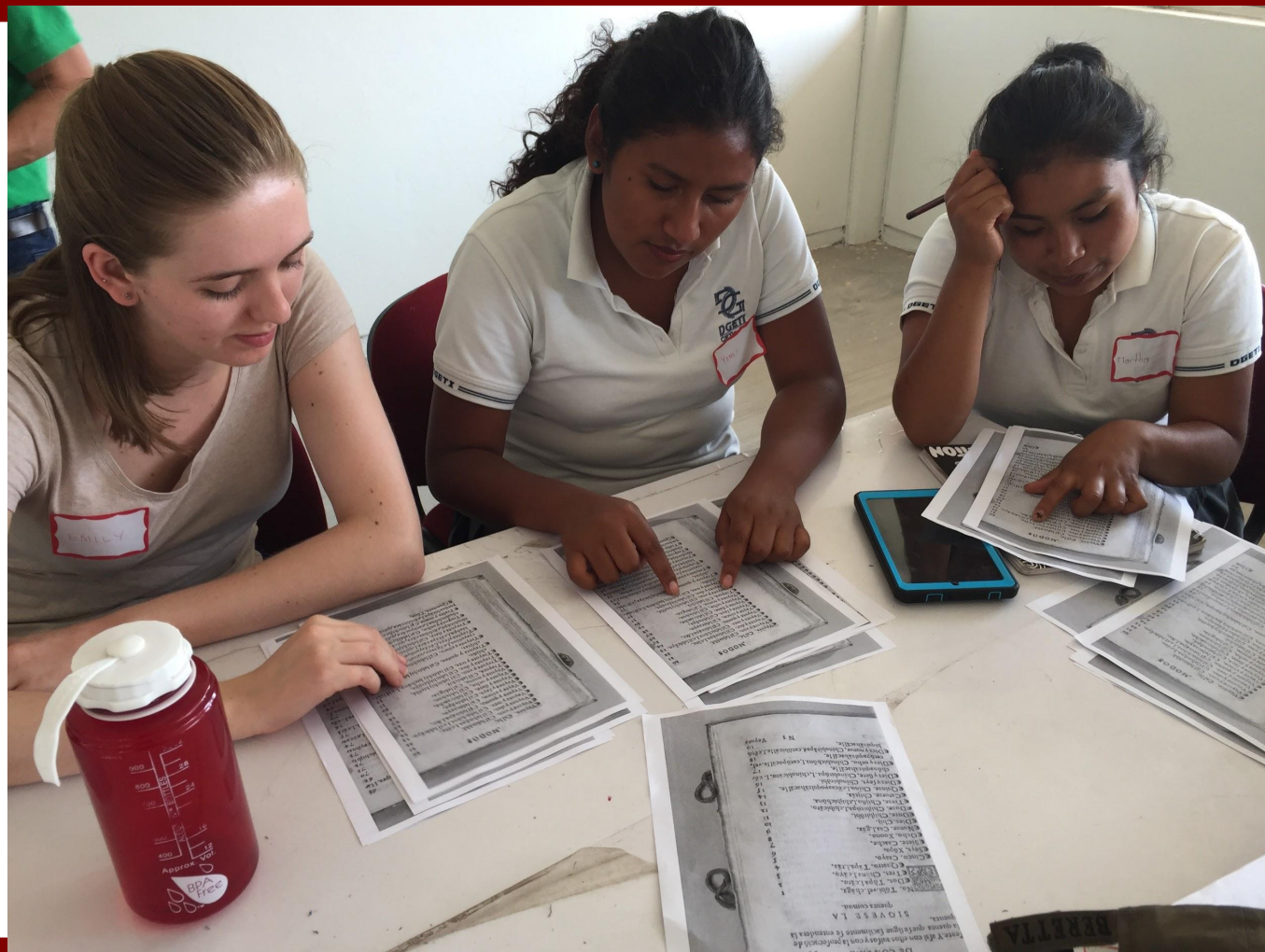
Search:

Name of Document	Year	Town	Archive	Type of Document	Language
Testament from Oaxaca de Juárez, 1633	1633	Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo Histórico de Notarías del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Testament	Zapotec
Testament from Santo Domingo, 1643	1643	Santo Domingo?, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Testament?	Zapotec
Bill of sale from San Miguel Talistaca, 1656	1656	San Miguel Talistaca, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Bill of Sale	Zapotec
Testament from Oaxaca de Juárez, 1670	1670	Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo Histórico de Notarías del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Testament	Zapotec
Bill of sale from San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, 1675	1675	San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Bill of Sale	Zapotec
Testament from San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, 1675	1675	San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Testament	Zapotec
Testament from Theozapotlan, 1687	1687	Theozapotlan, Oaxaca, Mexico	Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico	Testament	Zapotec



Process

- The texts are made publically available on Ticha as soon as possible (at any stage of analysis)
- The acknowledgement of existence of these texts is important to the community and gives public prestige to the language
- It makes visible a written history of a language currently seen as “only” an oral language
- Project grown collaboratively with undergraduate students and Zapotec speakers & community members





PADRE NUESTRO, QUE ESTAS EN
los Cielos, &c.

BYxoocetonoohe! Quiiebaa nachibalo : Naciroo ciica-
ni *Laalo*: Quellacooquii xtennilo quira ciica ruarij:
Niriziiguelalo ciica raca quiaa quiieba, laaniciica
gaca ruarii layoo; Xicónina quixee quixee penèche ciica annaà:
Chela conitilooiciicalo, ni rexihuina: Ciicatonoo reñiitiloo-
na, ni pexihui lezaana: Chela â cozaanañaaciicalo tonoo,
niiani yà quexihùina: Peziilla ciica tonoo niixtenni, quiraa
quella huechiie. Gaca ciiga ciica.
Jefus.

DIOS TE SALVE MARIA LLENA
eres de gracia, &c.

Annaa

PADRE NUESTRO, QUE ESTAS EN
los cielos, &c.

BYxoocetonoohe! Quiiebaa nachibalo: Naciroo ciica-
ni *Laalo*: Quellacooquii xtennilo quira ciica ruarij:
Niriziiguelalo ciica raca quiaa quiieba, laaniciica
gaca ruarii layoo; Xicónina quixee quixee penèche ciica annaà:
Chela conitilooiciicalo, ni rexihuina: Ciicatonoo reñiitiloo-
Na, ni pexihui lezaana: Chela â cozaanañaaciicalo tonoo,
niiani yà quexihùina: Peziilla ciica tonoo niixtenni, quiraa
quella huechiie. Gaca ciiga ciica.
Jefus.

DIOS TE SALVE MARIA LLENA
eres de gracia, &c.

Annaa

First

Previous

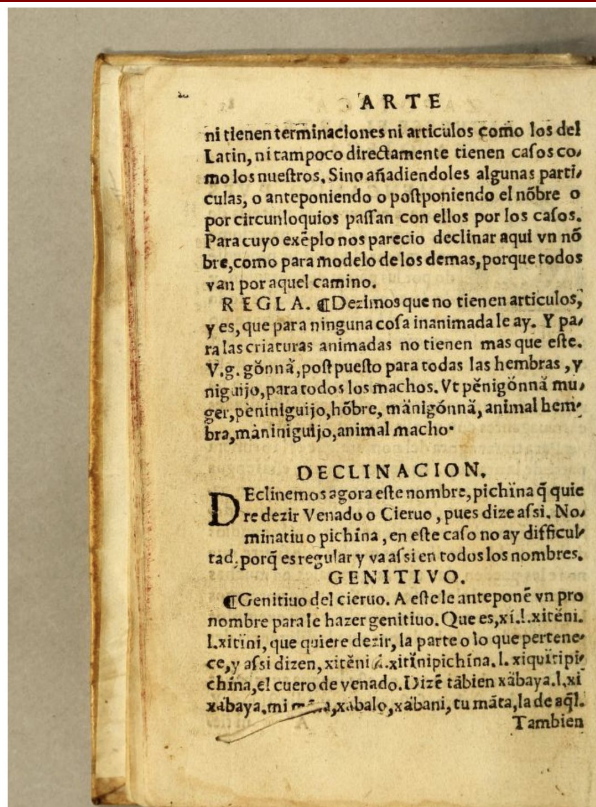
Next

Last

Feb 2017. This in progress beta version of the digital edition of Fray Leonardo Levanto's 1766 Cathecismo de la legua Zaaпотeca is being created as part of Lillehaugen's course, Linguistics 215 Structure of Colonial Valley Zapotec (Jan - May 2017). It can be cited as below:

Lillehaugen, Brook Danielle, Claire Benham, Janet Chavéz Santiago, Emily Drummond, James Arthur Faville, Avery A. King, Bridget Murray, Tristan Jacobo Pepin, May Helena Plumb, Mindy Renee Reutter, James E. Truitt, Christina Nicole Ulowetz, Mike Zarafonetis & Ian Fisher. 2017. Digital edition of Fray Leonardo Levanto's 1766 Cathecismo de la lengua Zaaпотeca, beta version. Ticha Project: <https://ticha.haverford.edu/en/texts/levanto/>

Access to linguistic information



Transcription

Modern Spanish

ARTE

ni tienen terminaciones ni artículos como los del Latin, ni tampoco directamente tienen casos como los nuestros. Sino añadiendoles algunas particulas, o anteponiendo o postponiendo el nōbre o por circunloquios pasan con ellos por los casos. Para cuyo exēplo nos parecio declinar aqui vn nōbre, como para modelo de los demas, porque todos van por aquel camino.

REGLA. Dezimos que no tienen artículos, y es, que para ninguna cosa inanimada le ay. Y para las criaturas animadas no tienen mas que este. *verbi gratia* gönnā, postpuesto para todas las hembras, para todos los machos. Vt pēnigönnā muerger, pēniniguijo, hōbre, mānigönnā, animal hembra, maniniguijo, animal macho.

pēni	gönnā
pēni	gönnā
person	female
'woman'	

DECLINACION.

2.2 Declinación

2.2.1 [Nominativo]

Declinemos agora este nombre, pichina q̃ quiere dezir Venado o Cieruo, pues dize así. Nominatiu o pichina, en este caso no ay dificultad. porq̃ es regular y va así en todos los nombres.

pichina
pichina
deer
'deer'

GENITIVO.

Zapotec people & modern language visible and audible

A

Search

A	B	C	E	G	H	I	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	X	Y	Reverse Index
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=**a** sp. var. of =ya 'I; me'

aca no, not (negative particle). (Also attested as **acua**, **haca**.)

acua sp. var. of **aca** 'no, not'

alani item (used to mark items in a list). See also **alarini**.

alarini item (used to mark items in a list). See also **alani**. (Also attested as **alatini**, **latini**.)

alatini sp. var. of **alarini** 'item'

ana now. (Also attested as **na**, **yana**.)

anachi 'today'

Hear it in San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec: **na**  

anachi today. (Composed of **ana** 'now', **chi** 'day'.) (Also attested as **anachihi**, **anchi**, **yanachi**.)

Hear it in San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec: **nazhi**  

Hear it in Tlacoachahuaya Zapotec: **an chi**  

Hear it in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec: **nadxi**  



Tlacochohuaya Zapotec

online talking dictionary

version 4.2013

Search:

entire dictionary

Semantic domain: [all] or Cali Chiu chapter:

Search for:

[hide keyboard](#)

All letters: ñ á ã à é ě è ě í ò ó ù ù ï

search

[image gallery](#) [surprise me](#) [reduplication](#)

Your random search has returned 1 entry

běch



listen

cracks in the soil

Speaker: Moisés García Guzmán



[bookmark](#)

- Talking Dictionaries, K. David Harrison, Living Tongues
- Inclusion of audio-visual materials allows for participation of community members who are aspiring speakers.
- The organization of semantic domains reflects local values with cultural content, ethnobotany, material culture, and foodways prominently featured.

gulaj



listen

shaft frame on a loom (where the weavings are stretched)
(Spanish) estirador en el telar (donde los tejidos son estirados)

Speaker: Federico Chávez Sosa



bookmark

gwepy



listen

loom net
(Spanish) mallas para el telar

Speaker: Miguel Ángel Mendoza Bautista



bookmark

du'



listen

noun yarn

(Spanish) hilo

Speaker: Janet Chávez Santiago



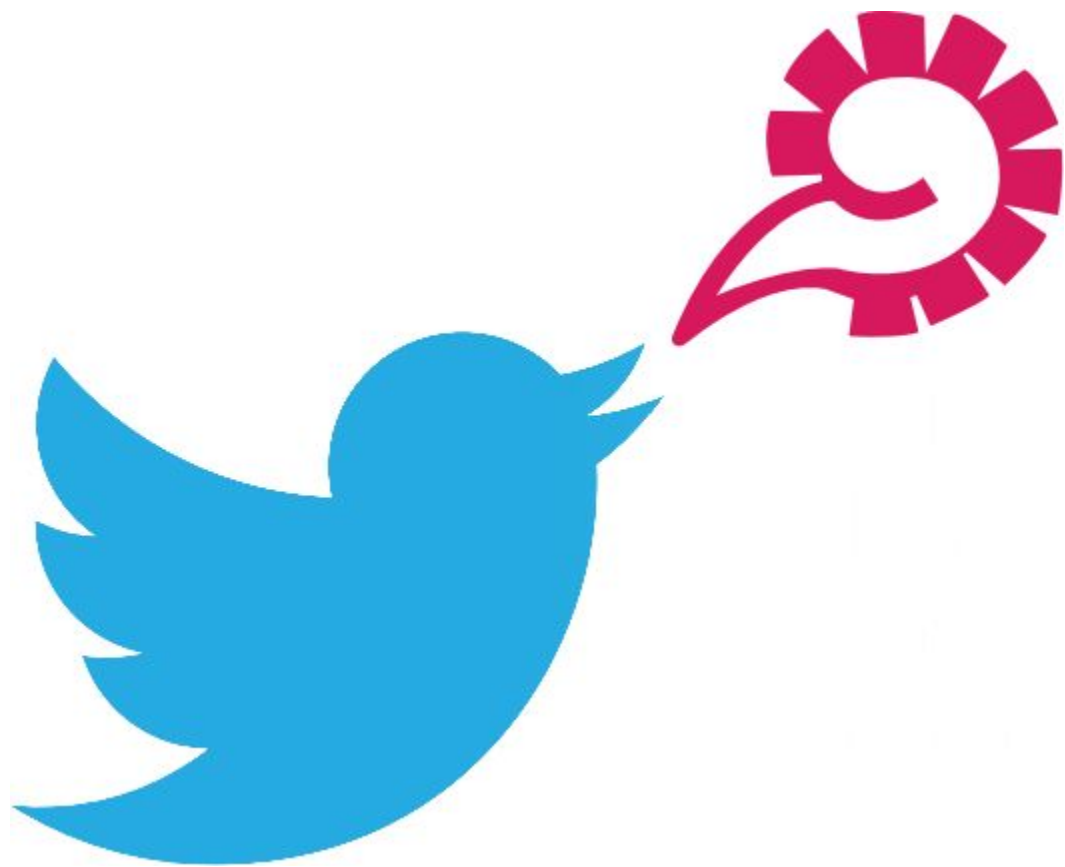
bookmark



@JanChvzSanti



- Community needs drive innovations in the platform design.
- The Talking Dictionaries originated on a web-based platform, users preferred to access the dictionaries from their smartphones, which are ubiquitous, even in rural Oaxaca. Future development of the platform was informed by this user preference.
- These dictionaries sit opposite from big data mining, and illustrate the potential value of dictionary projects based on small corpora, including having the flexibility to make design decision to maximize community impact and elevate the status of marginalized languages.
- Methodology -- not just final product-- is of central importance where participation in the creation of these dictionaries can be way to draw more community members into local language teaching and learning programs.





Moisés García Guzmán @BnZunni · Feb 2

When I speak my language, I want to tell other people how I see the world. (@BnZunni) #Usatuvoz

Chi rgüia x-ticha...
rkaza ghatzaa stuv de bnieti...
xha rguia göch lhew...

 @BnZunni



ENCUENTRO DE
**activismo digital de
lenguas indígenas**



3-5 de octubre 2014 | Oaxaca, México

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of indigenous languages used on Twitter</i>	<i>Source</i>
2011	68	Lee (2011)
2016 (March)	170+	Lillehaugen (2016), counting on Indigenous Tweets
2017 (August)	184	counting on Indigenous Tweets

Table 1. Number of indigenous languages used on Twitter 2011-2017



DizhSa @DizhSa · May 20



Re beinychiarëng lo galguty kën zhub bzyata, xnia chiru kën bzyia na kën xieru ra bez. [#usatuvoz](#) [#IYIL2019](#) [#tepoztlán](#) [#zapoteco](#) Buny Dizhsa lazhu Buny Mexican



 @DizhSa





Angel Morales @la_na_angel · Jan 18

Tibüxhgabülollem ruranxhgabüxha gacüxhi, izielorannircuaran parchalexhi
chalenuxhigacran **#UsaTuVoz** **#ZapotecoColonial**





Moisés García Guzmán @BnZunni · 13 Sep 2017



Bën Za rilo rzak laz de ze'é chi rndiani bndag quiadem / Zapotecs believe corn is happy, when it grows small leaves on top [#UsaTuVoz](#)





Yaneth Molina @YanethMolina99 · Mar 6

Ha que nanixha ti guiña'bichoxhe [#UsaTuVoz](#)





Yaneth Molina @YanethMolina99 · 10 Apr 2017

Vi a' dani bedxhe ca' ra ca sachelo lacabe' gunna sicaru ne galán shini bido'
San Blas 😊 #UsaTuVoz #ZapotecoColonial

🌐 Translate from Spanish



#UsaTuVoz

Zapotec speakers are using Twitter

Zapotec speakers are using Twitter for multiple, overlapping purposes:

- as a place to use their language and perform Zapotec identity
- as a way to practice writing their language
- as a means to communicate with other Zapotec speakers
- as a venue to share their language, culture, and identity with Zapotec and non-Zapotec individuals
- as a form of resistance through digital language activism.

- resists false ideologies that Zapotec language cannot be written
- pushes back against the notion that Zapotec language is something only of the past or something only of use in the pueblo, by using language in a modern global context

- resists false ideologies that Zapotec language cannot be written
- pushes back against the notion that Zapotec language is something only of the past or something only of use in the pueblo, by using language in a modern global context
- **has created a “born digital” Zapotec language corpus!**

bia'á



prickly pear cactus pad *noun*

(Spanish) nopal

listen



Moisés García Guzmán

@BnZunni



Bën Za udily ni goni lo nia, ze'éý bchieldeb Bia'á rë'ni / Loking for food, Zapotecs added tender cactus leaves to their diet

[#UsaTuVoz](#) pic.twitter.com/JpFTRE3pES

♡ 7 11:10 AM - Sep 11, 2017



See Moisés García Guzmán's other Tweets



Speaker: Moisés García Guzmán

bookmark

D I Z H S A N A B A N I

**LENGUA
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**LIVING
LANGUAGE**

Xtyoztën yuad - Thank you - Gracias

