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### **YOLANDA'S PORTRAIT: A STORY OF TRIQUI LINGUISTIC RESISTANCE MEDIATED BY ENGLISH AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COEVALNESS IN OAXACA, MEXICO**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic study provides insights into the social contradictions of everyday language use in the multicultural context of Oaxaca, México. Following a coeval perspective (Fabian, 2007), the researchers, along with the participant, co-construct or co-perform the ethnographic encounter. Based on a larger ethnographic study on how Oaxacan university students perform English with a 'postcolonial accent,' the authors explore Yolanda's use of English, along with Spanish and Triqui, as a series of multilingual social and cultural performances (Clemente and Higgins, 2008). This study takes place within the B.A. program in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the Language Centre of the state university of Oaxaca. Here, Yolanda becomes the sole focus within the coeval ethnographic perspective; that is, Yolanda is the co-performer of the ethnographic encounter.

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnographic Encounter - Coeval Perspective - Oaxaca - Triqui: Indigenous Peoples

This paper is an ethnographic study centered on Yolanda, a young Triqui woman, who provides interesting insights into the social contradictions of everyday language use in the multicultural context of Oaxaca, México. The study follows a coeval perspective (Fabian, 2007). Coevalness within ethnography is introduced in detail below; yet, for now, let it suffice to clarify that within a coeval ethnographic approach the researchers are co-constructors or co-performers with the participant(s) during all phases of an ethnographic encounter (Fabian, 2007). The present paper regarding Yolanda has emerged from our (Ángeles and Michael's) larger ethnographic study on how Oaxacan university students perform English with a postcolonial accent, by which we mean the manner in which the students learn, appropriate, modify, and redefine their use of English as a series of multilingual social and cultural performances (Clemente and Higgins, 2008). Our (Ángeles and Michael's) general research project is centered on the Language Centre (*Facultad de Idiomas*) of Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (*Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca*); specifically, the project focuses on the students of the B.A. program in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). As a student in this B.A. TEFL program, Yolanda is one of various participants in the general project; and here, in this present paper, Yolanda becomes the sole focus within the coeval ethnographic perspective. The present paper is the first in a projected series in which we will work directly with the students as coeval partners in the authorship of how to represent the praxis of their linguistic activities; that is, in each paper, one particular student will be a co-performer of the ethnographic encounter.

The manner in which we as 'researchers' and the student as 'participant' co-perform or co-construct the ethnographic encounter generally follows three main phases, the first two of which partially overlap: (A) The participant, after having 'co-performed' an interviewing process with the researchers, provides a 'story' or 'narrative' about her/his life, which is reflected upon, commented on, and summarily analyzed by the researchers; (B) the participant revises, modifies and/or expands her/his own 'story' or 'narrative' and/or comments on the manner in which it has been interpreted by the researcher(s); and (C) conclusions are made. These three phases generally constitute our methodological procedure in undertaking a coeval ethnographic encounter, which itself extends into the planning, structuring, and writing of the respective article. However, drawing from these three phases, a particular coeval ethnographic research may involve its own sub-phases or stages. As explained below in the section entitled "Our Particular Research Method and Process," the ethnographic research of our present paper regarding Yolanda involved a total of eight sub-stages within the main three stages above<sup>1</sup>.

Essentially, the coeval-oriented purpose and structure of this paper means that we as researchers help Yolanda develop an ethnographic portrait of her language activities<sup>2</sup>. Yolanda, a university student in the city of Oaxaca, is a Triqui; she originally is from the village of San Juan Copala in the Sierra

Mixtec mountains far outside the city. The Triquis are one of the many indigenous groups in the state of Oaxaca. Yolanda's portrait, which we alternately refer to as 'story' and 'narrative,' is quite dramatic in its simplicity. It is a telling tale of the everyday struggles of the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, such as the Triquis. These struggles include 'colonial difference' not only between English and Spanish, but also between these two dominant language regimes and the indigenous language (Mignolo, 2005), which in Yolanda's case is Triqui. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the constraints upon Yolanda's English performances are not in terms of linguistic imperialism, but rather hegemonic authority of the colonial difference, as it is expressed in the multilingual and multicultural context of Oaxaca, a context that can be seen as a postcolonial contact zone between various language regimes (Clemente and Higgins, 2008).

### **POSTCOLONIALISM, COLONIAL DIFFERENCE, CONTACT ZONES, AND LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE**

The English language performances of students such as Yolanda at the Language Centre of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca challenge the hegemony of the colonial difference through communicative interaction in both English and Spanish (Mignolo, 2002). Along with performing their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, youth, and social class, the students compose their identities as particular types of learners and users of their various languages. The students then engage these identities in their use of English as a social and cultural act; this, as explained above, becomes the students' postcolonial accent (Clemente and Higgins, 2008).

It can be said that the Americas, particularly Latin America, represent the first postcolonial societies in terms of European imperialism (Galeano, 1985). From their beginnings, these postcolonial societies were embedded in the hegemonic networks of the United States (González Casanova, 1986); included in these networks were the complex histories of the United States as well as the particular country within the Americas, such as México. Consequently, for the nation state of México, there arose a social and economic dynamics of 'internal colonialism' that the metropolitan zones asserted to the provincial zones of the country. As a result, the racial, ethnic, and class systems of the stratification of México emerged and thrived in Oaxaca and other similar areas with a high percentage of indigenous peoples. These historical realities have made contemporary Oaxaca a postcolonial society (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1999; Nahmad Sittón, 2000).

The socio-cultural postcolonial arguments that we make in this paper draw upon Mignolo's emphasis on the colonial difference (2002, 2005) as well as Pratt's concept of the contact zone (1991). Colonial difference refers to the geopolitics of how knowledge is produced and the question of who has the power to claim the authority of knowledge. According to Mignolo (2005), this right to produce universal knowledge is asserted by the metropolitan areas; and this universal knowledge, emerging from the metropolitan areas,

dominates the local knowledges of those in the colonies or post-colonies. Mignolo (2005) states that globalization is a continuation of the modes of socio-economic authority and power resulting from the construction of capitalism as a modern/colonial world system. Colonial difference therefore refers to the geopolitics of how knowledge was (and is) produced, accessed, and reproduced within this complex historical context. It becomes “the difference between centre and periphery, between the Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism and knowledge production by those who participated in building the modern/colonial world and those who have been left out of the discussion” (Mignolo, 2002, p. 63). In this sense, Yolanda and her Triqui community have often been “left out of the discussion” over who gets to produce knowledge; therefore, Yolanda’s narrative is a movement towards challenging the hegemony of the colonial difference. In her story, Yolanda, in a very local and personal sense, reflects upon her own ethnic community; she addresses the issues of race, class and sexuality in Oaxaca and México at large, while considering the structure of education within those social folds.

The concept of contact zones refers to the dynamics of transculturation, where reciprocal influences of styles of representation and cultural practices between the colonies and the metropolis, or between the metropolitan centers and the periphery, take place (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998, p. 233). Pratt describes contact zones as social spaces where “disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination -- like colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991, p. 6). Pratt further points out that the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, but habitually blinds itself to the ways that the periphery determines the metropolis (ibid). Pratt’s argument about contact zones has focused on the historical dynamics of Western imperialism in the Americas with particular attention to the contacts between Spaniards and the indigenous peoples of this continent.

We can use the concept of contact zone to localize Yolanda’s sense of her everyday life. First of all, Yolanda’s place within the general Triqui community, both its rural and urban formations, is clearly one contact zone between the various segments that make up the racial, ethnic and class systems of the stratification in México and Oaxaca. Secondly, her family’s participation in the artisan and tourism economy situates her in a different kind of contact zone; although perhaps a more benign separation between the metropolis and the periphery, this zone offers Yolanda a different look at her local context and its connections to a globalized world economy. Third, Yolanda’s education history and involvement at the Language Centre of the university in Oaxaca clearly is another contact zone (which is not constrained by the physical boundaries of the school) where she and other students enter into the ‘world’ of learning how to perform English. For Yolanda and the other students at the Language Centre, this contact zone is the stage on which they play out the social dynamics involving the colonial

difference (Mignolo, 2002). In this zone, those of the periphery - that is, the students - challenge the authority of those of the metropolis in order to set the boundaries of language standards. For us, these dynamics are played out in the Language Centre in terms of whose voice has the authority to set the standards for English and Spanish performances: the hegemonic voices of the language regimes of 'standardized' English and 'authentic' Spanish, or the voices of the language performers themselves?<sup>3</sup>

### **ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS AND METHODS**

Our ability to understand these performances involved an awareness that the ethnography that we were composing was a performative activity between ourselves and these students: what Fabian (2007) refers to as the coevalness of the ethnographic encounter. That is, in this ethnography, we and the students held co-equivalent positions in the production of the knowledge that framed our performances with a postcolonial accent (ibid). Fabian stresses that because "ethnography is a product of interaction, with speaking as its major, though not only medium, it is dialogical"; and he emphasizes that "[w]hat we take away from research as data is only sometimes found, most often it is made" (2007, p. 13). In this sense, the "emphasis on communication and language in action made us realize how much of cultural knowledge and hence ethnography is performative"; as well, we realized that "what we learn does not come as responses to our questions but is enacted in, and mediated by, events which we may trigger but cannot really control" (ibid). Fabian states that the goal of anthropology is "to understand (and demonstrate) humanity's unity" and that "to attain this goal depends on recognizing the presence or co-temporaneity of the peoples we study" (2007, p. 3). According to Fabian's argument, qualitative research studies have their empirical foundation in ethnographic research conducted as communicative interaction; this requires the ethnographers to recognize the people whom they study as their coevals. It is within these ethnographic performative dynamics that the co-equivalency of all the participants is composed. That is, there is neither an analytical nor a material separation of time and space between those involved in these encounters, but rather collaborative movements through shared time and space that allow for an 'empirical' representation of these performances (Clemente and Higgins, 2009).

This leads to our view of 'method.' As the particular 'hands-on' technique or procedure of generating and handling data, such as "observation, interviewing and audio recording," 'method' itself incorporates 'type of data,' 'data collection,' 'analysis,' and often the 'writing up' of the respective report or article related to the research (Silverman, 2004, p. 53). While we would confirm this conception of 'method,' we also perceive 'methods' as ethnographic performances. Such a position recognizes that ethnographic means of representations are partial and contingent; that is, the representations not only are constrained by the time and space realities of both ethnographer and those of the ethnography, but also are contingent

upon the actual social and material realities of all those involved in producing the narrative. Further, although traditional forms of data collection and composition (interviews, observations, participation, and residency within the ethnographic context) can be used 'critically,' there is also a seeking for ethnographic praxis. Methodologically, this involves opening the interviewing process to reflective dialoging between all the participants in the endeavor, sharing and collaborating on how the range and style of the ethnography can be developed, and collectively searching for forms of multimodal expressions of all the actors' activities. This further assumes that the ethnographic shape of these various activities will be of use to the social actors in developing their own critical reflections on their everyday lives. In turn, they can use such reflections as forms of empowerment towards their own expression of praxis (Clemente and Higgins, 2008).

Consequently, for us, methods are not external procedures framing the research; but rather, integral elements within the collaborative performance of the ethnographic encounter. Kumaravadivelu (2003, 2005) has developed a discourse that he refers to as 'post-methodology,' whereby he suggests that the context of both the researcher and the researched should set and encourage appropriate strategies of investigation; in this sense, 'context' includes the social, cultural and political realities of those involved in the research. Kumaravadivelu (2007) stresses that there are no standard techniques nor stratagems and therefore that one needs to make various critical and reflective choices on attaining information and data best representative of the social dynamics under investigation. This means that one should perform methods that are socially and ethnically contextualized to the realities of coevalness between the participants within the ethnographic encounter.

#### **OUR PARTICULAR RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCESS**

After having presented our methodology from a conceptual perspective (immediately previous section), we now turn to the more practical side of the methodology, including the sequential stages of the research process. The method of the research pivots on 'interviewing.' Method itself, procedural as well as performative, dwells within the larger domain of methodology. This refers to the 'general approaches' in doing research, the most common of which are quantitative, qualitative, mixed-quantitative/qualitative, and ethnographic approaches (Neuman, 2000; Silverman, 2004; Fielding, 2008); this last, ethnography, being thought of, alternately, as overriding qualitative research, being subordinate to qualitative research, being integrated within qualitative research, or being separate from and parallel to qualitative research (e.g. Green, Dixon and Zaharlick, 2003; Fabian, 2007; Watts, 2008). Although in our present paper we do not take a particular stand on the issues of subordination between qualitative and ethnographic methodological approaches, we nevertheless would characterize our 'methodology' as directly ethnographic while more generally qualitative; that

is, ethnographic in the sense of becoming “involved in the daily world of the people [i.e. in our case, Yolanda] ... in order to understand the meanings that people [i.e. Yolanda] apply to their own life and world” (Fielding, 2008, pp. 282-283); and qualitative in the more general sense of considering “data and knowledge ... [as] constructed through dialogic (and other) interaction” (Mason, 2006, p. 62).

As a result, our ‘interviewing method,’ from a broad qualitative perspective, involves the “interactional exchange of dialogue” between the interviewer and interviewee (ibid) in order “to achieve a depth of understanding” (Gillham, 2005, p. 3) as well as a range of “interpretations, [and] not facts or laws” (Warren, 2002, p. 83); and more specifically, from its ethnographic position, the interviews constitute “respectful, on-going relationships with ... [the] interviewees [i.e. in our case, Yolanda], including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposely with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds” (Sherman Heyl, 2002, p. 369). To this end, from January of 2006 to May of 2009, Ángeles and Michael participated in series of lengthy interviews with Yolanda. Conducted in Spanish, the interviews were recorded verbatim on digital audio equipment; the interviews totalled 25 hours.

Being ethnographic and qualitative, these interviews with Yolanda, on a more specific level, can be considered an eclectic mixture of the following: the *semi-structured interview*, during which the interviewer seeks rapport with the participant while the conversation loosely follows a list of general questions or topic guide (Silverman, 2006); the *open-ended interview*, during which the interviewer mainly listens and affords maxim time to the participant to talk (ibid); and the *life story interview* (Atkinson, 2002) which can be seen as “people telling stories from their life experience” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 661) while forging “the link between personal biography and social processes, past and present” (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p. 430). It is important to emphasize that our intention here is not to advocate one or more of these three particular types of interviews, nor to profile an attempt to create a fusion of these interview types. Further, we do recognize that other interview types, such as the ‘narrative interview’ (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2002) and ‘in-depth interview’ (Johnson, 2002; Walsh, 2004) could also be identified as having elements similar to those of our interviews with Yolanda. Our intention simply is to acknowledge those pre-existing interview types (semi-structured, open-ended, and life story) that directly gave us footing and perspective in conducting our interviews with Yolanda. Regardless, for us, more pronounced than this triple interview-identity of *semi-structured*, *open-ended*, and *life story* was our awareness, during and after the interview process, that we as ‘researchers’ and Yolanda as ‘participant’ were bound up in the coeval performance (as explained previously).

Part of this co-performance, for the 'interviewers' Ángeles and Michael, was to produce a verbatim transcript of the interviews, while (along with 'interviewee' Yolanda) translating the text from Spanish to English and shaping it into a 'story' or 'narrative' type of text. This was the first of the eight stages derived from the three main phases (A, B, C) as stated previously (opening section of this paper). In the second stage of our research process, Ángeles and Michael added their own comments, reflections, and questions in the margins of Yolanda's story and on separate sheets of paper. They presented this commentary to Yolanda and discussed it with her; and, naturally, these discussions themselves produced further insights from Ángeles and Michael as well as from Yolanda. Third, as a follow up to these discussions, Yolanda re-read what had been composed in written form; and she made her own revisions and additions to the text, thereby 'finalizing' her story or narrative. Fourth, Ángeles and Michael wrote out a draft of the entire paper. This was a long process during which Ángeles and Michael further analyzed and reflected on Yolanda's story; divided up Yolanda's story while themes and issues began to emerge; integrated their own commentary and perspectives between the excerpts and passages of Yolanda's story; and gave a shape and structure to the paper as a whole while writing out a preliminary version. Fifth, Bill came into the process at this point, as the paper moved through various phases from 'preliminary' to 'final' (as explained in note 1 of this paper). Both overlapping and extending beyond this fifth stage was the sixth stage. In the sixth stage, Yolanda herself read and re-read the paper to obtain an overall perspective of her story, including the analysis and representation of her story on the part of the researchers (that is, the emerging paper as a whole); and Yolanda wrote out her own reflections on the significance of the paper as her 'ethnographic portrait.' This became the penultimate section of this paper, entitled "Yolanda's Reflections." In the seventh stage, Ángeles and Michael composed what they felt were the appropriate conclusions to draw from this coeval ethnographic encounter; this became the final section of the paper. In the eighth and final stage, Bill continued in his revising and editing (see note 1), while maintaining dialogue with Ángeles, Michael, and Yolanda. These eight stages, ranging from interview design to final paper, maintained the 'ethnographic,' 'qualitative,' and (we would now assert) 'coeval' spirit. It all began with the method of 'interviewing' undertaken as a social encounter in which "interviewees reconstruct events or aspects of social experience" while at the same time the "interviewers make their own sense of what has been said" (Sherman Heyl, 2002, p. 370).

## **SETTING**

The Language Centre is the language teacher-training department of Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca, the public university of the state of Oaxaca. As such, the Language Centre offers a B.A. degree in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This program hosts approximately seven hundred undergraduate students, the majority of whom are female. The students come mainly from the city and region of the valley



of Oaxaca; and they are mostly from middle-class and working-class backgrounds, often being the first in their family to study at the university level. Most of the students at the Language Centre are mestizos (people of a mixed European and Indigenous ancestry). A small number of students come directly from Oaxacan indigenous communities; while a large number of students have been born and raised in urban areas outside of the indigenous communities but have parents or grandparents who have come directly from these communities. The majority of the students enter the university with plans to study other programs, but for various reasons gravitate towards the B.A. in TEFL at the Language Centre; they seem attracted to learning English and getting a university degree at the same time.

The state of Oaxaca is located in the Southwest region of México and has a population of over 3.2 million people. It is well-known for its ethnic diversity, ecological variety, and extreme poverty. The university is located in the city of Oaxaca, which has a population of close to half a million. The city is the political, commercial and communication centre of the state. It is famous for its colonial architecture, ethnic and social diversity, and culinary excellence. The city of Oaxaca also has many of the problems associated with urbanization in México: shortage of housing, limited employment possibilities for 'popular' classes, traffic congestion, and political protests (Nahmad Sittón, 2000).

Triquis inhabit the most western part of the state of Oaxaca, a territory of approximately 193 square miles (Lewin Fischer and Sandoval Cruz, 2007). To the north, the Triqui territory borders on the Mixtec municipality of Mixtepec; to the south, on the Mestizo town of Constanza del Rosario; to the east, the Mixtec town of Santo Tomás Ocotepec; and to the west, the town of Juxtlahuaca as well as the state line of Guerrero (Lewin Fischer and Sandoval Cruz, 2007). The Triqui area is extremely treacherous since most of it is located in the Sierra de Chicahuaxtla, which is part of the Southern Sierra Madre. Altitudes vary from 2,625 to 10,000 feet above sea level, allowing for the presence of a variety of ecological resources. Because of the variations in altitudes, the Triqui area is divided into *zona alta* (the highlands) and *zona bajo* (the lowlands). The primary economic activity of the Triquis is agriculture: corn, chilli, squash, and beans. This agricultural production is mainly for self-consumption and for selling in the regional markets (Lewin Fischer and Sandoval Cruz, 2007). The Triquis are also well-known for their weaving products. As of 1995, the population of the Triquis was 16,271; with 68% of the population being bilingual in Spanish and Triqui (ibid). Because of their complex and conflict-ridden history, Triquis are well-known throughout the state of Oaxaca and México as a whole.

### **INTRODUCING YOLANDA**

I (Ángeles) first spoke with Yolanda when she approached me to ask if she could get into my course on speaking skills evaluation. She had heard it was

a course to improve speaking skills in English and she wanted to work on her own speaking skills. I designed the course in such a way that advanced students would be taught learning strategies for speaking and then would, in turn, teach these same strategies to novice students such as Yolanda. During the course, the advanced students reported to me about their tutees' progress. According to her tutor, Yolanda was shy and quiet but willing to work. At the end of the course, I decided to corroborate the speaking skills of the students, so for their final assignment I asked them to give an in-class, oral presentation on a topic of their choosing.

The range of topics was quite varied, from ghost stories to marriage customs in the Isthmus area of the state of Oaxaca. Yolanda chose to talk about the discrimination against indigenous peoples. When it was her team's turn, she decided to be the last one. She started in a low, slowly-paced voice, trying to make her pronunciation clear. However, at one moment while she was speaking, she started to cry. I asked her if she was able to go on, and she assured me that she wanted to finish. As Yolanda was the last one to participate, I dismissed the class and asked her to stay and talk. We talked for some time. She told me that her presentation was not about the discrimination of indigenous peoples in general but about the discrimination that she and her family had suffered personally. She explained that she actually was very proud of her indigenous heritage. When we finished our conversation, she seemed to be feeling better. The following day, Yolanda came to school, wearing, for the first time, her indigenous clothes (Clemente and Higgins, 2008).

## **YOLANDA'S VOICE**

### ***Her family and community***

We begin with Yolanda first introducing herself and her family and then continuing with a description of her family life.

My name is Yolanda. I am a student and 21 years-old. I am from San Juan Copala, a small Triqui village in the Sierra Mixteca, five hours from the city of Oaxaca. I have two marvellous parents. My father is Mariano, 60, and my mother Catalina, 54. I have five siblings, all older than me. My brother is Cesar; he is 30 years-old and works with my parents. My other brother is Leonardo. He is my mother's headache, but I still love him. He is 27 and studies architecture. Catalina, my sister, is the fourth child of the family. She is 25 years-old, has a bachelor's degree in Educational Sciences from the university here in Oaxaca. She is married and has one child. My other sister, Filomena, is the fifth child. She is studying to be a nurse, also here at the university. And finally there is me, the youngest and my mother's baby. My parents were each married before. I have two step-siblings from my father's first marriage and also two from my mother's other marriage.

My mother first marriage was "by custom" [a free union marriage]. With this husband, she had two children, Pablo and Julio. The oldest, Julio, is 34; he is married and has two daughters. My mother left her husband because he beat her, he drank too much, and he had two more wives. She left him and moved to the city of Oaxaca to sell her weaving products. Here in the city she met my father and fell in love with him and decided to live with him. My father had immigrated to Oaxaca

because his first wife was sick and he took her to the civil hospital. Back in the pueblo, they criticized my father a lot because he got involved with a woman that already has two children. My father's family mistreated my mother very much; they said that she was not virgin and Triquis value virginity very much.

My parents are now both Christians. They were Catholic before, but my father told me that, once, when my brother Leonardo was a baby, he got very sick and they went to the Catholic church to pray, but he didn't get better. Then, they went to the Christian church and the people there got together and prayed with them to get help for my brother. They also helped them economically and the baby got better. He also told me that, on another occasion, he had made a promise to go to a Christian temple, but he didn't go. Instead he chose to go to Monterrey to sell merchandise in a fair there. He says that God punished him and that's why he was sent to prison there. My parents got married while he was in jail. The party was organized and paid for by Christian people. Very few of my father's relatives attended the party.

When my father got out of jail, he worked very hard, so we could all study at school and have good clothes and shoes. To do that, he took my mother with him and we were babysat by a neighbor woman. I cried a lot. We were very poor. We would go to the local store to ask for food, like an egg, that my parents would pay when they returned. They always paid the store. But our neighbors and the owners of the store always looked at us disrespectfully because we were '*pedíamos fiado*' [always asking for credit]. And that's the way we grew up.

My parents don't go away anymore. Now we work together. My father sells *ropa típica* [traditional clothing] in the center of the city, where he puts up the clothes in the stand, and we arrive after school and stay selling until 10 at night. Then we put away everything, and if we sold well, we come back by taxi. If not, we walk home. My brother Cesar has a motorcycle and sometimes we use it to come back home. My parents have worked very hard and they even managed to buy a small plot of land where we live now.

I grew up with this new religion of theirs. My parents taught us to believe in that, but now I do not feel that religious. I have changed a lot, being here in the school. But I don't want to argue with my parents about it, because my mother has recently been found to be diabetic. We now are controlling her diet. The doctor told us that she could suffer a diabetic coma if we don't take care of her. My father also suffers from high blood pressure. So we are very careful and avoid making them angry. So we go to church with them without complaining.

In this early part of Yolanda's narrative, we begin to recognize the various identity locations that Yolanda uses to weave together her everyday life (Clemente and Higgins, 2008). We see identities as neither fixed entities nor established social positions. For us, 'identity' involves how social actors (depending on their overall social/cultural context) use their agency to move in and out of various social locations associated with particular identities (Clemente and Higgins, 2008). Yolanda's family, their history, and Yolanda's position within the family are some of the threads of her various identity locations: as younger sibling, as young woman, and as daughter. She is proud of how her family has managed a difficult adjustment to urban life; and she is proud of how her parents have struggled with the gender complexes of the Triquis and have kept the family together through various crises. This respect for her parent's histories of struggles allows her to accept their religious faith, which she and her siblings adopt not out of personal

belief, per se, but rather out of an inclination to not anger or upset their parents.

In this part of the narrative, we also get glimpses of the contact zones that frame the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Yolanda and her family. Yolanda locates herself in her Triqui community. She gives a brief look at the Triquis' gender perspectives through her account of the community's reluctance to accept the legitimacy of her parent's marriage because her mother had been previously married. We also hear about the incarceration of her father (later to become an example of discrimination against indigenous peoples); the social and economic hardships of urban migration; the struggle of her mother as a single parent; and the difficulties of being a small-scale entrepreneur in the urban artisan market of Oaxaca. Each of these is a type of contact zone. Religious differences represent another contact zone in her family's experiences. Her father's conversion to a protestant religious group is a common strategy that many urban migrants pursue in dealing with the ambiguity of urban life (Higgins, 1997; Norget, 2006).

Yolanda takes a critical read on cultural dynamics in terms of shifting patterns of language use and community development. She first refers to her community:

I lived in my *pueblo* for a very short time, though my father still has a house there. I would like to write my thesis about something connected to my *pueblo*. Nobody in the family wants to stay there, we only go for visits. My half-brother went back. He is an accountant, but he is working as a driver because there is no work, and his wife is selling meals there for the same reason. It is very pretty there and I think our culture is unique and important. San Juan Copala has changed radically. Now they even have a preschool run by the autonomous government, but the building, a three by two, tinned room with no glass in the windows, is in very bad condition, and my niece told me that there are snakes; the bathrooms are very bad as well. There is another preschool that is a boarding school that is run by nuns. There are two elementary schools, one from the local government and the religious one. There is only one secondary school. There is a recently painted church. Also, they finished the market and reworked the autonomous city government house. There is also a health center. Every Monday, it is market day. The girls wear factory clothes and only the adult or married women use the *huipiles*. In cold weather everybody uses *huipiles*.

The above passage seems to allude a certain alienation, as sensed by Yolanda and her family and somehow by the community itself. Although one has the distinct impression that Yolanda and her family consider their move to the city a wise decision, at least for economic and educational reasons, one nevertheless senses that the family, especially Yolanda, seems to feel 'less whole' or 'vacated' by having abandoned San Juan Copala. To counter this feeling of detachment, Yolanda seems to seek solace through the memory of geography as well as the fine attention to physical detail of key parts of the community infrastructure (the schools, government building, and health centre). Describing these buildings or structures seems, for Yolanda, an act of regaining something that has been lost. This is a noble

and important effort. For one senses the community itself, at least in the 'impressionistic' sense of narrative, seeking to be remembered by Yolanda; this seems salient in the reader's visualized image of the father's deserted house and its physical spatiality in relation to the other 'material' structures in the passage such as the windowless preschool. Both - the community and Yolanda - feel abandoned by the other. Yet within her story, Yolanda dignifies her community by giving value to minute physical detail as well as by documenting what seems an up-and-down but yet persistent struggle of the education, commerce, political and health infrastructure of the community to modernize itself; and in so doing, Yolanda dignifies herself as a Triqui. The ease and sureness with which she thus confirms her Triqui identity seems apparent in the quiet lyricism of the final three lines of the above passage, which ever so slightly veers the passage from descriptive to scenic: Mondays at the busy market of San Juan Copala, in all extremes of weather, throughout the year.

That at times some of those at market wear 'factory' or store-bought clothing and others the regional *huipiles* while on cold days all at the market wear *huipiles* seems analogous of the language use on the part of the Triquis. As the Triquis' manner of dress is ancestral as well as modern, so too is their language use. Yolanda says:

Because of my parents, I speak both Spanish and Triqui, my indigenous language. The Triqui are noted for the fact that most of the women still wear the traditional red *huipiles* that are woven on a *telar de cintura* [a back strip loom] and an *enahua*, which is a woollen or cotton skirt. Most people in my *pueblo* speak Spanish now; Triqui is spoken now mostly by only older people and some women.

Lewin Fischer and Sandoval Cruz (2007) elaborate on this importance of language to the Triquis:

In this sense, the practice of the language is not only a source of ethnographic information, but the context for their identity construction. Thus, the Triqui language -- and the knowledge of their territory -- is intrinsically linked to fact of being socially Triqui. These events create the symbolic thread of the Triqui habitus. Local knowledge and belonging are updated through contextualized discourses that shape the Triqui identity and the culturally specific habitus. The discourses around the territorial conflicts constitute a mediating communicative strategy that allows both parties to explain their disagreement, and at the same time, they are useful to prepare future negotiations. The human experience of the socioecological space is the core of Triqui culture and identity. The discourses about space and borders -- the ones they produced about self-representations and representations of the other -- are fundamental aspects that shape the Triqui social identity. Thus, the use of the language is part of the everyday practices that give a social sense to the land and a sense of social collectivity (pp. 25-26).

This social/political dimension of 'land,' however, also has a negative side for the Triquis, as explained by Yolanda. Demonstrating a critical understanding of her community's contradictions in terms of political violence, Yolanda says:

I don't want to say that there are not problems among the Triqui, such as *machismo* and unfortunately the long histories of feuds between communities which often lead to violence and killings. In our village, people are very political; they even kill each other over their political views. The major groups in conflict are the MULT [*Movimiento Unificador de la Lucha Triqui*] and MULTI [*Movimiento Unificador de la Lucha Triqui Independiente*] which are rival groups claiming to speak for the Triquis. There is now a new group, called the UBISORT [*Unidad de Bienestar Social de la Región Triqui*]. It gets confusing at times. How does this affect our family? My mother is from another pueblo, called Rastrojo. This is where MULT was first formed. Her family is from there, and it is divided between support for MULT and the UBISORT, which supports the PRI in Oaxaca [the former ruling party]. She will not go into the area of the UBISORT because her ex-husband is a supporter, and she fears that he would kill her.

The factionalism of these groups has separated our whole family. Some have migrated to other parts of the country or have gone to the states. My cousin now lives in Puerto Vallarta with his family, but he is still in MULT. His house in Copala is practically abandoned. They are in trouble because two militant youngsters from UBISORT were killed in that part of Copala, by people from MULT. San Juan Copala is divided in two parts; from the church to the autonomous government building is the area of UBISORT and from the church to the secondary school is the area of the MULT.

Once I told one of my cousins that I wanted to carry out research in San Juan Copala and speak up on behalf of people there. But he told me not to do that unless I wanted to end up being murdered.

These revenge killings never end. So, let's say that they killed Teresa, and then they are going to kill who 'supposedly' killed her, and so on, like a chain effect. In Copala you do not live happily, you live scared. When the sun is setting, everybody goes home. Nobody stays out, only men with guns keeping watch. At eight at night most people are sleeping. Later the shooting starts. In such a small village, you hear everything. The most recent event was the murder of Felicitas and Teresa from the radio station. My sister-in-law told me: "You live with fear in Copala, fear that someone from the other party comes and kills you and your people. That's why men keep watch from the mountains. Tomorrow is my father's turn.

This is a clear illustration of the way the indigenous people have been discriminated against by people who believe that they are superior, but that have not acknowledged that without us they could not do their business that gives them a lot of money. For many years, the Triquis have suffered discrimination because they are one of the most marginalized of the indigenous groups. We are located in three very large districts (Juxtlahuaca, Putla and Tlaxiaco) where there are a lot of Mixtecs and Mestizos, and these two groups have always wanted to control us, just because we are different. It is all mixed up: the coffee exploitation by our Mixtec neighbors, land invasion, followed by the Mixtecs giving weapons to some Triquis, Mixtec ambition, the government's lack of attention, the unjust death of many people, regardless of age or gender. All of this has caused bitterness among the Triqui people. Now we are fighting to control the region and to get revenge for the death of our people. The Triquis have attempted to resist these forms of manipulation and those resistances have been the cause of the violence that we still suffer. The opinion of the indigenous people is not taken into consideration. We only receive what they believe

we deserve, but they do not acknowledge how much work it takes to harvest the product.

I, as a Triqui, would like this to finish. My *pueblo* is a beautiful place, high in the mountains, with a lot of ecological diversity; it would be a great place to develop ecotourism. I would like peace, harmony and brotherhood because, at the end of the day, we are all brothers and sisters and we shouldn't be fighting. I think that this will end up when nobody feels revengeful and rancorous.

The violence and killings that Yolanda refers to has emerged from the complex history of the Triquis dating back to before the arrival of the Spanish in México. In the Pre-Spanish times, the Triquis were not a large nor powerful group, and they had been subjected to tribute-bound relations with the Mixtec and Nahuatl political systems. During the colonial period of México from the 1600s to 1821 and following independence in 1821, the Triquis found themselves in similar relations of domination: their lands and communities were controlled by the Mixtec and Mestizo populations in the area. Only the Triquis of Sierra Alta had autonomous communities. The Mexican revolution of the 1920's had very limited impact on these domains of power and authority. Throughout decades of attempting to address these inequalities, the Triquis were involved in limited armed conflicts with local, state and federal authorities. Sadly, this history has also encouraged various forms of internal factionalism among the Triquis themselves, which has contributed to local violence.

In recent times, these factions have been organized into political groups who have affiliated themselves with state and national political parties and social movements. This, in turn, adds to the pre-existing dynamics of violence: the struggles over land and community autonomy become framed in revolutionary action against the state; and this prompts the state to take action against what they label as subversive forces in the region. Given the level of impunity existing in the state and national political context, very few social actors are held accountable for these acts of violence. Tragically last year, two young Triqui women who were conductors of an alternative radio station in the area were murdered; as of yet, no one has been held accountable.

In her narrative, Yolanda also reflects on gender and sexuality issues among the Triqui:

Violence is not the only problem among the Triqui. In my *pueblo*, people marry very young. A man chooses a girl and he goes to see her parents and they agree on a date for the wedding. She doesn't even know. They pay for the girl. I don't like that. I don't want to get married yet. I have to finish my degree and get a job. I have had the experience of having to take care of children and I don't want that yet. It is a big responsibility and it takes a lot of effort. Men in my *pueblo* are very *macho*. For example, married women are not supposed to look directly at other men. You can still see how they look at the floor instead of looking at people because their husbands are so jealous. Men do not cook or take care of anything in the house. I do not know if you have noticed that here in the *Zócalo*, at our market stands, men do not work. While women are selling in the stands, they sit in the back and chat

with their male friends. They are *mantenidos* [irresponsible and lazy]. In the village they either work the land or go to the States.

There are exceptions, like my father. From the beginning he taught us that men do not cook and men do not cry, but later on he realized that everybody has to help and that women need to work outside the house as well. My father never made the distinction between boys that needed to study and girls that should stay at home. There in the pueblo, men have several women living in the same house. My mother was married before and her husband took two other women to live with them and he also beat them. She left him. She said: 'He can stay with the other two. I am leaving.' But women that leave their husbands are *repudiadas* [repudiated], so she left the village.

Maybe someday I will have a *novio* [boyfriend] but if I do, he will have to wait till I have finished my education. I don't know if I want a Triqui *novio* or somebody from Oaxaca or a foreigner. Here in the pueblo, they think it is bad if couples hold hands and touch. I would like to have a relationship but not in my pueblo; it would be impossible to get used to their restrictions. My father doesn't want us to have *novios*. He wants us to finish our studies first. It is taken as a lack of respect to one's parents if you have a *novio* without their permission. When my sister had a boyfriend, my father was very strict with her, very jealous. They thought that she would make a mistake and lose her virginity. They think that a woman that is not virgin is a woman of the street. Virginity is important for them, and it is important to me because they taught me that.

In the above sections, Yolanda offers critical ethnographic observations on her own ethnic community. She gives both general and specific comments on the dilemma of violence in the community. Although she expresses hope for some way to move beyond these conflicts, she also recognizes other social problems among the Triquis, such as the contradictions around gender and sexuality. Further, she grounds her observations in terms of how they affect her everyday life, particularly in terms of whether she would want to marry within the community as well as reasons for maintaining her virginity. She is beginning to use her own voice to analyze and critique social activities of her own social context, while claiming her right to produce knowledge and place that knowledge in the public arena. She is confronting the colonial difference.

### ***Yolanda's life in the urban context of Oaxaca***

There has been very little ethnographic research on the Triqui's presence in the city of Oaxaca (Ortiz Nahon, 2000). However, the Triquis have been part of the urban social context of the city for more than thirty years, particularly within the tourist economy. They have been primarily street merchants selling their woven goods and regional clothing. Below Yolanda describes her family's enterprises.

We make *ropa típica* of the Triquis: *huipiles*, *telares*, dresses, blouses, *rebosos*, and bracelets. My mother weaves different *huipiles* on a *telar de cintura* [back strap loom], my father sews the *manta* [muslin] clothes into garments like blouses or shirts, and the whole family works at selling the clothing, especially when there are a lot of tourist/visitors, such as during the *Guelaguetza* [a folkloric dance celebration in the summer] or on holidays, such as Christmas or the Day of the Dead.



In the past, during time of school vacations, we went to other states to sell our goods. My parents have a stand in the main market in the city, and in the evenings and during the weekends we also sell in the centre of the city. When my parents first arrived to work in the main market, it was not very well-developed and most the streets were still unpaved. Now it is much better.

We are not involved with middlemen in either the production or selling of our weavings. We make and sell everything ourselves. It is not easy to get permission to sell your goods and it is expensive. I think our prices are fair. Clearly, the clothing that is embroidered costs more than other items, because these items take a lot of time. In my village, some middlemen go and buy really cheaply and they come to the city and sell these things at a much higher price. That is not fair. People who make the clothes should be the ones that sell them. It takes my mother a year and a half to finish a *huipil* made out of fine cotton thread. When we are selling these clothes, the buyers ask for the price, and then they look surprised because of the high price. They will go away making fun of us. They will ask: 'Why does it have to be so expensive? Does it walk or turn around?' Some people are nicer and ask why it costs so much. Then, as the salesperson, I explain the whole process and they look surprised and say: 'It is then inexpensive for all the work that it entails.' However, sometimes, when we are very needy, we will lower the price in order to just get back the money we invested in the material. I would like to ask the government to carry out programs to support the indigenous work, showing the people the quality and the elaborate process of making a *huipil*. It is not fair that people do not recognize how much work goes into our weavings and that they think we should sell at low prices.

And I get even angrier when the possible buyer says, 'I would never wear it' or 'I will look too fat in it.' They do not understand the way that belittles my Triqui culture and the importance of cultural diversity in Oaxaca. Thanks to cultural diversity, Oaxaca is such a good place for tourism. The *Guelaguetza*, the best festival of the Oaxacans, shows how diverse Oaxaca is. Why do they reject our *huipiles* if they are the illustration of our culture? In each *huipil* there is a feeling and a meaning about the people of Oaxaca. Oaxacans should be proud of this. Some Oaxacans say: 'Foreigners love *huipiles*.' But I know that, like everybody else, some of them like to buy them, some like only to look at them, and some ignore them.

Once, a French couple asked about buying one of my mother's *huipiles* and I offered them a fair price, and they told me that they would only want to pay half that price. Even foreigners bargain for something that is handmade and they know they would never be able to make. And they want to pay so little! Maybe it is because they see us wearing the *huipiles* and we are poor indigenous people. I do not know what they have against indigenous people. Yes, we are the producers, but we are the ones paid so little for our work. The same situation is suffered by the Triqui producers of coffee. They say that the poorest are the ones that have to pay the consequences. After all, who cares for the indigenous peoples?

Here, Yolanda begins to develop a critical voice through her account of her family's production of clothing, the middlemen-vendors' exploitive actions, and the tourists' assumptions of pricing related to perceptions about the value of indigenous productions. It should be noted that the family's refusal to use intermediaries is a common pattern within the Triquis, given their history of subordination to other groups in their area (Lewin Fischer and Sandoval Cruz, 2007). Further, the elaborate weaving styles used in the making of *huipiles* are a form of 'text' representing historical, ecological and mythical events in Triqui life and culture (ibid). Relating these issues to the manipulation of coffee growers in the Triqui area, Yolanda perceives what to

her seems the negative side of the Triqui social structure; and she links this perception to external factors of globalization. For us, this is another illustration of Yolanda entering into an arena for producing knowledge about herself, her community, and the context surrounding the activities of the community.

### ***The incarceration of Yolanda's father***

When Yolanda was quite young, her father was incarcerated on very vague charges. Yolanda justifiably feels that her father's time in jail was a reflection of the ways that the indigenous people in Oaxaca (and throughout México) are often exploited because they cannot communicate in the Spanish language.

Sorrow came to our home many years ago when my father was put into jail. My father went to jail because they thought he was an accomplice to someone else's crime. My father was on a bus to Monterrey because he was going to a fair to sell the clothes my mother had made. On the bus he started talking with the man sitting next to him. This man that my father was talking to was travelling with a younger boy, who was not related to him. He was accused of kidnapping the boy, and since my father seemed to be travelling with him, my father was arrested also. And because my father did not speak Spanish fluently, he was not able to defend himself. I think that that happens a lot to indigenous people. And I still do not know if they provide translators for indigenous people when they have to go to court. Besides, it was very difficult for my father to have this trial in Monterrey, where there were no indigenous groups and, since it was many years ago, there were not any programs to help indigenous people caught in the legal system.

Later, he was transferred to Miahuatlan, Oaxaca. My mother used to take us to visit him. They actually got formally married while he was in jail. Before they got married, they were only what they called *juntados* [in a free union]. My father had a 6 year sentence, but because of his good behavior, he got paroled after three years. As part of his parole, he had to check in each week. After that, it was difficult for my father to start his life again. He only wanted to be at home and not go out where people had so many questions for him.

The three years my father was in jail were hell for my mother and the rest of us. She didn't want to go out to sell because she did not speak Spanish at all. But she had to start selling at night, going to restaurants in the *Zócalo* to offer her goods. We also went out with her to sell. In the morning we sold chewing gum and at night woven bracelets that we made ourselves. My father would help from the jail. He wove hammocks and bags and gave them to us to sell. There were people that bought from us and people that looked down on us. Once my mother was offering something to a woman and this woman called her *pata rajada* [a derogative term for poor indigenous people] and my mother started crying and the woman laughed at her. Another problem was the government inspectors. Since we had no money for permits or to offer for bribes, they would confiscate our goods.

We started helping my mother selling bracelets, while my mother sold *huipiles* and *telares*. My uncle and his family criticized my mother, saying that she went out at night and that she did not prepare food for us. They said that she *andaba de loca* [an expression meaning 'someone who plays around with men']. I remember very vividly that my mother used to cry a lot. But she was a fighter, and during the day she went to the market and at night to the *Zócalo*. We used to walk back home around eleven at night. At home, my mother put us to bed and then she would knit.

She is still knitting nowadays. I tell her not to do it anymore, but she says that she likes it, that it is part of her identity; she is so used to that.

Sometimes people gave me money because I was the smallest. In the market, I sold chewing gum, but some people only touched and damaged the wrapping and we did not say anything because we were too young. At home the people in the store always called us 'Triquis' to annoy us, saying that our physical appearance was indigenous, me, with my braids, my little dress and my plastic sandals. In the market, there were many rich women that humiliated us by staining our clothes and calling us 'Triquis.' The way the word 'Triquis' is used can make you feel proud of our identity or it can make you feel ashamed. This bad use of our name belittles my Triqui culture and cultural diversity in Oaxaca.

Out of necessity I learned to go by myself from Colonia Sandoval (where we lived) to the market. I was 7 or 8. Then I went to secondary school and I learned to travel by bus and I helped my parents in the stand. We always carried a big box with all the clothes. Once they stole the box from us and my mother cried a lot, but being the hard-working woman that she was, she worked all day and night and made up for everything that had been stolen. Our neighbor was very bad to us, but we never said anything because my mother taught us to be submissive and humble. I used to tell this lady that even though my house was made out of tin, she was welcome there, but she said that it was full of lice and fleas.

My mother has suffered a lot because she was monolingual, and when she learned Spanish, she spoke it very badly. She learned it because she heard her children speaking it. There was a time in secondary school and high school when I was ashamed to say that I was a Triqui and that I spoke an indigenous language.

That is the context that I grew up in!

Yolanda's perception of the treatment received by indigenous people within the Mexican legal system is sadly quite accurate. Although various national and state legal services are supposed to provide legal aid and services to indigenous peoples, it is quite rare that people gain access to such help (Pardo, 2008). Currently, human rights groups in México claim that there are thousands of indigenous people held for dubious reasons throughout the prisons of the country (Sánchez Treviño, 2009). Because of the complexities of the land and political conflicts within the Triqui area, many Triquis find themselves entangled in this 'never-never land' of the Mexican legal system.

Núñez Miranda (2006) conducted a long-term ethnographic study on indigenous women prisoners in Oaxaca. The study centered on sixteen Zapotec women (poor and mainly monolingual) from the rural Sierra area of Oaxaca. Although these women had been arrested in separate incidents and each of their cases adjudicated separately, the circumstances of their arrest followed a common scenario. As the women waited to take buses from their home villages to the city of Oaxaca, they were approached by someone who offered them a small amount of money to take a package to the city, where someone would pick it up from them; and upon arrival in Oaxaca, they were searched by the local police, who discovered that the package in their possession contained drugs. They were arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned. Unknowingly, these sixteen Zapotec women, in separate incidents, had been recruited as drug mules. It took more than a decade of political and legal

struggles to get the women out of jail. Like Yolanda's father, the Zapotec women had a very limited understanding of what they had done and why they were incarcerated for simply carrying a package for someone. It was in the process of Núñez Miranda's (ibid) ethnography on women in prison where the story of these sixteen women emerged and gained public sympathy. Some of those involved in the legal defense felt that the Zapotec women were the victims of drug war policies between México and the United States; that is, the incarceration of the women being used as proof of México's active war against drugs.

Unjust imprisonment is suffered not only by indigenous inmates but also by the vast majority of inmates within the prison system of the state of Oaxaca. For the last year, we (Ángeles and Michael) have been working on a research project in a prison located in the state capital, Oaxaca. We have seen that many inmates do not clearly understand what they have been charged with, what their actual sentence is, and how long they have to serve. Those inmates with university-level studies find themselves in an arena of endless contestation of words, legal documents, and court-filings. Their struggles often produce conflicting results; they may be granted a reprieve from one judge, only to have it countermanded by another judge. Those inmates with more limited access to legal literacy often remain in a hopeless morass of words, judicial seals, and the accumulation of legal documents that they do not understand. Whether indigenous or not, inmates find themselves illiterate within these discourses of legalism, and their incarceration is not only physical but textual (Clemente and Higgins, 2009).

Another common thread in these tales of incarceration is the family's struggle for financial survival while the more economically active member of the household remains in jail. What makes Yolanda's story somewhat different from those of others has been the successful reintegration of the family upon the father's return. What contributes to the family solidity, as in the case of Yolanda's family, is a very open policy of visitation in the Oaxacan prison system. In the prison where we (Ángeles and Michael) are currently conducting our research, the inmates' families are permitted to stay at the prison during the summer months. In fact, there is a special summer school organized for the children of the inmates. Thus, the inmates can maintain both physical and emotional connections to their families within the parameters of the prison (Clemente and Higgins, 2009).

Running through the above narrative of the incarceration of Yolanda's father are examples of monolingualism as a contact zone. Although her father's level of bilingualism was adequate for the artisan markets within the tourist economy of Oaxaca, it could not help him within the prison and judicial systems that operated monolingually in Spanish. Further, the monolingualism of Yolanda's mother had not posed a hindrance to familial well-being during the years prior to the father's imprisonment. However, with the father now in jail, the mother's monolingualism in Triqui became a

limitation to the family's enterprises; and it was the children's bilingualism that provided the means to financially maintain the family.

It was within this intricate and conflict-ridden context where Yolanda grew up: struggling with who she was and who she wanted to be. Her quest for self-discovery included her educational experience.

### ***Yolanda's educational history***

As a university student at the present moment, Yolanda reflects back on her years from pre-school to high school.

The first time my mother left me without saying anything and I asked my sister Caty what was going on, she told me our mother had to go to work, and that I should not cry. I started to cry a lot and she told me: 'Don't cry. Mum is coming back.'

'Why did she go?'

'To sell clothes to pay for the school and the food.'

'Then I don't want to study. I want to be with her.'

'No, Yolis [short for Yolanda]. Mum wants you to study.'

Caty was the oldest, so she was the one to take care of me because my mother told her to.

When my parents came back, I was very happy. I ran to them and I hugged them and told my mother that she had been very bad because she had left me, and she said: 'Do you think I enjoy doing it? I do it because we need the money to pay for school. When I leave my children, I suffer a lot, but I love you a lot, so I do it.'

I also remember when I told my father that I didn't want to study. He said: 'No, daughter. Study. Study because I don't want you to suffer from sleeping on the floor and to suffer the cold weather or the lack of food. I want you to study so that in the future you can finish your studies and work in an office. Do you want to keep selling and suffering?'

'No.'

'Daughter, your mother and I have suffered working hard to get money for your schooling. Don't you see your mother all day weaving, sometimes all night as well? She does it for you. That's why you have to make the effort to go to school.'

'Yes, father. I will do it. I will make every effort I can to finish my studies.'

Then I understood why they worked so hard. So my siblings and I would go off to school, holding hands, like our father told us to. We came back from school the same way, walking and holding hands.

When my father was released from jail, I was just finishing elementary school. Then he took me to secondary school and taught me how to go and come back. Later I started high school. I remember once that I went to school wearing my *huipil* and the gatekeeper said: 'You are coming to school, not to a carnival.' And he laughed at me. Then I also started to notice that some guys made fun of my way of speaking, imitating my Spanish and Triqui. That made me self-conscious when speaking,

which I tried to avoid. I was becoming ashamed of my great culture and origins. But I have also noticed that foreign people were enthralled when they saw my mother weaving at her *telar de cintura* and wearing the clothes from my pueblo. Many indigenous youngsters suffer maltreatment and bullying because they are not in 'fashion,' and that causes them to hide who they are and forget the language that they were taught by their parents. Thank God I have moved on from that stage, thanks to my family, and thanks to the people that have told me that it is marvellous to speak two languages.

Now I am studying at the *Facultad*. My parents do not go to *ferias* anymore. We, their children, still help them to make and sell the merchandise. Thank God our economic situation is stable, thanks to their efforts and work.

In the above section, Yolanda begins to form linguistic agency and praxis. She talks about her childhood fears of leaving the household to go to school. She remembers her father having conveyed to her that education is the key to a stable economic future. She recounts her early experiences in being subjected to racism towards indigenous students; this allows her to reflect on how racism often shames many students and prevents them from expressing their identities. She is proud that she has not allowed her own identity to suffer in this manner. She recognizes that it was her family, as well as the tourists who viewed or purchased items at her family's artisan stand, who instilled in her the importance of being bilingual in Triqui and Spanish. She also values the somewhat stable economic condition of her family at the present time; and she has not forgotten the many years of hard work that her parents underwent in order to reach this modest level of financial stability. Consequently, in the above section of narrative, one sees Yolanda navigating through the contact zones of education, tourism, and ethnic relations. In this way, Yolanda utilizes her ethnographic observations to locate herself in the social process of her everyday life.

### ***Yolanda's encounter with learning English at the university***

The university years that were briefly introduced in the previous section of Yolanda's narrative become more developed in the following section. Yolanda begins this section by describing her motivation to begin her B.A. studies in TEFL at the Language Centre of Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca.

I got into this program because we sell clothes, typical clothes, and it is essential to speak English because when foreigners come to my stand they do not speak Spanish. Sometimes I speak English with my friends, even with my mother although she does not understand me. Then she says in Triqui, '*Ya tú, nica's gringo,*' which means 'Stop it, you, *gringo's* wife.' It is a joke. They also tell me that I will marry a *gringo*, but it is their joke because I speak English. Sometimes with my sister I practice a little. When I am selling, other women get cross with me because I speak English and they don't. It would be good to teach them English. Very often, foreigners really appreciate that we can speak several languages. Once, a woman asked me for the price of one our weavings, and I asked my mother in Triqui how much it was. Then this woman told me that it was very good to speak another language, and she told me not to lose my language, and fight to maintain it. This was very encouraging to me; to meet people who admire that I speak three

languages. They even ask us to teach them some Triqui. They say: 'What a beautiful language and what beautiful clothes you sell.'

I do not feel different knowing that I speak three languages. I feel the same. It feels nice to be able to speak English; however, it is not that difficult to speak three languages. Maybe I feel that way because I am already used to switching between Triqui and Spanish. My father is proud of me. I am the only one in the family that speaks English. I have become friends with many of these international visitors, but since they are often only here for a few weeks, there is not much time to build strong friendships. They come and go. I would like to go to the States some day to study for an M.A., or to work as a teacher, but not as a *mojada* [an illegal immigrant]. In my village a lot of people go to the States. It is almost a ghost town now. But I didn't want to study English just to go away. My need to learn English is to sell in my stand, and also because my father used to tell us that we had to get a degree. Still I would like to be a teacher in the States.

However, in the classroom, I am afraid to talk, because there are always students that know English better than me and they make fun of you if you get something wrong. Foreigners are more understanding. In the classroom I remain silent. But my grades in English are good. I have never failed any subject. I have few friends at school, but I get along with everybody. Naylai is my best friend and sometimes we speak in English in the street so people will not understand us. But I do not speak English with everybody. It doesn't come naturally. It is not spontaneous. And it has to be that way, not be forced. I think my English comes more naturally with a foreigner than with my classmates.

My life has changed with my English because I have met a lot of people at our stand. Before, when they found out that we did not speak English, they would ask us to write the price on a piece of paper, but that is not necessary anymore, and they also tell me that my pronunciation is good. Before, I did not relate to foreigners. Also, before, I was the interpreter for my mother because she did not speak Spanish; and now, I am the interpreter for other Triqui vendors because they do not speak English.

I always wanted to go somewhere else, to another country and meet people. Now I also think that I want to be a teacher and specialize and give English courses in my village or go to the States to teach my Triqui language. Now, with what I have learned, there is a lot that I could do for my family or my community.

The story of Yolanda's years at the Language Centre has many threads. Examples would be Yolanda's strategies for learning English; her timid feelings in front of the other students; her affirmation of her linguistic skills within the tourist-oriented handicraft market of Oaxaca; and her imagined futures beyond Oaxaca. Each of the many threads demonstrates how Yolanda has learned to navigate her way through the different language regimes that surround her everyday life. In the next section of this paper, we will attempt to pull together some of these threads, as we give our reflections on Yolanda's narrative as a whole.

### **OUR REFLECTIONS ON YOLANDA'S STORY**

Yolanda moves in and out of various identity locations while performing English with a postcolonial accent. In these performances, Yolanda develops ways to navigate through the various contact zones of her everyday life. As explained above, 'contact zones' are socially-created spaces in which dissimilar cultures "meet, clash, and grapple" within an off-tilter relation of

dominator and dominated (Pratt, 1991, p. 6). It is within the multilingual and multicultural context of Oaxaca where Yolanda 'clashes and grapples' with these structures of dominance and subordination; she does this by confronting the hegemonic authority of the colonial difference. Yolanda faces colonial difference not only in opposition between English and Spanish, but between these two dominant language regimes in relation to Triqui, her indigenous language (Gal, 1989; Woolard, 2005).

English gives Yolanda the means by which she can explain and defend her own cultural heritage as represented by the Triqui weavings and clothing. With English, she can also minimize the hegemonic authority of Spanish as a 'middle person' between her culture and the provincial views of Oaxaca. Yolanda uses English to counter the lightly veiled racist assumptions directed at the Triquis and other indigenous Oaxacan people. English reinforces the cultural capital that she has accumulated as a young Triqui woman; and English opens new ways for her to understand that background. Because Spanish is the dominant language in México, perhaps, for Yolanda, English becomes a neutral language (Kachru, 1986; Kumaravadivelu, 2007), not loaded with an imperialistic connotation, but rather a linguistic benefit that locates her in a better position.

While Yolanda proclaims the importance of her Triqui heritage, she also becomes aware of its own internal contradictions, especially in terms of community violence and gender inequality. She moves between two spheres: questioning whether she could live within the restrictive confines of her community's assumptions about gender roles and obligations; and accepting the regulation of her sexuality to honor her parents' values. She praises the sense of solidarity that allowed her family to survive the unjust incarceration of her father; and at the same time, she recognizes the fissures in the familial unity. She is critical of the dubious assumptions about male privilege among urban Triqui males; and she feels proud that her father was able to move beyond these assumptions. She is also aware of the social domain encompassing the internal dynamics of Oaxaca's postcolonial context, where the Spanish-speaking world imposes its domination upon the indigenous world. This awareness seems strongly expressed in her account of her father's time in jail as well as her experiences in encountering racist attitudes in the educational system.

By encountering the imposition of the Spanish-speaking world, along with all the other factors mentioned above, Yolanda has developed a general ethnographic awareness about her everyday life; this, in turn, allows her to confront the hegemonic authority of the colonial difference. As such, she proclaims her own authority to make truth claims about her community, about institutional racism in Oaxaca, and about her educational endeavors.

A significant educational setting in Yolanda's story is the Language Centre of the state university of Oaxaca. Clearly, the learning of English for many students at the Language Centre locates them within a contact zone where



there is an obvious clash of cultures between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking worlds. In our (Ángeles and Michael's) general ethnography, we have found that, for many students, the Language Centre serves as a 'safe house' in which to practice their performances of English (Clemente and Higgins, 2008; see also Canagarajah, 2004). However, for Yolanda, the Language Centre has not been a 'safe house,' since her ethnic background and her Spanish are at stake there. For her, the 'safe house' is her family's artisan stand located within a market-building in downtown Oaxaca; more specifically, Yolanda finds this 'safe house' in her encounters with international tourists at the artisan stand. Promoting and selling her family's goods to these tourists, Yolanda feels free to perform her English and to present herself as a multilingual young woman; and for this, she has been praised several times. It is within this 'safe house' of the artisan stand where Yolanda has been able to express her identity as a Triqui through her use of the English language. There, at the artisan stand, no one tells her that she should not wear her *huipil*; there, she finds encouragement and support. On the other hand, it is at the Language Centre where she has authored her declaration of indigenous language rights; it is at the Language Centre where she feels timid about expressing herself in the classroom for fear of criticism from students who feel superior to her. She has found it easier to speak English with international visitors, with her friends from the artisan market, and even with her family.

Yolanda's pursuit of English has moved her through various identity locations -- ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class -- while allowing her to accumulate different forms of linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). It is her ethnic identity that currently frames the importance of her other locations, with the ironic twist that English should enhance that concern. All the above threads of this ethnographic portrait can be seen in Yolanda's own reflections about what this encounter has meant to her.

#### **YOLANDA'S REFLECTIONS**

In a more formal style of writing than mine, you (Ángeles, Michael, and Bill) have given a fair description of my life, my family, and my village. You have accurately represented what has happened to me and my family: discrimination, violence, and exploitation, and how we have struggled for a better quality of life. One clear example of this has been my effort to attain a greater proficiency in English as my third language while I am finishing my B.A. in language studies at the university. You have talked about my experiences as an indigenous person, as a Oaxacan person, and as a multilingual language speaker. I think this entire paper has strongly expressed my sentiments and I think the readers will actually see what has been happening in my life.

This paper perfectly describes my feelings when I presented my topic, "The Discrimination of Indigenous People," in Ángeles' class and when we talked about it. While I was doing this presentation, my mind went back to that part of my life. I think that you have the knowledge and sensitivity to tell the story of how we suffered to overcome all our problems. With this writing, you not only helped my family but also my community. I think that you understand that as an indigenous student

studying an additional language, my life has been framed by the historical discrimination against the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. I made the decision to present that history in front of my classmates because I had this thorn in my heart that I needed to pull out. I wanted people to know what and how we suffer as indigenous people. The problem is that, in our case, we have not only been mistreated by outsiders, but also by people from our own community and even by our own relatives.

Yes, I am happy to be part of this publication, and I hope that with this story I can help other young people who have gone through the same situation. I am not the only one who has experienced these kinds of struggles. There are some students whom I know that resist speaking Triqui. I do not know if it is because they are afraid to make mistakes or because they are ashamed to have it known that they speak an indigenous language. I know this person who is studying in the law school. She understands Triqui but hardly speaks it. She may feel more confident in Spanish or she may believe that it is 'cool' to speak Spanish. That's why I think that this publication may help students who, like me, have become aware that by using their own language they preserve their identity and their roots. Thank God, my brother and his family are back in San Juan Copala. That way, when I go there, I have somebody to visit. I now have a reason to go and stay there. I think that one of the reasons I am improving my Triqui is the fact that I love my village, my roots, and I want my people to progress and have a better life. That's why I want to go there at least for a year but without getting involved in politics. Luckily, the last time I went, there was no shooting.

My mother is very thankful that this work will help me academically. My father thinks that with this article, many people will become aware of the damage that someone does when he or she judges the Triquis without knowing their situation. He hopes that this publication will encourage more support for indigenous communities, who are some of the most vulnerable people in the world. As for one of my brothers, he is not happy that such intimate information will be published, but when I explained to him that this publication would help me get my degree, he gave his support. We all gain from adding to the knowledge about the Triquis.

I am often seen as having a shy and timid personality and that I seem fearful of things. This is because I have had to deal with many difficult things in my life in terms of my gender, sexuality and ethnicity. That's why I want to overcome all this through studying more and helping other people in similar situations. I thank God for placing me in the context where I was able to know you, Ángeles. Because of your help, I have been able to remove this thorn of suffering that has been piercing my heart. You have not only been my professor and my friend, but even my therapist by letting me tell my story in my own words.

## **CONCLUSION**

Yolanda's gracious acknowledgement of Ángeles is, for us, an expression of the coevalness of this ethnographic encounter. This began in Yolanda's presentation in Ángeles' class, when Yolanda related the social realities of the discrimination against indigenous people in Oaxaca. What has made this encounter possible was the recognition, held by us as well as Yolanda, that both she and we were located in the same time and space (Fabian, 2007). This allowed us to ask and listen to Yolanda's comments and observations on her everyday life and, likewise, allowed Yolanda to ask and listen to our understandings of those activities. Furthermore, Yolanda was able to question us about our everyday lives, and about how this

ethnographic encounter would affect her and her community. In this performative collaboration, we all have come to understand that confronting the colonial difference is not only about the collision of opposing discursive regimens of power and authority, but also about people contesting the geopolitics of knowledge production in their everyday lives. By participating in this ethnographic encounter, Yolanda found new ways to challenge her own and others' presuppositions about what it means to be a young Triqui woman; and similarly, by our participation, we have found new ways to pursue the praxis of applied linguistics and anthropology. While Yolanda has reconfigured what it means to be an 'indigenous intellectual,' we have been able to weave her understandings into professional performances (Quecha, 2008).

Hopefully, we have made some progress towards reducing the "highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination" (Pratt, 1991, pp. 34-35) that frame the everyday lives of so many people in Oaxaca. We further hope that, with this paper, it becomes apparent that the social realities of language learning (in this case, English as an additional language) involve more than the utilitarian goals of adequate grammar and pronunciation (Clemente, Dantas and Higgins, 2009). More often than not, such realities involve contact zones that become arenas for confronting the hegemonic authority of the colonial difference (Clemente and Higgins, 2009). Ironically, English, or English with a postcolonial accent, has been the stage on which these collaborative practices have been carried out.

## NOTES

1. It seems important to comment on the authorial 'we.' This paper was conceived, researched, and 'written up' in article form by the 'researchers,' Ángeles Clemente and Michael J. Higgins, along with the 'participant,' Yolanda Merino-López, pursuant to the coevalness of the ethnographic encounter. Ángeles and Michael carried this article from its initial conception and all the way up to and through the actual planning, structuring, and writing of the article in draft form; and Yolanda supplied her extensive narrative and participated in the structuring and positioning of same within the paper at large. Nevertheless, in addition to Ángeles, Michael, and Yolanda, a fourth author of this paper is listed: William Sughrua. This fourth author, Bill, came in at the end. Ángeles and Michael presented Bill with the complete draft of this paper. Bill assumed the role of textual editor; this included some actual writing on his part. It should be clarified, however, that Bill focused on those areas of the paper outside of the actual narrative directly related by Yolanda (i.e. the sections of this paper with 'type' of a smaller font and an indented left margin). Bill, of course, closely read Yolanda's narrative and developed his 'textual' and 'critical' appreciation of the narrative in order to position it within the paper at large; yet his intervention as editor in the narrative of Yolanda (i.e. indented passages, smaller font) remained limited to basic formatting (e.g. margins, paragraph breaks) as well as basic proofreading of typographical mistakes and the stray period, comma, or semi-colon that had been neglected. This virtual suppression of 'an inclination to revise' with regard to Yolanda's narrative was for the sake of ensuring that the 'voice' of this narrative, including rhetorical development, content, vocabulary, and grammar, remained uniquely Yolanda's. However, all the other areas of the paper were worked on by Bill and thus subjected to revision and editing. In doing such work, and in dialoging with the other authors in order to seek clarification on certain areas of the paper as well as to explain his various revisions, Bill not only was brought 'into the loop' (so to speak), but also his affective sensibilities and identities, at least subtly, were directed at the underlying ethnography of the paper. Such

seems the reason why contemporary qualitative research of a postmodern inclination considers 'writing' and 'textual editing' as part of the very act of researching (e.g. Gergen and Gergen, 2002; Richards, 2002; Richards and St. Pierre, 2005). This is to say: While rephrasing, rewriting, sentence insertions, and stylistic adjustments continue to occur, so too does the reflexive presence of the researcher(s) continue to emerge and the implications of the data continue to fall into perspective (Holliday, 2007; Merrill and West, 2009). In this manner, Bill joined the coevalness of our ethnographic encounter, albeit in the final stages. He hence became one of the researchers and authors.

2. Accordingly, this paper gives substantial emphasis, as well as textual space, to Yolanda's own story or narrative, as directly related by Yolanda. On the surface level of lexis and syntax, as well as deeper levels of 'meaning-making,' one may note certain differences between the narrative of Yolanda and the commentaries and otherwise exposition of the 'researchers,' that is, Ángeles, Michael, and Bill. Because of the asymmetry of the power relations seemingly embedded within our respective backgrounds (Yolanda as an undergraduate student and we as her professors), it is probable that our voices cannot be perfectly blended. The conceptual language is presented through our (Ángeles, Michael, and Bill's) voices, though shared by Yolanda; whereas, the ethnographic portrait sections remain completely in Yolanda's voice while being supported by information from outside sources. Therefore, this paper, as one 'unit' or 'complete text,' can be seen to contain various linguistic, semantic, and referential variations and inconsistencies such as a shifting of verb tense as well as differing degrees of vocabulary register. However, we all (Ángeles, Michael, Yolanda, and Bill) would 'explain away' these inconsistencies -- and, indeed, justify them -- on the basis of the coevalness of our ethnographic encounter. That is, the social and linguistic dynamics presented in this paper were not discovered by us (the researchers: Ángeles, Michael, and Bill); rather, these dynamics emerged from the dialogue between us and Yolanda. Consequently, while the entire 'text' of the paper is presented in conventional fashion, the knowledge claims have derived from the collaborative efforts of the researchers and Yolanda.

3. This arena for learning English certainly contains reciprocal influences of highly asymmetrical cultural practices between the domains of the metropolis and the periphery in terms of the native/non-native dichotomy. There is also a parallel in how the gatekeepers of 'standard' English clearly assume that they are in charge of the kind of English that should be taught, with little concern over how the Englishes of the periphery will alter the 'standard.'

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## **RESUMEN**

Este estudio etnográfico reflexiona sobre las contradicciones sociales del uso cotidiano del lenguaje en el contexto multicultural de Oaxaca, México. Basado en una perspectiva coeva o de coexistencia (Fabian, 2007), los investigadores junto con la participante, son los co-constructores y co-realizadores del encuentro etnográfico (ibid). Partiendo de un estudio etnográfico previo sobre la forma en que estudiantes universitarios oaxaqueños realizan su inglés con un acento postcolonial, los autores exploran la forma en que Yolanda hace de su inglés, junto con su español y su triqui, una serie de realizaciones sociales y culturales multilingües (Clemente & Higgins, 2008). Este estudio se lleva a cabo dentro del contexto de la licenciatura en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Facultad de Idiomas de la universidad estatal de Oaxaca. Aquí, Yolanda es la única participante dentro de esta perspectiva de coexistencia etnográfica; es decir, Yolanda es la co-realizadora del encuentro etnográfico.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Encuentro etnográfico - Perspectiva *coeva* - Oaxaca - Triqui - Pueblos indígenas.