



MAKING CIRCLES OUT OF LINES

A VIEW OF THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES

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OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION

1. History and context of Greko and Nahuat-Pipil
2. The complex and variable role of linguists in an endangered language context
 - 2.1 The unequal exchange between academia and communities
 - 2.2 Decolonizing our minds
 - 2.3 Language authenticity within language revitalization
3. Support networks for language revitalization
 - 3.1 Institutional support and inclusion of indigenous perspective
 - 3.2 International support networks rooted in heritage
 - 3.3 Social media as an example for support networks
4. Conclusion

NAHUAT-PIPIL

- Uto-Aztecan language spoken in El Salvador, variant of Nahuatl from Mexico
- Decline in use of language a result of historical events such as the indigenous genocide (1932), the civil war (1980-1992) and ongoing displacement and migration as a result of criminal activity and gang violence
- First conservation and revitalization efforts in 1960s-1970s > speaker led
- Revitalization efforts in 2012 by young activists > Tzunhejekat
- Academic support for these activities exists but there is a lot of internal conflict



GREKO

- Greek variety spoken in the south of Calabria
- «la lenta eutanasia del greco di Calabria» (Longo 1988)
- Acceleration of the process of language shift in the 20th century
- First revitalization efforts in the late 1960s
- New revitalization movement since 2014 (2017)
- Little academic support for community-led activities





THE COMPLEX AND VARIABLE ROLE OF LINGUISTS IN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

TABLE 1: LINGUISTS' AND LLW'S PERSPECTIVES ON FIELDWORK PROJECTS (MOSEL 2006: 68)

	Linguist	Local Language Worker LLW
Aims	academic	educational, cultural
Perspective	focus on otherness	focus on identity
Motivations	intellectual curiosity	intellectual curiosity, status, money
Products	PhD thesis, specialised investigation	dictionary, reading materials, translations

TABLE 2: LINGUISTS' AND LLW'S PERSPECTIVES ON FIELDWORK PROJECTS

	Linguist	Local Language Worker (LLW)
Aims	academic, interdisciplinary	educational, cultural, social, well-being
Perspective	focus on otherness, focus on knowledge sharing	focus on identity, knowledge transmission, problem-solving
Motivations	intellectual curiosity, problem solving, emotional, personal, ancestral history	intellectual curiosity, emotional, personal, ancestral history, status, money
Products	PhD thesis, specialised investigation, outreach materials (exhibitions, documentaries, language books and literature etc)	academic articles, dictionaries, reading materials, translations, socially motivated projects

UP UNTIL SOME DECADES AGO, 'ETHICS WAS NOT AN ISSUE' (ADELAAR P.C., DOHLE 2018)

'[n]o one sets out to exploit, and we all like to believe we are ethical—whether or not we collaborate with speech community members', however, we must recognise that 'many of the people we work with are tired of being subject to academic research that is of little benefit to them' (Yamada 2007:271)


- The helicopter researcher (Lutter 2007)
- historical stigmatisation or prohibition
- collaboration with outsiders
- speakers feel constantly observed or checked on the 'correctness' of their speech
- feel as guinea pigs /data generators (cf. Petropoulou 1995, Yamada 2007)
- **unequal exchange between the researcher and the community** (Grinevald and Sinha 2016)



Irtasi manè, ekamasi ta pramata dikato, ma den irtasi plèo apoi na ivrusi an immasto zondari

They [researchers] came, yes, they did their things, but they haven't come back to see if we are still alive

- speakers feel frustrated by the one-way relation established by academics
- feel undervalued when their views or their approaches to their language are misinterpreted or not even considered
- Giving back something does not necessarily have to entail revitalization activities (see ED photo exhibition)

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- **This must be a core principle** in any research project, acknowledging that, regardless of the type of research conducted the relationship developed with the community might affect future research and outcomes, continuity, and permanence of local language maintenance and/or revitalization activities
 - “addimmonia to greko” – I forgot Greko

There is already a change towards a more equal relation and an openness of academia (see for instance production of teaching material) **BUT**

with this new approach we run the risk of establishing the linguist as the only one able to produce language material while the speakers are the passive receivers.

DECOLONIZING OUR MINDS

- search for the ‘exotic’ → folklorization
- expertise
 - researchers “owning” the community (Shaw 2004: 186)
 - ‘lack of real interaction with community members can actually result in descriptions that can be taken out of context and used to harm speakers and their language communities’ (Justyna Majerska EngHum focus group).
 - allowing insider researcher to advance also means allowing them to give different insights of the language and the community so far found in literature.
- authenticity

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- Language as an object view (Grinevald and Sinha 2016)
 - NORMs (Sallabank 2018)
 - Romanticization


“thelusi na jenastùme mia riserva ode” – they [researchers] want us to become a reservation

‘We want our language to be a YOUNG language wearing jeans and sneakers, a language that you can use while going to the cinema with your friends. Not just a pretty piece in a museum to appreciate when you visit that place’ (Colectivo Tzunhejekat facebook post 27th December 2014)

AUTHENTICITY

SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

- Challenges of establishing international networks and alliances within language documentation (Austin 2003)
 - support networks should be inclusive of language and speaker communities the fieldworker is collaborating with
 - create networks which specifically focus on language revitalization activities in those communities that are involved and want to be part of the process.
- great support to both communities and academia and contribute to ethical and innovative research outputs, and new actions for language revitalization.

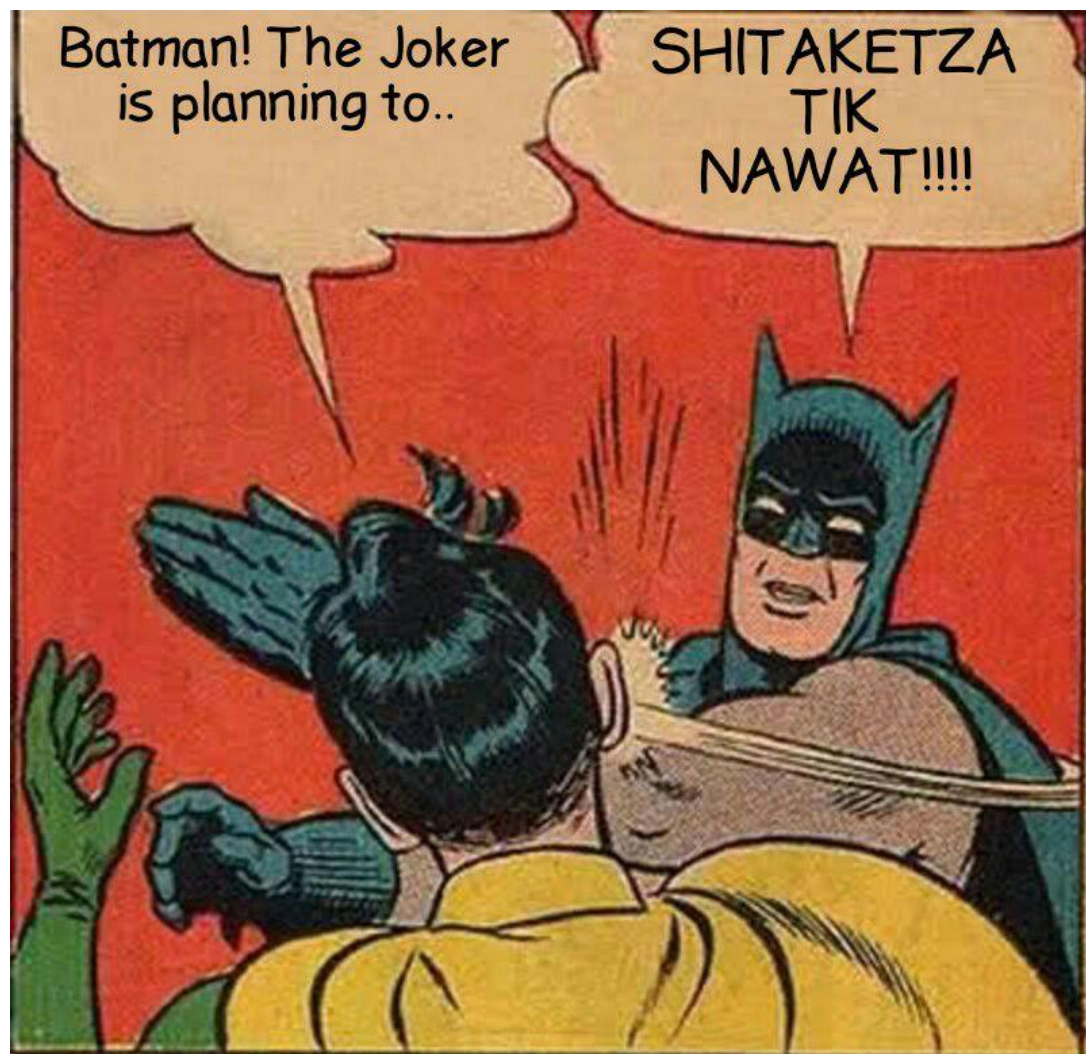
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1. Salvadoran example (TEK, MARN)
 2. SOS launched by the Greko community

**INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND INCLUSION OF
INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE**

Nahuat-Pipil and Greko beyond borders

- **different interpretation given by researchers and locals of the same events**
 - International indigenous women for digital communication workshop in Oaxaca
 - Trips to Greece
 - International Field School financed by the EngHum project, Tlaxcala (Mexico), August 2017
- The Ddomadi Greko & the Nahuat-Pipil Colectivo Tzunhejekat

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT NETWORKS ROOTED IN HERITAGE




SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EXAMPLE FOR SUPPORT NETWORKS

social media interaction (Dołowy-Rybińska 2013, Mayeux 2019, a.o.) :

- formal and light-hearted use of language
- fun and creative
- flexible
- making 'mistakes'
- code-switching
- different types of users
- diminishes the hierarchy of interaction
- discussion and communication in the language in a way that is more 'natural'
- creation of new domains
- bridge international distances
- can bring forward new ideas to support language activists within minoritized communities

TABLE 2: LINGUISTS' AND LLW'S PERSPECTIVES ON FIELDWORK PROJECTS

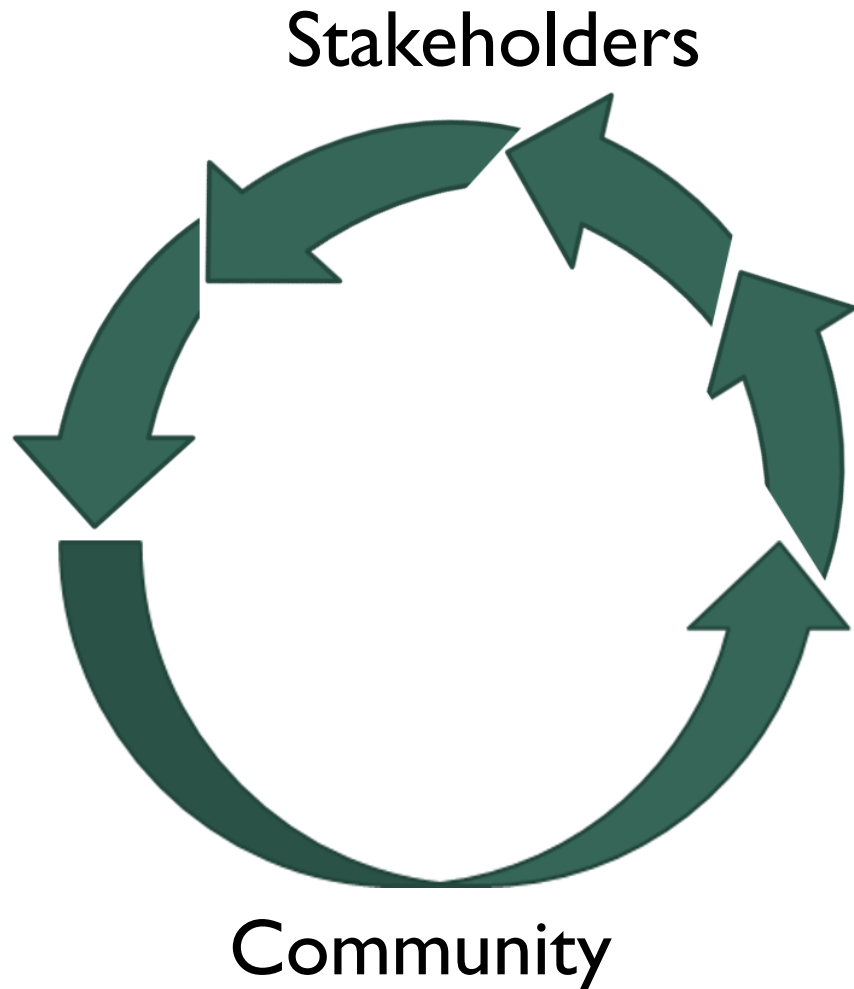
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Linguists can offer further tools, options, knowledge about all the possible solutions for the communities to make informed decisions, reflect on the potential choices to value the richness and depth of their cultural and linguistic heritage.

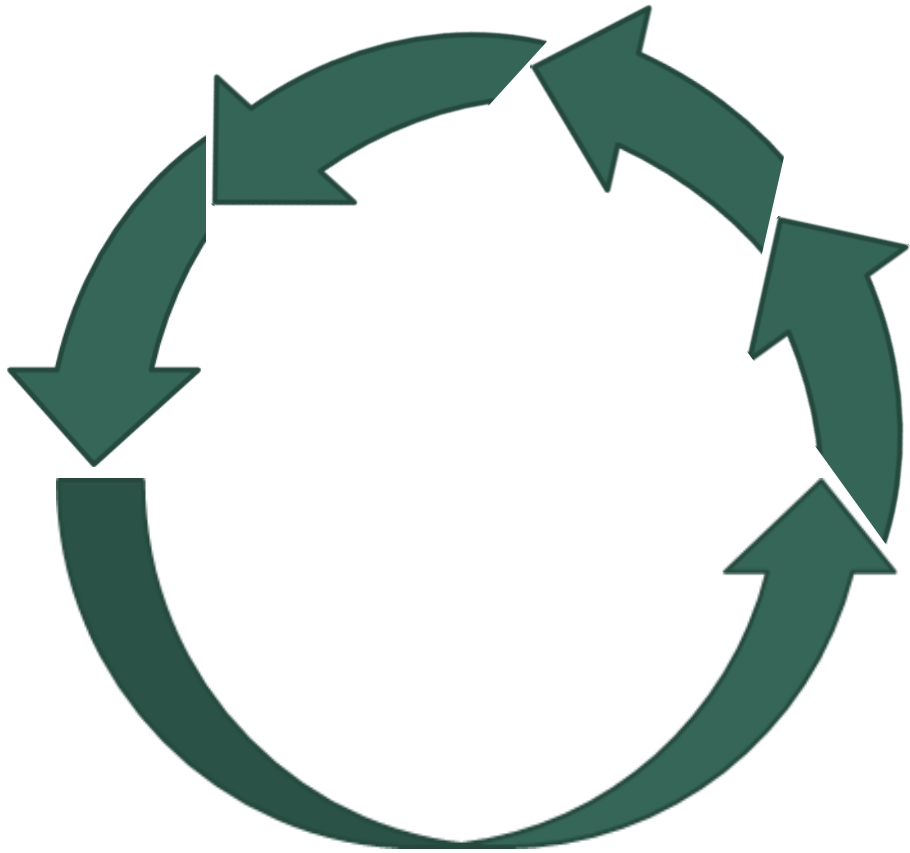
The key to this is an equal-partner network of communities, researchers and institutions, working collaboratively in order to i. find new ways towards language maintenance or revitalization, and ii. reach ethical qualitative research outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS



“to recognise each others’ equal contribution to the projects and to give everyone the possibility to be trained in someone else’s field of expertise, in a continuous and circular manner, with the exchange of knowledge and competences as a core principle. This type of approach would give linguistic research projects in endangered language contexts a solid and fair base, making their success more feasible and durable”

CONCLUSIONS



At a more theoretical level, this suggests that we should transform Mosel's (2006) table (Table 1) and our proposed table (Table 2) into a circular schema in which the actors, their roles, and their motivations are in flux. This is not to undermine anybody's position, to say for instance that locals have the same skills as linguists, but to recognise that linguists too or institutions do not have the same skills as locals. In other words, to recognise each others' equal contribution to the projects and to give everyone the possibility to be trained in someone else's field of expertise, in a continuous and circular manner, with the exchange of knowledge and competences as a core principle. This type of approach would give documentation and revitalization projects a solid and fair base, making their success more feasible and durable