

# Writing for the future of Ayapaneco: An orthography for heritage and new speakers of a critically endangered language

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# Agenda

**01** Critically endangered languages

**02** Zoque Ayapaneco

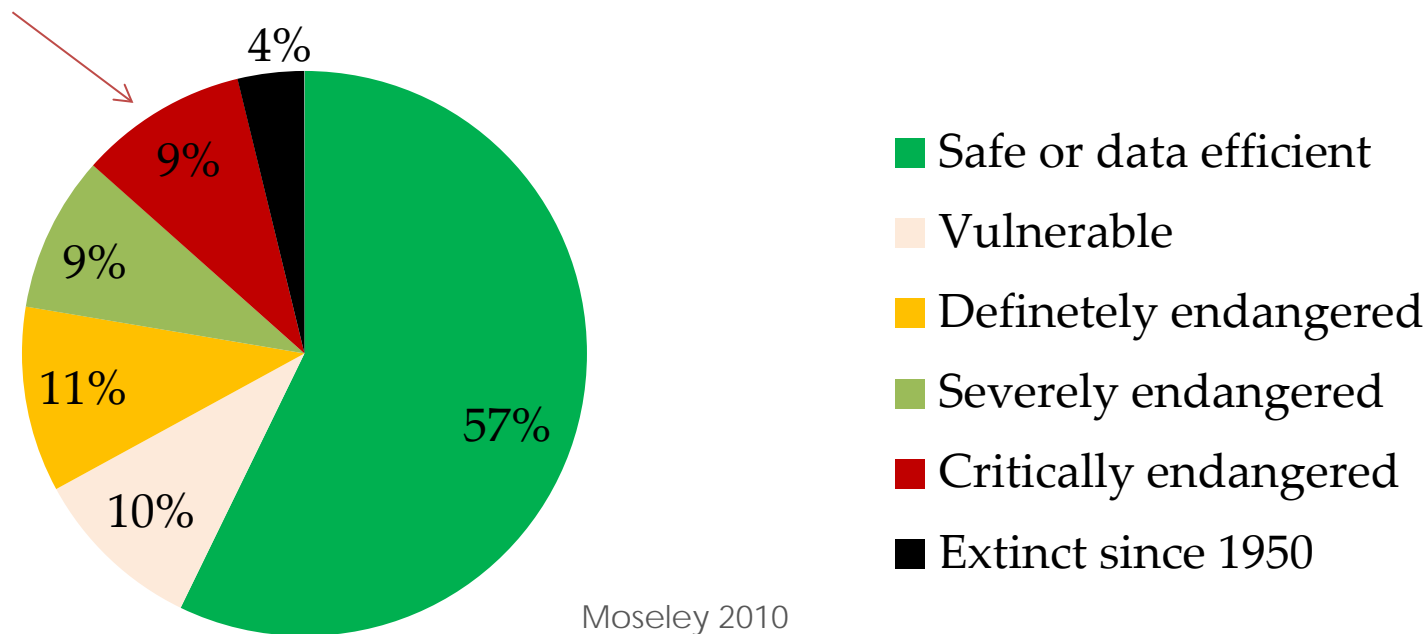
**03** Revitalization

**04** Orthography development

**05** Concluding remarks

# Critically endangered languages (CEL)


# Vitality of the world's languages



# Characteristics of CEL

- Inter-generational (or traditional) transmission of the language interrupted for decades
- Youngest speakers are grandparents and older
- Small proportion of speakers in relation to larger community
- Sporadic use of language & reduced to private domains
- Lack of written tradition and literacy in the language

Rangel 2019



There are currently 577 critically endangered languages in the world, making up 9% of the world's 6,000+ languages & their disappearance could occur at any time in this decade

Moseley 2010; Rangel 2019

# Distribution of CEL



Moseley 2010

- Critically endangered languages

# Zoque Ayapaneco



# Mixe-zoque family



# Ayapaneco: a CEL

- Spoken in Ayapa (5,500 inhabitants) by approximately 8 remaining bilingual speakers (Ayapaneco-Spanish) between the ages of 70 and 90 years old
  - Disconnected “pockets” of speakers
  - 0.2% of total population
- The language hasn't been transmitted to newer generations for over 60 years
- Language rarely used in daily life

# Ayapaneco: a CEL

- All interactions among the local population are conducted in Spanish
- Under-documented & under-described
- Oral tradition without previous writing system

# Community-based revitalization efforts

# Actors

Elder speakers

Larger community & researcher

Heritage speaker

# Revitalization objectives

Domain	Short term	Long term
Acquisition	Encourage the emergence of new speakers	Reversing language shift
Corpus	Produce language materials	
Status	Raise awareness locally and nationally	
Reclamation	Recover sense of identity	Rebuilding of communal life

# Emergence of new speakers

- Informal L2 classes (since 2012) centered on reading & writing
- Learners: children aged 6-12 who grew up in a monolingual Spanish setting
- Teachers: elder speakers with limited Spanish literacy, and one young adult heritage speaker who is literate in Spanish

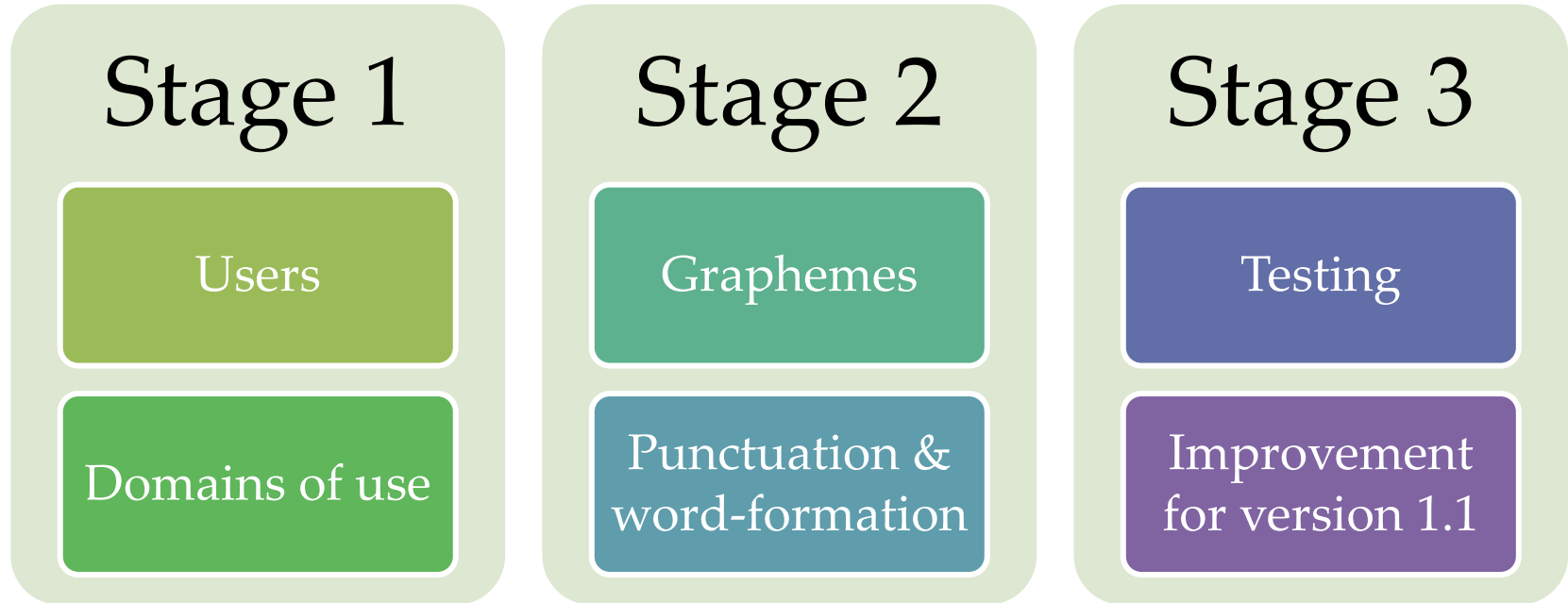
# Revitalization challenge

- Represent Ayapaneco in writing to support the emergence of new speakers (via L2 classes) and to produce language materials



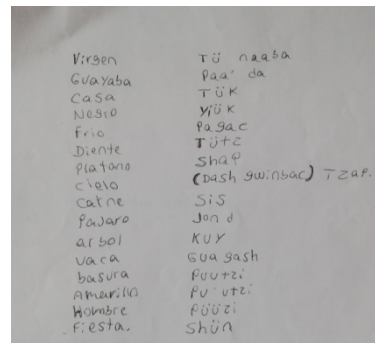
# Orthography development

# Development process



# Process

- Meetings with elders & heritage speaker
- Development workshops with heritage speaker/learners
  - Pre-tests
  - Vowels
  - Consonants
  - Word-formation & punctuation
- Testing in L2 & use
  - Use in class
  - Use in language documentation project
- With the support of:



Writing sample of an L2 learner

- Orthography development



# Immediate users

- L2 learners whose first language is Spanish
- Heritage speakers
  - Individuals from language minority groups who grow up exposed to a minority language in the home and the majority societal language (Montrul, 2015)
- Heritage speakers are the bridge between elder speakers & new speakers, and between language states: endangered-dormant-reawoken

# Future users

- New speakers of *Ayapaneco*
  - Individuals that learned the language in the context of language revitalization activities (Bert & Grinevald, 2010)
- Their social and linguistic characteristics are yet to be determined (Rangel, 2017)
  - Relation to the language?
  - Relation to the community?
  - Language practices?
  - Self-identification?

# Domains of use

- Pedagogical materials
- Books
- Printed magazines
- Internet
- Social media: WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram
- Phone applications

# Orthography depth

- Shallow orthography
  - There is a correspondence between orthographic representation and phonetic realization
- Advantages:
  - Easier to learn for L2 learners/readers/writers of Ayapaneco because they rely on phonetic realization to recognize words
- Considerations:
  - It may blur graphic identity of morphemes. This is not a concern right now but it could be for the long-term users

# Language conventions

- Following Spanish conventions will facilitate transfer of literacy from Spanish to Ayapaneco & technical text production
- Graphemes are based on the Spanish script



# Language variation

- This orthography incorporates language variation
- Language variation in Ayapaneco is structured around various highly complex parameters and is part of the characteristics of the language (Rangel, 2019)
- Simplicity vs avoiding potential conflict
- No local norm regarding variation

# Example

Phonemic	Orthographic	Variation
<i>/numte ʔote/</i>	<numdi oodi>	[i – i]
	<numde oode>	[e – e]
	<numde oodi>	[e – i]
	<numdi oode>	[i – e]

‘True voice/speech’

# Transitional orthography

- Long-term vision: to transition to a deep orthography once a generation of new speakers develops its own language practices
- A database cataloguing all phonological representations of common words will inform the development of a deep orthography in the future if needed



# Concluding remarks

# Concluding remarks

- 9% of the world's 6,000+ languages are critically endangered
- A revitalization process through second language classes and pedagogical materials in this context requires an orthography
- An orthography is a revitalization tool but not necessarily an end in itself
- We must identify the users & domains of use for an orthography

# Concluding remarks

- There could be immediate & future users, and their characteristics are different
- A transitional orthography allows this transition between immediate & future users (fluid)
- Heritage speakers are the bridge between elder speakers & new speakers, and between language states: endangered-dormant-reawoken
- Language variation in critically endangered languages follows complex parameters and could be a source of conflict that cannot be overlooked in an orthography

# Stay in touch



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<https://wils.hypotheses.org/>

# References

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