

# From Linguistic Landscape to Semiotic Landscape: Indigenous Language Revitalization and Literacy



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## ABSTRACT:

For endangered indigenous languages in Mexico, new forms of symbolic representation have been generated by linguistic landscapes. These forms involve the written use of these languages in public spaces, which in turn (re)incorporates the languages into traditional and new contexts. In addition, linguistic landscape production aids indigenous language literacy. Yet the notion of linguistic landscape seems limited to alphabetic writing and grammar standardization through the production of signage, outdoor advertising, and signs. Usually the social actors involved in linguistic landscape production, such as researchers, activists, and public officials, do not recognize the linguistic landscape as inseparable from the concepts of indigenous people. This article argues that the relationship between linguistic landscape and indigenous concepts cannot be mediated only through the linguistic landscape itself, but also through the interconnection of language and remembering as well as the retrieval of the endangered language through strategies of recalling experiences mediated through that particular language. These additional dimensions involving remembering and retrieval become what we refer to as the semiotic landscape. This landscape, including multimodal and multiliteracy methodologies (Kress, 2009), can be considered a channel of language revitalization, as it serves as a space for the interconnection between language and remembering. In this manner, the semiotic landscape allows written language (discourse) to interact with other discourses (visual images, spatial practices, and cultural dimensions), thereby aiding the emergence of indigenous self-representation and cultural values and hence working toward language revitalization. In particular, this pathway to language revitalization can be seen when considering the Ixcatec language in southern Mexico.

## KEY WORDS:

endangered languages, indigenous language revitalization, linguistic landscape, multiliteracies, semiotic landscape

## INTRODUCTION

The linguistic landscape (LL) “consists of all visual forms of language present in the public space of a pre-determined geographic area” (Lou, 2016, p. 2). Hence LL is considered part of the language planning and policies of a country or region. At the global level, LL as an area of interdisciplinary studies is spreading rapidly. In Latin America and Mexico, LL studies have primarily focused on the various languages such as English, French, and Chinese used within the tourism industry. A variation of LL is the indigenous language landscape (ILL). Following from the above definition, the ILL consists of the visual display of language within the public spaces of indigenous communities. Recently, ILL has been initiated as a way of exercising the cultural rights of indigenous peoples. For example, in Mexico and Peru, community projects of language revitalization have resulted from ILL production (Yataco — Córdova, 2016).



Although LL production is often used for economic and governmental purposes (Cenoz — Gorter, 2009; Moriarty, 2014), research on LL has shown that its variant, ILL, is an integral part of ethnic and linguistic demands (Pavlenko, 2012).

Following from and building upon this ILL-related research, the present article argues that the relationship between LL and indigenous concepts cannot be mediated only through the LL itself, but also through the interconnection of language and remembering as well as the retrieval of the endangered language through strategies of recalling experiences mediated through that particular language. These additional dimensions which involve remembering and retrieval become what we refer to as the semiotic landscape (SL). This landscape, including multimodal and multiliteracy methodologies, can be considered a channel of language revitalization, as it serves as a space for the interconnection between language and remembering. In this manner, the SL allows written language (discourse) to interact with other discourses (visual images, spatial practices, and cultural dimensions), thereby aiding the emergence of indigenous self-representation and cultural values and hence working toward language revitalization. In particular, this pathway to language revitalization can be seen when considering the Ixcatec language in southern Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

## LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

LL studies show that multiple historical, social, and power processes coexist within LL production (e.g., Shohamy — Gorter, 2009; Blommaert, 2013). Likewise, studies suggest that LL, though supported by language, depends heavily on the public space within both multilingual and multicultural contexts. For instance, Ben-Rafael (2009, p. 40; parenthesis in original) states: “The notion of ‘linguistic landscape’ (LL) refers to linguistic objects that mark the public space, i.e. inscriptions — LL items — that may refer to any written sign one finds outside private homes, from road signs to private names to names of streets, shops or schools.”

In the case of Mexico, indigenous languages — which are historically minoritized — occupy minimal visible space within the communities where their speakers live, as these languages are mostly confined to private spaces (e.g., home or religious rituals). Therefore, increasing the visibility of these indigenous languages in the public space would allow the languages to recover some of the communicative spaces from which they have been displaced. This displacement is due to the fact that most of Mexico’s indigenous languages are considered to have low social prestige and, as mentioned above, mostly dwell within private spaces. These languages, therefore, can be deemed “endangered”; and some of them are at high risk of disappearance. Thus, in contexts where such languages are threatened, the ILL has significant social relevance, not only because the LL publicly displays the existence of a language in a given territory, but also because it motivates a reorganization of the existing power relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Ixcatec, from the Popolocan group within the Oto-Mangue family, is the most endangered language in the Mexican state of Oaxaca.



In this regard, Landry and Bourhis' (1997) classic perspective on the dual function of LL has bearing. Based on their research in Belgium and Québec, Landry and Bourhis refer to LL as the representation of languages in public spaces such as communication routes, government buildings, and shopping centers, and they describe LL as having an informative as well as symbolic function. They state:

The most basic informational function of the linguistic landscape is that it serves as a distinctive marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community. The linguistic landscape also serves to delineate the territorial limits of the language group it harbors relative to other linguistic communities inhabiting adjoining territories. (...) The symbolic function of the linguistic landscape is most likely to be salient in settings where language has emerged as the most important dimension of the ethnic identity. It is in such settings that the presence of the in-group language in the linguistic landscape can contribute most directly to the positive social identity of the ethnolinguistic groups (Landry — Bourhis, 1997, pp. 25-27).

In this excerpt, Landry and Bourhis suggest that, for indigenous languages, both the informative and symbolic function should be activated at the same time. The activation of both functions allows performative speech acts in the indigenous language to resonate not only with what is “said” but also what is “done”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the presence of the ILL within a public space generates a physical action by the indexicality of places that are important to the daily lives of the social actors because the uttering of certain words (and not others) is necessary. Likewise, a mental action is generated because the presence of the indigenous language becomes revalued not only in symbolic but also political terms. These physical and mental actions involving indigenous languages within the LL work toward reversing language loss and initiating the language revitalization process.

Generally, actions taken to produce the LL promote the informative rather than symbolic function. For example, in Mexico, the LL has been developed through the initiatives of various governmental institutions or civil society organizations over the past two decades.<sup>3</sup> The central premise is to display the written language and indicate some important places within the space where its speakers live. Unlike the urban landscape, whose interests may be related to tourism, commerce, and similar concerns, the ILL highlights the presence of the speakers through written language. This does not mean there are no tourism-related interests promoted through ILL, but rather that tourism is not one of its main objectives. By displaying the written forms

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2 We refer here to Austin's (1962, p. 25) concept of the “performative utterance [...] as not, or not merely, saying something but doing something, as not a true or false report of something”.

3 It is important to recognize the work of the INALI in developing LL in the different regions of Mexico, as well as local institutions or organizations that have collaborated with INALI and communities in LL production. CEDELIO in the state of Oaxaca is an example of one of these organizations.



of these languages, ILL fosters a certain degree of ethnolinguistic vitality. However, the production of this landscape has, in our opinion, fulfilled only the information and not the symbolic function.

In Mexico, ILL has mainly focused on signage. This seems to be because speakers and promoters generally believe that the best way to revitalize an indigenous language is through its written form and in particular its “correct” alphabet and spelling. In our experience, speakers and promoters make a list in Spanish of places to signalize and later develop a direct translation into the indigenous language. In this case, there is no interest to prioritize or think about the names that had been used previously or the meanings that those places had for the elderly people. On the contrary, through signage, the speakers and promoters produce automatic translations and thus generate unintelligible neologisms for the inhabitants of the communities. For this reason, the landscape fulfills only an informative function. The processes of revitalization or linguistic claim are very slow and, in many cases, null.

If, on the contrary, LL is deemed as having a dual function (informative and symbolic), then the production of LL should not be limited to signage. This is because the LL emerges from the cultural dynamics of the social actors. With this cultural influence the LL then takes on a symbolic function, which can intensify in the case of an ILL. Furthermore, if the initial premise is that LL has been reduced to the use of written language, that same premise suggests that LL has the capacity to be wider or denser and to expand outward or complexify with symbolic dimensions. Consequently, it seems necessary to problematize LL as to its limits and potential as well as to consider the semiotic landscape (SL) which essentially would be a type of LL displayed in public spaces but not limited or reduced to the production of signaling.

## LANGUAGES AND THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

The LL is a graphic and visual synthesis delimiting different territories. In this sense, the symbols and icons used in a LL speak to the sociocultural identities of the groups that inhabit a certain region. The use of different graphic elements for the construction of the LL refers to the writing within the landscape. For this reason, it can be stated that “linguistic landscaping is as old as writing” (Coulmas, 2009, p. 13).

The LL makes use of writing that is not only alphabetic but also iconographic, chromatic, and so on. Nevertheless, some linguists with little training in LL studies — mainly descriptive linguists and sociolinguists — affirm that “if the LL is about the language, it must be about the alphabetic writing, [and that] any other type of non-alphabetic writing is not linguistic”.<sup>4</sup> Although this view may lead to extensive debates on the meaning of writing, it does not seem conducive to a dialogue treating LL in a broader sense, beyond that of alphabetic writing. This seems especially the case in Mexico, where indigenous peoples, after 500 years of an imposed colonialist

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<sup>4</sup> These comments were made by a group of linguists and sociolinguists at *Sociolinguistics Symposium 21*, Murcia, 2016.



ideology, have ceased to recognize their traditional writings such as iconography in textiles, ceramics, and murals. The idea that LL represents language not through the traditional forms just mentioned but rather through alphabetic writing has caused indigenous communities to consider signage as synonymous with LL. This perspective is reinforced by the belief that languages, in order to be revitalized, need to be written and, in order to be written, need an alphabet. In this way, searching for an alphabet as well as translating words and phrases occupies the bulk of the time and human resources available to LL producers.

The need to write an indigenous language so that the language obtains the *status quo* of Spanish is an ideology embedded in the communities (López-Gopar, 2007). This ideology does not develop language; on the contrary, it generates contradictory attitudes. On the one hand, materials are not produced in the indigenous language, because it is thought that speakers do not have the perfect alphabet. On the other hand, an indigenous language such as Zapoteco can have two or three proposed alphabets, each corresponding to a particular variant of the same language such as “Zapoteco of the Central Valley” and “Zapoteco of the Isthmus”. Inevitably often one proposed alphabet (e.g., the alphabet corresponding to the variant “Zapoteco of the Central Valley”) would be selected to represent all the variants of the language (e.g., Zapoteco), though those variants may be widely divergent.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the particular language group, whose alphabet has been selected (e.g., “Zapoteco of the Central Valley”), in effect, delegitimizes the other language group or groups within the same language (e.g., “Zapoteco of the Isthmus”), who now need to conform to a “standard” Zapotec alphabet, which actually is not based on their own language variant but that of another. This practice of delegitimization, which results from the attempts at standardization of the linguistic systems of indigenous languages consisting of significantly different language variations, is often reinforced by researchers who study the internal structure of the indigenous language as well as by different state agents such as indigenous education teachers and public servants. In both cases, language revitalization is difficult to achieve. This is because while the search for the perfect alphabet and writing proceeds, communicative practices are becoming obsolete and the remaining speakers are dying out.

The ideology of indigenous language alphabetic writing relegates or rejects other forms of traditional writing. Scarcely any thought is given to what, for whom and why to write. In addition, the intention to use the direct translation (Spanish-indigenous language) of words or phrases to generate didactic materials as well as the LL also motivates contradictory actions in promoting the indigenous language and deal-

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5 Often these variants of indigenous languages in Mexico (e.g., Zapoteco) are so widely divergent that some researchers as well as some language users themselves consider the variants not as “variants” *per se* but rather as distinct “languages” in and of themselves. In the case of the present example, then, “Zapoteco of the Central Valley” would be considered one language and “Zapoteco of the Isthmus” another language. However, taking up this debatable issue of “variants” versus “languages” would be beyond the scope of the present paper. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, and while not taking sides within this debate, we refer to “variants”.



ing with its elderly speakers. The direct translation of words or phrases takes place as a result of two factors associated with the work of the cultural promoters.

On the one hand, the production of LL is financed or initiated by external institutions or organizations. The administrative project timelines, however, often do not coincide with the community dynamics which almost always necessitate more time than that allowed in the project. Nonetheless, the project timelines determine the development of the LL; and as a result, the direct translation of words, in many cases unintelligible to the community in general, becomes a means of reducing the time invested. On the other hand, speakers who collaborate on the construction of the LL have also worked with different researchers or institutions to translate lists of words or texts (e.g., political constitutions, the national anthem, and legislations). In most cases, these speakers are hired without having had any previous training in the complexities of translating.

For these reasons, it is necessary to rethink the way in which the production process of the ILL is perceived not only in terms of writing and translation but also in terms of the issues pertaining to the visual and material culture of indigenous peoples. For example, if one's starting point were to be the idea that LL helps to visualize historically minoritized languages, then it would be necessary to prioritize the activation of the linguistic and cultural memory of the speakers. In other words, it would prove vital to recreate or introduce discussions regarding other visual elements into the community, regardless of whether or not the visual elements are supported by alphabetical writing or translation. The LL, as its own name indicates, is about the language, but the language cannot be disconnected from the culture. In this sense, it is important to refer to the "language in the material world" (Scollon — Scollon, 2003).

A language is a cultural marker that allows the labelling of a given group's social world. Even in the absence of alphabetic writing, a language helps to classify and establish social relations. Thus, it can be affirmed that for centuries language has given names and meanings to the places where the social group using the language has lived. Such names can remain in the community memory, even if the speakers of that particular language no longer exist. For example, in the municipality of Tlacotepec Plumas (Oaxaca, Mexico), there are no living speakers of the Chocholtec language, the last of the Chocholtec speakers having died about thirty years ago.<sup>6</sup> However, one of the Chocholtec municipalities retains the names of its hamlets in the Chocholtec language. Although the inhabitants of the municipality do not speak their indigenous Chocholtec language, they refer to the hamlets by their names in Chocholtec.

The above example shows that the language can have a presence in the social world even though it no longer has any speakers. In other Chocholtecan municipalities (e.g., Teotongo, San Miguel Tulancingo, and others) that do have small groups of Chocholtec speakers, the place names in this language have begun to assimilate into

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6 Chocholtec is the second endangered indigenous language in Oaxaca, Mexico. The first endangered language is Ixcatec. Both languages are part of the Popocolan language group or subfamily within the Oto-Manguéan language family.

the Nahuatl language (the imperial language in Prehispanic times) and Spanish. It is important to note that the maintenance of the names in Chocholtec and the displacement by Nahuatl or Spanish has not required signage in an alphabetical or written form. This shows that, despite the displacement of Chocholtec by Spanish, there are still sociocultural elements codified in the Chocholtec language as well as in the memory of speakers and non-speakers who inhabit these municipalities.

The cultural and historical memory of the indigenous people is dying out and the production of LL only in the sense of alphabetic writing and literal translation is contributing to this extinction process. It therefore seems necessary to prioritize the processes by which cultural memory can nourish the landscape. As a result, the SL seems to be the best means of promoting a visual and communicative culture closer to the interactions of its social actors. The SL has the potential to fully activate the symbolic function of the LL, as referred to by Landry and Bourhis (1997).

## CULTURAL MEMORY AND SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE

In the context of language revitalization, the production of the LL should be seen as a pretext for promoting collaborative work among speakers, authorities, institutional representatives, and researchers. In contexts of language loss, minority language speakers usually lose communicative skills because these speakers encounter few, if any, opportunities to use their minority language in “spaces of use” such as classrooms, marketplaces, and government offices. Likewise, the speakers leave aside the cultural knowledge they acquired from their ancestors since such knowledge is considered obsolete. In these situations, the LL becomes an important form of symbolic input. However, if the LL production process were to be accelerated, poorly thought-out, or non-collaborative, the symbolic function of the produced landscape would be temporary. For this reason, the construction of the LL needs to conform to the norms and dynamics of the communities, which do not necessarily coincide with the administrative timelines of the institutional grants. Therefore, if a process of collaboration between the institutional grants and the community dynamics is followed, then the possibilities of ILL production would expand and create new materials and, in this way, new communicative dynamics could be generated in languages which are at a high risk of dying out.

For this reason, in Mexico in 2016, the *Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas* (National Institute of Indigenous languages; INALI), *Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas* (Secretary of Indigenous Affairs; SAI), *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca* (Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca; UABJO), and *Centro de Estudios y Desarrollo de las Lenguas Indígenas de Oaxaca* (Center of Study and Development of Indigenous Languages in Oaxaca; CEDELIO) joined forces on a research project involving the endangered Ixcatec language in Oaxaca, Mexico. The coalition of INALI, SAI, UABJO, and CEDELIO collaborated on this research project with the municipality of Santa María Ixcatlán (Oaxaca, Mexico), where the Ixtapec speakers primarily reside. This project was aimed at producing LL (signage) in the Ixcatec language. As mentioned previously, Ixcatec is the most endangered language of Oaxaca. It has





less than a dozen speakers and the majority of those speakers are people over the age of seventy. In addition, Ixcatec has not been used in community communication for more than forty years. The proposal to produce an ILL in Ixtatepec was well received by the municipal authorities, most likely because Santa María Ixcatlán is an important Catholic religious centre in Mexico and receives many visitors during the year. In this way, the production of Ixcatec in the form of a LL would become an effective symbolic input for introducing the language and its speakers to the community public space.

Initiating the production of a LL in Ixcatec was motivating for all the participants. However, the process was complex. This was especially because, although the project was met with enthusiasm, only three Ixcatec speakers decided to participate. The methodology of the general work was as follows:

- Meetings with municipal authorities in order to present the project.<sup>7</sup>
- Reflections about which spaces would be signaled and how the signaling would be realized.
- Elicitation of audio information from the three Ixcatec speakers.
- Phonetic transcription.
- Analysis of transcriptions conducted by the interinstitutional team along with the Ixcatec speakers as well as a guest specialist / researcher of the Ixcatec language.<sup>8</sup>
- Photographing for iconography design.
- Selection of iconography and emerging alphabetic writing.

In this section of the paper, we direct our attention to the second phase listed above, namely the reflections regarding which spaces to signalize. We have selected only this phase for discussion here because it is the most relevant to the issue of signage (as in LL) and semiotics (as in SL).

The reflection phase began with questions regarding which places should be signaled or were important to signal. The first response of the Ixcatec speakers to the institutional representatives was: “It is better to give us the list of words you want to translate and we will translate it.” This response propped up a methodological barrier. It was, therefore, necessary for the institutional representatives to change the questions to trigger more reflection on the part of the Ixcatec speakers. In order to achieve this, the team posed indirect questions, such as:

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7 INALI, SAI, UABJO, and CEDELIO provided the technical and linguistic advice; INALI provided the funding for the LL production; UABJO directed the LL design; and the municipal authority of Santa María Ixcatlán had the task of organizing the Ixcatec speakers and displaying the final version of the LL.

8 The guest specialist / researcher belongs to the Juan de Córdova Research Library, Oaxaca, Mexico. This researcher helped, through email exchanges, to discern the use of some spelling and words although he advised the interinstitutional team to respect the decisions that the Ixcatec speakers made regarding the writing.



- What were the places that their grandparents visited?
- What was the name, in Ixcatec, of the road that goes from Coixtlahuaca to Nodon?
- What did their grandparents call the market?
- What was the name of the hill behind us?

“Correct” or “specific” answers to these questions were not expected. The answers had two outcomes. First, the speakers began to remember how some community spaces were named or labeled in the Ixcatec language. Second, a list of ancestral or important places that could be signaled began to emerge from the answers. This does not mean that all places would be signaled, but a range of possibilities was compiled for their subsequent selection. From this exercise, although the answers were names in Spanish, an attempt was made to revive the cultural memory of the speakers. This is one of the most important aspects of the SL construction, as Assman (2008, p. 111) indicates:

Cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent: They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another.

As Assman (2008) explains, cultural memory depends on the intergenerational transmission performed by the community. However, in the Ixcatec case, this memory has not been transmitted in a constant way. The cultural memory of Ixcatec has been displaced for more than four decades. In this way, language revitalization can be seen as heavily reliant on the cultural memory of its speakers, because it is from that memory that cultural events can be recreated or resignified. However, it is also recognized that in the process of language loss, cultural memory fades because it includes reduced spaces of interaction. As Assman (2008, p. 111) states: “Our memory, which we possess as being equipped with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with ‘things’, outward symbols.” Therefore, in the Ixcatec project, it was necessary to promote the activation of memory. But that would not be achieved if the Ixcatec language was treated only as a system of sounds. Other symbolic input was also needed to motivate the reactivation of memory, but this was not achieved through the construction of the ILL, because “memory” appeared to be perceived by the speakers as Ixcatec signage.

Despite the production of the Ixcatec LL (see Figure 1), it was not possible to alter the dependence on signage.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the process in creating the LL shown in Figure 1 below did allow us to set up a platform for collaborative work. Firstly, the institutional representatives had to change or adjust their working methodology, and secondly, the speakers and authorities demonstrated a willingness to continue collaborating. From this collaborative platform, the team began work on another type of LL: the SL.



**FIGURE 1:** Linguistic landscape in Ixcatec and Spanish: “Welcome to Ixcatlan”, “Come back soon”, and “Visit Ixcatlan”.

The SL is understood in this paper as “the interplay between language, visual discourse, and spatial practices and dimensions of culture, especially the textual mediation or discursive construction of place and the use of space as semiotic resource” (Jaworski — Thurlow, 2010, p. 1). In the Ixcatec case, the production of the SL emerged from another constructed LL: a bilingual calendar (Ixcatec-Spanish). The production of a calendar was proposed by one of interinstitutional team members, Marcos Sandoval Cruz, a cultural promoter, who had already implemented this process in his community San Andrés Chicahuaxtla (Putla Villa de Guerrero, Oaxaca).<sup>9</sup> For Sandoval Cruz, calendars have a stronger informative and semiotic function than the LL, because calendars can be displayed in both public and private spaces. Also, calendars have the ability to condense extensive cultural information and are used in the everyday lives of the social actors. In this way, calendars can be considered SL as they consist of linguistic, discursive and visual aspects that allow an interaction between the observer and the object. As seen below, the informative and symbolic functions of a calendar have a strong impact on the everyday life of the inhabitants of a community.

The 2016 Ixcatec seasonal calendar was produced by the project team. This calendar presents the seasons of the year, with the starting point focused on the agricultural cycle of the community. The calendar includes an image of the *Xujun Na’ande* 1580 canvas, which the community recognizes as an important part of the local history (see Figure 2 below).

<sup>9</sup> Chicahuaxtla is in the Triqui region of Oaxaca, Mexico. The Triqui language, belonging to the Oto-Mangue family, is one of the languages with the highest vitality in the state of Oaxaca.



FIGURE 2: Ixcatec Seasonal Calendar 2016.



In constructing this calendar, the project team utilized the information gathered in the reflection phase of the methodology (above). During this reflection process, the Ixcatec speakers were not asked to translate “spring”, “summer”, “autumn” or “winter” from Spanish to Ixcatec but rather to reflect directly on the names of the seasons in Ixcatec, by way of questions such as the following:

- What is the season called when the corn (*maíz*) is sown?
- What is the name of the season when there is rain?
- What is the name of the season when the weather is cloudy?

The answers to such questions determined the names of three seasons of the Ixcatec year (see Figure 3 below). In the calendar, the phrases were developed in Ixcatec and the seasons were marked with three different colours so that the viewers can easily locate the seasons (see Figure 2 above):



Ixcatec seasons	Translation
KAA SUWA	Warm weather (March, April and May)
KAA TIUSHTI	Rainy weather (June, July, August and September)
KAA LAKIN	Cool weather (October, November, December, January and February)

FIGURE 3: Ixcatec Seasons of Year

It is important to mention that the names of the months (according to the Gregorian calendar) could not be found in the Ixcatec language. The reason is that, in many Mesoamerican languages such as Ixcatec, time periods are calculated in a vigesimal manner and the year does not begin in January but in December. For this reason, naming each month of the Gregorian calendar required the name of the month in Spanish, preceded by the word *Ndusa* (moon). Examples are *Ndusa Enero* (January moon), *Ndusa Febrero* (February moon), and *Ndusa Marzo* (March moon). Also, one of the most important Christian festivals of the community — *Tsitse Tje Anima* (All Souls' Day), celebrated on November 1 and 2 of each year — was signaled.

The construction of the calendar allowed the Ixcatec speakers as well as the team members to put into practice knowledge that had not been used until that moment. Also, it allowed for the synthesis of knowledge and symbolic values within one single material — that is, the 2016 Ixcatec calendar, as a SL. With the Ixcatec calendar, it is possible to observe that the SL facilitates the experience of new forms of representation of the language and culture of a social group. In particular, the SL is not constrained to a “marginalised alphabet” (López-Gopar, 2007). On the contrary, in order to achieve its symbolic function, it needs multiple elements with which to construct a new discourse.

## THE SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE AND MULTILITERACIES

As mentioned above, the writing of language is an important element but not the only one. To accompany writing, a SL such as the 2016 Ixcatec calendar (Figure 2 above) activates cultural memory, puts to use new visual and linguistic supports, and shows the cultural complexity in which a language is used. Although the Ixcatec calendar was written in the indigenous language along with Spanish, the calendar proved useful to reactivate knowledge by means that went beyond the alphabetical writing of a language.

The *Xujun Na'ande 1580* canvas which was included in the Ixcatec calendar has an important historical value for the community, mainly because it depicts how the region in which Santa María Ixcatlán is located was organized and governed. In this sense, the canvas tells a story based on a discourse whose visual load is stronger than that of the lower part of the calendar where the months and seasons of the year are found. The public use of the *Xujun Na'ande 1580* canvas allowed the community to revalue this discourse, and this revaluing was confirmed on an individual level as each person could view and privately respond to the calendar within the confines of her/his own home. Essentially, what took place was a community democratization of the canvas.



The canvas is, in the words of López-Gopar (2007), a text of multiple modalities. It is a text in which the pictographic writing of the indigenous population is mixed with the Castilian alphabetical writing of the European conquerors. At present, there is no alphabetic writing in the Ixcatec language that is used as a communication method. In fact, speakers who write in the language are guided by the dictionaries (Ixcatec-Spanish) that were developed more than 50 years ago as well as those created recently as a result of suggestions made by language specialists. In that sense, the calendar in general and the canvas in particular promote multiple forms of writing. From this, the teaching of literacy in Ixcatec could make use of multimodal inputs in order to foster a deeper cultural development.

The use of alphabetic writing has become deeply embedded as an ideal and goal to be achieved by indigenous language speakers. However, if this writing were to be isolated from the entire cultural context, alphabetic writing would not be able to motivate communication. In this sense, a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996) can be negotiated and redirected to promote the written use of languages and cultures. SL can become part of a new methodological development with the aim of promoting multiliteracies with the indigenous languages of Mexico and even the world.

It is important to emphasize that the promotion of multiliteracies presents a challenge. It is necessary to not only reactive the cultural memory of indigenous language speakers but also to reorganize the ideologies underlying the literacy practices of a country. This is especially pertinent for the country of Mexico, which appears to have placed all its hopes for permanence in the social world on LL projects limited to writing and signage. However, both in the cities and indigenous communities of Mexico, the practice of reading and writing texts is limited, so alphabetic writing is not a guarantee of the ethnolinguistic vitality of a given language community.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated the conceptual and methodological transition from a linguistic landscape (LL) to a semiotic landscape (SL) within the context of the indigenous languages of Mexico and, in particular, the Ixcatec language in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The paper has also discussed how this transition from a LL to an SL endows the SL with the two general functions that Landry and Bourhis (1997) mention: an informative function and a symbolic function. Further, the paper has argued that, to achieve linguistic revitalization, it is not necessary to promote a correct alphabet and writing, but rather to activate the cultural memory and multiliteracies around cultural knowledge. More specifically, it is necessary to recognize that the production of LL makes indigenous languages visible. This revaluation does not have long-term effects, but temporary ones, which is why SL can become a tool for the development of multiliteracies. The SL can be a landscape that helps revitalize endangered languages, and perhaps more so because it does not need to be materially constrained or restricted to one location. The SL can be found in different spaces and fulfill different types of functions within the social life of the speakers.



For example, the 2016 Ixcatec calendar (Figure 2 above) was given to every family in the community, to those who are originally from the community but now live outside the community, and to visitors. Thus, the calendar served as a tool for counting and keeping track of time, a paper on which to write reminders, a gift for visitors, a didactic material for Ixcatec language classes, a disseminator of knowledge, and so on. The potential of SL is greater than what has been developed as LL in many regions of Mexico. It should be noted that the 2016 Ixcatec calendar is just one example of a SL. In order to construct a SL, there are many available strategies and processes other than those used by the project team consisting of INALI, SAI, UABJO, CEDELIO, and the Santa María Ixcatlán municipality, and the process of constructing a SL can be experienced by different age groups and not just by indigenous language speakers and specialists.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the SL democratizes the visual discourses of a community and, especially if reproduced in different spaces, works to prevent the fading of the people's linguistic and cultural memory. The SL can also be an instrument for teaching indigenous languages in a socially dynamic and relevant manner based on communicative interactions rather than imposed writing practices.

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