

## **Indigenous bilingualism and language shift: Heritage language speakers in Mexico**

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Mexico is a country with a very rich linguistic diversity. Besides Spanish, the majority language, and several prestigious minority languages like English, French, German, and Italian, there are millions of Mexicans who speak one of the 364 linguistic variants of 68 indigenous languages comprising 11 linguistic families (INALI 2008). Even though only about one tenth of Mexicans speak an indigenous language or live in an indigenous household, about one third of this population live in cities due to an extensive migration from rural areas that started in the last century (INEGI 2016; CDI 2016). In Spanish-dominant urban environments, the loss of indigenous languages and language shift to Spanish due to extensive language contact has been observed in just three generations (Canuto Castillo 2015; Guerrero Galván 2009; among others). Despite this and the fact that about 85% of indigenous language speakers are considered bilingual since they also speak Spanish (INEGI 2011), the notion of *heritage language speakers* has not been widely explored in this context. Therefore, this presentation analyzes whether indigenous Mexicans who live in cities as a result of internal migration within the Mexican territory can be described as heritage language speakers, considering several features associated with such speakers (Rothman 2009), by reviewing a body of published research carried out on Santiago Mexquititlán Otomi (Hñãñho) speakers residing in Mexican cities. In particular, we focus on identifying those studied individuals who might speak or merely understand the indigenous language and are to some degree bilingual (Valdés 2000; 2001), and who experienced a change in language dominance from their indigenous mother tongue to Spanish, being exposed to the minority language from early age at home but being highly proficient in Spanish at present (Montrul 2012). Taking into account Fishman's classification of heritage languages (Fishman 2001), Mexican indigenous heritage languages in urban contexts might exhibit both indigenous and immigrant heritage language features. Based on the results of this study, we establish the similarities and the differences between indigenous heritage speakers in Mexico and Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S. Specifically, we identify the features that might be specific to the heritage language situation in Mexico, due mainly to the several-centuries-long process of creating the Mexican national identity by genetic and cultural incorporation of the indigenous population into the now majority *mestizo* population (López-Beltrán & García Deister 2013; Stolcke 2009). In conclusion, linguistic studies on Mexican indigenous language speakers residing in urban contexts can benefit from a more precise classification of this population as heritage language speakers, since a vast body of international research suggests that such individuals exhibit important differences from monolingual and bilingual speakers

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