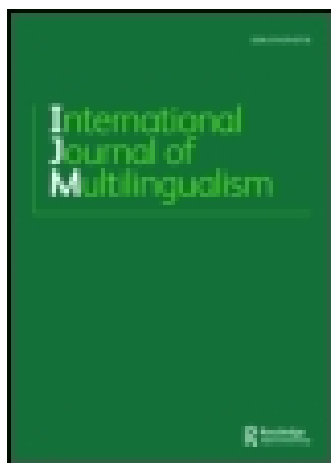


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Language dispute and social change in new multilingual institutions in Chaco, Argentina

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Language dispute and social change in new multilingual institutions in Chaco, Argentina

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Intercultural bilingual education (IBE) programmes in Latin America pose interesting questions for sociolinguistics, since their implementation interrogates the link between language and the nation resulting from the emergence of nation-states, but also from processes of decolonization. In the case of Argentina, a new legal framework and the recent implementation of new public policies at national and provincial levels have caused key social and linguistic transformations in educational institutions in indigenous contexts. This paper aims to show some current transformations in multilingual management in Chaco's educational institutions. To do this, I consider the case of public schools, traditionally monolingual in Spanish, to which new actors are incorporated, i.e. Wichi bilingual teachers. Their presence at school and their linguistic practices illustrate the tensions between different language ideologies that coexist today in the Argentinean educational system. As I try to show, bilingualism – as an ideological sign and as symbolic capital – and bilingual practices constitute a contested terrain that can be explored through a sociolinguistic ethnography.

Keywords: bilingualism; bilingual education; Wichi; Argentina; language ideologies; social change

1. Introduction

Intercultural bilingual education (IBE) programmes in Latin America pose interesting questions for sociolinguistics, since their implementation forces questioning of the link between language and the nation, resulting from the emergence of nation-states in Europe and from processes of decolonization. Indeed, following the pattern of the colonising states, Latin American countries adopted linguistic homogenization policies, despite the enormous linguistic diversity existing among the local populations and in spite of the great diversity of immigrants that these countries received during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

IBE has its origin in at least three interrelated causes: first, the struggles of the indigenous peoples, which are echoed in internationally spreading discourses on their rights; second, the neoliberal context which, since the 1970s, has imposed neoliberal reforms on economic and educational fields in Latin America and in the rest of the world; and third, the failure of an educational system that has systematically ignored the processes of early indigenous language socialization in schoolchildren.

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In Argentina, IBE programmes were born in a neoliberal context, where educational responsibilities were distributed among different local, regional and state administrations, and where private and non-governmental initiatives were promoted by the state. In a country with great economic and social inequalities between regions, neoliberal policies strongly deepened social inequalities. Indigenous language education was in the hands of the poorest provinces. It was establishing itself as part of the government's *focused policy* in rural areas aimed at the welfare of exclusively indigenous children (Novaro, 2011). In Argentina, being poor and indigenous were, until recently, synonymous concepts.

However, IBE programmes are changing. As different studies on the Latin American context show, there is a remarkable development in the discourse regarding IBE (López & Sichra, 2008; Zavala, 2012). Currently, IBE models seem to be oriented towards more grassroots and critical proposals which emphasise the role of indigenous communities in decision-making and implementation. These transformations are part of a new agenda which includes new indigenous demands for quality education, curriculum decision-making and participation in institutional management, and which defines the current scenario of my research (Unamuno, 2013).

At the beginning, IBE was implemented as part and parcel of assimilation policies and practices. IBE emerged as a transitional *de facto* model, ultimately aimed at replacing the use of native languages with Spanish (López, 2006). However, in the 1980s and 1990s, many states passed laws acknowledging their 'multi' nature (multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual), and the right of indigenous peoples to receive education in their own languages (López, 2006; López & Sichra, 2008; Moya, 1998). At present, there is wider agreement on the benefits of bilingual education, and a consensus on a school curriculum which establishes connections between Western and indigenous knowledge is being reached.

At the institutional level, all these changes involve new challenges in different areas, in particular, with regard to the incorporation of indigenous actors into institutional spaces. In a context characterized by deep ethnic and social conflicts between different groups and by racist historical and daily events, this institutional refashioning augurs a complex scenario. The study of language practices and language ideologies is presented here as a privileged entry point into these shifting social processes.

For the present work, I consider the case of public schools in the Chaco region called *El Impenetrable*, where new actors are entering the scene, i.e. the Wichi bilingual teachers. Their presence and linguistic practices at school illustrate the tensions between different language ideologies that coexist in Argentinean education today: one ideology which holds that Spanish is the national language that gives access to 'regular' citizenship and that heritage languages are only a medium to achieve Spanish language proficiency; the other claims that native languages might be legitimate resources for quality education. As I would like to show, these new bilingual educational practitioners must solve this paradoxical situation in practice. They have to contribute to the formal education of their communities by ensuring their access to the Spanish language and, in turn, they have the duty to contribute to the use and development of their native language and pedagogy. As will be discussed, the incorporation of these new actors brings to the fore ideological tensions related to the definition of bilingualism and bilingual education and shows that bilingualism constitutes a terrain of struggle between different social groups.

In the first part of this paper, I briefly describe language policies in Argentina. This is followed by a general sociolinguistic portrait of the *El Impenetrable* region in Chaco focusing particularly on the institutional implementation of IBE programmes. In Section 3, I outline the main dimensions of my research and the data I have collected. In Section 4,

I show how teaching roles and language management in bilingual classrooms are perceived and interpreted by the different actors involved, and how current changes in IBE institutions are constructing an area of struggle. Finally, in the last sections I discuss some general issues posed by the analysis of the data, and I conclude with a few general remarks on how a sociolinguistic approach to multilingualism as situated discourse and practice can throw light on institutional transformations and social change.

2. Language policies in Argentina and Chaco

In past decades, Argentina's legal framework with regard to linguistic minorities has been modified in accordance with international discourses on the rights of minorities. Among other dispositions regarding indigenous communities, new policies have established educational programmes that allow the learning of languages other than Spanish in certain regions of Argentina. These bilingual programmes for indigenous people contrast with the monolingual tradition of public institutions in the country. These institutions have played a significant role in the linguistic homogenization of the Argentinean population (Arnoux & Bein, 1995; Bein & Arnoux, 2010).

As is known, during the Spanish colonization, representatives of the Spanish Government promoted native languages alongside Spanish as languages of communication with the citizenry. Likewise, at the beginning of Argentina's independence process, a decision was made to draft the conclusions of the General Assembly (1813) in three indigenous languages as well as in Spanish. However, Argentina's first constitution (1853) does not mention any language issues nor does it identify Spanish as the official language for that matter. This 'silence' when it comes to language issues continues to the present day.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the demographic composition of Argentina changed dramatically with the massive arrival of European migrants. Between 1869 and 1914, the proportion of foreigners in the country increased from 12% to 30% (Bein, 1999). The 1987 Census states that more than 50% of Buenos Aires citizens were born in foreign countries, especially in Italy, Spain and France. According to Di Tullio (2003) and Bein (2004), the massive presence of speakers of other languages in the country influenced the definition of a centralist language policy that enforced Spanish as the only legitimate language. This language ideology was circulated widely, especially in schools and compulsory military service. These decisions reflect the ideology of the dominant classes in the country during this period.

Following European models, linguistic homogenization was one of the key instruments for the construction of the modern Argentinean state. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the economic project to turn Argentina into a worldwide exporter of beef and grain prompted two crucial political decisions which, to this day, still have consequences for the linguistic diversity of the country (Bein, 2004).

The expansion of the internal border of the country resulted in the so-called 'war against the Indian', which was initiated in the last part of the nineteenth century. In 1884, a military occupation of indigenous lands was authorized in the Chaco region. According to Iñigo Carrera (1983, 1984), this authorization was in compliance with capitalist interests to obtain raw material in order to respond to the population growth and supplies for the country's recent industrialization process. In 1911, as a result of the military campaign in Chaco, indigenous communities retreated towards the desert regions of the interior. Deprived of land, these hunter-gatherer communities were forced to join the capitalist system mainly by working in the sugar harvest. In these processes of forced

re-territorialization, the communities developed new communicative relationships with other inhabitants, all of them Spanish speakers.

2.1. Implementing IBE programmes at Chaco

El Impenetrable of Chaco is a complex territory, far from urban centres and connected to them only by unpaved roads that cannot be accessed during the rainy season. Wichi people live there with ‘*criollos*’ (traditional non-indigenous inhabitants of the region) and ‘whites’ (non-indigenous people arrived from other regions who inhabit the area). The latter group works in public institutions and private companies as doctors, civil servants, public school principals and teachers, nurses, etc. They are compensated for working there with increased salaries, which often are double than what they would earn in another location. Generally, they live in the region for some years in order to obtain economic benefits but maintain residence and social networks outside the zone.

From a linguistic point of view, the Argentinean Chaco region (which includes the provinces of Salta, Formosa and Chaco) is still characterized as being the most linguistically diverse area in Argentina, according to the recent Sociolinguistic *Atlas of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America* (Censabella, 2009). Specifically, in the province of Chaco, indigenous people speak three native languages, namely Qom, Moqoit and Wichi. Among the three native languages still spoken by indigenous people, significant differences exist regarding the degree of linguistic vitality. While a significant proportion of Qom and Moqoit normally speak Spanish, over 90% of people who consider themselves to be Wichi speak that language.

These languages did not receive any official recognition by the national or provincial government until the late 1980s, when different acts in the province of Chaco began to acknowledge the linguistic rights of indigenous peoples. These new political contexts must be framed within the transformations that occurred in the country after its return to democracy, following the cruel military dictatorship of the 1970s. According to Schalck (2012, 5):

[...] in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s assemblies, conferences, political meetings and other forms of social, cultural, political or economic gatherings were held in order to demand the right of the different indigenous communities to keep their languages and cultures and their right to a truly inclusive education, not just the formal equality of opportunities granted by free access to state afforded education.

As a result of these social movements, various legal regulations were adopted. In 1987, the *Ley del aborigen chaqueño* (Chaco’s Aboriginal Act) was passed. To this day, it is considered the basis for the introduction of indigenous languages in the region’s educational system. However, one of the main problems in the implementation of IBE in Chaco lay in finding teachers capable of using a native language in schools. Young natives have systematically been excluded from the Argentinean school system, so few of them have the secondary school diploma that enables them to train as teachers. For that reason, over the last few decades, IBE proposals have been characterized by classrooms organized by a mixed management model through the simultaneous presence of a non-indigenous teacher and an indigenous teacher, who acts as a teaching assistant (Aboriginal teaching assistant, ATA). Those assistant teachers do not have any official qualifications. The ATAs’ role is traditionally restricted to translating and mediating in the classroom, which is managed in Spanish by the class teacher.

The 1987 Act also established the basis for the creation of the first training centre for indigenous teachers, which I will call *El Instituto*. That same year it began operating experimentally in the second largest city of the Chaco region. Young people from different ethnic groups and provinces went to live and study there. To get in, students needed a letter from the community (usually from an elder) to confirm that they belonged to an indigenous minority.

At the beginning, *El Instituto* trained ATAs and later, *profesores interculturales bilingües* (intercultural bilingual teachers, IBT; Valenzuela, 2009). Now there are more than 300 bilingual teachers in the Province of Chaco, most of them working in schools as well as in educational administration.

Twenty years later, in 2007, the Wichis of *El Impenetrable* demanded the creation of a branch of *El Instituto* in their communities, so that their youth could continue their studies there without having to leave their community. Although there are many primary and a few secondary schools in the area, there were no, until the creation of *El Instituto*, post-secondary institutions. This initiative not only created opportunities for young Wichis to continue studying, but it also lay the ground for a new distribution of public sector jobs in the area.

My study was carried out 25 years after the enactment of the aboriginal law of Chaco at a crucial moment, that is, when the agents of the real implementation of bilingualism at school were entering the scene. In this context, one of the key issues was to describe the relationship between the institutional and the sociolinguistic orders. To do this, I addressed a number of questions, namely (1) How do non-indigenous teachers, historically in charge of education in Chaco, perceive the current proposals for bilingual education and the incorporation of bilingual indigenous teachers into schools? (2) How do they see the role of the bilingual teachers and the place of the Wichi language in the classroom? (3) How do bilingual teachers themselves perceive their incorporation into schools and their role in the classrooms? (4) How are these perceptions of roles and practices related to language ideologies and to the distribution of material and symbolic resources across different social groups? and (5) What are some of the implications of the sociolinguistic changes in the schools for the indigenous communities and the wider society? Before proceeding to a discussion of these questions, drawing on my research findings, Section 3 will briefly present my research approach and the data examined.

3. Research approach and data

I begin with the assumption that the study of multilingualism in institutional settings needs to be carried out from an ethnographic perspective, since this current of anthropology allows analysts to study the tensions and contradictions that actors face and understands locally situated practices in relation to historical dimensions and policy agendas (Codó, Patiño, & Unamuno, 2012; Heller, 2011). In this sense, fieldwork observations and the detailed study of interactions are combined in a type of sociolinguistics that tries to 'undo' the micro and macro dichotomy (Heller, 2001) that often arises in many analyses of multilingualism. It is from that perspective that I would like to understand and explain the sociolinguistic changes in educational institutions regarding the indigenous populations of *the Impenetrable*. In the present paper, I will focus on two aspects of those changes. First, I will examine some transformations in language ideologies connected to bilingualism and bilingual education; second, I will discuss changes in bilingual classroom practices. Although both aspects are inseparable, it seems necessary to place the analytical lens on each of them separately. To do this, a

critical approach to bilingual education must be put forward, since it allows for the discussion of the linkages between the interactional practices of the classroom, institutional, community and societal discourses on bilingual education, and socio-economic transformations. Such a critical perspective is useful to capture the ways in which language, economic mobility and social transformations are woven together.

Changes in the sociolinguistic orders of institutions are also traversed by ideological struggles, which are in fact bound up with wider social struggles, as I will show in [Section 4](#). From the perspective of the ideological debate, the ongoing changes in the field of bilingual education in Argentina can be explained as stemming from the tension between two complexes, i.e. that of authenticity and that of anonymity (Gal & Woolard, 2001). These authors argue that in multilingual contexts different complexes can be identified as sources of linguistic authority. The former, i.e. the ideology of authenticity, is associated with languages that are rooted in one particular community. Their use shows the ‘authentic’ voice of the speakers, and indexes a territory or even the common origin of its speakers. Conversely, linguistic authority emanating from the ideological complex of anonymity refers to a common, standardized language whose use does not index a specific geographical space or common roots. Its employment evokes a public and common language that is not localized, but rather presented as universal, i.e. not belonging to a particular social group (Woolard, 2007, 2008). In the case of minority languages which begin to be present in public domains, both ideological complexes come into tension. That is true, for example, of situations in which the minority language is employed publicly to address minority and non-minority communities alike.

As I try to illustrate in this paper with the case of Chaco, the kinds of language ideological tensions just outlined have to do with changes in the social position of bilingual actors in institutions. Namely, when speakers of ‘authentic’ languages hold public positions – precisely because of their mastery of those linguistic resources – such resources are reclassified. The ideology of anonymity becomes then a ‘trench’ employed by non-minority speakers to fight against new forms of material distribution linked to verbal resources. Because of their local roots and their ‘authentic’ character, native languages acquire a new value that gives their speakers access to employment opportunities. These languages then become a symbolic form of capital that can be converted into economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1980, 1982). From a critical point of view, it seems clear that the debates about what counts as legitimate language or legitimate forms of bilingualism (and bilingual education) are linked to the ways in which material and symbolic resources are distributed across different social groups (Heller, 2007; Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001).

Changes in the value of language resources are closely related to transformations in economic structures and in the relationships of communities and states. As noted by Heller (2003) in the case of French Canada, the language of the ‘native people’ – historically linked to resistance struggles and to demands for minority language recognition and bilingual education – may acquire an exchange value that allows minority speakers to compete for work positions in better conditions than non-bilinguals in the area. Thus, the transformation of bilingualism into a market resource has an impact on the social structure, ‘pushing up’ new social groups, which get culturally and economically inserted into the incipient middle classes (Unamuno, 2012). The commodification of language becomes an instrument of social mobility and a source of struggle between groups. Thus, economic changes affecting minority populations have led to claims over new social spaces of action and the creation of new employment in educational institutions and other institutions. It should be noted, further, that such claims

echo global movements (López & Sichra, 2008). However, as I will show, these claims are in tension with those who, until now, held the reins of education using their symbolic capital (the Spanish language) as a means to do so. Within the framework of these changes, *interculturalism* and *bilingualism* become disputed ideological signs (Voloshinov, 1929), where different actors fight for their (de)valuation. In this ideological tension, bilingualism becomes a ground of dispute, ‘a place of discursive struggle over social categorization and over power’ (Heller, 2000, 10). Part of this discursive struggle can be traced through the analysis of institutional language practices and ideologies.

In the present paper, I investigate through interactional and discourse analysis how self- and other-positionings in bilingual classrooms can be perceived and interpreted and how languages and forms of participation are managed in classroom interactions. My intention here is to place the outcome of that analysis in relation to language ideologies and social struggles.

The data analyzed here are part of a larger corpus of data collected since 2009 through field work entailing many long visits to the Chaco region. These visits have allowed me to learn some language skills by interacting with different social actors, as well as to become familiar with the daily life of the people living there and their school culture. I collected field notes in kindergarten, in elementary schools and at *El Instituto*, as well as in related sites, in order to capture local community practices (e.g. teacher training sessions; interactions in the hospital, churches, courts and the local radio; meetings between elders and community representatives; and meetings and public debates regarding the indigenous curriculum, collectivization of land, etc.). I have been a participant observer in schools and at *El Instituto*. In addition to these data gathered via observation, I recorded audio and video interactions in class and conducted open interviews and focus groups. Some of that data will be analyzed and discussed in the next section.

4. Bilingual practices as a contested terrain

In this section, I will analyze different types of data in order to show how *bilingualism* has been constituted as an ideological sign disputed by different social groups who, speaking from widely different positions, try to give it different meanings. In an attempt to respect some sense of historicity, I will begin by narrating the resistance of the non-indigenous sectors towards the training and insertion of Wichi teachers into schools. Then, I will give voice to those who manage educational institutions and to their way of understanding the positions and roles of indigenous bilingual teachers. Finally, I will focus on a particular school and a particular Wichi teacher, whom I call Laura. She has recently graduated and has begun teaching at a local school. Her view about what happens there and the analysis of her classes serves me to identify incipient forms of bilingualism which could help delineate a new phase for bilingual education in the region.

4.1. Resisting bilingual practitioners in institutions

As mentioned in Section 3, the creation of *El Instituto* in the context of affirmative action towards Wichis opened the possibility of a new distribution of employment between different groups in the region of *El Impenetrable*. Over the last few years, the training and incorporation of bilingual Wichi teachers have been resisted by traditional teachers through different initiatives, as I noted on various occasions in my field notes:

Excerpt 1. Fieldwork notes, April 2012

Today I have been invited to give a talk at one of the elementary schools in the area. The principal has called on all teachers to attend and meet in the staffroom. Non-indigenous teachers were sitting at the table, around me; Wichi teachers were standing, right next to the exit door. I started to talk about our work in *El Instituto* and about the advantages of bilingual education for minority children. The non-indigenous teachers interrupted me, stressing the fact that I don't understand anything about what really goes on there. A middle-aged teacher, with a loud voice, said 'what happens here is that they want us to leave here and give them the jobs. Bilingual education is invented for giving them public positions. We have to pay a lot of money if we want our kids to study, but they have the possibility here to obtain a diploma and a salary.' Gradually, the Wichi teachers left the room. I listened to the other teachers speak badly of *El Instituto* and the Wichis. I got out of the room while the principal was trying to apologize. (my translation from Spanish)

Since its inception, *El Instituto* has created considerable hardship for non-indigenous sectors, some of which led to legal complaints of discrimination. Indigenous teacher training has been seen as a threat by the non-indigenous members of the staff in the area, especially by 'white' teachers working in the area, who are 'foreign' to the place. 'White' resistance to bilingual training was also noted by Lukas, a teacher trainer at *El Instituto*, in the following excerpt from an interview:

Excerpt 2. Interview to Lukas, February 2010

[Participants: LUKAS; VIR: Researcher]

1. VIR: ¿cuál es la perspectiva del maestro blanco¹? ¿cómo lo ve?
2. LUKAS: el blanco lo ve así\ de ahí\ existe cierta resistencia ha_ hacia lo que se llama bilingüe desde ahí por esa situación\ porque saben que son la competencia\ y saben que van a ocupar un lugar que por ahí vos pensabas cinco años atrás que era una _ una cosa imposible pensar en eso\

.....

1. VIR: *what is the white teacher's perspective? \ how does he see it?*
2. LUKAS: *the whites see it that way\ that's why\ there is some resistance to_towards what's called bilingual from them for that reason\ | because they know that they are competitors\ and they know that they're going to occupy a position that five years ago one thought was an_ an impossible thing to imagine\ |*

According to Lukas, Wichi teachers constitute a source of 'competition' for white teachers and their resistance 'towards what is called bilingual' can be ultimately understood as resistance against a new distribution of the material resources, which would put some Wichis in a better social and institutional position if compared to some non-indigenous populations. I want to note in this case that Lukas uses 'bilingual' as a social category. I will come back to this point in the next sections.

It is interesting that this competition for resources was not raised by ATAs, the bilingual teaching assistants. They referred to the traditional model of bilingual education (and of 'being bilingual'), a model marked by an asymmetrical distribution of roles in the

classroom between indigenous and non-indigenous actors. This unequal allocation of roles and languages legitimizes the status of Spanish as a common language and that of indigenous languages as subsidiary resources for the appropriation (by indigenous children) of the legitimate language. However, the ‘bilinguals’, as they are called, do represent a competition for material resources, since their academic qualifications enable them to replace the ‘white’ teachers. Their ability to handle both languages challenges the traditional distribution of languages for different types of activities and classroom roles.

In this context of manifold challenges, we need to explore the various understandings of ‘bilingual education’, ‘bilingualism’ and the role of ‘bilingual teachers’ among the different social actors involved. In the following sections, two positions will be analyzed. First, I will discuss the view of the non-indigenous principals, who are responsible for the organization of the schools and the management of human resources. Subsequently, I will examine the perspective of indigenous teachers, trying to show how some of the current changes in bilingual interaction practice in classrooms may challenge the traditional meaning of bilingual education in the region.

4.2. Solving the ‘problem of bilingualism’

During my fieldwork, I repeatedly heard and wrote down the expression ‘the problem of bilingualism’. For most of the school administrators I interviewed, as well as for many of the non-indigenous teachers, this ‘problem’ was one of the main characteristics of the context in which they worked. It was also one of the elements that they considered could explain school failure in the area.

From the point of view of the non-indigenous principals, the task of the bilingual teachers, and previously of the ATA, was to solve that ‘problem’ by mediating between the lack of proficiency in the indigenous language of the ‘white’ teachers and the indigenous children’s lack of proficiency in Spanish in their early school years. As I noted, ‘the problem of bilingualism’ was defined precisely as the intersection of two monolingualisms: the monolingualism of the ‘white’ teachers and the monolingualism of the indigenous children. The following excerpt from an interview with a school principal illustrates this account of the ‘problem of bilingualism’:

Excerpt 3. Interview to Nélida, School Principal, September 2011

[Participants: NÉLIDA: School PrincipaL; VIR: Researcher].

1. NÉLIDA: eso_ tengo un solo maestro intercultural que nosotros_ nosotros teníamos
2. el cargo con un maestro bilingüe intercultural_ que era de aquí de la zona v del
3. paraje\| nacido aquí\| renunció y se fue a trabajar más cerca con su señora\ y este-| de
4. ahí no podíamos conseguir maestros bilingües con título\ porque ninguno tenía el
5. título hasta que el año pasado se recibió un grupito y vino ahora a trabajar\<0>
6. VIR: ¿trabaja acá?
7. NÉLIDA: trabaja acá\| y él está trabajando acá hace más o menos un mes que está
8. trabajando\|
9. VIR: ¿y vos cómo ves la inserción de los maestros bilingües acá?\

10. NÉLIDA: sí\ yo los veo\ yo siempre fui la de pelear mucho po_ por los bilingües y
11. los auxiliares\ yo cuando asumí el cargo directivo encontré un nivel muy bajo de
12. educación especialmente los aborígenes\ pero el tema es que no nos entienden a
13. nosotros\ entonces es imposible que nosotros queramos explicarle_ vos les enseñas
14. a sumar restar multiplicar dividir y está de diez\ lee y escribe\ pero no le pidas que
15. te comprenda una lectura\ o no le pidas que te hagan algo más porque no nos
16. entienden lo que nosotros les explicamos\ especialmente los chiquititos\ los más
17. grandes sí\ pero los de primer ciclo no entienden\ lo mismos los de jardín\ no nos
18. entienden\ y más si viene una maestra nueva y les habla seguido\ están en el
19. muere\ están en el muere\ no entienden nada\ entonces no es que no aprenden
20. porque el maestro no les enseña o porque ellos no tengan interés\ sino porque no
21. los entienden_ no los entienden\ si no te sabés expresar con ellos-

.....

1. NÉLIDA: *that_ I have just one intercultural teacher_ we_ we had a bilingual teacher in*
2. *that position here _ he was from this area _from this place\ | born here\ | he resigned and*
3. *went to work closer to his wife \ and so- | we could not get bilingual teachers with a*
4. *degree \ because none of them had a degree until last year when a small group graduated and*
5. *came here to work \ < 0>*
6. VIR: *he works here?*
7. NÉLIDA: *he works here\ he's been working here for over a month*
8. VIR: *and how do you see the insertion of bilingual teachers here? *
9. NÉLIDA: *yes \ I see them\ I was always a person who fought a lot for_ for bilinguals*
10. *and assistants\ when I became principal I found a very low level of education*
11. *especially among the natives\ but the point is that they don't understand us\ then it is*
12. *impossible for us to teach them _you teach them how to add subtract multiply divide*
13. *and it is great\ they read and write \ but do not ask them to understand a reading\ or*
14. *do not ask them to do more because they don't understand what we explain\ especially*
15. *the little ones\ the bigger do\ but the first grade kids they don't understand\ same as*
16. *the kindergarten kids\ they don't understand us\ even more if a new teacher comes*

17. *and talks to them frequently* | *they're lost* \ *they're lost* | *they don't understand*
18. *anything* | *so it is not really that they don't learn because the teacher does not teach*
19. *them or because they have no interest* \ *but because they don't understand them_ they do not*
20. *understand* | *if you do not know how to talk to them* |

As we see, according to this principal from a school in *El Impenetrable*, the presence of bilingual teachers is justified because they give children access to an understanding of content and school practice, especially as regards the language curriculum. It becomes also apparent in the interview that the principal – like most of the principals interviewed – considers that the role of bilingual teachers makes sense especially in the first grades of elementary school – ages 6–9 – and kindergarten, when children ‘do not understand’.

During this interview, the difference between *us* (non-indigenous) and *them* (the indigenous) is apparent. Also present is the difference between *me* (the principal) and *us* (the institution). However, the two uses of the first person plural are merged during the interview (see, for example, lines 1 and 12). This suggests that the institution is present as opposed to them, the ‘natives’ (line 12).

The ‘non-indigenous school’ seems to expect bilingual teachers to participate in the development of active and passive skills in Spanish, and to do so in the first phase of schooling. According to the data I have surveyed (Unamuno, 2011, 2013), most bilingual teachers are working in the first years of elementary education. Beyond this, school administrators consider that bilingual teachers and native languages are not necessary resources (Unamuno, 2011). Therefore, IBE is described by non-indigenous teachers as tool for language shift, since it involves the abandonment of the Wichi language once children have acquired Spanish.

Bilingualism as a problem and indigenous teachers as bridges between two monolingualisms are the two discursive tropes associated with bilingual education programmes from the traditional point of view of educational institutions. They are part of the institutional commonsense the bilingual teachers encounter when they reach schools. Both are at play in the way schools traditionally organize classrooms, having one non-Wichi teacher and one assistant sharing the same class, but occupying very different roles in them (Unamuno, 2013). The inclusion of graduate Wichi teachers into the educational institutions brings to the fore other possible categories concerning bilingualism, as I will discuss below.

4.3. From bilingualism as a problem to bilingualism as a resource

The data discussed below have been collected in a primary school I call *Arcoiris*, located in a small town that I will call Pozo Mate. This is a school with poor infrastructure where, due to the shortage of classroom space, different groups are distributed throughout the morning and afternoon shifts: in the morning, intermediate and higher level grades; in the afternoon, kindergarten and first, second and third grades. It must be noted that the great majority of Wichi children start schooling without knowing Spanish, and they begin to learn it at school with non-indigenous teachers and the assistance of the ATAs.

In 2011, eight non-indigenous teachers worked at the school. After one of them retired, the school got a qualified indigenous teacher for the first time (Laura). Laura’s arrival did not go unnoticed by the other teachers: it was the first time that a young Wichi had held a teaching position at the institution in the same conditions as her

non-indigenous counterparts. In the following extract from a conversation with me, Laura explains how she felt permanently observed and evaluated by her colleagues:

Excerpt 4. Interview to Laura, September 2011

[Participants: LAU: Laura, 2nd grade teacher]

1. LAU: como que_ todo en donde hay gente Wichì\| eh-| la gente blanca es como que
2. piensan que la gente Wichì no tienen capacidad\| a eso voy\| no sé cómo lo podés
3. demostrar que que- como yo siendo una_ un Wichì puedo demostrarle que sí puedo \

.....

1. *LAU: it's like _ particularly where there are Wichis\| eh-| the white people think the Wichì*
2. *people are unable\| that's my point \| I do not know how one can prove that that-*
3. *me being a_a Wichì I can show to them that I can\|*

As shown in Laura's words, it seems that her colleagues do not believe that she has the skills to teach, either because of her education or because of her ethnicity. Besides Laura, two ATAs were working at *Arcoiris* as the assistants of non-Wichis teachers. They represent the traditional bilingual proposal in institutions described above, defined by sharp power asymmetries in the classroom. Forms of participation are controlled and distributed by the non-indigenous teacher. The participation of ATAs was situated in interactional side-sequences, while non-indigenous teachers occupied the main floor, making decisions about student participation and lesson content. In general, the Wichì language was used only in sequences oriented to guaranteeing Wichì children's comprehension of activity and contents in Spanish (Unamuno, 2013).² In the following excerpt, Laura describes ATAs' role in relation to her bilingual teaching position:

Excerpt 5. Interview to Laura, September 2011

[Participants: LAU: Laura, 2nd grade teacher; VIR: Researcher]

1. LAU: bueno\ yo yo trabajo en la escuelita de Pozo Mate\ hace como xx cuatro meses
2. ya\que trabajo allí\ y trabajo como maestra bilingüe\| o sea\ tengo el título de maes_
3. de profesora bilingüe intercultural\ y trabajo en segundo grado\ (...)
4. VIR: y hay otro primer grado\
5. LAU: sí hay otro primer grado\ pero que atiende una maestra_ eh_ criolla\ {(AC)
6. maestra común}\}
7. VIR: y qué diferencia vos vés ahí trabajando entre los maestros como ustedes_ los
8. Maestros bilingües y los auxiliares?\o mejor dicho\ el maestro bilingüe solo en el

9. aula o la pareja esa que llaman pareja pedagógica\?
10. VIR: el tema es que el_ la maestra auxiliar trabaja a la par con la maestra blanca\
11. nomás te digo así\| le ayuda en las actividades con la lengua\| suponte si una_ la
12. maestra le da un tema y el chico no escucha o no entiende el idioma castellano\| la
13. bilingüe\ la auxiliar {(AC) quiero decir}\| habla en su idioma y le explica\| ese es
14. el trabajo de ellos\| no sé cómo será el tema de las planificaciones pero yo creo que
15. no_ no planifican los auxiliares\| y hacen sí trabajo eh-| por ejemplo se le dan las
16. vocales\ las vocales en castellano y ella lo hace en Wichì\| lo hace en Wichì\| y se le
17. hace más fácil al maestro común o blanco que le llamamos así nosotros [ríe]\|
18. VIR: está bien dicho\| todos les llamamos así\<0>
19. LAU: se le hace más fácil seguir dando clases o-|

.....

1. LAU: okay\ I I work in a little school in Pozo Mate\ it's been like xxx four months
2. already\ that I've worked there\| and I work as a bilingual teacher\ | I mean\ I have a
3. degree in teach_ intercultural bilingual education\ and I work in the second grade\ | (...)
4. VIR: and is there another first grade\|
5. LAU: yes there is another first grade\ but it's taught by a_ eh_ criolla\ |(AC)
6. an ordinary teacher}\ |
7. VIR: and what difference do you see there between you_ bilingual teachers and the
8. assistants?\ or rather\ the bilingual teacher alone in the classroom or that couple that
9. they call a teaching couple\?
10. VIR: the thing is that the_ the assistant teacher works alongside the white teacher\ it's
11. like this\| she helps her in the activities with the language\| suppose that_ if the
12. teacher gives a topic and the children do not listen or do not understand the Spanish
13. language\| the bilingual\ the assistant {(AC) I mean}\| she speaks in her language
14. and explains to them\| that's their job\| I do not know how the planning goes but I think
15. that assistants do not do any planning\| but they do work eh- | for example they are
16. assigned the vowels\ the vowels in Spanish and she does it in Wichì\| she does it in
17. Wichì\| and it makes it easier for the ordinary or white teacher we call them that way

18. here [laughs]||
 19. VIR: that's fine| everybody calls them that way| <0>
 20. LAU: it makes it easier for them to continue teaching o-|

The conversational repairs that occur during the interview show revealing tensions between categories that coexist in the area in relation to the actors involved in IBE. In addition, these repairs exhibit the interplay of the different voices in dispute. For example, in lines 2 and 3, the contrast between '*trabajo como maestra bilingüe*' (I work as a bilingual teacher) and '*tengo el título de profesora bilingüe intercultural*' (I have a degree in intercultural bilingual education) underlines the fact that Laura has been educated at *El Instituto* and has a diploma; the repair of '*maestra criolla*' (criolla teacher) by '*maestra común*' (ordinary teacher) (line 5) and the negotiation sequence in lines 17–18 between Laura and her interviewer conjure up different voices: on the one hand, the Wichi voice, which draws on ethnic categories to describe the different school actors, and on the other, the non-Wichi voice, which avoids these categories for fear of being politically inappropriate. In this game of voices and glances, Laura describes the participation of ATAs as defined by the 'common teacher'. From her position as a 'qualified bilingual teacher', she describes them as linguistic support for the ordinary teachers in order to make their job 'easier' when a Wichi child 'does not understand the Spanish language'.

As we saw in Excerpt 3 (the interview with the school principal), Laura's description of language management in the classroom places the Wichi language and its speakers in a subordinate position. According to Laura, the ATA's role in the classroom is limited to guaranteeing Wichi children's participation through the comprehension of Spanish and to assist non-indigenous teachers with Wichi pupils only.

Unlike teaching assistants, qualified bilingual teachers are authorized to be alone in the classroom and in charge of a class, usually in the first grades of elementary school. There they have to teach the basic principles of mathematics and of reading and writing in Spanish. However, in the framework of the recent social and ideological changes regarding language diversity, the belief that the role of the bilingual teachers should not be reduced to contributing to the learning of Spanish language and contents is increasingly shared among the Wichis. This is also the case for Laura.

The following excerpt is from Laura's second grade class, where 13 of 21 of her students are Wichi. Laura and her pupils are reviewing colour names in Wichi prior to undertaking a math activity, where they will have to identify, add and subtract football T-shirts:

Excerpt 6. 'En Wichi, ¿sabés?'. Arcoiris school second grade.

[Participants: LAURA: teacher; HINU, LUIS, JUAN: Wichi pupils; JONY: Criollo pupil]

1. LAURA: CHON\ rojo\|
2. JONY: rojo\|
3. LAU: WIT TOJH EH\ la camiseta-\W'ATSHAN\W'ATSHAN SUWELE
LHAÑHI
4. HAT'E\|
5. LUIS: ve:rde\|
6. LAU: {(F) ve:rde\}\| azul\ TOJ WICHI **LHAÑHATE**?
7. LUIS: azul\|
8. JONY: azu\|

9. LAU: TIK MAT?|
10. HINU: verde\|
11. LAU: TOJ WICHI LHAÑHI LATS'AJH³\|
12. HINU: LATS'AJH\|
13. LAU: LATS'AJH\ azul\|
14. HINU: XXX
15. LUIS: W'ATSHAN\| W'ATSHAN\|
16. LAU: W'ATSHAN verde\|| amarillo\|-| WICHI LHAÑHI
17. JONY: amarillo\|
18. LAU: TOJH\| WICHI LHAÑHI\||
19. JUAN: {(P) ama=rillo\}=
20. LAU: =amari=llo WICH LHAÑHI HAT'E\|
21. LUIS: W'ATSHAN\|
22. LAU: KA-
23. HINU: amarillo?|
24. LAU: KA-|
25. LUIS: KATE\|
26. LAU: KATE\ KATE\|| el naranja? <2.5>
27. JONY: en criollo⁴\|
28. LAU: [regarding the researcher] [smile]
29. HINU: ATSETAJH\|
30. LAU: [A AL3] el color\ naranja\ | en Wichi?| sabés?|
31. JONY: no\|
32. LAU: que te digan tus compañeros\|| a ver vos Juan\|

.....

1. LAU: RED \ red \ |
2. HINU: red \
3. LAU: AND THIS \ t-shirt-| GREEN \ WHAT'S THE SPANISH WORD FOR
4. THIS?\ |
5. LUIS: gree:n\|
6. LAU: {(F) gree:n \} | | blue \ | THE WICHI WORD **LHAÑHATE ** /|
7. LUIS: blue \ |
8. JONY: blue\|
9. LAU: IT'S NOT THIS?
10. HINU: green\|
11. LAU: WICHI WORD FOR THIS IS LATS'AJH \|
12. HINU: LATS'AJH\|
13. LAU: LATS'AJH \ blue \
14. HINU: XXX
15. LUIS: GREEN \ GREEN\|
16. LAU: green GREEN \ | | yellow\ | WICHI WORD?|
17. JONY: yellow \|
18. LAU: THIS \ WICHI WORD?||
19. JUAN: {(P) yel = low \} =
20. LAU: = yellow = WICHI WORD FOR THIS \ |
21. LUIS: GREEN\|

22. LAU: YE-
23. HINU: yellow \
24. LAU:YE-|
25. LUIS: YELLOW \ |
26. LAU: YELLOW \ YELLOW \ | | orange? <2.5>
27. JONY: in criollo|
28. LAU: [regarding the researcher] [smile]
29. HINU: ORANGE|
30. LAU: [A AL3] color \ orange \ | in Wichi?/ do you know?|
31. JONY: no|
32. LAU: ask your classmates| you\ Juan|

Throughout the interaction, Laura constantly switches from one language to the other. Her translanguaging (García, 2009) helps the development of the activity. Moreover, unlike in traditional classrooms where there is one teacher and one ATA, Laura does not only address aspects of children's understanding of Spanish through switching to Wichi, but she also teaches the Wichi vocabulary. I refer specifically to the colours blue and orange (LATS'AJH and ATSETAJH) (lines 10–13 and 25–28). These words are not usually used in the Wichi language but they are necessary to develop a part of the school activity that Laura is proposing. So Laura teaches these words contributing to creating a new verbal repertoire in this language for schooling purposes.

The distribution of languages among the different participants is another difference compared to traditional classes with two teachers. In her class, Laura uses Wichi to address all the students. She even accepts the spontaneous intervention of a non-indigenous child, Jony (line 27) who tries to participate in 'criollo' inviting him (line 30) to speak Wichi with the help of his classmate Juan (line 32).

The language practices of this bilingual teacher are interesting in relation to the transformation of the sociolinguistic order that I am describing here. If bilingual education arrangements were justified with respect to an ideological stance of authenticity, proposing the use of indigenous languages only for native people or if they were justified with respect to a stance of anonymity, thereby privileging Spanish-only arrangements (with Spanish being construed as a common language, accessible to all and not attributable to any specific ethnic group identity), these new classroom practices would not be possible. The traditional distribution of languages along 'ethnic' lines (and the subsequent distribution of teaching roles) is challenged both by Laura's being and acting as a fully qualified teacher in the school and by her classroom practice.

Laura's attempt to engage non-Wichi children in situations of Wichi language use is frequent in her classes. However, it is not something that non-Wichi families or school principals consider positive in relation to children's learning processes. Therefore, Laura prevents the written use of Wichi by children in their class notebooks. I recorded this as follows:

Excerpt 7. Field work notes, 17 April 2012

At the beginning of the class, Laura asks the children to say what the weather is today using sheets with drawings of the sun, rain and a cloud. But first, she shows the sheets one by one and asks pupils what the words are in Wichi ('*Wichi lhañi?*') and in Spanish ('*Suwele lhañi?*'). One of the criollo boys in the class says '*wel'a wel'a*' (moon, moon), and Laura smiles. Then she addresses the whole class and, showing the drawing on the sun, she asks again: '*Wichi lhañi?*' And most children, Wichi and non-Wichi, say *fwala*. Then Laura says

'*fwala, sol* (sun)' (...) During the class, the children repeatedly show me their class notebooks. I'm surprised that there is nothing written in Wichi. They have even put the word '*sol*' (sun) and have drawn a sun. I mention this to Laura at the end of the day. Laura tells me that normally they ask the children to write in Spanish because Criollo families do not like seeing things in Wichi. 'For them, it is a waste of time,' says Laura. From her point of view, 'this will change when Wichi appears in the school certificates.' (my translation from Spanish)

In sum, Laura's classes reveal interesting aspects of a new way of managing multilingualism in the classroom. First, as mentioned earlier, there is interactive work that is not only meant to facilitate Spanish comprehension; it actually develops some knowledge of the Wichi language. Second, there is an attempt to include non-indigenous children in bilingual proposals. Both actions define new dimensions for the institutionalization of multilingualism which are in tension with the idea of Wichi as a subsidiary language and as a resource for indigenous children to acquire Spanish. These changes, however, are still not fully accepted by the school administration and non-indigenous families.

5. Discussion: bilingual and multilingual institutions as disputed terrains

It is difficult to discuss the situation of indigenous languages without referring to the situation of their speakers and territories. For Wichi people, the struggle for language is intimately linked to their struggle for land. With the advance of soybean farming and mining industries on indigenous territories in Argentina, this fight is becoming harder every day. In that context, the struggle to acquire agency in multilingual institutions by indigenous groups takes on even more meaning. What is at stake is not just a job, a salary, a change in social status, but primarily the possibility to continue living on their land and to fight for that.

In Argentina, the IBE programmes have until now been officially considered part of the educational measures against poverty and school dropout. In that sense, bilingualism is considered a resource to give indigenous people access to the state language and curricula. However, some changes can be glimpsed in the province of Chaco that impact on language ideology and language management in educational institutions.

The IBE institutions are finding themselves positioned between two opposite ideologies: one that conceives of bilingualism as a 'necessary evil' to get to the monolingualism that gives access to the public domain, and another one that conceives of bilingualism as a stable reality. In both cases, material and symbolic resources provide individuals with the means to maintain or occupy workplaces in educational institutions.

In institutions, there are different ways of describing in practice what *bilingualism* and its users are. They evidence different ways of categorising verbal resources in education. The institutional decisions regarding the role and place of bilingual teachers and also the school's linguistic goals show how traditional educational decision-makers resist new forms of multilingualism (see Excerpts 1, 2 and 3).

If, historically, the people who were licensed to teach in schools – the non-indigenous teachers – considered the Wichi educational actors as an aid for their duties and in this sense they fulfilled a subsidiary role, new Wichi teachers, qualified for practice, are now demanding a new configuration of multilingualism in local institutions. The consequences of their insertion into the workplace and of their proposals for innovative ways of understanding the management of multilingualism in schools will be seen in the near future. As I tried to show, they perform tasks beyond translation (see Excerpt 6) and

propose, in interaction, new forms of participation that cut across different groups in the classroom (Excerpts 6 and 7). Since they are bilingual, they can take over and manage multiethnic classroom participation in a single activity that includes the meaningful use of the Wichi language for practical purposes. It is this multiple competence that threatens the jobs of the non-indigenous educators and, therefore, the schools managed by them limit Wichi teachers' professional practice to the early years of schooling. Arguing that beyond the initial level Wichi children do not have problems with Spanish, school administrators claim that indigenous teachers are not necessary and they do not support their access to other positions in schools. In that sense, as I noted, the representation of bilingualism as a problem serves as a resource for the non-indigenous in the struggle for control of local institutions, along with their own workplace status and, ultimately, their public sector income.

Beyond educational institutions, the current changes in the institutional value of the Wichi language appear to have had a number of consequences. Over recent years, the 'bilinguals' have formed an 'increasingly influential social group' among the Wichi people. They have access to the public sector for the first time on the basis of their mastery of language skills other than Spanish. Through their work in schools and public education services, they have begun to present the case for knowing the Wichi language and assert its value. Their language practices challenge the ideology of Spanish as the only verbal capital that gives access to education and work. In that sense, in recent years the word 'bilingual' has moved from being an adjective to a noun; from characterizing the subject's abilities to handle situations that require the use of Wichi and Spanish, to creating a subgroup inside the Wichi communities.

Beyond indigenous communities, this new social group occupies an important role in the ideological change on regarding indigenous rights in general and linguistic rights in particular. In recent years, they have been recognised as legitimate governmental political interlocutors in educational matters. In addition, in the Chaco, they lead a movement addressed at creating community-managed public schools which have a minimum of 50% indigenous teachers as members of staff. According to a bill put before the Chaco Parliament, these schools would be co-managed by the state and an indigenous council, which would be responsible for the selection of teachers. However, objections to this bill have been put forward by unions representing non-indigenous teachers, so the proposal has been shelved for now.

6. Final notes

To conclude, I have argued in this paper that the study of multilingual practices and language ideologies is a gateway to build an understanding of institutional processes and social change. In the case of the multilingual schools involved in the practical implementation of IBE programmes in Chaco, it is possible to empirically trace the changes away from the discursive construction and the legitimization of a monolingual citizenry, resulting from the one-state one-language ideological framework, towards newer conceptions where new resources and new forms of citizenship are being defined.

The research presented here puts into dialogue economic processes, language ideologies and values, and the practices of bilingualism (Heller, 2000, 2002). My analysis of the data presented here shows that changes in practices are constrained by resistance to economic transformations, and that bilingualism is a disputed ideological arena. Different actors fight over the meaning of this term in concordance with their social and economic interests and positions. The struggle in institutional roles and forms

of participation is also a struggle for and against new forms of legitimacy where language use plays a key role.

Ultimately, this paper shows that the study of multilingualism in institutional contexts needs to describe the transformations that are at work in the field of language and encompass both local and global discourses. The transformations need to be understood in connection with ongoing social changes. This implies the need for accounting for the role of language in the new forms of distribution of economic and symbolic goods. It is important to continue with this type of research in order to account for the ways in which multilingualism is described and evaluated in interaction, and the causes and consequences of such evaluation at the local level and at broader social levels.

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Notes

1. As I mentioned in [Section 2.1.](#), ‘blanco’ (white) is a native category used by Wichi people to refer to non-indigenous who arrived from other regions and inhabit the area.
2. The participant structures and the interactional practices described here are very similar to those identified in classroom research elsewhere, where bilingual assistants are appointed to work alongside a monolingual class teacher, for example, in the study by Martin-Jones and Saxena (2001) on bilingual classrooms in the UK.
3. The name of the colour blue has many translations in Wichi because it is not part of Wichi everyday vocabulary. In this case, Laura chooses LATS’AJH, which may also be translated as grey. A similar case is the colour orange. In line 29, Hinu uses ATSETAJ as a translation for ‘naranja’. This word refers to the fruit. Laura accepts this suggestion and in the following lines she uses this word.
4. As I mentioned in [Section 2](#), in the region two native categories can be found to refer to the non-indigenous populations, i.e. ‘criollo’ (creole) and ‘blanco’ (white). However, the Wichis use their own word, ‘suwele’, to refer to any person who is not Wichi. This term is also used to refer to Spanish (the language of others). In this classroom extract, it is interesting that Jony asks to participate in ‘criollo’, projecting a social category onto a linguistic one.

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Appendix. Transcription symbols

1. Intonation types: a. Affirmative: \ b. Questions? c. Suspension:- 2. Pauses: a. Short: || b. Quite long: ||| c. Longer than a second: <n°> 3. Overlapping: =text of speaker A= =text of speaker B= 4. Interruption (unfinished sentence): text_ 5. Lengthening of a sound: Text: 6. Intensity: a. Loud (forte): {(F) text} (fortissimo): {(FF) text} b. Soft (piano): {(P) text} (pianissimo): {(PP) text} 7. Languages: a. Spanish: normal b. Wichi: CAPITALS. 8. Transcriber's comments: [text] 9. Non verbal actions: between * *10. Other symbols: a. Incomprehensible: XXXX b. Uncertain {& text} c. Utterance produced laughter; {@ text}