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oscar.mendoza1@upr.edu

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Barnes, Hilary

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# LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN AN IMMIGRANT LANGUAGE SETTING: THE CASE OF A EUROPEAN LANGUAGE IN MEXICO

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*Hilary Barnes*

## *ABSTRACT*

This paper investigates language ideologies and language use in a small Veneto-Spanish bilingual community in central Mexico, founded by immigrants from Northern Italy. In this contact situation, a European language has been in contact with Spanish, as well as other minority languages spoken in the state of Puebla. This article will draw from data collected through both sociolinguistic questionnaires and qualitative interviews to show that language maintenance and high prestige are due in part to positive attitudes and the use of Veneto as an identity marker.

**Keywords:** language maintenance, language attitudes, Veneto, Mexico, language contact

## *RESUMEN*

Este estudio investiga las ideologías lingüísticas y el uso de la lengua en una pequeña comunidad bilingüe de veneto-español, ubicada en el área central de México, fundada por inmigrantes del norte de Italia. En esta situación de contacto lingüístico, una lengua europea ha estado en contacto con el español, al igual que con otras lenguas minoritarias que se hablan en el estado de Puebla. Este artículo presentará algunos datos recopilados por medio de cuestionarios sociolingüísticos y entrevistas cualitativas para mostrar que el mantenimiento lingüístico y el alto prestigio atribuido a la lengua se deben en parte a las opiniones positivas y al uso del veneto como una marca de identidad.

**Palabras clave:** mantenimiento lingüístico, actitudes lingüísticas, veneto, México, contacto lingüístico

## *RÉSUMÉ*

Ce document examine les idéologies linguistiques et l'utilisation de la langue dans une petite communauté bilingue vénitien-castillan dans le centre du Mexique, fondée par des immigrants de l'Italie du Nord. Dans cette situation de contact, le vénitien est en contact avec l'espagnol, ainsi que d'autres langues minoritaires parlées dans l'État de Puebla. L'étude se fonde sur deux questionnaires sociolingüistiques, et les données d'entrevues qualitatives montrent que le maintien et le

prestige de la langue sont liés, en partie, à des attitudes positives et la utilisation du vénitien comme marqueur d'identité.

**Mots-clés :** maintien des langues; attitudes linguistiques; vénitien, Mexique, contact linguistique

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## Introduction

In the case of immigrant language communities, the speakers of the immigrant language are often under significant social and economic pressures to acquire the language of the new country or region, generally giving rise to language shift by the third generation. This can be seen, for example, with numerous immigrant groups to the United States where English has often taken the place of the original language of the speakers. Whether a community adopts the majority language or maintains its own is dependent on a number of variables such as the numerical strength of the group in relation to other minorities and majorities, socioeconomic class, educational background, settlement patterns, ties with the homeland, extent of exogamous marriage, attitudes of majority and minority groups, government policy and institutional support, and language use patterns (Romaine 1995). Additionally, the role of language attitudes, prestige, and language loyalty play a significant role in the maintenance or shift of a minority language (see Fishman 1991). Positive attitudes on the part of the individual or community may serve to slow the process of shift (Mejías *et al.* 2002; Potowski 2004) whereas negative attitudes can lead to rapid shift (Lam 2009; Messing 2007). Thus, there is a need, as suggested by many, to not only examine the structural consequences of language maintenance and shift but also the social, ideological, and ethnolinguistic factors that contribute to these processes.

The present study focuses on the case of Chipilo, a Veneto-Spanish bilingual community in central Mexico in which Veneto, a Northern Italian language, continues to be spoken throughout the community. Chipilo was founded in 1882 by immigrants from Veneto-speaking regions of Northern Italy who sought better economic conditions and an improved quality of life than what they were facing at the time in Italy. Today, Veneto continues to co-exist along with Spanish in a situation of sustained bilingualism, due in part to the positive attitudes and high prestige ascribed to Veneto by its speakers, thereby slowing the process of language shift from Veneto to Spanish. Thus, unlike many cases of minority language shift, Chipilo presents a unique window for the study of sustained bilingualism linked to positive language ideologies. Veneto

has co-existed with Spanish for over 130 years and is the first language of many of the bilinguals in Chipilo, thereby distinguishing Chipilo from many other immigrant communities where the minority group typically undergoes language shift to the majority language within three generations. Importantly, Veneto receives no formal recognition by the Mexican government, is not taught or used as a language of instruction in education, and is not used in the church. Spanish is the language of the church and education, and Veneto is used primarily in the home. However, in many instances, Veneto is spoken with anyone that speaks Veneto, and Spanish is reserved for interactions with non-Veneto speakers. Support for continued use of Veneto therefore originates in the speakers themselves who exhibit positive attitudes towards the language and a strong sense of ethnolinguistic identity (Barnes 2009, 2010; MacKay 1992, 1999; Romani 1992). The present study will identify and discuss the social motivations for the sustained bilingualism observed in Chipilo by focusing on the ideologies, attitudes and beliefs surrounding both languages at an individual and community level.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 provides a brief historical overview of the community. Section 3 presents the methodology used to collect data for the study. Section 4 presents the results, and section 5 discusses these results as they relate to language attitudes and language maintenance within the community.

## Historical background

Shortly after Mexican independence in 1821, the Mexican government began to consider foreign colonization as a means to stimulate economic growth and exploit the many unused lands and natural resources of Mexico. By the late nineteenth century, following the trend in countries such as the United States, Mexico began to actively recruit European immigrants, with a preference for farmers and agricultural workers who could convert the many unused lands into productive resources and stimulate the agricultural economy of the country. The recent expulsion of the Spanish from Mexico in 1827 and a lingering “sentimiento antiespañol de los criollos” (‘the anti-Spanish feelings of the criollos’) (Zilli Manica 1981:13) led to the quick decision to not recruit Spanish farmers. The French were also excluded as potential colonizers due to their intervention in 1862 (Zilli Manica 1981). Mexico therefore focused on Italy, specifically the northern region, where they could recruit Catholic farmers who were struggling with poor economic conditions. Mexican recruiters arrived in Italy to distribute flyers and information in an effort to attract these farmers, describing the lands that awaited them in Mexico as “immense distese di terreno incolto,

in località fertilissime per clima, salubrità e potenza di produzione” (‘immense spread of uncultivated lands, in very fertile localities with good climate, health and production abilities’) (Casa di Navigazione Rovati, cited in Romani 1992:27). The recruitment was a success, and in the end seven Italian colonies were established in Mexico between 1881 and 1882. Sartor and Ursini (1983) note several reasons for the emigration from Italy, including the flooding of the Piave River, plagues, and a feeling of detachment from Italian nationality given that the Veneto region had only recently left the Austrian Empire and become part of the country. However, according to Sartor and Ursini, the main reason behind the mass emigration was a struggling economy combined with a growing population. Local Chipileño historian Zago concurs, asserting “la crisis radical del sistema agrario italiano que, junto con la elevada tasa del crecimiento poblacional, provocó el empobrecimiento de la clase campesina hasta llegar a extremos insostenibles” (‘the radical crisis of the Italian agrarian system that, together with the elevated levels of population growth, provoked further poverty in the working-class which arrived at unsustainable extremes’) (2007:30).

Of the seven colonies that were established between 1881 and 1882, Chipilo was the last. It was founded in October of 1882 by approximately 560 Italian immigrants who were given lands on the vacant haciendas of Chipilco and Tenamixtla, between the cities of Puebla and Atlixco. The majority of the group came from the Veneto region of Northern Italy, specifically Segusino and nearby towns, and most spoke a variety of Veneto. They were given contracts with the Mexican government and were to pay off the lands within a period of ten years, beginning with the first harvest (Zago 1982, 2007). However, the initial years of the colony were difficult because the lands they received were not yet in condition for farming, and they yielded little in productivity. Over time, however, Chipilo has become one of the most economically successful towns in the area, where dairy production has been the main industry followed by carpentry. Today the community enjoys economic productivity and continues as an agricultural leader of the region.

The initial homogeneity of the families living in Chipilo and the relative isolation from nearby cities such as Puebla and Atlixco are often cited as having prevented rapid language shift, and for many years the immigrants lived and married among themselves (McKay 1992, Romani 1992, Zago 2007). Zago attributes the initial maintenance of Veneto to the fact that the immigrants were primarily from the same region of Italy and that most arrived in large family units. As Zago states, “se puede decir que hicieron el trasplante de una comunidad véneta en tierras poblanas” (‘you could say that they made a transplant of a Veneto community into Poblano lands’) (Zago 2007:77). Romani also comments on

the tight-knit community's cohesion in the new setting, noting: "favorecieron una urbanización extraordinariamente compacta y defensiva contra el exterior, y esto hizo que el grupo se viera, desde el inicio, como diferente y fuertemente cohesionado" (they favored an extraordinarily compact and defensive urbanization against the outsider, and this made the group see themselves, from the beginning, as different and strongly cohesive) (Romani 1992:24).

While there is no exact number available, it has been estimated by some locals that there are around 5,000 Chipileños and approximately 2,500 to 3,500 who speak Veneto, and, despite the increasing dominance of the city of Puebla, many people of Italian descent speak Veneto on a daily basis as their regular means of communication. All Veneto speakers are bilingual in Spanish; however, Veneto remains the preferred language of the home and family. Romani (1992) found that 99.2% of the population was bilingual, with very few monolingual Spanish speakers and no monolingual Veneto speakers. At the time of her study, which was conducted in 1984, the population of Chipilo was in its 5th generation, and Veneto was the first language of the majority of the children of Italian descent. More recent studies by Barnes (2009, 2010, 2015) and Barnes and Michnowicz (2013, 2015) confirm the continued use of Veneto in Chipilo today.

This continued use of Veneto can also be attributed to the renewed contact between Chipilo and Northern Italy. In October of 1982, Chipilo celebrated its centennial with many festivities that included the visit of families from Segusino for the first time. This *hermandad* between the two towns has continued, and excursions to each country take place frequently. In addition, several local groups work toward preserving and documenting the variety of Veneto spoken in Chipilo and facilitate home stays and cultural workshops within each community. Furthermore, in the last decade, there have been ongoing efforts to develop and standardize a written form of the language (see Montagner 2005). A newspaper written entirely in Veneto was distributed monthly for two years, ending due to a lack of funding rather than a lack of popularity or interest.

The constant presence of both Spanish and Veneto in Chipilo has led to a dual identity that situates speakers as both Mexican and Italian. Sartor and Ursini (1983) note that "Chipilo e ambivalente, e rischia per un periodo ancora lungo di esserlo sempre di più, in equilibrio tra due culture, senza decidersi a quale darsi definitivamente" ('Chipilo is ambivalent, and risks being so for a long period, in a balance between two cultures, without deciding which one to dedicate itself to.') This ambivalence is still applicable today in that many Chipileños identify themselves as both Mexican and Veneto, and often times simply as Chipileño (Barnes 2009, 2010). The fact that both languages are utilized

in the community is a result of positive ideologies surrounding both languages, with Veneto enjoying a prestige that is not often attributed to other minority languages in Mexico.

### Minority languages and language shift

Chipilo presents a unique case of language maintenance given that Veneto continues to be spoken alongside Spanish and transmission of the language has surpassed the normal three generations common with immigrant languages. In many other minority language communities in Mexico, the trend has been to shift to Spanish, primarily due to increased educational and employment opportunities as well as negative attitudes surrounding the minority language, these come from within the community and are also imposed on the community by mainstream Mexican society. Messing (2007) examined Náhuatl-speaking communities in central Mexico where shift to Spanish appears inevitable. Her ethnographic study of Náhuatl speakers in Tlaxcala shows that language shift occurs due to shifting ideologies not only at the community level but also at the individual level as a result of competing discourses. In the case of these communities, there is an ideological struggle between the notions of *salir adelante*, or moving forward and adopting Spanish for socioeconomic gain, that of *menosprecio* and the negative attitudes towards indigenous languages and culture, and finally the *pro-indígena* ideologies promoting indigenous language and culture. On the one hand, speakers strive to advance their socioeconomic standing by adopting Spanish in place of Náhuatl, but at the same time there is a desire to maintain their distinct identity and “indigenous Mexicanness” (Messing 2007:573). She finds that ultimately these competing ideologies are simultaneously promoting indigenism and leading to less intergenerational transmission of Náhuatl and an overall shift to Spanish for many speakers and communities.

Lam (2009) also found negative ideologies surrounding the use of Totonac in the central Mexican communities she studied. She notes that even though that Spanish and Totonac have been in contact for centuries, the shift to Spanish has only occurred in the past four decades. As with the speakers in Messing’s (2007) study, speakers of Totonac often shift to Spanish for socioeconomic advancement and education and employment opportunities. And with the increased presence and need for Spanish in these communities, the use of Totonac has been stigmatized and discouraged. The negative attitudes of teachers and other outsiders towards Totonac, combined with the increased exposure to Spanish in education, has led speakers to adopt these disparaging ideologies themselves. Younger generations have more opportunities to learn and use

Spanish, and speakers are opting to use Spanish at home thus halting the transmission of Totonac to future generations. While there are still speakers of Totonac, particularly older speakers, the growing desire and opportunity to use Spanish is leading to a linguistic tip towards Spanish monolingualism (see Dorian 1986).

A case in which a minority and immigrant language seems to enjoy positive attitudes can be seen in Jansen's (2013) study investigating Haitian immigration to the *bateyes* of the Dominican Republic. These former work camps put in place by sugar companies served as a home to both Dominicans of Haitian descent and illegal Haitian immigrants who could live there temporarily while they worked on the sugar plantations. Jansen shows that in spite of positive attitudes toward Haitian Creole, speakers tend to shift towards the majority language, Spanish, within three generations. The author notes that while Haitian Creole continues to be spoken in this region of the Dominican Republic, it is not due to intergenerational transmission but rather to the continued presence of new immigrants moving to the region. As noted by Lam (2009) with respect to Totonac speakers, Jansen also observes that in the case of the *bateyes* it is not so much the prestige of Spanish that leads speakers to abandon Haitian Creole in favor of Spanish, but rather the negative attitudes that surround Haitian Creole.

Another case of immigrant language maintenance is that of Chinese immigrants in Cuba. According to Figueroa Arencibia (2008), the community was reinforced by new immigrants arriving in Cuba through the early 1900s. However, many of these immigrants and their descendents have since left Cuba for other opportunities leaving a population of only 280 in 2004 (Figueroa Arencibia 2008:186). Furthermore, the population was almost entirely male, therefore leading to mixed marriages. Children of marriages between two Chinese speakers were often bilingual, with Chinese used with family and in community activities. Children of mixed marriages, however, often felt a detachment from Chinese culture and were viewed as not being "chinos legítimos" (Baltar 1997:102, cited in Figueroa Arencibia 2008:188).<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, the current much smaller population of Chinese speakers in Cuba continue to use Chinese alongside Spanish. Urzúa and Gómez (2008) also comment on the role of marriage patterns in a small Puerto Rican community in New England. They observe that the use of Spanish in the home is reinforced when a New England-born Puerto Rican marries an island-born Puerto Rican, thereby reversing the shift to English as the home language. This can also be seen in Chipilo where it is frequently noted by Chipileños that if the mother is Veneto-speaking, then Veneto will also likely be the language of the home and the children.

In the case of Puerto Ricans in a small town in Massachusetts, Urzúa



and Gómez (2008) attribute the positive attitudes surrounding Spanish in to the small community size and dense social networks. The participants in their study view the maintenance of Spanish as important, although the researchers note that those Puerto Ricans who have spent a larger proportion of their lifetime in the US, Spanish is viewed as less important and with less favorable attitudes. As such, young Puerto Ricans born in the US often demonstrate less loyalty to Spanish and use it less at home than other speakers. The authors conclude that while Spanish is often favored as the home language, positive attitudes cannot prevent language shift as younger speakers are moving towards the use of English over Spanish.

Chipilo provides another example of the role that language attitudes and ideologies play in the maintenance or shift of a minority language. As previously noted, Veneto enjoys positive attitudes on the part of its speakers, and as such it continues to be spoken in the home with a high degree of intergenerational transmission. The economic independence of Chipilo and the employment opportunities within the community have led people to associate Veneto with economic success, resulting in a positive connection between Chipileño society and the Veneto language. Speakers are not ashamed of Veneto, as it is not associated with poverty or a lack of education. However, as also observed in the aforementioned studies, many speakers perceive an increasing number of people using Spanish with their children and shifting to Spanish in the home. In some cases, the reason is to help children be better prepared for Spanish instruction when starting school given that many older Chipileños recall the difficulties they experienced due to not speaking Spanish. In addition, the continued growth and proximity of Puebla has given rise to an increase in opportunities for education and employment, as well as circumstances favoring the use of Spanish in these domains over Veneto. Thus, the growing presence of Spanish at both an individual and community level in Chipilo could lead to a decrease in the use of Veneto. In the following sections, I will present sociolinguistic data from interviews and questionnaires addressing the ideologies surrounding the use of both languages in Chipilo.

## Methodology

In order to further explore the sustained bilingualism in Chipilo this paper will draw on data from sociolinguistic questionnaires and 54 interviews collected in 2011 and 2013. My time in the community as a participant observer also informs this study. The questionnaire was adapted from a previous version (Barnes 2009, 2010) and included a total of 81 questions.<sup>2</sup> The initial section of the questionnaire included

personal background items, including languages spoken by parents and grandparents, and self-reported ratings of abilities to speak, understand, read, and write both Spanish and Veneto. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of language use items in which participants indicated on a scale of 1 (all Veneto) to 5 (all Spanish) the degree to which they use each language with a particular person or in a particular context. The remaining part of the questionnaire consisted of items pertaining to language importance, linguistic insecurity, language and identity, and language use. These items were presented with a 7 point Likert scale where 1 indicates that a participant does not agree with the statement and 7 indicates that the participant strongly agrees with the statement. In total, 164 questionnaires were collected and analyzed. In this paper I will only examine a subset of items from the questionnaire, focusing particularly on language importance and the ideologies surrounding language use. In addition to the questionnaire data, I will present data from sociolinguistic interviews with Chipileños. These interviews consisted of questions pertaining to language use, ideologies, language and identity, as well as stories about daily life in Chipilo.

### **Ideologies surrounding Veneto and Spanish**

In spite of its status as a minority language in Chipilo, Veneto is used daily by many Chipileños of Italian descent. Spanish is the language of the church, education, and government offices, and Veneto is used in the home, with family and friends, and may be used in business transactions with other Veneto speakers, such as in a restaurant or in the dairy or carpentry businesses. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each language on a scale of 1 to 7 and we see that both languages are rated highly. At an individual level, Veneto is rated as very important by 87.8% of the respondents, whereas Spanish is rated as very important by 76.8%. With respect to the community, Veneto is rated as very important by 82.8%; however, Spanish is rated as much less important, with only 43.2% of the respondents giving it the rating of “7”.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Table 1: Percentage of participants selecting “7” or completely agree</b>		
<b>Questionnaire Item</b>	<b>Veneto</b>	<b>Spanish</b>
¿Qué importancia tiene cada lengua para usted?	87.8%	76.8%
¿Qué importancia tiene cada lengua en la comunidad de Chipilo?	82.8%	43.2%

As Messing (2007) suggests, it is important to consider the language ideologies held not only at the individual level but also at the community

level. In this case, Veneto is perceived as a home language and very closely linked to family. Spanish is often reserved for non-Veneto speaking outsiders or travel outside of the community. This can be seen in the quotes in (1) and (2). In (1), a Chipileña expresses the close connection Chipileños often feel towards Veneto as opposed to Spanish. In (2), a Chipileño attributes the continued use of Veneto to the strong sense of worth placed on the language, as opposed to other situations of minority language use where speakers may feel embarrassment or shame.

- (1) No es lo mismo hablarle español que hablar en véneto con la gente. Es como si, a veces, siento como si fueras dos personas distintas. El español es formal. Para el trabajo. Para la escuela. Para los amigos que no son de acá o así pero lo que es la familia, lo que nosotros sentimos como nuestro siempre usamos el véneto. (female, born 1978, L1 Veneto)
- (2) En otras partes me imagino que porque se lo perdieron porque les daba vergüenza. Y aquí, aquí nos vale. Nos vale. Al menos yo. A mí me vale. (male, born 1959, L1 Veneto)

These quotes reflect the importance attributed to Veneto and Spanish in the questionnaire data. Veneto is rated highly at both the individual and the community level; however, we see a clear difference between the values placed on each language and the perception of how as a community, the importance of Spanish is quite low. In Table 2, we see that 92.6% of respondents believe speaking Veneto is important and 87.1% believe it is important for their children to speak Veneto.<sup>4</sup> The same items with respect to Spanish are both rated lower at 74.3%. Furthermore, an overwhelming 95.1% of respondents feel strongly about

Table 2: Importance of speaking Veneto and Spanish	
Questionnaire Item	Percentage who rate “7” or strongly agree
¿Qué importancia tiene para usted poder hablar véneto?	92.6%
¿Qué importancia tiene para usted que sus hijos puedan hablar véneto (si tiene hijos)?	87.1%
¿Qué importancia tiene para usted poder hablar español?	74.3%
¿Qué importancia tiene para usted que sus hijos puedan hablar español (si tiene hijos)?	74.3%
Me parece importante seguir usando el véneto.	95.1%
A la comunidad de Chipilo le parece importante seguir usando el véneto.	81.4%

the continued use of Veneto. However, as found with the importance of Veneto, in Table 1, we see a slightly lower number for the perceived community importance of continuing to speak Veneto, at 81.4%.

As previously mentioned, Chipilo demonstrates a high degree of intergenerational transmission, although many speakers note the need to use Spanish with their children so they are not faced with language difficulties upon entering school. One young woman, however, when asked if she would teach Spanish to her children, responded that she would only speak Veneto to her children.

- (3) No, no, que le enseñe la escuela pues yo no. No le voy a hablar nada de español. Yo siento que ya, este, el véneto se está, como, como deshaciendo poco a poco con la misma, con las mismas palabras del, del español. Ya, o sea, como hablan más español que véneto entonces, este, hay que seguir la tradición. (female, born 1987, L1 Veneto)

While many speakers clearly view Veneto as important both at an individual and community-wide level, there is a slight drop in those who strongly agree when asked about the use of Veneto in more formal domains (such as literature in Veneto; Veneto in schools, cultural events, meetings and political events), as shown in Table 3. With respect to the use of Veneto in school, only 72.5% strongly agree. However, there is a positive response to a Veneto-Spanish dictionary at 82.3%, literature in Veneto at 81.7%, and the use of Veneto in cultural events specific to Chipilo, at 82.3%, as seen in Table 3. On the other hand, with regards to the use of Veneto in more formal events such as political meetings, festivals, and more administrative venues, speakers are much less in favor of the use of Veneto with only 30.4% strongly agreeing that Veneto should be used on such occasions.

<b>Table 3: Use of Veneto in more formal domains</b>	
<b>Questionnaire Item</b>	<b>Percentage who strongly agree</b>
Me agradaría que en la escuela se enseñara el véneto.	72.5%
Me gustaría un diccionario véneto-español y español-véneto para aprender más palabras.	82.3%
Me gustaría que hubiera más literatura en véneto.	81.7%
Es importante usar el véneto en eventos culturales como el Rigoletto o la Befana.	82.3%
Es importante usar el véneto en eventos masivos como juntas, ferias, eventos políticos.	30.4%

These differences may be due to the informal uses associated with Veneto, given that it is primarily a home language without an established writing system. Veneto is viewed favorably overall and granted high prestige, but participants seem to consider the language as not appropriate for use in formal domains, such as meetings, festivals, and political events. Interestingly, there does appear to be interest in Veneto in education and in more formal writing, such as dictionaries and literature.<sup>5</sup> As noted, Spanish is the language of education and the use of Veneto, even when used between students, is often discouraged by teachers, who are typically non-Veneto speaking outsiders. Many Chipileños note the difficulties faced by children when they first enter school and encounter Spanish for the first time, as seen in the following quotes.

- (4) Llegaba a ver un poquito de problema, por ejemplo como la escuela, toda la escuela es en español. Cuando el niño entraba el kínder, si no había tenido mucho contacto con español en su casa tenían un poquito de problema con la comunicación entonces los papás empezaron a hablarles para que no entraran totalmente sin saber mucho. Entonces ha venido siendo perjudicial porque entonces, casa un poco de español y escuela. Entonces los niños van oyendo más horas el español. (female, born 1954, L1 Veneto)

When asked about her experience with children using Veneto and Spanish in the schools, one woman noted that the experience was difficult for her daughters who did not speak much Spanish upon entering school. As a result, her family decided to speak Spanish at home to the children in addition to Veneto.

- (5) A mis hijas sí le costó mucho. Ya después cuando ellas tenían a sus hijos chiquitos me dicen ‘no me va a pasar lo mismo’ porque yo le dije que le pase que a ustedes, mi hijo, hablemle el mexicano para que también aprendan el mexicano. Están aprendiendo dos, dos idiomas, mi hija, pero tienen que entrar a la escuela y tienen que contestar a la maestra. Y ya le hablábamos también en mexicano a las niñas así, pero es difícil. (female, born 1948, L1 Veneto)

A further difficulty for Chipileño children when entering school is teachers’ discouragement of the use of Veneto and the ridicule brought about by non-Chipileño students. Additionally, many of the students who currently attend the schools located in Chipilo are non-Veneto speaking students who come from other nearby Spanish-speaking communities. Many recall that when the schools were predominantly Chipileño children, Spanish was used when speaking in class, but amongst themselves,

Chipileño children continued to speak Veneto unless scolded by the teachers, as seen in (6) and (7). In (8), a speaker recalls the disparaging comments of non-Veneto speaking classmates who viewed Veneto as an ‘ugly dialect.’

- (6) Yo me acuerdo que las monjitas querían quitarnos el véneto. Querían quitarlo pero no pudieron. No pudieron. O sea, entre nosotros no se pudo, nunca. (female, born 1941, L1 Veneto)
- (7) Siempre nos habla en castellano y entonces en el recreo o en el pasillo a veces en dialecto y a veces en español. Platicaba con, pues con todos nosotros pero no, esta súper prohibidísimo en la escuela hablar dialecto. En el kínder, en el recreo perfectamente lo hablas pero en clase, no. (female, born 1975, L1 Veneto)
- (8) Y también para nuestro idioma porque ‘ay mugre dialecto más feo’ así me lo decían en la escuela. (female, born 1978, L1 Veneto)

As these quotes demonstrate, the use of Veneto has typically been discouraged in the schools and students were often punished or ridiculed for speaking their ‘dialecto.’ This has, in some cases, led Veneto-speaking parents to opt to use both Veneto and Spanish at home to avoid similar difficulties for their children when attending school in Spanish. As often occurs in other communities (Gal 1979; Lam 2009; Messing 2007), the negative attitudes of outsiders can shape language use patterns and the direction of language shift. In the case of Chipilo, the negative association of the use of Veneto in schools has perhaps led speakers to deem it inappropriate for use in more formal domains such as education. Furthermore, use of the term ‘dialect’ to refer to Veneto gives the language a more unofficial, or informal, status as opposed to Spanish or even Standard Italian.<sup>6</sup> In Chipilo, Spanish is referred to as both *español* ‘Spanish’ and *mexicano* ‘Mexican.’ Veneto has been called *italian* ‘Italian’ (Meo Zilio 1981) and more recently, *véneto*, but it is also frequently referred to as *chipileño* or simply as *dialecto*.<sup>7</sup> This last term is particularly interesting for the connotation that it carries for some Chipileños. While the language enjoys prestige within the community as the home language and a symbol of in-group membership, some speakers downplay the importance of the language since it is ‘only a *dialecto*.’ This may be reinforced by negative outsider perspectives that disparage the language as not ‘real Italian.’ This can be seen in comments from some speakers. When asked about whether she considered it important to speak Veneto, one participant pointed out that even though Veneto is not a real language, they continue to preserve it.

- (9) Pues sí, realmente sí porque le digo más que nada, pues, no es

un idioma, ¿verdad? Pero pues sí es otra lengua que podemos hablar y, pues, más que nada pues lo conservamos (female, born 1965, L1 Veneto)

Veneto is also sometimes viewed as lacking grammatical rules due to the fact that there is no formal instruction in Veneto and no official writing system. When asked about the possibility of a Chipileño teaching the language in the schools, one Chipileña replied that the grammatical rules would first have to be established.

- (10) Habría que primero que poner las reglas gramaticales pera ya fijas para escribir y para leerlo (female, born 1960, L1 Veneto)

Yet, despite the perception that it lacks a grammar, speakers are not ashamed of Veneto, as evidenced in the high importance attributed to the language. As further reinforcement, in March of 2007, Italy gave official status to Veneto and other dialects of Italy. This has not been overlooked in Chipilo and is reflected in the way some speakers refer to the language, as shown in the excerpts in (11) and (12).

- (11) Pues está haciendo muchas cosas para rescatar y pues primer principalmente ya está catalogado como lengua. No es un dialecto. Ya es lengua. Ya es registrada y todo. (female, born 1954, L1 Veneto)
- (12) O sea, por eso se conservó el día- el nuestro dialecto, el nuestro que hoy en día ya es lengua. En Italia a partir del año pasado, de marzo del año pasado ya el dialecto véneto se considera ya como una lengua. En Italia. Acá todavía no. (male, born 1951, L1 Veneto)

The new status of Veneto as a ‘language’ has led some people to try to avoid the term *dialecto* as a way of referring to Veneto. The same speaker commenting in (11), at a later time during the interview, corrected herself when referring to the language that her mother used in school:

- (13) Estamos hablando de hace 30 años que, pues ella estaba más acostumbrada a tener escuela todo, todo en dialecto, perdón, todo en la lengua. (female born 1954, L1 Veneto)

Furthermore, the fact that Veneto has been granted “official” status in Italy may also lead to its use in more formal domains in Chipilo. The following speaker, who is aware of the change in status, explains that there is a desire to use Veneto in schools, particularly now that the language has what the speaker in (14) refers to as a “gramática,” or some sort of formalized established norms.

- (14) Sí, sí es lo que estamos luchando, que queremos que entren a las escuelas. En sí, en sí enseñar véneto no hace falta porque todas las casas lo hablamos, vaya. Por eso no ha habido mucho interés en, en hablar porque todo el día se está hablando aquí en véneto. Pero sí, nuestro interés es que más que nada enseñar una gramática que ya la hay, ya tenemos una gramática de nuestro dialecto, entonces aprovecharla. (male, born 1951, L1 Veneto)

Given that no formal education is provided in Veneto and the absence of a standard written form for the variety spoken in Chipilo, it is not surprising that speakers are less secure about their reading and writing abilities in Veneto. As seen in (10) above and again in (15), several participants comment that Veneto first needs to establish formal grammar or rules. In (15), a participant demonstrates a lack of metalinguistic awareness and disparages the language as having no grammatical rules, but comments that she expresses herself better in Veneto than in Spanish, in spite of the latter's written form.

- (15) El véneto es el mío, es con el que me comunico pero gramaticalmente no sé reglas, no sé cómo escribirlo. No sé, no hay reglas o a lo mejor las hay pero nadie nos las enseñó. El español, tengo buena ortografía. Lo aprendí bien porque me lo enseñaron toda la vida. Entonces si pusiéramos un examen, digamos, de cómo lo escribo, cómo lo leo, es más fácil en español. Pero cómo me expreso, es más fácil en véneto. (female born 1978, L1 Veneto)

This speaker demonstrates insecurity in her knowledge of Veneto grammar due to a lack of formal education in the language, yet, at the same time, she identifies Veneto as her own and comments on her ease of expression in Veneto over Spanish. In spite of her lack of confidence in reading and writing Veneto, the same speaker later revealed that she enjoyed reading the Veneto-language newspaper, *Al Nostro*, a Veneto language newspaper that was published locally and supported by a grant for two years. The participant also notes that she writes letters and notes in Veneto to her husband and other family members. Therefore, the self-reported minimal ability to read and write Veneto is not necessarily reflected in this speaker's behavior. This does not seem to be uncommon, as Chipileños often leave notes for family members or communicate via social media in Veneto. The lack of instruction in Veneto, therefore, does not prevent speakers from reading and writing the language, but it does affect their sense of linguistic security.

A common theme that appears in many conversations with Chipileños is that of Veneto belonging to them. It is a marker of in-group status and a symbol of ethnolinguistic identity. As the borders of the community blur, it may enhance the saliency of the language and ethnicity link.



The Chipileño identity and Veneto language use may remain strong as speakers are confronted directly with out-group members and, as a consequence, the ethnolinguistic vitality of Veneto may remain high. This is important, as currently, there is no official government support of Veneto, and Veneto is not used in education, radio, or print. When asked if Veneto will be maintained or if it will be lost, the participants interviewed present no consensus. The speaker quoted in (16) focuses on the role of the Chipileños in maintaining Veneto, whereas the speaker in (17) believes that the everyday use of Veneto will continue given that children are raised speaking Veneto before Spanish. The speaker in (18), however, believes that the influx of outsiders will eventually lead not only to the loss of Veneto but to the loss of the Chipileño identity associated with it.

- (16) ¿En Chipilo? Pues está difícil. Depende de nosotros, si le tenemos mucho aprecio o poco aprecio mantenerlo o no. Solo depende de nosotros. (male, born 1973, L1 Veneto)
- (17) La verdad, yo no porque pues todos lo hablan. No se puede perder. Los niños chiquitos es lo primero que aprenden, el chipileño. (female, born 1984, L1 Veneto)
- (18) Lo veo que va a desaparecer como va a desaparecer la identidad del chipileño y no creo que tarde mucho. ¿Por qué? Porque ya está entrando a vivir a esta zona mucha gente que no se identifica ni con el véneto ni con la cultura ni con la cosmovisión. (male born 1981, L1 Spanish)

It is interesting to note that Spanish is not perceived as very important to the community, yet the perception of the vitality of Veneto is also not entirely optimistic. Veneto maintains a very powerful position in the Chipileño community, yet there are some conflicting ideologies that prevent it from taking on a more formal status as a written language or a language used in more formal domains. On the other hand, its use in the home and at Chipileño cultural events is favored by speakers and, on such occasions Veneto may even be used in the presence of non-Veneto speaking outsiders visiting the town. The presence of Veneto-speaking visitors from Italy further reinforces ideologies supporting the use of Veneto in the community. The connections established with Segusino in particular have led to frequent contact between members of both communities and excursions and extended stays from both sides. The language of communication in these instances is Veneto.

## Conclusions

In this paper I have explored some of the ideologies surrounding the use of Spanish and Veneto, an immigrant language, in Chipilo, Mexico. While the norm in many immigrant groups is to assimilate into the majority culture and adopt the majority language, Chipilo has surpassed the typical three generation language shift. Veneto also distinguishes itself from other minority language groups in Mexico by enjoying relatively high prestige and status within the community. In this way, Chipilo resembles other cases of immigrant languages in the United States, such as Pennsylvania German communities (see Loudén and Page 2005; Page and Brown 2007) and German in Texas (see Boas 2009). Similar to these other communities, Chipilo remained an isolated agricultural community for many years, thereby preventing rapid shift to Spanish. In more recent years, the increase in education and employment opportunities in Spanish and the growth of the nearby city of Puebla has led to more Spanish usage. In contrast to other minority language communities in Mexico, such as speakers of Totonac (Lam 2009), there is a strong sense of language loyalty and ethnolinguistic identity that has favored the continued use of Veneto in the home and as a community language rather than a complete shift towards Spanish and integration into national Mexican culture (see Fishman 1981). There has not been a constant influx of new Veneto speakers arriving in Chipilo to reinvigorate the use of Veneto, as seen in the Puerto Rican community in Massachusetts (Urzúa and Gómez 2008); however, the frequent interest and presence of Veneto-speaking Italians visiting the community has enhanced the prestige and status granted to the language by both Italian outsiders and the actual Chipileños. Furthermore, the recognition of Veneto as a “language” and not merely a “dialect” and the reinforcement of using the language with European outsiders have perhaps enhanced the status that the language enjoys within the community. By being accepted and acknowledged as a “legitimate” language by European outsiders, the attitudes towards the language by many Chipileños remain favorable. In spite of this, however, speakers do demonstrate a preference for Spanish in more public domains. Fishman (1980) notes that the lack of separation of languages into distinct domains can result in instability and the probability of language shift. In Chipilo, the use of Spanish as the formal language of the church and education has perhaps reinforced the association between Veneto and the home and family, and thereby led to the preference to not use Veneto as a language of formal functions and politics. This preference may also be strengthened by the perceived weakness on the part of many Chipileños with respect to reading and writing Veneto, which may preclude speakers from viewing the language as “formal” enough

for public forums. This linguistic insecurity with respect to reading and writing Veneto is not reflected in many participants' behavior, however, as many use Veneto both on social media and in informal communication, such as text messages or notes at home. The linguistic insecurity towards reading and writing Veneto is likely enhanced due to the lack of a written standard. In the mid 2000s, a Yahoo! group existed with the intention of exclusively writing in Veneto and it welcomed a variety of spellings and writing styles. In more recent years, as social media has evolved and gained more users of diverse age groups, many Chipileños interact in Veneto via these websites with other community members and also with Veneto speakers in other parts of the world, including Italy, Australia, and Brazil. Future research in this area is needed to determine the extent to which Veneto is used in these online interactions and in what ways. An analysis of the effects that written standards, and social media usage in general, have on minority language maintenance would also be of interest.

In sum, in the case of other language contact situations, such as those in the United States or the Caribbean, minority language maintenance may be enhanced by positive ideologies regarding the use of both languages within the same community, resulting in sustained bilingualism. However, the factors that contribute to language maintenance and shift are variable and what leads to maintenance in one community may lead to shift in another. While the ideologies surrounding Veneto and Spanish in Chipilo may be positive, speakers view the ever increasing proximity of Puebla and influx of non-Veneto speakers as a threat to the future of Veneto in the community. Furthermore, the results of the present study reveal that speakers do not necessarily favor the use of Veneto in formal public domains, such as politics or formal functions. Yet, in spite of the conflicting ideologies surrounding the use of Veneto in the community and the increasing number of non-Chipileños, Veneto remains the language of the home in many cases and continues to be ascribed high prestige as the language of family and friends, thus allowing Veneto to be passed on to new generations of speakers.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This idea of being 'legítimo' is also seen in Chipilo. Mixed marriages are more common now than they were in the past, but children of mixed marriages are sometimes referred to as being 'mitad-mitad' (see Barnes 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> The questionnaire was adapted with the collaboration of several Chipileños, many involved in the group Veneti a Chipilo. They

provided additional questions and aided immensely in the distribution and collection of the questionnaire.

- <sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper, the percentages shown include only those speakers who selected “7” completely agree. Given that many speakers selected either extreme on the Likert scale, only responses of “7” were included in the analysis.
- <sup>4</sup> Note that in the items referencing language use in children, not all participants responded. If they did not currently have children, some opted not to answer.
- <sup>5</sup> It should be noted that there is already a small body of literature written in Chipileño Veneto (see Montagner 2005).
- <sup>6</sup> The use of the term ‘dialect’ to refer to the Veneto language is certainly not unique to Chipilo. The term is used to refer to many regional varieties in Italy and is also used to refer to indigenous languages in Mexico (Lam 2009 for example).
- <sup>7</sup> Meo Zilio notes that these two forms, *chipileño* and *dialecto* are “forme meno usuali tra i vénetofoni” ‘less common forms among Veneto-speakers’ (1981:239). Interestingly, today both forms seem to be the most common, along with *véneto*, and *talian* is rarely used.

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