Mother-Tongue Instruction and Biliteracy Development in P'urhepecha

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ABSTRACT

The dominant role of the P'urhepecha language at two primary schools in central Mexico provides an encouraging example of the promotion of an indigenous language in an educational context. P'urhepecha is a language isolate spoken by around 125,000 predominantly bilingual people in four regions of the central highlands of Michoacán. Intercultural Bilingual Education programs run in government schools throughout the state but offer only minimal indigenous language instruction. However, the two rural primary schools of San Isidro and Uringuitiro have developed a program and curriculum that emphasizes P'urhepecha language and culture, with instruction for all subjects provided in P'urhepecha from Grades 1 through 6. The schools are concerned with the maintenance of P'urhepecha language and culture as well as higher academic achievement and the transfer of P'urhepecha literacy skills to Spanish. Early literacy is introduced through P'urhepecha, and writing instruction is incorporated into the curriculum, with pupils given writing assignments across a range of school subjects. Native language literacy is crucial in facilitating cognitive development and the acquisition of competence in other domains, not just language. In this chapter we describe historical attempts to introduce P'urhepecha-based literacy, particularly the Tarascan Project, and a current initiative promoting biliteracy in P'urhepecha and Spanish through mother-tongue-based education. We then describe the instructional context for pupil writing at the two schools and analyse writing samples from four P'urhepecha-dominant fourth-grade pupils (aged 9-11) who were instructed to retell a story. We analyse these samples in terms of morphological complexity, narrative style, and orthographic accuracy, using the continua of biliteracy to frame the analysis. In so doing, we highlight the writing competence of the pupils in their contemporary version of P'urhepecha and illustrate the valued role of the language in the context of the school's native-language curriculum.

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1. Introduction

P'urhepecha (previously known as Tarascan[1]) is spoken by around 125,000 mostly bilingual people in four regions of the central highlands of Michoacán, Mexico (INEGI, 2010). This figure may suggest that P'urhepecha is quite vital, but the reality is that fewer and fewer children are learning the language at home (Chamoreau, 2000: 14); therefore it is potentially only a few generations away from grave endangerment. Economic circumstances have contributed to rapid language loss. In search of work, many P'urhepecha speakers have emigrated abroad, changing language use patterns and rupturing the transmission of the indigenous language from parent to child. Within this context of emerging language shift, our chapter presents positive examples of educational initiatives that have promoted literacy development in P'urhepecha and provides a preliminary analysis of writing samples by P'urhepecha pupils attending bilingual primary schools.

To survive under pressure from changing socio-economic circumstances and a dominant national language, it is important for the minority language to feature prominently in the education system (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000; Fishman, 1991). In the case of P'urhepecha, children need to be schooled in their language as well as in Spanish, and to see the value in learning to read and write both languages. Despite the introduction of a compulsory eight-year programme of bilingual and bicultural primary education across Mexico in the 1970s, and the concomitant founding of the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena* (DGEI, Directorate General of Indigenous Education), Spanish remains the language of instruction at all levels. Only a few hours a week are devoted to the indigenous language at the primary school level and no provision is made for such lessons in secondary school. However, two rural primary schools in Michoacán have shifted to P'urhepecha-medium instruction in an encouraging but rare example of indigenous language promotion in an educational context (Hamel 2008, 2009; Hamel & Francis, 2006).

As part of our ongoing analysis of biliteracy development through mother tongue instruction, we present here an evaluation of P'urhepecha writing samples penned by four P'urhepecha-dominant pupils at the end of fourth grade, who had been instructed to retell the

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[1] P'urhepecha can also be found spelled as Purepecha, Purépecha, P'urhépecha, and P'orhépecha, amongst others. The term 'Tarascan' was used to refer to the language in earlier studies but now is generally used only to refer to the precolonial population, as in the Tarascan State (see Section 3).

P'urhepecha story *Tukuru* 'Owl'. We focus on how the texts are written in terms of narrative style, morphological complexity, and orthographic accuracy. Our analysis highlights how the P'urhepecha children can represent their own contemporary version of the language, including some (mostly lexical) elements from Spanish, in a grammatically and stylistically appropriate way. The following section provides the theoretical background to biliteracy development in indigenous education that motivates our analysis, focusing on the value of gaining initial literacy skills in one's own native language and on contesting established linguistic hierarchies in educational contexts.

2. Biliteracy development in indigenous education

Much has been said about the importance of educating children first in their native language, thus facilitating cognitive development and the acquisition of competence in other domains, not just language (Baker, 2000; Carlisle & Beeman, 2000; Dutcher & Tucker, 1996). Education in the native language or mother tongue is particularly important for linguistic minorities whose home language is undervalued, or in some cases not even recognised, by the dominant society around them. For indigenous communities attempting to preserve or revitalize their language, emphasis should be given to developing literacy skills in both the native, minority language, and the language of the dominant society. Previous research in the Mexican context, including at the schools featured in this chapter, has demonstrated that pupils who receive literacy instruction in their mother tongue or strongest language, whether that be an indigenous language or Spanish, achieve superior writing skills in *both* languages (Hamel, 2008). Such findings suggest a common underlying language proficiency in multilinguals that supports the transfer of literacy skills from one language to another (Cummins, 1980, 2000; Hamel & Francis, 2006).

In further exploring the connections between first and second language literacy, we make use of the continua of biliteracy framework, which brings together key research on literacy and multilingualism, emphasizing the interconnectedness among various aspects of biliteracy contexts, development, content, and media (Hornberger 1989; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester 2000; see Figure 1). Biliteracy refers to "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing" (Hornberger, 1990, 2). Of particular interest here is the interconnection among the various skills in the development of biliteracy, whether first language or second language, oral or written, receptive or productive. Although the opposite ends of the continua may appear to be dichotomous and finite, the notion of continua emphasizes

a more nuanced and dynamic perspective. Indeed the framework draws attention to what these aspects of biliteracy have in common; e.g., the interrelatedness between first and second language skills. It also recommends the promotion of the traditionally undervalued aspects of biliteracy, giving attention, for example, to the first language of linguistic minorities, to oral skills as well as written, and to receptive as well as productive language skills. By providing a space for P'urhepecha literacy, the projects described in this chapter have contested established linguistic hierarchies, the historical context of which are described in the following section.

Figure 1: The Continua of Biliteracy

(from Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000)

Traditionally less powerful		Traditionally more powerful
Context of biliteracy		
Micro	<------------------->	Macro
Oral	<------------------->	Literate
Bi(multi)lingual	<------------------->	Monolingual
Development of biliteracy		
Reception	<------------------->	Production
Oral	<------------------->	Written
L1	<------------------->	L2
Content of biliteracy		
Minority	<------------------->	Majority
Vernacular	<------------------->	Literary
Contextualized	<------------------->	Decontextualized
Media of biliteracy		
Simultaneous exposure	<------------------->	Successive exposure
Dissimilar structures	<------------------->	Similar structures
Divergent scripts	<------------------->	Convergent scripts

3. History of the P'urhepecha

The beginning of a distinguishable P'urhepecha cultural tradition can be traced to the north and central zones of Michoacán in the Late Preclassic period (400 BCE - 150 CE; Pollard, 2015: 93). In the subsequent period (150 - 900 CE), a major cultural transformation occurred under

influence from central Mexico, leading to greater urbanisation. As well as regional interaction, facilitated along the Balsas-Tepelcatepec and Santiago-Lerma Rivers, there may also have been long-distance contact with Andean and coastal peoples of Peru and Ecuador, perhaps mediated by metallurgy (Hosler, 1994).

The formation of the Tarascan State began around 1000 CE as a number of competing small state societies emerged in Michoacán. Through warfare and strategic marriage alliances, the *Wakúsecha* "eagle warriors" emerged as the most dominant lineage in the region, fully consolidating their power under Lord Taríacuri (c. 1380-1420 CE), the first *cazonci* "chief" (Roskamp, 2016), thereby founding the Tarascan State. Through a rapid process of cultural assimilation and political unification, the different groups in the region converged on a Tarascan ethnicity and socio-political system, which included use of the Tarascan language and centralised autocratic rule (Gorenstein & Pollard, 1983). By the mid-1400s, the Tarascans were the most formidable enemy of the Aztecs, being the only population to resist them militarily.

The Tarascan State was successfully invaded by the Spanish in 1523, with indigenous towns distributed among the colonisers as *encomiendas*. Spanish rule revolved around the exploitation of these *encomiendas* and other natural resources (e.g., mines) and the introduction of foreign socio-political structures (Warren, 1985). A continued struggle between the Tarascans and the Spanish ended abruptly on February 14, 1530, when the last *cazonci* was executed.

In the first two decades after the conquest, Michoacán, along with the rest of Mexico, saw a huge depopulation due to disease and forced resettlement. The Tarascan population was reduced by half in the first 30 years of Spanish occupation, with many survivors taking refuge deep in the *Sierra* (West, 1948: 12). Integrated into the Spanish colony, the former Tarascan State experienced profound socio-political and cultural transformations. One of the most obvious changes was linguistic; with the arrival of the Spaniards came the Spanish language, which quickly led to a situation of bilingualism and eventual shift away from P'urhepecha for many people.

The newly founded village structures were not delineated according to precolonial boundaries, leading to land disputes between some P'urhepecha communities. These disputes were compounded by a number of subsequent land reform acts, which persist to this day in some cases (Roskamp, 2015). Moreover, the rise of drug cartels in the region has compounded land disputes and increased violence across the state. For example, disillusioned by the lack of

governmental support to combat various local issues, the P'urhepecha town of Cherán declared independence from the state in 2010, setting up its own local council to govern according to the community's priorities (Roth Seneff, 2015). Indeed the past 40 years have seen the development of a clearer, more unified P'urhepecha identity, manifested in, for example, the inauguration of a flag representing the four regions, an anthem, and the motto *juchari winapikwa,* "our strength."

4. Language structure

A language isolate, P'urhepecha is characterised by its agglutinating structure and reliance on suffixation as a principal means of word formation. Four major dialect zones can be identified among the 110 P'urhepecha villages on the basis of linguistic, geographic, cultural, and social features: Meseta or Sierra, Lake Pátzcuaro Basin, Cañada de los 11 Pueblos, and Zacapu (Chamoreau, 2005). The variety represented in these samples is from the Meseta.

P'urhepecha's strongly agglutinative nature enables the formation of morphologically complex words entirely through suffixation. The core element of any word is the root, which can be either mono- or disyllabic. To this root can be added a sequence of suffixes, depending on the word class and meanings to be expressed. Most roots can also be reduplicated, yielding additional meanings of, for example, intensity, repetition, or multiple distribution in time and place (Friedrich, 1984: 66).

Two main types of nouns can be identified: fused and derived. Fused nouns comprise a root and suffix that are now inseparable (e.g., *tsa=ki* 'lizard'), while derived nouns add a nominalising suffix (usually *-kwa)* to a root (e.g., *piré-kwa* 'song,' from the root *piré-* 'to sing'). Irrespective of their formation method, nouns are pluralised with the suffix *-echa/-icha*. There are seven cases in P'urhepecha: nominative, objective, genitive, instrumental, comitative, locative, and residential (Chamoreau, 2003). The personal pronoun system is a standard six-way system, three singular and three plural, with the demonstratives *ima* and *ts'ïma* drafted in to function as third person singular and plural pronouns, respectively. P'urhepecha possesses a base 20 counting system, but it has largely been replaced by its Spanish counterpart. The numeral *ma* 'one' can also function as an indefinite article. There is no definite article.

Verbal morphology in P'urhepecha is remarkably elaborate, enabling the speaker to express combinations of location, direction, causative, voice/valency, mood, desiderative, adverbials, 3rd person plural object, aspect, tense, irrealis, mood, and subject/object person and number through the combination of suffixes, strictly in this order (Chamoreau, in press b).

Words can contain up to seven suffixes, but most are somewhat shorter (Friedrich, 1984: 65). Members of the same category cannot co-occur, except for certain combinations of locative suffixes in the second slot. In the tense-aspect-mood domain, only mood is obligatory in a finite verb.

At the clausal level, word order is generally subject-verb-object (SVO), although historically it was more strictly SOV. The shift away from verb-final order is likely due to contact first with neighbouring Nahuatl (Uto-Aztecan) and Otomí (Otomanguean) and later with Spanish (Chamoreau, 2007). Coordinate clauses are linked with *ka* 'and'. In certain narrative styles, *ka* is ubiquitous, linking chain-medial clauses whose verbs take non-finite morphology as the subject has already been established (Chamoreau, 2016; see Section 8).

5. Revitalisation efforts

P'urhepecha has been spoken in Michoacán since well before colonisation but was not a written language at that time. Franciscan missionaries encouraged literacy in P'urhepecha during the sixteenth century, but widespread literacy in the language was never established (Hamel 2008: 313). Colonial education policies focused primarily on forcibly assimilating indigenous peoples, both culturally and linguistically, through the direct imposition of Spanish in all grades in school (Hamel, 2013: 1). A second strategy comprised slow transition to Spanish and a very small number of language maintenance programs, but these were very much the exception (see Section 6).

Consequently, the Tarascan Project, initiated in 1939, represented a long-awaited shift to native language-medium education for P'urhepecha speakers. The project fostered literacy and language maintenance by teaching reading and writing in P'urhepecha, acting also as a bridge to Spanish literacy. Before launching the project, a combined team of Mexican and U.S. linguists and anthropologists devised a suitable, streamlined alphabet for P'urhepecha, as well as a set of primers for pedagogical purposes. P'urhepecha literacy classes were taught by 20 specially selected and trained native speakers. In Paracho, where the project was established, the project team produced additional materials, including instructional pamphlets regarding health and sanitation. Posters presenting the alphabet and contrasting segments were also displayed in village squares for consultation outside of class (Figure 2). The project ran for just over a year, from 1939-1941, and was reported as being immensely successful. Following its methodologically advanced, linguistic theory-based approach, previously illiterate individuals

learned to read and write in 30 to 45 days (Barrera-Vásquez, 1953: 83). The project ended abruptly in 1941 due to the withdrawal of all funding.

Figure 2: *Example of Tarascan Project teaching material: a mural newspaper bearing the title kerénda ¢i¢ʌki* 'crag flower'. *A younger man, probably a teacher, stands by as members of the community read local and national news. Photo by Frances L. (Swadesh) Quintana, 1939/1940.*

After the Tarascan Project ended, literacy in P'urhepecha advanced little, even with the introduction of bilingual and bicultural education in primary schools across Mexico in the 1970s and the later establishment of intercultural bilingual education (*educación intercultural bilingüe,* EIB) in the 1990s (Hamel, 2008). EIB is intended to integrate "content matters and competencies from indigenous funds of knowledge, as well as from national programs, [and] should be integrated in a culturally and pedagogically appropriate curriculum" (Hamel, 2013: 1-2). In contrast to earlier Spanish-centred programs, EIB should enable children to know and appropriate their own culture in their own language so that they can form sound competencies, values, and ethnic identity (see also López, 2009).

Unfortunately, the reality of EIB is not as positive as its aims suggest. The vast majority of P'urhepecha-speaking children are not schooled in their native language first, or at all. Instead, they continue to work through a system of "Castillanization," with Spanish as the

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vehicle for literacy and content instruction for all subjects. Government-run primary schools often provide a mere two hours a week of instruction in P'urhepecha, focusing only on language acquisition, albeit using P'urhepecha-medium materials in the form of workbooks and storybooks.

Revitalization efforts also exist in tertiary-level education institutions. The Instituto Tecnológico Superior P'urhepecha offers P'urhepecha language courses, while the Universidad Indígena Intercultural de Michoacán offers a number of Bachelor-level programs designed primarily for indigenous pupils, notably the *Licenciatura* in Language and Intercultural Communication. The Universidad Michoacana in Morelia also offers P'urhepecha language classes. The first *Diplomado* in P'urhepecha language was run by the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en   Social (CIESAS, Mexico City) in Santa Fe de la Laguna in July 2016, stimulating additional courses in legal translation and P'urhepecha syntax.

The main online community portal is hosted at http://www.purepecha.mx, which also includes a P'urhépecha-Spanish dictionary; *Radio Xiranhua;* and information regarding language, culture, and local initiatives and events (largely in Spanish). Local radio stations, such as *Radio Juchári Uinápekua* in Santa Fe de la Laguna, are also promoting the language to a wide audience. The revitalization efforts mentioned here, however, clearly do not constitute an exhaustive list. We focus in the following section on a specific effort to both promote mother tongue education and strengthen the language.

6. Language maintenance in a school context

A unique educational initiative has been developing in two government primary schools in the neighbouring towns of San Isidro and Uringuitiro, high in the Meseta P'urhepecha of western Michoacán. A group of committed P'urhepecha teachers were dissatisfied with the lack of attention to the P'urhepecha language under the national Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) program and so began to develop a mother-tongue-based bilingual education program in the early 1990s. The national provisions for indigenous education mentioned above open up a space for the P'urhepecha language in government schools but do not provide for comprehensive literacy development in the mother tongue for those children who are primarily speakers of P'urhepecha. The new endeavour required awareness raising in the community, decisions about

an appropriate alphabet, and ongoing development of their own materials and curriculum (Hamel & Francis, 2006; Hamel, 2008, 2009).

The P'urhepecha educators have continued to improve the program over the last two decades, with support from researchers and experts through the Comunidad Indígena y Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (CIEIB) program, directed by R. Enrique Hamel. The curriculum that the schools are developing attempts to balance external educational demands with the maintenance of P'urhepecha language and culture, emphasizing P'urhepecha-medium instruction. In summarizing the schools' achievements, Hamel (2008) writes that "[d]ifferent from most indigenous schools in Mexico, P'urhepecha has become the legitimate, unmarked language of all interaction at school, a sociolinguistic achievement still quite exceptional in indigenous education" (p. 320).

In San Isidro and Uringuitiro, P'urhepecha remains the primary home language. Although in some cases Spanish is entering the home domain through marriages and returned migration, as well as through media and communication, the majority of the pupils start school with very little functional knowledge of Spanish. This is also true for many children in other P'urhepecha-dominant villages who must attend Spanish-medium public primary schools. Thus, the schools in San Isidro and Uringuitiro focus on three important objectives for the bilingual program: (i) supporting pupil content learning through the use of their mother tongue, (ii) supporting pupils in learning Spanish as a second language, and (iii) developing and revitalizing P'urhepecha language and culture. Although often conceived of separately, in this instance the pedagogical and language learning objectives actually coincide with and mutually reinforce the preservation and revitalization objectives in these schools (Hamel & Francis, 2006).

7. Instructional writing practices

Writing in the P'urhepecha language forms an integral part of the educational program at these two primary schools. A number of alphabets still exist for P'urhepecha, leading to difficulties in carrying out unified literacy initiatives. The educators in San Isidro and Uringuitiro have developed a pedagogical alphabet appropriate for literacy instruction and employ a contrastive method to introduce letters in Spanish that do not exist in P'urhepecha (Hamel & Ibáñez Caselli, 2000), a method reminiscent of the Tarascan Project. As the principal medium of instruction and the "legitimate, unmarked language of all interaction" at the schools (Hamel, 2008), P'urhepecha

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is naturally used for note taking, learning exercises, and writing assignments throughout the primary school years.

According to the overall plan for bilingual instruction at the two schools, Grades 1 and 2 emphasize literacy development in P'urhepecha, with introduction to oral Spanish. By Grade 3, pupils should be able to read and write in P'urhepecha, after which they learn to read and write in Spanish. The teaching of Spanish follows the principles of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), with selected content instruction in Spanish forming the basis for teaching Spanish as a second language (see Coyle, 2007; Hall Haley & Austin, 2004; Richard & Rodgers, 2001). Classroom observations by the second author of this chapter, including in Grade 4 classes, confirmed that P'urhepecha was the primary language for both speaking and writing. Although the program plans for one hour of Spanish-medium instruction per day, P'urhepecha is by far the most frequently used language for communication in the classroom, even when Spanish textbooks are being used. Lessons are usually followed by writing assignments, whether pupils are copying notes, providing example sentences, describing the results of an experiment, or retelling stories from home. When pupils finish an assignment, they bring their notebooks to the teacher for verification and feedback.
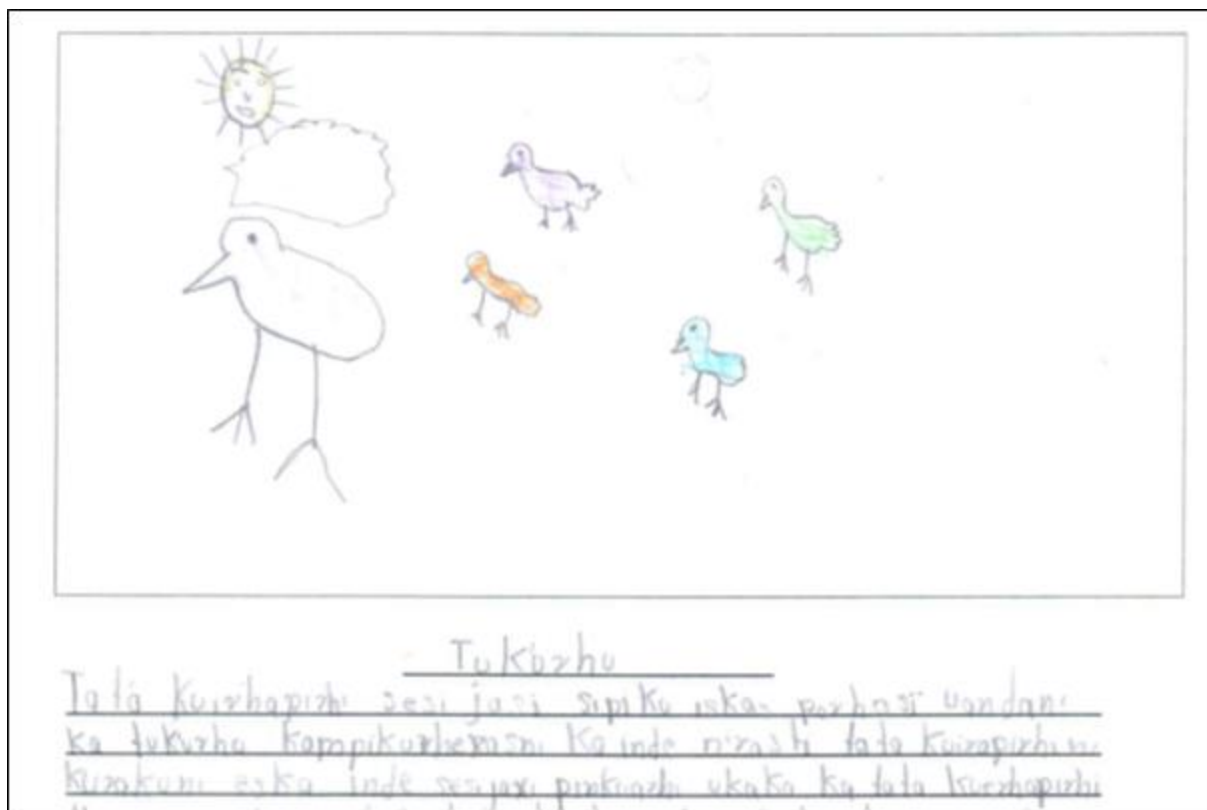
Building from the requirements of the Mexican education system, the schools have developed a curriculum that is divided into the five school terms and that integrates concepts and vocabulary from the L1 (P'urhepecha) and the L2 (Spanish). Thus, the development of language skills, including writing, is incorporated into the content learning. By Grade 5, writing is listed as an important learning goal in the various subject areas, and by Grade 6, pupils are expected to be able to write opinions and arguments, as well as informative and descriptive texts in both languages.

Observers conducting research at the schools through CIEIB were impressed by the writing abilities of pupils in both languages by the end of Grade 3 (age 8-10). Also significant in the assessment of language skills at the two schools is the clearly parallel development of reading and writing skills in the two languages (Hamel 2009). One of the primary research goals of CIEIB in the current phase of the project is to explore the process of acquiring and developing P'urhepecha and Spanish literacy skills in the context of primary education. The P'urhepecha writing we analyse in the following section formed part of an assessment administered to all

pupils at the two schools in 2013, including components for both Spanish and P'urhepecha written expression.

8. Development of pupils' writing

The four writing samples under analysis were written by four pupils completing fourth grade, whose first language is P'urhepecha and whose Spanish proficiency was quite low at the time of assessment. The pupils were selected based on their representative performance in the assessment and on the availability of later writing samples, which form part of our ongoing analysis of biliteracy development. They were asked to re-write a story that had been read to them entitled *Tukuru* 'Owl,' with emphasis placed on their ability to articulate the key points in the story. The global scores given by teachers on the selected essays ranged from 3 to 6 out of 10, indicating that there were fragments of narrative-capturing elements of the story, though the stories lack a full story line. The same assessment was administered to pupils at all grade levels, so a sixth-grade pupil would be expected to score higher, for example, than a fourth-grade pupil. Thus, the mid-range scores achieved by the fourth-grade pupils were not unexpected. An example of one of these samples is presented in Figure 3. The writing samples range from 15 to 40 lines of text on the test paper, with the original story comprising 12 sentences (around 620 words).

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Figure 3: Extract of a writing sample from the P'urhepecha-medium Miguel Hidalgo primary school, San Isidro, Michoacán

The writing samples were analysed with attention to morphological complexity, narrative style, and orthographic accuracy. Our goal in this initial analysis was to identify features of pupil writing that suggest biliteracy development and that could be compared across time and across languages.

One of the salient features in all four essays was the frequent use of a very typical P'urhepecha discourse structure. This narrative style relies heavily on the coordinator *ka* 'and', as well as non-finite verbs ending in *-ni*, usually after the main actor of a sentence has been introduced (Chamoreau, 2016). See example (1), where these features are underlined.

(1) *ka*   *tukuru* *no*   *uxe-ni*   *uanda-ni*   *ka*
      and   owl   NEG   can-NF   speak-NF   and
      'and the owl could not speak, and…'

Pupils also use Spanish connectors such as *komu (como)* 'like', *pari/para* 'for, in order to', and *porka (porque)* 'because' as in example (2). This is a common feature of spoken P'urhepecha (Chamoreau, 2007) and is also found in other indigenous languages that are in contact with Spanish, such as Otomí, also spoken in Mexico, as the coordinators sit in prominent positions outside of the clause and are therefore easily replaced with loanwords (Bakker & Hekking, 2012).

(2)   *ka*   <u>*porka*</u>   *tukuru*   *no*   *sesi*   *jasï*   *uka-s-p-ti*

     and   because   owl   NEG   well   type   do-AOR-PST-3S.ASS

     'And because the owl did it harm' (lit. did not do it well)

P'urhepecha verbs can be fairly complex (see Section 4), but the pupils have clearly mastered them by Grade 4. The verbs in the writing samples generally include up to three suffixes, including aspect (usually in the form of the aorist), tense (past, as this is the only one that is marked), and mood/person (3).

(3)   *arhi-s-p-ti*

     say-AOR-PST-3.ASS

     's/he said'

Despite being immersed in their native language, with low proficiency in Spanish, the impact of the national language is still observable in the writing samples. While no Spanish loanwords were used in the original essay that was read to the pupils, several Spanish loanwords appear in the pupil essays, fully integrated into P'urhepecha morphology. The noun *pajarito* 'little bird' and the verb *buscar* 'to look for' are evident in examples (4a-b).

(4a)   *kwiripu-echa*   *ka*   *ima=ksi*   *pajaritu-cha*   *mantini=ksi*

     person-PL   and   DEM=3PL   bird.DIM-PL   by.one=3PL

     'The people and those birds one by one…'

(4b)   *y*   *que*   *busqi-ti=ksɨ*   *pajaritu-cha*

     and   that   look.for-3.ASS=3PL   bird.DIM-PL

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'And that he is looking for (them) the birds'

Various orthographic inconsistencies can be identified in the writing samples, such as in the name of the story itself, which is spelled as *tukuru, tukurhu* and *tuk'urhu,* but this is to be expected for various reasons. First, the pupils are still quite young; therefore, one should not expect complete consistency. A low emphasis on orthographic conventions is a currently accepted pedagogical strategy and is not to be censured. Second, given the relatively recent development of written materials in the language, standards are still being developed, and consistency among materials from different sources is yet to be achieved. Third, it can be difficult to distinguish between the aspirated and non-aspirated stops, and also between the tap and retroflex rhotic (/rh/) in everyday speech. However, one does see a certain amount of consistency in the way the language is represented orthographically. The use of /b d g/ for /p t k/ after a nasal phoneme reflects the voicing that occurs in speech, and /l/ for /ɽ/ reflects a regional pronunciation of this phoneme.

In sum, these examples show that the children can represent their own contemporary version of the language, which includes some elements from Spanish, in a grammatically appropriate way. More importantly, these essays represent the opportunity that pupils have to demonstrate their skills in written P'urhepecha in a legitimized educational context. Rather than pinpointing a specific method for writing instruction, we emphasize here the legitimate, unmarked use of a minority language in all aspects of these pupils' primary education. This extensive space for P'urhepecha and for a P'urhepecha discourse style reflects the broader valuing of P'urhepecha cultural norms evident in the two schools, where their language is given as much, if not more, value than the dominant national language.

Like the other chapters in this volume, we focus at a micro level on pupil writing samples within a classroom and school environment that supports minority language development, even if the more macro level (i.e. national, government) context is unsupportive. In such contexts of biliteracy, the traditionally less powerful orality and bilingualism (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000; see Figure 1) are given value. The content of biliteracy in the case of the San Isidro and Uringuitiro schools is consciously minority and contextualized. Although the school remains tied to decontextualized, majority curriculum requirements, the development of a P'urhepecha curriculum based on traditional P'urhepecha values and discourse styles has been an

ongoing priority. The media of biliteracy in this case emphasizes a gradual introduction of Spanish, which is structurally rather dissimilar from P'urhepecha and has a somewhat divergent orthography. In terms of the development of biliteracy, we expect that the receptive and productive skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing will be interconnected, especially in a context where these skills are nurtured in both the L1 and the L2. This preliminary analysis shows features of an oral narrative style incorporated into a formal writing assignment and L2 features incorporated into well-structured ("grammatically correct") L1 sentences.

9. Promising directions for future revitalization efforts

Much remains to be learned regarding the interrelated development of literacy skills in multiple languages. The analysis presented here forms part of an ongoing exploration of biliteracy development, including analysis of written and oral samples, in both P'urhepecha and Spanish across time and grade levels. Such investigations will also shed light on the language acquisition process and can help to feed back into refining teaching methods. Clearly the transfer of literacy skills is also relevant to contexts in which pupils are (re-)learning an indigenous language and have stronger skills in the dominant national language, which is the case for some P'urhepecha children.

In some parts of rural Michoacán, P'urhepecha is still fortunate to be in a language maintenance situation, with its associated intergenerational transmission of the language. However, the risk of language shift in the coming generations is great. The use of P'urhepecha as medium of instruction in primary schools is a much-needed, longer-term solution to the current low levels of P'urhepecha literacy transmission across the region. The schools in San Isidro and Uringuitiro provide an example of best practice in mother-tongue instruction that can be emulated by other schools in Michoacán as well as further afield . These schools provide for the educational needs of P'urhepecha-dominant pupils and also promote P'urhepecha language and culture in a valued educational context. However, for children to develop full biliteracy skills, the less valued aspects of biliteracy require promotion. This entails continuous support for and development of proficiency in minority languages such as P'urhepecha in the spaces where they have been undervalued, including onward into secondary and higher education.

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