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# Determinants of language reproduction and shift in a transnational community

**Abstract:** This study centers on the impact of migration on the vitality of San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec (SLQZ) spoken in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, Mexico. The data show (a) that children in Los Angeles, whether US- or Mexican-born, are not growing up as active SLQZ speakers and (b) that given sustained travel between the two communities, language use in Los Angeles is replicated in San Lucas, thereby introducing Spanish and English into otherwise Zapotec-only domains such as the home. The case of SLQZ is one in which a language vitality assessment that considers the home community only, would lead to an incorrect evaluation. Signs of language endangerment become evident in a sociolinguistic analysis that crosses borders.

**Keywords:** border sociolinguistics, Zapotec languages, transnational migration, language endangerment

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## 1 Introduction

This study centers on the impact of migration on the maintenance prospects of an indigenous language of Mexico, spoken in San Lucas Quiaviní (SLQ, San Lucas), in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca. The community of speakers of San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec (SLQZ) is estimated at over 2,500 individuals with about 1,700 residing in San Lucas itself. Emigration from San Lucas to Los Angeles, California began in 1968. In its first 20 years, emigration was small scale, temporary and involved mostly men. By the mid-1980s women and children began to emigrate and migration became mostly permanent. Some estimates suggest that 30 to 50% of the SLQZ speaker base now resides in Los Angeles (Lopez and Runsten 2004). Additionally, language shift away from SLQZ and towards Spanish and English can be attested in the diaspora community. I hypothesize, therefore, that the language choices that migrants are making in California affect language choices in San Lucas Quiaviní altering the stability of the domains of SLQZ use in the home community and compromising the long-term prospects of the language.

## 1.1 Rationale

The diversity among Mexico's indigenous languages makes for a complex scenario in which language endangerment cannot be defined solely by the absolute number of speakers or the rate at which children learn a language. Critical to a vitality assessment is the size of the minority in question (Wölck 2003). Mexico's 2000 Census reports 6,044,547 speakers of indigenous languages over age five which represents 6.2% of Mexico's population (INEGI 2000). This segment of the population includes numerous ethnicities and languages. Garza Cuarón and Lastra (1991) list 58 indigenous languages belonging to 16 language families, the 2000 Census lists 85 languages, the Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) lists 291 and the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (2008) lists 364 language varieties belonging to 68 language groups. The 6.2% of the population in question, therefore, comprises dozens of languages that are mutually unintelligible and often genetically unrelated. Mexico's linguistic minorities are dramatically small and facing the overwhelming dominance of Spanish, spoken almost universally in Mexico. In this context, it is no surprise that indigenous languages in Mexico are, in terms proposed by Grenoble and Whaley (2006: 18), "at risk" in the best case scenario or "disappearing" in the worst. An assessment of language endangerment in Mexico must take into consideration the small speaker bases that most of the country's indigenous languages have, especially as they are further reduced by contemporary migration trends.

The study of migration and language vitality in San Lucas Quiavini contributes to the understanding of migration as a threat to the survival prospects of numerous indigenous languages in Mexico and in Latin America in general. The geographic contiguity of the United States and Mexico, their shared nation-forming history and the trade and labor exchanges since the 1940s have led to a situation in which communities are divided between a community of origin and a sister community (or communities) in the United States. The 2000 US Population Census reports that 407,073 individuals self-identified as "Hispanic American Indian" – originally from an indigenous community in a predominantly Spanish-speaking country. This is likely a "minimum estimate" (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004: 283) that includes indigenous migrants from Guatemala and Mexico. With this in mind, it is evident that migration in numerous indigenous communities is sizable and must be considered as a crucial language endangerment factor. Hence the relevance of a study that considers the effects of migration on the vitality of a language, the impact of a reduction of the speaker base due to a sustained exodus, the process of community adaptation to changes in the language-community-space relationship by negotiating community cohesion across political borders, and the impact on language maintenance in the community of origin.

## 1.2 San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec and its transnational community of speakers

In keeping with the border sociolinguistics approach of this thematic issue, this article considers and studies both the community of origin in San Lucas and the diaspora community in Los Angeles. Levitt and Schiller (2004) advise that:

The lives of increasing numbers of individuals can no longer be understood by looking only at what goes on within national boundaries. Our analytical lens must necessarily broaden and deepen because migrants are often embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind. (Levitt and Schiller 2004: 1002)

SLQZ is considered here as a transnational language. The community has maintained the relation between the home and the immigrant communities through a variety of means including travel, telecommunications, visual documentation and mail parcels. Social events are carefully recorded through photography and, especially, video, and these media are then shipped from one community to the other. At the economic level, remittances are regularly sent from Los Angeles to San Lucas to finance the construction of homes and the development of businesses.

Furthermore, migration from San Lucas to Los Angeles is not always permanent, and it is common for migrants to return to San Lucas temporarily or permanently. Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between SLQ and the immigrant community thereby creating a transnational community that includes individuals who have lived in Los Angeles at some point in their lives, but who at the time of this research were living in San Lucas Quiaviní. Adequately accounting for these individuals is essential to this study. The greatest impact on SLQZ domains of use in San Lucas is the result of the presence in the hometown of children and adults who have lived in Los Angeles at one point or another.

## 1.3 Methods for surveying a transnational community

The methods used in the research presented here follow Wölck's (1985) tripartite model of sociolinguistic field research. At its core is a case study followed by a community profile, both based on participant observation and subsequent spot checks. The research included seven periods of fieldwork – five in San Lucas between 2002 and 2008 and two in Los Angeles (2007–2008). Two surveys were conducted, one in San Lucas with seven families with at least one member each who

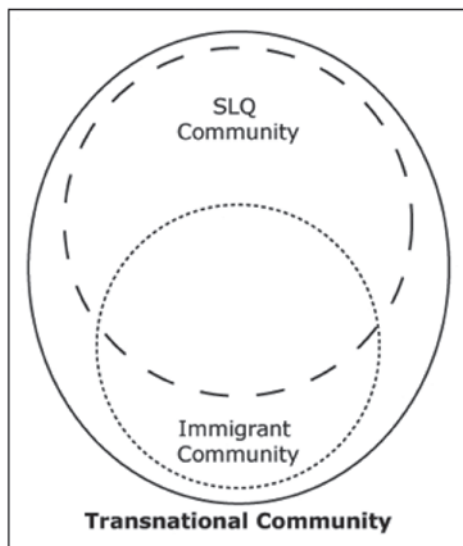


Fig. 1: The transnational community of SLQZ speakers

had emigrated to Los Angeles and returned to San Lucas, and one in Los Angeles with 19 families.

## 2 San Lucas Quiavini community profile

San Lucas Quiavini is located in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca (Figure 2). It is one of 25 *municipios* ‘municipalities’ of the *distrito* ‘administrative area’ of Tlacolula de Matamoros (Figure 3). In the most recent population count (INEGI 2010), San Lucas was reported to have a total of 1,745 inhabitants.

### 2.1 The San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec language

The term *Zapotec* refers to a complex family of languages of the Zapotecan branch of the Otomanguan stock of Mesoamerican languages. The diversity of the family has been recognized in numerous works summarized in Smith-Stark (2003). While there is no consensus as to the dialectal classification of Zapotec languages, there is broad agreement in that the label Zapotec should never be intended to refer to a single language or community.



Fig. 2: Map of the state of Oaxaca

SLQZ has VSO word order and a complex phonology, with four tones and four different vowel articulation types. It shares properties with other languages of the Tlacolula Valley but significant typological differences exist (Jones and Knudson 1977; Munro and López 1999; López Cruz 1997). While dialectology in the Valley of Tlacolula remains a topic of discussion, it is very much the case that a language such as SLQZ has unique structural characteristics shared only by its small community of speakers. This is of relevance to the present study because it renders the effects that migration is having on the vitality of SLQZ all the more damaging to the maintenance prospects of this unique language variety.

## 2.2 Language use in San Lucas Quiaviní

SLQZ is the primary language in San Lucas. Since 1995, the percentage of SLQZ speakers in San Lucas ages five and older has remained steady at around 98% with 15% monolingualism (INEGI 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010). Family interaction among San Lucas residents is almost exclusively in SLQZ. In interviews with seven families (October 2007), all interviewees confirmed that they speak SLQZ with family members, relatives and neighbors. Interviewees also confirmed my



**Fig. 3:** Map of the district of Tlacolula de Matamoros

observations that children are exposed from birth to and are socialized in SLQZ until they begin attending pre-school where Spanish is introduced. SLQZ is also the language of community interaction. All community matters are conducted in Zapotec, including the meetings of the *xtisy* ‘town council’.

Some 35 years ago, San Lucas was a community with close to 50% monolingualism. Bilingualism rates have increased dramatically and have been above 70% since 1995 in the population five years and older (INEGI 1995, 2000, 2005) with the most current estimate being at 73% (INEGI 2010). This increase can be traced back to the availability of Spanish-only education in San Lucas (Pérez Báez 2009). Spanish is a condition for access to health care in the local clinic. It is also used with non-SLQZ-speaking visitors and as *lingua franca* outside San Lucas with speakers of neighboring non-mutually intelligible Zapotec varieties. The language contact environment in San Lucas now includes English in addition to SLQZ and Spanish as a result of large-scale emigration to the United States.

### 3 Emigration to Los Angeles, California

The path of migration from San Lucas to Los Angeles was paved by three people from Tlacolula de Matamoros in 1965 who, once settled, assisted migrants from neighboring communities. The first man to migrate from SLQ to Los Angeles did so at the end of 1968 (Lopez and Runsten 2004). Two years later, he assisted two brothers and a brother-in-law. By the mid-1970s, some 80 people from San Lucas were living in Los Angeles (Lopez and Runsten 2004). Based on a San Lucas census count, by 1986, 58% of the population in San Lucas had a relative in the United States (Hardeman 1987). SLQ municipal records show that 60% of financial contributions received between 1994 and 1997 had been sent by men living and working in the Los Angeles area (Lopez and Munro 1999). This translates into an estimated 90% of the SLQ population having relatives in the United States. Lopez and Runsten (2004) further estimate that over 800 people from San Lucas reside in Los Angeles. Beyond these estimates, there are no census data to quantify the rate of emigration and the size of the Los Angeles community. Census data from Mexico do show that the San Lucas population is declining. A cumulative population decline of 19% is documented in San Lucas in the 1990–2010 period, with the decline between 2000 and 2005 being almost three-fold as compared to the 1990–1995 period (see Table 1).

#### 3.1 Participation in emigration by sex and age

Emigration from San Lucas was initiated by men and remains a journey undertaken primarily by men (Hulshof 1991; Lopez and Munro 1999). However, a decline in the San Lucas female population reflects increasing emigration among women (see Table 2). The increased migration of women to Los Angeles starting in the mid-1980s and intensifying in the late 1990s has allowed for families to reunite in Los Angeles – children are usually not left behind in San Lucas – and for new families to form.

**Table 1:** Population decline in San Lucas Quiavini

Year	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Total Population	2127	2156	2088	1941	1769	1745
Decline since previous count	–	–	3.2%	7.1%	8.9%	0.3%

Sources: Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010, Conteo de Población y Vivienda 1995 and 2005, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

**Table 2:** San Lucas Quiavini population figures

Year	Total Population	Male Population		Female Population	
1986	2230				
1990	2156	1055	48.9%	1106	51.2
1995	2088	971	46.5%	1117	53.5%
2000	1941	845	43%	1096	56.5%
2005	1769	763	43%	1006	56.8%
2010	1745	720	41%	1025	58.7%

Sources: Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1990, 2000 and 2010, Conteo de Población y Vivienda 1995 and 2005, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

**Table 3:** Population changes by age groups

Age groups	1990	2005	2010
0–4	223	124	108
5–9	296	163	162
10–14	263	204	175
15–19	250	179	190
20–24	169	140	113
25–29	189	79	108
30–34	148	105	87
35–39	129	95	97
40–44	90	108	87
45–49	85	91	110
50–54	83	96	101
55–59	59	43	82
60<	172	285	325

Sources: Archivo Histórico de Localidades, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (<http://geoweb.inegi.org.mx/AHL/realizaBusquedaurl.do?cvegeo=202330001> last accessed March 3, 2014). Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1990 and 2010, Conteo de Población y Vivienda 2005, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

Table 3 includes data from 1990 and 2005 as well as the most recent 2010 census. The age group 30–34 shows a significant population decline in San Lucas at 30% suggesting that this has been a group with high emigration rates. Similarly, the age groups 20–24 and 25–29 exhibit a significant decline, especially the latter between 1990 and 2005 with a decline of 58%. The age groups of children 9 years and younger have declined by a combined 52% since 1990. In other words, the San Lucas child population has decreased by half in the last 20 years. This suggests a correlation with the efforts by fathers to reunite their families in Los



Angeles and with high emigration rates in age groups whose members are of childbearing age and likely to raise families in Los Angeles rather than San Lucas.

Emigration rates by sex and age are of relevance to this study, which centers on the impact that the population decline in San Lucas has on the language maintenance prospects of its language. It follows to analyze, in Section 4, the language choices that emigrants from San Lucas make once in Los Angeles, which disfavor SLQZ and which are exported, so to speak, back to San Lucas.

## 4 Profile of the Los Angeles community

The immigrant community has found residence in the greater Los Angeles area, especially in West Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Culver City, Venice and the San Fernando Valley. Overall, the immigrant community has maintained elements of life in San Lucas such as living in extended families and playing basketball as a primary leisure activity. However, it is only recently that the immigrant community has engaged in replicating cultural activities originally from San Lucas. For instance, it is only in the last five to seven years that initiatives such as a children's music band and the celebration of the Patron Saint festivities have been carried out.

### 4.1 Language use in Los Angeles

Language use patterns as documented through 19 surveys conducted in Los Angeles in 2008, are summarized in Table 4. These show two clusters of 7 families. The first cluster labeled *Adult Maintenance – Partial Transmission* corresponds to cases where adults confidently address each other in SLQZ, considered to be the language of interaction among adult *buny San Luc* 'people from San Lucas' both in private and public settings. Within this pattern of language use, parents address their children in SLQZ and are engaged in language transmission. However, and as indicated in the *Child to Parent* and *Child to Child* columns, this is not resulting in active language use among children. In fact, with the exception of the older daughter of Family 13 who actively speaks SLQZ with her parents, all of the children in these families are passive bilinguals who choose to address their parents in Spanish or English.

Transmission that results in language reproduction was documented in three interviewed families listed in the *Maintenance* row where the common variable is that their children had significant socialization in San Lucas whether because of shuttle migration and long-term stays in San Lucas or because the families

**Table 4:** Use of SLQZ in the Los Angeles community

Patterns of SLQZ use (Maintenance to Shift)		Adult to Adult	Parent to Child	Child to Parent	Child to Child	Families exhibiting pattern
1	Maintenance	Y	Y	Y	Y	6, 10, 16
2	Adult Maintenance – Partial Transmission	Y	Y	N	N	7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 18
3	Adult Maintenance in Private Settings only – Partial Transmission	Y	Y	N	N	2
4	Adult Maintenance Only – No Transmission	Y	N	N	N	3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 15, 17
5	Minimal Adult Only Maintenance in Private – No Transmission	Y/N	N	N	N	1, 19
6	Total Language Shift	N	N	N	N	–

(families 10 and 16) arrived in Los Angeles in the last 10 years after their children had been socialized in San Lucas. Thus, only Family 13 has carried out transmission of SLQZ in Los Angeles that resulted in active bilingualism, and this, only in one of their two children. Otherwise, the patterns observed in the surveyed population suggest that no transmission that results in active bilingualism is taking place in Los Angeles among families headed by SLQZ-speaking parents.

The number of families who speak to their children in SLQZ is as large as the number of families who have chosen not to do so and are raising their children as Spanish-English bilinguals. This is seen in the cluster of seven families labeled *Adult Maintenance Only – No Transmission* whose children are Los Angeles-born. In these families, language maintenance occurs exclusively among adults and Parent-child interaction is in Spanish or English. In most of these families, children acquire passive knowledge of SLQZ by exposure to adult interaction in SLQZ but have little to no opportunity or motivation to develop any active use of the language (an assessment of language competency is explained in Pérez Báez 2009). The interview excerpt in (1) illustrates these patterns of language use and points to a decline in use of SLQZ among immigrants from San Lucas.

- (1) Q: I have noticed that a lot of people, once they have their children, they do not speak to them in Zapotec, they only speak to them in Spanish. Why do you think they do that?
- A: *Rrilya ti queity queity ru rcazdi ra mniny ygwe Dizhsa, nazh Ingles rgwe ra mniny. Ni negza xtada ra mniny rgwe Ingles.*  
 ‘I think because children don’t want to speak Zapotec, they only speak in English. That is why the children’s fathers speak English as well.’

## 5 The impact of migration on language use and attitudes in San Lucas Quiavini

Language shift is common in immigrant communities of speakers of what would constitute a minority language in the host community. Thus shift away from SLQZ described in Section 4 is, in and of itself, not unusual. The patterns of language shift that the community is experiencing, however, are noteworthy for two reasons. First, the community is shifting primarily to Spanish in California where Spanish is widely spoken and also heavily stigmatized. In 1986, English was established as the official language of the State of California by referendum. Subsequent legislation, however, has been adopted against the use of Spanish, including Proposition 277, which in 1998 banned bilingual education in California public schools. Zentella (1997) reports on the recurrence of public displays of disapproval towards the use of Spanish in the United States. There is therefore an interplay between prestige, stigma, place and community size worthy of dedicated attention. Second, the language shift patterns in the Los Angeles community are being *exported*, so to speak, to San Lucas Quiavini, given the close ties it maintains with the home community. It is this latter point that is of relevance to this study and the focus of the remainder of this article. Specifically, I refer to language use patterns in San Lucas (cf. Section 2.2) as they are affected by language choices in Los Angeles (cf. Section 4.1) and which are reproduced in San Lucas by visiting migrants.

### 5.1 Return migration and travel from Los Angeles to San Lucas

Patterns of migration between San Lucas and Los Angeles were initially characterized as patterns of return migration (Hulshof 1991). These patterns evolved and gave way to permanent immigration to the United States in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. This was especially the case of entire nuclear families that were raised in or emigrated to Los Angeles. Nevertheless, return migration as well as short term visits from Los Angeles to San Lucas, have remained a constant throughout the history of migration between the two locales. In 17 of the 19 surveyed Los Angeles families, instances of return to San Lucas of one or more members of the nuclear family whether for short or long-term stays, were documented. The only two couples that have not returned to San Lucas at all are of recent arrival having been in the US for less than six years. In both cases, however, close relatives of these two couples have returned to San Lucas at least once.

Return migration may be motivated by family pressures in San Lucas including the need to manage family land or live stock, cases of illness and

death, special occasions such as weddings, or men's interests in finding wives in San Lucas. Short visits of under a month in duration are also common especially towards the end of October when the Patron Saint celebration takes place. It should be noted that these visits entail a great deal of effort, financial burden and risk. Meeting these challenges in order to enable travel to San Lucas is indicative of the strong ties that exist between the home and the diaspora communities.

## 5.2 Language choices of migrants returning to San Lucas

The age group of migrants returning to San Lucas is a variable of relevance in understanding language choices when back in San Lucas. Adult returnees are expected to re-engage in the linguistic and cultural practices of the community and they generally do so with ease. Thus, adults will readily use SLQZ with relatives and community members. Adults who have learned English – usually men – may, however, be asked to speak English with San Lucas children who are often very interested in learning it. Young adult returnees conform much less to cultural and linguistic practices when back in San Lucas, than do older adults, and make public use of Spanish and English. All seven participants from San Lucas interviewed in October 2009 report that young adults, when back from Los Angeles, are often heard on the streets speaking to each other in English. The extent to which they speak English might be limited to colloquial expressions and curse words, but that may be sufficient to define them as a group of individuals who share the migration experience and to challenge the local dominance of SLQZ in community interaction.

Adults who bring children along during a visit to San Lucas will continue to speak with their children whatever language or languages they spoke in Los Angeles. Thus, the same patterns of use of SLQZ and/or Spanish listed in Table 4 (cf. Section 4.1) for parent-child and child-parent dyads tend to be replicated in San Lucas. This is illustrated in (2). To summarize, adults will conform to San Lucas linguistic practices, but young adults challenge them some and children are not held to the same expectations of conformity. Section 5.3 explains children's language use patterns in detail and discusses their consequences.

(2) Q: When you are in San Lucas, do you speak Spanish or just Zapotec?

A: *Xnana, cwèn ra xfamilia rgwinia Dizhsa, as ra zhinya nu gwelli Dizhsa nu gwel Dixtily.*

'My mother, with all of my family I speak Zapotec, with my children sometimes I speak Zapotec and sometimes Spanish.'

### 5.3 SLQ community response to children from Los Angeles

The presence of a Los Angeles child triggers patterns of accommodation on the part of San Lucas families and the community overall. Whether the child is a returnee or a visitor, there is an assumption that the LA-born and/or raised child is not a member of the San Lucas community and consequently is not expected to be an active speaker of SLQZ. Bilingual SLQZ-Spanish speaking relatives are therefore induced to accommodate to the child and address him or her in Spanish and little to no efforts are made to foster acquisition of SLQZ in the child. In the case of a child who is in San Lucas for an extended or indefinite stay, close relatives become engaged in socializing the child. This would be especially the case of monolingual SLQZ speakers such as grandparents who see an opportunity to develop stronger ties with the child. In addition, community children carry out SLQZ socialization even in the school context where Spanish is the medium of instruction.

As a result of the interaction between San Lucas families and Los Angeles children, Spanish is suddenly introduced into the family setting, which would otherwise be an SLQZ-only domain. A visiting child brings about a temporary introduction of Spanish into the SLQZ-domain. In the case of a child who is in San Lucas for an extended or indefinite stay, Spanish and sometimes English, become permanent features of the linguistic repertoire of the hosting family. Even when a child acquires SLQZ, certain family members – notably the child's parents – tend to continue to use Spanish and/or English with the child as illustrated in (3).

(3) *Nosotros le hablamos en español, su abuelita en dialecto, mi cuñado en inglés . . . [su mamá] le habla en los dos (español y zapoteco), [y yo] en los dos o en los tres.*

'We speak to her in Spanish, her grandmother speaks to her in Zapotec, my brother-in-law in English . . . [her mother] speaks to her in both (Spanish and Zapotec), [and I speak to her] in both, or in the three languages.'

### 5.4 The role of English

The preceding sections have made it clear that the contact situation in SLQZ now includes English in addition to Spanish. Saturday English classes are now offered in elementary school, and of course, English is present through the presence of migrants in San Lucas Quiavini. In this paper, however, the attention given to English is limited because the research so far has not provided any indication that

the role of English in San Lucas is unusual: at the moment, there is an interest among children in learning English much in the same way as English has become a desirable language to learn around the world. This interest is unlikely to constitute a threat to the vitality of the local language and any shift away from SLQZ in San Lucas is unlikely to be in the direction of English. In other words, the shift to English that is indeed occurring in the migrant community in Los Angeles does not appear to have a negative impact in the sustained use of SLQZ in San Lucas, as the shift to Spanish does. The role of English in the linguistic environment of San Lucas migrants in Los Angeles does present very interesting research issues. However, these are outside the scope of this article and will be the subject of a future article.

## 6 Language endangerment in a transnational context

To summarize, a decrease in intergenerational transfer of the language in Los Angeles is motivating language shift in San Lucas, as if the interruption in language reproduction were originating in San Lucas itself. SLQZ families hosting children from Los Angeles see their linguistic environment radically altered. Spanish, and sometimes also English, are introduced into the home domain thereby inducing hosting relatives to shift away from SLQZ, a behavior that would otherwise not occur in San Lucas homes and has not occurred much despite 500 years of colonization and over 30 years of Spanish-only education. As a consequence the relevance of SLQZ in its own community is compromised by the fact that Spanish has become a condition for community members to have adequate communication with children born and/or raised in Los Angeles.

It follows to analyze the case of SLQZ in the context of bilingualism models of language maintenance or endangerment. In Fishman's (1972) proposed model of stable bilingualism, a minority language benefits from having a domain of use that is separate from and exclusive of the majority language. Up until large scale emigration developed in San Lucas, the maintenance of SLQZ had been characterized by a clear division of the domains of use of SLQZ vs. Spanish: family and community interaction were conducted in SLQZ, while Spanish was limited to school instruction and interaction with some outsiders, in a form of stable bilingualism. However, this may be changing as the community of speakers of SLQZ becomes increasingly bilingual and as the domains of use of SLQZ are increasingly opened to Spanish. Following Fishman's model, we would expect that the change in the distribution of domains of use in San Lucas that this article

describes – notably the home domain opening up to Spanish – will lead to marked language shift and language endangerment.

Wölck (2003) states, following his research on Quechua, that the fact that domains of Spanish use became incorporated into the Quechua domains to become shared domains, offset the decrease in monolingualism among Quechua speakers. However, insertion of one language into the domain of another in the Quechua case is in the direction of the minority language entering the majority language domain. In the case of SLQZ, the direction of this movement is reversed and it is the majority language (or languages in cases where English is part of the language repertoire) that is entering a domain previously reserved for Zapotec. Therefore, maintenance of SLQZ is an unlikely outcome of a ‘co-existent’ (Wölck 2003: 34) form of bilingualism.

## 7 Conclusion

The case of SLQZ and its transnational community of speakers is one in which an assessment of language vitality that considers the home community only, would lead to an incorrect evaluation. SLQZ is dominant in family and community interactions. These variables in isolation would suggest that SLQZ is at risk given its small number of speakers, but remains vital and with well-established domains of use. However, the analysis presented in this article considers the migration trends that the community has seen over the last 40 years, and yields a much less optimistic assessment of the long-term prospects of the local language. The child speaker base of SLQZ has been dramatically reduced as children of SLQ parents emigrate to or are born in Los Angeles. This is especially so as adults of child-bearing age emigrate, marry and have children in Los Angeles who do not grow up as active SLQZ speakers. Further, the domains of use of SLQZ in San Lucas itself are increasingly compromised by the introduction of Spanish and sometimes English in family and community interaction by children visiting or returning from Los Angeles.

What was a small but stable speaker base of SLQZ has been significantly reduced through migration, especially in the younger age groups. With less children growing up in San Lucas as speakers of the local language, each Los Angeles child present in San Lucas is a powerful agent of language shift and has an exponentially greater impact on the vitality of SLQZ. These signs of language endangerment among speakers of San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec become very evident in a sociolinguistic analysis that crosses borders and considers the community of speakers as transnational. This research approach is relevant to numerous other indigenous languages with small speech communities dispersed and reduced

due to migration, notably in cases where the distance between the home and the immigrant communities enables frequent and sustained contact.

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