Community-engaged research for the promotion of immigrant indigenous languages in the U.S. Southeast

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ABSTRACT

Languages (IILs) in the U.S., much remains unknown regarding their visibility and the different efforts that can be made to promote their maintenance in their respective immigrant communities. In this paper, we showcase three different, but related, community-engaged research projects inspired by the Participatory Action Research (PAR) model that explore the presence of different IILs in the U.S. Southeast. Three recent and ongoing projects have analyzed the presence of IILs and the needs their speakers face to maintain and promote their languages in immigration settings in the U.S. Southeast in a rural, suburban and urban area. These three case studies highlight the interest of IIL speakers in the preservation and promotion of these languages in their respective settings while also raising awareness of their presence within the immigrant community. Despite the differences observed in all these studies, there are some commonalities: all three projects highlight the importance of raising awareness of IILs in immigrant settings and the lack of data that exists with regards to the presence of IILs in the U.S. Also, the suburban area project exemplifies how community-centered research can be a fruitful tool for IIL speakers to maintain their first language and to create materials that are beneficial to the community as exemplified through the creation of a multilingual visual dictionary for children, following the needs expressed by members of the community. These experiences serve as examples of community-centered research projects that can be adapted to other areas with a significant presence of immigrant minorized languages in order to raise awareness of and promote their use among immigrant communities.

RESUMEN

A pesar del creciente interés reciente en el estudio de las Lenguas Indígenas de Inmigrantes (LIIs) en EE.UU., existe todavía mucho desconocimiento sobre su visibilidad y los diferentes esfuerzos que se pueden hacer para promover su mantenimiento en sus respectivas comunidades inmigrantes. En este documento, mostramos tres proyectos de investigación comunitaria diferentes pero relacionados, inspirados en el modelo de Investigación Acción Participativa, que exploran la presencia de diferentes LIIs en el sureste de EE.UU. Tres proyectos recientes han analizado la presencia de LIIs y las necesidades a las que se enfrentan sus hablantes para mantener y promover sus lenguas en entornos de inmigración en el sureste de EE.UU. en áreas rurales, suburbanas y urbanas. Estos tres estudios resaltan el interés de los hablantes de LIIs para la preservación y promoción de estas lenguas en sus respectivas comunidades, al mismo tiempo que crean conciencia sobre su presencia dentro de la comunidad inmigrante. A pesar de las diferencias observadas en estos estudios, hay algunas similitudes: los tres proyectos resaltan la importancia de crear conciencia sobre las LIIs en entornos de inmigrantes y la falta de datos existentes sobre su presencia en EE.UU. Además, el proyecto del área suburbana ejemplifica cómo la investigación centrada en la comunidad puede ser una herramienta fructífera para que los hablantes de LIIs puedan mantener su lengua materna y se puedan crear materiales beneficiosos para la comunidad, como un diccionario visual multilingüe para niños, de acuerdo con las necesidades expresadas por miembros de la comunidad. Estas experiencias sirven como ejemplos de proyectos de investigación centrados en la comunidad que pueden adaptarse a otras áreas con una presencia significativa de lenguas inmigrantes minorizadas para crear conciencia y promover su uso entre las comunidades inmigrantes.

1. INTRODUCTION

'*Saqirik! Jun rutzil iwach. La utz iwach?* In response to the K'iche' greetings from one of the non-native speaking authors, two young Indigenous[1] language speakers nervously giggled in the audience. To hear an Indigenous language from Latin America being spoken publicly in the community is uncommon, but to hear K'iche' within the school setting in the United States particularly struck these young girls as strange. This is due to the fact that Immigrant Indigenous Languages (hereafter, IILs) spoken by immigrants from Latin America remain largely invisible in the U.S. and, if acknowledged,

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, we utilize the term Indigenous with a capital "I" as a sign of respect for the Indigenous persons who we worked with and their languages, which we discuss here.

are often overlooked across the country. Although there are a few recent studies regarding the presence of IILs in the U.S. (Campbell-Montalvo, 2021; Martinez et al., 2021; Pérez Báez et al., 2022), much remains unknown about IILs in various regions of the country, especially in the Southeast.

In this paper, we analyze three independent but related studies exploring different efforts in awareness-raising and promotion of IILs in three separate areas (rural, suburban and metropolitan) of the United States Southeast and the research methodology employed in each case.

For the purposes of this article, we define IILs as languages spoken indigenously in the homelands of the language community, as well as by a sister community in the United States. The IILs analyzed in this paper are Indigenous languages primarily from Mexico and Guatemala which are also spoken in sister communities in the United States.

It is worth noting that Spanish is a dominant language in both Mexico and Guatemala. For this reason, and also for the sake of clarity and economy, we refer to these (Mesoamerican) communities maintaining the US Census terminology of 'Hispanic'. We acknowledge and recognize, though, that speakers of IILs may not consider themselves Hispanic.

1.1 MOTIVATION

The motivation for this study is threefold. First, we recognize the need to showcase the presence of IILs in different Hispanic communities in the U.S. Southeast. Second, we believe there is a need to raise awareness about the presence of IILs hidden within this immigration setting, as in many cases these languages remain 'invisible' both within the immigrant Hispanic community and within the national community at large. And third, we recognize the importance of promoting the use of IILs in immigrant settings by responding to the speakers' linguistic needs, always within a community-centered research methodology.

1.2 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

All three studies analyzed here share common ground regarding the research methodology employed in the promotion efforts of IILs. In all three cases, researchers followed the general guidelines of a Participatory Action Research (or PAR) model. As outlined in Benedicto et al. (2007), PAR is a methodological approach used in linguistic research (as well as in other disciplines) that advocates for an egalitarian relationship between the external researcher(s) (in this case, linguists) and the members of the community being studied. This research model is based on two main aspects: the active participation of the members of the community, so they are engaged in the discovery process; and the establishment of a balance of power between the researchers and the participants through the (self-)empowering of the members of the language community. Crucially, the main tenet

within the PAR approach is the acknowledgement that both the members of the speaking community and the researcher(s) hold (different) knowledge systems of equal value.

In accordance with these main principles of PAR, all outcomes in the research process must have a positive impact for the speaking community, without prioritizing the potential needs of the researcher(s).

1.3 GOALS

In response to the motivation and needs outlined in Section 1.1. above, the goals of this paper are as follows: first, to shed light on the presence of different IILs in three areas of the U.S. Southeast; second, to present the outcomes of the three separate but connected studies on IILs awareness raising and promotion in these three areas; and finally, to analyze the benefits and limitations of the implementation of research methodology based on the PAR approach in the promotion of IILs in the three regions under study.

In order to provide an answer to these goals, we put forth the following research questions (RQs):

(1)   RQ1:   What IILs are present in the three communities of study?

RQ2:   What are the identified linguistic needs and wants of the members of the different IIL speaking communities in their respective immigrant settings?

RQ3:   What are the outcomes obtained in the three different studies?

RQ4:   What are the challenges observed in the implementation of a PAR-based approach in the promotion of IILs in these three communities of study?

1.4 METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research questions listed above, the authors identified three projects in three different demographic settings in the U.S. Southeast to study the presence of IILs in these areas and the impacts of the different promotion strategies to visualize these underrepresented languages. In all three studies, the authors followed similar methodologies, which were based on the main tenets of the PAR approach. To summarize, the authors identified different communities and presented a questionnaire to participants to indicate their first language and their language use in their immigration settings in the US. Once the different languages had been identified, researchers and participants established the linguistic needs in each community and set the goals and tools that would best serve them in an effort to raise awareness about their languages and to promote and foster their use in immigration settings. Finally, in subsequent meetings, and in accordance with the working

methodology presented in the PAR approach, researchers and participants continued to elaborate and reshape the goals and outcomes for each project.

1.5 PAPER OUTLINE

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we present an overview of the linguistic variation of the three regions of the U.S. Southeast that were the object of study with a focus on the presence of IILs in these areas. In Section 3, we present a detailed analysis of the three studies in a rural, suburban and urban area in the Southeast, shedding light on the outcomes obtained in each case and presenting the different challenges observed in the implementation of a community-centered approach. Section 4 presents a more in-depth discussion of the results observed in each case, and the common benefits and limitations of the use of a community-centered approach in the efforts to raise awareness and promote the use of IILs in immigrant settings. Finally, in Section 5, we summarize the main results of the paper and present some issues for further research and discussion.

2. IILs IN THE U.S. SOUTHEAST

In this section, we present an overview of the linguistic variation in four states within the Southeastern U.S. where the different immigrant communities under study are located. As of 2020, 21.5% of U.S. residents over the age of 5 years old speak a language "other than English" at home, representing more than 66 million individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The American Community Survey breaks down languages "other than English" into four categories including "Spanish," "Other-Indo European Languages," "Asian and Pacific Island Languages" and, once again, "Other Languages." Spanish has consistently comprised the largest category of speakers of languages "other than English" over the previous decade, remaining at approximately 12% of the total number of U.S. residents from 2010 to 2020. In contrast, the "Other Languages" category has consistently been the smallest, rising from .08% of the total in 2010 to 1.1.% in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). However, this percentage still accounts for nearly 3.5 million individuals across the United States, and yet, there is a lack of detailed information on the "other languages" that these millions of people speak (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

In 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report on the languages spoken at home for individuals five or older from 2009 to 2013. Under the "Other and Unspecified Languages" category, there are ten Indigenous language families from Latin America represented, as illustrated in Table 1 below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). However, the data are incomplete: for instance, there are no specific languages indicated and only the language families are reported. If we look at the example of the Mayan language family, Aissen et al. (2017) report that there are 32 different languages in this

language family alone; yet, in Table 1, there is no detailed information about which of these 32 Mayan languages are actively spoken in the United States.

Other and Unspecified Languages	Number of Speakers	Margin of Error
Aztecan	720	267
Misumalpan	95	78
Mayan	7,650	1,273
Tarascan	60	54
Mapuche	210	267
Oto-Manguean	5,100	1,161
Quechua	1,300	465
Arawakan	3,150	765
Chibchan	1,095	515
Tupi-Guarani	245	102
Total	19,625	4,947
Uncodable	6,760	571

Table 1: Detailed Languages Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over for United States: 2009-2013

In total, the census data state that there are only 19,625 speakers of IILs from Latin America across the entirety of the United States, with a margin of error of 25% (US Census Bureau, 2015). Additionally, knowing that many IIL speakers from Latin America are often hidden within the larger Hispanic community, it should be noted that many of the Spanish speaking individuals could also qualify as IIL speakers, whose Indigenous languages are not included in these data. Similarly, IILs could possibly

be hidden within the category of the more than 6,000 speakers of "uncodable" languages (US Census Bureau, 2015).

A similar data trend is reflected on a smaller scale in state language data in the U.S. Southeast in terms of lack of specificity and low numbers of IILs. Not only is the same vague terminology used such as "languages other than English" and "unspecified languages," but the number of IIL speakers appears to be very low. In order to maintain anonymity of the studies' participants, we analyze the linguistic data in four states in the U.S. Southeast including North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee, recognizing that the three case studies took place in distinctive areas within this region including a rural, suburban and urban area.

North Carolina is one of the larger states in the Southeastern U.S. in terms of population with more than 10,000,000 residents. More than 12% of North Carolina's population speaks a language "other than English" at home, representing more than one million people (US Census Bureau, 2021b; Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2022b). However, Indigenous language data for North Carolina demonstrate that there are 2,470 speakers of "native languages of North America" and 4,218 speakers of "unspecified languages" (MPI 2022b). Although some studies have shed light on the fact that there are indeed IILs in North Carolina (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004), it should be noted that in this state, there is a significant population of Cherokee speakers, so it is difficult to determine from the Census data above how many of the speakers of native languages of North America would represent IIL speakers and how many represent Indigenous languages of the United States.

Georgia, the state with the largest population of the four included in this analysis, has a population of 10,912,876 residents, and 14.4% of this population over the age of five speaks a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a; MPI 2022a). Georgia identifies 1,288 speakers of native languages of North America and a startling 12,933 speakers of "unspecified languages" (MPI 2022a).

In South Carolina, which is the study's smallest state in terms of population, approximately 7.6% of the population speaks a language "other than English" at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021c; MPI 2022c). A total of 434 individuals are identified as speakers of native languages of North America, which is significantly lower than the other states included in this study, and there are more than 3,500 speakers of "unspecified languages" (MPI 2022c).

Lastly, Tennessee has the smallest percentage of residents who speak a language "other than English" at home with 7.5% in its population of 7,051,339 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021d; MPI 2022d). This state identifies 1,176 speakers of native languages of North America and 3,513 unspecified languages (MPI 2022d). This information is summarized in Table 2 below.

U.S. State	Total Population	Percentage of Speakers of Languages "Other Than English"[11]	Number of Speakers of Native Languages of North America	Unspecified Languages
North Carolina	10,698,973	12.4%	2,470	4,218
Georgia	10,912,876	14.4%	1,288	12,933
South Carolina	5,282,634	7.6%	434	3,848
Tennessee	7,051,339	7.5%	1,176	3,513

Table 2: State Populations and Linguistic Data Regarding Speakers of Non-English Languages

Overall, what the national and state linguistic data demonstrate is a lack of information on the presence of IIL speakers. A significant percentage of the immigrant Indigenous language speaking population in the United States, as found in these three case studies, are from Mexico and Guatemala. Both countries have significant numbers of Indigenous persons. In Mexico, 15.1% of the population, representing 17 million people, are Indigenous, and Guatemala has Latin America's second largest Indigenous population in terms of percentage of its whole country (41%) with 5.9 million Indigenous persons (CEPAL, 2014).

These two nations have continued to comprise a large portion of the United States' foreign-born population of 44.8 million individuals (Budiman, 2020). As of 2021, there were 1,107,000 Guatemalan immigrants in the United States (Ward & Batalova, 2023). As of 2021, there were 10,687,000 immigrants from Mexico in the United States; even with the overall decline in Mexican immigration over the past several years, Mexico remains the "top sending origin country" of U.S. immigrants (Rosenbloom & Batalova, 2022; Budiman, 2020).

With such a significant number of immigrants in the United States from Mexico and Guatemala, two countries with large Indigenous populations and consequently significant numbers of Indigenous languages, it arguably follows that there should be a growing presence of Indigenous languages

spoken in the U.S. from Latin America. However, we find IIL speakers and their languages to be underrepresented in the data with limited detail on the IIL languages that are represented. For this very reason, this methodology for developing community-based projects to identify, promote and create more visibility for IIL speakers is necessary.

In Section 3, we will discuss the three case studies in depth, which took place in a rural, suburban and urban area respectively, to demonstrate the significant presence of IILs specifically in the U.S. Southeast.

3. THREE CASE STUDIES IN THE U.S. SOUTHEAST

In this section, we present the main results of three separate but related case studies in three different areas—rural, suburban and urban—in three different states within the U.S. Southeast. For each case, we outline the different IILs identified, the linguistic needs expressed by the members of the community, as well as the outcomes and challenges observed for each case. These cases are presented chronologically.

3.1 CASE STUDY #1: A RURAL CASE

The first case study, which started in mid 2010 and lasted until May 2011, was centered around a rural town in the Southeastern U.S. In this coastal plain area, there is a significant population of migrant workers, most of whom come from Mexico and Guatemala (Ortega, 2010). This project in particular originated through different contacts with members of the Hispanic community, and, although other, different IILs are present in the area, speakers of two linguistically unrelated IILs volunteered to take part in the project. These languages are presented in Table 3 below.

Language Family	Languages Identified
Mayan	Tzotzil
Oto-Manguean	Hñähñü (Otomí)

Table 3. IILs Identified in Case Study #1

3.1.1 IDENTIFIED LINGUISTIC NEEDS

Through different individual and joint meetings maintained in the initial stages of the project with the speakers of these IILs, both external researchers and members of the community identified several needs related to the visualization, maintenance, and promotion of their respective IILs. Three of these

linguistic needs involved the creation of useful materials in their native Indigenous languages, which were as follows: i. creation of a basic dictionary, which would include core terms in both IILs, as well as in Spanish and English; ii. collection of traditional folktales to pass along to younger generations; and iii. production of a medical glossary as a tool to bring to doctor visits.

Additionally, the members of the extended community (which also included non-IIL speakers) expressed the need to establish an ESL program, as a necessary tool to progress in their immigration setting.

3.1.2 OUTCOMES

After several months of collaborative efforts, the team produced two different outcomes that partially addressed the linguistic needs expressed above. The first outcome was the creation of a basic trilingual dictionary, which included some core terminology in Hñähñü and Tzotzil, along with their equivalences in English and Spanish. As part of the continuous re-evaluation of the goals and objectives of the project in accordance to the PAR approach (see Section 1.4. above), the second outcome represented a change from one of the previously identified linguistic needs: the members of the team decided that instead of collecting traditional folktales, it would be best to create a collection of traditional recipes, collected in their respective Indigenous languages.

For the purposes of this study, and in concordance with the tenets of the PAR model that inspired this research, all physical outcomes, including field notes, glossaries, and initial collection of recipes, were kept by the participants. Therefore, and given the migratory nature of the community, these documents are no longer accessible by the authors of this paper.

Finally, a six-month ESL program was also established, which was funded by a research grant from a local university. Once a week, a student from the funding university met with members of the Hispanic immigrant community, which included IIL and non-IIL speakers, to offer basic English language classes.

3.1.3 CHALLENGES

As it can be noted from the previous subsections, there is an obvious mismatch between the original linguistic needs that were identified at the beginning of the project and the final outcomes produced. Such disparity can be explained through the different challenges observed during the project. The different origins of the members of these communities led to different levels of literacy, which resulted in different priorities regarding the linguistic needs initially identified. Additionally, the IILs in this study came from a diverse range of communities in their home countries. As noted by Ortega (2010) and Viñas-de-Puig (2013), speakers of IILs who come from separate immigrant communities are users of different languages, without any shared IIL; this fact also has an impact in

the decision-making process and the application of the needs and goals of the project. Also, given the nature of the working conditions of the members of the immigrant community, the members of the team expressed an irregular availability to participate, which also had repercussions on the progress of the project. Finally, and possibly the most important factor that created difficulties to reach of the goals commonly decided at the beginning of the project, IIL speakers (and the rest of the members) of these communities in this rural county were migrant workers, who followed the different harvest seasons along the eastern seaboard of the United States. This eventually resulted in the almost sudden 'disappearance' of the IIL participants, which resulted in an initial halt of the project that led to its eventual cancellation.

3.2   CASE STUDY #2: A SUBURBAN CASE

The second case study took place in a suburban area within the Southeastern U.S. from August of 2019 to May of 2020. This particular area is well known for tourism, but what is typically not imparted upon tourists is the presence of a lively and large Hispanic community as well as a sizable migrant population in which we identified a significant number of IILs.

Utilizing a language use questionnaire, 15 speakers of IILs in this area were interviewed about their language use. Another 25 speakers of IILs within this suburban area of study identified themselves as speakers of a variety of Indigenous languages from Latin America but were not interviewed. Participants were identified in-person through the state's Migrant Education Program and local organizations that work with the area's Hispanic community. Another set of study participants were contacted online through a Facebook group for Hispanics living in the surrounding area. In total, 14 languages were identified from six distinct language families. See Table 4 below.

A quick note is relevant at this point. All the languages indicated in Table 4 above are listed as expressed by the speakers who took part in the study. As pointed out by a reviewer to an earlier version of the paper, some of the languages indicated above (such as Mixteco) are in fact macro-languages which encompass several, and not always mutually intelligible, varieties. Although we do recognize that fact, we wanted to maintain the terminology used by the participants.

3.2.1 IDENTIFIED LINGUISTIC NEEDS

Through in-depth interviews and a linguistic survey, participants identified three specific linguistic needs. The first need repeatedly acknowledged by interviewees was access to interpretation services, specifically for their IILs. A total of 20% of interviewees "spoke little to no Spanish" before arriving in the United States, (Crow, 2020, p. 162). Facing a double language barrier, these individuals learn Spanish to "acculturate" into the Hispanic communities where they tend to settle and English to incorporate themselves into larger U.S. society. Therefore, providing access to Spanish interpretation

for IIL speakers does not necessarily imply understanding, as a native Indigenous language speaker may still be in the process of learning Spanish. Instead, interviewees expressed a need for native-language interpretation in their IILs rather than interpretation in what is commonly their second language—Spanish.

Language Family	Languages Identified*
Mixe-Zoque	Olmeca
Quechuan	Quechua
Uto-Aztecan	Nahuatl
Mayan	K'iche', Kakchiquel, Mam, Popti', Q'anjob'al, Tzotzil, Unidentified Variant
Oto-Manguean	Mazateco, Mixteco, Triqui, Chatino

Table 4. IILs Identified in Case Study #2

*As identified by the speaker

The second need identified was linguistic preservation across generations. Interviewees, most of whom are parents, indicated that it is challenging to pass their Indigenous language onto their children for a variety of reasons. Interviewees voiced the difficulty of maintaining Spanish in the household while their children learn English at school; such parents aim to preserve their child's bilingualism in English and Spanish first and foremost because they see these two languages as the most beneficial for their child's future in the United States over their family's IIL. Other families may have parents who speak two different Indigenous languages, resulting in complications when it comes to teaching both of those languages to their children. Rather than attempt to choose one over the other or teach both, these parents may opt to not teach either language.

The third need expressed was access to opportunities to express cultural traditions. Interviewees expressed a certain sadness at their inability to connect with other speakers of their Indigenous language and participate in cultural activities like holidays or festivals. One interviewee expressed such sentiments by saying, '*A veces me siento sola*' ('*Sometimes I feel alone.*', our translation) This

was particularly important for the women who were interviewed, who longed to wear their traditional Indigenous clothing but were either fearful to do so or did not have access to such clothing due to the lofty prices for traditional garments such as *cortes* and *huipiles* in the United States.

3.2.2 OUTCOMES

The outcomes of this research were two-fold. The first included an extensive survey of IILs in this suburban area. This relatively concise study with a sample size of 40 participants revealed 14 distinct IILs that are actively spoken in the suburban area of study. In accordance with the Participatory Action Research Model, the second research outcome was the creation of a children's visual dictionary in the eight IILs spoken by the 15 interviewees (see Figure 1 below). This dictionary was created in response to the interviewees' need for linguistic preservation of their languages across generations and was developed with the input of the speakers themselves. The book includes eight categories including colors, animals, family members, food, basic actions, body parts, numbers and nature. The purpose of the book is to facilitate conversations between parents and children about their Indigenous language(s) and encourage their children's interest in their parents' native language(s). All participants received a copy of the book, and all the community organizations involved in the project received copies to share with IIL speaking families they work with now and will encounter in the future. Participants have since expressed contentment regarding the multilingual dictionary and have indicated that they have indeed used the book to share their Indigenous language with their child(ren).

Figure 1. Children's Visual Dictionary Sample Page

3.2.3 CHALLENGES

There is limited research on IILs spoken in the United States, and this may be as a result of some of the challenges faced in these case studies. One of the greatest challenges to this project was accessing IIL speakers. Finding the study's participants required extensive networking throughout the

community of study, specifically with organizations that work within the Hispanic community. This involved years of relationship building. Additionally, building trust with participants in such a limited amount of time presented a significant challenge, especially considering the extensive history of discrimination against Indigenous language speakers throughout the Americas and fear of revealing documentation status. Preserving anonymity was key to building trust with participants.

3.3 CASE STUDY #3: AN URBAN CASE

The third and final case study was completed as part of a master's thesis from July of 2022 to April 2023. The study was based in a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States. Much like the second case study, this area is a popular tourist destination but is not well known for its expansive immigrant and refugee community.

In contrast to the two aforementioned case studies, this research was with IIL-speaking middle school and high school students. This case study specifically focused on newcomer students in the city's public schools and worked directly within a sheltered program for English Language Learners (ELLs) designed to support such students' transition to U.S. schools for one year. Students who qualify for this program have limited English proficiency and previously experienced serious interruptions in their education of two years or more (e.g., Bridges to Academic Success, 2019, p. 8). Through classroom observations, formal interviews with educators and focus groups with IIL speaking students, 17 IILs from the Mayan, Arawakan, and Zapotecan language families were identified. These are illustrated in Table 5 below.

Language Family	Language(s) Identified
Arawakan	Garífuna
Mayan	Achi', Chuj, K'iche', Mam, Q'eqchi'
Oto-Manguean	Chatino

Table 5. IILs Identified in Case Study #3

3.3.1 IDENTIFIED LINGUISTIC NEEDS

For this project, various linguistic needs were identified through both student focus groups and interviews with the students' educators. While the students were the central focus of this study, the students' teachers, none of whom are speakers of Indigenous languages, spend a significant portion of their time with the students each week and have a unique understanding of the students' educational experiences and their linguistic needs. In accordance with PAR, the discussions held within the focus groups were student-led, and while the principal investigator prepared questions to ask the students relating to their educational experience in the case of long silences, any topics addressed by the students became the focus of the conversation. In addition, students were asked to complete a "language pie" by writing their language(s) in the center and any words, drawings or symbols they associate with their language(s) in the surrounding pie slices (see Figure 2 below).
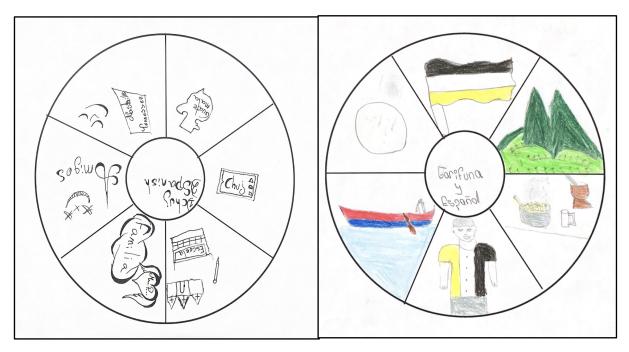

Figure 2. Two Language Pies Completed By Student Participants*

*IRB information was removed from Language Pie worksheets for anonymity purposes. Documents were IRB approved on September 7, 2022.

It is important to note that the student participants in this study did not express uniform needs; rather, these linguistic needs are dependent upon whether the students desire to continue speaking their Indigenous language(s) (to any degree) and their present circumstances in the United States. Many students in this study are unaccompanied minors, living with older siblings, relatives or family friends. A significant number of students indicated the importance of their grandparents as transmitters

of their Indigenous language(s), but the majority of the students' grandparents continue to live in Central America. While some students were living with their grandparents in their home countries, their only access to their grandparents in the U.S. is through limited WhatsApp phone calls, voice notes and video calls. As a result, several students indicated a loss of Indigenous language proficiency as well as a lack of individuals to speak their Indigenous languages within the U.S. While each student maintained different priorities, some students did explicitly indicate the importance of preserving their Indigenous language(s) and continuing to speak such language(s) in the U.S. Although he expressed limited opportunities to speak his native language, Chuj, since he had immigrated to the U.S., one student indicated: 'Chuj, yo lo sé cien por ciento. A mí no se me olvido alguna cosa' ('Chuj, I know it one hundred percent. I do not forget anything.', our translation.)

Finally, access to Spanish interpretation is not sufficient for students who have begun learning Spanish upon their arrival in the United States and may still speak Spanish at a beginner level, creating potential difficulties in class, important school communications, parent-teacher conferences and other school events. The district's newest interpretation service does include a few IILs, but it remains limited in the scope of the diversity of IILs present in local schools.

3.3.2 OUTCOMES

While the outcomes of the urban study were not tangible products such as in the case of the rural and suburban case study, this particular project did result in an increased awareness of the presence of IILs within the school district. Following the completion of the project, a presentation was given to teachers (both those interviewed and not) as well as other district staff on the diversity of IILs in the district and IIL speaking student experiences–both positive and negative. The responses to this presentation were positive, encouraging discussion among changemakers within the school district about what can be done in the future to better support IIL speakers. Furthermore, the student focus groups held within this research provided students with spaces to share their own experiences, connect with other speakers of IILs and express pride in their ability to speak their Indigenous language(s).

3.3.3 CHALLENGES

Just as many immigrant Indigenous language speakers are often hidden within the larger Hispanic community, IIL speaking students are commonly "Latinized" within the school system and over-generalized as solely Spanish-speakers (cf., Campbell-Montalvo, 2021, p. 53; Crow, 2023). As a result, the school district data on IILs is practically non-existent and inaccurate, which created challenges in identifying IIL speaking students for this study. Furthermore, because the large majority of these students are under 18 years of age, the process to obtain access to the classrooms and create focus

groups with students was extensive. A significant barrier to research was the required signed consent forms from the students' parents or guardians for their participation in the focus groups. While the aim was to protect students, this process assumes that all parents/guardians are literate. However, due to educational interruptions, discrimination against Indigenous languages and the lack of effectiveness of Guatemala's Bilingual Education system, many Indigenous guardians or parents are not literate in their first language, Spanish or English.

4. DISCUSSION

As indicated in the introductory section of the paper, the three projects outlined in Section 3 were conducted using the principal guidelines of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Ideally, according to the PAR model, both members of the (speaking) community and external researchers join the project providing knowledge systems of equal value and collaborate in all the processes of the research project, from the joint decision of goals to the creation of tangible outcomes and products. In this section we summarize the common challenges and outcomes of the three projects and provide a comparison with an ideal application of the PAR model.

4.1 COMMON CHALLENGES

In the initial discussions with the members of the IIL speaking communities in all three areas under study, participants identified the preservation of their respective languages as one of the main linguistic needs for the project. However, in each case we observed and experienced different challenges based on the characteristics of each community. One of the most important challenges observed had to do with the access to the different communities of IIL speakers. Given the migrant nature of the Hispanic communities in both the rural and suburban case studies, it became difficult at times to establish regular meeting times to work on the goal-decision and outcome-creation processes of each project. This challenge ultimately resulted in a deviation from an ideal application of the PAR model, as it limited the true collaboration between speakers and external researchers during all stages of the language revitalization and promotion efforts.

Another challenge observed in all three areas is related to the multilingual nature of the immigrant communities where IIL speakers are found. As indicated in Section 3, all IIL speakers who participated in the three separate projects live within the larger Hispanic immigrant community. In such a community, Spanish is the lingua franca (as hinted at in Section 2), and the individual IILs become invisible not only to the community at large but also within the most immediate Hispanic community. Obviously, this presents a challenge for external researchers when trying to identify the different languages spoken in the community, and also for IIL speakers when trying to naturally use their respective languages. Additionally, for the purposes of each of these studies, Spanish was also utilized

as the lingua franca in order to conduct interviews, focus groups and connect with IIL speakers. In an ideal research environment, such research would have been conducted in each participant's respective Indigenous language.

Additionally, these studies further demonstrate the lack of data regarding the presence of Indigenous language speakers in the U.S. As an example, in the urban study identified above, within the small sample size of students (17), the students interviewed spoke eight different Indigenous languages. However, data from this southeastern school district indicates that there have only ever been three speakers of Mayan languages in the program over the previous two decades, not indicating which languages those are. Much work is left to be done in order to create a body of accurate data regarding the presence of IILs in the United States. Such data will help to promote the preservation of Indigenous languages from Latin America in the U.S. and prevent the continued 'invisibilization' of IILs, especially within immigrant settings.

4.2 POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Recall that one of the main aspects of the PAR model is the production of outcomes with a positive impact for all participants in the research project. Despite the main challenges listed in the previous subsection, all three projects produced positive outcomes. Notably, in both the rural and suburban case studies, the teams' efforts resulted in tangible materials and outcomes that were beneficial to the community. As noted above, in the rural case study, the team created a basic trilingual glossary and implemented an ESL program, which had a positive impact within the IIL community and beyond. In the suburban case study, the publication and distribution of a multilingual visual dictionary was very positively received by all members of the community, regardless of their IIL-speaking status. These two serve as examples of positive and tangible outcomes that are aligned with one of the goals of a model of participatory research.

While the urban case study did not result in a linguistic product for the speakers themselves, this project culminated in a presentation to teachers and other school staff in the district of study who work with IIL speaking students through which such individuals could learn about the results of the study to better serve the diversity of students in their district.

We should also note the significance of other observed outcomes, which, although are not tangible products, are of high importance. In all three areas of study, the language promotion efforts presented in this paper resulted in raised visibility of IILs, both within the Hispanic immigrant community and the community at large. Before these three projects, many members of these communities were not even aware that some of these Indigenous languages existed, let alone in immigrant settings in the U.S. Southeast. This increased visibility, along with the actual products created, led to another very positive

outcome: IIL speakers in these communities manifested a sense of pride for being speakers of an Indigenous language.

4.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

Although the three projects described in this paper differ substantially from a true implementation of the PAR model, we would like to highlight the importance and viability of awareness-raising and promotion efforts of IILs. In all three case studies, external researchers always reached a consensus with IIL speakers to determine the linguistic needs, goals, and outcomes for each individual project. This joint goal-decision process results in an increased sense of community and agency by the members of the IIL communities.

Although far from being perfect models, we wholeheartedly believe that the three case studies presented in this paper serve as good examples of a positive application of a community-centered approach in raising awareness and promotion of IILs that can be applied to other areas of the U.S. and elsewhere where there is a significant concentration of immigrant populations.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we presented an analysis of three independent but related case studies regarding the promotion of immigrant indigenous languages (or IILs) in three states in the U.S. Southeast, each representing a different area: rural, suburban and urban. In all three cases, external researchers collaborated with IIL speakers following a working methodology inspired in the main tenets of Participatory Action Research (or PAR), which advocates for an egalitarian relationship and a joint decision-making process between members of the (speaking) community and external researchers. Following this idea, the paper aimed to answer four research questions: i. what IILs are present in each of the communities of study?; ii. what are the linguistic needs of IIL speakers in their respective immigrant settings?; iii. what are the outcomes resulting from each study?; and iv. what are the challenges observed in the implementation of a PAR-inspired model?

We should note that all three studies each took place in a distinctive area of the Southeast representing a rural, suburban and metropolitan area. Furthermore, the networks utilized to reach Indigenous language speakers varied greatly including migrant farmworker communities, local Hispanic community organizations and local schools. Despite these vast differences, each study represents a positive implementation of a community-centered methodology based on the main guidelines of PAR.

Each of these three studies identified a distinctive set of IILs in their areas of study. For instance, in the suburban study, the IILs principally represented Indigenous communities from southern Mexico. In the urban study, however, the vast majority of the Indigenous languages identified were from

Guatemala. In the rural case study, the languages identified were from Central Mexico. Although these languages are from different origins in the three areas analyzed, we argue that they all face similar issues in their use in immigrant communities.

In Section 2, we highlighted the need to identify and promote IILs in the areas under study, as these languages remain frequently unreported in most of the census data available. Given that the majority of the immigrant population in these three case studies come from areas of Mexico and Guatemala, two countries with a significant presence of Indigenous languages, many of these languages should also be present in immigration settings. Yet, IILs remain invisible within both their immigrant settings and the community at large.

The first three research questions were addressed in Section 3. In all three areas we identified the presence of IILs that had previously remained unreported, with a predominance of Mayan languages, especially in the suburban study site; the urban study site; and their respective surrounding areas. Although we observed varying linguistic needs depending on each community, speakers of these languages in all three areas clearly expressed the need to establish efforts to promote and revitalize the use of their languages in their respective immigrant settings. In response to these needs, different products were created with the publication of a multilingual visual dictionary including several IILs spoken in the suburban case study being the most significant tangible outcome. It is also important to note that the efforts in all three projects resulted in a less tangible but yet highly important outcome: thanks to these efforts, IIL speakers expressed a renewed sense of pride in the use of their languages.

Finally, in the last part of Section 3 and in Section 4, we summarized the main aspects of each case study, placing special emphasis on the challenges encountered during the research in all three areas under study. These challenges included the availability of IIL speakers to contribute regular and significant time to the research project and the overwhelming presence of Spanish in these different immigrant settings, which makes it difficult for IIL speakers to use and promote their respective languages. Lastly, we discussed the divergences observed between an ideal implementation of a PAR model in language preservation efforts and the methodology used in these three case studies: although the challenges observed forced a reshaping of the research model, we hold the strong opinion that a community-centered approach in which speakers and external researchers actively cooperate in the decision-making process and in the creation of final products is a viable option to raise awareness and promote the use of IILs in immigrant settings in the U.S. and elsewhere.

While on a small scale, these three case studies display a pattern of the 'invisibilization' of IILs within the Hispanic community that continues within these areas, across the Southeast and the country. This paper outlines a methodology for conducting community-based research to promote the acknowledgement and increased use of IILs and their preservation across the United States and in

other areas of significant immigration in hopes of inciting similar projects that can continue to identify IILs and advocating for the promotion of these diverse linguistic communities. Additionally, more issues for future research include addressing the unanswered linguistic needs of each of these IIL communities included in this paper and beyond. This may include improving access to interpretation services, developing more resources to promote language preservation across generations, and providing access to language learning services as these are continued needs determined by the speakers themselves, following and adapting the main guidelines of the Participatory Action Research model.

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