

# LINGUISTIC RIGHTS IN MEXICO

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## Abstract

This paper exposes the linguistic rights situation in Mexico. To help the reader understand the linguistic rights conditions of the country, the article offers an overview of the languages of the country and their social conflict; the language policy; and the factors that have contributed to the survival of indigenous languages. In particular, the paper emphasises the fact that even though it could be argued that the process to achieve the fully exercise of linguistic rights by indigenous people has started, there are important issues that urge to be addressed by the Mexican government and society with regard to discrimination towards indigenous people. The study suggests actions to be taken in two fronts: 1) the need of sociolinguistic awareness in education; and 2) the activation of mass sensitivity and empathy towards indigenous people through the media, bringing the negative stereotype of indigenous people to a halt on television.

**Keywords:** *linguistic rights, language policy, languages of Mexico, indigenous people of Mexico*

## Resumen

El artículo describe la situación de los derechos lingüísticos en México. Además de ofrecer una perspectiva general de las lenguas del país y su conflicto social; el documento da una recapitulación de las políticas lingüísticas y presenta los factores que han contribuido a la preservación de las lenguas indígenas. A pesar de que se puede afirmar que ha comenzado el proceso para que los indígenas ejerzan sus derechos lingüísticos, este estudio enfatiza la importancia de factores que no han sido tomados en cuenta en su totalidad por parte del gobierno y la sociedad mexicana; dichos factores tienen que ver con la discriminación hacia los indígenas. El artículo sugiere acciones para realizarse en dos frentes: 1) la necesidad de una conciencia sociolingüística en la educación; y 2) además de darle fin a la proyección del estereotipo negativo del indígena en la televisión, se necesita la activación de la sensibilidad y empatía hacia los indígenas a través de los medios de comunicación.

**Palabras clave:** *derechos lingüísticos, política del lenguaje, las lenguas de México, los pueblos indígenas de México*

## 1. Introduction

There is a persisting biological metaphor, that regards languages as entities whose life cycle consists of being born, flourishing, declining and dying (Hamel, 1997); such a conception supports the belief that there is no need to regulate or legislate linguistic rights in society since languages fall in the same domain as customs or traditions. However, this metaphor neither takes into account the “essentially historical and social nature of language...[nor the]...constituent and expression of society”. (p. 2).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, languages are social and cultural entities which can be the cause of inequality and discrimination in society; we may argue then, that these facts that Hamel highlights are suitable accounts to amalgamate

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<sup>1</sup> We can compare this with the two approaches in linguistics: the asocial (e.g. Chomsky, 1965) and the social (e.g. Labov, 1977). The former studies language isolated from society; in contrast, the latter seeks for linguistic patterns in a given social group.

language and human rights: linguistic human rights or language rights (henceforth, LRs) as natural shorthand.

This paper examines the LRs in Mexico. The first section gives an overview of LRs and the characteristics of their legislation. The second section focuses on LRs in Mexico, the social conflict of languages as well as the language policy of the country are mentioned, and the factors that have contributed to the survival of indigenous languages are highlighted. In the final section, we present two missing aspects that have failed to be triggered by policies for the full exercise of LRs, and we conclude suggesting possible actions to be taken.

## 2. LRs and Their Legislation: an overview

In Phillipson et al.'s (1995) seminal introduction to the field, LRs are defined at an *individual* and *collective* level. The former refers to (i) the right that every person has to identify positively with their mother tongue(s), and be respected by those who do not hold the same linguistic identification; (ii) the right to learn the mother tongue(s) and use it in diverse official contexts; and (iii) the right to learn the official languages of one's country of residence. The *collective* level alludes to (iv) the right of minorities to exist; (v) the right of people to use and develop their languages; (vi) the right of the groups to own autonomy to maintain their languages; and (vii) the right to count on the State's support to administer internal matters of the group such as culture, education, religion, information, and social affairs.<sup>2</sup> These rights are completely enjoyed by speakers of official languages; that is, only dominant groups in the State fully exercise these rights, on the contrary, subordinate groups, in most cases, minority groups, suffer from deprivation of some or all of these rights (indigenous minorities are a clear example). Consequently, the legislation on LRs "relate[s] either to subordinate minorities... or to dominant groups who want to perpetuate their linguistic rule and privileges..." (Hamel, 1997: 3).<sup>3</sup>

We can notice that in general LRs involve individual and collective autonomy; it ranges from the right to choose to be part of a linguistic group to the right of people to decide on how to develop their languages. It is believed that the collective autonomy could be a "threat" to the political structure of the State since the exercise of these rights implies that the State delegates power to the linguistic minorities. Simultaneously, both individual and collective rights are linked to the respect and the recognition of differences between groups and individuals to prevent inequality and discrimination in society. To ensure the effective exercise of LRs through legislation autonomy, respect, and recognition of minorities have to be taken into account by the lawmakers; Hamel (1994: 210) developed this idea and suggested two key components that legislation on LRs should include: 1) the embracement of special arrangements through which the distinguishing characteristics of the groups (i.e. language) can be maintained; and 2) the principle of equality not only between minorities and majorities but also among the individuals of both communities. By virtue of these two

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<sup>2</sup> In their text, Phillipson et al. (1995: 2) mention "mother tongue", in singular; however, Pellicer (1997: 1) remarks that when defining linguistic rights, mother tongue is conceived as the only one language that is acquired at home, and /or the only one language speakers use to express their feeling and knowledge, with this conception, she says, we are putting aside people who have more than one mother tongue.

<sup>3</sup> With *minority*, we refer to a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show if only implicitly a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language" (Capotorti, 1991: paragraph 568).

principles, commonly the legal instruments where LR are explicitly proclaimed are those related to minorities or indigenous people.

With regard to the defence of LR by legal instruments Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1995b) reveal that the strongest degree of protection is appreciable in national constitutions and relevant legislations; for instance, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 which recognises the multilingual and multicultural character (Article 3) of the Spanish State (Pellicer, 1997: 4) by officialising the languages of the Autonomous Communities (e.g. Catalan, Basque, Galician, etc.).<sup>4</sup> This action and the statutes of each community ensured the protection of collective and individual rights.<sup>5</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillips argue as well that there is less protection in multilateral instruments and universal ones; they say that “the more general human rights instruments usually mention language only by passing” (1995b: 78).<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to underline recent regional and international efforts to support LR; such as the 1998 *Oslo Recommendation Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities* by the OSCE (The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the document aims to “be an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage” (p. 1) by means of clarifying the linguistic rights of minorities. The second example is the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* signed in 1996 by UNESCO and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations).<sup>7</sup> This document conceives the respect and full development of all languages as a key factor in the maintenance of peace in society (p. 2); although the declaration is not a legal instrument *per-se*, it recommends the creation of a Council of Languages within the United Nations and promotes the establishment of a World Commission on Linguistic Rights.<sup>8</sup> In both documents, the recommendation and the declaration, the individual and collective LR mentioned above are clearly detailed, particularly in the universal document.

Up to this point, we have broadly seen what the LR are, the principles that their legislation should include, and some examples of efforts made to support the protection of LR. In the following section we will focus our attention on LR in Mexico; in general we will talk about social and linguistic conditions of the country and will focus on LR in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> They are the first level of political division in Spain.

<sup>5</sup> We could argue that the LR are protected to a certain extent because, the co-official nature of these languages and Castilian is only applicable in their respective autonomous communities; that is, Castilian is the only official language in all the State and the other languages are official languages in their respective autonomous territories; (the Spanish linguistic system is considered as an “impure territorial model” (Gálvez Salvador, 2008). These means, for example, a Catalan speaker fully exercises their LR only in their own Autonomous Community (Catalonia) but not elsewhere in the country because the other Autonomous Communities have their own official languages which are not Catalan.

<sup>6</sup> The multilateral instruments are geographically restricted (e. g. European instruments).

<sup>7</sup> “This Declaration became a general reference point for the evolution and discussion of linguistic rights in Mexico” (Pellicer, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> In the First Final Disposition the Declaration says “This Declaration proposes the creation of a Council of Languages within the United Nations Organization. The General Assembly of the United Nations Organization is to be responsible for setting up this Council, defining its functions and appointing its members, and for creating a body in international law to protect language communities in the exercise of the rights recognized in this Declaration” (p.14).

The Second Final Disposition says “This Declaration recommends and promotes the creation of a World Commission on Linguistic Rights, a non-official, consultative body made up of representatives of non-governmental organizations and organizations working in the field of linguistic law” (p. 14).

### 3. LRs in Mexico

At the beginning of this paper it was claimed that LRs involve the historical and social nature of languages as well as the inequality issues that languages might create in a given society; so, to appreciate the situation of LRs in Mexico it is important to have an overview of: the languages of the country and their social conflict; the language policy of the country; and the factors that have contributed to the survival of the languages.

#### 3.1. *The Languages of Mexico*

In their extensive and detailed monograph entitled “The Language Situation in Mexico”, Terborg *et al.* (2006) indicate that Spanish is the *de facto* official language of the government and is the first language of about 90 per cent of the population of Mexico; Spanish is the national language due to historical and legislative affairs.<sup>9</sup> Moreover they claim, Mexican Spanish is the least purist variant of Spanish in an international level.<sup>10</sup> In regard to other languages, the authors indicate that Mexico has the largest population of indigenous languages (henceforth ILs) and the highest linguistic diversity in the Americas: with 63 recognized Amerindian languages classified in eight families and fifteen subfamilies.<sup>11</sup> Since 1992 these languages are recognized as national languages by the Mexican constitution.<sup>12</sup> Evidently, all these languages are minority languages in Mexico; however, within them, the authors argue, there are two major minority languages: Nahuatl and Yucatec Mayan.<sup>13</sup>

#### 3.2. *The Social Conflict of Languages*

Dorian (1998) claims that “if the people who speak a language have power and prestige, the language will enjoy high prestige as well...” In a given State, the power and prestige of the language is accompanied by the fact that its speakers, the dominant group, have full access to information, education, jobs, etc., which allows them to improve or maintain their living conditions and social stratus. In contrast, the speakers of the subordinate languages have few or non opportunities to do so because of their linguistic disadvantage; that is why they might

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<sup>9</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the colonisation of the Americas, the Aztec Empire was defeated by Spain who established a Spanish viceroyalty in the occupied territories; action that introduced Spanish as the official language. After the independence from Spain, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new Mexican government continued using Spanish as the language of administration, even though, by then (1821) most of the people in Mexico spoke ILs (Terborg *et al.* 2006: 440).

<sup>10</sup> To support this claim, the authors offer a concise analysis of the Mexican Spanish varieties which includes grammatical (e.g. use of preposition), lexical (influence of Mexican Amerindian languages and some borrowings from English) and phonetic variation.

<sup>11</sup> The actual number of recognized indigenous languages is 64 according to the *Catálogo de las Lenguas indígenas Nacionales* (Catalogue of National Indigenous Languages), INALI, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> In 1992, the first paragraph of Article 4 established the multilingual and multicultural character of the nation; that means the ILs were recognized as a cultural heritage of the country.

<sup>13</sup> Nahuatl was the language of the Aztecs and was the lingua franca for speakers of other ILs during the Aztec Empire. Terborg *et al.* 2006 report that nowadays Nahuatl is still the lingua franca among speakers of other ILs (p. 427). There are around 1.5 million speakers of Nahuatl in Mexico (INEGI, 2005); this language is spoken in ten States of the Mexican Republic (INEGI, 2000) and also it is spoken in El Salvador and some parts of Central America (INALI, 2008).

“Yucatan Mayan is a local language that contrasts with Nahuatl in that it is spoken in a contiguous area with no interruption...” (Terborg *et al.* 2006: 427). There are 759 mil speakers of Mayan in Mexico (INEGI, 2005). Most of the Mayan speakers live in the Yucatan Peninsula (INEGI, 2005b).

opt to learn the dominant language or/and may decide not to transmit their languages to their children anymore so that in the future their descendants have the same opportunities and prestige that the speakers of the dominant language have; this action leads to language shift and death of languages.

Mexico presents the scenario described above. The social inequality that exists in Mexico has an impact on the indigenous people (henceforth IP); overwhelmingly, there is a correlation between IP and poverty and marginalization because almost 90 percent of the indigenous population in the country live in poor conditions (Serrano, 2004).<sup>14</sup> As reported in Velázquez Vilchis (2008), there have been numerous studies that show how Mexican ILs are being replaced by Spanish because of their restricted domain of use, (they are spoken only at home). This is an *a posteriori* consequence of believing that speaking Spanish offers the opportunity of improving their living conditions and, most of the time, it even implies having access to health services and education.

### 3.3. Language Policy in Mexico

Hidalgo (2006b) briefly recapitulates how the language policy in Mexico has been since ILs came into contact with Spanish. She mentions that the Spanish policies in colonial times were conflicting because, on the one hand, the Crown proclaimed Spanish as the language of the Empire, but on the other, ILs were used as instruments of conversion to Catholicism, so at the end of the colonial period ILs were more predominant than Spanish.<sup>15</sup> However, after the independence process, Hidalgo notes a “dramatic shift to the colonial language... in addition, [Spanish was supported by] education, language academies and the like” (p. 361).<sup>16</sup> This tendency favoured Spanish language in two ways: 1) it contributed to the legitimisation of the Mexican variety of Spanish carried out by Mexican *criollos*; and 2) it was a determining factor of the national belief that “the transplanted language is the national language or the language of the State *par excellence*” (p. 362).<sup>17</sup>

Since the twentieth century, the language policy has mainly been oriented to promote bilingual education only at basic levels (Hidalgo, 2006b; Terborg et al., 2006), which means Castellanisation of IP.<sup>18</sup> This policy seems to have had an effect on the number of bilinguals and monolinguals because according to the census the former have increased and the latter have decreased (Cifuentes and Moctezuma, 2006; Hidalgo, 2006a) as we can notice in Figure 1:

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<sup>14</sup> In Mexico “social inequality is a part of everyday life and the division between rural and urban areas is notorious. In some areas, all kinds of modern services may be available, while others, not far away, may lack electricity, running water and/or drainage facilities” (Terborg et al. 2006: 418).

<sup>15</sup> The author argues that the language policy during this period is considered to have failed because at “the end of the colonial period...only 35% of the population knew how to speak Spanish, and just 0.5% knew how to read and write the language of the ‘mother country’” (Hidalgo, 2006a: 360).

<sup>16</sup> According to the first official census in (1895), 83 per cent of the population are reported to be speakers of Spanish and only 16.6 per cent appear to be speakers of ILs. (Cifuentes and Pellicer, 1989 cited in Hidalgo, 2006). It is argued as well that many indigenous groups disappear during the independence process.

<sup>17</sup> *Criollos* were the Europeans born in Mexico who were the elite in power after the independence of Mexico. They did many language planning actions such as standardized Mexican Spanish by orthographic reforms to Peninsular Spanish, adopting Nahuatl-origin lexicon, publishing a *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* and creating the Mexican Academy of Language (Hidalgo 2006a).

<sup>18</sup> Castellanisation refers to the teaching of Spanish to IP.

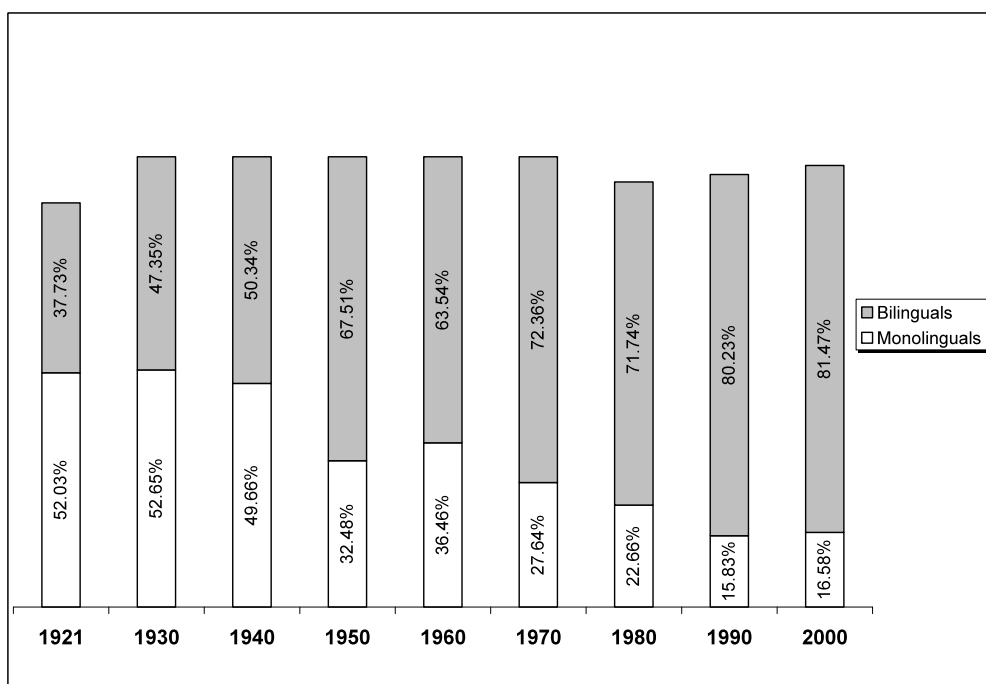


Figure 1: Bilinguals and Monolinguals, 1921-2000; based on Cifuentes and Moctezuma (2006: 204).

The bilingual education of recent decades is described as the teaching of “indigenous languages in transitional programs that would eventually lead students to learn reading and writing in Spanish” (p. 63). In other words, IP are taught Spanish through their ILs so as to be able to “join up” the Mexican society and have the chance to enjoy the benefits that being a speaker of the dominant language in the country grants; although, we will later see that speaking Spanish does not prevent IP from being in disadvantage and discriminated.

In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* or EZLN) uprose against the Mexican government demanding better social conditions for IP.<sup>19</sup> In 1996, the result of the negotiation for peace between the EZLN and the government was the document called San Andres Larraínza Accords (*Acuerdos de San Andres Larraínza*, henceforth ASAL); which is considered to be a “turning point in national language policy [because the text] raised the underlying problem since colonial times: the relationship between the indigenous peoples and the new authorities that were denying their existence” (Hidalgo, 2006: 363). Although in the ASAL there was not a specific part where language was treated, linguistic matters were involved in the whole document principally when referring to cultural preservation and education. For example, they demanded the equal social value of Spanish and ILs in order to create language policies to protect ILs; they claimed national awareness of IP and their cultures; and they stipulate the right of participation of indigenous communities in the planning of educational contents with the purpose of revitalizing ILs (Pellicer et al. 2006). After further legislative discussions and negotiations, legal ratifications, etc., in 2001 the first reforms to the constitution took place which in general involved a detailed catalogue of the rights of IP (Cienfuegos Salgado,

<sup>19</sup> They demanded work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace for IP (EZLN, 1993).

2005); the protection and preservation of cultural and social values of IP and the autonomy of their communities was recognized.<sup>20</sup>

The follow up of the constitutional reforms was The General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous People (*Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas*, henceforth LGDLPI) introduced in 2003. This legislative text protects the individual and collective LRs of IP and it promotes the development of ILs. We give a summary of the law in terms of individual and collective LRs:

Individual LRs:

- i) All Mexicans have the right to speak their language without restriction of any kind and without any kind of discrimination (Arts. 8, 9).
- ii) Spanish and ILs have equal status and both are valid in any public or private sector and in any kind of social activity (Arts. 4, 7).
- iii) The right of IP to bilingual and bicultural education in the compulsory levels, respecting and dignifying their cultural identity (Art. 12).
- iv) The right to have access to the judicial system through ILs (Art. 10).

Collective LRs:

- v) The State and its three governmental orders (Federation, States, and Municipalities ) will protect, preserve, promote and develop the ILs through the participation of the indigenous population and their communities (Arts. 5, 6, 12, 13).

The LGDLPI in its final chapter mandates the creation of the INALI (*Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas/ National Institute of Indigenous languages*) which is in charge of “articulate[ing] the policies required to uphold the law” (Pellicer et al. 2006).

### 3.4. Language Survival

It is a fact that many ILs have died since colonial times, however, it is worth mentioning the factors that have contributed to the survival of ILs. These are: 1) Colonial policies, as we saw, mandated the conversion of IP; paradoxically, to do so Catholic missionaries learned the ILs and did detailed linguistic studies which consisted of grammars and vocabularies (Terborg et al. 2006) that nowadays are still used as reference; 2) The cultural and social nature of ILs expressed by IP in many aspects of their life, such as religion and traditions; that is, the maintenance of their culture helped the maintenance of their language; and 3) the endeavours of professionals to revitalize ILs; for instance, the *Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural* (Project for the Revitalization, Maintenance and Cultural and Linguistic Development) conducted by Flores Farfán (2006), which recreates indigenous traditions in media (videos, books) in a number of ILs such as Nahuatl and Yucatec Mayan; the materials trigger oral production in order to contribute to language re-acquisition. Other examples of efforts to preserve ILs are the academies of ILs and civil associations (cf. Terborg et al. 2006).

### 3.5. LRs in Mexico

From a general point of view, it can be argued that, on the one hand, Spanish speakers are the only group that fully enjoy and exercise their individual and collective LRs because they are the dominant and majority group in Mexico. On the other, it seems that since 1994 and after 500 years of being ignored by the government, IP have just started gaining the policies to

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<sup>20</sup> The first paragraph of Article 4 in the constitution was derogated and Article 2 was reformed.

enjoy and exercise not only their LRs but also their other human rights. The question we raise at this point is: Does having and enforcing the correct language policies guarantee the exercise and enjoyment of LRs by IP and their consequent well-being?<sup>21</sup>

Fishman (1989: 399) points out that “language always exists in a cultural matrix and it is this matrix what needs to be fostered...rather than languages *per se*”. In the case of Mexico, language policies that protect LRs of IP are very important, but will not automatically change the situation of the IP and their languages; that is, the marginalization and discrimination that IP suffer will not spontaneously disappear when policies are published; because firstly, for the policies to be fully enforced and practiced, the government needs to create infrastructure and provide the resources to uphold the policies; and secondly, and most importantly, the cultural matrix (Mexican culture) where languages (ILs and Spanish) co-exist has to be changed in order for the policies to be completely effective.<sup>22</sup> To illustrate this need of change in the Mexican cultural matrix we suggest, in the final section of this paper, that sociolinguistic awareness, defined as the knowledge that Mexican (non-indigenous) people have about ILs, and their attitudes towards IP are crucial elements for the complete achievement of LRs in Mexico.

#### 4. Missing Factors for the Achievement of LRs in Mexico

We have seen that LRs in Mexico have been demanded by IP (e.g. EZLN uprising). The government has reacted and made the legal framework for the protection of LRs (LGDLPI); scholars have contributed as well, they have, for example, promoted ILs in the indigenous communities (Flores Farfán’s project); they have conducted numerous studies that demonstrate how ILs have lost domains (cf. Velázquez Vilchis, 2008); and they have created pro-ILs organizations. Undeniably these endeavours are a huge advance in the protection of LRs in Mexico; however, they have had little impact on the Mexican (non-indigenous) population. Therefore, there is the need to promote the ILs of Mexico and promote a change of attitudes towards indigenous people in order to guarantee the exercise of LRs by IP. The following and final section is devoted to supporting this claim and suggestions to face the problem are given.

##### 4.1. Sociolinguistic Awareness and Attitudes towards IP

Brambila Rojo’s (2004) survey shows how there are contrasting attitudes towards IP and their languages. His study demonstrates that despite the fact that people lack knowledge about the ILs of Mexico and about their lexical contribution to Mexican Spanish, they regard ILs as historical and cultural symbols; paradoxically, they believe ILs should be preserved, although they claim ILs are not useful in the modern world. With respect to IP, it seems that the same tendencies of colonial times prevail nowadays in Mexican society, that is, people still appear to repudiate and scorn IP. These results highlight the fact that there is indeed concern about ILs but not about their speakers.

Another study, carried out by Terborg and Velázquez (2008), suggests that a speaker of Spanish whose first language is Otomí, that is, someone who speaks Spanish with an indigenous accent, is considered to be less qualified to do sophisticated and better paid jobs

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<sup>21</sup> By *correct* we refer to the language policies that will protect the LRs of IP.

<sup>22</sup> By *culture* we refer to the social values, attitudes and beliefs of the Mexican (non-indigenous) people.



than someone who speaks the standard Spanish of the region.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the study claims that Otomí speakers are treated as second-class citizens, they are discriminated and verbally attacked in society; the authors also report a case when the principal of a secondary school in an Otomí community banned the use of the IL in the school; so, Otomí speakers suffer discrimination not only outside their communities but also inside.

From the studies just reported, it can be noticed that the need to combat discrimination against IP and to promote both IP and their languages in Mexican society in order to change the Mexican cultural matrix is imminent. The support to ILs and the respect to IP are already legally established (in the LGDLPI and in Article 2 of the Mexican constitution, respectively), but little has been done to enforce these important aspects in society. We suggest two ways to achieve the task.

#### 4.1.1. Education

Brambila Rojo (2004: 27) points out that the teaching of ILs to non-indigenous people is a way to promote the ILs and their speakers (their culture) similar to the teaching of English. Therefore, indigenous cultures and languages should be included in the curricula of the Mexican educational system so as to eradicate discrimination and the lack of knowledge about IP: sociolinguistic awareness. This would complement the Intercultural Universities (*Universidades Interculturales*) established in 2004 by the Mexican government; these universities aim to promote the maintenance, development and consolidation of indigenous languages and cultures by forming professionals committed to working in indigenous communities (SEP, 2009).

#### 4.1.2. Media

Television is the most common mass media in Mexico. Unfortunately, as reported by Narvarte Linares (2008), the Mexican television promotes racism against IP because most of the actors that appear on TV programs and commercials have a European appearance which is consequently related to beauty, sophistication and success; what is more, the few characters with dark skin or indigenous physique are presented as servants, stupid and ignorant.<sup>24</sup> This needs to be changed; there should be a policy to regulate these practices and to promote respect to IP and their cultures. Similarly to the ITC (Independent Television Commission) and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) in the United Kingdom (cf. ERCOMER, 2002), we consider that Televisa and TV Azteca, which are the most important media companies in Mexico, should adopt internal initiatives to address improving the presentation of minorities, in this case IP, on TV; and to eradicate the stereotype of IP they have maintained through their programmes, specially in their soap operas.<sup>25</sup> Actions like these would active a mass sensitivity and empathy towards IP.

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<sup>23</sup> Otomí is an IL spoken in some regions of the State of Mexico, mainly in communities neighbouring Toluca (the capital of the State of Mexico).

<sup>24</sup>“...la televisión mexicana practica otra forma de racismo contra los indígenas, y contra muchos no indígenas de piel oscura, pues casi la totalidad de los actores que aparecen en programas y publicidad tienen un físico europeo, que se asocia con belleza y sofisticación...” (Narvarte Linares, 2008: 11). Paxman (2005) argues that Televisa has marginalized the *meztizo* community which is most of the population by having only white actors in its soap operas.

<sup>25</sup> Soap operas (*telenovelas*) are the most popular TV programmes in Mexico.

## 5. Final remarks

We can conclude that the process to achieve the full exercise of LRs in Mexico has just started, as we have explained in this paper. There are still important aspects that urge to be covered not only for the protection and maintenance of languages but also for the well-being of indigenous people.

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