

The Commodification of Kaqchikel: A Commodities Chain Approach to the Kaqchikel Language in the Foreign Language and Area Studies Program*

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Investigating how Kaqchikel is commodified through U.S. foreign language instruction programs reveals complex and often contradictory ideologies about language, including linguistic capital and exchange value. I argue that Kaqchikel is commodified through the FLAS program, which treats language as a skill that has value in promoting U.S. national needs (e.g., security and economic competitiveness). Moreover, while globalization has negatively impacted the vitality of indigenous languages worldwide, including Mayan languages such as Kaqchikel, the narrative I develop suggests that individuals successfully utilize existing structures of globalization in ways that subvert hegemony and cultural and linguistic homogeneity. In particular, I show how individuals use structures that emerge through globalization and commodification in order to create transborder alliances that increase the value of Kaqchikel.

Keywords: Kaqchikel language, Mayan languages, language study and teaching, foreign language and area studies, less commonly taught languages, strategic languages

1. Introduction

On December 29, 1996, the United Nations brokered a peace treaty between the Guatemalan government and guerrilla organizations that had been engaged in armed conflict for decades. Following several years of investigation into human rights abuses and state-sponsored violence, the Peace Accords officially marked the ending of a thirty-six-year-long civil war. This war was sparked in part by a 1954 CIA-led coup against a leftist Guatemalan government that the U.S. viewed as a threat to national security. Deaths and *desaparecidos* from the war are estimated at 200,000, and the total deaths disproportionately affected indigenous Mayas, especially during the period known as *la violencia* (1982-1983; Garrard-Burnett, 2010). Moreover, as part of the violence administered, the government strategically implemented fear tactics during the civil war. As a result, fear and silence are deeply embedded into the cultural memory of Mayas (Wilkinson 2004; Garrard-Burnett 2010), and these factors converged to negatively impact Mayan identity, culture, and language.

In the years immediately following the signing of the Peace Accords, the University of Kansas became the second U.S. institution to establish a program to teach Kaqchikel, an indigenous Mayan language of Guatemala. Teaching Kaqchikel at KU was made possible

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through U.S. programs aimed at meeting national needs through foreign language instruction. Nearly two decades earlier, the Guatemalan government, seeking to democratize and give birth to *La Nueva Guatemala* with economic and military support from the U.S., dramatically escalated its violence against indigenous Mayas. During this same time, the U.S. began realizing that increased globalization and its resultant economic landscapes were creating a new need to develop multilingual experts who could support state interests. Incorporating indigenous languages such as Kaqchikel into foreign language instruction in higher education became one means of ensuring economic competitiveness in the global market.

This brief juxtaposition of sociopolitical and historical developments in the U.S. and Guatemala during the latter half of the twentieth-century only begins to illustrate reasons why the federal government developed an interest in funding the teaching of Kaqchikel. With this frame in mind, further questions arise, such as: What are the origins and trajectories of Kaqchikel as it was exported from Guatemala to the U.S. in order to satisfy international demands? How might U.S. programs and institutions increasingly add value to Kaqchikel, which in turn has material consequences for the language in Kaqchikel communities in Guatemala?

To answer these questions, I apply a commodity chain approach to discourse analysis in order to investigate how the Kaqchikel language undergoes processes of commodification through its use in U.S. foreign language programs. In order to highlight such processes, I consider the U.S.-Guatemala context as a mini-globalization effect wherein global developments and local interests ultimately resulted in the inclusion of Kaqchikel in federally funded U.S. language programs. I aim to investigate the commodification of Kaqchikel and the complex relations between language and globalization that play out in both Guatemalan Kaqchikel communities and communities in the U.S. In particular, I look at the links between language revitalization efforts by Kaqchikel Maya in Guatemala and U.S. foreign language programs that promote learning Kaqchikel in undergraduate and graduate degree programs in order to satisfy shifting national needs.

The organization of this paper is as follows. The next section provides a brief sketch of the Kaqchikel language and highlights relevant sociopolitical and historical developments in Guatemala and the U.S. Following this, I discuss the data I analyze as well as the methods used in my analysis. Since language is not traditional commodity, afterward I provide a rationale for considering language as a commodity by virtue of its capacity to undergo processes of commodification. This section also discusses recent developments in sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological literature, which suggest that current discursive shifts are taking place in recent decades that increasingly integrate economic elements as a key tropological feature of discourse. This frames a discussion that details the history of the Foreign Language and Area Studies program in the U.S. as an outcome of the 1958 National Defense Education Act. Using a commodity chain approach in my analysis, I then follow the flow of Kaqchikel from U.S. institutions back to Kaqchikel communities in Guatemala.

Investigating how Kaqchikel is commodified through U.S. foreign language instruction programs reveals complex and often contradictory ideologies about language, including linguistic capital and exchange value. I argue that Kaqchikel is commodified through the FLAS program, which treats language as a skill that has value in promoting U.S. national needs (e.g., security and economic competitiveness). Moreover, while globalization has negatively impacted the vitality of indigenous languages worldwide, including Mayan languages such as Kaqchikel, the narrative I develop suggests that individuals successfully utilize existing structures of globalization in ways that subvert hegemony and cultural and linguistic homogeneity. In

particular, I show how individuals use structures that emerge through globalization and commodification in order to create transborder alliances that increase the value of Kaqchikel. This valorization occurs through expanding the domains in which Kaqchikel is spoken, and through further commodification of Kaqchikel for the advantage of Kaqchikel communities by providing job opportunities for native speakers.

2. The Kaqchikel language in Guatemala and the U.S.

Kaqchikel is one of twenty-one Mayan languages currently spoken in Guatemala. From the perspective of five centuries-long contact with Spanish, the language can be seen as thriving. Though speakers primarily reside in the highlands of Guatemala near Lake Atitlán, Kaqchikel is spoken in forty-seven municipalities in Guatemala, and the geographical distribution of its speakers has not varied significantly since the sixteenth century (Richards, 2003:60). Along with K'ichee', Q'eqchi', and Mam, Kaqchikel is one of the four "principal" Mayan languages whose speakers each number nearly half a million (Richards, 2003).

In Guatemala today, Mayan languages are threatened by language shift as Spanish is increasingly spoken in multiple domains. This problem has become more acute in recent decades, as the use of Mayan languages has been dramatically impacted by globalization and a brutal civil war that lasted more than three decades (1960-1996). This civil war generated asymmetric consequences for indigenous Maya, who were seen as a threat to modernization and democratization in a country dominated by "racial hierarchy, racism, and racial privilege" (Hale, 2006:209). In the most violent period of the Guatemalan civil war, indigenous Maya were disproportionate recipients of violence as the U.S.-backed government systematically targeted Mayan communities in acts of genocide (Garrard-Burnett, 2010). The amount and type of violence directed against Mayas cultivated an ethos of fear and silence that endures to this day (Wilkinson, 2004). As historian Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes, "The counterinsurgency campaign of the early 1980s was the worst calamity to befall Mayan life and culture in Guatemala since the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest" (Garrard-Burnett, 2010:7).

The history of indigeneity in Guatemala is therefore quite complex, and deeply affected by structural racism. The government had established an official position early on as part of a modern nation-building project that Guatemala had no indigenous peoples. As a result, beginning in the early 1900s, Maya increasingly self-identified as *ladino* (Wilkinson, 2004:45; Hale, 2006). Throughout the majority of the twentieth century, both cultural and linguistic difference were viewed as problematic from the perspective of the state, and "transforming Mayan-speaking *indios* into Spanish-speaking *guatemaltecos*" (French, 2010:1) became a national aim.

Yet, although violence against Maya produced widespread fear that further exacerbated a reluctance to self-identify as Maya, in the 1980s Mayan scholars and activists worked together to combat ethnocide and linguicide, to foster Mayan cultural revitalization, and to promote Maya self-determination. Out of this collaboration emerged an influential social movement known as the Pan-Maya movement, a "diverse" and "dynamic" undertaking which sought to unify Mayas in an effort to collectively prioritize projects aimed at linguistic and cultural revitalization (Warren, 1998:39). The U.N.-initiated 1996 Peace Accords brought an end to the civil war, but *Mayanistas* struggled to obtain indigenous rights as neoliberal multiculturalism flourished (Hale, 2006). This emergent ideology recognized difference, but sought to assimilate Mayas into dominant *ladino* status, including social and linguistic practices. In 2003, the Guatemalan government passed the *Ley de Idiomas*, which granted Mayan languages co-official status with

Spanish in areas that each language is spoken (Maxwell, 2011). However, the quality of bilingual education in Guatemala makes meaningful implementation of the *Ley de Idiomas* difficult (Tummons, Henderson, & Rohloff, 2012:3-4; Garzon, Brown, Richards, & Ajpub', 1998), and Spanish is commonly viewed as a better means of obtaining economic success (Heinze Balcazar, 2008, 2009).

In the U.S. during the 1950s, nearly two thousand miles away from Guatemala, two events occurred that would become intimately tied to the vitality of Kaqchikel. First, in 1954, the CIA instigated a coup d'état against what the U.S. saw as a leftist government in Guatemala by ousting then president Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán (1951-1954). The Arbenz administration supported Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, aimed in part at resolving issues concerning land inequality. If enacted, the Agrarian Reform would have had potentially devastating consequences for the U.S. in two principal ways. First, one of the major landowners in Guatemala during this time was the U.S.-owned United Fruit Company, who risked losing a substantial land base in Central America. Second, the U.S. also saw these reforms as entailing the expansion of communism, which it had resolved to eradicate. The U.S. thus feared that, if successful, the reform would grant communists "control of the country" as well as result in "elimination of American economic interests" (U.S. State Department to the National Security Council, as cited in Wilkinson, 2004:166) This coup became the catalyst for what soon turned into state-sponsored violence against civilians, and eventually against Guatemala's indigenous Maya majority (Garrard-Burnett, 2010:26).

The second event occurred just four years later, and was also related to Cold War developments and the threat of communism. In 1958, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed as a direct response to the Space Race, in particular the Soviet Union's launch of the satellite Sputnik (Lambert, Barber, Jorden, Merrill, & Twarog, 1984:9). The act intended to both draw from the U.S.'s current, as well as generate lasting, educated citizenry whose knowledge and skills could be deployed to serve national needs. Title VI of the act made provisions for securing centers of foreign language instruction, which eventually provided an inroad for Kaqchikel to be taught at two U.S. institutions of higher education: Tulane University and the University of Kansas. Many U.S. students who study and learn Kaqchikel as a foreign language do so with financial assistance in the form Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships, which are disbursed through one of the major programs in the U.S. Department of Education that was created to meet the objectives of Title VI of the NDEA. Since the 1990s, FLAS program participants have also become involved in work with Kaqchikel communities and language programs in Guatemala in ways that have encouraged increased use of Kaqchikel in multiple domains.

3. Data and methods

To investigate how Kaqchikel might be treated as a commodity through foreign language instruction, I analyzed a small corpus of texts that I created based on interlinkages between various entities – individuals, institutions, organizations (including NGOs), language centers – that I conceptualize as nodes comprising a complex "meshwork" of social fields with unique discursive practices (Escobar, 2003). The concept of meshwork is useful for capturing the complexity and spontaneous emergence of interlinkages between groups, individuals, and institutions that pertain to teaching Kaqchikel as part of the FLAS program. I use the concept of meshwork in part, then, as a tool for selecting texts for analysis. The entities in Table 1 below

represent a portion of the meshwork that my analysis is based on. These entities relate to one another through complex interlinkages as each is involved in Kaqchikel language instruction. A brief description of each entity is also included.

The two U.S. universities that offer Kaqchikel as a modern language of study, KU and Tulane, are intricately related to multiple other interlinked institutions that are based both in the U.S. and Guatemala. Since the primary focus of this paper is to understand the commodification of Kaqchikel through the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program specifically, I selected texts to analyze that were produced by U.S.-based groups: the U.S. Department of Education, the University of Kansas, and Wuqu' Kawoq, a nonprofit organization cofounded by Emily Tummons, former Kaqchikel instructor at KU. These texts include government documents, pamphlets, websites, and poster advertisements for Kaqchikel classes.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Description</i>
U.S. Department of Education (USDE)	Washington, D.C., USA	Federal department that houses the IEPS
International Education Programs Service (IEPS)	Washington, D.C., USA	Division of the USDE that houses FLAS
Foreign Language and Area Studies Program (FLAS)	USA	
University of Kansas (KU)	Lawrence, KS, USA	One of two U.S. institutions that offers Kaqchikel language instruction
Center for Latin American Studies	Lawrence, KS, USA	Primary department in charge of Kaqchikel instruction at KU
Wuqu' Kawoq	Bethel, VT, USA; Santiago Sacatepéquez, Guatemala	Non-profit healthcare organization that encourages use of Kaqchikel in medical domains
Tulane University	New Orleans, LA, USA	One of two U.S. institutions that offers Kaqchikel language instruction
Stone Center for Latin American Studies	New Orleans, LA, USA	Primary department in charge of Kaqchikel language instruction at Tulane
Oxlajuj Aj	Antigua, Guatemala (Sponsored by Tulane University and the University of Texas at Austin)	Six week intensive Kaqchikel course in Guatemala
Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM)	Antigua, Guatemala	Foundation created to promote Maya linguistic and cultural development
Academia de Lenguas Mayas in Guatemala (ALMG)	Guatemala City, Guatemala	Organization promoting research in the 21 Mayan languages of Guatemala
Kaqchikel Cholchi'	Guatemala City, Guatemala	The Kaqchikel Branch of the ALMG; Community of Kaqchikel linguistics

Table 1: Entities in the Kaqchikel meshwork.

I used tools from discourse analysis (Rapley, 2007) to draw a historical narrative of Kaqchikel's inclusion in the FLAS program as well as to investigate language use as an indicator of linguistic and other ideologies. Methods in discourse analysis are diverse, but two consistent themes are: (1) a focus on naturally occurring language use,¹ and (2) a socio-philosophical orientation that sees meaning as constructed and negotiated. In discourse analytic approaches, language is not treated as neutral, but instead seen as performative and functional, as well as having "historical, social and cultural specificity" (Rapley, 2007:4). Thus, discourse analysis orients toward context-dependent language use. My analysis primarily focuses on "keywords" that might suggest ideological transformations over time. For the discourse topics under consideration, these include terms and phrases such as "national need," "national security," "business," "economy," and "economic competitiveness." Bonnie McElhinny notes a major contribution of Raymond Williams (1983) when he introduced the concept of keywords: "In his account semantics becomes political and critical; lexical analysis becomes a discussion of ideology and hegemony" (McElhinny, 2003, quoted in Miskimmin, 2007). Thus, orienting toward keywords in discourse can make manifest ideologies underlying language use.

Moreover, I also conducted three qualitative interviews to gain further insight into the ways in which FLAS participants studying Kaqchikel become involved in communities in Guatemala. I interviewed Emily Tummons, who received three FLAS fellowships to study Kaqchikel: two summer fellowships in 2005 and 2006 to study at Oxlajuj Aj, and one academic year fellowship to study at KU. I also interviewed Rusty Barrett, a professor at the University of Kentucky who received a FLAS to study Kaqchikel in 1992 and has since then been involved with the summer program in Guatemala, Oxlajuj Aj. Finally, I interviewed Elizabeth Kuznesof, Professor of History at the University of Kansas, who was instrumental in founding and developing the Kaqchikel language program at KU.²

Because the individuals and groups that produce these texts are part of a complex meshwork, it is necessary at times to refer to the other entities in Figure 1 in order to develop a more robust historical analysis. For example, although I focus on the University of Kansas in this paper, the existence of the Kaqchikel program at KU would not have been possible without the groundbreaking work of Judith Maxwell and R. McKenna Brown, who helped found the Oxlajuj Aj summer program and the Kaqchikel language program at the Stone Center at Tulane. Acknowledging relationships between entities in the Kaqchikel meshwork helps to generate a better understanding of the spontaneous, dynamic, and hybrid nature of the entities and relationships involved.

As Lynn Stephen notes, properties of meshworks include that they are "self-organizing and grow in unplanned directions; they are made up of diverse elements; they exist in hybridized form with other hierarchies and meshworks; they accomplish the articulation of heterogeneous elements without imposing uniformity; and they are determined by the degree of connectivity that enables them to be self-sustaining" (Stephen, 2007:19; Escobar, 2003:610-611). Moreover, she points to a key attribute of meshworks that distinguish them from networks: "Unlike networks, which may be focused from one person outward, the idea of meshwork is about

¹ By "naturally occurring" I intend a distinction between language use in the real world (e.g., conversations, speeches, websites, etc.) versus constructed data (e.g., decontextualized hypothetical utterances).

² The interviews I conducted with Emily Tummons and Professor Kuznesof were in person while the one I conducted with Rusty Barrett was via email. Additionally, I have contacted Judith Maxwell at Tulane University, who was a cofounder of Oxlajuj Aj in 1987. She has been gracious enough to agree to be interviewed, but, unfortunately, I have not able to talk with her in order to include her responses in this paper.

understanding interlinked networks and the total effect they can produce on a system” (Stephen, 2007:19). This aim of understanding the “total effect [meshworks] can produce on a system” necessitates a conceptual-methodological framework that views the complex interaction between nodes in a meshwork holistically.

In order to obtain this outcome, I adopt a commodity chain approach in my analysis. Doing this brings glocal aspects to the fore by following the product (language) as it is produced in Kaqchikel communities and transferred through international links where consuming (i.e., learning, speaking, and otherwise participating in FLAS) Kaqchikel takes on new meaning as the language is imbued with values that are salient in the new globalized economy. Accordingly, the emphasis on glocal features highlights the interaction between local and regional dynamics (in the U.S. and Guatemala) with global processes that often shape national developments.

I follow Topik, Marichal, and Frank’s definition of the commodity chain approach as “the production of tradable goods from their inception through their elaboration and transport to their final destination in the hands of consumers” (Topik, Marichal, & Frank 2006:14). Topik *et al.* describe the commodity chain as an “analytical vehicle” that allows analysts to draw connections between “producers, intermediaries, and consumers” (Topik et al., 2006:13, 2). Commodity chains can thus be conceived as “unit[s] (Bucheli & Read, 2006:205) or “instrument[s]” (Topik et al., 2006:14) of analysis that comprise a part of the historical analyst’s conceptual toolkit. Because the perspective is a “holistic” one, it can help to bridge the “traditional divides between internal and external factors and between economic and noneconomic factors in Latin American history” (Gootenberg, 2006:322). Moreover, the comprehensive account of processes of production and consumption that orientation to commodity chains favors are what Topik and Samper call “bidirectional links” that display the interconnectedness of local and global processes (Topik & Samper, 2006:119). This allows for discerning complex interactions between production and consumption. The major upshot of utilizing the commodity chain approach in my analysis is that it enables me to highlight the effects that U.S.-based language learning efforts have in Kaqchikel communities, rather than just orienting to the effects on the individual participants of the FLAS program.

Mary Ann Mahony notes that a major drawback of the commodity chain approach is its inability to answer the question: “Why this commodity at this time?” (Mahony, 2006:175). In order to address the issue of why Kaqchikel should become commodified when it did, I propose that the three-pronged methodology outlined above alleviates this problem. The commodity chain approach draws attention to bidirectional linkages and to the mobility of a commodity, discourse analysis helps to provide an understanding of language use related to historical and socio-political context, and the concept of meshworks illustrates the complexity of interlinkages between entities that enabled the commodification of Kaqchikel.

4. Language as a commodity

That the commodification of language entails viewing language as a commodity is obvious, but that language truly is a commodity is perhaps less so. After all, languages are not like traditional commodities that are material, tangible goods. However, while comparing language with traditional commodities may at first give rise to differences, overemphasizing such distinctions can overshadow a critical underlying theme that unifies the two: all commodities undergo a process of commodification to become such; they are not commodities *sui generis*. Seen in this light, broadening the conceptualization of commodity to include language is rather non-

controversial. Entities become commodities as humans attribute “use value” and “exchange value” (Marx, 1906 [1867]) to them based on desires, practices, and social-economic exchanges.

As Jaworski and Thurlow note, “under the new economic conditions of globalization, existing language forms and configurations (for example bilingualism) are put to new uses, gain new values, and become objects of intense scrutiny as well as vehicles and sites of ideological struggle, contestation, legitimation, and authentication of ethnic, national, and other subject positions” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010:258). Language is, therefore, a key dimension in globalization. For example, this can be seen in the way that languages and language skills are increasingly marketed for economic advantage: English as a global language functions as a commodity as its value increases, and its (as well as other languages like Chinese) popularity often “closely follow[s] market trends” (Tan & Rubdy, 2008:3).

With these points in mind, I consider language as a commodity in the sense that languages can “constitute a saleable commodity with regard to business and marketing, whilst for clients they represent an investment in cultural capital which can then be exchanged within the global labour market” (Rassool, 2007:148). Language is a commodity because its value derives from its being treated as a “standardizable and measurable skill” (Heller, 2010a:354). Languages are exchanged, invested in, and a means of investment; languages are increasingly seen as having market value because individuals with multilingual skills are more competitive in the labor market. Moreover, like traditional commodities, languages do not operate in an egalitarian political setting. Instead, they “operate in relation to one another and occupy different (political) positions” (Blommaert, 2010:20).

5. National pride and economic profit: Language in a globalized world

Paul Bruthiaux (2008) surveyed a complex array of publications in applied linguistics on language and globalization and notes a stark trend: researchers in this domain tended to focus on sociological rather than economic aspects of globalization. This observation is of interest in light of a broader recognition that “globalization is primarily linked to economic factors in an overwhelming majority of journalistic sources” (Bruthiaux, 2008:19; Teubert, 2001). This trend is, however, changing, as sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists analyzing the complex and multi-faceted roles that language plays in processes of globalization are increasingly placing greater emphasis on the influence of economic elements in the commodification of language.

Alexandre Duchêne and Monica Heller’s (2011) recently edited volume *Pride and Profit* is an example of newly emphasizing the economic in studies on language and globalization. There is a sense in which language can always be viewed as a commodity (Heller, 2010b), a point which Pierre Bourdieu captured in seeing language as a form of “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991). However, Heller and Duchêne argue that the period they identify as “late capitalism” (from the 1990s to the 21st century) is uniquely characterized by discursive shifts that reveal the significance of economic factors in how language operates in processes of globalization (Heller & Duchêne, 2011:3).

Prior to “late capitalism,” Heller and Duchêne propose that modern discourses and language ideologies were primarily characterized by a relation to the nation-state as a vehicle for identity. Rather than displacing nationalistic-type discourses, Duchêne and Heller maintain that discourses within “late capitalism” are increasingly and dynamically characterized by two interwoven tropes, “pride” and “profit.” “Pride” is here understood in nationalistic terms, as a “product of the modern nation-state” that functions as a means of self-legitimization, structuring,

contestation, (re)imagination, and maintenance. “Profit” is viewed in economic terms, and often relates to how linguistic adeptness can be exploited in the globalized/globalizing market. Heller and Duchêne consider “pride” and “profit” to be “keywords” in the sense of McElhinny (2007), that is, as socially consequential and contested loci. Heller and Duchêne maintain that the shift toward including the trope of “profit” represents a break from former hegemony and is uniquely distinguished by the discursive construction of language in economic terms, such as “added value” (Heller & Duchêne, 2011:9).

Consequently, the centrality of language, and, in particular, linguistic variability and multilingualism, is seen as a core feature of late capitalism. The interaction of “pride” and “profit” creates a nexus of nationalism, globalization, and neoliberalism. Moreover, these old and new discourses are not only “intertwined in complex ways” (Heller & Duchêne, 2011:3), they are co-constitutive and “inextricably linked” (Heller & Bell, 2011:167). The discursive shift from “pride” to “profit,” therefore, involves significant transformations in the role of language in society moving from a symbol of national identity into a hybrid role that is highly informed by the global(izing) economy. Thus, language is commodified as it becomes a marketable resource for use in new market niches as well as a form of symbolic and cultural capital that has significant added value and exchange value (Tan & Rubdy, 2008).

In what follows, I trace the flow of Kaqchikel on a commodity chain where multisited production originates in Guatemala before expanding to U.S. production at institutions of higher education. I consider this expansion to the U.S., in light of the national aims, of which programs like FLAS are an integral component, to be a crucial point in the commodification process. Kaqchikel becomes embedded in discursive practices that treat multilingual proficiency as an important – and marketable – skillset, and, as a commodity, is valorized by virtue of U.S. learners’ ability to contribute to national needs.

5. From the National Defense Languages Act to Foreign Language and Area Studies: Shifting discourses on U.S. foreign language study

One expectation that can be extrapolated from Duchêne and Heller’s (2011) work is that, as a given language is treated as a commodity, this transformation aligns with discursive shifts that increasingly appeal to economic profit as a newly emerging tropological feature in discourses about that language. The way that this works out in discourses relating to the Kaqchikel language is complex and tied to context-dependent social-economic, sociopolitical, and historical developments.

In U.S. discourses on foreign language programs at institutions of higher education, the decision to secure federal funding for modern language instruction grew out of the post-WWII era, where globalizing forces caused the U.S. to rethink its role in the world and the role of education in securing national interests. Eventually the choice to invest in educational programs (including teaching foreign languages) was codified when on September 2, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) ratified the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). As former U.S. Secretary of Health Arthur S. Flemming notes, the NDEA was based partly on a political philosophy that directs federal aid to national and state-run programs that satisfy “national need” (Flemming, 1960:132). In the 1950s, U.S. national need primarily entailed international cooperation among shifting political and economic alliances, as well obtaining security.

Title VI of the NDEA specifically set out to ensure that these needs were met through language instruction. Moreover, this would be achieved by recruiting from, in the language of the Act, “the talent of the our nation” (Flemming, 1960:134) and creating language experts that could fill the new “need[s]’ [held] by government, business, and industry for making language teaching more *functional*” (Derthrick, 1959:50, emphasis original). As Fleming states, these needs included:

The obligations of world leadership, the increasing demands of industry and the armed forces for highly trained personnel, the requirements of foreign trade and international diplomacy for personnel having mastery of languages other than their own, and the increasing complexity of our economic and social arrangements. (Flemming, 1960:134)

Consequently, national education, generally, and language education, specifically, were seen as crucial means for meeting U.S. “demands.”

Interestingly, with regard to the initial aims of the NDEA, both tropes of “pride” and “profit” operate, but there is a greater emphasis on the former. Linguistic skills are viewed first as a source of national pride, and economic and international competitiveness derive from this primary goal. Multilingual citizens came to be viewed as a resource to, among other ideals, “strengthen resistance to totalitarianism, and enhance the quality of [U.S.] leadership on the international scene” (Flemming, 1960:132). Additionally, rather than being a “‘crash’ program,” the NDEA was carefully crafted in order to respond to the pressing need of “defense of our nation against every enemy of body, mind, and spirit that time may bring” (Derthrick, 1959:51).

With details laid out regarding the immediate needs of the U.S. and foreign language instruction as a functional means to satisfy these needs, U.S. Language education institutions became the primary site for obtaining the objectives of the NDEA. As the then U.S. Commissioner of Education, Lawrence G. Derthrick’s exhortation to the general assembly of the Modern Language Association was quite fitting: “tune your teaching of languages to the key of national need” (Derthrick, 1959:51). One of the immediate outcomes of Title VI of the Education Act was a program known as Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS). FLAS programs offer funding to individual students studying particular languages of interest to the U.S., and the goals of FLAS echo those of the NDEA:

- To assist in the development of knowledge, resources, and trained personnel for modern language and area or international studies.
- To foster foreign language acquisition and fluency.
- To develop a domestic pool of international experts to meet national needs. (USDE, n.d.)

Again the importance of “national needs” in defining the aims of Title VI programs comes to the fore. However, it is significant to note that the phrase is ambiguous, which allows for programs such as FLAS to be sensitive to discursive shifts and changes in national need over time as global developments prompted new demands for the U.S.

In the U.S. education system, attention to language instruction has often been sensitive to national needs aimed at present and future security. The presence of Title VI in the NDEA itself is evidence of this: competition with the Soviet Union and increasing international trade following the second World War were catalysts for expanding foreign language instruction at U.S. institutions (NRC, 2007:269). The NDEA has been revised repeatedly since its inception,

and, as of 1980 is currently embedded in the Higher Education Act (HEA), which comes under review every six years. Although legislation concerning Title VI programs has been altered, the core ideological underpinnings of the NDEA remain intact. In reviewing the history and efficacy of Title VI programs, the National Resource Council (NRC) observes that:

The original goals of providing linguistic and international expertise to serve the national interest and global understanding endure. So too does the original *mechanism* selected to serve that goal, that is, working with institutions of higher education. (NRC, 2007:267)

Additionally, however, the NRC lists among “several interesting changes” since the early 1980s that “the original goals [of the NDEA] were supplemented with the aim of linking Title VI to the nation’s *economic competitiveness* (NRC, 2007:267, emphasis added). The trope of “pride” was and is still relevant, but the notion of linguistic skills as a source of economic benefit and competitiveness became increasingly salient in discourse.

The shift toward economic needs is perhaps most evident in the creation of two new Title VI programs within the U.S. Department of Education for the aim of “meeting business needs for international knowledge and foreign language skills: the Business and International Education (BIE) Program [...] and the Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) Program” (NRC, 2007:182). However, this discursive evolution is also manifest in discourses on FLAS. For example, program descriptions on USDE brochures and university websites give prominence to “business”³ instead of national security:

the Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships Program has produced and continues to produce a uniquely qualified cadre of modern foreign language experts whose knowledge significantly influences business, government, and higher education. (USDE, n.d.; KU, 2013)

Accordingly, the FLAS program and its objectives manifest a shift to the trope of “profit” as more attention is given to linguistic skills a source of economic benefit and competitiveness. Moreover, just as the NDEA originated in response to broad politico-historical developments, programs such as FLAS exhibit sensitivity to global trends. In particular, the FLAS program has evolved in order to meet national needs for language instruction, which have in recent decades been informed by economic conditions.

The FLAS program thus evidences the discursive shift from “pride” to “profit” that Duchêne and Heller (2011) suggest is characteristic of late capitalism. Moreover, because multilingual capacities are valued for their utility in serving malleable national needs and interests, languages such as Kaqchikel undergo a process of commodification as they are embedded in practices that treat language skills as “standardizable,” “measureable” (Heller, 2010a:354) and marketable. Kaqchikel, therefore, becomes a commodity through the FLAS program, which encourages the consumption of language in order to meet strategic objectives centered on national security and economic advantage.

³ It is worth noting that FLAS participants at the University of Kansas from professional schools such as the School of Business are eligible for greater amounts of funding (\$18,000 in an academic year) than students in non-professional schools (\$15,000) such as the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (KU 2013).

6. Kaqchikel goes global: Kaqchikel language programs in U.S. universities

As noted above, language instruction in U.S. educational institutions has often been reactionary. Emphasis on teaching specific languages is additionally often an acknowledgement that the creation of language experts is more critical for certain languages than others in addressing national security issues. For example, the Bush administration “announced the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) to increase the nation’s capacity to provide experts with critical language skills – in languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Farsi/Dari, Hindi/Urdu, and Turkic – determined to be vital to national security and foreign policy” (NRC, 2007:4-5). Kaqchikel is not “critical” in this sense; at present it may be “latent,” meaning that it is “not reflective of the true national need” (Brecht, 1998:101) that critical languages explicitly address. However, the study of Kaqchikel is still interpreted as satisfying the objectives of the FLAS program, specifically, and the NDEA (/HEA), generally. If this is the case, how does the teaching of Kaqchikel work toward fulfilling the “strategic goal” of Title VI, which includes “provid[ing] the human resources, knowledge, and information necessary for national security and economic well-being” (Brecht, Golonka, Hart, & Rivers, 2007:19)?

The existence of Kaqchikel in the FLAS program is in part explained by national responses to global developments in the 1980s and 1990s that caused language programs dependent on Title VI funding to shift focus based on “new international realities” (USDE, 2013, para. 16). Such changing realities eventually generated an interest in knowledge about Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs; languages other than Spanish, French, English, and German) among U.S. policymakers. As the post-Cold War détente relaxed tensions concerning national security, global developments such as increased international trade amplified interdependency among nations. These new economic conditions informed revisions of the HEA in 1980, and the revisions reflected an acute awareness of the need to emphasize international and area studies in higher education. As the USDE notes,

The HEA reauthorization language reflected the increasing importance of international expertise to all aspects of modern life, including business, technology, education, media, health, and other professional fields. (USDE, 2013, para. 12)

Moreover, the orientation toward economic needs and competitiveness was made further explicit when the HEA was reauthorized in 1998:

The security, stability and economic vitality of the United States in a complex global era dependent upon American experts in and citizens knowledgeable about world regions, foreign languages, and international affairs, as well as upon a strong research base in these areas. [...] Dramatic post-Cold War changes in the world’s geopolitical and economic landscapes are creating needs for American expertise and knowledge about a greater diversity of less commonly taught foreign languages and nations of the world. (USDE 2013,, para. 13)

Accordingly, the “reauthorization language” of Title VI of the HEA in the 1980 and 1998 reauthorizations pointed to the significance of globalization and economic factors for rearticulating national needs for foreign language instruction. The language use articulating these needs demonstrates a discursive shift that foregrounds the trope of “profit” and backgrounds the

trope of “pride.” Moreover, and quite significant, language needs were radically expanded to include stronger orientation to LCTLs in Title VI programs such as FLAS. Consequently, the new landscapes of globalization triggered a change of objectives that opened the door for LCTLs such as Kaqchikel to be taught at U.S. universities with the assistance of federal funds.

This point in the history of FLAS is critical for the understanding of how languages undergo a process of commodification through the FLAS program. In terms of speaking for the sake of speaking, and of basic communication and a source of identity, indigenous languages of the world have little “use value” according to the language of the HEA. Put another way, the value of indigenous languages for the purpose of satisfying national needs in a global world is not intrinsic, but, rather, instrumental. Kaqchikel, and other languages taught through FLAS programs, increase in their “exchange value” as they become commodified in an effort to maintain and stimulate economic competitiveness. Thus, multilingual proficiency in Kaqchikel is treated as a marketable skillset with exchange value in a global market.

However, the decision to include Kaqchikel among the foreign languages taught at U.S. higher education institutions was not exclusively the result of congressional deliberations and the more local decisions of National Resource Centers (NRCs) where FLAS programs operate. As noted above, concurrent with the passing of the NDEA, sociopolitical and historical developments in Guatemala that followed a CIA-led ousting of President Arbenz initially produced devastating consequences for the vitality of Mayan languages such as Kaqchikel. These effects included dramatic language shift toward Spanish that was not significantly challenged until the emergence of the Maya cultural revitalization movements of the 1980s. Moreover, as the atrocities by the minority *ladino* Guatemalan government against the majority indigenous population of Guatemala began gaining international attention, U.S. academics increased research in Guatemala relating to these events. Importantly, these researchers included linguists such as Judith Maxwell and R. McKenna Brown, who collaborated with Mayan scholar-activists (for example, at Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín) and eventually helped found Oxlajuj Aj, a six-week intensive summer language program to study Kaqchikel in Guatemala.

Sponsored by Tulane University and the University of Texas at Austin, Oxlajuj Aj operates in part with funding from FLAS, and it became the cornerstone for the eventual establishment of a more robust U.S.-based Kaqchikel program. FLAS funding is still a major source for financing U.S. student participation in this program through summer fellowships that enable travel to Guatemala. Eventually Kaqchikel courses were taught at Tulane University through the Stone Center for Latin American Studies during the academic year.

The realization of Oxlajuj Aj and the program at Tulane ultimately enabled a second U.S.-based program to be initiated through a FLAS-operating NRC at the University of Kansas (Emily Tummons, April 23, 2013, personal communication). The program at KU has been hosted by the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) since its inception in 1997. Together with Quechua, teaching Kaqchikel was part of a newly-initiated program, the Indigenous Languages Program (ILP). The ILP was established by then director of CLAS, Professor Elizabeth Kuznesof, who authored a grant proposal to fund the program (Elizabeth Kuznesof, October 16, 2013, personal communication). The successful realization of ILP at KU resulted from a convergence of historical developments. Within KU and even in the context of U.S. academia more broadly, there was heightened interest in things indigenous, including the study of indigenous languages. For example, at KU this was additionally evidenced by the creation in of an independent department dedicated to Native American and Indigenous Studies, the Center for Indigenous

Studies (now the Indigenous Studies Program) whose founding director was Donald L. Fixico. Second, the ILP arose in the midst of an existing architecture of relationships between KU scholars and communities in Central America. This included faculty members such as Kuznesof, whose primary area of specialization is Brazil, but also others whose research focused on Guatemala, such as Brent Metz and Anita Herzfeld. KU's strong Central American ties thus provided a network that contributed to the founding of the ILP.

Among the ILP goals was to hire native speakers who could serve as language teachers. To achieve this for Kaqchikel, Professor Anita Herzfeld received funding to travel to Guatemala, in part to search for a speaker who might be interested in teaching the language at KU. While in Guatemala, Herzfeld met Pakal B'alam, a linguist and activist from Tecpán who had been working in Antigua with Judith Maxwell (from Tulane's Stone Center). B'alam entered the Latin America Studies master's program and became KU's first Kaqchikel teacher as part of the ILP, a position that he held for six years. The inclusion of Kaqchikel language classes at KU was, in a sense, made possible through the Central American connections already present through KU faculty (Anderson, 2000).⁴

After Pakal B'alam left KU, another Kaqchikel Maya linguist and activist, Ixkusamil Alonzo Guaján, came to KU as a recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship, and taught Kaqchikel classes for a short time. Her time at KU as instructor of Kaqchikel was impacted by earlier national and university policy developments that gave rise to requirements imposed upon foreign language instructors whose native language was not English (Elizabeth Kusnesof, October 16, 2013, personal communication). In the history of Kaqchikel at KU, then, she was the second and last native speaker to serve as a Kaqchikel instructor. Since Alonzo Guaján left, non-native speakers of Kaqchikel have held the position of Kaqchikel instructor. Alonzo Guaján was succeeded in 2006 by Brad Montgomery-Anderson, a then graduate student in Linguistics and former FLAS fellow. Emily Tummons, who also received a FLAS to study Kaqchikel while a student in Linguistics at KU, followed Montgomery-Anderson and taught Kaqchikel until spring 2014. She was succeeded by Katherine Moneymaker Barker, who is the current instructor.⁵

Accordingly, part of the reason that the Kaqchikel language became integrated into the FLAS program was that multiple circumstances contributed to its being ripe for selection. These circumstances include: converting the ideals of the NDEA to the HEA, the new focus on LCTLs, the status of Kaqchikel as a relatively well-studied and "principal" Mayan language, the rise of the pan-Mayan movement, and the transnational connections established by linguists and scholar activists in the U.S. and Guatemala. The ability for Kaqchikel to be taught at U.S. universities was due in large part to relationships at both institutional and individual levels, and the present of a complex meshwork linking places like KU to Central America and Guatemala.

Importantly, not all the entities and social actors involved in making the teaching of Kaqchikel a federally funded project did so based on the logic of globalization. Some linguists, for example, seem to be more motivated by the ideological mores of the Mayan revitalization movement and the needs of organizations such as the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín and the Academia de Lenguas Mayas en Guatemala (French, 2010:53-62). These organizations emphasize the intrinsic value of Mayan languages and cultures rather than any instrumental value they provide (ALMG, 1989, 1992). This type of emphasis is also present in texts produced

⁴ KU's CLAS hosted Judith Maxwell at a conference in the early years of the ILP. KU also hosted a weeklong visit by Alberto Esquit Choy (then president of the Academy of Mayan Languages in Guatemala), a scholar and activist who has been influential in the Mayan Movement.

⁵ As of September, 2014.

by the Center for Latin American Studies at KU articulating reasons why one should study Kaqchikel. When the FLAS program is the discourse topic, KU texts such as websites represent U.S. national need as a motivating factor by recontextualizing linguistic elements from USDE discourses on FLAS (KU, 2013). However, at an even more micro level, texts produced by the KU Center for Latin American Studies are starkly different in their emphasis: they highlight issues such as language revitalization and maintenance, obtaining a greater understanding of linguistic diversity, unique access to unique resources in Guatemala, and the intrinsic value of Kaqchikel (Tummons, 2013; Rohloff & Tummons, 2013).

The non-federal developments that enabled Kaqchikel to be taught at U.S. institutions via federally funded programs are significant for the emergence of a complex meshwork based on Kaqchikel language instruction. This is because including Kaqchikel among the LCTLs was not a purely top-down decision. Additionally, ideals underlying microsocietal objectives for teaching Kaqchikel diverge significantly from larger macrosocietal aims. Instead, language production in Guatemala and the U.S., individual agency, and the spontaneous emergence of interlinkages that utilized existing national and transnational structures combined to increase the mobility of Kaqchikel along the commodity chain. Thus, control of Kaqchikel is dependent on federal structures initiated by the NDEA/HEA that emphasizes the ideologies of national defense and economic competitiveness, but is also heavily influenced by a grid of social relations where the ideologies centered on intrinsic value flourish.

7. Kaqchikel goes (back) to Guatemala: FLAS participants and language revitalization

Up to this point the commodification of Kaqchikel is manifest as it enters into the realm of U.S. higher education via federally funded programs supporting modern foreign language instruction. From the perspective of the U.S. Department of Education, LCTLs such as Kaqchikel have exchange value in that they contribute to the ability of FLAS participants to be more competitive in a globalized and multilingual economy. Thus, while the FLAS program and its predecessor initially arose for purposes of national defense, a major current aim is to promote internationally competent and economically competitive laborers in the global workforce. The use of Kaqchikel (in terms of speaking/studying) in U.S. universities can be partially seen as use (in terms of value) as a skillset that promotes national and personal economic needs.

From the perspective of this link in the commodity chain, the effect of FLAS programs on Kaqchikel communities is not readily apparent. The commodification of Kaqchikel in this manner could suggest potentially negative consequences regarding the use of Kaqchikel communities, since increasing the use of the language among Kaqchikel Mayas is not necessarily a primary outcome of FLAS at the federal level. Additionally, the commodification of Kaqchikel through the FLAS and LCTL programs has developed concurrently with increased language shift in Guatemala as globalization has generated increased value for language proficiency in Spanish. This trend has in some cases impacted the use of Kaqchikel by Kaqchikel Maya in Guatemala, with bilingualism and/or Spanish monolingualism ebbing and flowing (Garzon et al., 1998; French, 2010; Heinze Balcazar, 2008).⁶

However, stopping at this point in the commodity chain leads to an incomplete analysis, and it is important to recognize that the flow of language as Kaqchikel moves along the commodity chain does not end in the U.S. Moreover, the “needs” and “desires” that learning, teaching, and

⁶ Maxwell (2009:109) notably points to a recent slowing of this shift as more Kaqchikel youth are speaking the language.

speaking Kaqchikel satisfy are insufficiently explained by exclusive reference to U.S. national interests. The reason for this is that the interests of individual students are not necessarily aligned with (or even aware of) the national needs that the FLAS program exists to fulfill. In general, and especially for non-heritage speakers, “Often the study of a foreign language (not a particular one) is deemed as career enhancing, a means of self-development, and a source of knowledge about another culture” (Janus, 1998:167). Learners of Kaqchikel in U.S. institutions may be motivated by a variety of factors that influence their decision to enroll in Kaqchikel language classes, and this likely includes FLAS participants. Some of these factors may be rather trivial, such as meeting immediate schedule needs and convenience. Since FLAS in particular is a source of funding for graduate students (and undergraduates as of 2010), financial aid for schooling may be a significant motivating factor influencing students’ initial decisions to participate in Kaqchikel programs.

Regardless of the motivating factors for students’ decisions to apply for FLAS fellowships to study Kaqchikel, participants in the Kaqchikel FLAS program at KU often engage in research and other activities that have positive material consequences in Kaqchikel communities in Guatemala (Emily Tummons, personal communication, April 23, 2013). For example, students who enroll in Oxlajuj Aj, or the summer language school Kab’lajuj Ey, hosted by Wuqu’ Kawoq, create “economic opportunities” for native speakers of Kaqchikel who serve as teachers (Barrett, 2009a, 2009b:1; Emily Tummons, personal communication, April 23, 2013). Moreover, recipients of FLAS fellowships have also partnered with the NGO Wuqu’ Kawoq in ways that have promoted language conservation/revitalization. Wuqu’ Kawoq is a U.S.-based healthcare NGO in Guatemala that is committed to language conservation by encouraging the use of Kaqchikel in the delivery of medical care. Several Kaqchikel FLAS recipients have interned with Wuqu’ Kawoq, produced Kaqchikel literature for use by the organization, and participated in the Kab’lajuj Ey language school. Currently, the Academic Coordinator of Kab’lajuj Ey is a KU FLAS fellow.

Consequently, multiple interrelated factors converge that generate benefits for Kaqchikel communities and the overall vitality of the Kaqchikel language. On the one hand, some of these benefits stem from the FLAS program in a general sense. For example, teaching Kaqchikel at U.S. institutions raises the prestige of the language in Guatemala, and entire programs such as Oxlajuj Aj depend on FLAS for economic support (Rusty Barrett, personal communication, May 6, 2013). On the other hand, though, individual participants in the FLAS program also utilize its resources in work that effectively contributes to the expansion of the use of Kaqchikel into more domains. Moreover, both program and individual resources contribute to the emergence of niche markets where Kaqchikel proficiency is viewed as a valuable skill with exchange value in Guatemala, since FLAS assisted programs provide job opportunities in education and healthcare that are exclusively available to native speakers.

8. The Kaqchikel commodity chain

The above discussion indicates that applying a commodity chain approach to Kaqchikel illuminates the complex meshwork of relationships that spontaneously emerge as Kaqchikel is commodified through the FLAS program. This commodity chain – the Kaqchikel commodity chain – is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

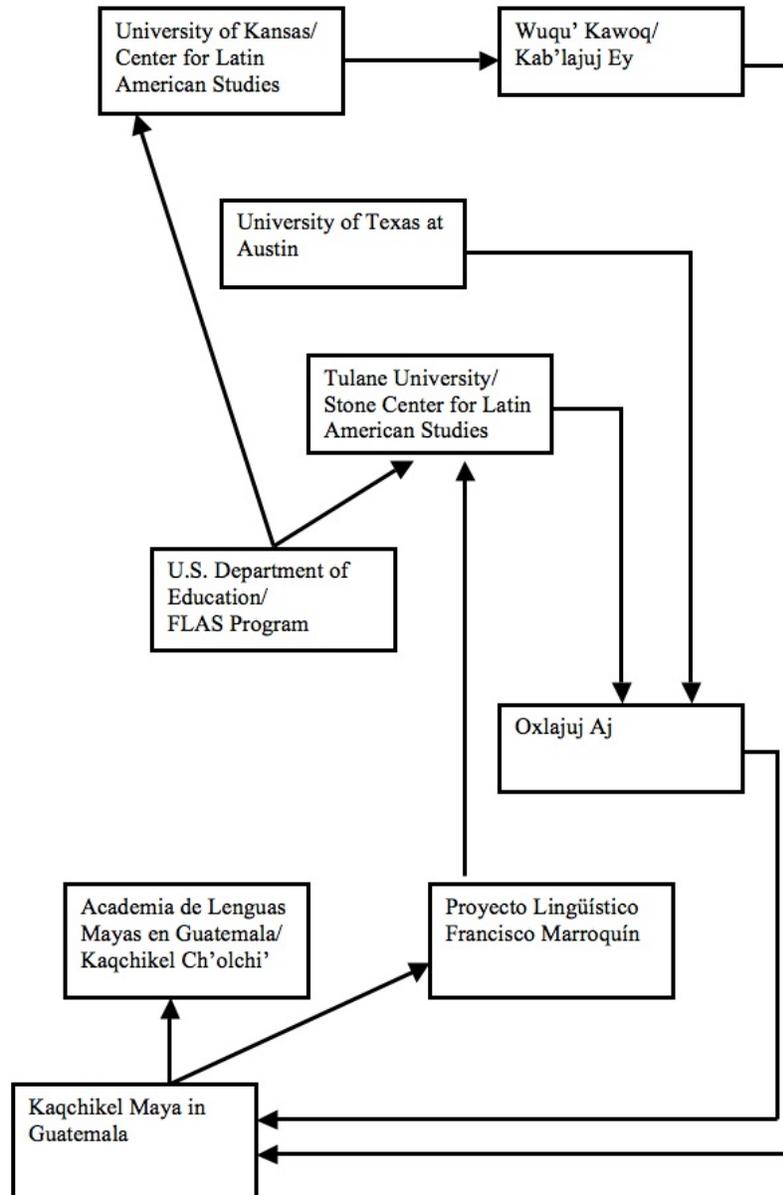


Figure 1: The Kaqchikel language commodity chain, 1987-2013.

Kaqchikel is initially produced by native speakers in Guatemala, and production expands as organizations such as ALMG and PLFM assist by supporting revitalization and maintenance. These local and regional developments in Guatemala were largely independent of larger market trends in the U.S. wherein processes of globalization were creating niche markets for acquiring language proficiency in indigenous languages such as Kaqchikel. The next link in the chain begins the process of U.S. entities adding value to the language, which I take to be a nascent form of commodification. This process starts with bilateral relations between not just states but also individual actors at Tulane and PLFM, and it further valorizes Kaqchikel through the founding of Oxlajuj Aj. With these new interlinkages in place, and with existing structures resultant from the NDEA, Kaqchikel became commodified when, as an LCTL, it was integrated

into the FLAS program and taught at U.S. institutions. In this way, the commodification of Kaqchikel was partly driven by international demands, and production also becomes multisited. I propose that this point in the commodity chain uniquely entails commodification because Kaqchikel is now treated as a standardizable, marketable skill, which can be utilized for profit-based national needs. Moreover, this process of commodification through U.S. programs coincides with discursive shifts about the role of language instruction in meeting national needs wherein the trope of profit is prominent. Finally, some individuals who receive FLAS fellowships to study Kaqchikel further commodify Kaqchikel by supporting language conservation and instruction programs that collaborate with Kaqchikel Mayas and valorize the language by again making proficiency a marketable skillset.

What the Kaqchikel commodity chain reveals is that social actors utilize existing structures in order to create and support “transborder” (Stephen, 2007) relationships. That is, these relationships do not only involve crossing the boundaries of two nation-states. Rather, transborder relationships transcend these limitations; they are diachronic and cross linguistic, “ethnic, class, cultural, colonial, and state borders” (Stephen, 2007:6) in addition to national ones. These transborder relationships of the Kaqchikel commodity chain, which enable the spontaneous instantiation of the meshwork in Table 1 (see above), are illustrated in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Stages of the Kaqchikel language commodity chain, 1987-2013.⁷

⁷ Image adapted from Armstrong’s (2002:25) *Outline Map Resource Book*. © McGraw Hill Education. Used with permission.

In this figure, the stages of the commodity chain are sequentially numbered, but it should be noted that these often overlap and do not follow a strict chronological development where one stage simply follows another. In terms of developing transborder relationships and complex interlinkages between entities, Stage 1 occurred through interactions with U.S. linguists and Mayan linguists and activists in Guatemala. This facilitated further transborder relations as U.S. students traveled to Guatemala to participate in Oxlajuj Aj (Stage 2). The existence of this language program in Antigua and the realization of a FLAS supported Kaqchikel program at Tulane enabled a second U.S.-based Kaqchikel program to be founded (Stage 3), which was first taught by a Kaqchikel Maya linguist and activist attending KU (Stage 4).

The fifth stage demarcates yet another pathway of the Kaqchikel commodity chain and the emergence of interlinkages between U.S.-based and Guatemala-based organizations as U.S. students, through collaboration with Kaqchikel individuals and groups, help enact positive impacts for Kaqchikel language use in Guatemala. From these transborder relationships a complex meshwork of individuals, organizations, and institutions, emerges that produces a unique “social field” (Glick Schiller, 2003) where the Kaqchikel language inhabits a “simultaneity of connections” (Stephen, 2007:315). Within this social field operate multiple ideologies and values, such as state defense, economic competitiveness, and the value of cultural and linguistic diversity.

9. Conclusions

The commodities approach to understanding how Kaqchikel came to be taught through the FLAS program pushes us toward acknowledging the *cycle* of Kaqchikel use and how it functions as a tradable commodity between U.S. and Mayan/Guatemalan social actors. In other words, the commodification of Kaqchikel is not merely a unidirectional process that bottoms out in U.S. universities and participants of programs like FLAS. Additionally, this approach enables us to highlight what can be seen as potentially positive aspects of globalization – at least in the sense that individuals utilize existing structures in counter-hegemonic and counter-homogenizing ways. The return trip seen in this light almost subverts the homogenizing tendency of globalization that can erase linguistic and cultural difference. This is significant because this stage of the Kaqchikel commodity chain involves U.S.-Maya collaboration in valorizing Kaqchikel. Such collaboration can further help to overcome the linguistic and cultural assimilationism inherent in the neoliberal multiculturalism that arose after the close of the Guatemalan civil war. Accordingly, work by current and former FLAS recipients in Kaqchikel communities has in some cases positively informed language shift by increasing the domains in which Kaqchikel is spoken. This, in turn, adds value to Kaqchikel, both for the U.S. students and researchers as well as the members of the Kaqchikel community. Moreover, the U.S.-based activity in Guatemalan Mayan contexts works in concert with local efforts of language activism and language revitalization.

This leads to the question of whether globalization both causes language shift as well as creating tools/structures to counter it. The current research suggests that, just as “dominant languages may well be utilized to subvert the very interests they represent” (Tan & Rubdy, 2008:8), so language programs such as FLAS may become a tool for subverting hegemony and homogenizing tendencies (for example, by countering/balancing the increase of Spanish in Kaqchikel communities as a means of perceived economic viability). The Kaqchikel commodity chain highlights the role of human agency (see Tan & Rubdy, 2008:8) as individual motivations

and desires inform participation among, and in collaboration with, Kaqchikel communities in ways that are adding value to the Kaqchikel language.

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