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“Our Languages Do Not Die, They are Being Killed”: Indigenismo and its Effects on Indigenous Language Revitalization

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“Our languages do not die, they are being killed”: Indigenismo and its Effects on Indigenous Language Revitalization

UNLV

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Introduction

How can language activism be introduced into the field of social movement theory?



(The Conversation 2019)

Language Activism – an “energetic action focused on language use in order to create, influence, and change existing language policies,” (Combs and Penfield 2012).

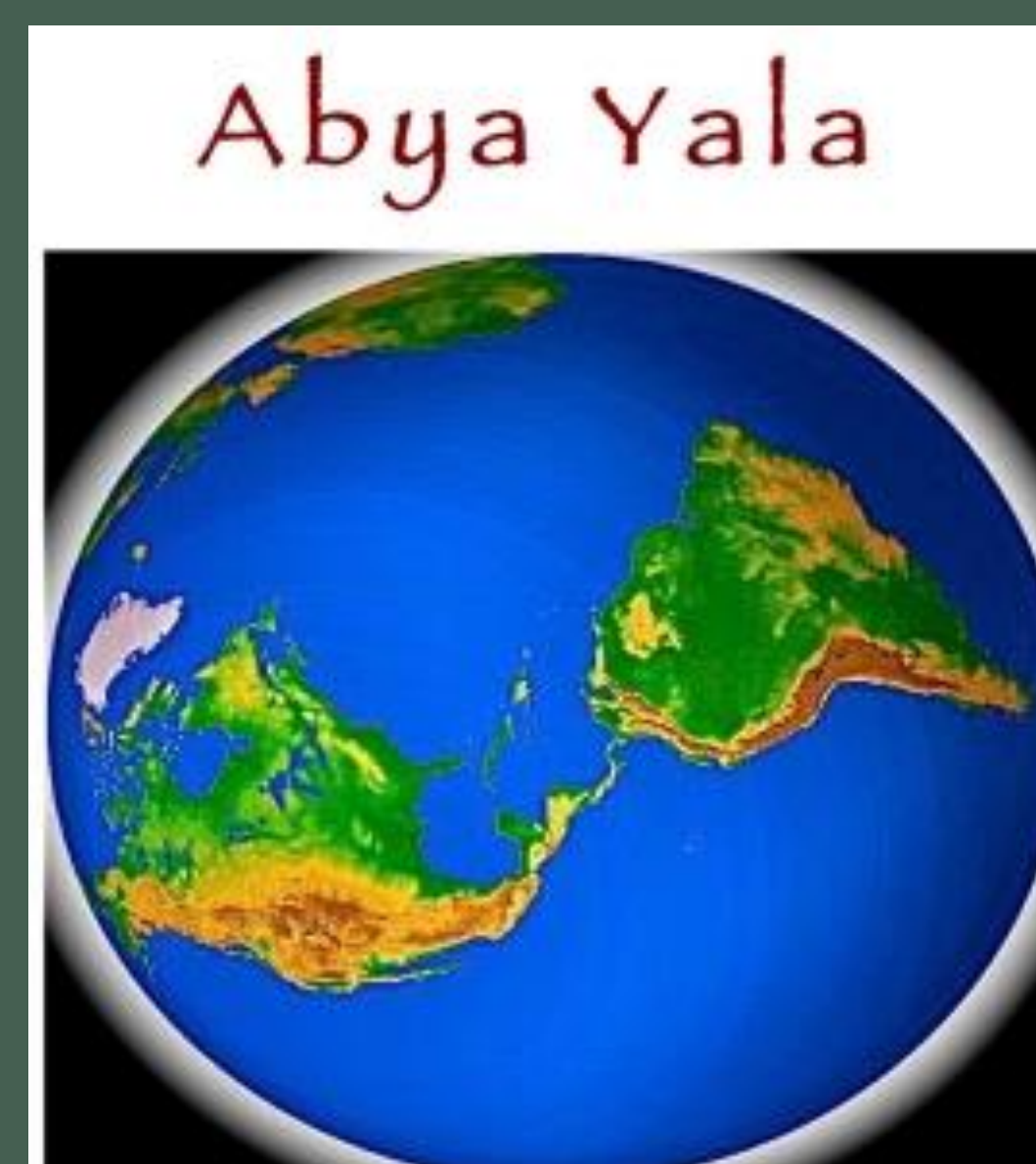
Present Research

- Minority language documentation & revitalization practices
- Language attitudes & ideologies
- Minority language shift

Research Aims

Develop a socio-political and socio-historical framework of language activism in Abiyala (as adopted by Keme (2011)) highlighting:

- 1) *indigenismo* in Mexico
- 2) the link between language and *indigenismo* in Mexico
- 3) language activism in Mexico



Map of Abiyala (Abya Yala) (Permanent Forum 2006)

Methods

Literature Review

- History
- Applied Linguistics
- Linguistic Anthropology
- Cultural Anthropology

Indigenismo in Mexico

Indigenismo - a nationalist- motivated movement that sought to define Indigenous groups in relation to “modernized” mestizo groups.

- Manuel Gamio’s “official indigenismo” & *mestizaje* (a cultural project that “claimed” Indigenous ancestry while distancing itself from the living Indigenous population)
- The façade of the Inter-American Indian Institute.
- Mexico as the “hemispheric model” of assimilationist policy (Giraudó & Lewis 2012).

Language & Indigenismo

- Indigenous languages as a marker of identity and threat to the “imagined *mexicano* community” (Brading 1988; Dawson 1998).
- Bilingual Education Reform as a method of erasure.
- Indigenous languages in Abiyala as *dialectos* (inferior languages).



Yásnaya Aguilar speaking before the Cámara de Diputados in Mexico in 2019 (El País 2019)

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Language Activism in Mexico

“Counter spaces” – “spatial projects produced through the political imagination and practice of social movements as an alternative to the spaces created by the dominant system,” (Magaña 2016, 218).

- Bilingual Classrooms
- Digital Spaces
- Community Radio



Bilingual Classroom in Mexico (Huffington Post 2017)

Conclusion & Future Research

- Language activism combats the legacy of *indigenismo*.
- The project of Abiyala recognizes the agency of Indigenous groups.

Future Research

- Identity-based social movement theory
- “Parlay our expertise into political agency” (Paz 2020, 280).
- The role of globalization in transnational language identity-based activism

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