

**GBS Project Report 2015:**  
**Cross-mediated elicitation in Amuzgo:**  
**Application of a participatory and experimental model**  
**from the Meso-American Morphophonology Project**

*Bien DoBui and Jair Apostol*

**Description of the Project**

In 2016, this project sought to apply the experimental model of elicitation from the MamP Project (Meso-American Morphophonology Project) as it was developed from 2009-2014 over the course of dozens of different workshops throughout the Papaloapam Basin in southeastern Mexico. Our area of focus is the series of dialects that make up the Amuzgo language group as it may be found in Xochistlahuaca, the capital of the Amuzgo civilization. Objectives of our project are similar to those of the MamP Project<sup>1</sup>: 1) to produce materials for bilingual schools through co-participatory workshops exploring cycles of orality-textuality-orality; and 2) to gather data for

linguistic research on a language group that has not been directly worked with since the 1960s.



A public mural in Xochistlahuaca depicting a traditional weaver (A. Massart, 2016)

**About Amuzgo**

*Ñomndaa* ('word of water,' the endonym for *Amuzgo*) is a member of the wide-sprawling and diverse Oto-Manguean language stock. Previously considered a Mixtecan language, Longacre (1966) demonstrated that Amuzgo was better classified as its own language group. Today, we count four different Amuzgoan varieties: Xochistlahuaca Amuzgo, Huixtepec Amuzgo (both AMU), Ipalapa Amuzgo (AZM), and San Pedro Amuzgo (AZG), the better documented of the four. Speakers of Amuzgo languages total about 35,000 in number with AMU, the variety from Xochistlahuaca (the center of the Amuzgo civilization), being the most commonly spoken and understood (Suarez, 1983). AMU is listed as having 30,000 speakers, although it is locally well known that speakers from Xochistlahuaca (pop. ~4500) do not necessarily understand all that is said by a speaker from Huehuetónoc (pop. ~1900) about 30 kilometers from Xochistlahuaca, let alone those from Cozoyoapan, the town across the street. Little dialectal work has been done and remains an area in need to further investigation.

The status of AMU is rated as 5 (developing) on the scale from *Ethnologue* (Lewis, et al., 2015) as the language counts a widely used writing system, its own radio station, a dictionary, and other written materials. On the other hand, AZG is listed as 6b, threatened and AZM as 7, shifting.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Data, recordings, methodology, materials, and publications can be accessed on the website for this expansive project: <http://axe7.labex-efl.org/taxonomy/term/12>

The current socio-economic situation and globalizing pressures have contributed to a continued rise in urban migration from this area (Dobui 2015, Lewis, et al. 2015, *Institución nacional de estadística y geografía*, 2015), a typical indicator of lowering language attitudes in favor of national, more globally competitive languages (Hagege, 2002:129). A continuing trend throughout certain areas of Central America as a direct consequence of the free-trade agreements with the United



A young participant of an elicitation workshop in front a mural in Xochistlahuaca depicting traditional backstrap weaving, typically taught to females from a young age (Dobui, 2016)

States from the 1990's (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2011, Grinevald 2007), this on-going liberalization of traditional markets of substantive farming has decimated cultures considered uncompetitive at the international level. The homogenization of culture appears to be one of the consequences if not part of the *sine qua non* of global free markets.

that the institutional mestizo powers were displaced to a neighboring town. The current political order remains unstable and has led to a number of community organizing projects like the local Amuzgo-language radio station, Radio Ñomndaa. While the Amuzgo spoken in Xochistlahuaca has some level of political status, little is known of the other varieties. In elicitation workshops through the MamP Project, Amuzgo speakers from San Pedro Amuzgos note varieties that have not yet been catalogued.

Taking into consideration the language's particular ecology, Amuzgo represents a group of languages on the cusp of endangerment. This project hopes to participate in the stemming of such forces not only in engaging in the expression of positive language attitudes, but by imparting methods for cooperative writing projects for speakers to autonomously engage their own culture in the production of Amuzgo language teaching materials.

### Project results:

Unforeseen restrictions caused by widespread and long-term teacher strikes made it very difficult to hold workshops. Teachers and supporters of the strikes were under union obligation to not work in any way, our project included. Through contacts of co-researcher Jair Apostol, we were able to work with a speaker of Santa Maria Peñoles Mixtec and a speaker of Del Valle Zapotec on verb paradigms. We were also able to use exercises from the MaMP methodology with a group of school-aged children in Xochistlahuaca, from which vocabulary concerning spatiality and noun classes (animals, buildings, plants) and animal cosmology were extracted.

The collaboration between co-researchers Jair Apostol and Bien DoBui was also a fruitful part of this research project. Both were able to learn from the other in the hopes of furthering scientific knowledge of Amuzgo. Continued collaboration between the researchers is a promising opportunity for future work.

In Guerrero State, economic disparity has contributed to recurrent political upheaval which continues to pit Spanish-speaking public institutions and the indigenous Amuzgo-speaking population in an on-going and diglossically repressive confrontation surrounding land rights, political representation and access to common resources (e.g. *ejidos* or communal lands). In the early 2000s, wide-spread protests led to the declaration of a traditional and indigenous governing body so

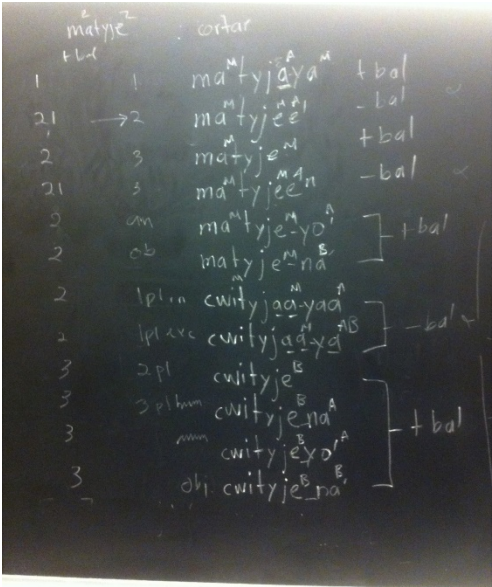


A well-known traditional musician whose partial repertoire was recorded in Xochistlahuaca in 2016 (A Massart, 2016)



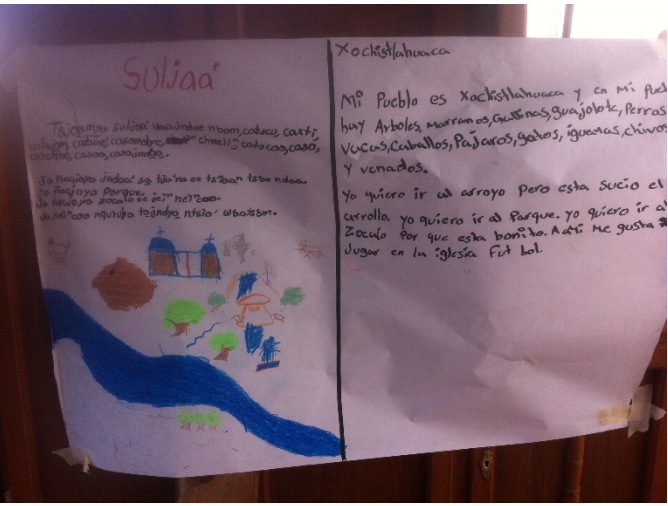
The data from this trip is still being treated, in part with the help of a native Amuzgo speaker who was trained in glossing techniques. Access to electronic equipment is limited in the region, and as a result, no technical training using annotation software was possible.

Verbal Class I: <i>ma-tyje2/cwi-tyje3</i> “to cut”			
{ <i>ma-</i> } <sub>PROGSG</sub> { <i>cwi-</i> } <sub>PROGPL</sub>	{ <i>tyje2</i> } <sub>SG</sub> { <i>tyje3</i> } <sub>PL</sub>	=SUB	alternations on radical
1sg	<i>tyja1</i>	= <i>ya</i>	1
2sg	<i>tyjee21</i>	'	-bal, 21
3sg	<i>tyjee21</i>	n	
3sg (w/ nominal subj)	<b><i>tyje2</i></b>		
3sganimal	<i>tyje2</i>	= <i>yo'1</i>	
3sgobj	<i>tyje2</i>	= <i>na'3</i>	
1plincl	<i>tyjaa2</i>	= <i>yaa2</i>	
1plexcl	<i>tyjaa2</i>	= <i>ya13</i>	-bal
2pl	<b><i>tyje3</i></b>		3
3pl	<i>tyje3</i>	= <i>na1</i>	
3planimal	<i>tyje3</i>	= <i>yo'1</i>	
3plobj	<i>tyje3</i>	= <i>na'3</i>	



Verb paradigms from elicitation sessions in Oaxaca City and Xochistlahuaca.

Researchers focused on separating canonic versus inflectional alternations, previously unexplored work in AMU.



Sample text from a workshop with young school children in Xochistlahuaca in 2016 (photos by A. Massart)

A central objective of MaMP’s elicitation method is not the production of physical materials, but rather the development of practices that explore dynamic relationships between orality and literacy. The young participants in our workshops in Xochistlahuaca were asked to describe their city in its ideal form and in its current form. Descriptions of how the city

once was, as told by elders, were compared to how the city is today. Participants were invited to reflect on the changes their city has undergone and their own hopes for its future.

Elicitations with different members of the community in Xochistlahuaca are being transcribed and translated by Karla Apostol, an Amuzgo school teacher who joined the research team in 2016. Interviews with a traditional weaver, a modern *modista* and local community leader, one of the town criers, and a bilingual school teacher were also recorded and are still being transcribed and translated. Data from a few interviews has been used in scientific presentations given by the researchers.



X'mandyu	chuwaa	njdyu'	Amalia Santiago Soledad	ndo'	cwanfi	chu
buenas	como	te llamas		y	cuantos	años
tarde						tiene
cwen'a'nchoyon	ndo'	ncwa'	t'sjom	mac'ei'	Santiago	ndo'
46	y	cual	pueblo	vives	y	ncwa'
		cual es tu				nñom
						lengua
matseinein	nñomdaa	ndo'	l'jotsiaa'	mache'	njnommacwaa	cwanfi
hablas	amuzgo	y	trabajo	haces	tejer	cuantos
			cual es tu			años

Karla's (pictured left) transcription and translation of interviews from 2016

## Budget details

The GBS budget of 1500 euros was mostly used for travel (1100 euros), but has also served to finance the transcription and translation of recordings (400 euros).

A secondary grant from the University of Paris Sorbonne supplemented on-site expenses like writing materials and gifts for some speakers.

## Conclusion

Without the help of GBS, this initial project would not have been possible. Direct linguistic work with Xochistlahuaca Amuzgo from after the 1960s had not been observed by the researchers, outside of two masters theses from native speakers (of which co-researcher Jair Apostol is one). For the future, transcription and annotation of interviews continues in the hopes of making the data available online. Dialectal work is likely to continue thanks to Jair Apostol's future doctoral work.

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