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## Introduction to TZIJONĪK RICHIN JUN TINAMĪTAJ CHI IXIMULEW

Hana Muzika Kahn

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***Introduction to TZIJON'K RICHIN JUN TINAM'TAJ CHI IXIMULEW***

**Hana Muzika Kahn  
Yax Te' Books  
Temple University**

Maya America and Yax Te' Books team up for this special edition of the journal in order to present a new trilingual book of stories, traditions and testimonies recorded in the department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala. The book, edited by Hana Muzika Kahn and Jonathan Holmquist, is in Kaqchikel, Spanish and English, presented in three columns on each page, so that the reader can read and compare the languages. It is presented in this edition of the Maya America Journal, and can also be downloaded at no cost from the Yax Te' website: <https://yaxtebooks.info/> A print version will be available shortly.

The format of this book is designed to reflect a community where both Kaqchikel and Spanish languages and cultures are active, to preserve local customs, traditions and community memories in writing, and to promote literacy. English translations were added in at the request of community members, in order to reinforce English language classes and to share the materials with a wider English-speaking public.

The stories in this collection were recorded during interviews for a sociolinguistic study of the use of Spanish and Kaqchikel languages in the town of Parramos and neighboring villages in the central highlands of Guatemala. The study combines the work of Jonathan Holmquist, a linguist, and Hana Muzika Kahn, a professor of comparative literature, both with more than ten years of experience visiting the research site, a town and surrounding villages in the central highlands of Guatemala. Three approaches were incorporated in the research project: the sociology of language in a study of language maintenance, shift and revitalization; a sociolinguistic study of effects of Maya on community Spanish; and a study of narratives in the form of folktales and oral histories told in Spanish or Kaqchikel-Maya. Kaqchikel is one of the most widely spoken Maya languages of Guatemala, spoken by over 500,000 people, with a rich oral tradition but minimal reading material and few people able to read and write their language.

The sociolinguistic field research was carried out between 2011 and 2016 in the town of Parramos and the village of Parrojas, both located in the Municipality of Parramos. Two hundred and eighty participants were interviewed individually for the study. These included residents of village and town; "indígenas" and "ladinos" (Hispanics and others not declaring Mayan background); and students, parents, and seniors. Among other topics, the research examined language choice, i.e., the choices of Spanish, Kaqchikel, or both, in community domains, activities in the home, and by members of the family, and compared responses of the different age groups and members of town and village. Students and adults were asked about their opinions about

the inclusion of recently initiated Kaqchikel language classes in schools as part of the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program, and many expressed positive reactions despite many initial reservations. The study also examined the impact of language choice by indigenous parents on the acquisition of Kaqchikel by indigenous students. As part of the interviews, the researchers helped by their Kaqchikel-speaking assistants appraised participants' vocabulary knowledge of Kaqchikel. The language skills of indigenous participants in the study were gauged by their active conversational ability in Kaqchikel. Two articles covering the sociolinguistic research have been published and are listed at the end of this article.<sup>i ii</sup>

Community members were invited to tell a story or legend or narrate a personal experience which was recorded as part of their interview. After completing the interviews, the researchers and Kaqchikel-speaking assistants transcribed the narratives, and, depending on the original language, translated them into Spanish/Kaqchikel. They then joined a committee of local community members to propose publishing a collection of these narratives, as a means of preserving community memories, and developing a community-based means of bilingual-bicultural instruction and sharing of experiences. Following their approval, the committee was asked to make a selection for the current publication and to discuss the format of a Kaqchikel – Spanish book. As mentioned earlier, after reading the narratives, the community members asked for the narratives to be translated into English, for the benefit of English classes in schools, and also asked for professional editing of the Kaqchikel transcriptions. Pedro Morejón, President of the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala (ALMG) in Chimaltenango, kindly agreed to review and edit the Kaqchikel version of each narrative. It should be noted that the ALMG has now produced an official, standardized form of Kaqchikel, but since this book is based on oral tradition and reflects the voices of people from several Kaqchikel-speaking communities, dialect variations were maintained in the written text. English translations were prepared by the editors of the book.

The book is divided into four chapters:

1. Memories and Comments of Youth. The life experiences and ideas of young people and memories of what they have heard from their parents and grandparents.
2. Customs and traditions. Some samples of the rich traditions of the communities.
3. Stories and Legends. Stories which are passed down from one generation to the next.
4. Memories of the armed conflict.

The book supports Maya language revitalization and provides material for school students studying Kaqchikel in the Bilingual Intercultural Education program. We offer this collection to students and adults who live in bilingual communities, who want to preserve their culture in writing and share it with other communities. In addition, as mentioned, it preserves some dialect variations which change from one community to another, and which are significant to respect at the same time as accepting language standardization for the publication and teaching of

Kaqchikel. The parallel formatting of the three language columns reflects the differences in cognitive functioning, syntax and semantics of each language: in many cases the paragraphs in Kaqchikel, Spanish and English are of different lengths, resulting in some asymmetrical spaces between paragraphs.

## Yax Te' Books

Yax Te' Books published this work in three languages with a long history which is reflected in the inauguration of the Maya America Journal. As James Loucky wrote in 2019, in his introductory essay for this journal, "in only four decades, people of Maya ancestry have become a vibrant and vital part of communities and neighborhoods throughout North America." And it was forty years ago, in the 1980's, in response to the growing number of Maya immigrants in California, that Fernando Peñalosa established Yax Te' in order to promote books in Maya languages. Under Peñalosa, it became a Foundation, importing and distributing books from Guatemala, and publishing books by Maya authors. In 2003, Yax Te' moved to Cleveland State University under the direction of Laura Martin and Nadine Grimm, and in 2009 it moved to Temple University, under the direction of Hana Muzika Kahn.

In recent years, Yax Te' has continued to distribute books by Maya authors in their own languages, in Spanish, and in English translation. They include folk tales, poetry, short stories and novels, and they represent the perspectives and experiences of Maya communities. Books are donated to Maya communities, schools and libraries in order to promote cultural awareness and Maya language literacy and support Multilingual Intercultural Education in Guatemala. The books are also distributed to Maya language individuals and communities in the U.S.A. and the books are used as university course materials. Currently available are novels and poems by Victor Montejo and by Gaspar Pedro González, in addition to this current 2020 trilingual book of narratives now available online.

Gaspar Pedro González' book: *Sb'eyb'al jun naq Maya Q'anjob'al / La Otra Cara / A Mayan Life* has been particularly widely assigned reading for American university courses as a perspective on the personal and community cultural experiences of a Q'anjob'al Maya community. The author has published several of his books in Spanish and English, and recently Yax Te' published his trilingual poetry collection *Xumakil / Botón en Flor / Budding* in Q'anjob'al, Spanish and English. Gaspar Pedro González and Hana Muzika Kahn, who translated the book, traveled to Soloma and Santa Eulalia to present the book at a teachers' conference, and donate copies to all the schools in order to promote Q'anjob'al literacy and to encourage students to write in Q'anjob'al. His just released book *Los Mayas Migrantes: Un Viaje Sin Retorno*, was published in Maya America (2020, Volume II Issue II).

## Stories from a Town in Guatemala

The new trilingual Kaqchikel /Spanish/English publication

***TZIJONĪK RICHIN JUN TINAMĪTAJ CHI IXIMULEW***

***HISTORIAS DE UN PUEBLO DE GUATEMALA***

***STORIES FROM A TOWN IN GUATEMALA***

is scheduled to be printed and distributed in Guatemala to schools, libraries and communities in the Kaqchikel-speaking region, and in the meantime can be downloaded free through this journal and the Yax Te' website. It honors the community members who shared their memories, cultures and traditions, preserves them in writing and promotes the multilingual multicultural society.

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<sup>i</sup> Holmquist, Jonathan and Hana Muzika Kahn (2017) "Spanish and Kaqchikel Maya: A Study in Town and Village in Guatemala's Central Highlands," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 248. 3-24.

<sup>ii</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ . (2012) "Spanish/Maya Contact in Town and Village: A Focus on Youth." *International Journal of the Linguistic Association of the Southwest* 31 (2). 57-78