

# Language Policy and the Construction of National Identity in Colombia

**Joshua James Zwisler**  
Universidad del Tolima, Colombia  
jjzwisler@ut.edu.co

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## ABSTRACT

The connection between identity and language is hard to deny. In the production of national identities, language plays a key role in the homogenizing of the population by political will. Since the conquest of Colombia over 500 years ago, language has been a crucial tool in the construction of national identity and the concept of nation. This article, through archival research, critical reading, textual analysis, and grounded theory, examines the role of language from pre-colonial Colombia to modern day Colombia in the formation of national identity and character. It carefully and critically examines the roles and conflicts of Spanish and indigenous languages in colonial laws until modern education legislation, and the current rise of English in education law, and what this means in terms of national identity for Colombia.

**Key words:** *national identity, language policy, language education, identity theory.*

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## La Política Lingüística y la Construcción de la Identidad Nacional en Colombia

### RESUMEN

La conexión entre la identidad y el lenguaje es difícil de negar. En la producción de identidades nacionales, el lenguaje desempeña un papel clave en la homogenización de la población por la voluntad política. Desde la conquista de Colombia hace más de 500 años, el lenguaje ha sido una herramienta crucial en la construcción de la identidad y el concepto de nacionalidad. Este artículo, a través de la investigación archivística, lectura crítica, análisis del texto y muestreo teórico, examina el papel del lenguaje desde la Colombia pre-colonial hasta la Colombia moderna en cuanto a la formación de la identidad y carácter nacional. También examina cuidadosa y críticamente los papeles y conflictos entre el español y las lenguas indígenas en las leyes coloniales hasta la legislación educativa moderna, y el auge actual del inglés en las leyes educativas, y lo que este último significa en cuanto a la identidad nacional de Colombia.

**Palabras clave:** *identidad nacional, política lingüística, educación lingüística, teoría de identidad.*

# Política Linguística e Construção da Identidade Nacional na Colômbia

## RESUMO

A conexão entre identidade e idioma é difícil de negar. Na produção de identidades nacionais, a linguagem desempenha um papel fundamental na homogeneização da população por vontade política. Desde a conquista da Colômbia há mais de 500 anos, a linguagem tem sido uma ferramenta crucial na construção de identidade e conceito nacional. Este artigo, através da pesquisa arquivística, leitura crítica, análise textual e teoria fundamentada, examina o papel da linguagem da colônia précolonial para o moderno Colômbia na formação da identidade e do caráter nacionais. Examina com cuidado e criticamente os papéis e conflitos das línguas espanholas e indígenas nas leis coloniais até a legislação educacional moderna e o aumento atual do inglês na legislação educacional e o que isso significa em termos de identidade nacional para a Colômbia.

**Palavras chave:** *identidade nacional, política linguística, educação linguística, teoria da identidade.*

## 1. Introduction

Since the colonisation of what we now know as the Republic of Colombia 516 years ago, the area has taken many shapes and forms: colonised, decolonised, divided, and even sold off. The formation of the state of Colombia has been at times a bloody crusade of arms, and at other times, a refined intellectual affair, but to all phases of the state of Colombia three central themes have been used to create the identity of the state, chosen originally by Spain and then adopted by the various incarnations of the Colombian republic – race, language, and religion (Charry, 2011). It is important to recognise that Colombia was not discovered as a *Terra Nullius* and when the Spaniards arrived, they discovered indigenous groups ranging from hunting tribes to early stone city builders.

The imposition of the Spanish trifecta of identity – in particular language - has over the course of these centuries greatly affected the identity of the indigenous groups that have survived, the progeny of the colonizers and even those groups that have immigrated to Colombia since – whether by choice or by force. However, today this original trifecta is not the lone player in the game of national identity in the country. Education in Spanish, foreign language education in English, and ethno-education all have important roles in the current development of national identity, although the role each plays is vastly different.

This article uses archival research, critical reading, text analysis, and grounded theory in terms of identity and identity theory on a wide variety of sources. As such, this article

examines how language policy has not only affected Colombians of all varieties, but also how it has been used to create national identity and how this policy is being used today to create a future identity for the country.

## 2. Methodology

As previously mentioned, this article uses archival research, critical reading, text analysis, and grounded theory. Archival research refers to researching documents that may not be widely known or accessible. Critical reading and text analysis are techniques whereby texts are submitted to detailed and careful analysis of their contents in terms of who wrote them, what was written, how they were written, and why they were written (University of Bradford, 2016) in addition to finding

limitations or influences in the text and applications (University of Queensland, 2016). Critical reading and text analysis are distinguished from other reading and analytical methods in that they do not allow for the writer to be given a neutral position – these techniques predict that all writers have a position that they are trying to promote, even when writing supposedly neutral academic texts (University of Queensland, 2016).

Grounded theory is an analytical method used in the social sciences which works in reverse to traditional hypothesis testing - grounded theory creates hypotheses from previously produced data. Grounded theory analyses data from a neutral position, looking for connections and phenomena that appear in the texts which are tagged and then connected into overarching patterns thus building a hypothesis from the ground up (Dörnyei, 2007).

In this case, a wide range of texts (55) regarding language policy, linguistic identity, identity theory, Colombian linguistics and Colombian language policy were used. The texts include official government policy, academic research, documents from non-profit organizations and reflective material from groups affected by linguistic policy. These texts were carefully analysed to find inherent patterns and connections in addition

to possible biases – all of which were tagged. Patterns and similarities were then connected together to find larger patterns and phenomena, and from these a larger hypothesis and results were obtained – all of which are discussed below.

### **3. Discussion**

#### ***Identity and Language***

Identity is a complex subject to study and even define. Identity, as a general term, can be understood as who we understand ourselves to be, though a more formal definition is harder to formulate and understand. Tajfel (1978), in Social Identity Theory, states that identity can be split into two broad categories – social and personal: with personal being those traits unique to the individual and social identity entailing those traits which come from membership in different groups. According to Weeks (1990) identity is defined in terms of social relationships and how we associate ourselves in terms of similarity and difference to others. Furthermore, according to Ochs (in Hall, 2012), our social identity also consists of the reputations and power relationships between groups which are linked to affective and epistemic stances: something that can change over time as we change groups and as the groups themselves change the power relations between themselves. For Bauman (in Hall, 2012) identity

is the situated outcome of the communicative processes whereby people make situationally motivated choices from social repertoires of resources and craft these choices into semiotic claims – something that is negotiated with others using the social and communicative/semiotic means available in the given culture. This agrees with Mendoza-Denton (2002), who asserts that identity is an active linguistic and semiotic negotiation of the individual's relationship to society and its constructs. It also agrees with Joseph (2004), who states that identity processes are constantly under maintenance or construction. Jaspal (2009) builds upon this saying that any change, be it social or personal, can result in the rapid destabilisation of identity and thus shows it to be a personal construction rather than an acceptable stable fact of the person.

It is important to keep in mind though that even if we accept Tajfel's division of identity into personal and social identities, in modern theories this is not enough to define identity. Among modern social identity theories that are used in sociolinguistics, two stand out from the rest. Hecht (2001) divides identity into four – a personal identity to which only the self has access, an enacted identity which is how we express that personal identity through language, a rational identity composed of how we stand in relation to others, and finally a communal identity, which is comprised of our

different group memberships. This theory clashes with the theory posited by Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004) who also divide identity into four categories but divide it along different lines - a personal identity which is unknown to all but the self also, an assumed identity - a social identity that is not contested, an imposed identity - a social identity given by others and which cannot be removed, and finally a negotiated identity, which is actively deliberated upon given the option of other identities. A key difference between these two models is that Pavlenko & Blackledge do not place a limit on the different identities that we have (Hecht places them as aspects of one of the divisions) but state that our different identities are classifiable within the schema of four lines and that the classification depends on how we express these identities. Given the more nuanced nature and the appearance of choice in the Pavlenko and Blackledge model, this is the model of social identity that will be used for the remainder of the article.

In terms of national identities, nations - which are purely political constructs and often contain more than one ethnic group - will often seek means to create or homogenise a national identity for those who fall inside its borders. One means of doing this is to select a language or dialect from among those within its borders (usually that of the ruling

class), give it the prestigious title of national language (Barbour, 2002) and then present linguistic diversity as a threat to unity (Jaspal, 2009). The creation of a 'national' language unites the majority of the populace under a common linguistic flag and helps enforce power relations between the ruling and other classes. However, this identity forming process is not without its consequences. The effect of this process will often be the official spreading of the new national language and the cultural norms attached to it at the expense of other languages as the economic and official strength given to the official language or dialect prejudices the use of other languages and/or dialects within the state (Arieza-Londoño, 2011). Indeed, as the media takes up the official language, and education enforces either monolingual (in the official language) or bilingual (in the official language and a mother tongue) education for children, the policy of national language as national identity is a direct cause of language loss and cultural death as the policy results in subtractive language learning and unstable diglossia in minority communities, which ultimately see the national language consume the groups' mother tongues (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010).

It is worth saying that there are cases (usually recent) where the nations have taken steps to include

most if not all of the nation's languages as national languages and create a national 'pluri-ethnic' identity (Byram, 2006) with examples including Switzerland, South Africa, and Bolivia. But what kind of social identity is a national identity? It must be a social identity, as it relies on group membership and the exclusion/inclusion of others, therefore being a personal identity, is ruled out. For the majority of the population, nationality is not something that is questioned – especially in Colombia, where most people are united by a common language – and thus falls into the category of assumed identity. However, this is not case the for the speakers of other languages inside the nation borders or any other class of social difference: these people have reasons to question their belonging to the national group and therefore any acceptance of the national identity must be the result of internal negotiation, and this make national identity a negotiated identity.

As mentioned above, minority groups usually fare badly under national language policies, and among those that suffer the most are indigenous groups. Being that Colombia has 82 indigenous languages and even more indigenous groups, it is vital to mention the construction of indigenous identity. For indigenous groups, while language is not the only defining characteristic of group membership and identity, it does play

a crucial role in identity formation (Schmidt, 2008; Cornthassel, 2003). Globally, being indigenous is an identity that has become conflated with resistance and opposition to the colonialization of foreigners and their descendants, along with the experience of struggle against being dispossessed of their ancestral lands and histories (Maddison, 2013). For many indigenous groups, language is a significant tool of pursuing a differentiated identity to that of the colonial state as the groups fight for rights, recognition and territory (Green, 2009). For many indigenous groups, the use of their own language means understanding their collective memory, stories, justice, territories, and essence. Thus, the loss of use of an indigenous language is the severing of ties, not only with territory, but also with history (Jamioy-Juagibuoy, 2005, Ramirez-Poloché, 2012). However, indigenous identity should not be understood as an assumed identity, but as a negotiated identity given that it is constructed through the negotiation of an 'other' and that, most importantly, it can be weakened or destroyed through linguistic means (Zwisler, 2015).

Language and semiotic means play an important role in identity formation and negotiation, and both major theories of social identity allude to this, but what about languages themselves as part of an identity? Language and culture are often

very difficult to separate. Languages express human understanding and meaning, and often this meaning is differently or even uniquely expressed in different languages (Fishman, 1991), and due to the fact that different languages can express things uniquely, a language often becomes closely associated with, or becomes associated as a part of, the culture of the people who speak it. When in contact with other groups and other languages, the use of a particular language helps demarcate a group and its cultures from other groups (Barbour, 2002) and serves as a marker of difference and in-group membership (Byram, 2006). And here we have the essential feature of language in identity construction: language is an effective 'othering' tool; that is a tool with which we can convert others into the sociological 'not us' (the other) (Zwisler, 2015). The mechanisms of this tool involve foregrounding and backgrounding aspects of the identity which show similarity or difference and thus manage the exclusivity of group membership. This foregrounding and backgrounding in order to create the other is supported by Rajagopalam (2001) who forwards that linguistic choice, when the possibility of choice exists, is a manner of flagging political allegiance to one group or another who are indexicalized by that linguistic code.

### ***Colombia: From Pre-Colony to Post-Colony***

The area that is today the Republic of Colombia has thousands of years of human history. When human population of Colombia started is not known, but the first material evidence of human habitation is dated at around 12,600 – 10,920 b.c. in the cliffs of Suesca, close to the capital, Bogotá (Castañeda de Eslava, 2008). When the Spanish arrived on the Caribbean shores of what would be Colombia in 1499, the number of indigenous groups (and number of languages) was unknown, but it is estimated to have been at least double of what exists today (Caro y Cuervo, 2000). The level of complexity of these civilizations ranged from hunting tribes (e.g. the Huitoto) to semi-migratory villages (e.g. the Pijao) to monument and stone city building cultures (e.g. the San Agustín culture and the Tayrona) (Silva, 2008).

From 1499 to the end of the revolution in 1810, the area that would be Colombia was under Spanish dominion in the form of the viceroyalty known as the Nuevo Reino de Granada, where the will of the Spanish monarchs was exercised through viceroys, whom they directed via royal letters (*cédulas reales*). During this time, the principal cities were founded, and much of the indigenous population was destroyed, enslaved or displaced (with the

exception of one culture – the Nasa, all of the city building cultures were destroyed or fragmented) and many of the native languages were killed (Silva, 2008; Giraldo-Gallego, 2011). After the revolution of 2010, came the creation of the first republic (Gran Colombia – today Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama) and the process of decolonization began. The first official constitution of the new country followed a few years after in 1821 (the constitution of Cúcuta). Come 1830, the new country would dissolve into three – Ecuador, Venezuela and Nueva Granada (Colombia and Panama) and after even more civil wars and social problems, Nueva Granada would be reborn as the Republic of Colombia in 1886 – with a new (and very damaging for minorities) constitution and vision of itself and what it meant to be Colombian. This new vision of Colombia would remain intact until 1991, when after decades of civil unrest and minority movements, Colombia would issue a new constitution cutting itself off from what it now recognised as a colonial and bigoted past, ushering in new rights for linguistic minorities and indigenous groups.

### ***Language Policy: Colonial Colombia***

Very little is known about language and identity before the Nuevo Reino de Granada was established; of the

empires stretching its Pre-Columbian era, it is known that Tahuantinsuyu had a language policy of Runasimi (Quechua) for administration and local languages for local life (Temoche-Cortez, 2007), but in terms of the other indigenous civilizations nothing is known. As for the Nuevo Reino de Granada, from its establishment to its fall, there are records showing how language was used in the control of the new territory and the identity of its inhabitants. As mentioned in the introduction, the new territory was governed under three concepts of identity – race, religion and language. Until 1550, the South American viceroys had decreed that religion (Catholicism) was only to be taught in five languages – principally Spanish, but also four indigenous languages: Muisocabun (at that time called Chibcha), Quechua (Runasimi), Seona and Sáliva (Muisocabun and Sáliva being Colombian languages) (Giraldo-Gallego, 2011; Pineda-Camacho, 2005). During this time, these languages enjoyed considerable prestige in comparison to the other languages, and as a result Quechua became the largest of the Amerindian languages and arrived to what are now the southernmost states of Colombia.

However, this was not to last and in 1550 the Spanish monarch (Carlos III) issued two royal decrees proclaiming that *'In the language of the Indians, one cannot properly explain the mysteries of our faith'*

(Alvar, 2000) (translation mine). Given that faith and its spread was one of the three pillars of the Spanish colony, it is not surprising that even these native languages began to suffer as the powerful Catholic identity was announced incompatible with the native linguistic identity. In 1770, Spanish king Felipe IV announced that not only was all activity inside Colombia to be done in Spanish, but that its teaching was to be imposed on all members of society, except for those in the *'most savage'* regions (Giraldo-Gallego, 2011, Pineda-Camacho, 2005), thus decreeing that the wide variety of linguistic identities in the Nuevo Reino were untenable in the new kingdom and its cities and villages, and reducing those indigenous language speakers identity holders to the place of *'savages'*.

From the very beginning, we can see that the Spanish Crown actively used language to forge the identity of the nascent nation. Having understood that language could be vital in changing the religious identity of the indigenous groups, the four most powerful indigenous languages were permitted to be used in the transmission of religious identity and given the prestige associated with these languages, other religions were quickly subsumed given the linguistic authority of Muisocabun, Runasimi, Seona and Sáliva. However, as these languages became more powerful, they became rallying

points against the Spanish Crown and, as such, threatening identities to the prevalence of Spanish dominion in South America. Thus to preserve dominion through national identity, under the guise of faith, indigenous languages were demoted from their positions of prestige to positions of social barbarity as a means of disparaging the social identity associated with these indigenous languages and to forcibly convert the holders of indigenous identities to the identity offered by the Spanish Crown.

### ***Language and Identity: Post-Colonial Colombia 1810 – 1991***

The Constitution of the independence movement (1821) would be an even stronger, though subtle, move against linguistic minorities – to be a citizen, apart from having a certain sum of money and being 21 years of age, one had to know how to read and write (La Constitución Política de la Gran Colombia, art. 1). With the exception of the four previously mentioned Amerindian languages, the native languages of (what was now) Gran Colombia had not been written. This was a blow for even those who were already considered savages – to become a member of the new republic and take up the identity of a Gran Colombian, speakers of indigenous languages had to learn

to read and write - and this meant learning Spanish. Even the big four that had relatively prospered before 1770 (albeit via covert prestige after 1550) would be devastated by this new constitution – Muisca was considered extinct by 1871 (Giraldo-Gallego, 2011), Seona and Sáliva were decimated (in 2005 Sáliva only had 20 speakers (Aguirre-Licht, 2005) and Quechua had broken down into communities which in the future would produce new languages from the Quechua base. Being that their languages could not be written or read, indigenous Gran Colombians had to choose between their own linguistic and indigenous identity or learning to read and write Spanish and become citizens (Mar-Molinero, 1995).

In terms of identity, the Constitution of Gran Colombia created a system where only those with a traditional western education would be perceived as Colombians. Thus the national identity was imagined as an extension of European education and standards, and language was the means to enforce this national identity: only Spanish was written at this time, and this meant that Spanish would become the only acceptable language of national identity and that minority would be unacceptable, non-national 'others'. Writing became the tool of othering those who bore what were derided as barbaric identities and relegating them to non-national

status.

The biggest blow to minority language identity though would be the constitution of 1886 and the creation of the Republic of Colombia. The 1886 constitution was written by linguist and ardent hispano-centrist, Miguel Antonio Caro; who apart from being a fervent catholic and believing the Felipe III decree to the word, believed that indigenous peoples were fallen and that their continued linguistic identities were a threat to the nascent republic (Pineda-Camacho, 2005). The constitution was written so that the three bases of Spanish civilization – race, religion and language – would once again become central to Colombian identity. Catholicism was to be spread further, the Colombian people were identified as 'white' or 'white-mestizo' (white mixed with indigenous but with more white than indigenous) and the official language of the country and all of its affairs would be Spanish – a form of Spanish that was to be polished and made authentically 'Colombian' under the guidance of the new national language institute (today Instituto Caro y Cuervo) (Miller, 2006; Aguirre-Licht, 2005). To further push this point, the constitution was amended with a law (#89) in 1890 putting language matters in the hands of religious authorities so that they '*determine the way in which the savages might be governed so that they are reduced to living a civilised life*'

(Constitución Política de Colombia, 1890 – translation mine). This put all indigenous language speakers in reserves under the management of religious authorities be they Catholic or some other Christian denomination.

Given the mission of ‘civilising’, religious authorities quickly demonised the country’s native languages and set out to change the customs of the different groups via traditional catholic education (Contraloría General de la República, 2012). This situation quickly produced disagreements between the indigenous groups who wished to lead a traditional lifestyle and maintain their indigenous heritage and identity and the various religious and governmental authorities who wished to convert them. From 1948 onwards, violent conflicts arose between the two parties (Miller, 2006) and took the form of two movements – the movement of Quintin Lame and the Pijaos for ancestral land and the movement led by the Nasa for cultural recognition (Pachón, 1997). This led to the creation of new reserves and laws, and of the regional councils of indigenous peoples, the most successful and powerful of which would be the Consejo Regional de Cauca (CRIC) of the Nasa people (Pachón, 1997).

Of particular interest during this period is the Summer Institute of

Linguistics (SIL). During the pre-1991 period this organization worked extensively with indigenous groups documenting their languages so that the bible might be presented to the groups in a form easier for them to understand and thus make it easier to convert them to Christianity (Corrales-Carvajal, 2008) and it is estimated that at the turn of the century almost 90% of all written material in the indigenous languages of Colombia had been produced by SIL (Pachón, 1997). Until the creation of the new constitution SIL was a powerful political player and promoter of indigenous education (Freeland & Howard-Malverde, 1995). However, upon the creation of the new constitution, SIL was banned from Colombia as it became illegal to convert indigenous communities under the guise of linguistic work. The government argued that SIL was not respecting the traditional character of indigenous identity and that SIL was using language to change the (now protected) identity of indigenous Colombians (Rojas-Curieux, 1998).

The changes to the national identity during this period are numerous and of great consequence. The strong wording of the constitution meant that through education, indigenous identity was to be erased from the national character and that the Spanish variety that had surged in Colombia would be given the special status of national identity marker. In

terms of Colombian Spanish, due to the efforts of Caro y Cuervo and the promulgation of their ideas by the national government, the Spanish variety that developed in the country during the colonial and post-colonial times would be used to mark a Colombian from other neighbouring Spanish-speaking countries and most importantly – Spain. Thus Colombian Spanish became a tool to other speakers of neighbouring Spanish varieties and the Colonial variety prevalent in education before the constitution and to foreground this difference in Spanish varieties to mark the national identity as an exclusive group.

Minority language identity suffered greatly during this period. With the church and military charged with educating the minorities in Colombian Spanish and Catholicism, the indigenous groups suffered linguistic - the destruction of a language through a government policy which can be overt or covert – through complete prohibition or through prohibition in education respectively (Zwisler, 2015). During this period, minority languages and therefore their attached identities suffered overt linguistic. In an attempt to homogenize the national identity, education and use of minority mother tongues were restricted and the social identities of indigenous and minority communities were demonised as unacceptable and barbaric – a title



which is still felt today by many communities. The Colombian linguicide achieved the further alienation of indigenous and minority identities from mainstream national identity. Indeed this period resulted in the complete annihilation of many indigenous cultures and languages in the name of national identity.

### ***Language and Identity: Modern Language Policy***

After decades of civil strife and minority movements, Colombia created a new constitution in 1991 that would radically alter its society and linguistic policy figured strongly in the new document. As of 1991, language policy divides into three clear divisions: ethno-education (the teaching of indigenous and Creole languages), Spanish education and foreign language teaching, and these divisions mark new steps in changing national identity.

Indigenous and minority groups received rights that had been denied to them for over 500 years in what the government hoped would be seen as a move of historical reconciliation. The national government declared itself a pluri-ethnic state, proud of its heritage and linguistic diversity, having realised that in the past it had consigned indigenous peoples to the national 'other' since the republic's founding and that there existed a desperate need of renewing the national identity (Ariza, 2004). While

Spanish would remain the national language, every indigenous language spoken in the country would be given official status in the region(s) where it is spoken and three more languages would receive official recognition—the immigrant language Romani, and the two African based creoles Palenquero and San Andres (Constitution of 1991, article 10). A further article in the new constitution would prohibit anyone from disrespecting any linguistic identity inside the country (article 13). Furthermore, in a move recognising indigenous languages as enriching the cultural heritage of the country, the government created the 'law of languages' in 2010 (Ley 1381 de 2010) that not only enshrined this further but enforced the right to use one's mother tongue in all ambits of government and healthcare. The new law would also promote the revitalisation of endangered and extinct languages and offer government financial assistance to do so; and also that the science arm of the government (Colciencias) would be charged with monitoring this preservation (Ley 1381 de 2010, articles 14 and 21).

The national census of 2005 put the total indigenous population of Colombia at 1,392,623 people (3.36% of the total population) comprising 87 ethnicities and speaking 64 languages (DANE, 2005) with the largest indigenous languages being Wayunaeki, Nasa Yuwe and Embera

(Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 2000). With only 3 languages not being below 'developing' on the EGIDS scale, most of the native languages are in clear danger of disappearing and are not being transmitted to new generations (Ethnologue, 2015). While the numbers appear grim, they are dated at least 10 years and may not represent current figures. This is not to say that the languages aren't in danger – they are, however the figures available to us at the moment cannot tell us how successful the last 22 years have been in terms of the new emphasis of local linguistic identities. For that we would need to look at new challenges and successes that have occurred in the last 22 years in comparison to the challenges (both new and old) faced by the countries linguistic identities.

One of the main challenges presented to the continuing survival of indigenous linguistic identities is that of work and in particular globalisation. Increasing globalisation and the rule of the market in almost all facets of Colombian life have arrived to even the most remote indigenous communities and have brought with them new linguistic challenges. Although having been given almost express control of their territories, the indigenous communities of Colombia are now exposed to the economic factors at play in the rest of the country. It has become common for indigenous youth to give up their

languages and even change their tradition names to Hispanic names as they seek work and higher education – which require Spanish in the cities (Areiza-Londoño, 2010). Another reason for youth leaving their linguistic identities has to do with the country's internal violence due to the guerrilla groups. Guerrilla groups frequently take indigenous land and force able indigenous peoples to leave and look for labour elsewhere. This usually entails leaving behind their identities as indigenous language speakers as they seek work with Spanish speakers (Jamioy-Juagibioy, 2005).

To counter these points though is the surge of evidence of activities being taken to promote indigenous linguistic identities that have been successful – even within the large cities. Muisca, one of the aforementioned chosen four indigenous languages, that was thought extinct has shown itself to be alive thanks to a spectacular revitalization effort. The Muisca reserves on the outskirts of the capital Bogotá have created language courses and primary schools in Muisca, that openly pass on the language to new generations (Giraldo-Gallego, 2011; Pineda-Camacho, 2005). Such is the power of this movement that even in mestizo sectors of Bogotá there are interests in learning the language as part of their heritage and for those interested; there is even an online course available to all.

Another well-known case in Bogotá is that of the Inga. Inga is both a group and a language from the south of Colombia and an offshoot of Quechua. Thousands of Inga have migrated to Bogotá and the larger cities to find work and for a long time did not pass on their language to their children. However given the recent interest and help given to indigenous linguistic identities in Colombia, the Inga language has also made a comeback – in both numbers and attitude. Not only have parents begun teaching their children to speak Inga (using new materials sponsored by the government) but attitudes towards the language have soared – with adults (particularly women) taking pride in public usage of their language (Pineda-Camacho, 2005).

In terms of revitalization outside of big cities, there are many success stories but here I will deal with two – Nonuya and Nasa Yuwe. The Nonuya were a group on the southern state of Putumayo who were reduced to only dozen people. However after the change in laws, the discovery of a single elderly Nonuya speaker led to the revitalization of the language with entire communities taking up the language (Echeverri & Landaburu, 1995). The example of revitalization *par excellence* in Colombia though is that of Nasa Yuwe. Under the 1886 constitution, the Nasa were interned under both

SIL and Catholic administrations and suffered an almost complete loss of tradition beliefs and autonomy. However, they were also one of the two groups who led the rebellions in the 1950s and 60s that led to the new language laws and the creation of the regional indigenous authorities. Once their authority (CRIT) was created; they quickly became proactive in not only setting up a language program for all Nasa wherever they may be in Colombia but also took steps to completely re-write their alphabet (thus eliminating the SIL and catholic versions) and to formally document their grammatical system and publish it for all. As a result of the proactive efforts and in the face of many challenges, Nasa Yuwe use is growing in and out of cities and can now be found in media and literature – proudly supporting traditional Nasa identity and values (UNICEF, 2002; Pachón, 1997; Corrales-Carvajal, 2008; Curieux-Rojas, 1998).

The success of Nasa Yuwe leads us to very notable initiative by big universities in the country. Understanding that higher education is often a reason for unstable diglossic situations occurring – with indigenous language speakers leaving their mother tongues for domestic affairs and using Spanish in the public sphere - many universities took steps to see that indigenous languages were incorporated in education. The National University of Colombia

offers its courses in Nasa Yuwe and Arhuaco in addition to Spanish and opened up an indigenous language line in its Master of Linguistics degree. The University of Los Andes opened up a Masters of Ethnolinguistics (now closed) specifically aimed at indigenous languages and their promotion and research; and the National University of Open and Distance Education (UNAD) offers an ethno-education degree so that indigenous languages speakers can educated their own language communities in their own languages and thus avoid unfavourable diglossic situations with Spanish in education that may damage the future of the languages.

Through recent legislation and changes in attitudes, indigenous identity has be accepted as a central facet of national identity. While attitudes from the 1886 constitution still and one can still hear disparaging remarks about indigenous language and culture, law and education have turned their back on the linguicidal past of the nation and embrace indigeneity and Creole as core tenets of the multi-cultural nature of the newly envisioned national identity – gone are the days were the minority identity were legally othered as barbaric and unacceptable.

In a similar vein to minority communities, the current social identity of Spanish speakers is

intimately tied to the education legislation regarding foreign language teaching. The creation of the new constitution resulted in the creation of new education guidelines a scant three years later. Under the Ministry of Education's (MEN) new plan education would now be compulsory until fifteen years of age and all students would need to be educated in a foreign language. While originally offering whatever language the student or school should desire, come 2004 MEN would introduce the plan 'Colombia Bilingüe' which recommended the teaching of English to every student in the country who was not of indigenous, Romani or Creole descent, and in 2006 it introduced the 'Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English, further strengthening the dominant position of English in education. In 2014, English would gain further foothold in Colombian education with the 'Colombia Very Well' programme whose aim is form a nation of English/Spanish bilingual individuals.

The nature of this education policy is tied very strongly with the concept of national identity, although at times it may not seem that obvious. Until 1994 the teaching of foreign languages was largely the domain of rich, private schools who taught prestigious European languages as means of creating a separate social identity for the uppers classes (de Mejía, 2011). This social identity

was closely attached to the idea of traditional European values and education and thus echoed the Constitution of Cúcuta and the 1886 Constitution and their division of social classes via education - a vision that is notably classist of social stratification in terms of wealth distribution, social opportunity and education quality. However, from 1994 onwards the onus of foreign language education was to develop '*competent and competitive*' citizens through the acquisition of English (Utakis & Pit, 2005).

Many academics have spoken out rather loudly against the imposition of English in the educational system at the cost of other foreign languages and even at the cost of Spanish itself. A particular criticism of the model imposed by MEN is that it does not provide a context which is relevant to Colombian national identity or everyday life (de Mejía, 2011). Patiño (2005) notes that the plan devised by MEN is focused on an ideal of europeanization of the education system and aims to emulate a Europe that in reality does not exist outside of the government's imagination. Indeed, a common fear is that the government (through MEN) may be trying to change the national identity, or at least the national power relations, due to influence from the British Council who has been lobbying around the world since the 1900s for English education everywhere (Crystal, 1997;

Phillipson, 2000; González-Moncada, 2007). Whether or not this is factual is hard to discern, but the influence of English speaking institutions on the national government of Colombia is hard to refute.

How is national identity influenced through MEN's English policies? As it has been mentioned, national identity is a creation and language is used to 'other' external societies and homogenize internal society. Prior to 1991, Colombia had been imagined as a Spanish speaking country which developed its own variety of Spanish which became the official tool with which to 'other' other Spanish speaking nations (particularly Spain) and the linguistic minorities inside the country. The 1991 constitution re-imagined the country as a Colombian Spanish speaking nation where minority languages were given equal footing and identity status. However the 1994 MEN decrees pushed national identity onto a different path.

With the 1994 decree, the national identity was re-imaged as being bilingual in English as a means of becoming competent and competitive in international markets. In this statement alone lies a key assumption about how Colombian identity is perceived: the Colombian government considered the linguistic prestige of Spanish to be inferior to that of English and, given that the national language of the country

is Spanish, perceived the national identity to be less prestigious than the identity of English speaking countries. Given the inferiority complex of the ruling class, the government saw fit to impose a foreign language on the population in order to create a new aspect of the country's social identity. What this has seen is the privileging of English in universities and schools at the expense of Spanish in technical education (Patiño, 2005). This privilege of English over Spanish creates the situation where the traditional unifying language (Spanish) is relegated to a position of social inferiority as the government tries to align itself more with capitalist English speaking countries for trade benefits. But for the hispanophones of the country, this has meant an immediate devaluing of the national identity that was constructed over 500 years through Spanish as the hispanophones are now made to see themselves as inferior to the more commercially dominating Anglophone identities. Thus Spanish, which was once the language of prestige and unification in the country; remains a tool to unify the country but at the same time is held as being inferior to the commercially dominant English speaking identities and English has become a tool to align the country's social identity with the Anglophone countries that manipulate the national government for their own benefit.

## 4. Conclusion

From the beginning of the Spanish colonization to its end and then through the changing borders and constitutions of the republic, the languages of Colombia and the identities attached to them have undergone many changes. Colombia as a country has passed from being a region of many nations with many languages to the colonial and post-colonial eras where power relations and nation identities were mandated through the national language policy of Spanish at the expense of indigenous languages, identities and knowledges. The minority linguistic communities of Colombia have gone from being treated as slaves and then savages for the language they spoke to their eventual vindication as valued speakers of valued languages, having endured many losses and hardships during 492 years to reach a point where they could be recognised as equals for the language they speak. While there are still challenges in the form of globalisation, the work market and the guerrilla problem facing indigenous language speakers in the expression of their linguistic identity; positive steps taken by the national authorities, educational institutions and proactive local organisations are helping to remediate this situation and create a state where all linguistic identities – be it Spanish, indigenous, Romani or Creole – are

valued as equal parts of the country's cultural and linguistic heritage and identity, and where all languages are given equal public expression. With the continued work of these mentioned institutions, linguists and the communities themselves, soon all of Colombia's linguistic identities will find the country a haven for their expression, thus overcoming the Spanish dominated past.

The Spanish speakers though find themselves in the opposite situation as the national identity constructed through their mother tongue finds itself threatened by the imposition of forced English bilingualism. The government has made English into the tool of recasting the national identity into a far more capitalist player on the world stage, and seeks to create a nation of English-Spanish bilinguals in the hope of creating a national identity of a mayor commercial capitalist player in the global markets. The cost of this has been the devaluing of traditional Colombian Spanish speaking linguistic identity for the benefit of the market. Thus the fate of Spanish as the marker of national identity finds itself intricately intertwined with English in a play for social identity dominance.

Hence, we see that language has played a vital and central role in the creation of the national identity of the Republic of Colombia and its role has not yet finished. As scholars

note, identity is a continuous process of production and is constantly under evaluation. The national identity of Colombia is no different: it is a social construct played out by the citizens of the country – open to change and contest at the whims of society and the government. What is clear though is that the role of language and language education will continue to play an important and guiding role in how Colombia imagines itself.

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