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## Gabriela Pérez Báez

### Migration as a Language Endangerment Factor

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

Gabriela Pérez Báez, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, and RISLUS Visiting Scholar will report on her research on Wednesday, April 18, at 6:30 p.m. at the CUNY Graduate Center, room C197. All are welcome.

San Lucas Quiaviní Zapotec is an Otomanguean language spoken in the community of San Lucas Quiaviní (SLQ), in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca in southwestern Mexico. The community has seen outmigration to the United States since the early 1940s through the Bracero program. By the early 1970s, the beginnings of large-scale migration were underway. Currently, the growing community is settled in Los Angeles and is estimated at close to 1,000 members.

The work I present builds upon earlier research which identified large-scale outmigration as a factor threatening the preservation of SLQ Zapotec. Findings from field research conducted in January of 2007 as a participant observer are reported in some detail. I give an overview of the community and elaborate on aspects directly related to current patterns of language use, including particulars of the migratory patterns, community cohesion (or lack thereof), work sphere, social activities and ties with the home community. These data provide the basis for a preliminary assessment of patterns of language use in the family domain. Based on such variables as place of birth and language contact history, I identify four types of families. I explain their resulting language choices and advance an assessment of their impact on the vitality of SLQ Zapotec.

This research, although it is in its early stages, sheds light on a language endangerment scenario not yet described. SLQ Zapotec is a language, which in its place of origin, is a minority language with virtually no literacy. The speech community has been uprooted, placing the language in direct confrontation with two globally dominant languages, English in addition to Spanish. This study is not limited to the examination of an immigrant minority group. Rather, it considers the transnational nature of the SLQ Zapotec speech community to assess the impact that the language choices of migrants will have on the home community, and on the survival of the language across borders.

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