

Participating to transform: the collective production of an  
intercultural bilingual education project in Chaco (Argentina)

And would we non-indigenous anthropologists be part of the solution or part of the problem? After all, when it comes to methodologies, perhaps the most sensible procedure for productive ethnographic research that is open to the unexpected is to scrap the research project on the first day in the field."

Alcida Rita Ramos

Participatory action research, which was born with the intention of giving a voice and a place to non-traditional researchers in the investigation of their own practices, also brings with it movements related to the legitimisation of knowledge-others in order to establish genuine dialogues with the knowledge produced in traditional frameworks, i.e. universities and research centres. A search for 'justice in demonstrating the legitimacy of being Other' (Alcida Ramos).

**A LA DERECHA  
LE DECIMOS  
NO PASARÁN**



The collective production of IBE



Here, I will briefly review the participatory action research project that we carried out with the Wichi community of Los Lotes, in the Chaco impenetrable, in order to focus on three moments of collective discussion:

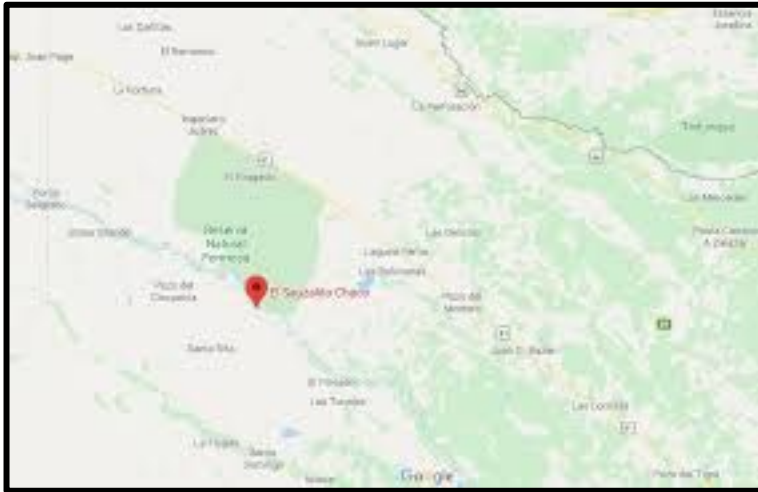
- 1) the Wichi language at school,
- 2) saying, doing and keeping quiet,
- 3) knowledge.

Finally, I will attempt some final reflections on the challenges of theoretical co-construction and the mobilisation of disciplinary knowledge in collaborative work.





## The Chaco Impenetrable and Wichi People



**Verdad y  
Justicia  
para  
Dominga Arias**





bringing language to school



“Sí un día la gente ya no conociera estas cosas, si ya no las hace, si ya no las nombra, entonces ya no seríamos wichi, seríamos criollos”.

Selis Navarrete (2019)

“Fwalasta pajche wichi latamsekis ihi che newache makche thamel nahayej wito. Hote newache pante che ichufwi hinu eth thomes (órdenes) lachemtes, wet thamil tat ta lawehey tat makta iwuyehen thoya mayai ta it pe hunat, taiñhi, inot afwenchey, hote newache hinu che hope. Che fwitaj la noyej maktoj iche. Hote thamil hawet ilon hihen tsotoy, thamel yomey ta nithokej tsotoy fwenchey fwenchey. Lawehey ihi. Eth che wet ilonen tsotoy fwenchey tatsiteyej wet nitefwa, lawefwa, lawehey yihanej che tawokwoy a awet ilon, wet wet che paj wet neeche yil thi wok upa, wichi nuwaya chewet, ilok thi mak fwas ta it pe hunat thamil lachayaj tatamenej”.

Avendaño, Ernesto (2016). Relatos wichi, Resistenica: Ed. Contexto

Before, the Wichi or indigenous people were free, because they had no commitments under other people's orders. They had only the obligations that they managed among themselves and they felt like owners of the field, of the forest and of the animals because nobody bullied them, they were not afraid of any outsider who could bully them. They did not kill the animals for pleasure, they hunted what they needed for their own consumption, they were very respectful of their beliefs. They believed that all the animals of the mountain and the river, birds and others, each thing had an owner. The owner of the creatures of the environment can get angry with the person who kills and plays with the animals and does not eat them, and then the person can get sick or go crazy. We, the Wichi, have a great respect for nature (according to our beliefs).

In these stories collected by Ernesto Avendaño and his team of young Wichi (Avendaño, 2016), it is also clear that the crisis begins with the difficulty of moving, of ceasing to be “transitory”. Transiting” seems to me to be key to understanding many things. Transiting is related to moving in a world that non-indigenous people reconfigured in a mean way, in a way that *cornered* the Wichi people. And in this moving to a *corner* there is also a movement of resistance in which language plays a key role. Language materialises this resistance based on difference. And this difference is key. It is a difference, as I will show, that is made by speaking, doing and keeping silent.

From the theoretical perspective that we construct in the workshops, language is also a **resource for the reproduction of the material and spiritual environment**. Hence, I believe, the insistence on recognising and maintaining certain expressions and words. The idea of language that names and constructs is very powerful in this sense.

And also, **language is a resource of memory**. Hence the Wichi people's insistence on opposing the standardisation of language, and opposing the production of teaching materials that are not situated.

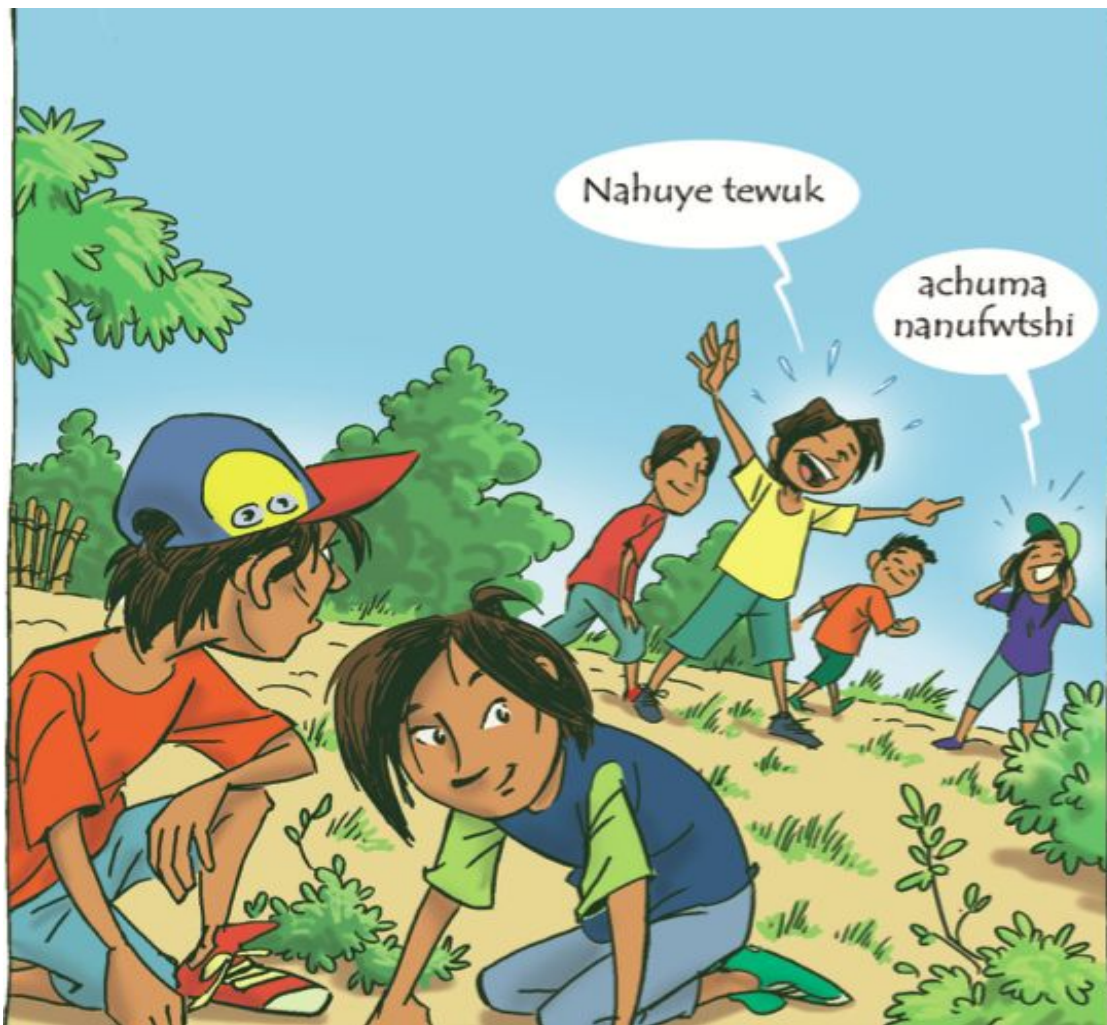


The ideas around language (woven into other practices, as a resource for configuring the 'Wichi corner', as a memory resource) are very different from the ideas of language that I brought to the workshops, and very distant from the notion of language as a code.

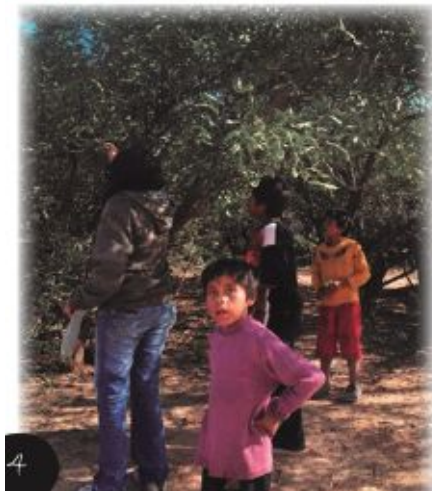
Revising the dominant ideas of language as a code allowed us to understand, from another perspective, the place given to Wichi people in schools: as interpreters for white teachers, as translators of teaching materials, as 'language' teachers.

By conceptualising language and, in particular, the transmission of language in the context of processes of resistance, territorial configuration and memory, Wichi educators brought into play other places and other desires regarding the incorporation of Wichi speaking into the white education system.

Language as a code and the transmission of language as autonomous from the transmission of other practices and knowledge are language ideologies that have accompanied these ways of inserting indigenous people and languages into schools. They reproduce the hierarchies between indigenous people and white people, and play a large part in their exclusion.



Doing, saying and keeping silent





In other works I have explored this relationship (Unamuno, 2020a and b), the ways in which the silent can be understood not as a characteristic of those who participate in a communication situation but as its result: as its product. I studied how classroom interaction with Wichi children produced silences and produced silenced people.

During the workshops, we explored the difference between being silenced and using silence. The use of silence is part of the socialisation of the Wichi people and, at the same time, a resource that strengthens the Wichi self vis-à-vis whites and “criollos”, i.e. non-indigenous people.

For non-indigenous people, the use of silence by Wichi people is a resource to create stigmas linked to characteristics such as 'being submissive', 'lacking initiative' or 'unwilling to progress' (in school, in life). In this sense, it is worth considering what Raciolinguistic studies call the listener's perspective. The Wichi people are NOT LISTENED TO in this sense.

As Claudia Jean Harris Clare (2012) also observes, the uses of silence are a performative resource that, in a society under threat and in permanent conflict, allows indigenous people to show themselves as such.

In the workshops we explored the regulation and meaning of the uses of silence, both in spaces regulated by the logics of inter-ethnic relations and in intra-Wichi situations. This allowed us to conceptualise silence in relation to other speech practices: the volume and tempo of Wichi speech.

Knowledge(s)

## WICHI TOJH NITICHENA HAL'OLHAYIS.



### HAL'O.

Tolhomet tojh molhyesha hayikalelhothi imayek, iwuyneshi nufwu hal'oy tojh iche wit lhamej, Wichi tojh yomey hal'oy, iwulheya hoptojh yikalelhot, molhyej: tek, huk, wit nufwu hal'oy tojh molhyesha iwuyneshi tojh kahopeya tojh tithatcho.



### TOKOS:

Talhometa yomey hal'oy tojh tithatcho, titolhat hope tojh towftajh tokos, wit hate ha-chiche tañhi tojh to'eñlok tiw'en iwatlok tithatcho.

**Lhey:** Nítsajh-lhok (*solanum argentinum*)

**Hunhat tojh law'et, wít ep hote:**

hal'o tojh hotena hawefwiche lhíle, wít t'ojh  
íchopte, law'ley chitseschehen wít lhawu yíka'te,  
hote lhay lalemsas wít t'ojh nichotlo  
atsetajht'ojh, hal'o tojh molhyesha law'et hunhat  
tojh nít'ena yihemen hunhat tojh ínot w'et  
p'ante.

**Tojh íslo:**

máke tojh lacha hal'ow'uleyna, hope tojhmhe  
totch'awhiya tojh pajhche tojh tokenít'alhama wít ne  
yomet t'enlhi tots'e tojh totch'awhiya, wít íwatlok  
tiyoyej hal'oyna lhítsí.

**Tojh tíwalhat tokacha:**

totchema nítsajh-lhok law'uley, tot'ohí tojh lhuk'asas, tojh ísís, tiw'aylhathí,  
wít típen toyom lhítsí nomhí, totchema tíwuhíya ne tiyoyej tojh ínathajh wít  
hunatsí.



NÍTSAJH-LHOK

TOJH ICHETTEJ TOKACHALH



Participatory action research and the attempt to mobilise the relationships involved in sociolinguistic research

From participatory action research or co-labour research, much progress has been made in the revision of research teams, criticising the fact that the 'others' are the ones who inform us and we are the ones who do and benefit from the research. We have criticised the use of other people's words in our texts.

We have also reviewed where the agenda of our research comes from, and the ways in which this agenda, often defined in universities or research centres in the central countries, dialogues with other agendas. We have even asked ourselves whether these agendas are useful to us, and about the economic logics of the scientific system that limit our possibility of discussing the northern agenda and proposing another.

To mobilise sociolinguistics in a critical sense implies, from my point of view, opening the game to other research experiences, to stop considering the experience of 'others' as objects of study, in order to mobilise them as spaces for conceptualisation and as producers of theory for the discipline.



Gracias

