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PRESENT-DAY POLICIES CONCERNING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE AMERICAS: A GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Abstract

Global changes in policies regarding Indigenous people, observed in the last decades, have had a strong impact on language policies in the Americas. They are aimed at increasing protection of Indigenous languages, especially in countries with a higher number and percentage of Native people and Indigenous language speakers (ILS). However, it is argued in the paper that the scope of these policies is often not adapted to changes in spatial distribution of Autochthonous populations, while their effective implementation in many cases seems outright impossible. The first part of the paper sums up an analysis concerning the number and spatial distribution of Indigenous people and ILS in countries and dependent territories of the Americas. The second part shows the evolution of policies towards Indigenous languages in the Americas from the colonial era to our times. The last part studies spatial aspects of the situation of Indigenous languages in Mexico City, based primarily on qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations carried out during field research. The paper concludes: that a clear progress has been made in language policies in the last decades in the analysed region, especially in Latin America; that there is no obvious difference in the implementation of these policies between unitary and federal states; and that, based on the case of Mexico City, the implementation of a relevant language policy may be seriously hindered by such factors as insufficient financing, political disputes, and a deeply embedded discrimination against Indigenous languages.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous people, language policy, North and South America, Mexico City

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

ludność tubylcza, polityka językowa, Ameryka Północna i Południowa, miasto Meksyk

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, more than 20 million people speak Indigenous languages in North and South America. Thanks to Indigenous social movements and a growing number of researchers, the need to protect those languages is more and more often discussed both at the national and international level. Nevertheless, research concerning the current status of Indigenous languages and the situation of their speakers is still scarce. The paper seeks to fill one of the gaps in existing literature on this topic by summing up the results of a research project that identified and assessed spatial aspects of present-day policies towards Indigenous languages in North and South American countries and dependent territories, in the context of increasing urbanization of Autochthonous populations.¹

Global changes in policies regarding Indigenous people have had a strong impact on language policies in the Americas. They are aimed at increasing protection of Indigenous languages, especially in countries with a higher number and percentage of Native people and Indigenous language speakers (ILS). However, it is argued in the paper that the scope of these policies is often not adapted to changes in the spatial distribution of Autochthonous populations, especially in the form of rural-urban migrations, while their effective implementation in many cases seems outright impossible.

1.1. COMMENTS ON TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

Before proceeding to the main topic of the paper, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the terminology and methodology used in the research. In the text, the notions of ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Autochthonous’, and ‘Native’ are considered

¹ K. Ząbecki, *Przestrenny wymiar współczesnej polityki państw obu Ameryk wobec języków rdzennych* (Doctoral dissertation), Warszawa 2019, available at: <https://depotuw.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/item/3482/1900-DR-GF-158652.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021).

synonymous, both in the context of people and languages. In different countries and international organizations, some terms are usually preferred over others. For example, when referring in general to members of different ethnic groups that lived in the Americas before their colonization by the Europeans, in Canada the preferred terms are 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' rather than 'Native' or 'Indian' (outside of a legal context), in the United States 'American Indian' and 'Native Indian' are commonly used,² while in Latin America the term *indio* is usually considered offensive,³ as can be, in some cases, calling someone *indígena*.⁴ In the paper, the aforementioned English terms are written in uppercase, as they refer to a specific – albeit very large and diverse – group of ethnicities whose origins date back to the pre-Columbian era.⁵ In addition, a differentiation is made between 'Indigenous (or Native, etc.) people', used as a general term to describe members of all Aboriginal groups, and 'Indigenous peoples', which serves to indicate the different groups themselves.

Given that the study is partially based upon census data regarding Indigenous people and their languages, it is important to take into account methodological issues related to its use. First of all, although there are different official ways to define who is 'Indigenous', and thus different possible criteria are applied to collect corresponding data, since the turn of the twenty-first century almost all countries in the Americas have decided to choose self-identification as the main – and usually only – criterion to define their Indigenous population.⁶ It is considered less stigmatizing than more 'objective' criteria, such as language or physical traits. At the same time, it means that people can change their ethnic identification over time, in a process referred to – mostly by Canadian researchers – as 'ethnic mobility',⁷ which in some cases does have a significant impact on differences in results between censuses. This process has been observed not only in Canada,⁸ but also for example in Bolivia, where according to the census from 2001 (the first one with self-identification as the main criterion), 62% of the population considered itself Indigenous,

² Terminology, Indigenous Foundations, <https://Indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/> (accessed 07.01.2021).

³ S. Serrano, *Indio e indígena*, 'El País' online, 22 January 2006, https://elpais.com/diario/2006/01/22/opinion/1137884409_850215.html (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁴ A. Arista Zerga, *La importancia de llamarse indígena: manejo y uso político del término indígena en Lircay – Perú*, 'e-cadernos CES' 2010, No. 7.

⁵ Ch. Weeber, *Why Capitalize 'Indigenous'?* SAPIENS, 19 May 2020, <https://www.sapiens.org/language/capitalize-indigenous/> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁶ S. Schkolnik, F. Del Popolo, *Los censos y los pueblos indígenas en América Latina: Una metodología regional*, 'Notas de Población' 2005, Vol. 31(79).

⁷ A. J. Siggner, *Impact of 'Ethnic Mobility' on Socio-Economic Conditions of Aboriginal Peoples*, 'Canadian Studies in Population' 2003, No. 30(1).

⁸ M. J. Norris, S. Clatworthy, *Urbanization and Migration Patterns of Aboriginal Populations in Canada: A Half Century in Review (1951–2006)*, 'Aboriginal Policy Studies' 2011, No. 1(1).

while in 2012 it was only 41%.⁹ There is no clear explanation of this change, but differences in census methodology, such as a slight change in the question about ethnicity between both questionnaires, have been since discarded as a decisive factor.¹⁰

Gathering and analysing data regarding ILS can also cause methodological problems, partly because it is difficult to determine what it actually means to 'speak' a language – for example, what level of proficiency is sufficient to consider someone a speaker of a given language. Since the basis for determining if someone is an ILS is that person's subjective assessment, just like in the case of ethnic identification, there can be – and often are – important changes in results between censuses that cannot be explained by natural causes. These seem to be due, among other factors, to a tendency to hide one's knowledge of an Indigenous language because of discrimination, still widespread in the Americas.¹¹ As a result, official data may be significantly underestimated. Additionally, there is no universal way of clearly differentiating languages from dialects,¹² and thus there may be disparities regarding, for example, the number of Indigenous languages spoken in each region.

In conclusion, census data regarding Indigenous people and ILS cannot be considered entirely reliable. Nevertheless, it is by far the largest and most complete source of information about both groups; therefore, despite its limitations, it provides in most cases a reasonable approximation of the current sociolinguistic reality of Indigenous people in the Americas. In addition, in this paper possible statistical inaccuracies do not hinder in a significant way the analysis of its main object of study, that is, language policies.

2. INDIGENOUS POPULATION IN THE AMERICAS: AN OVERVIEW

The purpose of this part of the paper is to present a brief overview of spatial distribution of Indigenous people and ILS in the Americas. This should serve as a sociolinguistic and geographical context of recent changes in policies towards

⁹ CEDIB, *Indígenas: Quién gana, quién pierde. Datos comparativos de la población indígena. Censos de población, 2001 y 2012*, <https://www.cedib.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Tabla-Poblacion-Indigena1.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021).

¹⁰ L. Tamburini, *Bolivia Censo 2012: Algunas claves para entender la variable indígena*, SERVINDI, 15 October 2013, <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad/94399> (accessed 07.01.2021).

¹¹ R. Martínez Casas, *De la resistencia al desplazamiento de las lenguas indígenas en situaciones de migración*, (in:) R. Barriga Villanueva, P. Martín Butragueño (eds), *Historia sociolingüística de México: Volumen 3. Espacio, contacto y discurso político*, la Ciudad de México 2014.

¹² M. Cysouw, J. Good, *Languid, Doculect and Glossonym: Formalizing the Notion 'Language'*, 'Language, Documentation & Conservation' 2013, Vol. 7, https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/4606/cysouw_good.pdf (accessed 07.01.2021).

Native languages, described further on in this paper, and thus help understand processes observed in this field in the last decades.

According to census data, the total Indigenous population of the Americas exceeds currently 55 million, while over 20 million people can speak an Indigenous language. The spatial distribution of both groups is very uneven both on a regional and national scale. First of all, officially no Indigenous languages are spoken in the Caribbean countries and territories¹³ or in Uruguay, and therefore they are not taken into consideration in this study. Regarding the rest of the region, as can be observed in the table below (Table 1), nearly half of the officially registered Indigenous population of the Americas lives in Mexico, and other countries with the highest number of Native people are Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia. On the other hand, in French Guiana, El Salvador, Suriname, and Belize, the Aboriginal population is under 50,000 people. By far the highest percentage of Indigenous people in the total population was observed in Greenland, followed by Bolivia and Guatemala, while the lowest figures, below 1%, were recorded in El Salvador, Brazil, and the United States.

Table 1. Census data regarding the number and percentage of Indigenous people and Indigenous language speakers in countries and dependent territories of the Americas

Country/ territory	Indigenous population (millions)	% of Indige- nous pop. in total pop.	Indigenous lan- guage speakers (ILS) (millions)	% of ILS among Indigenous people	Number of Indigenous languages
Argentina	0.96	2.4%	0.11	20.3%	15
Belize	0.04	11.3%	0.03	77.5%	3
Bolivia	4.18	41.5%	2.25	53.9%	34
Brazil	0.90	0.5%	0.29	37.4%	274
Canada	1.67	4.9%	0.23	13.7%	52
Chile	1.84	11.1%	0.16	9.2%	8
Colombia	1.91	4.4%	0.82	50.8% ¹⁴	64
Costa Rica	0.10	2.4%	0.03	30.4%	6
Ecuador	1.02	7.0%	0.69	67.9%	13
El Salvador	0.01	0.2%	0.001	10.0%	1
French Guiana	0.01	4.2%	0.003	30.0%	6

¹³ With the possible exception of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, although available data is scarce and possibly outdated; cf. H. Devonish, *Protecting, Propagating and Reviving Caribbean Indigenous Languages*, 31 January 2004, <https://www.mona.uwi.edu/dllp/jlu/ciel/pages/protecting.htm> (accessed 07.01.2021).

¹⁴ The percentage of ILS among Indigenous people indicated in the source and cited here is actually higher than the result of dividing the number of ILS by the total Indigenous population. This may be due to the methodology used; possibly only respondents above a certain age were asked about languages that they speak, although such information could not be found in the cited report.

Greenland	0.05	89.5%	0.05	95.6%	1
Guatemala	6.05	38.8%	4.35	71.9%	24
Guyana	0.08	10.5%	0.02	24.4%	12
Honduras	0.66	7.9%	0.03	4.7%	6
Mexico	25.69	21.5%	7.38	28.7%	64
Nicaragua	0.31	6.0%	0.12	39.9%	4
Panama	0.42	12.3%	0.28	66.1%	8
Paraguay	0.12	1.8%	0.06	49.3%	20
Peru	5.77	24.9%	3.29	57.0%	47
Suriname	0.02	3.8%	0.005	24.8%	9
United States	2.90	0.9%	0.38	13.0%	126
Venezuela	0.72	2.8%	0.47	64.3%	37

Source: Colombia: DANE, *Población indígena de Colombia: Resultados del Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2018*, 16 September 2019, <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/grupos-etnicos/presentacion-grupos-etnicos-2019.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021); Peru: Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, *Capítulo 3.1: Población Indígena u Originaria de los Andes*, (in:) *La Autoidentificación Étnica: Población Indígena y Afroperuana*, Lima 2018, https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1642/cap03_01.pdf (accessed 07.01.2021); for other countries and territories, see K. Ząbecki, *Przestrzenny wymiar współczesnej polityki państw obu Ameryk wobec języków rdzennych* (Doctoral dissertation), Warszawa 2019, available at: <https://depotuw.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/item/3482/1900-DR-GF-158652.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021)

Similar disparities can be noted in the case of data regarding ILS: while there are countries with several million people who speak a Native language, like Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru, in others their number does not exceed a few thousand. Similarly, significant differences can be observed in the percentage of Indigenous people who speak the language of their ethnic group, which varies from over 90% in Greenland and over 70% in Belize and Guatemala, to below 15% in Honduras, Chile, El Salvador, the United States, and Canada. In addition, the number of officially recognized Indigenous languages varies greatly between the analysed countries and territories: by far the largest number was registered in Brazil, followed by the United States, whereas in both El Salvador and Greenland there was only one such language.

In general, there are certain regional patterns of spatial distribution of both Indigenous people and ILS. There are two main regions where these groups are relatively concentrated: the southern part of North America, including Mexico and most of Central America, as well as the Andean states in the northwestern part of South America. On the other hand, regions with a relatively low number and percentage of Native population and ILS are the eastern coast of South America and the part of North America situated north of Mexico. Still, it is worth keeping in mind that, as already mentioned, there are also significant differences in spatial distribution of both groups on a national and local scale, e.g. in Mexico

they live mostly in the south of the country, whereas in the United States they are concentrated primarily in the south and southwest.¹⁵

As a part of the research project, a quantitative analysis of census data for first-order administrative divisions was carried out. Data regarding the number and percentage of Indigenous people was available for 21 countries listed in Table 1,¹⁶ whereas information about the number and percentage of ILS was obtained for 10 countries.¹⁷ Using basic correlation coefficients – Pearson's r and the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient – several hypotheses were tested. First of all, it was found out that there is no statistically significant linear correlation between the number of Indigenous languages spoken in a country and both the number of Indigenous people and number of speakers of Indigenous languages. Secondly, a statistically significant negative correlation ($\rho = -0.4$) between population density and the percentage of people who speak an Indigenous language was found. However, in this case the obtained correlation varied greatly between countries, e.g. in Mexico the result was only $\rho = -0.1$, since most Indigenous people live in more densely populated southern states than in the scarcely populated north.¹⁸ In addition, in the few cases where data was available, it has been observed that urbanization rate among speakers of Indigenous languages is significantly lower than among Indigenous population and the total population, as can be seen in the table below (Table 2).¹⁹

Table 2. Urbanization rate of the total population, Indigenous people and Indigenous language speakers (ILS) in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico

Country	Urbanization rate of the total population	Urbanization rate of Indigenous people	Urbanization rate of ILS
Bolivia	68%	43%	37%
Costa Rica	73%	41%	30%
Ecuador	63%	22%	17%
Mexico	77%	54%	38%

Source: K. Ząbecki, *Przestrzenny wymiar współczesnej polityki państw obu Ameryk wobec języków rdzennych* (Doctoral dissertation), Warszawa 2019, available at: <https://depotuw.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/item/3482/1900-DR-GF-158652.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021)

¹⁵ For more detailed information on spatial distribution of Indigenous people and ILS in the Americas, see K. Ząbecki, 2019, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Similar data was unavailable for the two analysed dependent territories, i.e. French Guiana and Greenland.

¹⁷ These countries are Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and the United States. In the rest of the cases data regarding ILS was available only for the entire country.

¹⁸ However, even in these more densely populated states the ILS live mostly in rural areas; this shows serious limitations to analysing data from first-order administrative divisions, which is not precise enough, but at the same time remains for most countries the most detailed source of information.

¹⁹ K. Ząbecki, 2019, *op. cit.*

This basic statistical analysis implies two important characteristics of the studied groups. Firstly, it indirectly suggests the rather obvious conclusion that there are important disparities between the numbers of speakers of different Indigenous languages. Actually, most of over 600 Native languages officially recognized in the Americas are seriously endangered due to a very low number of speakers,²⁰ which is crucial in the context of analysing present-day language policies. Secondly, the analysed data hints that there may be significant differences in the situation of Indigenous languages between rural and urban areas, and that Native people not only tend to live more often outside of the cities than the rest of respective societies, but also that they speak their languages less willingly in urban areas.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF POLICIES TOWARDS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE AMERICAS

In this part of the paper, changes over time in language policies towards Indigenous people are described, from the colonial era to the present day. Covering such a broad timeframe is intended to help better understand the current situation of Native languages and their speakers by presenting the historical context of how their legal status has evolved.

3.1. COLONIAL ERA

During the colonial era, Spain was the first empire to try to implement a comprehensive policy towards Indigenous languages in its American colonies. The importance of language as a significant tool of strengthening the authority had already been proven in the Spanish Empire during the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula that had directly preceded the colonial era. Nevertheless, due to the large number of different Native languages spoken by Autochthons, regional *linguae francae* such as Nahuatl or Mayan were widely used by colonizers in the first decades of conquest of the Americas.²¹ It was only in 1550 Spanish that was declared the only language of Christianization and was to be learnt by all Indigenous subjects, a decision opposed by missionaries who already had some

²⁰ *Languages of the World*, Ethnologue, <https://www.ethnologue.com/> (accessed 07.01.2021).

²¹ B. Garza Cuarón, *Políticas lingüísticas hacia la Nueva España en el siglo XVIII*, 'Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica' 1991, Vol. 39(2).

success in spreading Christianity through local languages.²² As a result, King Philip II imposed the knowledge of an Indigenous language on all missionaries. However, by the end of the sixteenth century the official language policy in the Spanish colonial empire reverted to Hispanicization, despite obstacles such as few educational institutions, relatively ineffective methods²³ and opposition by the Native population. This policy was not yet based on forced assimilation, which changed only in the second half of the eighteenth century when in 1770 Spanish was declared the only official language in the colonial empire and the use of Indigenous languages was to be forbidden.²⁴ However, the implementation of this new, more restrictive policy was only at an initial stage before most of the Spanish colonial empire in the Americas was engulfed in wars of independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁵

In Portuguese colonies in the Americas, formed principally of the territory of present-day Brazil, larger European settlements started to appear only in the mid-sixteenth century, and the very limited number of Portuguese colonizers made it virtually impossible for their language to become widely used among the Indigenous population.²⁶ Instead, along the Atlantic coast a local *lingua franca*, called *lingua geral* ('general language'), created by Jesuit missionaries and based on the Indigenous Tupi language, was widely used.²⁷ Already in the eighteenth century the metropole started imposing a more restrictive policy, especially after 1757, when a new law introduced the obligation to use Portuguese, while prohibiting the use of Native languages in the colony.²⁸ As a result of this new law and of demographic changes in the colony, the European language started to be used not only by the local elite but also by an increasing part of the rest of the society, while the *lingua geral* was gradually disappearing – a process accelerated by the exile of the Portuguese king and his court to Brazil in 1808, which resulted in an unprecedented cultural growth until the country's independence in the 1820s.²⁹

The process of introducing language policies was also similar in British and French colonies, established mostly in North America. In the first phase of col-

²² J. A. Rodríguez Maldonado, *La crónica de Motolinía y la enseñanza de la lengua en la evangelización*, (in:) R. Domínguez Angel, L. Pérez Sánchez (eds), *Memorias del XI Encuentro Nacional de Estudios en Lenguas*, Tlaxcala 2010.

²³ F. de Solano, *Documentos sobre política lingüística en Hispanoamérica (1492–1800)*, Madrid 1991.

²⁴ C. A. Klee, A. Lynch, *El español en contacto con otras lenguas*, Washington 2009.

²⁵ B. Garza Cuarón, 1991, *op. cit.*

²⁶ A. P. Santana, L. C. Paredes Müller, *A Língua Portuguesa no Brasil: percurso histórico-lingüístico*, 'SOCIODIALETO' 2015, Vol. 5(15).

²⁷ L. Lopes Fávero, *A política lingüística na América Latina Colonial e as Línguas Gerais*, 2008, <http://elvira.illf.uam.es/clg8/actas/pdf/paperCLG64.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021).

²⁸ E. Frühauf García, *O projeto pombalino de imposição da língua portuguesa aos índios e a sua aplicação na América meridional*, 'Tempo' 2007, Vol. 12(23).

²⁹ B. S. Mariani, *Língua portuguesa e realidade brasileira: o Diretório de Pombal segundo Celso Cunha*, 'Capa' 1995, Vol. 9(23).

onization, settlers were practically independent from their metropolises.³⁰ Due to their small number, the spread of both English and French outside of colonial settlements was very limited. In consequence, despite some intents especially on the part of the French colonial authorities,³¹ there was still no clearly defined language policy in either colonial empire in the Americas, especially since in 1763 Great Britain took control over almost all of the former New France. Only in 1775, a decision was taken to finance education of Indigenous people in the Thirteen Colonies to ‘civilize’ them, but the American Revolutionary War interfered with those plans.³² Due to a longer British rule over Canada, a colonial language policy had more time to evolve there. An important part of it was the intent to assimilate the Indigenous population, among other means through language. A crucial element of that policy was the creation of residential schools, where Native children were forced to adapt to the culture of the colonizers. Still, the system was yet at an early stage when Canada gained partial independence in 1867, and developed only later on.³³

The evolution of language policies was even slower in other colonies in the Americas. In present-day Belize, for example, neither the Spanish nor the British authorities introduced any kind of regulations regarding languages until the country’s independence in 1982.³⁴ French Guiana, for its part, was very scarcely populated until the mid-twentieth century and served mostly as a penal colony until 1946, when it became a French overseas department. Thus, as an integral part of France, it adapted the laws of its metropole,³⁵ which promoted French as the only official language.³⁶ On the other hand, in Dutch Guiana, which in 1975 became Suriname, until the mid-nineteenth century Indigenous people were forbidden to use Dutch, and even though from 1876 for almost a century education was conducted in this language, the colonizers did not actively fight against the use of Native languages.³⁷

³⁰ A. Taylor, *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2013.

³¹ J. Leclerc, *Histoire du français au Québec, Section 1: La Nouvelle-France (1534–1760)*, (in:) J. Leclerc (ed.), *L’aménagement linguistique dans le monde*, 2017, http://www.axl.cefanelaval.ca/francophonie/HISTfrQC_sl_Nlle-France.htm (accessed 07.01.2021).

³² T. L. McCarty, *Policy and Politics of Language Revitalization in the USA and Canada*, (in:) S. M. Coronel-Molina, T. L. McCarty (eds), *Indigenous Language Revitalization in the Americas*, New York 2016.

³³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part I, Origins to 1939*, Montreal 2015.

³⁴ J. Leclerc, *Belize*, (in:) J. Leclerc (ed.), *L’aménagement linguistique dans le monde*, 2015, <http://www.axl.cefanelaval.ca/amsudant/Belize.htm> (accessed 07.01.2021).

³⁵ F. Piantoni, *La question migratoire en Guyane française: Histoire, société et territoires*, ‘Hommes & Migrations’ 2009, No. 1278.

³⁶ J.-M. Chevalier, *La France, pays monolingue ou multilingue?* ‘Synergies Italie’ 2009, No. 5.

³⁷ J. Diepeveen, M. Hüning, *The Status of Dutch in Post-Colonial Suriname*, (in:) D. Schmidt-Brücken, S. Schuster, M. Wienberg (eds), *Aspects of (Post)Colonial Linguistics: Current Perspectives and New Approaches*, Berlin 2016.

3.2. AFTER DECOLONIZATION

The process of decolonization and formation of independent states in the Americas spanned from the end of the eighteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. Despite such an extensive period, numerous elements of this process were present in most or even all analysed countries. In almost every newly created state – with the partial exception of Paraguay³⁸ – shortly after gaining independence, authorities intended to unite the new society around a common religion and language. Despite the reluctance of Creole and Mestizo elites towards European colonizers, they adapted their languages for this purpose; although in a few cases there were also ideas of substituting them with Indigenous languages, they were never implemented.³⁹

Policies intended to linguistically unify these countries were, in most cases, ineffective in the nineteenth century, due to significant geographical isolation of the hinterland, where Indigenous enclaves were still numerous.⁴⁰ One notable exception were the United States, where the process started sooner and received from early on considerable funding from authorities. The system was based on boarding schools where, similarly to Canadian residential schools, Aboriginal children were isolated from their communities and forced to speak English, with physical and psychological punishment used as a widespread method to exact obedience.⁴¹

In most countries, more effective policies aimed at eradicating Indigenous languages started to be implemented in the twentieth century. It was made possible with, on the one hand, the development of infrastructure that facilitated access to the hinterland, and on the other, basic education made more accessible for all, including Native people. It is arguably this universal access to education, where the use of the official (European) language was mandatory and Indigenous languages were banned, that was the most important factor leading to a gradual

³⁸ The case of Paraguay is different in that during the colonial era one of the Indigenous languages of the region, Guaraní, was extensively used in the area by all social groups, including most of the elite. After Paraguay gained independence, it was the most widespread language in the country and it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that Spanish was declared official and Guaraní was banned from public space, especially schools. However, it remained in use by most of the society and even became a co-official language in 1954, while during this whole period other Native languages were largely marginalized. See G. Makaran, *El mito del bilingüismo y la colonización lingüística en Paraguay*, 'De Raíz Diversa' 2014, No. 2.

³⁹ E. Bravo García, *La construcción lingüística de la identidad americana*, 'Boletín de Filología' 2010, Vol. 45(1).

⁴⁰ See, for example: R. Pineda Camacho, *Trayectoria y desafío de la política de las lenguas indígenas en Colombia*, (in:) A. Kowii (ed.), *Identidad lingüística de los pueblos indígenas de la región andina*, Quito 2005; N. Bondarenko Pisemskaya, *Situación ecolingüística venezolana contemporánea*, 'Papeles de Trabajo' 2010, No. 20.

⁴¹ T. L. McCarty, 2016, *op. cit.*

disappearance of Native languages in favour of Spanish (known as ‘language shift’) among most Autochthonous communities in both Americas.⁴²

It is worth noting that despite similarities in the process of assimilation of Indigenous people after the colonial era, the dynamics and effectiveness of the process depended upon several factors, such as the social status of Native languages in a given country or region (e.g. the status of Quechua and Aymara was relatively high in Peru, at least compared to Indigenous languages in other countries⁴³), the number of Indigenous people and their spatial isolation (especially high in the Andean region and in Central America), as well as migrations, both of speakers of European languages to Indigenous regions and of Native people themselves to urban areas.

3.3. GLOBAL CHANGES IN LANGUAGE POLICIES FROM THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

After a long period of policies intended to marginalize or even eradicate Indigenous languages and to assimilate their users into new societies, important changes in this regard started to be observed after the end of World War II, at first mainly at the international level. Two documents can be considered fundamental for these changes: the Charter of the United Nations of 1945,⁴⁴ and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.⁴⁵ Although neither of them directly addressed the question of Indigenous languages, they mention that people have human rights regardless of the language they speak.

Even though none of the documents is legally binding, they set the stage for the subsequent evolution of language policies, expressed by the adoption, in 1957, of the International Labour Organization Convention No. 107, called the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention.⁴⁶ As the name indicates, it explicitly concentrated on questions relating to Indigenous people, including the right to start education in one’s mother tongue, to then gradually replace it with a national or official language, while also stating the necessity to preserve Indigenous languages as far as possible. In hindsight, the document may seem paternalistic towards Native populations, and it clearly emphasized the importance of assim-

⁴² K. Ząbecki, 2019, *op. cit.*

⁴³ C. Villari, L. A. Menacho López, *La situación lingüística actual en Ancash como reflejo de la historia de la política lingüística del Perú*, ‘Indiana’ 2017, No. 34(1).

⁴⁴ The Charter was signed on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco, 1 UNTS XVI, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁴⁵ United Nations GA Resolution 217 A (III) adopted on 10 December 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁴⁶ It was adopted by the International Labour Organization on 26 June 1957 (ILO C107), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/de/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_LANG_CODE:312252,en:NO (accessed 07.01.2021).

ilation. However, it also clearly mentioned Indigenous language rights, and as a convention was binding for ratifying countries, over half of which (14 out of 27) were American states.⁴⁷

In the next decades, changes in national policies targeted at protecting and promoting Indigenous languages were gradually implemented worldwide, especially from the 1980s onwards. The ILO C107 became outdated, and in 1989 a new document was presented by the ILO: the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169.⁴⁸ An important change regarding Indigenous languages was the removal of the provision regarding the progressive transition from a Native language to one of the national or official ones. In addition, instead of just being ‘preserved’, Indigenous languages should also be ‘promoted’, which implies a more active role of the authorities. As of the end of 2020, the Convention was ratified by 23 countries, of which 15 from the Americas.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that except for Denmark (and thus Greenland) all of them are part of Latin America, however, the ILO C169 is not in force in Canada, the United States, Belize, Guyana, Suriname, or France (French Guiana).

The ILO C169 was followed by several other international legal acts that directly mention linguistic rights of Indigenous people. For example, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1992,⁵⁰ states i.a. that linguistic identity of minority groups should be protected by the state, that members of these groups have the right to freely use their language, both in private and in public, and that authorities should, ‘wherever possible’, provide access to education in one’s mother tongue. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, passed by the UNESCO General Conference in 2001,⁵¹ mentions each person’s right to use the language of one’s choice, and to education that respects one’s cultural identity. Meanwhile, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007,⁵² mentions directly Indigenous languages by stating that Native people have the right to ‘revitalize, use, develop

⁴⁷ Data available at: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/de/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312252 (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁴⁸ It was adopted by the International Labour Organization on 27 June 1989 (ILO C169), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:P12100_LANG_CODE:312314,en:NO (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁴⁹ Data available at: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314:NO (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵⁰ United Nations GA Resolution A/RES/47/135 adopted on 18 December 1992, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/minorities.aspx> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵¹ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted in Paris on 2 November 2001, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵² United Nations GA Resolution A/RES/61/295 adopted on 13 September 2007, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf (accessed 07.01.2021).

and transmit to future generations their (...) languages' (Article 13), as well as to create and control their own systems of education, according to their culture.

It is also worth mentioning efforts to establish a legal framework regarding Indigenous rights at a regional level, most notably in the form of the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁵³ The document, adopted in 2016 after nearly three decades of work⁵⁴ by the Organization of American States, provides for i.a. the right of Indigenous peoples to 'preserve, use, develop, revitalize, and transmit to future generations their own (...) languages' (Article XIV, para. 1), especially through the education compatible with their culture. It also stipulates that the states should actively participate in the promotion of Indigenous languages and culture via the media and facilitate communication to Indigenous people in their languages in official proceedings. Still, it is worth reiterating that unlike the ILO Conventions, these declarations are not legally binding, which weakens their potential impact on national legislations.

3.4. PRESENT-DAY LANGUAGE POLICIES

The aforementioned documents show the general direction in which language policies have evolved in the last decades. However, the pace of these changes differs from country to country, and the current state of national policies towards Indigenous languages varies significantly. In Table 3, main provisions of these policies are summarized. As can be observed, there are six cases where at least one Indigenous language is official in the entire country or territory, although in Ecuador most Native languages are only in official use for Autochthonous populations, while only Quechua and Shuar are considered official in intercultural relations, which means that their status is still lower than this of Spanish. In Paraguay, on the other hand, Guaraní is official alongside Spanish, but it is a language used principally by the non-Native population of the country,⁵⁵ whereas other Indigenous languages have a very limited legal protection. In addition, in some cases Native languages have an official status only in a certain area, both in federal and unitary states. The first group covers Argentina, Brazil, Canada and the United States, where this status has been given to selected languages in specific

⁵³ It was adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States on 15 June 2016, <https://www.narf.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2016oas-declaration-indigenous-people.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵⁴ A. Portalewska, *Indigenous Caucus Withdraws from Negotiations on the Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Cultural Survival, 18 May 2015, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/indigenous-caucus-withdraws-negotiations-draft-american-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵⁵ DGEEC, *Paraguay. Principales indicadores de viviendas*, 2012, <https://www.dgeec.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/indicadores/Principales%20indicadores%20vivienda.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021).

administrative units, similarly to Nicaragua, which is a unitary state, but has two autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast with a relatively high level of sovereignty. In two other unitary countries, Colombia and Peru, this spatially limited official status applies to areas where Indigenous population predominates, i.e. at least theoretically its range could be considered more ‘flexible’.

Table 3. Summary of present-day policies towards Indigenous languages in analysed countries and dependent territories with years of introduction (constitutional provisions in bold, further explanations below the dates if necessary)

Country/ territory	Indigenous languages official in the whole country/ territory	Indigenous languages official in a part of the country/ territory	Right to bilingual education	Right to contacts with the authorities in one's language	Right to a court translator/ interpreter	Recognition, protection and/or pro- motion of Indigenous languages	Indig- enous languages as an element of the country's heritage
Argentina		2004/2011 Corrientes Province/Chaco Province	1994			2006 respect towards Indigenous languages as a goal of education policy	
Belize							
Bolivia	2000/2009		2009/2010	2009/2012 in areas where a language is in common use	2009/2012 in areas where a lan- guage is in common use	2009	
Brazil		2002/2010/2012/ 2016/2019 in 5 municipal- ities	1988 in primary education			1988	
Canada		1988/1999 Northwest Terri- tories/ Nunavut					1988
Chile			1993/1996 in areas with a high percentage of Indigenous people		1993	1993	

Colombia		1991 in Indigenous territories	1991 in commu- nities with their own linguistic tradition	2010	2010		
Costa Rica			1993 in Indigenous reserves			1999	
Ecuador	1998/2008 in official use for Indigenous people/two languages official in inter- cultural relations	1998 in areas where Indigenous people live	1998			1998	2008
El Salvador			2016			1983/2016	1983
French Guiana							
Green- land	1978/2009 Greenlandic official alongside Danish/the only official language						
Guyana						2003	
Guate- mala			1985 in regions with a pre- dominance of Indigenous people	2003	2003	1985	1985/2003
Honduras			1994/2012			1994	
Mexico	2015 68 In- digenous languages considered national languages alongside Spanish		2001/2003 support from authorities/ access in primary education	2015	2015	2001	

Nicaragua		1987 in autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast	1987/2006 in autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast			1987/2014 in autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast	
Panama			1972/2010 bilingual alphabetization in Indigenous communities/ intercultural bilingual education in these communities			1972	
Paraguay	1967/1992 Guarani as national/ as official alongside Spanish		2007 recognition of Indigenous education in primary and secondary schools by authorities			2007	1992
Peru		1979/1993 Quechua, Aymara and other Indigenous languages in areas where they predominate	1993/2011 support for bilingual education by authorities	1993	1993	2011	1979
United States		1978/2014 Hawaii/Alaska				1990	
Suriname							
Venezuela	1999/2008 Indigenous languages in official use for Native people/ official alongside Spanish		2002 in areas inhabited by Indigenous people		2005	1999	1999

Source: K. Ząbecki, *Przestrzenny wymiar współczesnej polityki państw obu Ameryk wobec języków rdzennych* (Doctoral dissertation), Warszawa 2019, available at: <https://depotuw.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/item/3482/1900-DR-GF-158652.pdf> (accessed 07.01.2021)

Other provisions also differ between countries and territories in their spatial scope. Among federal countries, a significant diversity in language policies between administrative units has been observed especially in Canada, Mexico and the United States, whereas in Venezuela the language policy is adopted at a federal level and specific provisions can apply only to Indigenous areas. Similarly, in Argentina and Brazil the policy regarding Native languages is decided by the federal government, although – as has already been mentioned – in both countries administrative units can grant a special status to an Indigenous language. On the other hand, in unitary states some provisions may have a local or regional spatial scope, e.g. in Panama the right to bilingual education for Native people is limited to officially recognized Indigenous areas, while in Bolivia access to public services provided in one's language is limited to areas where this language is in common use.

Regarding national constitutions, in eight cases there is no mention of Indigenous languages at all, whereas in the other fifteen constitutional provisions vary from mostly symbolical ones, like the recognition of these languages as part of the national heritage, to those that may have a more direct impact on language survival. In this context, the most important provisions are those regarding bilingual education for Indigenous people, since they potentially facilitate the acquisition of Indigenous languages at an early age and slow down their replacement by the dominant, European languages. As can be seen in Table 3, such provisions are present in most analysed countries and territories, except for Greenland (where Greenlandic is the only official language), Canada, the United States,⁵⁶ Belize, French Guiana, and Suriname. The last three cases are also the only ones that have virtually no explicitly defined policy regarding Indigenous languages.

A temporal analysis of the evolution of language policies shows that although some changes have started already in the 1960s, the large-scale process of official recognition and protection of Indigenous languages commenced in the 1980s and continues to this day. These changes coincide with the wave of democratization observed in Latin America since the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, which saw the end of authoritarian regimes in 16 countries of the region.⁵⁷ This process may at least partly explain why Latin American countries generally confer more extensive rights to ILS and a greater protection to their languages than in the rest of the Americas. Language policies are especially developed in Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia and Peru, whereas they are much more limited or even non-existent in Guyana, Suriname, Belize, Canada and the United States. Still, this should not be considered a universal

⁵⁶ However, both in Canada and the United States there are provisions at a local or regional level that provide for bilingual education, especially in reserves and reservations; K. Ząbecki, 2019, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ S. Mainwaring, A. Pérez-Liñán, *La democracia a la deriva en América Latina*, 'POSTData', 2015, Vol. 20(2).

rule, since there are Latin American countries with relatively limited language policies, such as El Salvador and Paraguay (except for Guaraní) as well as areas outside of Latin America with well-developed policies towards Indigenous languages, like Nunavut and Northwest Territories in Canada, Alaska in the United States, or Greenland.

4. A CASE STUDY: POLICY TOWARDS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN MEXICO CITY

The presentation of the specific case of Mexico City in this part of the paper serves the purpose of contrasting the official language policy with mostly qualitative data regarding its implementation, collected during a research project carried out between October 2017 and February 2018. Although the observations from this case study cannot be automatically extended to other parts of the Americas, they may help understand problems that can be experienced on a local, regional, and national scale while introducing new policies regarding Indigenous languages.

4.1. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND ILS IN MEXICO CITY

According to census data from 2015, Mexico City has an ILS population of 130,000, which constitutes around 17% of 780,000 Indigenous people living in the city,⁵⁸ and at least an additional 200,000 ILS live in the metropolitan area that surrounds the Mexican capital.⁵⁹ Given that official data regarding Indigenous people in Mexico is usually underestimated,⁶⁰ the actual number of ILS who live in the agglomeration can be estimated at well over 350,000. In addition, data from the 2010 census shows that 82% of ILS aged five years and above that live in Mexico City were born outside of the city, and 12% arrived there during the five years preceding the census;⁶¹ in other words, only a small percentage of ILS was born in Mexico City and acquired the language of their people there, while the vast

⁵⁸ INEGI, *Tabulados de la Encuesta Intercensal 2015: Etnicidad. Ciudad de México*, 2016, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/tabulados/05_etnicidad_cdmx.xls (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁵⁹ INEGI, *Tabulados de la Encuesta Intercensal 2015: Etnicidad. Estado de México*, 2016, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/tabulados/05_etnicidad_mex.xls (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁶⁰ R. Martínez Casas, 2014, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ INEGI, *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010. Conjunto de datos: Población de 3 años y más*, http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/olap/Proyectos/bd/censos/cpv2010/P3Mas.asp?s=est&c=27781&proy=cpv10_p3mas# (accessed 07.01.2021).

majority were immigrants from other regions of the country. In total, speakers of 55 of the 68 Indigenous languages officially recognized in Mexico were identified in the 2010 census,⁶² resulting in a very diverse linguistic landscape.

As has already been mentioned, official statistics regarding Indigenous people and ILS should be treated with caution, not only because available information is not entirely reliable, but also because important data, often crucial to understand these groups, is not available in this form. For instance, it is worth noting that Indigenous people in Mexico City consist of two clearly distinct groups. The first one are Indigenous – or ‘original’ – communities (*pueblos y barrios originarios*) that since the pre-Columbian era live roughly in the same area, mostly in the south of present-day Mexico City. Nowadays, only around 3% of them speak the Native language of their people (mostly Nahuatl or Otomi), and language rights are generally not considered a priority among these communities, especially compared to the issue of right to land.⁶³ In contrast, migrants from other regions of the country and their descendants (*comunidades indígenas residentes*, which can be roughly translated as ‘Indigenous resident communities’) have a much higher percentage of ILS, although it differs significantly between the immigrant generations: while in the first generation, among people raised mostly in Indigenous communities in rural areas, the percentage is by far the highest, it decreases considerably in the second and third generations.⁶⁴ Still, it is important to keep in mind that the dynamics of this process of language shift differs among and within Indigenous ethnic groups.

4.2. OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARDS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN MEXICO CITY

Provisions of international and national law that apply in Mexico do naturally apply in Mexico City, as well. These include the ILO C169, the national constitution, and the General Law of Indigenous Peoples’ Linguistic Rights (*Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas*), among others. In addition, there are several acts that apply locally, the most important being the new Law of Indigenous People’s Rights (*Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Barrios Originarios y Comunidades Indígenas Residentes en la Ciudad de México*, enacted at the end of 2019), the Constitution of Mexico City (*Constitución Política de la Ciudad*

⁶² SEDEREC, *Lenguas Indígenas en la CDMX*, <http://www.sedecr.cdmx.gob.mx/lenguas-indigenas> (accessed 07.01.2021).

⁶³ I. Gomezcézar Hernández, *La palabra de los antiguos. Territorio y memoria histórica en Milpa Alta*, (in:) P. Yanes, V. Molina, Ó. González (eds), *Ciudad, Pueblos Indígenas y Etnicidad*, la Ciudad de México 2004.

⁶⁴ M. Romer, *Persistencia y pérdida de la identidad étnica en la generación de los hijos de inmigrantes indígenas en el Área Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México*, (in:) P. Yanes, V. Molina, Ó. González (eds), *Urbi indiano. La larga marcha a la ciudad diversa*, la Ciudad de México 2005.

de México, 2017), the Law of Education (Ley de Educación del Distrito Federal, 2000), and the Law of Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility (Ley de Interculturalidad, Atención a Migrantes y Movilidad Humana en el Distrito Federal, 2011). These documents provide, among others, numerous linguistic rights to Indigenous people in Mexico City, such as the right: to use, preserve, and revitalize their languages; to be informed – where applicable – about administrative changes that may affect them in their language; to be protected from discrimination because of its use; to teach those languages and promote them through mass media; to access and contact public utilities and the justice system using their language; and to coordinate with the authorities intercultural and bilingual education, according to their own methods of teaching and learning.

In addition, an important factor in the implementation of a language policy in Mexico City is the presence of head offices of all the main federal institutions responsible for Indigenous rights. These include the National Indigenous Languages Institute (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, INALI), the General Coordinating Office for Intercultural Bilingual Education (Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe, CGEIB), and the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, CDI), all of which have carried out programmes related to the protection of Indigenous languages in Mexico City itself.

4.3. LANGUAGE POLICY IN MEXICO CITY: THEORY VERSUS REALITY

Despite an extensive range of legal instruments to protect Indigenous languages, the language policy in Mexico City is widely considered ineffective and mainly declarative, while most of its provisions are not adequately implemented and applied. This is due to several reasons. First of all, while in the last decades Mexican authorities have been pressured by international and national organizations to implement an official policy to protect Native languages, they were often unprepared and/or unwilling to do so accordingly, both at the national and local level. Secondly, there is a clear tendency in official institutions to abandon ongoing projects and replace a large part of staff after each political shift, thus significantly reducing their effectiveness. Thirdly, institutions tasked with implementing and applying the language policy tend to be underfinanced and understaffed. In addition, cooperation between local and federal authorities and Indigenous organizations, which could be an important asset in applying the new language policy, tends to be insufficient, partly due to poor coordination and a certain deficit of trust on both sides.

However, as has already been mentioned, the single most important factor that can either slow down or accelerate the process of language shift is the edu-

cation system. Despite provisions meant to facilitate the introduction of bilingual education in Mexico City, its implementation is in many cases virtually impossible. First and foremost, there are not enough qualified teachers to teach even the most popular Indigenous languages spoken in the city, such as Nahuatl, not to mention least used ones. Furthermore, there is a long tradition of discrimination of ILS in education institutions, both by other students and by teachers. Thus, despite some intents, there are still hardly any effective official programmes of bilingual education for Indigenous people in Mexico City.⁶⁵

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in the paper makes it possible to draw several conclusions regarding present-day policies towards Indigenous languages in the Americas. Firstly, undoubtedly a clear progress has been made in terms of legislation to protect Native languages in the last decades, and especially since the 1980s, at the international, national and local level. These changes took place after several centuries of increasingly hostile attitude towards Indigenous languages, first from colonial and then from national authorities of the newly created states. From the perspective of the Americas, the recent evolution in language policies is mostly visible in Latin America, whereas the rest of the region clearly lags behind. At the same time, there is no obvious difference in the implementation of these policies between unitary and federal states; even though in the latter it should be arguably easier to introduce laws adapted to the local situation, in practice this process is often relatively slow and does not necessarily concern regions with the major Indigenous populations (e.g. in Argentina and Brazil), while some federal states show a clearly centralized approach to implementing language policies (e.g. Venezuela). On the other hand, in some of the unitary countries (e.g. Ecuador, Colombia, Peru) such policies can be addressed to Indigenous people in regions where they are most numerous.

Another important point is the contrast between the regulatory framework and its implementation. Especially keeping in mind migrations of Native people from rural to urban areas observed in the last decades in the region, an increasingly important concern is the adoption of appropriate language policies in cities that attract Indigenous population. The case of Mexico City clearly shows that even if there is a relevant language policy, its adoption may be seriously hindered by numerous factors, such as insufficient financing, political disputes, and

⁶⁵ K. Ząbecki, 2019, *op. cit.*; *idem*, *Hablantes de lengua indígena en la Ciudad de México: entre desplazamiento y mantenimiento lingüístico*, 'Revista de Antropología y Sociología: Virajes' 2020, Vol. 22(1).

a deeply embedded discrimination against Indigenous languages, still present in many societies in the Americas.

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