

# Social Motivations for Sustained Bilingualism in an Italo-Mexican Community

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to identify the social motivations for the sustained bilingualism in the language contact situation of Chipilo, a Veneto-Spanish bilingual community in central Mexico. There are a number of factors that affect language maintenance and language shift within a community, among these the number of speakers of the minority language relative to the number of speakers of the majority language, exogamous or endogamous marriage patterns, immigration and emigration patterns, language attitudes, prestige, and official government policy (Romaine, 1995). In many cases of immigrant language communities, the norm has been language loss by the third generation, the original immigrants being monolingual in the language of the country of origin, their children being bilingual, and the grandchildren being monolingual in the dominant societal language. The present study focuses on the social factors that have contributed to language maintenance in Chipilo, an immigrant community founded in 1882 by a homogenous group of approximately 560 immigrants from a Veneto-speaking region in northern Italy.

Chipilo presents a unique window for the study of language maintenance for a number of reasons. First, Veneto has co-existed with Spanish for over 125 years and is the first language of many, if not all, of the bilinguals in Chipilo. This distinguishes Chipilo from many other immigrant communities where the minority group typically undergoes language shift to the majority language within three generations. And unlike many other instances of language contact in Mexico, in Chipilo both community languages are ascribed high prestige by the speakers, thereby slowing the process of language shift from Veneto to Spanish. Veneto receives no formal recognition by the Mexican government, is not taught or used as a language of instruction in education and is not used in the church. Spanish is the language of the church and the school, and Veneto is used primarily in the home. However, in most instances, Veneto is spoken with anyone that speaks Veneto, and Spanish is reserved for interactions with non-Veneto speakers.

This study will identify and discuss the social motivations for the sustained bilingualism observed in Chipilo by focusing on the social factors of age, gender, and L1 and how these influence language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes. This paper is organized as follows: section 2 provides a brief historical overview of the community. Section 3 presents the methodology used to collect data for the study. Section 4 presents the results and section 5 discusses these results as they relate to language attitudes and language maintenance within the community.

## 2. Community Background

### 2.1. Historical Background

In the late nineteenth century, the Mexican government sought to recruit European immigrants to settle in Mexico to encourage economic and population growth. There was a preference for farmers and agricultural workers who could convert unused lands and resources into productive resources.

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Initially, the government considered the recruitment of Spanish farmers, however, this idea was quickly dismissed due to the “sentimiento antiespañol de los criollos” (Zilli Manica, 1981:13) as well as the recent expulsion of the Spanish from Mexico in 1827. The French were also likely candidates with a colony having been previously established in Jicaltepec, Veracruz in 1857. The French intervention in 1862, however, made further colonization impossible (Zilli Manica, 1981). Mexico therefore looked to Italy where potential colonists were anxious to find alternatives to the difficult times facing them in Italy. Sartor and Ursini (1983) note several reasons for the emigration from Italy, including the flooding of the Piave river, plagues, and a feeling of detachment from Italian nationality given that the Veneto region had only recently left the Austrian Empire and become part of Italy. However, the main reason for the massive exodus was a struggling economy together with a growing population. Local Chipileño historian Zago concurs that “la crisis radical del sistema agrario italiano que, junto con la elevada tasa del crecimiento poblacional, provocó el empobrecimiento de la clase campesina hasta llegar a extremos insostenibles” (2007:30).

In total, seven Italian colonies were established between 1881 and 1882 of which Chipilo was the last. Chipilo was founded in October of 1882 by a homogeneous group of approximately 560 Italian immigrants on the vacant haciendas of Chipilloc and Tenamaxtla, outside of the city of Puebla. The majority of the group came from the Veneto region of Northern Italy, specifically Segusino and nearby towns, and most spoke a variety of Veneto.<sup>2</sup> They were given contracts with the Mexican government and were to pay off the lands within a period of ten years, beginning with the first harvest (Zago, 1982, 2007). However, the lands they received were sterile and unused and the first few years of the colony were difficult. Over time, however, Chipilo has become one of the most economically successful towns in the area, where dairy production has been the main industry.

The initial homogeneity of the families living in Chipilo and the relative isolation from urban areas prevented rapid language shift and for many years, the immigrants lived and married amongst themselves (Zago, 2007). Today, it is estimated that approximately 2,500 people speak Veneto, and, despite the increasing dominance of the city of Puebla, most people of Italian descent speak Veneto on a daily basis as the regular means of communication. Everyone is bilingual in Spanish; however, Veneto remains the preferred language of the home and with family. Romani (1992) found that 99.2% of the population was bilingual, with very few monolingual Spanish speakers and no monolingual Veneto speakers. At the time of her study, which was conducted in 1984, the population of Chipilo was in its 5<sup>th</sup> generation and Veneto was the first language of the majority of the children of Italian descent.

## 2.2. *Language Maintenance*

Chipilo has predominantly been studied from a language maintenance perspective (Sartor and Ursini, 1983; Romani, 1992; MacKay, 1992). In the late 1980s, Romani (1992) examined a group of speakers to determine the reasons behind the maintenance of Veneto. She focused on three areas: acquisition and degree of bilingualism, language use, and language loyalty. With respect to acquisition, she found that most participants of Italian descent and a small number of participants of Mexican descent learned Veneto in the home. Mexican descent participants are more likely to learn Veneto from their Veneto speaking spouse, relatives, or the community in general. In the case of mixed marriages, the language of the children tends to be the language of the mother although often children learn both Spanish and Veneto. Learning both Veneto and Spanish simultaneously marks the beginning of a shift for Romani, but she points out that in spite of this Veneto is still being passed down to the children at a high rate.

Romani also found a relationship between L1 and confidence in expression of each language. Not surprisingly, almost all speakers interviewed noted a good ability in speaking Spanish regardless of the L1 but a good ability in Veneto was restricted to native speakers of Veneto. Her results also show that the younger generations of all three L1 groups express more confidence in abilities in both languages, showing a positive attitude towards both conserving the minority language and accepting the majority language.

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<sup>2</sup> Although Veneto is often called a Northern Italian dialect, it is a sister language of the Florentine dialect that eventually became Standard Italian. The variety of Veneto spoken in Chipilo is of the Alto Adige region of Northern Italy and is a Bellunese variety of Veneto (MacKay, 1992).

The final area examined by Romani, language loyalty, shows that Veneto speakers feel that their language serves as a means of communication and they express desire to speak it, pass it on to younger generations, and standardize it. Romani notes that “los dos idiomas no representan valores en lucha, sino que poseen un diferente significado social y una diferente utilidad que, en esta fase del contacto, no se enfrentan abiertamente” (1992: 86). This allows for an equal status of the two languages with neither being classified as inferior and both being maintained in their respective functions.

Further contributing to Veneto language maintenance in Chipilo is the renewed contact between Chipilo and Northern Italy. In October of 1982, Chipilo celebrated its centennial with many festivities that included the visit of families from Segusino for the first time. This *hermandad* between the two towns has continued, and excursions to each country take place every year. In addition, local groups and chapters work towards preserving and documenting the variety of Veneto spoken in Chipilo. In the last decade, there have been ongoing efforts to develop and standardize a written form of the language (see Montagner, 2005) and a newspaper written entirely in Veneto was distributed monthly for two years.

### 2.3. Present Study

The present study expands on the line of work done by Romani and identifies the social factors that play a role in the sustained bilingualism found today in Chipilo. Romani’s (1992) examination of language use and loyalty in Chipilo and Mackay’s (1992) descriptive overview of the community were completed over 20 years ago, shortly after the community re-established close ties with Segusino, one of the Italian towns of origin, during the centennial celebration. The connection with Italy remains strong today and Veneto continues as the L1 of most children of Italian descent. The present paper aims to further explore the sustained bilingualism in Chipilo by examining questions of language maintenance, the degree to which both languages are used, and the attitudes Chipileños have towards the use of both languages. More specifically, this paper addresses the role gender, L1, and age have on the sustained bilingualism observed in Chipilo through the following research questions:

- What role does gender play in language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes in Chipilo? Are there differences between men and women?
- Does a participant’s L1 have an effect on language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes in Chipilo?
- Is there a difference across different age groups with respect to language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes in Chipilo?

The social factors of gender, age, and L1 were chosen based on the social context of Chipilo. Women typically work in the home and are considered the main transmitters of language. In the case of mixed-marriage households, many Chipileños believe that Veneto will be learned by the children if the mother is Chipileña but lost if only the father is Chipileño, as reported by Romani (1992). Because there is a strong association of Veneto with family and the home, it is predicted that women may view the use of Veneto by the community and children as more important. Furthermore, men are more likely to work outside the home or community, and therefore interact with non-Chipileños, providing them with more exposure to and opportunities to speak Spanish.

A speaker’s L1 is predicted to be a strong indicator of language use patterns, as found by Romani (1992). In Chipilo, the majority of persons of Italian descent claim Veneto as their L1, however in cases of mixed-marriages more children are being exposed to both Spanish and Veneto from an early age, and in some cases, just Spanish. Due to the strong association between language and identity in Chipilo, it is also predicted that L1 Veneto speakers will identify more with Veneto language and culture than L1 Spanish speakers or those raised speaking both Spanish and Veneto.

Finally, it is predicted that younger generations will identify with the national Mexican culture more than the Chipileño culture, as compared to older generations. Younger generations have more education and employment opportunities outside of Chipilo than older generations did and, thus, they have more exposure to the mainstream Mexican culture. While Veneto in Chipilo has already surpassed the typical three generation pattern of language shift, this study aims to determine if the younger generations are using less Veneto than older generations, an indication of shift.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Materials

Data used in this study were collected during two field trips in 2008. The data come from a sociolinguistic questionnaire which consisted of 81 close-ended questions focusing on personal background and language history, language use, and items focusing on language attitudes, language maintenance, and identity. Participants were asked to mark the response that most reflects their language use and opinions. Language use and maintenance were determined through self-rating items focusing on comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills in both Spanish and Veneto, and language use questions that required participants to indicate on a five-point scale the degree of Veneto and Spanish use in a variety of contexts, such as within the family or in a work environment. The scale ranged from all Veneto to all Spanish, as seen in (1).

(1) ¿Qué lengua se usaba en su casa cuando usted era pequeño?

Sólo véneto

Más véneto que español

La misma cantidad de véneto y español

Más español que véneto

Sólo español

In addition to the language use questions, items focusing on identity, language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes were presented with a 7-point Likert scale where participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement, as seen in the following examples. In several cases, items serve to measure not only language maintenance but also language use and attitudes towards the use of both languages within the community.

(2) El véneto es un aspecto importante de mi identidad.

No estoy de acuerdo

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Totalmente de acuerdo

(3) Me parece importante seguir usando el véneto.

No estoy de acuerdo

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Totalmente de acuerdo

While the present study focuses on the data collected from the sociolinguistic questionnaire, interviews were conducted with 20 members of the community in addition to the questionnaire. Interviews range from approximately 20 minutes to 90 minutes and focused on language use, language attitudes, life in Chipilo, and local traditions. Interviews were conducted in local cafés or in the participant's home. In some cases, interviews were conducted with multiple participants or with another community member present.

#### 3.2. Participants

Participants for this study were recruited using the friend of a friend method (Milroy and Gordon, 2003). They responded to the questionnaire at their own pace, usually requiring between 10 and 25 minutes, either in the presence of the researcher or at home. A total of 71 people responded to the questionnaire, 32 men and 37 women. Participants were also divided into four age groups: Group 1 includes participants between 18 and 30 years of age, Group 2 between 31 and 50, Group 3 between 51 and 64, and Group 4 65 and older. The age range for participants is between 18 and 96 years of age, with most participants falling into either Group 1 or Group 2. Table 1 shows a breakdown of participants across gender and age groups.

Table 1 Questionnaire Participants

Age Group	Women	Men
Group 1: 18-30	11	12
Group 2: 31-50	17	12
Group 3: 51-64	7	5
Group 4: 65+	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>

Participants were also divided into three L1 groups based on their response to the personal background section of the questionnaire. The questionnaire allowed participants to choose L1 Veneto (n=48), L1 Spanish (n=7), and 2L1 (n=15). Participants were given the option to choose *ambas* as their L1 due to the fact that in some households, particularly those of mixed-marriages, both Spanish and Veneto are used with children from an early age. Recall that all respondents to the questionnaire are bilingual in Spanish and Veneto, regardless of their L1.

In addition to the questionnaires, sociolinguistic interviews were conducted with 20 participants. All were bilingual members of the community. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the interview participants.

Table 2 Interview Participants

Age Group	Women	Men
18-30	3	6
31-50	3	2
51-64	2	1
65+	1	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>

The present study will focus primarily on the results from the questionnaire, although qualitative data from the sociolinguistic interviews will also be presented as complementary to the quantitative results from the questionnaire.

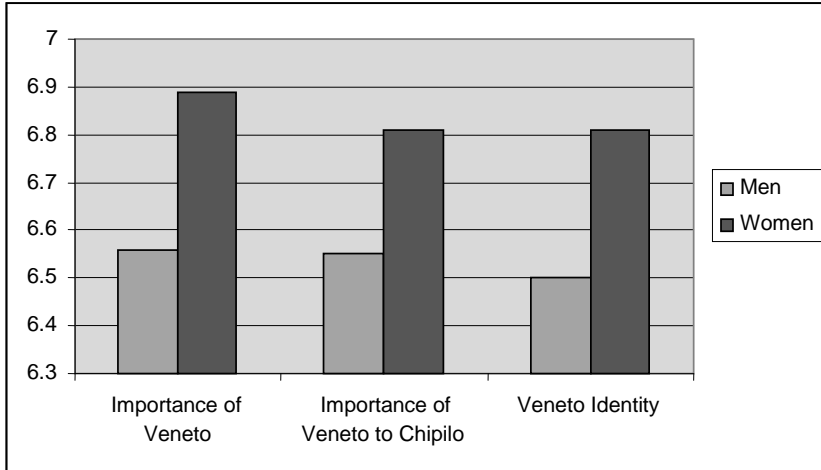
## 4. Results

The present study focuses on the role of gender, L1, and age in the sustained bilingualism found in Chipilo. Statistical analysis shows that these factors are significant in the maintenance of Veneto culture and language. A t-test revealed significant differences across genders. A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences across L1 groups and age groups, particularly with respect to identity and language use patterns. Each of these will be presented in turn. Only results for items that were found to be significant will be presented.

### 4.1. Gender

Following the predictions, gender was found to be a significant factor with respect to attitudes towards Veneto. Women rated Veneto as significantly more important to the question *¿Qué importancia tiene para usted poder hablar véneto?*,  $F(46.961) = 12.011$   $p < .05$ . They also responded more positively to the item *A la comunidad de Chipilo le parece importante seguir usando el véneto*,  $F(45.861) = 6.930$   $p < .05$ . Furthermore, they identify more with Veneto as seen in their response to the item *El véneto es un aspecto importante de mi identidad*,  $F(46.203) = 8.065$   $p < .05$ . These results are shown in Figure 1. Note that in spite of the significant differences in the responses of men and women, both groups rate these items highly (6.5 or higher).

Figure 1 Results for gender



#### 4.1.1. Gender and language use

With respect to language use patterns, women claim to use more Veneto in the home than men,  $F(59.788) = 4.351, p < .05$ . Other items regarding language use with parents, children, other relatives, neighbors, friends, classmates and co-workers reveal no significant differences between men and women. Therefore, while women do show significantly more favorable attitudes towards Veneto, it is important to note that in most cases men and women do not differ significantly in language use patterns.

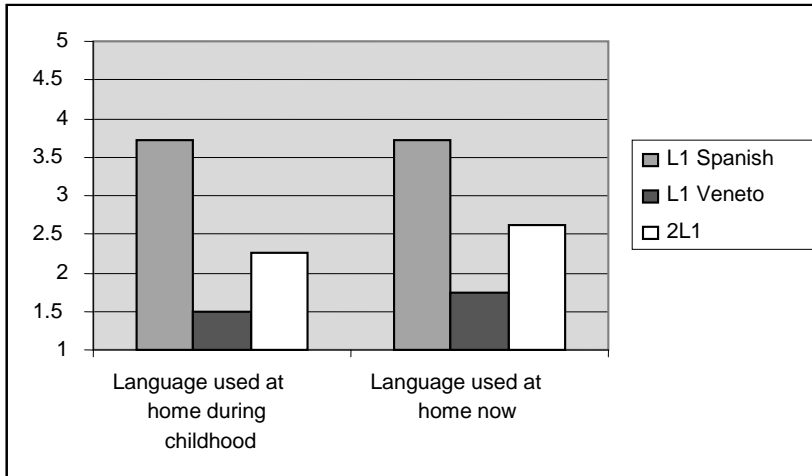
#### 4.2. L1

Language use is most affected by a person's L1. Recall that participants were divided into three L1 groups: L1 Spanish, L1 Veneto, and 2L1, who reported both Spanish and Veneto as their L1. A participant's L1 was found to be significant with respect to language use patterns, as found by Romani (1992), as well as with respect to attitudes towards language use.

##### 4.2.1. L1 and language use

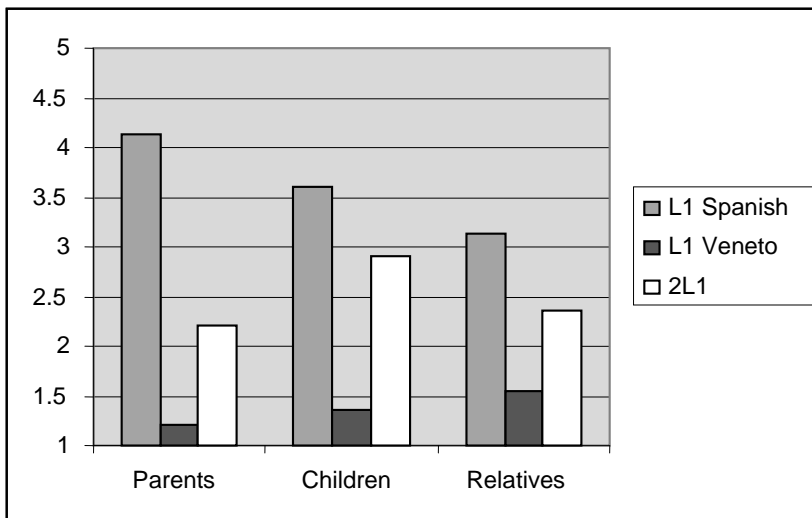
L1 Veneto speakers claim to have used Veneto in the home when they were young more often than L1 Spanish or 2L1 speakers. 2L1 speakers claim to have used more Veneto than L1 Spanish speakers,  $F(2, 66) = 21.389, p < .05$ . This pattern continues into present-day usage. The difference between all three groups is significant with Veneto being used most by L1 Veneto speakers,  $F(2, 67) = 12.524, p < .05$ . These results are presented in Figure 2, where 5 represents 'All Spanish' and 1 represents 'All Veneto'.

Figure 2 Language use in the home



Significant differences between L1 groups were also found with respect to the languages used with parents, children, and other relatives (Figure 3). L1 Veneto speakers use more Veneto with their parents than the other two groups and 2L1 use more Veneto with their parents than L1 Spanish speakers,  $F(2, 65) = 31.777, p < .05$ .<sup>3</sup> L1 Veneto speakers use more Veneto with their children than L1 Spanish speakers and 2L1,  $F(2, 46) = 18.155, p < .05$  and with other relatives  $F(2, 65) = 11.726, p < .05$ .

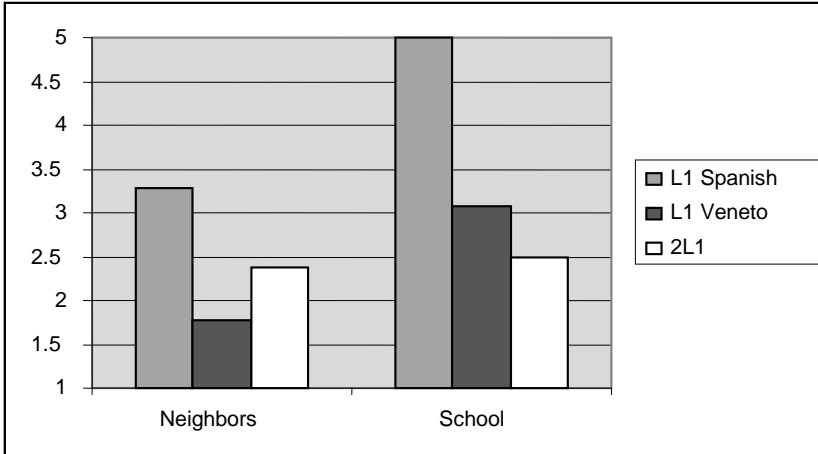
Figure 3 Language use with family members



Outside of the home and family, there are also differences in language choice across the three groups. L1 Veneto speakers use significantly more Veneto with their neighbors than L1 Spanish speakers  $F(2, 67) = 8.011, p < .05$ . L1 is also a strong indicator of language use at school. Recall that no classes are conducted in Veneto and most, if not all, of the teachers are monolingual Spanish speakers from outside the community. In spite of the lack of instruction in Veneto, L1 Veneto speakers and 2L1 use significantly more Veneto in school than L1 Spanish,  $F(2, 36) = 4.019, p < .05$ . Interestingly, 2L1 claim to use more Veneto than L1 Veneto, but this difference is not statistically significant. These results are presented in Figure 4.

<sup>3</sup> In the cases of mixed marriages both languages may be used. One participant wrote that she uses Spanish with her mother and Veneto with her father; therefore she chose *la misma cantidad de véneto y español*.

Figure 4 Language use outside of the family

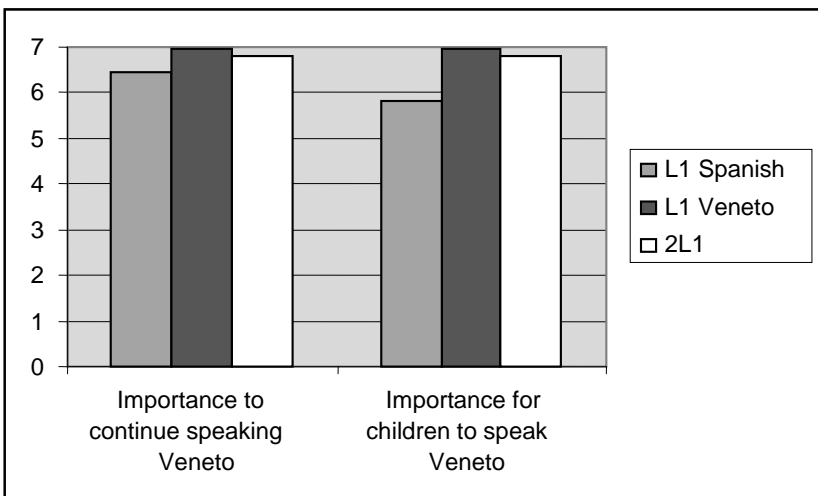


Participants were also asked to indicate the amount of Spanish and Veneto they use with their close friends and co-workers. No significant results were found between the three L1 groups in these two cases. This is not surprising given that many Chipileños attend school or are employed outside of Chipilo where many of their interactions are in Spanish. Therefore, Veneto is used with Veneto speaking colleagues and friends and Spanish with Spanish speaking colleagues and friends.

4.2.2. L1 and language importance

A participant’s L1 is also an indicator of attitudes towards language use. Participants were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale the degree to which they agree or disagree with various items or questions. Figure 5 shows the results to the item *Me parece importante seguir usando el véneto* (where 7 represents strongly agree) and *¿Qué importancia tiene para usted que sus hijos puedan hablar véneto (si tiene hijos)?* (where 7 represents *mucha* ‘a lot’). L1 Veneto speakers view it as significantly more important to continue using Veneto in the community than L1 Spanish speakers  $F(2, 66) = 3.618, p < .05$ . In addition, L1 Veneto and 2L1 speakers find it important for their children to speak Veneto more than L1 Spanish speakers,  $F(2, 55) = 10.767 p < .05$ .

Figure 5 Importance of Veneto

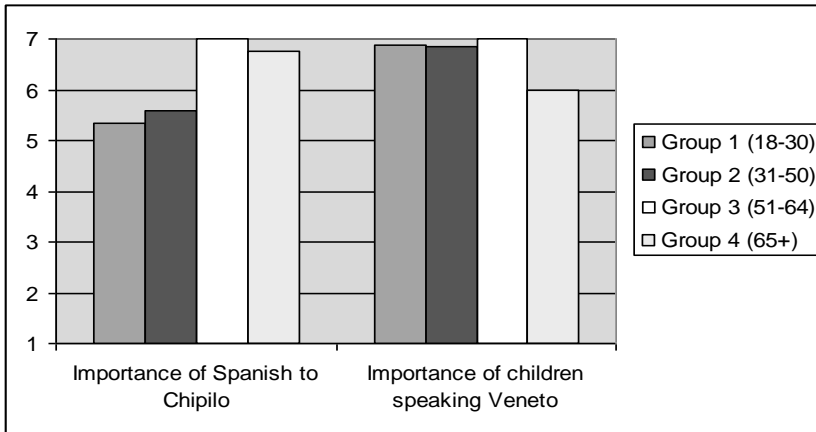




4.3. Age

Age was also found to be an important factor in the sustained bilingualism of Chipilo. One prediction was that younger generations would find Spanish as more important to themselves and to the community than older generations due to increased employment and education opportunities in nearby Puebla. However, responses to the question *¿En su opinión, qué importancia tienen las dos lenguas en la comunidad de Chipilo?* show unexpected results. Participants in Group 1, the youngest group, rate Spanish as less important to the community than Group 3, a difference that is statistically significant,  $F(3, 64) = 3.701, p < .05$ . Participants in Group 2 also rate Spanish as less important than Group 3, but this was just shy of reaching statistical significance. This is an unexpected result given that younger generations have more education and employment opportunities outside of Chipilo and are exposed to Spanish and mainstream Mexican culture more often than older generations.

Figure 6 Importance of Spanish and Veneto by Age Group



However, these results do not imply that Spanish is not viewed as important to the younger generations. If we look at the mean response shown in Table 3 for each age group we see that Group 1 does view Spanish as important (mean = 5.33). Interestingly, however, the range of responses for the younger two groups is between 1 and 7, whereas all respondents in Group 3 chose 7 and in Group 4 they chose 6 or 7.

Table 3 Importance of Spanish to Chipilo

Importance of Spanish to Chipilo				
Age Group	N	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min/Max
18-30	24	5.33	1.761	1/7
31-50	28	5.57	1.794	1/7
51-64	12	7	.000	7/7
65+	4	6.75	.500	6/7

In contrast, no significant differences were found across age groups with respect to the importance of Veneto to Chipilo, presented in Table 4. By comparing the two tables we can see that the means for the importance of Veneto to Chipilo are higher in the younger two groups, whereas Group 3 rates Spanish as slightly more important to Chipilo and Group 4 rates both languages equally.

Table 4 Importance of Veneto to Chipilo

Importance of Veneto to Chipilo				
Age Group	N	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min/Max
18-30	24	6.63	.924	3/7
31-50	30	6.70	.784	4/7
51-64	12	6.83	.577	5/7
65+	4	6.75	.500	6/7

This difference across generations is also seen in response to the question *¿Qué importancia tiene para usted que sus hijos puedan hablar véneto (si tiene hijos)?*. The oldest group rated Veneto ability in children as important (mean of 6.00), however this was significantly lower than the third group,  $F(3,55) = 2.713, p < .05$ . These results are presented above in Figure 6. It is interesting to note that Group 3 rates Spanish as very important to Chipilo but also highly rates the importance of Veneto use by the children.

Generational differences are further seen in response to the question *¿En su opinión, qué lengua es más bonita?* in which participants were asked to rate the languages on a 7-point Likert scale. The means for this item can be seen in Table 5. Group 1 rated Spanish as less attractive than the other three groups and only participants from Group 1 rated Spanish with the lowest rating of 1. This result is presented below in Figure 7. The difference was significant between Group 1 and Group 2,  $F(3, 56) = 3.185, p < .05$ . Table 6 shows a much higher overall response to the attractiveness of Veneto.

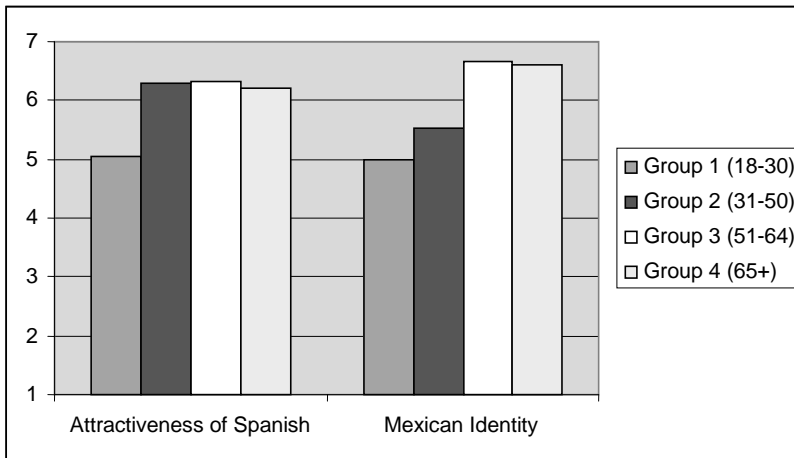
Table 5 Attractiveness of Spanish

Attractiveness of Spanish				
Age Group	N	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min/Max
18-30	22	5.05	2.011	1/7
31-50	24	6.29	1.122	3/7
51-64	9	6.33	1.118	4/7
65+	5	6.20	.837	5/7

Table 6 Attractiveness of Veneto

Attractiveness of Veneto				
Age Group	N	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min/Max
18-30	24	6.88	.338	6/7
31-50	28	6.82	.548	5/7
51-64	12	6.83	.577	5/7
65+	5	6.60	.894	5/7

Figure 7 Attractiveness of Spanish and Identification with Mexican Culture



The item *La cultura mexicana es un aspecto importante de mi identidad* also reveals interesting differences between the youngest generation and the older generations. Again, we see that Group 1 identifies less with Mexican culture than Group 3, a difference that is statistically significant,  $F(3, 66) = 3.098, p < .05$ , as shown above in Figure 7. In contrast, no significant differences across age groups were found for the item *La cultura véneta es un aspecto importante de mi identidad*. When we compare the raw numbers with respect to these two items we see that Groups 1 and 2 had a much broader range of responses for the item concerning Mexican culture, as seen in Table 7, than for the item concerning Veneto culture, in Table 8. The minimum rating with respect to Mexican identity for

the older age groups was 5 whereas the minimum for the younger age groups was 1. In general, identity with Veneto culture is higher overall than identity with Mexican culture however identification with one is not exclusive of the other, as will be discussed in the following section.

Table 7 Mexican identity

<i>La cultura mexicana es un aspecto importante de mi identidad.</i>				
<b>Age Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	<b>Min/Max</b>
18-30	24	5.00	2.147	1/7
31-50	29	5.52	1.682	1/7
51-64	12	6.67	.778	5/7
65+	5	6.60	.894	5/7

Table 8 Veneto identity

<i>La cultura veneta es un aspecto importante de mi identidad.</i>				
<b>Age Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	<b>Min/Max</b>
18-30	24	6.88	.338	6/7
31-50	29	6.79	.559	5/7
51-64	12	6.83	.577	5/7
65+	5	7.00	.000	7/7

#### 4.3.1. Age and Language use

No significant differences were found across age groups with respect to language use patterns. This again highlights the fact that Veneto not only continues to be the L1 for many bilinguals in the community but that it is also the preferred language of communication for many speakers of both older and younger generations.

## 5. Discussion

Results show that gender, L1, and age play an important role in the sustained bilingualism of Chipilo. As predicted, women consider Veneto more important to themselves and they perceive Veneto as more important to the community. They also consider Veneto to be an important part of their identity. Recall, however, that even though the differences between men and women on these items are significant, men also rated Veneto highly in all three categories. In addition, a participant's L1 remains a strong indicator of language use (Romani, 1992). L1 Veneto speakers typically speak more Veneto than 2L1 speakers who typically speak more Veneto than L1 Spanish speakers. In many cases, L1 Spanish and 2L1 speakers live or were raised in mixed-marriage households. Although not statistically significant, 2L1 speakers claim to use more Veneto in school than L1 Veneto speakers. This can be explained if we consider that many 2L1 participants grew up speaking more Spanish at home. The school, therefore, may have provided the best opportunity to interact with their Veneto speaking peers.

Work on language maintenance and shift has found that in mixed-marriage households, shift to the majority language is common (Clyne 2003; Romaine, 1995). In Chipilo, for many years, it has been claimed that marriage patterns were mostly endogamous; however, in more recent years, exogamous marriage has become much more common. In the long run, this may result in a decrease of L1 Veneto speakers and an increase in either 2L1 or L1 Spanish speakers. Based on results from the present study, the loss of Veneto as the L1 for many children may eventually lead to language shift. However, the present study revealed no significant differences across age groups. Veneto remains the language of choice for all interactions between Veneto speakers whether they occur in the home or in business interactions. Studies of other minority language contexts find that younger generations may use the minority language as the language of home out of need, for example to speak to elderly family members who have low proficiency in the majority language (Clyne, 2003). This is not the case in Chipilo where Veneto is spoken between parents and their children, indicating a high degree of language transmission. Differences in language use are instead attributed to differences in L1. In sum, the results for gender and L1 are in line with the predictions that women will have stronger

connections to Veneto than men and that L1 will be a strong indicator of language use patterns and language importance.

While language use patterns across age groups are similar, younger generations were found to view Spanish as somewhat less important to the community of Chipilo and to identify to a lesser degree with Mexican culture than older generations. They also rated Spanish as less attractive than other age groups. In Romani's (1992) study, she found that the youngest participants, regardless of L1, showed the most confidence in their expression ability in both Spanish and Veneto. She interpreted this to mean that the younger generations have positive attitudes towards both the local and national Mexican culture. The results presented here do not counter Romani's results, given that both Spanish and Veneto are rated highly by most participants. This indicates continued maintenance since the time of Romani's (1992) study but also points to a degree of growing interest in Veneto preservation. While younger generations do identify with Mexican culture (with a mean of 5.00), this is significantly less than Group 3. One possible reason for this difference could be an increase in pride in the local culture and language. Many Chipileños consider it rude, and a sign of *mala educación*, to use Veneto in the presence of a non-Veneto speaker, regardless of whether that person is participating in the conversation or not. This idea of *mala educación* may be stronger in the older generations who wanted to integrate into the national culture and be perceived as accepting of their Mexican nationality. This sentiment may be less strong in the younger generations who want to distinguish themselves from outside groups through their Chipileño identity and the use of Veneto.

This may be due in part to the re-establishment of ties with Italy, particularly Segusino, one of the towns of origin. After the immigrants left Italy, contact with the homeland was minimal. However, in 1982, Chipilo celebrated its centennial by establishing a *hermandad* with Segusino which brought many Veneto-speaking Italians to Chipilo for the first time. Since then, there have been annual excursions and home-stays between the two communities. These excursions are particularly popular with the younger generations and students, thus strengthening their connection to Veneto language and culture. The continuing relationship with Italy, and with other Veneto speakers, has provided further reinforcement of language maintenance in Chipilo. In addition, the last several years have seen an emerging interest in standardizing the local variety of Veneto, which has no written standard (see Montagner, 2005). Several local groups dedicated to maintaining Veneto language and culture have posted Veneto language signs and announcements around the community, sponsored Veneto community events and traditions, and published a Veneto-language newspaper.

Not surprisingly, Chipileño identity also plays a role in the maintenance of Veneto within the community. During the sociolinguistic interviews, participants were asked questions about their identity as *chipileños*, *mexicanos*, and *italianos*. Participants show strong ties to both the national Mexican culture and the local Chipileño culture, and we can see their dual identity as Mexican and Chipileño in the speech samples in (4) and (5).

- (4) “Italiano nacido en México, ¿no? Porque no soy ni de allá ni de acá porque nací en México y tengo cultura mexicana pero creo que tengo más cultura véneta.” (male, age 20)
- (5) “Yo me considero mexicana, más que italiana. Yo soy chipileña pero soy mexicana. Porque yo, Italia, no conozco nadie de Italia, no conozco Italia, mi hija, entonces ¿dónde nací? Yo nací en México.” (female, age 60)

Note that while both participants recognize a sort of dual identity, the young male participant in (4) stresses his Italian/Veneto identity more than his Mexican identity. This contrasts with the participant in (5), an older woman, who emphasizes her Mexican identity, more than her Italian or Chipileño identity. The difference between these two sentiments may be a reflection of the generational differences found in the questionnaire. It is interesting to note, however, that in many responses to this question, participants relate their identity to their place of birth. In the above examples, both participants mention being born in Mexico and hence they are Mexican. Few Chipileños consider themselves Italian. Most consider themselves Mexican, but in some cases this is based solely on nationality and not because there is a true sense of belonging to the national Mexican culture. The notion of identity is a very complex issue for many Chipileños. In (6), a Chipileña begins by clearly

identifying herself as Mexican. However, as she elaborates we see that in fact she also distinguishes between a Mexican and a Chipileño identity.

- (6) “Yo soy mexicana. Orgullosísima de ser chipileña pero cien por ciento mexicana. Yo creo que el ser chipileño es como un, otra identidad, o sea, no sé cómo te diré, igual y me estoy contradiciendo ahorita pero no sé, ser de Chipilo es como otra identidad. Ni eres italiano ni eres mexicano, o sea, eres de Chipilo. Eres chipileño yo creo que más bien, no sé, yo creo que, no sé, pues soy chipileña más que mexicana yo creo que chipileña, digo, me preguntan mi nacionalidad y siempre digo que soy mexicana pero de corazón chipileña.” (female, age 33)

This dual identity has been noted by others, particularly Sartor and Ursini’s (1983) study of Chipilo: “Chipilo e ambivalente, e rischia per un periodo ancora lungo di esserlo sempre di piu, in equilibrio tra due culture, senza decidersi a quale darsi definitivamente” ‘Chipilo is ambivalent, and risks being so for a long time, in a balance between two cultures, without deciding which one to dedicate itself to’ (1983:123). This observation was made over 25 years ago and still appears to be relevant to the community today as Chipileños still struggle with the idea of identity, as seen in (7).

- (7) “...en Italia somos mexicanos y para los mexicanos somos extranjeros. Lo único que tenemos es a Chipilo.” (female, age 32)

The sense of not entirely belonging to the national Mexican culture contributes to a stronger sense of identity with both the community of Chipilo and the Veneto language. The strong sense of group identity has been a strong factor in the sustained bilingualism in Chipilo, and has contributed to the continued maintenance in the younger generations.

## 6. Conclusion

Language shift is often associated with immigrant communities, particularly rapid shift within three generations. The community of Chipilo presents a unique case of an immigrant community where not only has Veneto, the minority language, survived more than three generations, but the younger generations appear to place more value on the use of Veneto at the individual and societal level than the older generations. This paper has presented results primarily from questionnaire data targeting patterns of language use and issues of language attitudes and identity. Results show that gender, L1, and age are all significant factors that contribute to the sustained bilingualism of Veneto and Spanish in Chipilo in a way that has thus far slowed the process of language shift. No significant differences were found across age groups with respect to language use patterns, but younger generations were found to in fact identify less with Mexican culture and view Spanish as less important to the community than older generations. The role of the L1 within the community is also a strong indicator of language use patterns thereby demonstrating the importance of Veneto in the home. With the increase in mixed marriages between Chipileños and non-Chipileños, language shift may be inevitable if Veneto is lost as the L1 of the children. However, for the moment, younger generations continue to identify with Veneto language and culture, thus slowing the process of language shift. Future research aims to further examine the social context of sustained bilingualism in Chipilo through analysis of the role of identity and language attitudes.

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