**Reawakening: Reclaiming Chatino Prayers and Political Speech**

### 1. Title: Reawakening: Reclaiming Chatino Prayers and Political Speech

**Abstract:** Speakers of the Chatino language in Oaxaca, Mexico perform prayers and speeches— composed with parallelism, repetition, and metonymy, typical patterns of pre-Columbian poetic traditions—in all aspects of daily life. The performance and transmission of these art forms is quickly declining due to migration of youth to Mexican and US cities and because public schools in the region only teach Spanish. Twelve of these prayers were published by anthropologist Carmen Cordero Avendaño de Durand in her 1986 book, “Stina Jo’o Kucha (Our Sacred Father Sun).” The Chatino texts were presented in blocks of texts, written by hand in an orthography that contemporary Chatinos cannot read. Chatino language activists, faculty, and students will come together to translate these Chatino prayers into English and Spanish so that Chatinos can incorporate them in their daily rituals as well as allowing larger society a window to these magnificent oral traditions.

### 2. Facilitator information:

For each facilitator (your group needs at least two), include a paragraph with the following information:

* Name: Hilaria Cruz
* Pronouns: She/her
* Affiliation: Comparative Humanities Department, University of Louisville
* Email address:hilaria.cruz@louisville.edu

Hilaria Cruz is a linguist and native speaker of the Chatino language spoken in San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca, Mexico. She is an Assistant Professor in the Comparative Humanities Department at the University of Louisville. Her research focuses on the documentation, reclamation, and analysis of endangered languages, especially Otomanguean languages. She has conducted work on tonal morphology, corpus development, ethnography of speaking, and has published children’s books in Indigenous languages. In collaboration with Gregory Stump, she is currently analyzing tonal verb inflection. She has also partnered with Chatino elders and accomplished speakers to document prayers, political speeches, and ceremonial discourse to analyze the poetic patterns embedded in this pre-Columbian, Mesoamerican style of speech. To promote literacy in Chatino and other Indigenous languages among youth, Hilaria has created, published, translated, and given away children’s books in the Chatino, Hupa, and Ojibwe languages.

* Name: Tuesday Shaw
* Pronouns: he/him
* Affiliation: Philosophy and Comparative Humanities, University of Louisville
* Email address: tuesday.shaw@louisville.edu

Tuesday Shaw is a third-year student at the University of Louisville studying philosophy and humanities with a concentration in cultural studies. After finishing college, he hopes to pursue his interests in language and literature through graduate studies in comparative literature.

* Name: Clare Sullivan
* Pronouns: She/her
* Affiliation: Department of Classical and Modern Languages, University of Louisville
* Email address: clara.sullivan@louisville.edu
* Bio statement/background (What expertise do you bring to this project?)

Clare Sullivan, professor of Spanish at the University of Louisville, teaches language, poetry, and translation. She and her students work regularly on translation projects for the Louisville community. Recently she guest edited a special issue of Translation Review: “Translation as Community” Vol 1:  Issue 1 (2023). Her collaborative translations of Natalia Toledo and Enriqueta Lunez have appeared in Phoneme Media and Ugly Duckling Presse. Deche bitoope/El dorso del cangrejo/Carapace Dancer, a trilingual version of Natalia Toledo’s 2016 collection, is forthcoming from Deep Vellum.

* Name: Cody Smith
* Pronouns: he/him
* Affiliation: College of Arts and Sciences
* Email address: cody.smith.3@louisville.edu
* Bio statement/background (What expertise do you bring to this project?)

Cody M. Smith is a third-year undergraduate student of Middle and Secondary Education and French at the University of Louisville, with minors in classical studies (Latin) and Spanish. He is passionate about providing access to language education and hopes to pursue doctoral studies in second language acquisition in the future.

* Name: María Elena Méndez Cortés
* Pronouns: she/her
* Affiliation: Cieneguilla, San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca, Mexico
* Email address: mary.cortesmendez@gmail.com

María Elena Méndez Cortés is a Chatina speaker from Cieneguilla, San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca. She is a language activist, writer and performer of traditional Chatino poetics and prayers. She maintains, shares, and promotes the Chatino language both at home, school, and the community. Among her future plans are to pursue linguistic studies.

* Name: José Vásquez Canseco
* Pronouns: he/him
* Affiliation: Universidad de Pueblo, San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca, Mexico
* Email address: josevazquezcan038@gmail.com

José Vásquez Canseco is a native speaker of Chatino from San Juan Quiahije, Oaxaca. He is a community activist, musician, and writer. He founded Universidad del Pueblo in San Juan Quiahije and also works to promote the Chatino language.

### 3. Primary Contact: Hilaria Cruz: [hilaria@louisville.edu](mailto:hilaria@louisville.edu)

### 4. Description (please include a Works Cited):

This project seeks to collaborate with scholars and artists (especially bilingual: English-Spanish) to translate, publish, and reclaim twelve Chatino ceremonial texts (prayer, advice, and political speech), that have been published in a book entitled *Stina Jo’o Kucha ‘Our Father Sun’* by Carmen Cordero Avendaño de Durand (1986 and 2012). (View [a few pages](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X8l4VPYDRlhqGEURQ2soyF82cSvMswhA/view) from the book.) San Juan Quiahije (SJQ) speeches are performed by elders, members of the traditional authorities, and talented speakers to mark important events, significant phases, and transitions in community member’s lives, especially births, marriages, and civic services.

In the 1980s, Carmen Cordero Avendaño de Durand—an anthropologist and graduate of the Sorbonne University in Paris— from Oaxaca City, conducted fieldwork in SJQ, a Chatino community nestled in the mountains of the Oaxacan Pacific Coast, Mexico. On her stop to the local Catholic church, she witnessed Mr. Felix Baltazar, a highly respected elder in SJQ, speaking a prayer to the sun inside the church. She was taken by what she experienced and believed she had uncovered something very special, a “Holy Grail” of sorts. She reached out to Mr. Baltazar and proceeded to record important speeches and prayers that members of the SJQ community recite on special occasions ranging from births to young people receiving advice from elders when they begin their free services at the local city hall.

Upon obtaining the recordings, Cordero enlisted the help of Hilario Canseco and Cirila Sanchez Mendoza to transcribe (into Chatino) and translate (into Spanish) the prayers and speeches she had elicited from Mr. Baltazar. Hilario, a schoolteacher, and his niece Cirila—both now deceased—were from Tepenixtlahuaca, a neighboring Chatino town where a different variety of Chatino is spoken.

These were some of the first published texts in the SJQ Chatino. In the 1980s, when Mrs. Canseco and Mrs. Mendoza worked on these texts, there was no standard orthography for SJQ Chatino. For this reason, they resorted to transcribe the texts phonetically based on their knowledge of written Spanish. Because they did not provide any keys to their written conventions and the texts lack tonal representation— tones are a vital feature of the Chatino languages; SJQ Chatino has 11 contrasting tones— contemporary Chatinos are not able to read and access these texts.

Chatino speakers hold these poetic speeches in high regard, making them vital for young generations of Chatinos who wish to incorporate them into their daily rituals. It takes a lifetime of practice to master their performance. Those wishing to learn this verbal art must apprentice with an elder, either a family member, or another gifted elder in the community. Today, with many young people migrating to Mexican and US cities, learning these spoken art forms is becoming increasingly difficult. With the precipitous decline of the Chatino language, the ability to sustain culturally valued texts is losing ground at a faster rate. Knowledge bearers and talented speakers are dying and not passing this knowledge to the younger generations.

Chatino verbal art exists mainly as an oral tradition. They are composed with parallelism, repetition, and metonymy, which are also typical poetic patterns found in pre-Columbian poetic traditions. They also illustrate important aspects of the Chatino world view, ethics, and the importance that Chatinos place on civic participation.

Each stage in a Chatino person’s private and civic life is celebrated with prayers and ceremonies that serve to transition the person into the next stage of the lives with ease. For instance, prayers are used to entreat good health and long life to a newborn or good tenure for someone who is entering city hall services. Prayers like these are considered, by Chatinos, as vital as food, water, and air; prayers make it possible for a person to be able to live, thrive, and achieve a long life.

When a child is born into a Chatino community, their birth is marked with prayers and ceremonies celebrated at home and at ritual sites scattered around the Chatino region. One of those ceremonies is the planting of the placenta for a new birth. In this ceremony, an elder of the family takes the baby’s placenta to the marsh. Upon arriving at the marsh, the elder begins the ceremony with a prayer. Then, she digs a hole, where she carefully places the placenta. On top of the placenta, she plants a rose bush and lights some candles. The Chatino community believes failing to mark the birth of a child with a ceremony and prayers could result in a premature death or a sickly child. For this and many other sensitive reasons, it is critical to document these poetics traditions to ensure their continue existence, use, and enjoyment into the future.

Since 2008, members of the Chatino community have repeatedly asked Dr. Cordero to share the recordings she made with Mr. Baltazar, so that they can be transcribed using a linguistic notation and the contemporary Chatino writing system. Dr. Cordero has refused to make them available to speakers.

Unable to access the original recordings, one of the conveners, Hilaria, has been collaborating with two University of Louisville students to recover the texts that Cordero published in her book. They have completed the following steps:

1. Cody, Tuesday, and Hilaria copied each word in the texts by hand. [The present example](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aPblDQArZaHcGefVc6y4UEFpzPwhTuq0/view?usp=sharing) is the result of one of the prayers.
2. Next, Hilaria provided a linguistic analysis of each word in every text, notating parts of speech and tone. She represented unique Chatino sounds such as the glottal stop with the International Phonetic symbol /ʔ/. On a separate line she offered a transcription on the same with a current Chatino orthography. Once this was completed Hilaria asked her friend Fraternidad Hernández to digitize the texts by typing them ([this example](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_vTp73xXo-QU81m7N61R4w8oLHqh8kwk/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=109321787770945874950&rtpof=true&sd=true) is the result of one text).
3. Next, Hilaria formatted the presentation of one of the texts into a poetic form and the three of us (Cody, Tuesday, and Hilaria) worked together to offer a free translation of each sentence into English (see their [English translation of “Plegaria del Nacimiento de un niño](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1laTJRJ6KMvw9OYqnPBearQC9-XWhXk43/edit)).”

We successfully copied, digitized, and performed a linguistic analysis all the texts in question (steps 1 and 2). As mentioned above, we translated into English (step 3) one of the texts. Now we need to translate the eleven remaining texts. Hilaria, Maria, and Jose also plan to speak the texts into Chatino.

**How are you going to work?**

We would like to work together to translate the eleven remaining texts and to chart out plans for their dissemination (both in writing and in audio) in scholarly and popular mediums. We seek to achieve a wide range of publications including academic publications geared to specialists as well as works for a popular audience.

Reference

Cordero de Durand, Carmen. 2012. “Stina Jo’o Kucha=El Santo Padre Sol”. México, D.F. : Miguel Angel Porrúa. Segunda edición.

### 5. Annotated schedule:

What will you do when you are together? Please consult the [schedule](#_ki6kpi377q9r) for the number of hours per day you have together. Zoom-only facilitators, make sure to build in lots of screen breaks. (Note that Zoom-only groups meet for slightly fewer hours than in-person groups because of the additional intensity of meeting on screen.)

In-Person Week

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| --- | --- |
| **Day 1: Thursday, March 7, 2024** | |
| 11:15 p.m.-1:00 p.m. | * Meet and greet. * Introduction to the project. |
| 1:00 p.m.-1:50 p.m. | * Lunch |
| 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. | * Chart out a plan for collaboration. * Divide tasks. |
| **Day 2: Friday, March 8, 2024** | |
| 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. | * Texts translation. |
| 12: p.m.-12:50 p.m. | * Lunch |
| 1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. | * Texts translation. * Plan Watson Conference presentation. |
| **Day 3: Saturday, March 9, 2024** | |
| 9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. | * Finish up presentations. * Plan on how we will continue our collaboration. after the Watson Conference. |
| 10:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. | * Present, listen, and learn from other projects. |

### 6. Modality:

Please indicate one preference.

Hybrid option (March 7-9). Hilaria, Cody, Clare, and Tuesday will participate in person and Maria and Jose will participate remotely. Other attendees are welcome to participate either remotely or in person.

### 7. Number of participants:

Please estimate the minimum and maximum numbers of participants that would make sense for your group. We can accommodate 20 people.

### 8. Participant background:

Are you looking for participants with certain kinds of skills (e.g., language, artistic, technical skills), roles, backgrounds, interests, or identities?

* We welcome speakers of any language, monolingual (English or Spanish) or bilingual. Bilingual English and Spanish ability is a plus.
* Rhetoric, composition, writing, translation, and literature scholars.
* Illustrators to help envision ways to reach Chatino communities.
* Book designers
* Linguists

### 9. Preparation:

Would participants need to read, do, and/or bring anything in advance? (As the [Timeline for Facilitators](#_ucjgu6b0q58q) indicates, they would be informed of their group a little over a month in advance of the conference’s start.)

Acquaint yourselves the stages of the process and the examples we have prepared, as described in Q4.

### 10. Final-day deliverable:

What deliverable would your group share with the whole conference on the last day? It can be very rough—we recognize that these collaborations are only just beginning—but there should be at least something that your group could present.

We will present translations of Chatino prayers and speeches and will also present plans for their publication.

### 11. How will participants get credit?

Will participants be coauthors who could list a publication on their CV? Will they be credited in some other way? Please explain their role in the project and how credit will work.

Participant will be coauthors on the publications of these texts.

### 12. What happens after the conference?

How will the project develop after the conference? What opportunities for further collaboration will participants have?

We hope to be able to publish these texts and the analyses thereof both in book format and in journal articles.

### 13. Working and learning environment:

What strategies might you use to foster an inclusive, accessible, “post-White” (Croom, 2022) environment founded in collective accountability and radical care (Johnston et al., 2022)? Feel free to make use of the [2021 Watson Conference Commitments](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/history-and-conference-archive/conference-archive/past-conferences/2021-watson-conference/2021-watson-conference-commitments) in your planning. (We will revise them slightly for 2024.)

* Generosity and reciprocity. When working with Chatino collaborators, we will provide the prayers and this corpus of the Chatino language and ensure accessibility to the public and future generations to come. For collaborators outside the Chatino community, we will make the corpus accessible to them as a way of showing our gratitude for their time, talent, and effort. We will provide the links to a digital repository. Top candidates are The Archives of the Indigenous languages of Latin America at the University of Texas at Austin or the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.
* Welcoming our whole selves. We will do our best to make everyone feel welcome and seek to learn what each individual brings to the gathering.
* We will approach the conference as a space for learning and growth. Everyone will work together to study and translate the Chatino texts and provide translations to make them more accessible. By working together, we will go from one completed text to several available and translated prayers. Throughout this experience, the participants will learn our method and become more proficient in translation work.
* We will honor our interlocutors with our communication choices. We will be respectful of others’ ideas and thoughts.
* We will co-create a culture of access while recognizing that this work is never complete.
* We will actively attend to power dynamics in participation, and we will name, and interrupt dynamics as needed.
  + Being mindful of our own tendencies to participate or withhold.
  + Reflecting on our purposes for asking questions.
  + Rejecting and responding to macroaggressions. Not being afraid to point out to macroaggressions that might ensue during collaboration.
* We will approach our missteps as opportunities for growth. Through listening with empathy, we will be able to put ourselves into the other person shoes, apologize, make amends, and continue the work.

### 14. (IN-PERSON PROPOSALS ONLY) Space and material needs:

Are there any particular requirements you have for space or materials that the conference planning team might be able to help you with?

We would like to work in a space that has access to wifi so that we can make zoom calls with Chatinos in SJQ. Maria and Jose need headsets to cancel environmental noise. Also wifi reception is very inconsistent in San Juan Quiahije. There are days when the reception is great, but then it can suddenly drop. Maria and Jose might need to go to a different place (perhaps Oaxaca, City) to access more reliable wifi signal for the conference.

### 15. (OPTIONAL FOR IN-PERSON PROPOSALS) Your interest in piloting a hybrid option:

We are happy to select 1-2 groups to pilot a hybrid option; one facilitator would also need to be remote in order to be more accessible to the online participants. If you are interested in this option, please answer the following questions:

Yes, we would like to pilot these options as this will make it possible for Chatino speakers to participate remotely.

* What has been your experience leading and/or participating in hybrid meetings? What strategies have made them more or less successful?

I have had a wide range of experiences working on Zoom, from excellent to difficult. The challenges have mostly been because of low-wifi in the Chatino region. When this happens, we switch to WhatsApp.

* What technologies would you want to use? How/when would you connect the in-person and online participants?

Zoom, WhatsApp, and Gmail.

* Which facilitator would be remote (whether in their Louisville hotel room or back home)?

Maria Elena Mendez Cortes and Jose Vasquez Canseco, two Chatino speakers located in San Juan Quiahije. They will need a hotel in Oaxaca, City.