While thousands of studies have examined the language practices of migrants in their new contexts of work and education, little attention has been paid to the language learning and usage patterns among the much larger numbers of individuals who remain at home in places affected by migration. As such, a largely unasked question is how migration affects language competencies, preferences, and practices of those children and other family members who remain in their home communities.

This article addresses this gap by examining language, cultural change, and migration among Indigenous Ecuadorians and draws from a broader project which explores how transmigration (Schiller, et al., 1992) is experienced by those who do not leave; how long-term separations are framed by family and friends; and, in particular, how these shifts are linked with changing conceptions of what it means to be a good child or a good parent. This article does so by analyzing the experiences of highland Indigenous communities of Ecuador—focusing on one Quichua group in particular, the Saraguros, after migration swept the country on an unprecedented scale in the late 1990s (Bacacela, 2003; Gratton, 2007; Jokisch, n.d.).

**CONTEXT AND RESEARCH APPROACH**

Julio: *No hay nadie... los borrachos [se] quedan.*

[There's nobody... the drunks are left.]

—Joking quip by former Saraguro community leader who works in Indigenous education in Quito; August 2006

Ecuador is a small South American nation-state of about thirteen million people. Roughly one-third of the country self-identifies as Indigenous. Quichua is...
the most widely spoken of Ecuador’s thirteen Indigenous languages (King & Hornberger, 2004). Within Ecuador, Saraguros are an Indigenous group numbering about 20,000.

Prior to 1990, few Saraguros—and indeed, relatively few Ecuadorians—had ever crossed national borders for work. For Saraguros, international transmigration began in the early to mid 1990s, with the best estimates putting the total number residing in the United States at around 200 people (Belote & Belote, 2005). By 2005, there were at least 1,000 Saraguros in Spain and the United States (Belote & Belote, 2005). Others put the estimate much higher, calculating that upwards of 5,000 Saraguros have moved to Spain or other European destinations (Bacacela, 2003). Within Spain, Ecuadorians are the third largest immigrant group (following Romania and Morocco); the official estimate is 414,000 legally registered Ecuadorian residents (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2009). While both Ecuador and Spain lack precise numbers of documented and undocumented migrants, it is clear that over the course of a decade thousands of Saraguros left their traditional territory of the southern Andes.

Although Quichua competency levels vary by community, Saraguros, overall, are engaged in language shift toward Spanish, with Spanish-Quichua bilingualism declining rapidly. This process has been ongoing for more than three decades, and varied revitalization programs have been under discussion, under development, or underway since at least the early 1990s (Haboud, 2003; King, 2001). Nevertheless, most Saraguros under the age of fifty are now Spanish dominant, and most under the age of thirty are Spanish monolingual.

Saraguro identity is locally rooted in the southern Andes. Concomitantly, Saraguros have long engaged in short-term, cyclical migration within Ecuador to cultivate lands for cattle pasture, to work as day laborers in mines, or to pursue education or employment in urban centers (Belote & Belote, 2005; Macas, et al., 2003). Saraguro existence traditionally was characterized by the dual approach of small-scale subsistence farming on land near Saraguro coupled with income-generating activities beyond the region (Belote, 2002; Vacacela, 2002). To some extent then, international migration is an extension of a well-established adaptive strategy dating back at least a hundred years. While Saraguro transmigration in some respects is a globalized twist on a long-standing local practice, it is also part of a pronounced trend that swept Ecuador in the 1990s, which Jokisch and Pribilsky (2002) describe as the “panic to leave.” In two years alone (1999 and 2000), more than a quarter of a million Ecuadorians emigrated.

Within this context, audio-recorded interviews and ethnographic observations were conducted in six Saraguro communities in August 2006. These included twenty-six formal interviews, including visits to friends, former colleagues, and godchildren and their families, drawing heavily on contacts made in 1994 and 1995 while the author lived in two Saraguro communities (King, 2001).

Across the international research literature, migration—and in particular, country-internal, rural-to-urban migration—is often linked with shift away from an Indigenous language and towards a language of wider communication (e.g., Dorian, 1981; Kulick, 1992). Much of this work suggests that rural-to-urban migration corresponds to individuals’ devaluation of their ethnic identity and, subsequently, a move away from their native language. While this dynamic is at play among some Indigenous Ecuadorians, the data here suggest that migration’s impact on Indigenous language maintenance is both more insidious and less direct. In short: most Saraguros continue to discuss Indigenous language and identity in positive terms and do not explicitly frame linguistic or cultural loss favorably. Nevertheless, international migration has led to shifts in how childhood and parenthood are constructed and enacted, including how children spend their time, how they relate to their elders, and how they envision their futures. As discussed below, these changes have profoundly affected Quichua language learning opportunities.
INDIGENOUS ECUADORIANS WENT GLOBAL/GLOBALIZATION CAME TO INDIGENOUS ECUADOR

MARÍA: Así es Kendalita. Estamos muy cambiados por la migración. Los jóvenes están afectados mucho mucho mucho. [That’s the way it is Kendalita. We are very changed because of migration. The youth are affected very very very much.]

MARIO: La globalización. [Globalization.]

KENDALL: ¿La qué? [What?]

MARIO: La globalización. [Globalization.]

—Family conversation with Mario and Maria, a married couple from the community of Tam-bopamba; August 2006)

By 2006, most Saraguros saw migration as something of a mixed bag (see also Foxen, 2007; Moran-Taylor, 2008b). Remittances sent by migrants abroad kept many families afloat throughout the economic crises and allowed for increased consumption of material goods as well as improved access to health care and education. Nevertheless, many Saraguros were quick to cite a long list of social ills they attributed to emigration. These included (but were not limited to):

- Increased rates of teen pregnancy and lower marital rates;
- Diminished use of indigenous clothing and preference for western-style garments;
- Economic inflation in general and in particular inflated land prices;
- Decreased participation in traditional community work parties (mingas);
- Decreased interest among young in agricultural work and artisan crafts;
- Increased traffic and pollution that come with cars in communities;
- Depression and loneliness;
- Greater focus on wages, cash earnings, material goods, and conspicuous consumption;
- Lack of adolescent discipline and the rise of gangs and associated criminal activity;
- Construction of non-traditional large, concrete houses and associated zoning conflicts;
- Social isolation and greater social class divisions;
- Increase in debts and foreclosures;
- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- Lack of respect for elders and erosion of norms of respect.

No doubt many of these social problems have intensified as the result of emigration, and many, such as increased teenage pregnancy, gang activity, and declining respect for elders, have been noted in other Latin American migratory contexts (e.g., Foxen, 2007; Moran-Taylor, 2008a; 2008b). However, not every item on this list of perceived social problems is the direct result of emigration. For instance, the decline in Quichua language use in Saraguro and elsewhere in Ecuador began well before large-scale emigration was under way (King, 2001; Haboud, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a widespread perception that a whole host of social problems is due to the influx of cash to the region and the departure of so many. Within everyday conversations, migration has become the catch-all explanation for nearly every social ill.

Emigration looms large as a causal explanation for such a wide range of social problems because all Saraguros live in the shadow of transmigration and experience it daily. All of the roughly 150 Saraguros with whom I met during fieldwork had at least one immediate family member who was working abroad. Most people had multiple family members and innumerable friends who had emigrated. Talk of who was planning to go, who had left or had arrived, and who had sent what to whom dominated many conversations. Keeping tabs and keeping in touch has been made much easier by the proliferation of cell phones and high-speed internet connections in Saraguro and in much of Ecuador.

Despite these advances in communication technology, as others have documented, transmigrant relationships are always uneven, and communication is less than perfect (Mahler, 2001; Pribilsky, 2004). For migrants abroad, phone calls, letters, text messages, emails, and other exchanges with family in Ecuador are fit into long workdays, arduous commutes, housekeeping tasks, and social and cultural activities. In turn, for those who are left behind in Saraguro, life is far less busy, and the anticipation of a letter, phone
call, email, package, or wire transfer is woven into the emotion and activity of everyday life. Many days in Saraguro are constructed around, for instance, a trip to town to see if money has been wired or to check if email has arrived. Another example: Sundays, the day when Saraguros used to walk to town to attend church, shop, and socialize, are now more often defined as time when one waits at home for phone calls from loved ones abroad.

As Pribilsky (2004) describes for other highland Ecuadorians in New York, migrants’ lives abroad often revolve around immediate social and economic concerns and basic survival; in contrast, family members remaining in Ecuador “could easily spend much of their time tending to issues related to their husbands’ absences” (327). Likewise, in many ways, Saraguro migration was experienced more intensively by those who did not migrate (see also Foxen, 2007). And while adults with spouses or parents abroad felt this absence acutely, migration cast an even longer shadow for children.

**MIGRATION AND CHANGING CONCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD**

Rosa: *No hay control de nada. Será por la migración. Será por la televisión. Será por el estudio. Estamos muy perdidos ya. Mucho, mucho, mucho. Hay un cambio en todo.* [Nothing is under control. It may be because of migration. It may be because of the television. It may be because of education. We are already quite lost. A lot, a lot, a lot. There is a change in everything.] —Rosa, a mother of four from the community of Tambopamba; August 2006

In Saraguro and elsewhere in the Andes, education is widely touted as a cure for social problems and as a key step in economic advancement for both the individual and the nation (e.g., Luykx, 1999). Why then does Rosa, a mother of four boys, link formal education with life in Saraguro being out of control? To begin to answer this question, it is important to consider how transmigration has accelerated the adaptation of nontraditional or “modern” constructions of childhood and parenthood in Saraguro and elsewhere in Ecuador.

Although children in Saraguro have always been loved, they have also served as important sources of labor and long have played an integral role in the economic survival of the family (Belote & Belote, 1984). While education is viewed as important, most parents expected their children to work before and after school in the home and in the fields. Thus, children were engaged in a reciprocal relationship within their immediate family: they were provided for materially, but also expected to assist in household maintenance. As such, children in Saraguro traditionally have been treated as and understood to be economic assets within the family economy (Belote & Belote, 1984: 41).

Migration has played an important role in the undoing of this social equation. In short, children are no longer economic assets but essentially emotional assets (Zelizer, 1994). Children do not contribute collectively to family livelihood, but are instead serve as a motivating factor for migration and family separation. Most Saraguros explain that they or others like them have migrated *por los niños,* “for the children.” By this they mean that they have traveled abroad to work in order to provide financially for their children, to improve their children’s material lives, and to offer them what they perceive to be greater opportunities for future life success. While many parents do achieve these aims to some extent, the migration of one or both parents undoes many aspects of the reciprocal economic relationship outlined above. The diffuse forces of globalization, and migration in particular, seem to have stepped up a change observed in the 1980s in Saraguro (Belote & Belote, 1984). By 2006, very few children were productive participants in their families’ economies. Time once spent working with family around the house and fields is now passed attending school or hanging around town—two domains where Spanish dominates.

This shift is also enmeshed with changing residential configurations in the wake of parental migration. When one Saraguro parent migrates, children typically reside with the remaining parent. When both parents migrate, children are left under the care of extended family, most often a grandmother or an
aunt. In such cases, parents send remittances to caregivers, who often give all or a portion directly to the child. Migration thus introduces cash into children's lives and relationships and alters how and where children spend much of their time. Migration also highlights the emotional ties between parents and children and makes this interpersonal relationship more salient. Indeed, separation from loved ones (and from children in particular) is routinely described as the hardest aspect of life abroad (Belote & Belote, 2005).

For nearly all children, having one or both parents abroad means much greater autonomy and freedom (Moran-Taylor, 2008a). Teens were well aware of the stress caused by such independence and often described it as a lack of “respect” amongst teens for adults (see also Foxen, 2007).

José: Pero siempre [se] quedan con familiares. No sé. [But (the children/teens) always stay with relatives. I don’t know.]
Manuel: Salen a los bailes de noches. Pues regresan al otro día. Así en esa forma falta respeto no tratando de respeto. . . . Las personas dejan a los hijos acá. No respetan a los abuelitos. Ya no es como los papás. Hacen lo que quieren. [They go out to the dances at night. And well, (they) return the following day. In that way, they lack respect, and are not treating (grandparents) with respect. . . . The people that leave their children here. (The children) do not respect the grandparents. It’s not like their parents. They do what they want.]
José: Mandan plata. Llevan la vida muy mala algunos. [(The parents) send money. (The children) lead a very bad life some of them.]
—Group conversation with teenage boys from community of Tambopamba; August 2006

Saraguro adults were also quick to note that financial improvements in children’s lives were not without emotional or personal costs.

Juana: Mucho mucho peor va. ¿Cómo va a ser para los niños? Debe ser bastante duro y es por eso que . . . que los chicos ahora doce trece años beben. Beben, ¿Por qué? Porque no hay control de los padres . . . . Eso es lo que dicen, y otra que tienen dinero en mano. [It is getting a lot worse. How is it going to be for the children? It’s going be pretty tough and for that reason . . . the teenagers now drink (at) twelve, thirteen years of age. They drink. Why? Because there is no control from the parents. . . . That’s what they say, and other (people say) that (it’s because) they have money in their hands.]
—Juana, mother of two young boys, who lives adjacent to town; August 2006

As these quotations demonstrate, there is a widespread sense that the cash brought into the local economy through emigration has entailed a tradeoff in terms of family separation and its effect on children. At a deeper level, for many families, transmigration has meant shifting conceptions of parenthood, childhood, and family obligation. When parents leave to seek employment abroad, family-based agricultural work diminishes in importance, and both children and parents are released from their traditional reciprocal, labor-based relationship. Parents send cash home to children; children, in turn, are expected to study in preparation for nonagricultural professional positions. This shift in parental roles and relationships is the crux of the loss and concern voiced in Rosa’s quote above. From her vantage point as a middle-aged woman, many of the children surrounding her seemed “out of control.” They no longer spent time in the fields working with parents or grandparents; they had pocket change and hours of free time, both of which were unimaginable in her youth. And most troublesome for Rosa and for many parents of her generation, children and teens seem brazen, free, and often disrespectful of their elders, all of which have implications for Quichua language shift.

**QUICHUA FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION**

These changing conceptions of childhood and parenthood and corresponding shifts in values and behaviors significantly affect Indigenous language
maintenance and revitalization in Saraguro and elsewhere. As Fishman (1990) has argued, a critical stage of all efforts to reverse language shift (RLS) is the (re)establishment of intergenerational transmission, wherein the language serves as the routine language of informal, spoken interaction between and within familial generations. Even under optimal conditions, reinstatement of intergenerational transmission is an ambitious and only rarely achieved goal (Romaine, 2007), and despite decades of efforts, there is little evidence of movement in this direction within Saraguro. Most adults of child-bearing age have limited-to-minimal Quichua language competency. And many families are no longer in regular, day-to-day, face-to-face contact to sustain contact across generations.

Given that so many children now reside with their grandparents (who are much more likely to be fluent in Quichua than the parental generation), one optimistic scenario would be that this domestic arrangement might facilitate acquisition and use of Quichua by children, a possibility raised by national education officials and community activists. However, parents and teachers within Saraguro routinely note that interaction between grandparents and children in Quichua is rare.

This is at least in part because children in many transmigrant homes far outnumber the adults; it is not unheard of for eight to ten children to live under one roof (cf. Bacacela, 2003; Belote & Belote, 2005). Many grandparents or older aunts and uncles—being at less than full physical strength—seem to have limited control over their charges and at times are overwhelmed by the sheer number of children and the responsibility of care. Sorting out caretaker responsibility is complicated by the fact that children often move back and forth between two or more homes (e.g., between maternal and paternal grandparents). As noted above, in the past respeto (respect) for elders was paramount. By 2006, many Saraguros noted that this had declined sharply. In terms of language practices, this means that rather than grandparents socializing children into ways of speaking Quichua, grandchildren are socializing their elders to use Spanish.

At a more basic level, if children are no longer working in the fields or tending to tasks at home—they have few opportunities to engage regularly or meaningfully with their elders in any language. Equally significant, if parents have left their communities to earn wages outside of the country, it is hardly realistic to expect children to value traditional agricultural, cultural, or linguistic practices (Foxen, 2007). Quichua is still strongly associated with agricultural and “traditional” Indigenous practices. While most Saraguros value their ethnic identity and exhort the importance of maintaining traditional cultural practices, they themselves have made different choices. Together these factors mean a greater reliance on schools and formal education for transmitting Quichua as a second language.

EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY, QUICHUA AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, AND ENGLISH

Appropriate national educational language policies to support Indigenous language education and maintenance in Ecuador have been in place for roughly two decades (Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, 1998; 2008). The 1988 Constitution explicitly recognized the multilingual and multicultural nature of the country and provided the legal opening for expanded Indigenous rights. Ecuador’s Indigenous groups, or nacionalidades, were granted specific rights, including the right to social and economic development without loss of their identity, culture, or territory and the right to culturally appropriate education. To this end, Article 84 of the 1988 Constitution established that support, development, and reinforcement of Indigenous people’s communities would be recognized and guaranteed; further, Indigenous traditional ways of life and social organization, including the exercise of authority and law, would be preserved and developed. Article 346 (1988 version) also guaranteed bilingual intercultural education based on use of each nationality’s native language as the principle means of education. The most recent October 2008 constitution reinforces rights to bilingual intercultural education and emphasizes the
need to spread bilingualism and interculturality to non-Indigenous schools. Regarding the use of Indigenous languages, the 2008 constitution (Article 2) recognizes Quechua and Shuar as official languages of intercultural relations (Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, 2008). In Saraguro, this policy support for Quechua has meant that as the language moved further away from everyday communication within and across generations, it has become more institutionalized in formal school systems. Indeed, when Quechua was raised as a topic during interviews and conversations during fieldwork, it was nearly always discussed in the context of formal education.

Quechua language revitalization in Saraguro—and in many other places—has always relied heavily on school programs (Hornberger & King, 1996, 2000; see also Hornberger, 2008). The increased reliance on school-based efforts to instruct Quechua is in step not only with declining adult proficiency levels, but also with the greater emphasis on teacher education and certification in the region. For instance, all Indigenous schools in the region are part of the national system of intercultural bilingual schools. To be employed as a teacher within the system, one must be certified as “bilingual,” which means passing a written and oral exam in Quechua. With few exceptions, Quechua competency and usage for both children and adults has been relegated to a school subject and institutional domain.

Even with this limited role, however, Quechua faces competition from another language, English, which is invariably linked by Saraguros with external emigration. For Saraguros, the prominence of migration reinforces the perceived need not only for Spanish but also increasingly for English. During informal conversations with Saraguros, English was raised as a topic of conversation much more frequently (and with more passion and urgency) than was Quechua. Overall, Quechua was described as a school subject, and as something that was needed for local employment as a teacher; English, in turn, was framed as the language one would need and use for communication, for work abroad, and for “real” purposes such as those related to technology (Moran-Taylor, 2008b). In Ecuador, as elsewhere in Latin America, the learning of English has come to symbolize realized dreams of migration, job and educational opportunities, and “entering the global market with its ‘imagined’ great advantages” (Niño-Murcia, 2003: 130; see also Haboud, 2001). For most, Quechua and other Indigenous languages play only a minor role in this envisioned life abroad.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of transmigration and Quechua language offers two lessons. First, the data from the Saraguro case demonstrates how Quechua language learning and potential revitalization is intimately linked with changing conceptions of childhood and parenthood among Saraguros, a point that has not been much developed in the literature on language shift (King, et al., 2008). Most Saraguros still view Indigenous Saraguro identity favorably and explicitly frame the Quechua language as a critical component of their Indigenous ethnic identity. Nevertheless, long-term, international migration has resulted in shifts in how childhood and parenthood are constructed and enacted, most notably in how children spend their time, how they relate to their elders, and how they envision their future, all of which critically affect language choices and language usage patterns.

Second, this article has shown how even progressive language policy to support an Indigenous language such as Quechua can be simply overwhelmed by large-scale global forces. The data here remind us of the importance of conceptualizing migration as a phenomenon that primarily affects not only the host country, but also the communities that send the migrants in profound ways. Indeed, one could reasonably argue that the impact of migration on Ecuadorian communities has been far greater than any economic, social, or cultural effect on the United States or on Spain. Ecuador’s Indigenous organizations maintain that the current laws and policies—which they had a major hand in shaping—are well crafted and work to promote respect for their linguistic and cultural rights.

Lastly, this article has underlined the challenges to advances in Indigenous language planning. The
data here illustrate how global developments are much more powerful forces than whatever governmental language policy is put into place. Whether or not this official policy meets its explicitly stated goals and whether Quichua and other Indigenous languages maintain a foothold in the republic depends to great measure not on the creation of future additional national language policies, but rather on how the local human ecology and micro-constructed language policy and supporting language practices change in relation to migration and other global phenomena.

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