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Community-based lexicographic research for the sustainability of ethnobotanical knowledge and language revitalization

As part of the Project for the Documentation of the Languages of Mesoamerica (PDLMA), I have carried out documentation of the lexicon of Diidxaza (Isthmus Zapotec, iso: zai) since 2003. In a lexical database of around 10,000 entries, about 10% refer to the realm of human-plant interaction. In 2010, it became clear that the elicitation-based methods prescribed by the PDLMA had not yielded adequate documentation of plant names and associated knowledge. In response, a multi-year documentation project in the community of La Ventosa was designed following principles of community-based research (CBR, cf. Bischoff and Jany 2018). In this presentation, I introduce the collaborative team which included both members of the Diidxaza language community as well as external researchers. I describe the consultation process which lead to CBR outputs. These were prioritized over academic outputs and preceded them in the form of high-quality pedagogical materials and language revitalization workshops for children which ran for three years. I share the expressions of hopes and wishes conveyed by the La Ventosa collaborators to show the direct correlation between them and the capacity of the project to produce meaningful community-centered outputs. I offer insights into the challenges that this work faced as a result of a devastating earthquake in 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic. I close by showing how more than ten years after the start of the research, and despite these challenges, it is the community-centered methods and outputs what have given them longevity which in turn, translates into tangible contributions towards the sustainability of ethnobotanical knowledge and associated lexicon in Diidxaza.