

# In southern Mexico, one poet is challenging the language of Mexican literature | Aggies GO

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A picture from the Carnival Zoque in 2020, which fuses elements of Zoque culture with other cultural elements of Mexico.

Jonah Carlson - Language is a crucial part of how humans interact with each other in everyday life. As the key element of communication, language also plays an important role in influencing and defining our identities. In a [recent article](#) with *The New York Times*, Benjamin P. Russell highlights a new collection of poetry by Mikeas Sánchez, “How to Be a Good Savage,” raising attention to the role language plays in not only our personal but political identities as well.

One method through which states aim to unite their citizens is the concept of [nation](#), a connection to a particular place or people. States promote certain national symbols and downplay other forms of identity to produce this unity. Language, too, can act as one of these national symbols: the French speak French, for example, while the English speak English and Germans speak German. But this form of national identity is often an oversimplification of the language landscapes that exist in various states. Through her work “How to Be a Good Savage,” Mikeas Sánchez highlights this oversimplification in Mexico. An Indigenous woman from the country’s south, many of the poems in her latest collection are written in Zoque, a language native to the region. In doing so, she challenges the predominance of Spanish as the central language of Mexico and opens a new route through which to

publicly explore the interplay between her Mexican and Indigenous identities. Russell notes that Sánchez is a serious promoter of Zoque in the region as well, aiming to bring the language to public spaces through the use of radio and by promoting the language in local schools. The result is an understanding of Mexican nation comprised of many identities.

Through challenging the concept of the Mexican nation – or, at the very least, widening its boundaries – Sánchez is also challenging the [ideological power](#) of Mexico. Ideological power is the ability to get people to do what one wants without significant coercion, and national ideas are often very influential in shaping this power. While Sánchez doesn’t necessarily undermine Mexico’s ideological influence, her works shapes how that ideological power is felt and applied to the state’s domestic population, and thus how it affects the geopolitical landscape at large.

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