

Navigating Linguistic Landscapes: Bilingualism, Identity, and Market Integration among Yucatec Maya Communities

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Abstract

In Yucatec Maya communities the interplay between language, cultural identity, and market integration underscores the complexity of linguistic dynamics. This analysis investigates the impact of socioeconomic changes on bilingualism, identity, and social networks among Yucatec Maya speakers, focusing on language acquisition, cultural perceptions, and household dynamics.

Methodologically, two studies conducted in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico provide insights into language use and cultural identity. Structured interviews and longitudinal data collection shed light on the relationship between language, socioeconomic factors, and social networks.

Results reveal the adaptive nature of language dynamics, with Spanish fluency increasing over time alongside Yucatec Maya's continued significance. Bilingualism emerges as a common trend, driven by economic incentives and social networks. Household dynamics and gendered differences in bilingualism highlight the diverse sociocultural contexts shaping language use.

The findings emphasize the sustainable nature of bilingualism in Yucatec Maya communities, challenging simplistic replacement trajectories. Proficiency in both Yucatec Maya and Spanish offers complementary social and economic development amidst ongoing globalization and socioeconomic changes.

Methodology

	¹ Study 1	² Study 2
Location:	4 villages located in the state of Yucatán; ~130km to the southwest of Cancun	Rural area in the Puuc region in Campeche
Data Collection:	Structured interviews across 10 different scenarios; 121 adults; Between January and December 2019	Longitudinal data spanning from the early 1990s to 2017; One community
Statistical Approach:	Bayesian Models For language acquisition, identity, social networks	
Language and Cultural Identity:	Linguistic repertoire; Perceived cultural identity	Linguistic decisions in response to market integration
Predictions/Hypotheses:	Relationship between cultural identity, language acquisition, and competences in Yucatec Maya and Spanish	Changes in language use due to market integration, with households adopting mixed economic strategies

References

¹Padilla-Iglesias, Cecilia et. al (2020): Language as a Marker of Ethnic Identity among The Yucatec Maya. doi: 10.1017/ehs.2020.39

²Padilla-Iglesias, Cecilia and Kramer, Karen L. (2021): The Role of Language in Structuring Social Networks Following Market Integration in a Yucatec Maya Population. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.656963

Results

Language Acquisition and Value:

- Yucatec Maya: from parents or village environments
- Spanish: formal education
- Equal value in proficiency in both languages
- Cultural significance and equal importance attributed to both languages

Ethnolinguistic Reasoning:

- Linguistic differences = genetic markers of cultural identity
- Fluency in Yucatec Maya = primary determinant of Mayan cultural identity
- Proficiency in Spanish highlights inclusive nature of identity within the community

Linguistic Landscape and Market Integration:

- Spanish fluency among the villages increased over time → reflecting market integration
- Bilingualism: homogenous trend of language acquisition
- Economic strategies (e.g., wage labor) associated with increased Spanish fluency → practical incentive for language acquisition in response to market demands

Household Socioeconomic Dynamics:

- Linguistic repertoire of household head influenced social network positions and economic outcomes
- Spanish-speaking household heads had varying effects on network centrality and access to resources, depending on gender and economic activities
- Mixed economic strategies associated with increased household income

Social Network Dynamics:

- Language did not directly influence assortativity, but homophilic tendencies in certain contexts
- High reciprocity across networks → strong social ties regardless of linguistic or economic factors
- Language proficiency influenced household interactions → reflecting complex sociocultural dynamics

Discussion

Comparative Analysis:

- Study 1: challenges essentialist views on linguistic identity, emphasizing fluidity and adaptability
- Study 2: highlights the sustainable nature of bilingualism, stressing the complementary benefits of Yucatec Maya and Spanish

→ Both studies reveal the importance of language acquisition as a marker for cultural assimilation and social integration

Socioeconomic Dynamics:

- Study 1: underscores the adaptive responses to evolving socioeconomic landscapes, influencing language use and identity
- Study 2: illustrates how Spanish proficiency aids in pursuing a mixed economy, impacting household dynamics and social networks differently

Gendered Patterns:

- While Study 1 discusses fluidity in reasoning about linguistic identity, study 2 emphasizes gendered patterns of bilingualism, with women playing a central role in sustaining local social networks

Insights into Human Behavior:

- Both studies provide insights into human cognition and behavior regarding linguistic identity, highlighting the context-sensitive nature of cultural affiliation and the multifaceted role of language acquisition

Conclusion

- Bilingualism in Yucatec Maya and Spanish is sustainable, offering complementary social and economic benefits amidst evolving socioeconomic landscapes
- The adaptive nature of language dynamics challenges simplistic replacement trajectories, emphasizing the fluidity and adaptability of linguistic identity
- Understanding the multifaceted role of language acquisition provides insights into human cognition and behavior, highlighting the context-sensitive nature of cultural affiliation
- Gendered patterns of bilingualism underscore the central role of women in sustaining local social networks, contributing to the resilience of minority languages
- Overall, the findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between language, cultural identity, and socioeconomic changes in Yucatec Maya communities, emphasizing the importance of considering local contexts and individual differences in language use and identity

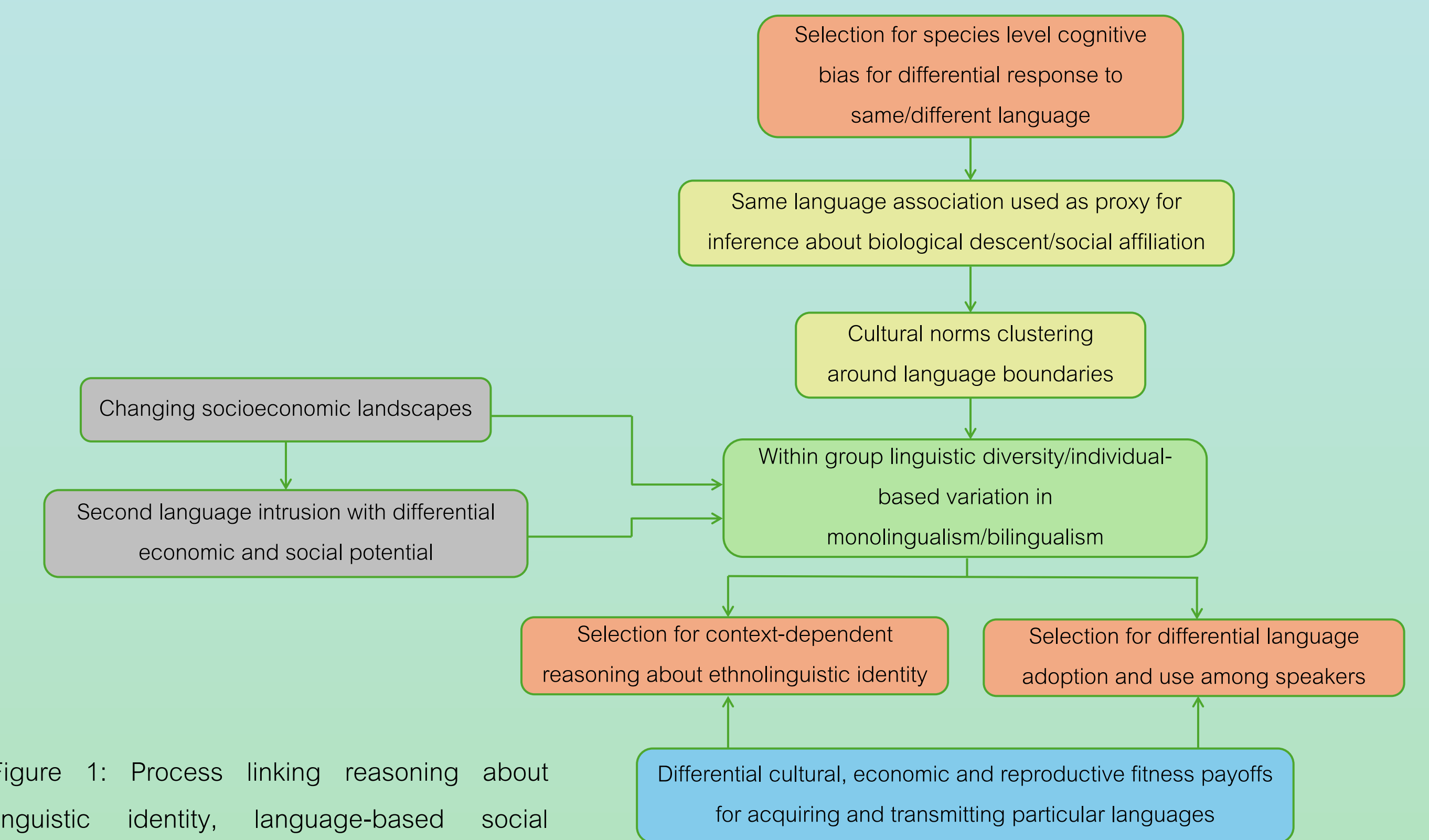


Figure 1: Process linking reasoning about linguistic identity, language-based social behaviors and the payoffs to bilingual acquisition following socioeconomic changes.¹

Yellow boxes: Species-specific tendencies to use elements of language as markers of cultural identity or other forms of social affiliation.

Grey boxes: Changing socioeconomic circumstances resulting from the introduction of a second language.

Green box: Outcome is within-group diversity in language use

Red boxes: Selection for both differential language use among speakers and reasoning about ethnolinguistic identity

Blue box: Differential outcomes of both the adoption of second language and reasoning about their use, representing payoffs

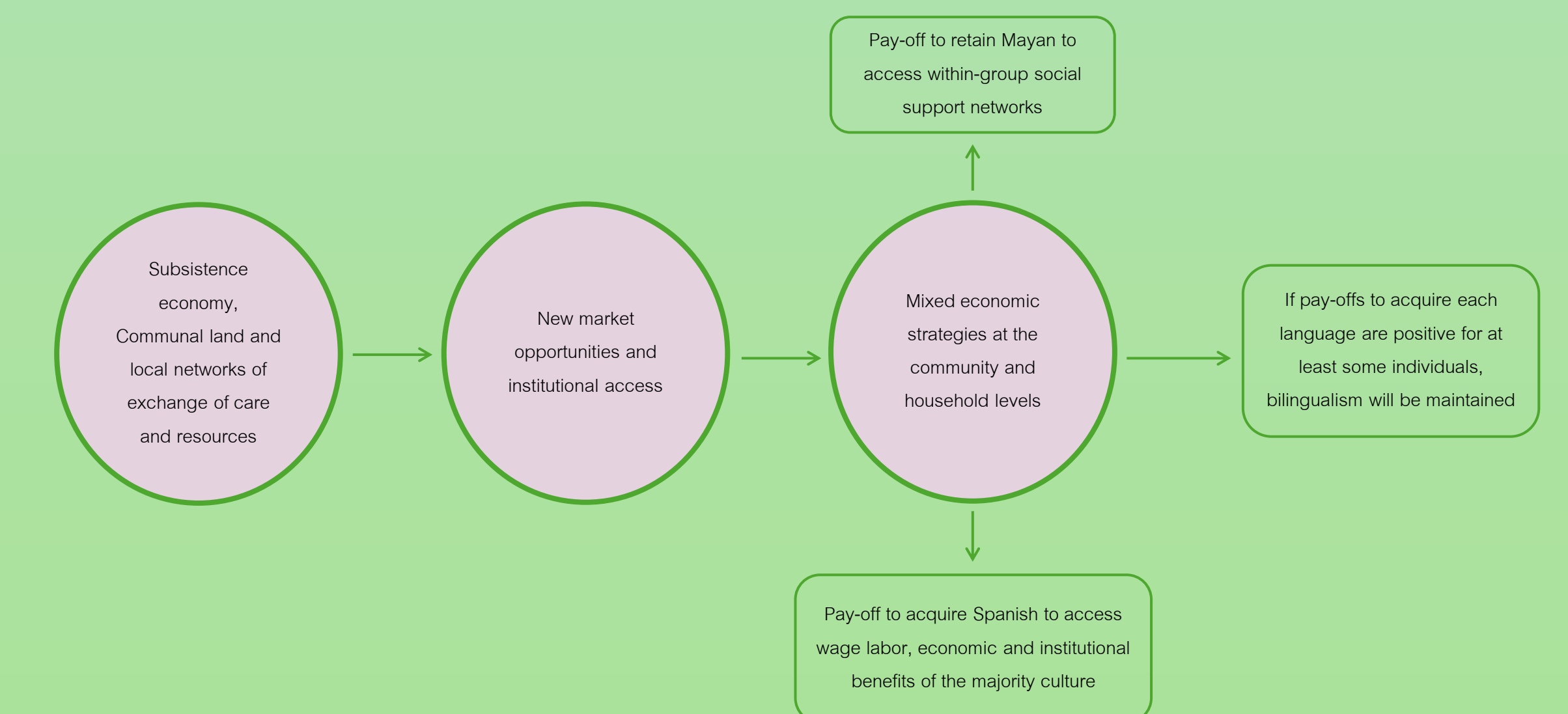


Figure 2: Processes linking changes associated with market integration with economic and social influences on the payoffs to different linguistic repertoires. Payoffs predict those circumstances under which local language use would be sustained and long-term linguistic diversity maintained, and those under which they are at risk.²