

**NAHUATL: THE INFLUENCE OF SPANISH ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE AZTECS**

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The Spanish Conquest of Mexico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was responsible for a cultural diffusion in the realm of linguistics. The contact of the conquistadors from the Iberian Peninsula with the indigenous people of what is now Mexico set conditions for the exchange of customs and traditions. One area of culture that served to shape cultural contact is in the field of language. The Spanish came into contact with Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. Dalby a writer of the Aztecs, gives a brief background explaining the origin of the Aztecs. He states (436) that

Aztec intruders were in the Valley of Mexico in 1256. They founded Tenochtitlan in 1325, and began to expand their empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Nahuatl was essential to Spanish conquerors and “Nahuatl continued to spread while some other languages died away” (Dalby, 436). Cultural exchanges between Spanish and Nahuatl speakers left neither language unaffected and speakers exchanged portions of their language with each other. An essential fact is that “[n]o distinction between the colonial language and that of today is more immediately apparent than the influence of Spanish” (Karttunen & Lockhart, xi). Groundbreaking examples of this are seen in the extensive usage of loanwords in Nahuatl, the syntactic structure of the language and other key linguistic patterns that can be traced back to the Conquest.

Spanish brought by the conquistadors served as a catalyst for Nahuatl to undergo a major transformation like no other factor. Evidence of contact from other indigenous languages did not have nearly as much of influence as Spanish had on Nahuatl. Many elements of the Spanish language would radically transform Nahuatl. This is proven in the great gap between classical and modern Nahuatl early errors in recording keeping, and an inaccurate linguistic account of classical Nahuatl. The greatest factor responsible for the changes in the Nahuatl language throughout the colonial and into the modern era is the influence of Spanish.

The infiltration of Spanish into Nahuatl was not overnight but progressive. In the “first three years speakers mainly resisted loans other than proper names” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49) and they implemented “native elements in various ways: by identification, descriptive circumlocutions, and extensions” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49). In the following period of borrowing came the emergence of nouns borrowed directly, unlike verbs which were not. In the second phase of borrowing the “surface phonetics of Spanish words [...] [was] strongly assimilated [...] [into] Nahuatl phonology” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49). The third phase of borrowing came in the 1600’s when “verbs were borrowed” and several “idioms were translated” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49). Karttunen states that the third stage continues into the present. The previous statement holds because the “standard conventions of adjustment to Spanish have remained unchanged since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49).

A key fact is that

Nahuatl by 1700 or 1720 had become capable in principle of absorbing any Spanish word or construction. The rest has been done by continued, ever growing cultural pressures, bringing in more words and phrases as the two bodies of speakers became more intertwined and bilingualism increased. (Karttunen & Lockhart, 50).

The concept of cultural diffusion as previously discussed is seen in Spanish contact with the Aztecs. The socio-cultural contacts may be proven by the “Nahuatl strategies of assimilation for the most part came out of regular processes of the preconquest language” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 49).

### What It’s Called

Nahuatl scholars differ in what to call the language; some call it *Mexicano*, or *Mexica* in addition to Nahuatl. Another name is the Aztec mēcēhuallohtōlli, “the speech of the common people” (Karttunen, 502). “The Aztecs referred to any speech mutually intelligible with their own as nāhuatlahtōlli ‘clear speech’ or just Nahuatl” (Karttunen, 502). Most speakers today call the language of the Aztecs Mexicano, or Mexica. “Nahuatl (or Mexican, as it is also called)” (Andrews, vii) is the language of the Aztecs. Hill points out that “*Mexicano* often called Nahuatl is the language of indigenous peoples of central Mexico that has descended from pre-Columbian Aztec” (Hill & Hill, inside jacket flap). In Hill’s work Nahuatl is referred to as ‘*Mexicano*’. Hill states that “[a]lternate names for *Mexicano* are rare” (Hill & Hill 91) and “most modern scholars of the language call it Nahuatl” (Hill & Hill, 91) [but] this word appears only once” in their material.

Hill’s argument for using the word Mexicano and not Nahuatl continues stating that “[*M*]exicano is specifically mentioned as a ‘popular name’ for the language as early as 1600” (Hill & Hill, 91) thus emphasizing the traditional usage since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other scholars of the language such as Karttunen and Lockhart prefer to call it Nahuatl. In either case Mexicano and Nahuatl refer to the same language with the stipulation that Nahuatl may be seen as ‘modern *Mexicano*’. Hill’s preference in calling the language of the Aztecs as Mexicano as opposed to Nahuatl is because “[t]he term *Mexicano* is very old, in both popular and scholarly usage” (Hill & Hill, 91) and

[t]he earliest grammars and dictionaries of the language refer to it by this term, and a survey of major bibliographies of the literature reveals that the most common modern scholarly usage, ‘Nahuatl’, does not begin to appear regularly until the end of the nineteenth century (qtd. in Bright 1967, A. Leon-Portilla 1972).

The problem with referring to the same language by different names is that meaning could take divergent paths. For example,

The Nahuatl which Marina had used as a child was that spoken in the southern marches of the Mexican empire. This dialect had certain differences from the language of Tenochtitlan. Malinche was [C]hristened “Marina” by the Castillians since her real name [that] sounded like that “L” in Nahuatl is pronounced “R” in Spanish

(Thomas, 172).

Based on Thomas’ passage Malinche *Mexicano* is different from Nahuatl. Another problem with research on Nahuatl as the object of study for change is in Muser’s definition of Mexicano which can take

make research on this topic challenging: Mexicano is defined as a “modern synonym for Nahuatl or other Nahua dialects spoken by natives” (Muser, 110). The confusing part of the definition is the second clause that states ‘or other Nahua dialects...’ Hill’s study explains Mexicano to be “often called Aztec or Nahuatl” (Hill & Hill, 1). In reference to Malinche (Mexicano): “[I]n speaking Mexicano they incorporate enormous amounts of material from Spanish” (Hill & Hill, 1). In either case whether it is in reference to Malinche Mexicano or simply Nahuatl both have been affected by the Spanish language in several cases seem to be referring to the same language.

### **Malinche Mexicano**

Evidence for the fact that Malinche Mexicano was influenced by Spanish is the fact that “[r]elative pronouns appear in Malinche Mexicano”. Those came from Spanish grammar. A crucial piece of information is that “[c]lassical Mexicano apparently lacked true relative pronouns (Lackgacker 1975, J. Health 1972)” (Hill & Hill, 276). That statement implies a certain mutation in classical Mexicano and shows the connection between Malinche Mexicano and Nahuatl. Despite the variances that maybe in them for the purpose of research they have a related pattern in its linguistics transformation.

### **Nahuatl Vocabulary**

Nahuatl has brought a wide range of loanwords relating to food and agriculture, but its impact on the Spanish language relatively small overall. The Spanish words cacahuate (peanut) and atole (cornflour drink) respectively, are loanwords from Nahuatl to Spanish. Other examples of this are seen in the following: hule (rubber), achiote (annatto), coyote (prairie wolf), tule (bulrush) and chipotle (air-dried jalapeño). Most of these words refer to plants suggesting a connection of the Aztecs to the land or discovery of species by the Spanish. To detect a Nahuatl loanword look for the suffix -te, -tl or -le. Some loanwords from Spanish into Nahuatl had been ‘[f]or things newly introduced after the conquest, Spanish loanwords in Nahuatl have multiplied: from Spanish *naranja* comes Nahuatl *laxa* (orange) (Dalby 437). Nahuatl had influence Spanish, and *vice versa*, but Spanish had the stronger impact.

A clear example of Spanish influence on Nahuatl is in loanwords, words incorporated into a language from a foreign one, sometimes with some linguistic adjustments. This is a key feature in the experience of cultural diffusion. What may be referred to as the functional unit of linguistic convergence is the borrowing of words.

### **Karttunen begins by stating (504) that**

Nahuatl has borrowed massively from Spanish. The borrowing fall[s] into three clear stages [...] Spanish nouns that end in vowels are borrowed if they have end in a glottal stop.

In the second stage, the Spanish verbs were borrowed “by adding the suffix -oā to the Spanish infinitive form.”

Hill’s ideas of loanwords agree. He explains the process of how Spanish verbs are borrowed. Verbs “are incorporated into Mexicano utterances by the addition of thematizing and stemforming suffixes to the Spanish infinitive” (Hill & Hill, 158). The borrowed Spanish verbs would add —oā, —i —hui, and —lia which would apply to transitive, intransitive and the ‘applicative’ (Hill & Hill, 158). The last to be discussed is what Karttunen calls the “locational and temporal particles” which “were borrowed very early in the contact period such as Spanish *hasta* (up to, until) > Nahuatl *asta*” (Karttunen, 504).

### Differences between Nahuatl and Spanish

The great differences between Spanish and Nahuatl are the immaterial factors that lent themselves to a greater change when Nahuatl adopted linguistic aspects of the Spanish language. In the analogy of the hues, for example, when the colors yellow and orange mix the blend may be not as radical a change as if yellow were mix with blue to yield green. The process of incorporating Spanish elements into Nahuatl had its problems because of linguistic differences. So some adjustments or accommodations had to be made. Direct borrowing of words with the same pronunciation and orthography or spelling was difficult. Some cases of these problems are seen in noun borrowing. Exceptional rules and modifications were used to fit accentuation.

Nahuatl borrowing a Spanish word uses a suffix to make it plural. For example, persona (person) and the plural in Mexicano is persónah-tin (Hill & Hill, 64). The suffix -tin is used as a plural marker and “[m]ost borrowed Spanish nouns form plurals with -tin, and hence do not shift their stress” (Hill & Hill, 164). An example of exceptions to this rule are cases occurs where the Spanish word being borrowed places a stress on its last syllable; “particularly words ending in -ñ” (Hill & Hill, 164). In these cases there is an add-meh rule which simply applies by placing the -meh in the same way that the -tin was applied. The advantage of using -meh is that the “plurals always have penultimate stress in Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 164). The Spanish *capitanes* (captains) in Mexicano is capitan-meh (Hill & Hill, 164). The -meh suffixes are not always added to “final-stressed Spanish nouns” but they “sometimes takes the -tin plural” (Hill & Hill, 164). Examples are camion-tin (trucks) and lugar-tin.

These linguistic changes did not come *ex-nihilo* but from the Spanish lexicon. The previous examples give a snapshot of the Spanish language seeping into the Nahuatl vocabulary. Although Nahuatl made some adjustments, the Spanish words could be easily detected since the suffix does not mask the influence of Spanish very well. Anyone with knowledge of Spanish can detect it.

### Accentuation

Plural nouns were not the only issue. There was also accentuation. Accentuation sets up an obstacle in the direct borrowing of words. In the previous cases where noun plurals were developed there had to be an adjustment using suffix. The option of having a word directly fit the language faces a Catch 22. For example, if the Spanish *capitán* were to go directly into Nahuatl, it word break the Nahuatl rule of penultimate stress. The alternative could be to modify the word to compensate for the accentuation rules, but the problem is that word is now in a sense mutated. Cultural diffusion through language was not accomplished without modifications in the exchange to keep linguistic characteristics or to fit more naturally. With all modifications the reasons for the change was rooted in Spanish. The manipulations caused by accentuation were not drastic enough to marginalize the impact of Spanish on Nahuatl.

### Loan Words

Spanish was able to penetrate the heart of the indigenous language of the Aztecs with loanwords. This was not a cut and paste procedure but a transfer. “Mexicano lacked the Spanish distinction of /u/ and /o/” (Hill & Hill, 199). Matching sounds in Mexicano and Nahuatl was linguistically challenging because “Spanish had voiceless /p/ and voiced /f/ and /b/, pronouncing them all as /p/, a sound found in Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 199). “Nahuatl is phonologically and typologically quite different sort of

language from Spanish, Spanish loanwords are often represented, especially in texts of the earlier centuries, with letter substitutions which appear to correspond to pronunciations” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1). Spanish loanwords that entered Nahuatl were not fully borrowed in the sense that the exact spelling, meaning and sound of the word was adopted: “[n]o phonetic contrast in Spanish represented by b/v, which led to mutual substitution” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1). Karttunen gives examples of the letter swapping in (*vida* > *bida*), (*bigornia* > *vicornia*), (*caballo* > *cavallo*). The first word is the Spanish the second is the Spanish loanword in Nahuatl.

### Other Borrowings and features

Loanwords may be accompanied a subset of cultural terms such as the measurements of time by Nahuatl that were based on Spanish vocabulary. These changes took place fewer than three decades after the Conquest. Karttunen believes “that as early as 1545 if not earlier, central Mexican Nahuatl had borrowed all the Spanish words for the days of the week and the months of the year” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 53). Their research includes Molina’s *Vocabulario* of 1571 in their loanwords list. Some of Molina’s words include: *escrivano* from the Spanish *escribano* (scribe, notary). What is interesting to observe in this case is the b and the v which in Spanish sound the same, may have been misplaced when incorporated. A consistent pattern can be seen when analyzing the loanwords in the days of the week. Although *semana* (week) remained the same, the days or week did not. The Spanish words for Tuesday and Thursday are *martes* and *jueves*, respectively, while Nahuatl has *martestica* and *juevestica*.

Tracing language manipulation in the rise of the Japanese syllabaries is comparable to the situations previously discussed in Nahuatl. The Japanese language was only a spoken language until the emergence of the *manyoogana* syllabary. *Manyoogana* eventually gave rise to *hiragana* in that some of its characters were incorporated using the cursive technique that made some characters more aesthetically attractive. The -tica suffix could possibly be the Nahuatl version of a similar aesthetic process. Loanwords involve the problem of voiced and unvoiced sounds which include t, s, k, and p for the unvoiced, and the counterpart of d, z, g and b for the voiced. Some examples from Molina’s vocabulary list that show the pairs of voiced and unvoiced are in the following words, *trigo* (wheat), *drigo*, and *puñal* (dagger), and *bunal*. Both pairs contain unvoiced and voiced consonants that were switched when creating a loanword.

In Japanese there were problems in distinguishing the voiced and unvoiced sounds attached to the *manyoogana* characters. There was no distinction. In the relatively modern syllabaries of *hiragana* and *katakana* there are distinguishing marks that set the voiced apart from the unvoiced. This was accomplished using the double prime and the degree symbol. In Japanese the k sound and *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabary change to the g sound when the double prime symbol is added to the character. The Spanish word *clérigo* (cleric) was transformed into Nahuatl as *glericosme*. The unvoiced k is traded for the voiced g sound. In a different case in Molina’s vocabulary list is in the word *bonete* (cap) which entered Nahuatl as *ponetes*, the voiced b replaced with the unvoiced p. This was the reverse of the previous example. The voiced/unvoiced pattern was an important issue in dealing with the correct pronunciation of *manyoogana* as was in the direct borrowing of words with regards to the retention of the proper voiced and unvoiced pattern.

## Cultural Transfers

Language is closely connected with its society, so any ambiguity in that is particular to the language may be difficult to transfer. Nahuatl “[I]ike many of the languages of the Uto-Aztecan family” (Hill & Hill, 170) has few adjectives. This is seen in the fact that

Mexicano speakers today use adjectives of both Mexicano and Spanish etymology sparingly, even in long and enthusiastic narratives. In the acquisition of loanwords for Mexicano, they added the suffix *-tic* to nouns or verb stems. (Hill & Hill, 171)

An example of this is *mulahtic* from the Spanish word *mula* (mule). *Mula* and the suffix *-tic* combined. The problem with Spanish adjectives is that they could be adjectives or nouns thus making matters ambiguous. For example “the adjective *viejo* can appear alone as *el viejo* ‘the old man’, and must be classified in such a case syntactically as a noun” (Hill & Hill, 171). Using an adjective introduces another piece in the puzzle because it is an addition to Nahuatl that was caused by the Spanish language’s impact.

The Spanish adjectives borrowed by Mexicano can be classified as comparative and ordinal and “might be said to fill a genuine lexical gap, since Classical Mexicano [or Nahuatl] used various types of conjunctions for comparisons” (Hill & Hill, 173). A Spanish speaker who says *mi casa es más mejor* (my house is better) would be manifesting an incorrect usage of the language, but in Mexicano it is not. The Spanish comparatives such as *más* (more) and *menos* (less) “are very common and often appear doubled with one another and with Mexicano forms and this doubling yields construction such as *más mejor* ‘more better’” (Hill & Hill, 174).

Another linguistic issue is the tendency “to render Spanish /v/ as Mexicano /w/” (Hill & Hill, 199). Some evidence in the loanwords that from Spanish to Nahuatl in which the transformation of /f/ is /p/ is illustrated “by the Nahuatl loan word *Josepa*” (Hill & Hill, 200) which in Spanish is *Josefa*. Another Nahuatl loanword is *brijolito* (bean) is taken from the Spanish word *frijolito* (Hill & Hill, 200). When the Spanish /f/ is replaced by the Nahuatl /b/ we have *brondosamente* (leafy). In Spanish that is *frondosamente* (Hill & Hill, 200).

Both these examples show evidence of imperfect infiltration of Spanish into Nahuatl. Further examples of loanwords do also. The Nahuatl word *burgatorio* (purgatory) lies in the Spanish *purgatorio*. The Spanish /p/ was replaced by /b/. aside from the voiced and unvoiced sounds the fundamental nature of the word could easily be traced to Spanish. Speakers of Nahuatl “commonly delete Spanish unstressed initial syllables” (Hill & Hill, 208). Three examples of this are in the Nahuatl *huelito* (grandfather), *pende* (it depends), and *penas* (hardly, suddenly). The Spanish words are *abuelito*, *depende* and *apenas*. Nahuatl loanwords you have seen have not been a mirror image of Spanish words. In Hill’s study is the exchange of words or in the borrowing process, sometimes there are intruders that jump in. Nahuatl adopted the *saltillo* (little jump) although with a different meaning.

The intruders previously discussed are sounds of the letters k and n. In Malinche Mexicano (Hill & Hill, 209) examples of this include the words *respecto* (respect) and *actoridad* (authority). In these words the intruder inserted itself in the former case and in the latter replaced the n with a c. Parallel are *negoncio* (business) and *sancerdotes* from the words *negocio* and *sacerdotes*. The letter n we can say jumped in. The k sound is common “in Malinche Mexicano speech” (Hill & Hill, 209). The intrusive letter n alters the original spelling of the Spanish *mucho* (much) into *muncho* as well as *así* (thus) into

*ansi* (Hill & Hill, 211). In Malinche Mexicano there are other cases in which the n can be said to escapes from the beginning of the word. This linguistic phenomenon adds a touch of humor in the study of Spanish influence on Nahuatl. Hill provides some examples of this occurrence, *número* (number) and *nailón* (nylon) that became *umero* and *ailoh*. We have noticed thus far the why parts but not the how.

### Now the How

There is a pattern in how these words came into existence. A key piece of the puzzle is that in Nahuatl stress in most cases on the penultimate syllable. In Malinche Mexicano *timah-tin* (blankets) has its stress on the first syllable. That is “an exception to the usual pattern of penultimate stress in Malinche Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 164). The first syllable of the words *abuelito*, *depende* and *apenas* are unstressed and that gives a possible option as to why the words came to be in the way that they were, since ‘[s]tress in Nahuatl is [almost] always on the penultimate syllable’ (Karttunen, 504).

A unique characteristic in the Nahuatl language is the *saltillo*, a sound effected by the quick opening and closing of the glottis. Since the *saltillo* was something foreign to Spanish and Latin, some recorders of Nahuatl neglected to take note of it in their writings. Hill states that a “phonological feature of Mexicano that confused Spanish scholars was the glottal consonant, called *saltillo* ‘little jump’ by the early grammarians, who heard it as a glottal stop in the Mexicano spoken in the Valley of Mexico” (Hill & Hill, 63).

According to dictionary.com, glottal stop is synonymous with glottal plosive and glottal catch, defined as “[a] speech sound produced by a momentary complete closure of the glottis, followed by an explosive release.” A critical element in the pronunciation and meaning “of Aztec words is the “glottal stop,”” (van Zantwijk, xxii)

The inadequate recording of Nahuatl caused a transformation due to the Spanish linguistic limitation when it comes to the *saltillo*. The error was not only in modern texts, which if that had been the case then other scholars could use an older reference to understand the *saltillo*; “[u]nfortunately, most colonial and modern writers do not indicate this glottal stop in their spellings. Therefore we sometimes have to guess whether the *saltillo* had to be written” (van Zantwijk, xxii). Andrews (xiii) boldly places it in the preface of his *Introduction to Classical Nahuatl* that “[a]mong the more aggravating problems faced in writing this grammar have been those of vowel length and glottal stops.” His comment on glottal stop is related to the *Saltillo*.

A problem with the proper representation of Nahuatl has been the fact that it is a language that seems strange to those of us familiar with Latin and the Romance languages. Van Zantwijk (xxi) states that

the spelling of [Nahuatl] was created by Spaniards and their Indian apprentices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Therefore, Nahuatl is generally pronounced in agreement with the rules valid for the Spanish language of that time”

Because the Spanish language was so different from Nahuatl it facilitated more errors and increased the chance of making a poor translation or misrepresentation. Had the Spanish conquered a land where people spoke Italian or Portuguese matters would have been quite different because all languages concerned trace their roots to Latin. Having a common lineage they naturally would share linguistic similarities. It would not have been as difficult to keep an accurate record of linguistic interaction.

An instance of the dominance of the Spanish language on Nahuatl is seen in the fact that the “Spanish introduced the Roman script and soon recorded a large body of Aztec prose and poetry” (Katzner, 279). There is the “text of the prayer to Tlaloc, the god of rain, [which] runs about 200 lines” (Katzner, 279). The Iberians used Spanish or Latin phonetics for Nahuatl. That naturally caused it to change.

### Recording Nahuatl

Recording of Nahuatl had to be done meticulously because of differences in two words that are spelled the same but have different meaning because of the *salttillo*. Van Zantwijk (xxii) gives these examples: are *huehuetlan* (place of drums) and *huehuêtlan* (place of old men). Another example is in *ma ehua* (may he or she rise) and *mâ ehua* (may he or she not rise). The *salttillo* was not to be neglected in the language, because its presence or absence could alter the word’s meaning. The Spanish confusion of the *salttillo* parallels the Nahuatl perplexity of the voiced and unvoiced sounds. Each language contained the tendency to pronounce language on the basis of the mother tongue which led to confusion in the proper recording in the former and loanwords with swapped unvoiced/voiced partners in the latter.

Loanwords can be acknowledged as one of the pillars that support the notion of Spanish influence on Nahuatl. They are salient indicators of cultural impact of language. The phenomenon of the Nahuatl Spanish contact helps us understand how languages interact and what Clure & Clure (1977) called ethno-reconstruction. We see words like *xaloh* (jar) or *caxon* (drawer) instead of the common forms of *jarro* and *cajón*. We see stress shift and “word-final stress in Spanish” (Hill & Hill, 212). This is different from spelling changes. It is stress relocation, “[w]here stress is shifted, the vowel of the original Spanish stressed syllable retains its length” (Hill & Hill, 212). Some examples of this are in the Spanish *mama* (mom), *revolución* (revolution) and *razón* (reason) where the accent on the last syllable shifts to the penultimate syllable in Nahuatl.

Botany can be used to paint the picture. Nahuatl can be seen as a tree with roots, leaves and branches. The incorporation of the pieces of the Spanish language can be seen as someone cutting some branches from a Spanish tree and grafting them onto the Nahuatl tree. The new branch is adjusted to fit Nahuatl’s natural pattern of growth. Nahuatl is and this “tree” is very different from the pre-conquest tree.

Loanwords are indicators of cultural diffusion, but Spanish is only part of the story. Other languages have given Nahuatl loanwords and Nahuatl has given loanwords to the Spanish language such as *tequila*, *coyote*, *escuincle* (youth, lad) and some others. Another key point that distinguishes classical Nahuatl from modern Nahuatl is the fact of the apparent changes in grammar. The mix of Spanish and the *indios’* culture is apparent. Before the conquest Nahuatl had not experienced radical change in the language. Then two cultures clashed and Nahuatl speakers encountered new customs, rituals and even new language. Changes took place and continued to the modern period.

Even left alone Nahuatl like all languages would have changed but Spanish, with a very different grammatical system, created a sudden and profound set of changes. It is unclear whether changes in syntax or word order in Nahuatl were influenced by Spanish but “it seems likely that contact with Spanish has hastened, and in some cases provided the models which precipitated, word order change in Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 234). The verb in Malinche Mexicano “is usually the first element of the

syntactic core, preceding subjects, objects, and locative and temporal elements” (Hill & Hill, 234). For example, “the use of *de* and *que*, two borrowed Spanish particles” had a significant “impact on Mexicano syntax” (Hill & Hill p.233). Linguistically speaking,

[t]here is a tendency for locational and directional element to come before their nouns. Much of this organization has probably developed during the last few hundred years, during a period when Malinche Mexicano was in a close contact except for the verb initial component (Hill & Hill, 234).

Another example of syncretism is in Spanish *de* and *que*. The “Spanish particles *de* and *que* have been incorporated into Malinche Mexicano usage in so many environments, and are used at such a high frequency, that they are important contributors in their own right to syntactic convergence with Spanish” (Hill & Hill, 293). Language can be seen as an organic creature that grows and changes over time. Language evolves and “syntactic innovations may take place which have no precedent in Spanish or Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 293). Thus it would seem logical to think that if the verbs of Malinche Mexicano were placed in a different position it may indicate either an exception to the rule or a possible Spanish influence on the language.

In Hill’s research there is reference to Karttunen & Lockhart in the suggestion that in “the period covered by their sample of documents, from 1540 to 1795, *de* appeared only in environments which were clearly inspired by Spanish models, and most occurrences of *de* were in fixed Spanish phrases” (Hill & Hill, 294). Karttunen & Lockhart found two examples where *de* showed up in Mexicano words. These include the following phrases from Hills’ work: *se blatant de matlacquahuatl* and *nacatl de carnero* (Hill & Hill, 294). Both use *de*, the former from 1795 and the latter from 1611. Although there is evidence that the particle *de* came from Spanish there is also the case that in Malinche Mexicano where “*de* can appear in environments for which there are no Spanish models” (Hill & Hill, 294). The transfer process of Spanish grammar into Mexicano failed to translate properly or capture the meaning of *de*. Hill suggests that “Malinche Mexicano speakers consider *de* to be equivalent to the Mexicano adjunctor *in*” (Hill & Hill, 294). It seems that particle *de* was another example of Spanish influence and of change within with Nahuatl language. *De* is a little particle that made a big difference in Nahuatl. Karttunen finds *de* in texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Documents from the 16<sup>th</sup> century using *de* support the argument that at the time of the Conquest Nahuatl began to change by influence of Spanish grammar borrowed for Nahuatl. *De* was manipulated when placed into Nahuatl. *De* is found in Nahuatl but with a different meaning; nonetheless, the presence of *de* in Nahuatl serves as a potent proof that the Spanish language played a role in the new developments of Nahuatl.

## Nouns

Nouns predominate in the lexicon of Spanish loanwords in Nahuatl. Nouns cover: people, places, things, and even abstract notions. Nouns “were practically the only loans during the 16<sup>th</sup> century; even taking the entire colonial period as a unit, noun loans outnumber loans in all other grammatical categories” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 16). In texts examined by Karttunen “nouns outnumber loans in all other grammatical categories.... And it is quite significant being a ratio of 12 to 1 (Karttunen & Lockhart, 16). Based on the evidence in previous sections, the loanwords were seen to have a tendency to “cluster in the categories of words for introduced artifacts, plants, and animals” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 16). According to Karttunen, “there is a distinct, significant diachronic and topical patterning in the Nahuatl

incorporation of noun loans” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 16). The research of these scholars includes a list of Molina’s loanwords of 1571. In the list there were three main categories labeled as Concrete, Quasi-concrete, and More Abstract.

The first category branches off into two sections labeled biological and inanimate. In the first section of the Concrete category plants and animals provided the most loanwords. In the inanimate section an overwhelming majority of loanwords were for “artifacts based on new principles and/or made of new material” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 17). The Quasi-Concrete category is defined as possessing “a concrete referent distinguished by an abstract quality” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 17). The characterization of individuals was the leading category for the most number of loanwords. Lastly, the More Abstract section’s loanwords were religious, trumping all the remaining topics including legal. Aside from the patterns of the loanwords there is also a rule for certain loanwords. The general rule is “that any Spanish word ending in a vowel was pronounced with a final glottal stop in Nahuatl” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 22). This rule was applied by Carochi and his “rule holds true for vowel-final Spanish words in various Nahuatl dialects to this day (Karttunen & Lockhart, 22). Nahuatl was influenced by Spanish but modified Spanish. Dialects of Nahuatl still use Spanish words.

### Other Influences

“Besides Nahuatl, over a hundred languages were spoken in New Spain” (Gruzinski, 98). A ground-breaking opinion formulated by Karttunen is in the uniqueness of the language contact of Spanish and Nahuatl. “It is a remarkable thing that though linguistic and cultural diffusion is a strong characteristic of preconquest Meso-America, Nahuatl gives no unequivocal indication of having had any conventional ways of dealing with language contact before the intrusion of Spanish” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 50). Since there have been no clear signs that Nahuatl had any predictable ways of handling a sudden language contact. Some language contact was with similar indigenous languages, so no major adjustments had to be made or the influence of those other languages was relatively small. In either case no other language could have changed Nahuatl as radically as Spanish and that influence lasted from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Karttunen claims that this is so even though “that there are many loanwords from other Indian languages in Nahuatl” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 50). They add that “Nahuatl behaved as though it had never borrowed a word, concept or construction before, going through an entire self-contained process in relation to Spanish alone” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 50). Most likely the other Meso-American languages were more closely related to Nahuatl than Spanish. Two other factors to keep in mind were the fact that Nahuatl “had been a much more [of] a donor [language] than recipient in contact situations” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 50). Nahuatl had been the giver locally and suddenly became the taker.

There is not much evidence of Nahuatl vocabulary that came from other *Indio* languages. Nahuatl had contact with other languages, true, but Karttunen shows that borrowing was very little. Spanish was not the only language that influenced Nahuatl. Dalby states as a historical reference that “[a]t the crossroads of Mexican culture, Nahuatl naturally contains loanwords from other American languages” (Dalby, 437). The early Olmec civilization spoke a Mixe-Zoque language. From this source comes *nixtamalli* (maize dough), a staple food. From Mixe-Zoque too (proto-Mixe-Zoque *kakawa*) come the Nahuatl *cacao* that eventually entered the European languages (e.g., English chocolate, cocoa)” (see Dalby, 437). It is natural for cultures to influence one another, but so great an impact as Spanish on

Nahuatl, lasting for centuries into the present, is unusual. Minor Mesoamerican languages played a smaller role in the transformation of Nahuatl that evolved over the course of centuries. Proof of major influence of the Spanish language is in the spelling of words. “Soon after the conquest of Mexico, Franciscan friars adapted Spanish and Latin orthographic conventions to the alphabetic representation of Nahuatl” (Karttunen, 502). A second indicator of major Spanish influence on Nahuatl Karttunen notes in that “[a]lphabetic writing was immediately adopted for community record keeping and legal documentation, and there are dated samples of written Nahuatl for every decade from the 1540’s through the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (502). “Nahuatl speakers had used a logosyllabic writing system similar to (and undoubtedly derived from) those used by the Zapotec, Maya and Mixtec” (Karttunen, 502).

### **The Mexican Language**

A new Mexicano language was evolving as the incorporation of Spanish linguistic elements crept into it. The sequence previously discussed shows that “syntactic innovations may take place which have no precedent in either Spanish or Mexicano” (Hill & Hill, 293). This can be explained as two parents, (in this analogy Spanish and Mexicano, who gave birth to two sons. The first son is mostly like the Spanish parent with minor features of the Mexicano parent. The second son is clearly like the Mexicano parent. The first son may be interpreted as Spanish with influence of Nahuatl or Mexicano. The second son may be seen as the New Nahuatl, new because Nahuatl before the Conquest was different. What makes the influence of the Spanish language so unique is that it went deep to change certain roots of the language. Nahuatl had been affected by other languages but relative to the Spanish those changes were superficial.

Cultural diffusion took place despite linguistic difficulties in the adoption of loanwords from Spanish into Nahuatl and the accurate state of Nahuatl phonetics has been poorly recorded because of the great differences in language. Because it has undergone so many changes due to Spanish influence the contact between the languages gave rise to new language, Mexican Spanish. According to Andrews (p. x)

Nahuatl has never been presented in its peculiarity. Grammars of the language have presented it from foreign perspectives. Latin, Spanish, French and German have served as frameworks for the description of linguistic phenomena that are meaningless in such contexts.

Andrews states that “[t]he result has frequently been that what is merely exotic has become evidently idiotic” (Andrews, x). He argues that there have been misconceptions about the Nahuatl language as some people have tried to play down the exotic nature of Nahuatl by misrepresenting their language system “as if they were merely disguised Indo-European structures” (Andrews, x). A writer on the Aztecs shares similar frustrations in the imprecision of words, for example, “[t]he correct Nahuatl form “Motecuhzoma” has been adopted for the third and seventh Aztece kings, in preference to inaccurate variants such as “Montezuma” and “moctezuma.”

### **An Imperfect Account of Nahuatl.**

Early Spanish friars attempting to obtain a precise accounting of the *indio* language realized how different the languages were and “that they had to devise a new terminology for this utterly different tongue” (Dalby, 437). As for verbs, new concepts came out named compulsive or applicative. The introduction of new verb classifications may have helped to play up distinctions from Spanish or Latin verb classifications. Even though this may be true, a perfect account of classical Nahuatl was not

achieved by the Spanish. The prudent decision of the Spanish friars was seen in their use of new terminology. From the perspective of people with a European language background, their task was not easy and Andrews claims that Nahuatl was poorly represented. Clearly the Iberians had a difficult time in getting a clear account of the language. Not only were phonetics a problem but when Nahuatl was recorded the bias of Spanish speakers skewed recording.

### **Divergence Has Been Little Studied**

What makes the study of the Spanish influence on Nahuatl challenging is that “[l]inguistic divergence has been little studied” (Hill & Hill, 56). Languages are difficult to translate from one to another. Andrews declares: “To describe the grammar of a Spanish or English translation as if one were describing the grammar of the Nahuatl source is merely to create bewilderment and a willingness to allow nonsensical translations to stand as valid representations of Nahuatl thought” (p. x). The Spanish language placed heavy hand on Nahuatl, yet “inflectional convergence between Spanish and Mexicano had been very restricted” (Hill & Hill, 57). From the inception of the Conquest “Nahuatl was being recorded in writing: in sculpted inscriptions, usually brief; and in picture books” (Dalby, 436). The Aztecs during “the Spanish Conquest, introduce[d] the European alphabet, supplied their scholars with a more perfect continuance for expressing thought, which soon supplanted the ancient pictorial character” (Prescott, 76-77). Prescott supports the statement (p. 82) claiming that “[i]n less than a hundred years after the Conquest, the knowledge of the hieroglyphics had.”

It was only in fairly recent times that scholars learned how to read Mayan inscriptions and even when people were around who could more or less tell the Spanish what the names of the old *ruinas* were the Spanish settled for calling these buildings by Spanish names such as *castillo* (castle). The zealous Spanish clerics destroyed many *indio* codexes with their pictorial writings, condemning them as idolatrous and heretical. Only a few such documents have survived.

During the Conquest “the Mexicano-speaking Aztecs kept records in a notational system” that “combined pictographic symbols of the rebus type” (Hill & Hill, 61). For example, the Aztecs used “small footprints to indicate travel, or a picture of a face with curlicues issuing from the lips to indicate speaking” (Hill & Hill, 61). Although many of the books were lost, ancient pictograms along with Spanish interpretations are found in the *Codex Mendoza*, a bilingual manuscript. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p. 2199) pictograph (which is synonymous to pictogram) is defined as “[a] pictorial symbol or sign; *esp.* a symbol representing a word or group of words in a writing system.” Dalby states that “Mexican pictograms stood for a sequence of ideas” (Dalby, 437). After the Conquest Nahuatl was supplanted by the “addition of an alphabetic writing system based on Spanish orthography” (Hill & Hill, 61)

Karttunen points out that “[t]he orthographic conventions of early 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish formed the basis of Nahuatl orthography except in a few details” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1). An example of the details were in that case that “[t]he affricative [ts], which corresponded to one that had existed in Spanish but apparently had been lost before contact with Nahuatl, was represented as tz” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1) Evidence of language manipulation and influence by the Spanish in the post-conquest era is seen in fact that in the “18<sup>th</sup> century Nahuatl orthography followed Spanish changes as to s and made adjustments related to changes in Spanish ll” (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1). These transformations are attributed to the linguistics of Spanish. A relatively immediate change in Nahuatl came when Spanish orthography

supplanted as Nahuatl's new writing system. Hill writes that "[a]mong the languages of Mesoamerica, Mexicano posed relatively few problems for Spanish speakers designing an orthography" (Hill & Hill, 62), his claim lying in the basis that "[t]he language had no contrasts of tone, the system of consonants contained no sounds for which Spanish had no easily adaptable symbol, and except for the problem of vowel length, the vowels could be represented easily with Spanish symbols" (Hill & Hill, 62). He agrees with Karttunen in the assertion that "Nahuatl had distinctive vowel length and the glottal stop, but the Spanish-based orthography ignored them, more or less successfully" (Karttunen & Lockhart, 1). Despite these facts there were problems in recording because the letters used for Nahuatl were "devised by students of Latin, whose orthography does not represent the vowel lengths" found in Nahuatl. Andrews' previous commentary on the poor representation of Nahuatl is connected the case stated by the Hills in that "most scholars publish materials in Mexicano without representing vowel length" (Hill & Hill, 63).

From the Conquest on, record keeping was altered by the Spanish. Karttunen asks a question to make a linguistic point: "to what extent can the orthographic record be used to pinpoint steps in the diachronic process of Nahuatl's reaction to Spanish on the level of phonetics?" (Karttunen & Lockhart, 7) He continues stating that "the greatest stumbling block is the fact that even in the earliest records, *most* loanwords are written in according to the norm of Spanish orthography" (Karttunen & Lockhart, 7). Classical Nahuatl is no longer spoken in communities; the only surviving form of the indigenous language is modern Nahuatl or Mexicano. This reality along with the fact that Nahuatl has changed since the colonial period poses linguistic issues at hand. Hill and Hill after ten years of working in the Mexican states of Tlaxcala and Puebla for their linguistic research "have not met any literate Mexicano speakers who knew how to represent [vowel length]" (Hill & Hill, 63). The preface of *Nahuatl in the Middle Years* states that "[t]he corpus of texts written throughout the colonial period represents an usually good opportunity to study a language contact situation from the beginning through succeeding centuries almost year by year" (Karttunen & Lockhart, xii). Evidence of the evolution of Nahuatl, and in support of the family analogy previously offered in which the Spanish and Nahuatl parents gave birth to the new Nahuatl sons is seen in the fact that "modern dialects of Nahuatl number around a million speakers, [but] Classical Nahuatl is no longer spoken" (Andrews, xii). Indeed, classical anything is no longer spoken anywhere because each and every language evolves continually and a language unless it is dead is modern, or, some say, post-modern today. Cultural diffusion, in fact, goes on daily and, with modern technology, faster and farther all the time.

### **The Situation Today**

The experience of cultural diffusion in Mexico from a linguistic perspective can be compared to a similar situation in India. The "syntactic convergence between Mexicano and Spanish is reminiscent of the massive syntactic convergence between Marathi and Kannada in Maharashtra State in India, reported by Gumperz and Wilson (1971)" (Hill & Hill, 233). In a comparable scenario with "Mexicano and Spanish, Marathi and Kannada are quite unrelated to one another. The result of syntactic convergence in Mexicano has been a change in its place in the typology of the languages of the world" (Hill & Hill, 233). Loan translation is defined by Hill and Hill to be "a type of construction in which forms from the target language are inserted into frames borrowed from the donor language (sometimes called 'calquing')" (Hill & Hill, 233). Hills and Hill define loan blending in the case that "target and donor language forms appear together in donor-language syntactic frames" (Hill & Hill, 233).

Nahuatl borrowing can be explained by a simple analogy. Nahuatl can be compared to a business person who deals with the market, an entrepreneur who is both a consumer and producer. As a consumer the Nahuatl bought some goods in the market here and there without affecting its overall image or inventory. The neighboring indigenous languages sold their goods to the Nahuatl but the language was, relatively speaking, unchanged in comparison to its coming destiny. When the Spanish language became a major player in the market the economic circumstances of the time lent themselves to a massive change in the Nahuatl's market. Given the circumstance of the Conquest, Nahuatl had bought Spanish words not like a shopper who picks and chooses here and there but in bulk. The influences of the Spanish language on Nahuatl can be seen as wholesale.

Nahuatl had a massive change in inventory. It adjusted its goods to fit some of the business rules, so call that is grammar. When the Spanish took over the Nahuatl market they attempted to do some business by adapting their ways to fit Nahuatl. There was much influence and so many sales over the centuries that the original Nahuatl businessman is not the same person of centuries gone by. He is in a mixed and modern market now.

Nahuatl still may be defined as the language of the Aztecs, Nahuatl being a “[d]ialect of Nahua centered in the Valley of Mexico [...] that is still spoken today” (Muser, 113). Still in its significant changes Nahuatl may deserve to be renamed as a language that would include the major impact from Spanish. Objectively speaking Nahuatl has changed greatly from what it was in the early 1500's to the language that we have today in modern Mexico along with Mexican Spanish. The works of several scholars prove that the leading cause of this change was the influence of the Spanish language. Merely saying that Spanish was the greatest agent for the change that occurred would be too simplistic, too generalized. Other languages had contact with Nahuatl as we said, but they have proven to have relatively minor effects, compared to the impact of Spanish. The changes in grammar seen in Nahuatl are clearly traced to Spanish grammar. The progression of language change chronicled by Karttunen shows a continuity of change and incorporation of loanwords, then verbs and other linguistic influences. There were barriers that prevented the Spanish from recording Nahuatl during the Conquest as we have noted. That contributed to Spanish influence and thus caused key alterations in the language, given that the Spanish language is so different from Nahuatl. Andrews points out that “Spanish replaced Nahuatl as the dominant language in most areas; although in isolated communities Nahuatl has survived” (Smith, 287). To this day Nahuatl is a living language in the United States of Mexico with over one million speakers. The national language, however, is a kind of Spanish, Mexican Spanish, differing in pronunciation and lexicon and to a smaller extent in grammar from the national language of Spain as, in fact, do all the Spanishes of Central and South America.

## **Conclusion**

Nahuatl is still spoken in Mexico by some 1.45 million, according to the Census of 2000, with the largest concentrations of Nahuatl speakers found mostly in the rural areas of the states of Puebla, Veracruz, Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, and Guerrero, of whom some 15 percent are monolingual. As one of the 62 national languages of Mexico, it is protected by the General Law on the Language Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of 2003. Yet much work remains to be done for the history and development of Nahuatl and as more documents and other writings become unearthed, new insight will be gained for an accurate and more complete picture of the language.

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