

Variation and Language Ideologies in Mesoamerican Languages: The case of Nahuatl

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Abstract

This paper provides a general account of various contexts in which specific questions related to variability as an expression of language ideologies can be elaborated, with special reference to selected illustrations of different language varieties in the mayor Mesoamerican language of Mexico, Nahuatl. For this aim, a series of bilingual materials stemming from different settings will be provided, in order to reconstruct the systematic constraints that guide the production of actual discourse which in turn derive from different ideological matrices. The contexts from which the materials will be presented include natural occurring conversations as well as elicited data, together with the consideration of published materials dealing with Nahuatl. I pinpoint the different biases and distinct methods derived from different and at times antagonistic linguistic traditions. These traditions construct approaches and descriptions of language that materialize divergent linguistic ideologies, especially purist ideologies. I hope such discussion will help unravel topics hardly reflected in the literature on Nahuatl, such as the difference between the written and the spoken word, the purist selection of a single variety to describe the structure of the Nahuatl language, thus discarding all contact phenomena, and in general the wide range of variability linked to different contexts, indexed in the materials themselves.

1. Introduction

It is a relatively well known fact that there is a wealth of literature on Nahuatl, spanning a considerable large period which includes: (1) early XVI century colonial Nahuatl literature, or what is properly known as Classical Nahuatl (CN)(1); graciously represented by a wide number of sources such as the Florentine Codex or Molina's Vocabulario, the most extensive encyclopedia and dictionary of sixteenth century Nahuatl, respectively. (2) Colonial Nahuatl, which refers to texts belonging to the phase in which bilingualism was at its first stages or seminal expression, together with advanced bilingual phases (phase 2 and phase 3 in terms of Lockhart s (1992) periodization); and (3)

Modern Nahuatl, which in turn contains a series of complex regional, dialectal, and social varieties linked to different stages of language maintenance and shift.

In general, different texts in all these periods include a wide range of variability in terms of e.g. the difference between written and oral discourse, not to speak of the wide spectrum of genres represented, including secular and ritual discourse. Yet, if one compares Nahuatl natural occurring conversations versus elicited materials, few if any reference is normally made when it comes to describe the origin of the data presented. In this sense, the difference between written and spoken discourse constitute clear instances of sociolinguistic differentiation. In what follows I will refer to significant illustrations of such sociolinguistic differential in its specific linguistic materialization.

2. Differences between the written and spoken word: Nahuatl examples

If we consider for instance prescriptive Nahuatl grammars we will immediately encounter the obligatory status of e.g. an epenthetic /i/ to avoid clusters not allowed in the formation of the Nahuatl syllable, i.e. cc clusters (cf. Andrews 1975). This is manifested among other paradigms in the personal pronoun prefixes which in Nahuatl are attached both to nouns and verbs. For example, compare CN words in (1) and (2):

1. ni-tlacatl

1sg-man, person

"I am a man, I am person"

2. n-otomitl

1sg-otomi

"I am otomi (a member of the hñahñu ethnic group)"

The same is true for the obligatory morphological marking of the object in Nahuatl, which canonical form is the third person object prefix k-. Consequently, verbal radicals with an initial vowel automatically only take k-, and, just as in the case of the noun we just briefly described in (1) and (2), insert an epenthetic /i/ when the verb begins with a consonant, once again to avoid cc clusters, as in example (1). For instance:

3. ni-cochi n-atl-i

1sg-sleep 1sg-water-drink
"I sleep" "I drink water"

As far as I can see, few if any violations of this rule are attested in CN, neither in other colonial sources, most probably due to its written, "high", nature. Yet if we turn to contemporary spoken evidence we will find a relaxation of such obligatory status, both at the nominal and verbal paradigms. In both cases, the whole epenthetic process can be omitted, as well as the object prefix in the case of the verb. Consider the following example, derived from actual verbal interaction:

3.1 t-kwaa-s sopa?
2sg-eat-fut soup
"Will you eat soup?"

Compare with the prescribed form, which in this case would be:

3.2 ti-h-kwaa-s sopa?
2sg-3ob-eat-fut soup
"Will you eat soup?"(2)

An interesting parallelism between a sort of complementary distribution in the appearance and disappearance of epenthetic /i/ in both the verbal and nominal paradigms, related to the written or oral nature of discourse, respectively, can be postulated. That is to say that when speakers consciously monitor their speech, as is the case of elicitation, the full fledged forms will be produced, as opposed to instances of natural extemporaneous conversations, in which the whole epenthetic process can be omitted. For example, compare (4), (5) and (6):

| | | |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|
| 4.xi-k-ita!(3) | 5.x-k-ita! | 6.x-ta(4) |
| imp-3ob-see | imp-3ob-see | imp-see |
| "Look!" | "Look!" | "See" |

From the perspective of the use of the language; i.e. that of the speaker, forms in (5) and (6) are not in free variation or at all ungrammatical or aberrant, the way in which they would be judged from a more external perspective, e.g. that of a prescriptive Nahuatl grammar, which would only allow (4). On the contrary, such forms are not at all marginal or even the effect of Nahuatl contact with Spanish, but rather index different types of interactions and varying interactional uses, linked to for instance the quest of an emphatic effect, something that cannot be captured by an isolated morphological gloss or translation as the ones just presented. From this point of view,

consider a form such as (7), which from a prescriptive viewpoint is again plainly ungrammatical, yet actually in use in Xalitla, a Balsas Nahuatl (BN) speaking community. Notice that the use of the second personal singular prefix instead of the first personal singular prefix indexes familiarity with the addressee, informality and even a (covert) emotional overtone:

7. moostla ti-mits-ittaa-s

tomorrow 2sg-2ob-see-fut

"I'll see you tomorrow" (e.g. said to a Good friend while departing)"

Notice that the "normal" utterance which corresponds to the first person singular in prescriptive grammars based on written sources or elicited oral data is n(i)- "I":

8. moostla ni-mits-ittaa-s

tomorrow 1sg-2ob-see-fut

"I'll see you tomorrow"

Similarly, if we compare the forms derived from verbal interaction with the lexicon that is obtained in elicitation, interesting differences also emerge. For instance, the fact that the linguist defines who speaks to whom and when, what to be uttered, all based on a second (dominant) language (Spanish), already establish specific power restrictions which trigger sociolinguistic reflexivity, framed in specific linguistic ideologies, such as purism. Providing that the speaker is willing to cooperate in elicitation already entails subordination, materialized in a number of ways; e.g., subordination of the oral to the written code, emblematically recasted as a power code (cf. Hill & Hill 1986). Even if after all oral forms obtained via elicitation are written down, this is done via the dominant language, by the linguist and not the speaker, paradoxically reproducing very common stereotypes such as "Nahuatl is not written down", along the lines of "Nahuatl has no grammar, is a dialect, is not a pure language, etc.". Many other effects such as hypercorrection, the production of careful, formal speech, neologisms and nativization linked to purist ideologies, an the like, produce a specific variety characteristic of elicitation, tainted with artificiality and de-contextualized forms from the point of view of every day usage (cf. Flores Farfán 2003a). Thus as with elicitation, close attention to the contexts of interaction in which data are negotiated reveal the material expression of specific Nahuatl varieties, such as purist (presumably monolingual) varieties, which index specific power arrangements. Just to give a couple of examples of the purist ideologies linked to linguistics and anthropology practitioners, consider the following

illustrations. On one occasion that the author of this paper, who has studied Nahuatl-Spanish contact extensively (cf. Flores Farfán 1999, etc.), mentioned in front of a number of Nahuatl speakers, including an anthropologist representative of such purist tradition, that he was heading to the bathroom, I used the following formulation:

8.1 n-iaw tla-teen-co

1sg-go ob-lip-loc

"I go to the outskirts (lit. the edge); i.e. I go to the bathroom"(5)

The alluded anthropologist immediately corrected my ("bad") speech, by precisely mentioning the literal meaning of tlateenco, as depicted in (8.1.), even when as a matter of fact this is a pretty much lexicalized expression for "bathroom", at least in more Hispanized Nahuatl communities, such as Xalitla.(6)

Still another example stemming from this same persons (purist) ideology is provided by his reluctance to accept the influence of Spanish on Nahuatl structure, not even as (possible) convergent forms. Consider:

8.2 tla-kwaa-n

ob-eat-pl

"They eat" (in conservative varieties we encounter tlakwaa-h)

Compare with the Spanish equivalent:

8.3 com-e-n

eat-3p-pl

"They eat"

It is unlikely that Nahuatl, a language that has been in intensive contact with Spanish for more than five centuries, has not develop strategies to cope with its pressures, which often times are threatening its very existence (cf. Flores Farfán 1992, etc.). Yet, as suggested, purism is present in anthropology and linguistics, which tend to treat contact phenomena, at best, as a parenthetic reality, if not as plainly "corrupted" forms of the language.

Other instances of extreme purism manifests themselves in the discourse of leading Nahua intellectuals, who have managed to emblematically present themselves as the authentic speakers of the language, at least those linked to the official realm. Paradoxically enough, Nahua intellectuals, since at least covertly claiming an

inexistent unity of the Nahuatl language, enact a type of written Nahuatl that include tokens stemming from divergent, even contradictory sources. These include chunks of written as well as oral discourse, encompassing fairly and at times extremely distant social and dialectal varieties (e.g. CN and Huastec Nahuatl), which as an overall effect produce an idiolectal, highly unintelligible variety, tainted with artificiality and of course absolute lack of comprehensibility for the lay man. Several such examples appear in the Nahuatl translation of the Mexican Constitution. The translation of the title itself is already telling of extreme idiosyncratic, purist biases which nurture Nahuatl intellectuals Nahuatl (idiosyncratic) competence:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|-----|-----------------|-------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----|------------------------|-------------|
| Tlen | in | tech | poui | altepe | mej | iuan | maseual | china | ko | mej tlen el | tok ipan |
| Rel | 3pl | loc | count | town | pl | and | people | seed (?) | loc | pl rel raise (?) | prog loc |
| What | in | contact them | to | the towns | and | the people that | are raising (?) | on | | | |
| tlajtol | tla | nauatili | tlen | motskitok mexko | | euanij tla | nauatiloyan | | | | |
| word | obj | order | rel | (?) prog (?) | Mexico | obj | order-imp-loc | | | | |

This is supposed to be the translation of Spanish: Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indigenas en la Constitucion Politica de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, "The rights of the people and indigenous communities in the constitution of the United States of Mexico".

Apart from few academics as the author of this paper, it is most likely that very few people actually read this text, not to speak of being able to understanding it. Once again, unintelligibility as an effect of extreme purist attitudes linked to mystified presentations of a presumed authentic language is ironically subordinated to the dominant language, as with most of the texts produced in the context of Mexican official materials for indigenous people education (cf. Flores Farfán forthcoming). This becomes clear considering that the text from which (9) stems is a translation of terms absolutely alien to the Nahua lay man, a fact that becomes crystal clear taking into account the inclusion of an appendix which "glosses" a number of terms utilized along the text. Some examples from this same source follow:

10. tlajtol-tek-pan-tli 11. asi-ti-listli
word-work-loc-ab to arrive-lig-nom
"Glossary" "Arrival", presumably "Objective"

Even if there is a well established, fully integrated loan word in most Nahuatl dialects to designate a foreigner, *kixtiaano* (or even *kixtioono*), in this text the CN form is preferred:

12. Chontal tlakatl
Chontal man
"Foreigner"

Another such Nahua intellectual provides a similar illustration of Nahuatl purism linked to the use of CN forms, no longer in use at the community level:

12a. cachopi tlahtoli
Spanish word
"The Spanish language" (Hernández 2002: 141)

This lexical item is chosen instead of the most common form *Castia*, derived from Spanish *Castilla*, "Castilian", a fully integrated loanword in most Nahuatl dialects, which interestingly enough is opposed to Mexicano "The Nahuatl language", the term most speakers utilize to designate their mother tongue.

As suggested elsewhere, purist reflexivity is mainly linked to the lexicon, as confirmed by (12a) in which ironically what is presented as an authentic Nahuatl form replicates, typologically speaking, a more Spanish (analytical) structure; simply put, what in conservative Nahuatl varieties, such as CN, would be treated as one single word in (12a) is presented as two words. Moreover, *cachopi* is a double loan, derived from Nahuatl *cactzopini*, "to kick with shoes", a description of the treatment that Spaniard invaders infringed indigenous people, from which the Mexican Spanish form *Gachupín* "Spaniard", is derived. Additional evidence to support the idea that purism is mostly limited to the lexicon is attested by the influence of Spanish at the morphological and syntactic levels, present even in extreme purist manifestations such as the discourse of similar individuals. A couple of more examples will suffice to demonstrate this point:

12b. mitz ilnamiqui
2obj remember
"They remember you" (Hernández 2002: 50)

Morphologically speaking, *mitz-* "to you", is not an independent morpheme, but rather a bound morpheme. The use in (12b) is calqued from Spanish *a ti* "to you", in which language it is in deed syntactically expressed, and can even be pragmatically treated as an independent form, just as when one replies to the courtesy form *gracias*, "Thanks".

Another illustration of the unmonitored influence of Spanish in purists discourse is provided by the use of optative forms to express indicative constructions, such as the *maa* particle, which in (12c) is treated as a relative particle, replicating Spanish que:

12c. amo qui-nequi-aya ma-mo-chicahua-li-can ma-xochi-ohua-can
neg3-ob-want-imp ex-ref-strong-apl-pl ex-flower-ver-pl
"Did not wanted to strenghten them, that they would flourish"

Thus limited to the lexicon, the preference for CN words is an extremely common resource of Nahuatl purism. In these same sources we find a number of such cases, as a CN relational word:

13. inik
"For"

Or the word for "time", *cahuitl*, which together with most lexical items for calendric or other systems of measurement have been substituted by Spanish forms, as we will see while discussing the use of numerals below.

As suggested, all these CN lexicon is not attested in current modern Nahuatl varieties, in which prepositions have been massively borrowed from Spanish, reaching the point in which, typologically speaking, highly Hispanized Nahuatl varieties have become closer to Spanish, becoming a more prepositional (analytical) than postpositional (polysynthetic) language (cf. Flores Farfán e.g. 1999, 2004).

All in all, not one single instance of nativization can be found in this text, even when in practice morphophonemic nativization is an outstanding resource in language maintenance and recreation at the community level, conceived as a productive strategy for the survival of endangered languages, as illustrated by bilingual doublets in the Balsas region and elsewhere. As an example recall the case of *kixtiaano* "foreigner" provided above, which is opposed to *kristiaano*, "one of us, person" (cf. Flores Farfán 2003a).

Even when such Nahua intellectuals would probably claim to speak one single Nahuatl language, representing the extreme opposite

ideology from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), which exacerbate the slightest differences, conceptualizations about Nahuatl and its nature linked to such politically motivated idiosyncratic presentations of the self ironically blur and obnubilate fine Nahuatl differences; these encompass socio-dialectal layers, as well as the difference between written and spoken discourse. This state of affairs tends to reproduce an individual code, as if it was a "private" language, which, together with its written nature, warrant the inaccessibility of the literature produced; perpetuating a power arrangement in which the Nahuatl intellectual defines what counts as Nahuatl (or not) on an extremely subjective basis, effectively preventing the accessibility of the written form to a common Nahuatl speaker - thus perpetuating his dominant position. As suggested, ideologically, the outstanding source which similar speakers recast is CN, as the ultimate legitimate corpus to resort to in order to provide "purity" to the code. Ironically, CN is an extinct language.

Thus purism and linguistic eclecticism is a way of exerting control on e.g. what counts (or not) as an lexical item of the language. To give another striking example, the CN term *toltecatl*, in historical times a representative of the high elite who nurtured so called "Aztec" civilization, no longer in use at the community level, was on one occasion used by one of these intellectuals to describe an "artist", while (semi) speaking (Huastec) Nahuatl in an modern Nahuatl interaction between speakers of different varieties of Nahuatl. Yet another outstanding example of a most extreme purist discourse is found in the speech and writings of self asserted "chroniclers" or "poets", or other cultural brokers who constitute part of the illustrated elite which in Mexico and other Latin American countries nurture indigenous official educational spheres. As we will see in the section devoted to numerals, a favorite quiz of purists concerns, such individuals ultimately resort to a counting system not longer in use. Or even create new words for toponyms which are of course attributed to a Nahuatl origin, such as rendering Atlantis or America as Nahuatl names (cf. Flores Farfán 2003a).

Even when as a matter of fact purism is actually a common resource of language planning world wide, specifically for the stabilization of a standard language, in the Nahua context the opportunistic manipulation of such linguistic capital is limited to individual maneuvers linked to the emergence of cultural caciques, a type of cultural brokers, who in general serve the purposes of mediatization and control of Mexican states policies towards indigenous population, with a very limited if any positive effect on the "real" stabilization and promotion of for instance a written form of the language. Purism is in deed a favorite

expression of the power linked to the presumed knowledge of the language, which in the case of the Nahuatl example convey a series of complex paradoxes that ultimately favor language shift. Let me provide some more relevant linguistic instances of Nahuatl purist ideologies not examined elsewhere (cf. Flores Farfán 2003a). For this purpose, I will turn to one of the most common targets of purist ideologies, numerals, a topic that deserves special attention.

3. Language ideologies as manifested in the use of numerals - Basic facts

Historically Mesoamerican languages distinguished themselves from Indo-European languages, and specifically from Spanish, in a number of ways, including typological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic traits. One outstanding difference in function and form is exemplified by the twentieth base numeral system characteristic of Mesoamerican languages, including languages of very different linguistic families or linguistic genetic affiliation such as the Maya or the Otomanguean. Thus historically the 20th base system is considered a Mesoamerican trait. In other words, the basic unit for counting in Mesoamerica were multiples of 20, as documented for early colonial times in e.g. Molina's *Vocabulario de la Lengua Mexicana* in the case of Nahuatl. We even find a pictographic representation for 20 (pantli, identified with a sort of "flag") and other numerals in old 16th century Nahuatl sources. In theory the Nahuatl numeral system originated in or at least was adapted from the Maya, which had the most developed and sophisticated system of Mesoamerica and beyond. As a background for an understanding of what is meant by 20th base Nahuatl system, consider the way the prehispanic system worked:

| | | | |
|----------|---------|--------------|---------|
| 14. Ce | "one" | (7)chicuace | "six" |
| ome | "two" | chicome | "seven" |
| yeyi | "three" | chicueyi | "eight" |
| nahui | "four" | chicnahui | "nine" |
| macuilli | "five" | (8)matlactli | "ten" |

Then the count continues using the conjunction (i)huan, commonly reduced to an "and", plus the same series of numbers, as in matlactli ihuan ce, 11, etc., with a separate word for fifteen, caxtollī. Thus caxtollī an ce 16, etc., until we reach 20, the basic unit, which is indicated by pohualli, literally "count" (related to CN qui-pohua, "to count"). Thus cem-poalli, lit. "one count", 20, cempoalli an ce, "twenty one", etc., etc.

Thus the prehispanic system is based on multiples of twenty, as illustrated in (15).

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 15. cem-poalli ihuan matlactli | "thirty" |
| om-poalli | "fourty" |
| ompoalli ihuan matlactli, | "fifty" |
| yeyi-poalli | "sixty" |
| yeyi-poalli ihuan matlactli | "seventy" |
| nah-poalli | "eighty" |
| nah-poalli ihuan matlactli | "ninety" |
| macuil-poalli | "one hundred" |
| matlac-poalli | "two hundred" |
| caxtol-poalli | "three hundred" |
| centzontli | "four hundred" (separate form) |
| centzontli ihuan macuilpoalli | "five hundred" |

A detailed investigation should be developed to establish when and where the use of the Nahuatl (and other) numeral systems finally faded away and were displaced by the Spanish 10th base system. Yet we can at least pinpoint to two different types of reasons favoring the 20th base numeral oblivion. The first and probably the most powerful one is the urge and consequent pressure of the colonial invaders and further on of the Hispanic Criollo nationalists to uniform the calendric and other measurement systems such as numerals to administrate, keep record and ultimately exploit indigenous peoples.

The other has to do with the numeral linguistic structure proper. From an instrumental point of view, the 20th base system, as compared to the 10th base one, turns out to be less difficult; that is to say, appealing to the principle of linguistic economy the 10th based system is cognitively simpler. Moreover, probably the 20th base system allowed a range of variability in counting, while the 10th base system does not. For example, differences in sizes of different hands while counting five (cf. the origin of macuilli in 14) in the market probably allowed for differences in the amounts actually exchanged, among other measurements.

In any case, we can be sure that the final disappearance of the 20th system was definite at the beginning of the 19th century, when the generalization of the capitalist market required a standard uniform system of measurements and weights, linked to the emergence of the Mexican national state, a period when significantly also a high number of indigenous languages became extinct. From such a wider perspective, the obsolescence of the 20th base system is linked to the

diglossic distribution and ideologies of indigenous languages in general with regard to Spanish, in deed one of the subsystems that has collapsed in most (all?) indigenous languages, regardless of those situations in which we witness cases of diglossic reversals, or at least partial diglossic reversals, such as the case of BN (cf. Flores Farfán e.g. 2001). In other words, even in regions in which indigenous languages and cultures present high levels of language loyalty and retention, the need to superimpose the capitalist market has produced the displacement of the indigenous numerals and other measuring systems. A number of investigations and sources confirm this. For instance, in the missionary work done by the SIL, such as the new testament translation, in a number of passages we encounter a couple of numerals in the old Nahua system, with a full explanation, as if it was sought to reintroduce the 20th base system:

(16) "Sempoajli quitosnequi veinte, niman sempoajli huan nahui quitosnequi venticuatro" (ILV 1987: 21, note 8) "Seempoahli means 20, thus seempoahli ihuan nawí means twenty four"

(17) "yepojli quitosnequi sesenta, niman yepojli huan nahui quitosnequi sesenta y cuatro" (ILV 1987: 858, note 1) "yepoahli means 60, thus yepoahli huan nahui means 64"

Another example is found in the already analyzed Nahuatl translation of the Mexican constitution, in which most numerals, even if as a whole are highly monitored in a purist direction, present Spanish forms - except for cardinal numbers, which even so do not go beyond 5 (e.g. achtoui, "first" ILV 1987:25). In page 27 we find:

18. ACHTOUI TLANAUATILI "first article"
OMPA TLANAUATILI "second article"
EXPA TLANAUATILI "third article"
NAJPA TLANAUATILI "fourth article"

This is coherent with the Balsas region and elsewhere where Nahuatl is spoken. In every day usage communities count up to five in Nahuatl, even if we can still find people that when questioned know up to ten, and even the isolated form for fifteen, kaxtohli. We can also find similar remnants of the indigenous system in fixed expressions such as amaan chikweyi "in eight days" or amaan kaxtohli "in fifteen days", forms used to for example establish appointments, as in:

19. timotaaske amaan chikweyi, tak?
"We'll meet in fifteen days, OK?"

Or only in very marginal lexicon as:

19a. seempoalxoochitl

"marigold", Sp. flor de muertos, lit. "the flower of the death".

In contemporary Nahua communities, for the lay man the knowledge of Nahua numerals is conceived as proof of one's competence in a sort of mythical, authentic, legitimo "real" Mexicano, as one of the proofs of the purity of the language and thus of the authenticity of a speaker. Such targets of purist quizzing are linked to highly mystified identities, often strongly manipulated as power differentials, as ideological ways of ranking people in society. Thus the use of numerals constitutes a favorite purist shibboleth, utilized as a burden of proof of speaker's authenticity, ideologically associated to what is conceived as a real, true, Nahuatl speaker, reminding the linguist's idealized speaker, implicitly denying and of course condemning the contact nature of the language. This speaker in practice does not exist, in fact BN speakers speak:

20. to-indioma

2popl-Indian-Tongue

"Our Indian tongue"

This is a bilingual play of words which constitutes a standard form in conversational practice to designate a speaker of the Nahuatl language in BN communities. It is constructed by identifying Sp. words Indio "Indian" and Idioma "tongue" (cf. Flores Farfán 1999).

Also consider Malinche region of Puebla and Tlaxcala, where we find ticneneloh, ticmorrevolverohua, "we mix", "we blend" (cf. Hill & Hill 1986). Even when such ideologies can be turned around, and for example Mexicano become the legítimo language against Spanish, the ideology of the Cuatrero, "mixer", and the less common Cuaravés, still persist and are used to refer to contact varieties of Mexicano and Spanish, as opposed to Mexicano de Iksan, "The Mexicano of the past". Cuaravés is derived from Spanish Cuatro "four, and "al revés "Up side down, the other way around, flipped over". In Mexican Spanish cuatro comprises an idiom that means "a difficult to solve problem, a pun". Cuatrero also stems from cuatro plus the agentive Spanish form -ero, roughly translated as "one who makes cuatros". It also means "outlaws", specifically "cattle thief". Cuatrerros are beyond control, such as the unconscious transfers between Mexicano and Spanish (cf Flores Farfán 1999).

To illustrate how numerals operate as favorite lexical items of purist quizzing, let me refer to one occasion that I presented myself in Nahuatl at the community of Tuliman, Guerrero. Strictly speaking this community is slightly off the Balsas region. Dialectologically it shares certain CN isoglosses such as the use of the free negation *amo* instead of BN *ka*, "no". In that opportunity, a craftsman that produces pottery there, such as *molcajetes* "grinding mortars to prepare chili sauces" to sell in neighboring communities and markets, invited us to visit an elder who, according to him, really spoke Nahuatl. After a few courtesy exchanges, the elder, who turned out to be around 80 years old and almost blind, and who recently passed away, challenged my knowledge of the language by directly asking for the word for 80. After replying CN *nahpohualli*, I was immediately considered a knowledgeable person. Recently, in the same community, we met another lady who took us to his father. She does not speak the language actively that much, as most adult speakers in Tuliman and similar communities (not to speak of children, who are monolingual in Spanish).(9)

When we arrived at her place, and after breaking the ice with her father and other family members, the father, an elder man of about 80 years old who cannot work any more, so he is basically laying down on his hammock most part of the day, ask us if we wanted to learn more Nahuatl. Again, one of the things he immediately offered was to teach us how to count in Nahuatl. The irony was that he counted as follows:

21. *See, ome, yeyi, nawi, makwihli, chikwasee, chikome, chikweyi, chiknawi, matlaktli*
"One ... ten".

Then he went on with *matlaktli wan see*, 11, up to 14, and then, for the first time indexed the obsolescence of his numeral usage by saying:

22. *matlaktli waan makwihli*
"ten plus five"

In other words, notice that this speaker in his spontaneous demonstration of his "real" knowledge of the numeral system not even used the word for fifteen, *kaxtohli*, which to a certain extend is still used in some communities where Nahuatl is still a viable language. Then he went on until 19. When he reached 20, he said:

23. *matlaktli waan matlaktli*
ten com ten

"Ten plus ten; i.e. twenty"

This was provided instead of CN cempohualli, lit. "one count; i.e., twenty".

This fact can be viewed as an innovation with regard to the old Nahua system. Simplification, linked to the obsolescent status of such usage, basically linked to the 10th base Spanish system, is also at stake here. Yet, paradoxically, this was produced as legitimo "real" Mexicano. On several other occasions that the researcher manifested an interest in learning Nahuatl many such purist examples occurred. For example, on another occasion, the investigator was provided with (24), as an indirect proof of the status of the speaker as a "real" Nahuatl speaker:

24.ome matlaktli waan see
two ten com one
"Two tens plus one; i.e. twenty one"

This was provided instead of CN ompohualli ihuan ce, lit. "two twenties and one, i.e., twenty one".

However recurrent, the use of Nahuatl numerals as a way of asserting a presentation of the self associated to a real, authentic speaker of the language, is still just one manifestation of Nahuatl purist ideologies which nurture language shift or what I have called negative purism, against a much more positive side of the phenomenon or positive purism, which in fact also exists (cf. Flores Farfán 2003a). Yet sticking to an obsolescent subsystem of the language to prove ones capacity in the language can become fairly paralyzing in terms of linguistic expressability (just as with other forms of negative purism) and become a type of boomerang regarding the integrity and viability of the language. In turn, this has a strong impact on the linguistic consciousness of the community, producing extremely negative linguistic ideologies that reproduce linguistic insecurity and self linguistic hatred, thus favoring language shift. Some speakers have stigmatized the lack of the Nahua numeral system so much that it is equated with other ideological value judgements, such as "Nahuatl has no grammar, it is a dialect, has no written form". Thus the stigmas linked to inferiority syndromes associated to extremely destroying language ideologies materialize in numeral shibboleths or other purist self presented proofs of the proficiency of the language.

Nahuas ideological purist conceptualizations of the Nahuatl language enables an understanding of the critical points faced by both intellectuals and lay Nahuatl speakers (Flores Farfán 2003a).

Differences in ideological use of purist shibboleths of course exist, and one can find a wide range of variability linked to different favorite purist topics, of course not only attached to numerals associated to stigmatization or vitality of indigenous languages in terms of language variations.

As we have seen, purism as a linguistic ideology is basically linked to the lexicon and to a certain extent to the phonology of the language, although the later might be linked to another type of (secondary) diglossic reflexivity, one that is not necessarily negatively conceived, and that would favor diglossic reversals linguistically by means of e.g. borrowings, nativization, resemantization or lexical coinage, amplifying the linguistic repertoire of the community (for examples of positive purism and other examples linked to the manifestation of purism in different contexts, including linguistic elicitation, cf. Flores Farfán 2003a). This is even the case with numerals, which on specific occasions are used to conceal the price of specific products while negotiating with non-Nahuatl speakers, highlighting the potential of Nahuatl as a secret (instrumental) language. A project that would pursue to modify and oppose negative ideologies favoring language shift would for instance reintroduce the Nahua numeral system in e.g. schools to prove not only that Nahuatl does have the possibility of expressing this and other things, but face the challenge of creating contexts in which these re-acquired forms could be productively used on an everyday basis (cf. Flores Farfán 2001, 2004a, forthcoming).

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-----|-------------|------|---------------------|
| Ab | Absolutive | Nom | Nominalizer |
| Apl | Applicative | P | Person |
| Com | Comitative | Pl | Plural |
| Ex | Exhortative | Po | Possessive |
| Fut | Future | Prog | Progressive |
| Imp | Imperative | Ref | Reflexive |
| Lig | Ligature | Rel | Relational Particle |
| Loc | Locative | Sg | Singular |
| Neg | Negation | Ver | Verbalizer |

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(1) For a discussion of the meaning of CN from a sociolinguistic perspective cf. Flores Farfán (forthcoming).

(2) [h] represents the phoneme /k/, since no -kksequences are phonologically allowed. For a number of instances of the dropping process linked to verbal interaction cf. Flores Farfán (1992, 2004).

(3) The orthography utilized for modern Nahuatl differs from the classical (normalized) orthography for a number of reasons, including phonemic representation of dialectological differences (for CN orthography cf. e.g. Andrews 1975; for a detailed explanation of the orthography devised for modern Nahuatl cf. Flores Farfán 1992, 1999, etc.)

(4) Mostly used as a tag word at the end of an utterance.

(5) Until recently there were no bathrooms in Nahuas households, so people urinate or defecate in the open, as precisely the outskirts of the villages.

(6) For a full description of the (socio) linguistic characteristics of Hispanized versus conservative Nahuatl communities cf. Flores Farfán (1999, etc.).

(7) In terms of Nahuatl contact linguistics, notice that this very first numeral has long ago been identified with the Spanish indefinite article, un "a", as in ce tlacatl, un hombre "a man". The numeral see "one" in Nahuatl as an indefinite article, is already present in Nahuatl documents: For example, while referring to colonial Nahuatl, Lockhart (2002: 213), states: "Ce. One. Also used much like the indefinite article in English...".

(8) From ma, hand and qui-cui, "to grab"

(9) In passing, consider that in Tuliman, as in several Nahua communities, Mexicano is reaching the tip of extinction, thus we have initiated an effort to document what is left of Nahuatl there, and maybe even to revitalize it, as we are trying to in BN and other Nahua communities (cf. e.g. Flores Farfan 2001, 2004a).

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