

## **Book Review**

Hidalgo, Margarita (ed.), *Mexican Indigenous Languages at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter (2006). Pp. xi + 382.

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This edited volume surveys the sociolinguistic situation of Mexican indigenous languages both currently and historically, examining how these languages have survived the colonial period as well as their current situation. Three chapters focus on the historical background, two on language policies, one on statistics, and four chapters provide case studies of bilingualism and bilingual education in individual languages.

The editor's prologue indicates that the book will treat the "significant events that brought the indigenous languages of Mexico to where they are today..." (p. vii) and then immediately goes on to characterize the current political climate of Mexico, which, in her view, has been shaped most deeply by such events as the student movement of 1968, the increased political democratization beginning in the mid-80's, and the Chiapas insurrection of 1994. This political climate has recently (2003) allowed for a new and highly democratic legislation with regard to indigenous languages. The editor is also author of the book's first chapter, which first briefly introduces Fishman's well-known Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale and his proposed stages in a reversal of language shift.

The first paper in the section devoted to the historical point of view is written by Claudia Parodi. It approaches the topic of indigenous Mexican languages in the colonial period from the refreshing opposite point of view of the influence undergone by Spanish through contact with these languages—in particular Nahuatl. In order to describe the

influence of the indigenous cultures on the Spaniards the author introduces the concept of 'indianization', meant to broadly encompass linguistic borrowings and bilingualism, but also the incorporation of indigenous diets, clothing, healing practices, etc. Nevertheless, the study is focused on linguistic indianization, and makes use of the works of chroniclers and historians such as Bernal Diaz del Castillo and Jerónimo de Mendieta, missionary linguists such as Alonso de Molina, and literary writers such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to document the influence of native languages on Spanish of colonial period Mexico. While some loanwords entered Spanish as early as by the time of the first encounters with New World peoples (e.g., *maíz* and *cacique* from Taino), there was a tendency to initially use semantic extensions such as *piedra* for 'grinding stone' or *gallina* for 'turkey' rather than the later borrowings—in this case *metate* and *guajolote*. Interestingly, Nahuatl similarly adopted relatively few borrowings from Spanish in the 16th century, for instance using *mazatl* 'deer' to refer to horses or *ixcatl* 'cotton' to refer to sheep. Soon, however, loanwords would begin to flow freely in both directions. In the 18th century the contact situation takes a drastic new turn with active attempts to abolish the use of Nahuatl. As a consequence, language shift became widespread, and the influence on Spanish is said by the author to now be more of a substratal nature, although it is not specified how this new type of influence manifests itself linguistically.

The next paper, by Margarita Hidalgo, looks at some of the domains in which Spanish and Nahuatl were used in the colonial period. It mainly focuses on the intellectual domains and devotes much space to illustrative cases such as, on the one hand, Bernardino de Sahagún's ethnographic works written in Nahuatl in the mid-16th century, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's poetry written in Spanish during the last half of the 17th century. The ordering of the confiscation of Sahagún's *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* in 1577 is symptomatic of an increasingly adverse attitude towards indigenous indigenous practices and languages. In 1576 the General Council of the Inquisition prohibited the use of sacred texts in indigenous languages and in 1634 the Spanish Crown issued an order to teach Spanish to indigenous people. The efforts to produce grammars and dictionaries of indigenous languages declined in the 17th

century and the use of Nahuatl in intellectual domains receded while, at the same time, Spanish was gaining grounds from Latin, becoming a language of literature and learning.

The fourth chapter, also by Hidalgo, sets out to explore the factors that have helped secure the survival of most Mexican indigenous languages. While indigenous populations declined in the wake of the conquest because of war and epidemics, there is a prolific scholarly production in and about indigenous languages throughout the 16th century witnessing the importance of these languages. Not all aspects of what happened during the ensuing centuries of the colonial period are clear, but two opposed trends can be identified: political resistance, manifested through more than fifty distinct rebellions during 1531-1761, and assimilation, manifested in the disappearance within Mexico of languages such as Lipano, Comanche, Concho, Chucona, Guasave, Opata, Tubar, Pochuteco, Chiapaneco, and others. A trend in the twentieth century is a growing indigenous population and a general maintenance of indigenous languages, but with increasing bilingualism. Rebellions also continue, the most important one being the Zapatista movement which began in 1994 and has continued to this day. Hidalgo sees this kind of resistance as a key to language maintenance.

The first of two chapters on legislation, by Dora Pellicer, Bárbara Cifuentes, and Carmen Herrera, presents a detailed discussion of the events that led to the formulation of Mexico's recent (March 2003) General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples and discusses its contents. The law elevates indigenous languages to the status of "national languages", requires that government services be available in indigenous languages, provides the right to bilingual education, encourages the promotion of indigenous languages through broadcasting and other means, and describes a new federal agency, the *Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI)*. In the following chapter, F. Daniel Althoff compares this new legislation for Mexican indigenous languages with the U.S. Native American Languages Act of 1990, which is shorter, less specific, and much more restricted in scope, essentially not providing much more than moral support. Both the Mexican and the U.S. law texts are provided in

appendices (the former in English translation). Althoff argues that the differences in legislation relate to historical differences in the treatment of indigenous peoples. In spite of acts of genocide and cultural annihilation, he writes, “the United States, in contrast to Mexico, understood that its agreements and dealings were always with sovereign nations” (p. 173), and the 562 tribal governments of the U.S. already enjoy a degree of autonomy that would allow them to formulate their own policies. In Mexico there is a greater tradition of centralized government and no such thing as indigenous “nations”. There are historical reasons for the differences which Althoff do not discuss, including the fact that elements of Mexican government were initially inherited by the Spaniards directly from the centralized Aztec government, the fact that Mexico early on became a mestizo society where indigenous and non-indigenous peoples have become increasingly difficult to distinguish, and the fact that indigenous peoples, although often forced to live in towns rather than dispersed hamlets, were not forced on to reservations. So if the two different modes of legislation are to be explained historically I would analyze the U.S. legislation as the symptom of an exclusionistic liberalism and the Mexican legislation as the symptom of a more inclusionistic tradition which, indeed, is combined with a tradition for centralized bureaucracy. The future success of *INALI* will depend very much on whether it will be able to overcome this bureaucratic hangover and instigate flexible cooperation with local communities.

A chapter by Barbara Cifuentes and José Luis Moctezuma analyzes data from the national censuses which are carried out every decade, focusing on the years 1970-2000 when the reports get sufficiently detailed. The most interesting figures discussed are those which concern growth rates, bilingualism, mobility and home use of the languages. Before commenting on the overall statistical picture that emerges let me point out some errors in the presentation.

Two charts present, respectively, the percentages of speakers of individual selected larger languages in different states and the degree of bilingualism in speakers in the different states. In both charts the states corresponding to the “ancestral territories” are—or are meant to be—in boldface. In both charts, however, there are

many numbers which should have been in boldface but are not and the other way around. Sometimes this is due to typographical negligence, but in some cases also to intended but erroneous representation of the facts. For instance, the state of Veracruz is treated as the ancestral territory (along with Oaxaca) of Mixe, Chinantec, Zapotec, and Mazatec, which it is not. More typographical negligence appears in two graphs showing the numbers of speakers of medium and small indigenous languages. Here every other language name has simply disappeared from the graphs. Errors have also crept into a table showing the growth rates for medium and small languages as well as in the author's interpretation. 'Growth rate' is defined as the difference between the numbers of speakers in 1970 and 2000 in proportion to the first of the two numbers. Thus, for instance, the increase of Totonac speakers from 124,840 to 240,034 gives a growth rate of 92.2%—the number of speakers has almost doubled. A superficial reader who has not checked how the number was calculated might be excused for interpreting the 92.2% figure as meaning that Totonac has 17.8% speakers less in 2000 than in 1970. But that the authors themselves make this mistake is inexcusable. It leads them to state that "[t]his survey shows that the four largest languages (Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotec and Mixtec) did not increase at all", when, in fact, each has become between 1.6 and 1.9 times as large. In the case of Chol there is a typo: the growth rate should be 120.8%, not 220.8%, and the wrong percentage is carried over to the commentary.

Not only do the authors make numerous greater and minor errors in presenting the data, they also fail to apply tests for correlations leading to larger generalizations. Such tests, however, are easily made and show the following patterns. While it is clear, and unsurprising, that there is more bilingualism among speakers who have emigrated from the ancestral territories, there is no correlation between mobility and bilingualism for languages as a whole. This means that the number of people who migrate is too small relative to the number of those who do not migrate to affect the overall rate of bilingualism. There is, however, a negative correlation between bilingualism and home use of languages ( $r = -.79$ ), meaning that where indigenous languages get used less at home, bilingualism increases. The growth rate of indigenous languages has been impressive. Overall the number of speakers of indigenous languages has close to

doubled over the the thirty-year period. The growth rate varies quite a lot from language to language, however, and it is not possible to predict from the number of speakers in 1970 of a given language how many there will be in 2000; but a good predictor of the growth rate is, again, the use of the languages in the home domain. Here one finds an exponential correlation ( $r = .88$ ). Bilingualism has increased for nearly all languages. The growth ranges from -0.1% to 26.8% and is on average 10.6%. There is a tendency ( $r = -.70$ ) towards a negative correlation between the amount of bilingualism present in 1970 and the subsequent growth in bilingualism, which is to say that language groups that already had a high degree of bilingualism have had a smaller growth in bilingualism than languages groups which started out with a smaller degree of bilingualism. Thus, there is a tendency for different language groups to become more evenly bilingual. In 1970 rates of bilingualism for different languages were evenly distributed between 43.8% and 95.9% and in 2000 they had a similarly even distribution of points between 52.1% and 97.0%. Thus, the number of bilinguals for all language groups in the sample discussed by the author now outnumber the number of monolinguals and this proportion will no doubt increase in the future.

These figures lead to the conclusion that the behavior of speakers in the home domain has been crucial for the general growth of speakers that most Mexican indigenous languages have enjoyed, but also that the behavior in homes has to some degree been responsible for the growing bilingualism. Thus, language policies should aim at stabilizing the already widespread situation of diglossia, where local languages are media of communication in the home domain and the national language is used for most other communication.

A chapter on 'Local language promoters and new discursive spaces: Mexicano in and out of schools in Tlaxcala' by Jacqueline H. E. Messing and Elsie Rockwell opens the section with case studies. It focuses on the area around the Malintzi volcano in the state of Tlaxcala, an area which has been studied relatively profoundly from a sociolinguistic point of view by various scholars, including Jane and Kenneth Hill, Norbert Francis, Refugio Nava Nava, and Jacqueline Messing from the 1980's to the

present. The study is descriptive and qualitative, bringing to light the multiplicity of factors that affect the situation of Mexicano (Nahuatl) in the area. It concludes that while bilingual education is far from efficient enough to reverse the ongoing language shift it does contribute positively towards changing perceptions, such that the language is no longer just seen as being restricted to the intimate sphere. Further, some of the bilingual teachers have developed into veritable language promoters, and the reversal of language shift will crucially depend on the efforts of such language promoters. Another chapter, by José Antonio Flores Farfán, also takes as its point of departure Nahuatl-speaking communities, but discusses a project which goes beyond bilingual education to seek creative ways of supporting language maintenance, the *Proyecto de Revitalización, Mantenimiento y Desarrollo Lingüístico y Cultural*. While the chapter is not explicit about this, it seems to be the case that this project depends upon a variety of funding agencies and is not integrated into some federal institution. The major achievements of the project are the organization of workshops and the production of videos and books in (Balsas) Nahuatl which draw upon traditional narrative genres. Beautifully illustrated books with riddles in Classical Nahuatl have been published and have enjoyed a wide circulation both within Nahuatl communities and beyond.

A chapter by Barbara Pfeiler and Lenka Zámešková contrasts two different bilingual education programs that have been applied in the Yucatec Maya region, both of which were instigated in 1996: the program for Indigenous Intercultural Development under the auspices of the *Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo (CONAFE)* and the program for Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Education of the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI)*. The approach of the *CONAFE* program was studied through fieldwork and is recommended by the authors as a possible strategy for the maintenance of Yucatec Maya. It is by far the smaller program of the two, and much more resource-intensive in terms of the number of instructors per children. Teachers are adapted to local situations since they live in the communities and they receive pedagogical training by participating in training courses and workshops. The children are not expected to learn to speak or write in Spanish immediately; the work they do relates to themes that are meaningful to them; and ample teaching materials in both

Maya and Spanish are available. Unfortunately, the chapter is not clear about why this program is not more widespread—only 749 children attended the *CONAFE*-run schools in 2003—, nor does it discuss the political, economic and other circumstances which would be required for this interesting program to develop and extend further.

The last case study, by Dora Pellicer, gives a characterization of the Mazahua sociolinguistic situation and presents discourse fragments about attitudes towards and uses of the language. While this Oto-Manguan language is among Mexico's larger indigenous languages, it has had a low growth rate; bilingualism is at 94.5%; and in terms of scholarship the language is and has been rather neglected. While the language is mostly spoken by older people it is still of importance in contexts such as community work, religious and family feasts, and the market place. Nevertheless, the author is not optimistic about the future of the language.

In the final chapter the editor briefly outlines half a millenium of changing language policies in Mexico, conveniently summarized in a chronologically ordered chart, and makes the general recommendation that the future language policy "should focus on attempts to recover the indigenous heritage and this expressed intention of reversing language shift and with specific goals of (re)allocation of sufficient resources to the most damaged languages" (p. 368).

Even though the book does contain some typos and stylistic slips<sup>1</sup> it generally reads well. The selection of contributions is appropriate: they all fit well into the whole and each contributes with an important aspect to the general theme. Taken together, the chapters on Mexican language policies past and present constitute the central and most significant contribution. These chapters provide much information which is not otherwise easily accessible. Altogether the book will appeal to students of the sociology of language, activists and other interested in language maintenance, as well as scholars

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., "...does mother earth flaunts..." (p. 44); "in retrospective" (p. 53); "monies" (p. 62); "urbane" (for "urban", said of subcomandante Marcos (p. 114); "Tzoltitl" (for Tzotzil, twice p. 227); "...the uses Mexicano..." (p. 249); "...the conglomerate of states that conforms the Yucatan Peninsula..." (p. 303); "an intercultural curricula" (p. 321); "Chocktaw" (p. 377).

with a regional focus on Mexico and adjacent areas. A book providing insights into the current situation of the indigenous languages of Mexico is welcome since this country is not only one of the linguistically most diverse countries of the Americas but probably also one of the countries of this area which will be most successful in retaining its diversity in the future.

Submitted: 06/07/08