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Language Death and Relexification in Tlaxcalan Nahuatl

Much of the descriptive foundation of modern linguistics is based on studies of dying languages, particularly in the indigenous languages of the New World.[1] Dying languages, however, have been seen until recently as providing the linguist with more nuisance than opportunity. The sense of urgency, the difficulty of finding "good speakers", the impossibility of adequate variation studies, all plague the linguist. In the last few years, however, dying languages have been found to offer many opportunities, particularly in the study of universals in language change and the relationship of linguistic structure to the functions of language. Descriptive studies by Dressler (1972), Dressler and Leodolter (1973), Dorian (1973), Hill (1973; ms.) illustrate what the study of dying languages can reveal when the situation is imaginatively exploited. Work by Hymes (e.g., 1961, 1972), Bailey (e.g., 1973) and other on language function and language change provides a set of hypotheses which can be tested in the study of dying languages. Innovations in field method, particularly the emphasis on quantitative method and collection in natural context suggested in the work of Labov (e.g., 1966, 1973) provide new opportunities for scholars working on dying languages.

In order to test some of these methods and hypotheses, we are working in Nahuatl-speaking communities in Central Mexico. Nahuatl (known to most of its speakers as "Mexicano", and as "Aztec" to many linguists) has nearly a million speakers, distributed in hundreds of communities, ranging from isolated semi-speakers in Mexico City itself to nearly monolingual Nahuatl towns in remote areas. Thus quantitative study and study of diversity of functional range are both possible. Written records in Nahuatl date to the sixteenth century, making possible comparison of today's peasant language with the language of the late Aztec empire and the early conquest period, when Nahuatl was used

in the administration of the Spanish empire in Mexico (Heath 1972). We are working in the valley of Tlaxcala, an area which may have as many as 25.000 speakers (Nutini, personal communication). In this area are found Nahuatl towns in every stage of linguistic and cultural assimilation to the dominant Spanish-speaking "mestizo" culture of Mexico. We are working informally with a few speakers, using traditional descriptive linguistic methods, but the major part of our study consists of the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of speakers in many communities. Questionnaires are administrated by a speaker of Nahuatl, and the results are tape-recorded.[2] In the interview the subject is requested to tell briefly about his life, to tell about some situation in which he was in great danger,[3] to tell a traditional story, to translate from Spanish words and sentences designed to elicit phonological and grammatical data, to give Nahuatl equivalents for a 100-word lexicostatistic list,[4] and to answer in Nahuatl some questions on language attitudes. Thus far, we have interviewed speakers in six communities: San Miguel Canoa (actually in the state of Puebla, but part of Tlaxcala culturally and linguistically), San Pablo del Monte, Acuamanala, San Jerónimo Zacualpan, Tepatlaxco, and Cuahutenco. Our most striking result at this early stage of the work is our identification of massive relexification from Spanish of the Nahuatl spoken in this area. This relexification is of extraordinary salience in the attitudes of the people themselves toward their language, and is probably contributing to the decline of its use. Our results are also strikingly at variance with previous results on hispanisms in Tlaxcalan Nahuatl reported by Bright and Thiel (1965). We believe that the difference is due to the more natural context in which our data were elicited.

Before discussing the relexification itself, a brief background of the area and language is necessary. The major commercial centers for the area (see map in Figure 1) are the city of Puebla (600,000 inhabitants), and the double center of Tlaxcala-Santa Ana Chiauhtempan, with 10,000 and 12,400 inhabitants respectively. The town of Zacatelco, with 14,000 inhabitants, provides a third important center. Along the highway between Puebla and Tlaxcala, and in the city of Puebla itself, is one of Mexico's major industrial complexes, providing employment for many people in the Nahuatl communities. None of the towns studied is more than forty-five minutes by bus (buses run every half hour or fifteen minutes, depending on the time of day, from almost all the towns in the area regardless of size) from one of the two major centers.

Nutini and Isaac (1974) describe the Nahuatl-speaking population

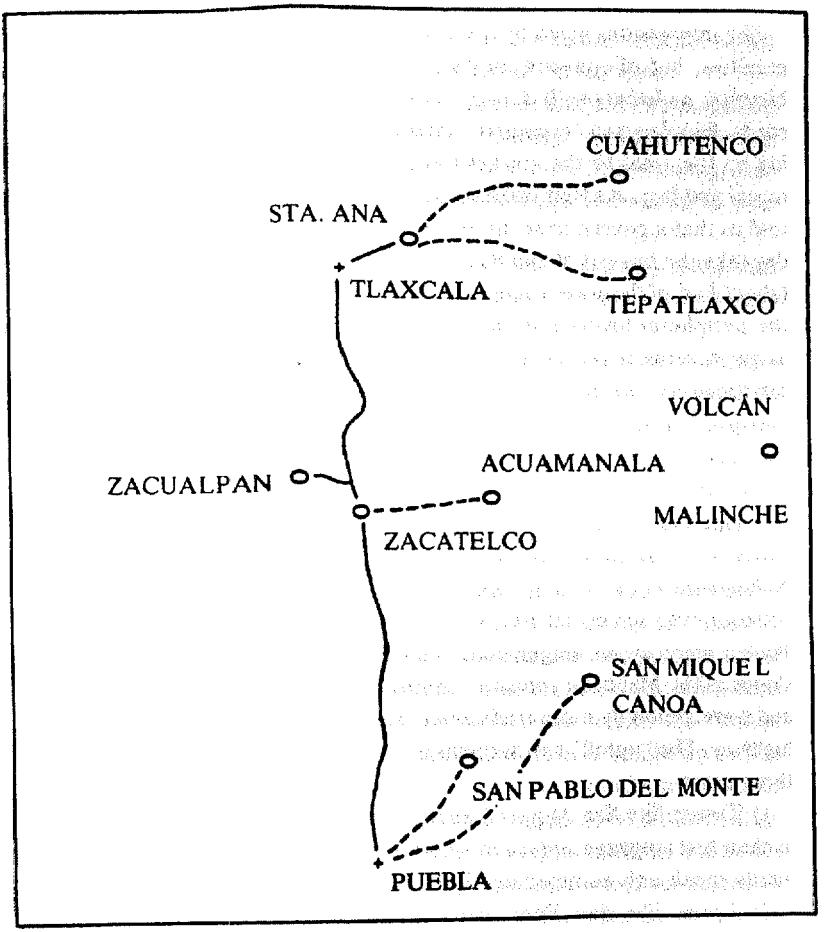

Figure 1. *Major Commercial Centers and Nahuatl towns discussed in the paper (scale approximate).*

of Tlaxcala as a "rural proletariat". Except for a few people who are weavers, nearly all men and many women migrate out of their villages at some time for work in the factories, or as tradesmen in Puebla or Mexico City. Nevertheless, almost every family own small "terrenos" on which are cultivated corn, beans, maguey, and other crops which yield 20 to 50% of family subsistence. People are heavily committed to the land; men invariably describe themselves as "campesinos" (peasants), even though they are currently working or actively seeking work in a factory.

The impressions given by the area is not one of isolated peasant communities, but of constant intensive movement. Packed buses, men on bicycles, muleteers with donkeys move constantly back and forth on the roads. People go to "el centro" (Puebla or Tlaxcala-Santa Ana, depending on the area) to the market towns in other areas, to work, to visit, to sell and buy, at a tremendous rate. The priest in San Pueblo del Monte told us that a government survey shows that at least 5,000 people every day take the bus out of San Pueblo, a community of about 20,000 people (about half of these are young children). Movement is primarily between the peripheral towns and the commercial centers. People do not visit as much between peripheral towns, and are often surprisingly vague on the location and nature of communities only a few kilometers away. However most people have relatives and friends in at least three or four nearby towns.

According to Nutini and Isaac (1974) the first major episode of language loss in the area took place between 1870 and 1920, when the valley was first industrialized. Before 1870 the area was predominantly Nahuatl-speaking, with Spanish dominant only in the cities. By 1920 the situation was somewhat like it is today. Towns to the west of Tlaxcala-Puebla highway no longer used Nahuatl. East of the highway, on the slopes of the Malinche volcano, "uphill" towns preserved more Nahuatl and were generally more traditional than "downhill" towns close to the highway. The "uphill" towns themselves can be divided now into roughly three types:

1) Towns like San Miguel Canoa, where children still learn Nahuatl as their first language and reach school with no Spanish, and where many adults speak only rudimentary Spanish.

2) Towns like San Pablo del Monte, where nearly everyone over thirty speaks the language, uses it occasionally, and may have learned Spanish as an adult, but where people under this age understand the language but refuse to speak it. School-age children often understand only a few words of Nahuatl.

3) Towns like Acuamanala, where a few older people still know the language, but seldom use it and are probably best characterized as semi-speakers. Most people under fifty neither speak nor understand Nahuatl.

The town of San Jerónimo Zacualpan, about three kilometers west of Tlaxcala-Puebla highway, is probably typical of this section of the valley. The last person remembered as a "good" speaker died four or five years ago, and even very old people now know only a few words, such as numbers up to five, "yes", "no", and the word for "pulque".

In most towns the language is clearly in its last generation of full speakers. Major factors linked with the loss of Nahuatl are:

1) Rapid population increase in Tlaxcala and resultant fragmentation of land, driving people into cities and the industrial suburbs as migrant laborers as it becomes impossible for them to survive from farming, even though they continue to farm very small holdings and return to their villages as often as possible.

2) The introduction of electricity and radios. Electricity dates back to the early 1940's in most communities; many humble cottages have high-fidelity stereo consoles, television, and radio.

3) Intensive efforts by the government to impose universal primary education. Most of our Nahuatl informants are illiterate. Heath (1972) points out that the position of the Mexican government on primary education in the indigenous languages has fluctuated, but as far as we know primary school in Tlaxcala has always been in Spanish. Many of our informants recall their terror of school, which they entered as monolingual Nahuatl speakers and left after three or four years as semi- or illiterate semi-speakers of Spanish. Most people now praise the schools as being an important agent in teaching their children "good" Spanish, and they point out that today's Spanish-speaking children are better prepared for school. Personal attitudes mentioned by our informants suggest that for young people Nahuatl has become defined as a "village thing", which a forward-looking, ambitious person would do well to abandon. For instance, one of our informants, a man of 26, understands but refuses to speak Nahuatl. He links the language with other village customs, such as service in the hierarchy of religious offices, and points out that he is not interested in such things; he sees them as economically stifling, and in any case he feels much more affinity for the customs of the city. People who are active in village life usually speak good Nahuatl. For instance the brother-in-law of the young man, about 40, is an official of the municipio (the major unit of local government in Mexico), speaks Nahuatl, and mildly criticizes his younger brother-in-law for having at his wedding a rock band which cannot sing the traditional Nahuatl song cycle appropriate to the occasion. The older man wears "campesino" work clothes, the younger man wears well-buttoned trousers and tight fitting shirts. Two brothers of our acquaintance also illustrate the importance of role-identification in language-choice. The older brother, age 60, is wealthy and has for many years been upwardly mobile in the community, and is resented by some people. He is a good Nahuatl speaker, but uses the language only occasionally. His

older children speak Nahuatl, but his younger children do not (he has eleven children, so the age span is wide). His younger brother, age 40, is poor, an alcoholic, and militantly identifies himself as an "Indio-Mexicano" (Nahuatl-speaking Indian). He lives in a very traditional style and speaks Nahuatl whenever possible.

The shift away from Nahuatl does not seem to be associated with "shame" in Tlaxcala, although outside of Tlaxcala people are sometimes very embarrassed about speaking Nahuatl. Young people freely admit that their parents speak Nahuatl, although they may tease their parents gently about their bad Spanish. The Nahuatl speakers themselves are proud of the language and consider it beautiful, even though they deplore the way it is now spoken. One of the questions on the questionnaire[5] asks if the informant ever feels ashamed to speak Nahuatl. Several people have replied somewhat as follows: "Shame? Why should I feel shame? My own mother and father, God rest their souls, spoke nothing but Nahuatl". One man, reflecting a widely-held view, replied, "After all, to whom did the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe appear? Not to some gringo, not to some millionaire, but to a Mexicano-speaking Indian like ourselves". Many people do mention that they are occasionally ashamed of their Spanish, however. Nutini (1968) suggests that this pride in "Indianness" in Tlaxcala dates back to the early post-conquest period, when the Tlaxcalan Indians were granted special privileges by the Spanish as a reward for their assistance in the conquest of the Aztecs.

In spite of their pride in the language, most of its speakers feel that it is in a very sad state, and that the genuine, the "legitimo Mexicano" has disappeared. They say that now the language is no longer pure, but that it is "revuelta" (topsy-turvy) and "mezclada" (mixed) with too many words from Spanish. This feeling is probably the most salient attitude about their language among speakers, and comes up early in any conversation about language attitudes.

In our first week in the field, we asked Don A., an elderly man who is a leading Tlaxcalan intellectual and a student of classical Nahuatl, how he would distinguish "good" from "bad" speakers. Don A. observed that there are not any good speakers any more, because everyone's speech is full of "hibridos". He said, "for instance in Contla you hear people say things like *nin tilmatl nicyevaroa*, "I'm carrying this blanket". This sentence is objectionable because it uses the Spanish root *llevar* "carry" instead of Nahuatl *cuica*. Don A. himself is very proud of the ingenious neologisms which he has developed for modern vocabulary

items, using classical Nahuatl roots. He cited as an example *tepiton tlaxtlahuil* "minimum salary".

On our first visit to Acuamanala Don P., who seldom speaks Nahuatl, was suspicious of our assistant and tested his Nahuatl by asking him to translate into Nahuatl items like "ferrocarril" (railroad) and "camion" (truck). He was distressed when the Spanish forms, which are the common usage, were offered instead of elaborate Nahuatl neologisms like *tepotzhuihuilana* "iron pulling".[6] We were surprised by this widespread belief that Tlaxcalan Nahuatl is being overrun by hispanisms, as in 1965 Bright and Thiel reported an extraordinarily low percentage of hispanisms in the speech of a middle-aged man from San Pedro Tlalcuapan del Bravo, a town uphill from Tlaxcala in the same area in which we are studying. Bright and Thiel's informant produced only 57 hispanisms in hundreds of hours of elicitation. Based on the low percentage of hispanisms in the speech of this man, Bright and Thiel drew far-reaching conclusions about the cultural history of Tlaxcala, suggesting an early period of intense and friendly contact with the Spanish during which a good deal of linguistic interchange took place, and a latter period of hostility in which strikingly few Spanish loans were assimilated, particularly in comparison with the Nahuatl of Mecayapan, Vera Cruz, described by Law as heavily hispanicized (Law 1961).

In collection of data through the questionnaires and requests for traditional texts, we found that our informants are absolutely right, and Bright and Thiel wrong, about the Mischsprache impression given by Tlaxcalan Nahuatl when spoken in its natural habitat. We found massive use of Spanish loan words in normal speech, regardless of the frequency of use of Nahuatl in the community, regardless of the age or sex of the informant. We have the impression that men use more hispanisms than women, that more fluent speakers use more hispanisms than less fluent speakers, and that extemporaneous conversation produces more hispanisms than does story-telling, but so far our data base is too small to quantify these suspicions. The material from which our data come are all fairly "natural" speech, tape recorded, elicited by another speaker of Nahuatl. Often other speakers of Nahuatl were present besides our assistant. Informants appeared relaxed and not particularly affected by our presence; other non-Nahuatl speakers, such as children, were often nearby. In conversations which we overheard in San Miguel Canoa (the only community in our survey in which most people speak Nahuatl most of the time), the frequency of hispanisms was just as high as in those which we actually recorded.

Hispanisms in normal daily usage in Tlaxcalan Nahuatl run as high as forty percent of words used in running speech. They range from Spanish hesitation forms such as "este" and "a ver" through syntactic elements such as "entonces" (then), and "hasta" (until) (some of these appear to be very old, appearing as early as the 17th century in legal documents [Karttunen and Lockhard, ms.]) to noun and verb roots. Bright and Thiel 1965 reported that Spanish root nouns always had Nahuatl plurals; we find considerable variation on this point even in the usage of single speakers. We did find, as they reported, that Spanish word roots are conjugated in the Nahuatl verb class ending in *-oa*, although they also appear occasionally with *-huilia*, a transitivizer.[7]

Below are given examples of hispanisms collected from a number of speakers in several communities, so that the reader can appreciate the wealth, diversity, and density of examples. It should be noted that a number of the forms given for each speaker appear more than once in a text. Where a root appears in more than one inflected form, we have given only one form. Connectives and hesitation forms of course may appear dozens of times in each sample.

All informants exhibit many instances of the following hispanisms, which are thus not listed separately for each informant: *pues* "well"; *entonces* "then"; *pero* "but"; *para que* "so that"; *porque* "because"; *este* "hesitation form"; *bueno* "o.k." (as a sentence).

Case 1: A.N., boy, age 13. A story about ten minutes long.

cuento "story"; *parejo* "couple"; *apiesta* "bet"; *mizahtzin* "mass" (Sp. *misa*, Na.*-tzin*, respect or diminutive suffix); *compadre* "cofather"; *cristianohtin* "people" (Sp. *cristiano*, Na. *-tin* plural); *pueblo* "town"; *rey* "king"; *princesa* "princess"; *dólor* "pain" (Sp. *dolor*); *pico* "pick"; *pala* "stick"; *cohetes* "rockets"; *mecha* "fuse"; *reina* "queen"; *palácio* "palace"; *soldadostin* "soldiers" (Sp. *soldados*, Na. *-tin*); *doctor* "doctor" (Sp. *doctor*); *sapohtin* "toads" (Sp. *sapo*, Na. *-tin*); *barcero* "brazier"; *caldo de pio* "chicken soup" (Sp. *pio*, "peeping of chicks"); *pipiotzin* "chickens" (Sp. *po*); *papa* "father"; *mesa* "table"; *siya* "chair"; *carreta* "wagon"; *tomin* "money" (Sp. *tomin*, a silver coin); *rico* "rich man"; *compasion* "compassion"; *sombrero* "hat"; *l'ultimo* "the last" (Sp. *el ultimo*).

quifusilaroa "he shoots him" (Sp. *fusilar*); *xicrisistero* "resist it!" (Sp. *resistir*); *niquisalvaroti* "I am going to save them" (Sp. *salvar*); *quinfaltaroa* "they lack" (Sp. *faltar*); *ticbombiarozqueh* "we are going to blow it up" (Sp. *bombear*); *yoquinvitarohqueh* "they invited them"

(Sp. *invitar*); *niquinmandaroa* "he sends them" (Sp. *mandar*); *ospre-pararoqueh* "they prepared it" (Sp. *preparar*); *yocpaxialoltihqueh* "they went walking" (Sp. *pasear*).

Cuauhuatenco: This town is perhaps the second most conservative community in the survey. Many people in the town are weavers. These two speakers, husband and wife, claim that they speak Nahuatl to "everybody", but they observe that only about ten percent of the people in the community usually use Nahuatl in the home. Few children now learn it. The examples were called from the tape by the authors and not by a Nahuatl speaker; thus verb forms in particular, which do not stand out, are probably underrepresented. Nonetheless we have the impression that these people speak with fewer hispanisms than do most speakers.

Case 2: Doñã J., age 46. Interview of about fifteen minutes.

huérfana "orphan"; *escuela* "school"; *vez* "time"; *febrero* "February"; *tomin* "money"; *envidia* "envy"; *mal* "evil"; *feo* "ugly"; *tejédor* "weaver" (*tejedor*); *télal* "loom" (telar); *chito* "meat"; *padre* "priest"; *novicino* "my neighbor (*vecino*); *puro Mexicano* "pure Nahuatl"; *español* "Spanish"; *idioma* "language"; *mala palabra* "a speech error"; *necesário* "necessary"; *in antes* "the before".

taiharoaya "was bringing" (*traer*?); *nisufriroh* "I suffered" (*sufrir*); *techaburiroa* "it bores us" (*aburrir*); *contarlo* "to count it"; *entenderoa* "he understands" (*entender*); *padeceroa* "he suffers" (*padecer*).

tanto "as much"; *todavia* "still"; *igual* "the same".

San Pablo del Monte: This town shows its conservatism particularly in the widespread use of very traditional costume by women. The town is large and wealthy, but Nahuatl is still used occasionally by many people. This town is only half an hour from downtown Puebla.

Case 3: Don P., age 60. Text of 205 words.

religión "religion"; *ciego* "blind"; *apostol* "apostol"; *movista* "your vision"; (Na, *mo-* "your") *maestro* "master"; *cristianos* "Christians".

oquipersiguiroaya "they persecuted it" (*persiguis*; *omoconvertirohqueh* "they were converted" (*convertir*; *ticricibiroz* "you will receive" (*recibir*); *xinechperdonaro* "Pardon me" (*perdonar*); *omocuparoh* "was occupied (*ocupar*); *omobautizaroh* "was baptized" (*bautizar*).

Case 4: Don A., age 40. Four minute story.

Chivo "goat"; *hueyote* "large one" (e.g., Sp. *grandote*, Na. *huey* "big, Sp. *-ote* "augmentative"); *vicino* "neighbor" (*vecino*); *toro* "bull"; *huelita* "grandmother" (*abuelita*); *pantzin* "bread" (*pan*, Na. *-tzin*), *leche* "milk"; *favor* "favor"; *axtaltzin* "altar" (*altar*, Na. *-tzin*); *cuento* "story".

maporaroa "she was burrying" (*apurarse*)

de manera "somehow"; *nada más* "no more than"; *in tal* "somehow or other" (*el tal*).

Case 5: Dona N., age 51. Text of 114 words.

papá "Papa"; *hijo de família* "child"; *temprano de vuelta* "early on the way"; *nocoñadahhuan* "my sisters-in-law" (*cuñada* Na. *-huan* plural); *cena* "dinner".

anteriormente "before".

"ya es tarde, ya es noche, ya que uno va a hacer" "now it is late, now it is night, what is one to do?" Such a long phrase should probably be considered a language "switch". Note that the sentence is ungrammatical for "que va a hacer uno". This speaker did not learn Spanish until her twenties.

Tepatlaxco: Speakers in this community claim they have few opportunities to speak the language. No children, and few people under fifty speak the language.

Case 6: Don S., age 63. Interview of about 20 minutes. Near the end of the interview Don S. constantly switched into Spanish, observing that "la señora" was listening. This is the only case where an informant was obviously affected by our presence. Forms from those sections of the interview are not included.

notrabaja "my work", *nalphabeto* "the alphabet"; *nonúmero* "my numbers"; *probre campesino* "poor peasant"; *campo* "land"; *presidencia* "presidency"; *padres* "fathers, parents"; *zorra* "fox"; *confianza*" confidence"; *nominseñora* "my wife"; *seccionado* "sectioned"; *tristezza* "sadness"; *lugarcito* "little place"; *desamparado* "without help"; *dinero* "money"; *cuartya* "little quarter"; *tiempo* "time"; *mejoramiento* "improvement"; *camión* "truck"; *tortiyería* "tortilla factory"; *rinconcito* "obscure little corner"; *brazos cruzados* "arms crossed"; *plata* "silver"; *legitimo* "genuine"; *chingado* "(an obscenity)"; *noculpa* "my fault"; *nonecesidad* "my necessity"; *estudiantes* "students"; *colégio* "school";

tointereses "our interest"; *gayera* "cockpit"; *abas* "broad beans"; *trigo* "wheat"; *tómin* "money"; *nevida* "my life"; *burro* "donkey"; *macho* "male"; *toapeyito* "your surname"; *mexicano* "Nahuatl"; *moviaje* "your trip"; *novecinos* "my neighbors"; *respeto* "respect"; *caxtiya* "Spanish" (*castilla, castellano*); *gringo* "American"; *miyionário* "millionaire"; *nopapa* "my papa"; *nomama* "my mother".

nileeroz "I will read" (*leer*); *ticentenderoa* "we understand it"; *condenaroa* "condemn".

nunca "never"; *quién sabe* "who knows"; *de ningún parte* "nowhere"; *como no* "why not"; *órale* "get along"; *eso es* "that's it"; *más* "more"; *es verdád* "that's true"; *ándale* "get along"; *verdad* "truly".

(These forms were collected from the tape by the authors, and thus may underrepresent hispanisms, particularly verb constructions.)

Acuamanala: In Acuamanala language loss is far advanced, and the few remaining speakers are quite militant about the language.

Case 7: Don P., age 55. Conversation lasting about ten minutes, dealing with the danger of mixing Spanish with Nahuatl. Don P. spoke about one half of the time. He speaks very slowly, as if groping for words, but very correctly. His usage included *bueno, entonces, para, este, cuando, porque, pues,* and *pero* as well as the forms given below.

hora "hour"; *sección* "section"; *personas* "people"; *toidioma* "your language"; *tiviviroa* "you live" (*vivir*); *yomorevolverah* "it's mixed up" (*revolver*); *mejor* "better"; *antes* "before"; *igúal* "the same".

In addition to the conversation and stories, we have collected several lexicostatistic lists. We go through the list rapidly; if the subject does not remember a form, we move on. Other speakers sometimes volunteer answers before a subject can speak up. The forms given below are only those for which the subject seemed certain that the Spanish word was his normal usage.

1. Doña H., age 70. Tepatlaxco. *gentes, pecho, semiya, nadaroz, redondo*
2. Doña A., age 85. Tepatlaxco. *gente pescado, pecho, hígado, verde, redondo*
3. Doña D., age 56. Tepatlaxco. *pajaro, nopecho, nohígado, nadaroz, redondo*

4. Doña J., age 46. Cuahuetenco. *gente, pájaro, semiya, pecho, hígado, verde, redondo*
5. Don D., age 50. Chauhutenco. *gente, pájaro, manteca, pecho, hígado, verde, redondo*
6. Don E., age 45. San Miguel Canoa. *nochito* (meat), *ipecho pastora* (green).

It is of interest that the Canoa speaker, who uses much Spanish in conversation, has only three hispanisms in the lexicostatic list. The other speakers all have from five to seven forms. However, the two Cuahutenco speakers look like the Tepatlaxco speakers, even though they use less Spanish in conversation. The list of Mecayapan, Vera Cruz Nahuatl given by Swadesh 1955 also show six hispanisms.

Our information on relexification in Tlaxcalan Nahuatl suggests two major conclusions. The first is based on the comparison of our findings with those of Bright and Thiel 1965, emphasizing the importance of natural context in data collection. The second is that, given the complex of attitudes in the Tlaxcalan Nahuatl speech community, relexification may be an important internal linguistic factor which is hastening the death of Nahuatl in this area.

Bright and Thiel's results came from a situation in which the informant was isolated from his community and no other speakers of Nahuatl were present during elicitation, which was formal, often one-to-one. Examples from Classical Nahuatl were frequently discussed in the informant's presence.[8] It is likely that the informant adjusted his performance to make it as "Indian" as possible. Bright and Thiel's list of hispanisms contains mostly forms that are not easily recognizable as Spanish loans by an uneducated speaker. On the other hand, most of our hispanisms are forms now current in Spanish, pronounced much as the speakers pronounce them when speaking Spanish. We have found in formal elicitation speakers often hypercorrect, or are prompted by others to hypercorrect, for recognizable hispanisms. For instance, a speaker who offers "burro" is likely to be corrected to the "*legítimo Mexicano*" form *âxno*, of course also from Spanish (*asno*). However, the latter form is not now current in Spanish. In running speech in a natural context, these corrections are minimized. Thus our data give a totally different picture from those of Bright and Thiel. Their conclusions about the role of Tlaxcalan history in the development of Tlaxcalan Nahuatl would appear to be invalidated, as certainly in the last hundred years there has been intensive borrowing from Spanish. The differences

between the two bodies of data emphasize that linguistic materials must be collected in as natural a context as possible, particularly if conclusions beyond narrow structural statements are to be drawn from the data.

Our second conclusion is based on the feeling of Tlaxcalan Nahuatl speakers that relexification is "spoiling" their language. They feel that their "revuelta", "mezcalada" usage makes the language not worth saving. Many speakers observe that Nahuatl, while beautiful when correctly spoken, is not really very useful in daily life. The interviews reflect the fact that people are more interested in improving their Spanish than in preserving Nahuatl. The one crucial role that Nahuatl does play, that of supporting self-identification as an "Indio" and a "campesino", is weakened by the relexification. Unusually role-conscious people, such as the indigenist intellectual Don A., can create neologisms in order to speak more "purely". The average speaker, however, lacks the linguistic resources to play this game. In the face of overwhelming economic and social factors in favor of Spanish, they abandon their "mixed-up" language. The prestige of Spanish produces the relexification, which for those who are trying to identify as Indians, ruins Nahuatl as a vehicle for such identification. Thus "Indianness" is expressed through the identification with agricultural work, involvement in the community and conservative dress, rather than through the use of Nahuatl.

SUMMARY

Speakers of Tlaxcalan Nahuatl, an indigenous language of Mexico, use enormous numbers of Spanish words in normal speech. Since the major function of Nahuatl in present-day Tlaxcala is to support speakers' self-identification as Indians, and since they feel that their language is "spoiled" by the high proportion of Spanish lexical items, the relexification contributes to the death of the language. The contrast between the heavy use of hispanisms in materials collected from natural conversation, and the scarcity of hispanisms collected in formal elicitation, emphasizes the desirability of collecting linguistic materials in as natural a context as possible.

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NOTES

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2. Our able assistant is Alberto Zepeda S., of San Miguel Canoa, a student at the Centro Escolar "Ninos Heroes de Chapultepec", in Puebla.
3. Labov (1966) suggests this technique as a way to get very natural, excited speech. We find that it seems to work this way for Nahuatl.
4. The list is that of Swadesh 1955, designed for Nahuatl dialects.
5. We are endebted to Professors Yolanda Lastra and Jorge Suárez for many of our questions on language attitudes.
6. Van Zantwijk (1965) has observed a similar "purist" tendency among Nahuatl speakers in a number of other areas.
7. Many linguists use a "phonemic" orthography for Nahuatl. We prefer the traditional orthography, out of respect to many years of Nahuatl scholarship using this orthography, and because this orthography is easy for people who are literate in Spanish. It can easily be modified to represent all significant contrasts.
8. Both authors were students in Bright's class, where the materials were largely collected.

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