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Anthony Girard Lozano

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LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

CONDUCTED BY JOHN P. WONDER*

AZTEC TRACES IN MODERN SPANISH

ANTHONY GIRARD LOZANO
University of Colorado, Boulder

The traces of the Aztec language in modern Spanish and its contribution to other languages of the world, lead one to think back, back into the origins of man. For half a million years man was a hunter and a food gatherer. At some point in that long history, at least in terms of man's existence, he became a cultivator and settled in small villages, 10,000 years ago in Mesopotamia. This was certainly a revolution in his way of life comparable to the manufacturing and utilization of tools.

But man was still subject to the whims of the gods. In Mesoamerica, Tlaloc, the god of Rain and Fog, could let the rains fall or could hold them back causing droughts and famine in the land. As did the Greeks, Mesoamerican man held a profound belief in the will and power of the gods.

The discovery of agriculture occurred in China, Egypt, Peru, India and Mexico. As the grains of plants were first sown, so were the seeds of later civilizations. But man was still subject to the elements. His life was still one of subsistence, leaving no extra food and all men were still tied to the cycle of planting, cultivation and harvesting.

Even at this time, however, man in Mesoamerica began the selection and breeding of plants that were later to become our modern squash, beans, the generous ears of corn and other foods. It is hard to imagine that our ear of corn (Nahuatl *elotl*) began as a stem of grass with seeds. Later it was to become the size of a strawberry, and finally it would evolve, by careful human selection, into the large ears that we find on the dinner table today. Man had to subsist; he could not rest.

When did he break the cycle which tied him to the land, thus allowing him to build the civilizations which appeared in the old and new worlds? Around 1400 B.C. (Wolf, 1972:54), we find Mesoamerican man still

tilling the soil and living in a *jacal* (Nahuatl *xacalli*), made of "wattle daubed with clay or mud." Who was to say that his descendants would build pyramids comparable to those in Egypt or that his sculptures would have no equal, that his art objects would be coveted by the famous museums and private collectors in our time and that modern governments would dispute their ownership?

The urban revolution coincided with the discovery that man was not completely at the will of the gods, that water could be kept in reservoirs, that it could be channeled for purposes of irrigation.

With the discovery of irrigation and *chinampas* (plantings on floating islands) in Mesoamerica, came an abundance of food. And with this abundance, some men could devote their time to other endeavors—to philosophy, to the arts, to architecture, to poetry, to rhetoric, to theology. In a few words, the discovery of irrigation allowed the growth of cities and civilizations (see Palerm 1972, and Palerm and Wolf 1972).

More complex social stratification came about since the systems of irrigation and distribution of food had to be regulated. As the new activities developed in the cities, these too needed direction. By the fifteenth century of our era the Valley of Mexico had become a rich agricultural center with a large population that also required social order and cohesiveness. The discovery of irrigation brought with it abundance of food, creativity in the arts, and a new social order. This was the urban revolution.

Palerm (pp. 174-75) in collaboration with Eric Wolf has placed the existence of complex agricultural systems in the Archaic or Preclassic periods in the center of Mexico and Puebla, while MacNeish and Johnson (see Johnson, 1972) have found irrigations systems at Tehuacan dating from a few centuries after the birth of Christ.

Agriculture was crucial in the development of urban life in Mesoamerica, more so than in China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India where large domesticated animals formed part of the food supply. In

*Articles for this section may be sent to Prof. John P. Wonder, Dept. of Modern Languages, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California 95204. Please send a typed original and copy for each paper submitted. Maximum length is 20 double-spaced pages.

Mesoamerica, the only domesticated animals used for this purpose were the turkey (Nahuatl *guajolote*) and the dog. Many of the Nahuatl words still used in Spanish, such as *tomate* (*tomatl*), *chocolate* (*chocolatl*), and *camote* (*camotl*) refer to the edible vegetables and fruits.

Palerm suggests that the later development of systems of irrigation in Mesoamerica may have been due to the lack of metallurgy, the lack of application of the wheel—although it was used for toys—and the absence of large farm animals. In any event, agriculture and irrigation on a large scale were certainly used in the Valley of Mexico in the century prior to the arrival of Cortés and probably much earlier.

We have spoken of Mesoamerican man as one, but in fact, mankind was divided into a number of cultures and alliances which rose, fell, and changed with the centuries. The Aztecs, one of several groups of Nahuatl speakers, were late comers to the Valley of Mexico. They appear to have established themselves on the frontiers of Toltec lands where they provided military service to the latter. As the Toltec Empire crumbled, they moved along with other Nahuatl speakers—Tlascaltecas, Xochimilcas, Heuxotzincas, Tlahuicas, Chalcas, and Tapanecas—into areas and towns where they themselves later came into contact with the Spaniards.

Establishing themselves in 1325 on two marshy islands, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, in Lake Texcoco, only two centuries before the Spanish Conquest, the Aztecs continued to absorb the traditions, learning and religious thought of the Toltecs and the myriad of cultures of Mesoamerica which predate the Christian era. It is easy to fault them for being the last of many great Mesoamerican cultures and to criticize their barbaric practice of human sacrifice. But no civilizations, including our own, are free of atrocities. Perhaps too much is said of the Aztec practice of human sacrifice and too little is said of the aspects of their civilization which led them to heights of learning, which allowed them to record in their books the movement of the stars, the complex counting of the years and their poetry. Their language belongs to the Uto-Aztecan family which stretches from Idaho to Tabasco with scattered pockets throughout Mexico and reaches as far south as Panama. Nahuatl was the lingua franca during the Mexica (Aztec) domination and was spread even more widely by Nahuatl speakers in the service of Spanish soldiers and missionaries in the

two centuries following the Spanish Conquest. Their place of origin, the mythical Aztlan, a place in northern Mexico or the Southwestern United States, is symbolic of the common history which ties together our two countries. Other languages belonging to the Uto-Aztecan stock are Huichol, Papago, Pima, Hopi, Ute Painte, Shoshone, Comanche and Mono. According to Hasler (p. 123), Nahuatl was used as a lingua franca from the Huasteca to Guerrero, and from the Huasteca to El Salvador. After the Spanish Conquest, ocean trade took Nahuatl words not only to the Philippines but to the ports of Europe and to their colonies. Terms such as *ocelot*, *tomato*, *chicle*, *chocolate*, *copal*, *mezquite*, *coyote* and *tamal* entered English and other European languages.

Nahua schooling for the sons of the nobles was held in the *calmécac* where the intent was to form men of wisdom and of inner strength, wisdom for their minds and strength for their hearts. Here they learned the philosophy of the Nahua *cemanahuac* (world) and the complex mathematical calculations required to maintain the count of the years. The language of poetry was learned since "flower and song" (*in xochitl in cuicatl*), was the repository of history, philosophy and beauty. They came to believe that poetry was the only reality in the world. As a people who looked for their destiny in omens, the study of astronomy occupied their thoughts and predestined the events in their lives.

The military nature of Aztec society required hard sacrifices on the part of the students (*momachtique*). Self inflicted wounds with maguery thorns and cold baths in the mountain nights of Tenochtitlan were used to shape the young men to meet the hardship of war. The *calmécac* formed men such as Nezahualcoyotl, the philosopher warrior who fought against incredible odds to regain his throne as king of Texcoco. At a time when Europe did not have extensive systems of public education, the sons of Nahua commoners were trained as soldiers in schools called *tepo-challi*. In Texcoco, (Martinez, p. 44) daughters of the king and probably the nobility were taught the arts of the household: weaving, cooking, spinning, as well as the arts of music, song, and dance. The *calmécac* and *tepo-challi* were extraordinary institutions which met the needs and goals of Nahua society.

Like the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the Nahuas place great value in rhetoric and elegant language (*tepillatolli*). The Greek and Roman tradition was handed

down to Medieval man and then to the men of the Renaissance like Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In the early days of the Spanish Colonial period, learning cultivated language and exposition were encouraged among the conquered nobility and learned men. European and Nahua currents merged in the modern Mexican for whom song, poetry and eloquent speeches are as common in small remote villages as in the cities. It is no coincidence that Rodolfo Corky Gonzales wrote in verse his *Yo Soy Joaquín* expressing in eloquent words the plight of the Chicano in the United States.

Like his Nahua ancestors, the modern Mexican does not vacillate in his judgment of language: language is refined or it is not. The *Tlatolmatini* (teacher learned in the use of words) passed on the tradition of noble language in the *calmécac*. In 1571 Molina based his Nahuatl grammar on the speech of the most learned Aztecs whose language was rich and eloquent (Newman, p. 180). The language of the commoners was known as *macehuallatolli*, an indication of the social stratification in existence.

The elegance of the language of Tezcoco (Martínez, p. 38) had such reknown that the sons of nobles from other cities were sent there to polish their speech. Under Nezahualcoyotl, the city of Texcoco had reached such heights of culture that the poets, astronomers, teachers and philosophers met regularly in the main patio of the palace, predating the meeting of scholars in the colonial university.

The language of Tezcoco has been compared to the polished and refined language of Toledo (Martínez, p. 38) and learning reached such heights that the city has been compared to the Athens of Ancient Greece. The collection of Nahua documents and codices gathered by Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli encompassed historical annals, chronologies, genealogies, laws, rites, religious ceremonies, prayers, magic, astrological calendars, and descriptions of domains and tributes (Martínez, p. 38). Considered the foremost collection (*amoxcalli*: house of books) in the Amerindian world, it too was to be consumed in the fires after the Spanish Conquest.

Although the fanaticism of the Catholic bishops and friars led them to burn the "heathen" documents, acts which they themselves would later come to regret, it was ironically the Spanish missionaries who maintained classical Nahuatl in the two centuries after the Conquest from 1521 to 1750 (Garibay:315). The great

impulse which pushed Spain to the glory that it reached in the two centuries following the unification of Spain under Isabel and Ferdinand extended to the arts and to all fields of life. Nebrija published his grammar of Spanish in 1492, the predecessor of all grammars later to be written of the languages in Europe. Before Nebrija's grammar the only languages considered worthy of such elevated study were Greek, Latin and Hebrew. He demonstrated with his grammar that Spanish had a structure comparable to the complexity of Latin, that it could express thoughts as elevated as those written in the classical languages, and that his grammar could be used to teach his language, *castellano*, to newly conquered peoples (Newman: 180) since, after all, "language was the companion of rule."

The same zeal which led the religious brothers to burn the "painted books" of the Nahuas also led them to spread their own faith, publishing sermons in Nahuatl in the first years following the Conquest. In the tradition of Nebrija, Fray Andrés de Olmos published the first grammar of Nahuatl in 1547 followed by four grammars in the next century. In 1571, Molina explained (Newman:180) that his grammar of Nahuatl would allow the priests and friars to learn this language, thus permitting them to confess, to preach, to teach, and to administer the holy sacraments to the local people.

Just as the Nahuas had their view of the world, the product of two and a half millennia of culture, philosophy and thought of many peoples, so did the Spanish friars, soldiers, and officials. It is difficult nearly five centuries after the Spanish Conquest to comprehend the fanaticism which drove the Spaniards to destroy what they could of the Amerindian "worship of devils," or the incredible belief of the Aztecs that Huitzilopochtli, the god of the Sun, could continue his journey across the sky only with the sacrifice of human blood. But each belief was rooted in centuries of tradition, ideas and practice, and each aspect had a rational justification within the logic, organization and context of the life of its own people.

And what was the consequence of the destruction of Nahua philosophy which began before the death of classical Nahuatl? Of the 83 terms listed by León-Portilla (1966:377-96) in his glossary called "Breve vocabulario filosófico Náhuatl," not a single term has remained in everyday usage in the Spanish of the United States

or Mexico. The only term which he lists that is heard occasionally is *Quetzalcoatl*, the Plumed Serpent god. The loss of these philosophical terms reflects the intrusion of Spanish learning and foretells the ultimate death of Classical Nahuatl.

What terms were lost? Let us take a glimpse at some of León-Portilla's listings. In the *calmécac*, the priests taught the *nomactique* (students) the precepts of Nahua learning and philosophy. Not only were they instructed in the use of noble or good language (*tepillatolli*), but also in poetry, "*in xochitl in cuicatl*" conceived by them as "flower and song" and considered of the highest value in the Nahua *cemanahuac* (world). The *iohtlatocuiztli* (the progress of the astronomical bodies in their orbits in the sky) was considered such an important facet of Nahua learning that it occupied an important place in the life of Nezahualcoyotl and Moctezuma. Knowledge was not defined simply in the Aztec world, but was divided into *machiliztli*, passive knowledge received by tradition and *tlamatiztli*, active knowledge, the fruit of personal investigation. A learned man who knew things experimentally—an expert in herbs, stones, trees, roots—was called a *tlaixmatini* and was used to describe the physician (*ticitl*).

Knowledge was handed down by many men, by the *cuicamatini*, the wise man expert in the codices of songs which were entrusted to him for safekeeping, by the *tlatmatini*, the learned man and philosopher, the *tlateumatini* who was learned in the things of the gods and the *tlatolmatini* who was learned in the use of words.

The *amoxcalli* (the house of books) and the *coateocalli* (the house of many gods) were destroyed to be replaced by the Colonial palaces and churches. The *amoxpohua* (the recounting and reading of codices) was to disappear along with the burning of the codices. No longer would *huehuetatolli* (philosophical treatises) speak about *huiloahuayan* (the hereafter) nor about *neltiliztli* (truth), nor about *vohiliztli* (life).

The loss of these terms is the consequence of the death of learning and philosophy in a civilization which was itself destroyed by new forces. Abandoned by their gods, living under the shadow of foreboding omens, the Nahuas came to lose their language, learning, philosophy and finally their world. The domestic vocabulary from Nahuatl which remains in the Spanish of the United States is comparable to fragments of pottery used by archaeologists to reconstruct the accomplishments

and cultures of old peoples and civilizations. But neither the few Nahuatl terms in active use nor these clay fragments can give us a total picture of the grandeur reached by the Nahuas. The few Nahuatl words we use and the fragments of pottery are a pale reflection of their civilization and those which preceded them. Our imagination can, however, break the bonds of the physical evidence available and allow us to visualize their world.

Having glimpsed the death of Nahua learning and the loss of the vocabulary which was the expression of that knowledge, we return to the words which deal with man's everyday existence, words which point back to the first cultivation of plants and the small villages which man constructed next to his fields. In different parts of Mexico, the inhabitants of small villages can still be found who live at a level of subsistence. Many still speak Nahuatl and other Amerindian languages. Others have been integrated more fully or completely into the larger society, providing the abundance of food necessary to support life in the urban centers.

Nevertheless, many terms in current usage in Mexico do not deal exclusively with domestic vocabulary. The names of countless streets, towns and regions such as Tlalpan, Acapulco, Coatepec, Jalapa, and Autlán are Nahuatl terms. Current in everyday Spanish in Mexico is *escuincle* (a small child) and *achichincle* (a "gofer", a subordinate at the beck and call of his superior), *apapachar* (to hug, console and caress), *tianguis* (a marketplace) and many others which are not used commonly in the United States. The Valley of Mexico was, after all, the center of Nahua life and it stands to reason that more terms would have been retained in this area.

To illustrate present usage of words from Nahuatl, I will present a brief sketch of three women in a kitchen preparing a wedding feast. In this sketch, 41 *Nahuatlisms* are presented as they could occur in a typical domestic situation. These are widely used in Mexico and the United States. Many have become international, being used in a wide range of languages. After the Spanish Conquest, these words were kept because of their obvious utility and since they did not threaten the new colonial government nor did they intrude into the substance of Catholic sermons and teachings. Indeed, such terms were necessary to name the plants, foods and animals unknown in Europe. Without them, a new terminology would have had to be created

to maintain the activities of domestic life. In the sketch below, I have not included *peyote* (a plant from which a drug is taken), *nagual* (a witch or wizard who can take the form of an animal) or *toloachi* (a plant from which a drug is taken) since these are better known to us as terms resurrected by the drug culture of the last two decades or as words used in folk medicine and witchcraft. Among the *curanderos* and *brujos* can still be found remnants of precolombian medicine, magical practices and religion. In the sketch below, *tocaya* refers to two persons having the same first name. María González is the *tocaya* of María López since both have the same name. It connotes a special relationship and the term is used frequently if the two are friends, affectionately calling each other *tocaya*.

—Ven acá *chamaco*, puedes jugar *canicas* más tarde, pero ahora quiero que vayas a la *milpa* a traerme unos *elotes*. También pasa por el *jacal* de Don Seferino y pídele unos *tomates* y *ejotes*. Y, por favor, tira ese *chicle* y no camines con los pies *chuecos*. No te vayas por el *zacate* porque mataron varios cascabelles allí esta mañana.

—Sí, sí, mamá. ¿No quieres que traiga *camotes* y *aguacates*?

—Sí, mi hijo. me van a hacer falta más *aguacates*.

Tocaya, ¿no vamos a necesitar unos *nopales* también?

—Sí, por supuesto. Mi hijo, ve a la casa vecina y pídele al *gachupín* que te deje *pepenar* unos en su rancho.

—Hasta luego, mamá. Voy a ir con mi *cuate*.

—*Tocaya*, ¿has visto el *molcajete*? Tenemos que moler los *aguacates* para hacer el *guacamole* y no lo puedo encontrar. ¡Ay Chihuahua! Nunca puedo encontrar nada en esta cocina.

—Aquí está *tocaya*. ¿Quieres que comience a molerlos?

Sí, por favor, yo voy a hacer el *atole* y las tortillas. Tengo que moler más maíz. ¿Me puedes pasar el *metate*? Está debajo de esa mesa. Ay *tocaya*, ¡cuánto tiempo toma preparar uno de estos *mitotes*! Parece que nunca vamos a acabar de hacer tortillas y tamales.

—*Tocaya*, ¿por qué no me dejas decirle a tu vecina que nos ayude?

—Pues no puedo. La gente dice que es una *huila*. ¡Y qué dirán si la ven aquí con nosotras!

—Tú bien sabes que las mujeres de este pueblo son como los *guajolotes*. Cuando algo las espanta corren por todas partes haciendo mucho ruido. Es una buena mujer, no es una *huila*. El año pasado me ayudó en la *pizca* cuando mi marido estaba tan enfermo.

—Aquí vienen los *chamacos*. ¡Ay Chihuahua! Muchachos, ¿en dónde han andado? Miren como dejaron el piso lleno de *zoquete*.

—Ay, mamá, perdona. Tuvimos que ir al otro lado del pueblo a conseguir los *camotes* y estaban inundadas las calles. Se le habían acabado a Don Seferino. Compramos *cacahuates* y *chocolates* y nos dieron un *pilón*.

—¡Ojalá que no se les haiga quitado el hambre! Si

quieren pueden comer unas *enchiladas* ahorita. Cuidado con esa botella, es *tequila* de tu papá. Ay, muchacho, ya dejaste caer el *comal* y lo quebraste. Quería usar el de barro para cocinar las tortillas.

—Mamá, alguien está tocando.

—Debe ser tu tía que viene de *Jalapa* para la boda de tu hermana.

• • •

—Hortencia, qué gusto de verte. Mi hijo, ayúdala a tu tía con su *petaca*. ¿Por qué la traes amarrada con tanto *mecate*?

—Se me abrió varias veces y me la tuvieron que amarrar bien. Vengo tan cansada del viaje que quisiera acostarme aunque fuera en un *petate* todo un día.

—Ay, hermana, no te acuestes por favor. Tienes que ayudarme a hacer el *mole*. Mira, aquí están los *chiles* que se tienen que moler.

—Muy bien, hermana. Oye, si viene la lluvia ¿qué van a hacer? La última vez que vine se les metió la lluvia al *chante* que usaron para la fiesta.

—No te preocupes, ya le mandamos poner *chapopote*, así que ya no se le mete l'agua.

—Menos mal. Casi me truje un poncho de *hule* que tiene mi esposo pero no me parecía muy bonito para una boda. Y a propósito, ¿dónde está la novia?

—Se fue a la iglesia a arreglar las flores. No tarda en llegar así que tenemos que acabar pronto.

In his brief article on "Nahuatlisms in the Philippines," León-Portilla (1960: pp. 135-38) lists 28 words commonly used in Tagalog, the main indigenous language in these islands. Carried by favorable trade-winds Spanish mariners followed a circular route through the Pacific during the colonial period starting in Acapulco, sailing to Manila and returning with their goods. With this trade, which lasted two and a half centuries, were carried words from Nahuatl. Many of these terms are the same as those presented in the domestic sketch above: *aguacate* (avocado), *apachurrar* (to squeeze), *atole* (a broth, made of rice in the Philippines), *cacahuete* (peanut), *camote* (sweet potato), *coyote*, *chicle*, *chocolate*, *jícara* (a vessel for drinking made of a calabaz shell), *metate* (three-legged flat stone on which to grind seeds like *maíz*, *cacao*, etc. along with the *metate* they use a *metlápil* which is a roller-like stone), *nana* (a nursemaid), *pepenar* (to gather), *petaca* (a suitcase; a litter for carrying important personages), *petate* (a sleeping mat), *tamal*, *tata* (father), *tianguis* (a small store; a game of chance), *tiza* (blackboard chalk), *tocayo* (namesake with the special Nahua relationship), *tomate* (tomato) and *zacate* (grass).

Six additional terms which he mentions are not used in the United States: *ahuete* (a

bush found in the Philippines from whose seeds is made a red dye), *camachile* (a leguminous plant whose fruit is used as a drink or condiment), *chico* (from *xicolzal-potl*, *chicozapote* whose skin is finer, the pulp less rough and more sweet), *chucubite* (a basket), *pachón* (a heavy set man) and *tapanco* (attic).

Again we are presented with *Nahuatlisms* which were carried thousands of miles but which represent only a few basic elements of the vocabulary. By way of comparison, during 800 years of contact between Arabic and Hispanoromance on the Iberian Peninsula, many Arabic terms were borrowed into Spanish, but these were not limited to a relatively few terms for food. Arabic gave *álgebra*, *aritmética*, *alcoba*, *acquia*, *química* and countless other terms, many of which dealt with the higher spheres of government and knowledge. Perhaps the contact between Arabic and Hispanoromance had lasted for so long and the borrowings from Arabic had been so integrated into Spanish that they were no longer tainted as being non-Christian, as was patently the case in New Spain. The question is not simply one of the superiority of Arabic culture. Knowledge had also reached high levels among the Nahuas, and was certainly superior to the Europeans in many respects.

As Leander has pointed out, the figurative or metaphorical extensions of *Nahuatl* terms have enriched the Spanish language. *Coco*, according to Leander (p. 41), derives from *cocoliztli*, a sickness or epidemic. In its extended meaning it now refers to a monster or phantom who scares children when they misbehave. Coming from the Nahuatl *chacalin*, a large shrimp, *chacal* (Leander, p. 51) also means a bad or savage person. The term *coyote* (Leander, p. 180) is now applied to a shyster lawyer without a license or to an intermediary who swindles or exploits his clients, such as the men who gather groups of undocumented farm laborers and lead them across the border to the United States. These extended meanings are now an integral part of the Spanish language.

The terms from Nahuatl borrowed into Spanish have ranged at different times from place names to domestic vocabulary. The trends and ideas of these centuries had striking results in the history of Nahuatl. Garibay (*Llave de Nahuatl*:315) has tentatively identified six stages dating from the precolombian to the colonial periods. His description of the Archaic Epoch (? 1430)

and Classic Epoch (1430-1520) reveals a language in which the world-view of the Nahuas is conveyed authentically by the writers of the Cuauhtitlan and Coatlinchan documents of the various manuscripts of the Heuheutlatolli, all of which are pre-cortesian and free of Hispanic influence.

The Epoch of Contact (1521-1600) is one of remarkable language contact between the European and the Amerindian worlds. With their religious fervor, the Catholic missionaries had to mold the concepts and forms of Christian theology to fit the structure of Nahuatl, requiring the creation of neologisms necessary to reach the intellects of the New World. The new Christian ideas were not accepted at face value nor docilely. Nevertheless, the missionaries made incredible strides in adapting Christian word and thought into Nahuatl, demonstrating the capacity of this language to express profound ideas and concepts totally foreign to the culture.

Like a star which burns strangely bright before it decays and disappears, in the Epoch of New Flowering (1600-1750) many learned books and treatises were written by the Jesuits, many of whom spoke Nahuatl or another Amerindian language. Their Colegio of Tepotzotlan was established specifically to study and learn to command the languages of New Spain. In 1606, at least 90 of the 150 Jesuits at Tepotzotlan spoke an indigenous language (Garibay: 322). These Jesuit priests attempted in their sermons to use Nahuatl with all the eloquence, clarity, and high level of concepts found in this language.

The expulsion of the Jesuits from New Spain in 1767 was the death blow of Classical Nahuatl. Because of various actions, Classical Nahuatl, the strongest living symbol of Nahua learning, died a slow death in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this Epoch of Dissolvement (1750-1810), Archbishop de Lorenzana prohibited the use of Nahuatl in the schools (Garibay: 325). Sermons were no longer given in Nahuatl and few books were written in this language. With the ascent of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne, Spanish society itself turned to France for cultural leadership. Spain and New Spain followed French and not their own traditions, the final death knell of Classical Nahuatl. The sixth and last period, the Stage of Nahuatl dialects (1810-?), marks the existence of varieties of Nahuatl in small remote villages of Mexico.

The fall of the Aztecs cities predated the

death of Classical Nahuatl by nearly 300 years. Foreboding omens began to appear. Comets were seen in the sky several years before the coming of Cortés. On a windless day, the lake surrounding the islands of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco moved and seethed with such force that houses on the lakeshore were washed away. Strange voices were heard in the air: "Oh, my children, what is to become of us?" From Lake Texcoco, they brought a strange bird to Moctezuma's palace. They had caught it in a net drawn from the lake. In its head it had a mirror into which Moctezuma looked, and saw what no other person in Mesoamerica had seen before, men on horseback. The temples of Huitzilopochtli, the Sun god, and Xinhutecutli, the god of Fire, each caught fire and burned to the ground without apparent human cause. What did all this mean? What shadow hung over the Aztec world? It is too easy to say that these men were superstitious, that these omens should not have affected them as they did. But they formed a pattern of life for Mesoamerican man just as omens had foretold the destiny of the Greeks and Romans in their worlds. Moctezuma and his oracles were convinced that something or some strange event doomed their world. Given the rigid training of the *calmecac*, his vacillation and indecision shown at the time of Cortés's arrival can only be explained by this view of the destiny of his people. Octavio Paz asks:

Why does Moctezuma give in? Why does he feel strangely fascinated by the Spaniards and why does he experience before them a vertigo which it is not exaggerated to call sacred—the lucid vertigo of the suicidal man in front of the abyss? The gods have abandoned him. The great treason with which the history of Mexico begins is not the one of the Tlaxcaltecas, nor of Moctezuma and his group, but rather the one of the gods: no other people have ever felt so totally abandoned as did the Aztec nation studying their omens and the signs and prophesies which foretold their fall. (Paz, 85, Lozano translation)

Indeed the Spaniards arrived walking on the causeways towards the great Tenochtitlán, marvelling at the temples, the many canoes in the water and the splendor of the city. Moctezuma met them with gifts, hoping to bribe them away. This event in history is too well known to repeat; Mexico fell to the Spaniards in 1521 after a heroic defense by the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco.

The Aztec leadership was swept away, but was all of the culture destroyed? Vestiges of precortesian life endure.

The paradox of profound Catholic belief and life alongside precortesian folk medicine and witchcraft can be understood only if we look at the underlying precolombian thought and life which can be found below the surface. Both the modern Mexican and Chicano have a profound religious upbringing, not necessarily in church, but as a way of life: "God will punish you! Respect your parents! I must ask the Virgin for help! Watch out for the evil eye!" This extends to other Hispanic groups as well. The holy War of Reconquest against the Moors in Spain in the years just preceding the Spanish Colonial Period left its mark: Spain, after all, was not united under the Catholic monarchs until 1492.

The Mexican and the Chicano have a profound love of life, song, beauty and poetry. Aztec man believed that everything in life was ephemeral, that everything in life was no more than a dream. He reasoned that if life was not true, then what was? Man is capable of lies, so perhaps nobody tells the truth on earth. Reaching for the only thing of value left, he came to think that poetry—*flor y canto*, flower and song—was the only truth on earth. He reasoned that poetry was an internal revelation, a universal experience. The words of poetry could, then, be an authentic revelation. Thus Nahua philosophy hinged on an aesthetic concept of the universe and of life (León-Portilla, *Filosofía*, 143-44; 322). Beauty was of foremost importance.

Thus speaks Ayoucan Cuetzpaltzin
who certainly knows the giver of life. . . .
There I hear his words, certainly his,
the *cascabel* bird answers the giver of life.

Go singing, offer flowers, offer flowers.
Like emeralds and quetzal feathers,
his words come raining down.

Is the giver of life perhaps satisfied in that place?

Is this the only real thing in life?

(Quoted by León-Portilla [p. 143], from ms.
Cantares mexicanos, fol. 9, v; AP I, 25)

During a decisive moment in history, two great civilizations were joined in an epic struggle from which was to emerge the mestizo, ancestor of the modern Mexican and the Chicano. As we trace the history of his language, we glimpse the essence of his life, philosophy, and history. In his biting criticism of the greed in American society, Rodolfo "Corky" González writes:

They frowned upon our way of life
and took what they could use,
our art,
our literature
our music, they ignored—

so they left the real things of value
and grabbed at their own destruction
by their greed and avarice.
(p. 70)

As for the Nahuatl speakers, the real things of value are not gold and power, but art, literature, and music. As the Aztec speaker would have said in *xochitl in cuicatl*, flower and song; this is the only real thing in life.

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LEXICAL SIMILARITIES OF LUNFARDO AND GÍRIA

BOBBY J. CHAMBERLAIN
Michigan State University

In his celebrated essay entitled "El idioma de los argentinos," Jorge Luis Borges identifies the *lunfardo* of Buenos Aires as the "jerigonza ocultadiza de los ladrones . . . un vocabulario gremial como tantos otros, es la tecnología de la furca y de la ganzá." In similar fashion, Antenor Nascentes tells us that the *gíria* of Rio de Janeiro "designa o vocabulário especial dos criminosos, contrabandistas, vadios e outra gente de hábitos duvidosos, que por aquele meio buscamos não ser entendidos pela sociedade em geral."²

Like their French counterpart, *argot*, both *lunfardo* and *gíria* as defined above do not constitute separate, specialized languages per se; rather, they are specialized lexicons, superimposed parasitically on

their respective national dialects, Argentine Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese.³ Their primary purpose, as both Borges and Nascentes have indicated, is indeed to conceal, to render inaccessible to law-enforcement personnel and to others regarded as outsiders the verbal communication between one member of the underworld counter-culture and another.⁴ Such semantic camouflage is particularly prevalent with regard to the group's professional activities. In this connection, *lunfardo* and *gíria* may be said to constitute codes: sub-codes within the overall sign-system of language (and their particular languages) and codes in the more traditional cryptological sense.⁵

Sociolinguistics assigns them a second function. They serve to identify and distin-