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Nahuas and Spaniards

Postconquest Central Mexican
History and Philology

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teopan niman ontlami y canin
opeuh ca mochi ytlatquitzin y St^{la}
elena yc quimotequipanilhuisque yn
santa Elena mochi oquimocahuililita
yn icoltzin omoetzticatca y maria
Aug^{na} auh tiquitohua timochintin
Gou^{or} Rexidor m^{or} yhuan alcaldes
timochintin ofiçiales de rrepublica
ca neltiliztli melahuac ca tixpan
opanoc yn iamayo y tlali omoten-
euh y quenin yaxca ocatca yn tlali y
fran^{co} de la cruz auh yn axcan ca
oquimocahuililitiaque y maria au-
gustina yc quimotequipanilhuis y
St^{la} Elena auh ypanpa yn axcan tic-
tomaquilia ynin amatl yn yehuatzin
maria Aug^{na} ypampa ca tixpan
opanoc yn iamayo yn tlali omoten-
euh tlacuitlapa auh ynic nelli mela-
huac ca nican tictlalia yn tofirma
auh yn xihuitl yn tonalli ca ye
tlacuitlapan omoteneuh

Dⁿ juan maldonado Gou^{or} Dⁿ
Antt^o de Galizia Rexidor m^{or} Dⁿ
p^o de la cruz alcalde Dⁿ Juan
rramos Alcalde Dⁿ Bartholome de
la Cruz alcalde Dⁿ Antt^o mexia
yterino alcalde tlayxpan

Antt^o rrodriguez escriu^o Repu-
blica (signatures all in same
hand)

water goes to the church, and then it
ends where it began. All of it is
Santa Elena's property; with it they
are to serve Santa Elena, and María
Agustina's late grandfather left it all
to her. And all of us, governor, re-
gidor mayor, and alcaldes, all of us
officials of the commonwealth say
that verily and truly we were shown
the documents for the aforemen-
tioned land, (proving) how the land
belonged to Francisco de la Cruz,
and now they have left it to María
Agustina to serve Santa Elena.
Therefore now we issue this docu-
ment to María Agustina, because we
were shown the documents for the
land mentioned on the other side (of
the sheet). Here we set down our
signatures; the year and day were
already given on the other side.

Don Juan Maldonado, governor.
Don Antonio de Galicia, regidor ma-
yor. Don Pedro de la Cruz, alcalde.
Don Juan Ramos, alcalde. Don Bar-
tolomé de la Cruz, alcalde. Don
Antonio Mejía, interim alcalde for
Tlaixpan.

Antonio Rodríguez, notary of
the commonwealth.

7. A Language Transition in Eighteenth-Century Mexico: The Change from Nahuatl to Spanish Recordkeeping in the Valley of Toluca

By the mid-eighteenth century central Mexico's dominant indigenous language, Nahuatl, had been in contact with Spanish for over two hundred years. As a result, it contained numerous Hispanisms, and many Nahuatl speakers habitually used Spanish in certain contexts.¹ At what point in time, among what groups, and for what reasons did Spanish replace Nahuatl as a vehicle of communication? In general, one must still answer such questions rather schematically and speculatively, but for one aspect of the matter—the language used in conducting corporate community business—texts are beginning to come to light which give us a closer view of how certain towns, in the course of the eighteenth century, made the transition from Nahuatl to Spanish in their internal recordkeeping. The particular texts to be used here come from the southern part of the Toluca Valley (the western neighbor of the Valley of Mexico), supplemented by a glimpse at some parallel texts from a segment of the indigenous community of Mexico City.²

The countryside of central Mexico during the colonial period, the area lying in between the dominant but widely interspersed "Spanish" towns such as Mexico City and Puebla, was organized into a large number of Indian municipalities, based on local preconquest states, which despite numerous obligations to the outside were, on a day-to-day basis, locally autonomous under their own town councils. From the mid-sixteenth century forward these Indian towns maintained records of council meetings, trials, land grants, wills, property sales, and the like, in essentially Spanish genres, but written (using the Roman alphabet) in Nahuatl. In some towns, at some periods, a large portion of the local upper group was literate in Nahuatl; in other situations Nahuatl literacy was confined to two or three local specialists who rotated as notaries attached to the town council or church. While almost universal over a wide area, the tradition of Nahuatl writing and recordkeeping was handed down locally in each case, and the numerous texts still preserved are a rich source for the study of Nahuatl speech in a time dimension one might have thought lost to direct observation.

Since the bulk of the Spaniards in colonial Mexico were long based in a few large cities, somewhat removed from the bulk of the Indians, it was possible for the Indian towns to retain indigenous speech and many indigenous practices for centuries—in some cases on into our own times. But the two components of the population could not be kept apart forever; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there came to be increasingly important nuclei of Spanish speakers resident in the Indian countryside, creating new Spanish-style settlements, until the whole area was honeycombed with them. Spanish enterprises hired a large number of the Indians at least part of the year; in the larger regional markets Spanish speakers with connections to the cities were dominant; Spanish-speaking administrative officials grew in numbers until there were some of them located in relative proximity to almost any Indian town.

One of the many results of this spilling out of Spanish speakers into the country was that the leaders of the Indian communities—the more or less noble, more or less wealthy figures who manned the town councils—began to become at least partially bilingual. (Not that indigenous speech was actually being lost; even by the time of Mexican independence in the early nineteenth century, the majority of the rural population of central Mexico still spoke various Indian languages, with Nahuatl the most widespread.) We can follow the process of acquisition of Spanish through observing the legal testimony of Indians which is so abundantly preserved in the archives. In order to be understood by the Spanish officials who reviewed appeals and disputes at the supracommunity level, testimony had to be rendered in Spanish either directly or through an interpreter. With very few exceptions, local Indian notables of the sixteenth century, and far into the seventeenth, in fact needed and used a court interpreter. In the latter years of the seventeenth century, for areas all over central Mexico, one begins to see rather frequently the notation that an interpreter was used for a given witness, in the name of juridical unimpeachability, “sin embargo de ser ladino en nuestra lengua castellana,” or some such phrase. By the middle of the eighteenth century such statements are almost the expected thing; it was also not uncommon for a Spanish official to interrogate an entire Indian town council as a body, noting the use of an interpreter despite the fact that *all* of them were fluent in Spanish. Over the century it was also becoming more common for original testimony in Spanish to be accepted from Indian council members. By about 1800 one begins to see whole sets of testimony in which there is no mention either of an interpreter or of what language was used; apparently there was coming to be a presumption that Indian notables could and would use Spanish in their depositions.

Another way of seeing the level of Spanish competence which was building up among the Indian leaders is to examine the Nahuatl texts they were producing. Generally speaking, over time these texts came ever closer to Spanish models—without ever literally duplicating them, because locally-grown formulas and turns of phrase always retained some currency. Late colonial Nahuatl had developed a set of standard mechanisms for adopting almost any needed Spanish word or phrase. Special Spanish legal terminology, in loan words new and old, and also in entire borrowed frozen expressions, came to dominate some texts to such an extent that superficially they almost seem to be in Spanish.

For illustration let us look at Text 1, a land grant issued in Nahuatl in 1750 by the council of the important Toluca Valley town of Calimaya.³ Although nothing in it, as to type of phenomenon, goes beyond parallel texts from the Valley of Mexico at the same time, it is the most extreme example I have yet seen, presented here for that very reason and because we know from later evidence that Calimaya was on the verge of going over to Spanish recordkeeping.⁴ If one somewhat arbitrarily divides Text 1 into 284 “words,” the result is that aside from 28 elements of proper names (all Spanish), 154 of the constructs are indigenous Nahuatl, and 102 (underlined in the transcription)⁵ are derived from Spanish, so that the lexical content is, depending on what one counts, some 40 to 46 percent overtly Spanish in origin. The material includes whole set phrases as well as nouns, verbs, and particles (especially *de* and the much-used *para*, *y* being only part of set loan phrases). Most of the loan vocabulary is legal in nature, or at least has to do with normal Spanish ways of referring to land (*pedazo*, *esquinas*), but some is more general, as with the particles in their various uses, or a *grano* of maize, or *mantener* (with the indigenous reflexive) for supporting oneself. Spanish influence in the text goes even beyond what is seen in overt loan words. Some indigenous words are used as equivalents of Spanish ones rather than in their original application. *Quenami*, originally “how, in what manner,” is used here as a substitute for Spanish *como* in two senses: “as, in the capacity of” (*nehual quenami juec*, “I as judge”), and as an introducer of dependent clauses, in effect “that” (*quenami mitlania se pedaso tlali*, “how—or that—a piece of land is requested”). Similarly, *yca* (*i-ca*) represents Spanish *con*, *pie* (*pia*) Spanish *tener*, and *pano* Spanish *pasar*.⁶

On the other hand, the text is by no means incompetent or incongruous as Nahuatl. All the Spanish phenomena are handled according to the then current conventions. The indigenous Nahuatl vocabulary is standard, varied, correctly inflected, and arranged by the usual principles of Nahuatl syntax. What may appear to be some simple errors are general characteristics of the

Text 1. Land grant, Calimaya, 1750

Nican ypan yaltepetzin *santo* Sⁿ Pedro Calimaya niquitua nehual juez y g^{or} por Su Mag^d yca nu s^{res} *alcaldes* yhuan *oficiales de Repp^{ca}* quenami tuchpa oquipresentaro se *petition* Marselino Annt^o yhuan y-sihuahuatzin Maria Magdalena yhuan nehual quenami juez y g^{or} oniquin-mosentlalili muchtintziti altepe-huacatzitzinti señores g^{res} *pasados* yhuan señores *alcaldes pasados* yca muchi *comun* yhuan oniquinmoca-quistilili ynon amatzintli yhuan ytech onesi ytlaytlanilis ynin D^s yconetzi quenami mopechtecatihuis yca ychoquis yhuan yyelsisihuilis quenami mitlania se *pedaso* tlali *para* *campa* quitucas ome yey *grano* tloli yhuan *para* quipies *campa* quiquichtis *para* *mumanteneros* quesqui tonali D^s quimochicahuilis yhuan *para* quichtlahuas ytlatocatlacalaquil-tzi tohueytlatocatzin *el Rey nuestro* s^r yhuan oc sequi *obensiones* mitlani ypan toaltepe *campa* sa nima otlananquililique muchtintziti s^{res} *gres pasados* yca *comun* que* ma momaca ynin D^s ypil-tzi tlen quitlani yhuan nehual quenami juez y g^r sa nima onipano yca nu *Repp^{ca}* otictemulique se *pedaso* *sacatitla* mani cuactenco mocuaxuxhuia yca ymiltzi S^{ta} Rosa *para* ycalaquian tonali yhuan *para* yquisayan tonali mocuaxuxhuia yca Calistro Joseph onicmaca *posesion* ynin D^s yconetzi *en nombre de Su Mag^d* onicasi yca

Here in the town of holy San Pedro of Calimaya, I, the judge/governor through His Majesty, with my honorable alcaldes and officials of the municipality, declare that before us Marcelino Antonio and his wife María Magdalena presented a petition, and I as judge/governor assembled all the town citizens, the honorable past governors and past alcaldes, with all the ordinary people, and I had that document read to them, and in it appears the request of this child of God, that he bows down with weeping and sighing and requests a piece of land where he can plant two or three grains of maize and to have some place where he can get the means to maintain himself for the time that God should give him health and to pay the tribute of our great ruler the king our lord, and other duties which are demanded in our town. Then immediately all the honorable past governors and ordinary people replied to him "Let this child of God be given what he asks," and I as judge/governor immediately went with my municipal officials and we sought for him a piece of land next to the grassland at the edge of the forest bordering with the field of Santa Rosa on the west, and on the east bordering with Calistro José; I gave possession to this child of God in the name of His Majesty; I took him by the hand,

yha quitepectiaya tlali yhuan tlasuli yhuan tlen casia ye muchi onicchi-hua *en nombre de Su Mag^d* ynic onicpaxaluchti ypan nahui *esquinas* yhuan *para* amo aquin quemania quipies tlen quitos onoso quixitinis tolatol tictemaca ynin *amal de posesion* ypan sempuali yhuan yey tonali *de noviembre* xihuil *de mil setesientos cincuenta* yhuan niquitua tla aquin tle quitos quemania nicmotlatlactilia *sasu* aquin s^r *jues de Su Mag^d* quimuquichtililis sempuali yhuan macuili *pesos pena para ycajatzin* tohueytlatocatzin *el Rey nuestro* s^r nehual juez y g^r por Su Mag^d Dⁿ Pablo Destrada nu s^{res} *alcaldes* Dⁿ Asensio de la Cruz yhuan Dⁿ Agustín de la Cruz *Regidor mayor* Dⁿ Fran^{co} xabiel yhuan muchtintziti *nuofisiales de Repp^{ca}* Es^{no} *de Republica* Julian Asensio

and he went about scattering earth and waste and whatever he put his hands on; I did it all in the name of His Majesty, causing him to stroll to the four corners. And so that no one will ever have any objections or abrogate our declaration, we issue this bill of possession on the 23rd day of November, year of 1750, and I declare that if anyone should ever raise objections, I implore any honorable judge of His Majesty to extract from him a penalty of 25 pesos for the treasury of our great ruler the king our lord; I the judge/governor through His Majesty, don Pablo de Estrada, and my honorable alcaldes don Ascencio de la Cruz and don Agustín de la Cruz, and the chief councilman don Francisco Javier, with all of my municipal officials. Municipal notary, Julián Asensio.

Nahuatl of the area of Calimaya and Tianquiztenco in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷ Moreover, as a statement in a certain genre the text is in touch with the great tradition of Nahuatl public documents. The language moves in formulas and accustomed phrases, some going all the way back to preconquest rhetoric, as in the assertion that the petitioner "bows down with weeping and sighing"; there is also the authentic archaic wording "where the sun comes out" for "east" and "where the sun enters" for "west" (though it is true that these venerable phrases are here introduced by *para* rather than by the traditional indigenous *inic*). Another traditional phrase is *quesqui tonali Ds quimochicahuilis* "for however many days God should strengthen him (give him health)," i.e., "for the rest of his life."

All in all, Text 1 shows a writer of Nahuatl who has absorbed a great deal in the way of Spanish vocabulary and concepts, who is writing a type of document which has very close Spanish parallels, and who, conceivably, part of the time, may have been actually thinking in Spanish and translating

back. We can see the temptation that might exist in him to go over to Spanish entirely, and the potential for doing so. Yet persons like the writer of the present text were under no compelling necessity to make the switch. They were entirely competent as writers and speakers of Nahuatl, in a context where Nahuatl was widely understood, while still adequate conventions of Nahuatl written expression were at their fingertips. The switch, when it came, was brought on by factors other than simple loss of the ability to produce intelligible Nahuatl texts.

What were the factors motivating a change? Nowhere does direct testimony from a participant appear, so we must look a bit into the logic of the overall context. Central Mexico, having been in the sixteenth century the arena of two almost separate societies, was evolving in the late colonial period toward a situation in which each local territorial subdivision of society consisted of an upper Spanish segment and a lower Indian segment. Consequently everything Spanish, language and all the rest, was acquiring a prestige which was not merely hypothetical or applied to distant spheres, but which was felt tangibly on the local scene. Whereas Indian towns, valuing their autonomy greatly, may once have found it advantageous to conduct their business in a medium Spaniards could not comprehend, now they faced the increasing necessity of having their affairs reviewed by Spanish speakers, with the consequent utility of keeping records in Spanish in the first place, not to speak of the increased urging on the part of the Spaniards that they do so. In such a context, it would not be surprising if the transition in recordkeeping antedated true linguistic necessity or even appropriateness.

Whatever the reasons, for they must remain up to a point in the realm of speculation, it is a fact that the transition sometimes preceded the ability to write reasonable Spanish prose. Consider Text 2, composed in Spanish in 1733 in the little town of Casulco, somewhere in the jurisdiction of Tlanquistenco.⁸ The transition here is premature, carried out by a writer who is convinced that it is better to use Spanish at all costs. The resulting text is intelligible only by reference to general documentary conventions, common sense, and the Nahuatl substratum. The writer masters neither number nor gender agreement (apparently not even the principle thereof, much less the details, especially with number), nor can he inflect verbs. He tends to prefer the infinitive for all cases and seems to lean to the view that all infinitives are in *-ar*, as seen in his form *morirar* (though possibly he intends his *-ar* as the future). In one case he actually uses a loan verb form much as it would be in Nahuatl, *quitaros*.⁹ The text shows little knowledge of the idiomatic use of Spanish prepositions (note the frequent lack of a necessary *de*, *a*, or

Text 2. *Bill of sale, Casulco in the jurisdiction of Tlanquistenco, 1733*

Año de 1733 a^{os}

Escrituran

El mes de diciembre a 28 pongo este escritura llo me llamo Dⁿ Andres Martin, sobre vn pedason de tierras que le bendin, estos hijos se llaman Andres Ju^o lo que me di su m^e estos hijos lo que balen, las tierras, que son berdan 3 p. 4 r. la uerdan pongo, mis juramentos, delante de Dios, que si D^s pedir juramentos a mi qui si Dios me lo perdonar, me morirar, y para que ningunos se les quitaros esta tierras besino la comonidad, esta tierras ninguno, molestete estos hijo, pongo mi juramento, delante mis hijas Ger^{ma} Angelan, y su hijo, fra^{co} pedro tengo los alguascal, que jue testigon los ofisiales, de republican el fiscal, y para que ninon se aga perjuision estos hijon si algunos sempiese pleitos pena para justisian, dosesos y dos mes de carse, el gouernador tampie lesi beintequatros asotes pena sinco p^s para go^r no mas que bongo juramentos delante de D^s

Dⁿ Saluador Mathias

Dⁿ matheo fra^{co} fiscal

alcalde ordinario

de la s^{ta} yglesia

alhuasil mayor

Nicolas de Tolentino

Siendo testigo todo esto

SS^{no} publico

Fer^{do} Belasques

en), and there is properly speaking no ability to construct Spanish sentences at all. Texts like these are amusing, but also distinctly ridiculous and close to meaningless, and hence they are apparently few. Not until the latter half of the eighteenth century, and indeed in the main not until its final quarter, does one see Spanish documents prepared by Nahuatl speakers of the Toluca Valley in numbers and as a matter of course. Such productions could still have their laughable side, as witness Text 3, from Santa María de la Asunción near Calimaya and dated 1781.¹⁰ But aside from some expectable *o-u* and *i-e* merging, *n* intrusion, and *r* metathesis, the effect in Text 3 is caused almost entirely by the use of *b* for *g* (*otorbamos* for *otorgamos*) and especially of *d* for *b* and *v* (*denifisios* for *beneficios*, *dedino* for *divino*, *cade* for *cabe*, etc.); perhaps the writer really did merge voiced obstruents in speech, since Nahuatl originally lacked them. In matters of vocabulary, inflection, agreement, and even overall syntax and idiom, the text is quite sophisticated, on a different level entirely from Text 2.

An intermediate step in the direction of original Spanish texts was the

Text 3. *Obligation of the council of Santa María de la Asunción, jurisdiction of Calimaya, 1781*

En este pueblo de S^{nta} Maria la Assump^{on} en bentio dias de febrero de 1781 anos estando todos juntos congregados el alcalde atual Dⁿ Andres Floren시오 Rexidor mayor Dⁿ Julian Faustino y demas ofisiales de Rep^{ca} en companian de todos lo señiores alcaldes pasados y demas comun deste dh^o pueblo los que en vuen a confromindad le otorbamos esta obligasion a S^{ra} Josefa Antonia de Albirde en compania de su erm ana Petrona Ygnasia tocante un pedaso de tierra de labor que tiene n^{ra} s^{ntisima} madre y s^{ra} de la Assump^{on} de la que nos obligamos en todo tiempo trabagarla en sus denefisios para en su cultu dedino poniendo y nonbrando un mayordomo para su santo serdision y es dentender que en la dh^a tierra cade de sendradura una fanega de mais y para que coste ser derdad lo firmamos en dicho dia mes y año los que supimos escriidir

el alcalde atual Dⁿ Ander Floren시오

Rexidor mayor Dⁿ Julian Faustino

es^{on} de Rep^{ca} Juan Bernardo

Luis de Fransia fiscal de la santa yglesia el escribano quando falliesio la difunta

D^{na} Pasquala Maria

y para que conste en todo tiempo delante de todos s^{res} pasados y demas comun

Dⁿ Antonio Silberio alcalde pasado

Urbano Jph esno pasado

preparation of Spanish translations of Nahuatl originals. Throughout most of the colonial period, whenever it was necessary to present a document to higher authorities, the interested party would appear with the Nahuatl original, which a court translator would then render into Spanish. In the second half of the eighteenth century, some of the local Indian notaries began to make their own Spanish translations of Nahuatl originals which their predecessors or they themselves had written. Finally, apparently around 1775-1780 in the Calimaya region, some of these local clerks began doing Spanish originals which differed in no way from the translations; all of the local conventions, whether concerning the general ordering of the document, the ceremonial mention of certain saints, or the way of describing a piece of land, remain the same. It is quite impossible to distinguish a translation from an original without a specific contemporary notation deciding the question.¹¹ The known translations and originals, taken as a

single corpus, show enough consistent characteristics to allow for some generalization about the nature and source of their deviance from more standard Spanish texts.

Among the first things drawing attention in the Spanish texts by Nahuatl speakers are some Nahuatl loan words; in fact, however, a large number of Nahuatl terms had entered general Mexican Spanish by the eighteenth century (many long before that). They are mainly nouns, with a scattering of verbs, and most of them designate characteristic indigenous objects and activities. Terms such as *milpa*, "field," *tepisque*, "ward head in an Indian town," or *sacamolear*, "to clear a field (especially by weeding and removing turf)" were widely understood and occur in Spanish texts of all kinds.¹²

All in all, despite Text 3, Spanish texts produced by indigenous persons in the Toluca Valley after about 1750 show considerable mastery of orthography (with probable implications for pronunciation), of number and gender agreement, and of verb inflection. The Spanish vocabulary is broad and is mainly used in ways showing inner comprehension. Some residual slips aside, most of the deviance has to do with syntax and use of larger idioms.

As to syntax, one notices a great deal of deviant use of Spanish object pronouns and of the preposition *a*, or to put it another way, an inability or disinclination to mark objects as they are ordinarily marked in Spanish. In effect, the writers tended to retain elements of the Nahuatl system, which is at considerable variance from the Spanish one. In Spanish, as I hardly need say, one marks a personal object of a verb with the preposition *a*, and also, optionally, according to dictates of emphasis and style, adds an object pronoun before the verb: *(lo) veo a Juan*. In Nahuatl the object pronoun, as a prefix incorporated into the verb complex, is the obligatory part; if the object is given in noun form at all, the noun merely specifies the content of the object prefix: *ni-qu-itta Juan* "I-him-see (him being, or i.e.) Juan." Anything on the order of a preposition would be entirely out of place in the Nahuatl framework; and in any case, Nahuatl had no prepositions before it borrowed some from Spanish. Almost predictably, Nahuatl speakers failed to see the function of the Spanish *a* and often left it out, as in the following examples:

le dio el difunto ocho pesos He gave eight pesos to the deceased

(Text 4)

les dejo mis hijitos¹³

I leave it to my children

In Nahuatl there is no formal distinction between direct and indirect object prefixes, and rarely are both present at the same time, the direct object

indicator almost always being omitted when the indirect object is marked. Nahuatl speakers were thus ill equipped to handle Spanish's elaborate system of differentiated object pronouns. They often used *lo* direct object and *le* indirect interchangeably, showing a tendency to use *lo* for all cases, as in *quien lo estorbe dho posesion* (Text 4) "whoever should disturb (to him) said possession," where *lo* should be *le*. Nahuatl object prefixes show no gender differentiation, and our writers had corresponding difficulty in keeping *lo* and *la* straight, again often deciding for the former. An especially mystifying element to the Nahuatl speaker was the non-reflexive *se* which Spanish uses to represent the indirect object when the direct object pronoun is also present. Consider *se los encargo a los señores jueces . . . que* (Text 4) "I charge the honorable judges . . . with . . ." The standard form would be *se lo encargo*, *se* representing the plural judges and *lo* the grammatically singular clause which follows; but the writer has made *los* agree with the judges, to whom he presumably takes it to refer, and has put in *se* only because he has observed that Spaniards include that syllable in such sentences. In general, the Nahuatl speakers were extremely unsure about when object pronouns should be used, or which ones, leading to strings like the following:

mi querido padre *me la* dexo la casa y mi hauelo y mi auela asimismo *le* deixo a mi hijo y asi tambien si se muere *le* dexara a su hijo¹⁴

In more standard Spanish, with modern orthographic conventions, this would be:

Mi querido padre *me* dejó la casa, y mi abuelo y abuela [antes de él]; asimismo (*se*) *la* deixo a mi hijo, y así también si se muere (muera), (*se*) *la* dejará a su hijo.

Since the Nahuatl speakers did not really understand the object-marking function of Spanish *a*, they seem to have construed it as an ornament conducive to good style, or perhaps as a marker of a personal noun regardless of its role in a sentence. At any rate, they often placed *a* before subjects as well as objects. In Text 4's passage *esta dha se lo fue dexando a Marselino Antonio*, Marcelino Antonio was the one who left the land to the other person named, as can be deduced not only from the thrust of the entire text, but from other relevant documents in the dossier.¹⁵

In a set of texts written by a Nahuatl-speaking notary of Mexico City at this time (1782-83) there is a feast of hypercorrect *a*, apparently associated with the high tone the writer seems to be aiming for; the following are only some of the examples:¹⁶

se a seruido de la tierra <i>a</i> dho mi	my said compadre don Domingo
compadre D ⁿ Domingo Ramos	Ramos has made use of the land

es dueño de dho sitio <i>a</i> D ⁿ Marcos	Don Marcos de la Cruz is the
de la Cruz	owner of the said site
para que <i>a</i> V md puede mandarnos	so that your grace can order us. . .
<i>a</i> la Chepa no tiene que dizir	La Chepa (nickname) has nothing
	to say (about the matter)

In this writer's usage, *a* is also sometimes employed as the general preposition, filling in for others in cases where the writer may not be sure of Spanish idiom. In the following two examples, the preposition would be *de* in standard Spanish:

con consentimiento <i>a</i> nuestro hijo	with the consent of our legitimate
lex ^{mo}	son . . .
todo es sullo <i>a</i> mi sobrino	it all belongs to my nephew . . .

Just as Nahuatl lets the specified object of a verb stand in a kind of apposition to the object pronoun without further overt marking, so also what appear to be dependent clauses in Nahuatl are often left overtly undifferentiated from main clauses, connected to them only by the implicit cross-reference (despite the existence of much machinery for overt subordination when desired). Something of the same tendency appears in the texts. The chaotic Text 2 contains (apparently) several examples, starting with *pongo este escritura llo me llamo Dⁿ Andres Martin*. The same thing is seen in *ago mi testamento yo me llamo Dⁿ Lazaro de Santiago aqui es mi barrio Nra Señora de la Limpia Concepcion*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, writers like those of Texts 3 and 4 evince considerable competence in distinguishing independent from subordinate clauses and in constructing unified several-clause strings.

Another characteristic of Nahuatl syntax is the absence of verbs in equative statements. Every noun has a subject pronoun affixed (the third person affix being zero) and by itself constitutes a statement that some entity belongs to the class designated by the noun: *ni-tlacatl*, "I (am a) person"; *tlacatl*, "he (is a) person." Residues of this phrase type can be found in the texts. For example, from Text 4:

no tiene nada mas que su cuerpo	he has no more than his body, not
ni vn pedasito solar onde puede	even a bit of a lot where he can live
bivir ni vn surco para senbrar y	nor a furrow to sow, and (<i>he is a</i>)
tributario	tribute-payer

A favored larger construction in Nahuatl was to single out one constituent and equate it verblessly to all the rest of the sentence, as opposed to making it serve directly as subject or object. Nahuatl might say the equivalent of "what he saw yesterday (is a) woman" rather than simply "he saw a woman yesterday." An example of this type appears in the Mexico City texts

mentioned just above (this one too contains a hypercorrect *a*):¹⁸

lo que daua cada vez que se benia	what the said doña Felisiana gave
a mexico a dha D ^a Felisiana	every time she came to Mexico
quatro rr ^s	(<i>is</i>) four reales

In Nahuatl, place names and names of settlements are nearly all locatives which already contain within themselves some such notion as “in, at, on,” etc. That is, a word like *Tetzococo* by itself means “in Tetzococo”; it neither needs nor will suffer any further locative expression. We are not surprised, then, to see some omission of *en* with place names in texts by Nahuatl speakers:

Coaticpac está ¹⁹	it is in Coaticpac . . .
vna tierra que esta Santa Maria	a piece of land which is in Santa
Asumpcion ²⁰	María de la Asunción

In Nahuatl, nearly all indication of the direction of motion is contained within the verb complex; Spanish directional indications attached to nouns had been being misunderstood by Nahuatl speakers since the sixteenth century, when they had borrowed *huerta* as *alahuerta* and taken *la Florida* to be *Alaflorida*.²¹ That something of this Nahuatl conception remained alive among the writers of our texts can be seen in such preposition-less phrases as *esta milpa entra dos almudes de mais* “two almudes (grain measure) of maize enter into (can be planted in, a Nahuatl idiom) this field.”²²

The Nahuatl tense system differed from the Spanish very considerably, yet writers like those of Texts 3 and 4 show a good grasp of the Spanish tenses, including the subjunctive. The deviance concerning verbs came not so much from an inability to handle the Spanish system as from a partial dissatisfaction with it, a determination to make certain distinctions which are usually made in Nahuatl but not in Spanish. There are two principal phenomena of this type, both having to do with Nahuatl auxiliary verbs which were suffixed to main verbs to indicate certain modal notions. A form of the verb “to go,” used in this way, indicated that the action took place on departure or death. It is in the attempt to duplicate that sense and structure that the writer of Text 4 put *fue dexando*, “went leaving.” Other Nahuatl auxiliaries had a progressive sense; various kinds of progressives were much more in use in Nahuatl than in Spanish, with the result that the Nahuatl-speaking writers, like modern English speakers, overused the Spanish progressive of *estar* plus the present participle, this being a partial explanation of Text 4’s phrases *todo lo esta pagando* and *mas que se ofrese lo esta dando*.²³

The Nahuatl speakers’ vocabulary in terms of individual words far

surpassed their grasp of Spanish idiom, or vocabulary in terms of frozen larger constructs. The texts bristle with thinly disguised Nahuatl idioms in lieu of the corresponding Spanish ones. To take one example, Spanish has several ways of speaking of fields abutting on each other, ways which need little discussion because they are so similar to those seen in English. Nahuatl, however, has a very special phrase type in which not only are the owners of the fields rather than the fields themselves construed as the actors, but as in all Nahuatl “we”-constructions, only the non-speaking member of the we-pair is specified: *titomilnetechana Mateo Juárez*, literally “we-ourselves-field-each-other-abut Mateo Juárez,” i.e., “the fields of Mateo Juárez and myself abut on each other.” A phrase like *nos lindamos señor San Miguel*²⁴ (literally “we border the lord San Miguel”) conforms to the Nahuatl model quite exactly, although it hardly yields a sense in Spanish unless one knows from the general context what to expect.

But not all such phenomena in the texts we are dealing with can be attributed to entirely naive retention of Nahuatl idioms and ignorance of Spanish equivalents. The texts betray a tenacious hanging on to local conventions over and above the language switch. In each Indian town, small or large, the order and wording of each type of document differed in its details from the equivalent either in other towns or among Spaniards. These idiosyncrasies held true over generations of Nahuatl recordkeeping, and it is clear that the writers of each community placed great value on them, perhaps as the truly right and legal way of doing things, perhaps as a mark of community distinctiveness. The texts originally in Spanish follow the older Nahuatl texts point by point, even when what is said is awkward to express in Spanish or is something not usually said in Spanish documents. Thus a 1779 Spanish will ends each bequest with a phrase like *esto a de ser fuerte mi palabra ninguno lo perjudique ni lo estorua*, which corresponds to a Nahuatl model probably on the order of *chichahuatiez nollatol ayac quiltaoz quixitiniz*, “my statement is to be strong (valid); no one is to spoil it, to abrogate it.”²⁵

Text 4, from which I have already been taking examples of individual phenomena, can also serve to give us a good overall impression.²⁶ Cast in a reasonably competent and persuasive Spanish, it nevertheless, as we have seen, has all the hallmarks of its genre, including deviance in object marking and in use of verb tenses. In addition to the facets pointed out before, there are some uncertainties concerning gender (the writer treats *posesión* as masculine) and the use of the article with titles (*por mandado de señor gobernador*, etc.), a few omissions of *s* and *n*, one or two other deviant spellings, and some Nahuatl-related idioms.²⁷ Above all, Text 4, written

Text 4. Land grant, Calimaya, 1783.

En el pueblo de Calimaya jurisdiccion de Tenango del Balle oy dia martes beinte y sinco de febrero año de mis setecientos ochenta y tres — digo governador actual juntamente con mis alcaldes Dⁿ Ygnacio Joseph y Dⁿ Julian Antonio y toda la Republica que le fuimos a dar posecion a Joseph Juaqui de vn pedaso de tierra que cita en el camino de Sacango y esta dha se lo fue dexando a Marselino Antonio como consta en el testamento del difunto Marselino y por eso le dimos posecion y como es tributario y obencionero todo lo esta pagando lo que se pide en el pueblo y es vn pobre que no tiene onde puede senbrar vn granito de mais mas que este pedaso que le yso el difunto vn bien y buena obra y por eso le di posecion en nombre de Su Mag^d lo coxi de la mano yba desparramando tierra piedras y lo que coxia todo lo yse en nombre de su Mag^d lo pacie en cuatro esquinas para que no agia quien le diga nada o desbarate nuestra palabra damos este posecion y digo yo jues y g^f si hubiere en algun tiempo quien lo estorbe dho posecion se los encargo a los s^{res} jueses y juticias de Su Mag^d que haga por este pobre guerfano porque no tiene nada mas que su cuerpo ni vn pedasito solar onde puede bivar ni vn surco para senbrar y tributario y mas que se ofrese lo esta dando como lo dira a senores gobernadores pasados por eso le dimos posecion yo jues y governador por Su Mag^d Dⁿ Nicolas de Alvarran alcaldes Dⁿ Ygnacio Jph y Dⁿ Julian Antonio Rexidor mayor Baltasar de lo Reyes jues Lionisio Lorenzo tepihque Asencio Basilio y toda la Republica testigo estaba

y mas digo le costo su trabajo de sacamoliarlo y limpiarlo y conponerlo y tambien le dio el difunto ocho pesos como costara Resibo que tengo o bale y yo escriui por mandado de s^f g^f y alcaldes como escriuano Pablo Jph

in Calimaya in 1783, is based on the same model as Text 1, written in that town in Nahuatl in 1750. The circumstances of the two documents are somewhat distinct, so that they are not absolutely identical in all respects, but note the similarity of the justification of the grant, including the phrase about the recipient needing some place to plant a grain or two of maize, and note especially the portion of Text 4 describing the actual rite of giving possession (from *le di posecion* to *damos este posecion*), which is literally the same in every detail as the relevant part of Text 1 and could pass for a translation of it.

How widespread was a Nahuatl to Spanish transition of the kind studied here, and what was its dating pattern? The same general conditions, including the penetration of Spaniards into country life, the ability of local leaders to speak Spanish, and a strong Nahuatl writing tradition ever closer

to Spanish vocabulary and norms, obtained throughout central Mexico. I have the impression, from having surveyed much parallel documentation for other purposes, that what was happening in the southern Toluca Valley was happening in other Indian towns over the whole region at much the same time, but not uniformly, for some towns preserved Nahuatl recordkeeping up to the time of Mexican independence and perhaps longer.

Rather than dwell on my impressions and speculate about the reasons for the spottiness of the timing, I will try to give a certain perspective by discussion of some texts of a similar nature, already alluded to, which chance to be preserved among the Toluca Valley documentation but are from another area, namely the capital itself.²⁸ Mexico City was the very core of the Spanish-Mexican world, a Spanish city if there ever was one, yet it was established in the midst of what had been the Aztec capital before the conquest. The still strong and populous Indian community of Mexico City/Tenochtitlan was given recognition as an Indian town and had its own government like any other such entity, with four subdivisions corresponding to the four great sectors of the city. Since the Nahuatl-speaking community of the capital was exposed to an absolute maximum of all kinds of Spanish penetration and influence, one would expect a priori that language transition in its various aspects would have come earlier and perhaps more suddenly or cleanly than in the countryside. Indeed, the Mexico City texts (a land donation and a letter-statement composed by the notary of the San Sebastián district of the Indian municipality in 1782-83) do betray a more advanced situation, but within the same general framework. That is, despite having a much fuller mastery of Spanish legal terms and attempting more ambitious formulations, the writer still shows the deviant use of *a* as seen above, has some deviant spellings, composes some sentences which are ungrammatical or incomplete, especially in longer constructions, and retains some hint of Nahuatl idiom. *Decir* is *dzir*, with the *i* which Nahuatl speakers often put for unstressed Spanish *e*; several *n*'s are omitted (*grade* for *grande*, *quato* for *quanto*, etc.); there are some examples of the Nahuatl speaker's *o* for *u*; *herencia* is hypercorrected to *heriencia*. One repeated phrase is *tierra citio*, in which two synonymous terms are juxtaposed and become a frozen designation of a single thing; this is the famous Nahuatl "diphthesis" and something not at all characteristic of Spanish, which would at least demand *y* between the two nouns.

The writer has a quite impressive familiarity with the more high-flown phraseology of Spanish law and correspondence. He knows for example that a polite greeting calls for the use of vocabulary such as *afecto*, *agrado*, and *finá voluntad*. But when he tries to compose in these realms, he overreaches

himself. Consider the following courtesy preamble, which maintains all the right vocabulary but wanders further and further from grammaticality:

Mui s^r mio apreciare de muchisimo gusto que â V md se halle gosando de mui cabal salud que nuestro fino afecto le desea a cuia evedicia ofresemos la que el altissimo Dios nos conde para que V md la desfrocte en cosas de su mayor agrado que â V md puede mandamos que executaremos con fina boluntad —

These texts show no definite signs of being based on a Nahuatl model in the fashion of Text 4, but they do have their rather idiosyncratic shape and formulas, indicating that to some extent the writer was still following internal community norms instead of general Spanish ones. On the basis of this glimpse, it would appear that the Nahuatl-speaking community of Mexico City had gone over to Spanish records somewhat earlier than the Toluca Valley towns, and by the 1780's was somewhat further advanced toward standard Spanish documentary types and ways of expression, but was, on balance, at the same essentially transitional stage. After all, the two communities were in direct touch with each other, and we owe this sample of Mexico City practice to the attempt of the people in the capital to communicate, in Spanish, with the people in Calimaya. One can even sense the existence of something on the order of a Nahuatl-speaker Spanish, to be used in community-internal communication, not unlike the special brands of English spoken in Hispanic and black communities in the United States today.

Overall, the texts studied show us a case in which the change from Nahuatl to Spanish records in Indian towns was primarily motivated not by the decadence of the older Nahuatl system, but by considerations of prestige and easier communication with an increasingly present Spanish sector. It is true that as the Nahuatl tradition came closer and closer to the Spanish tradition, and at the same time the writers were gaining considerable mastery of Spanish itself, it may have struck them as artificial or frustrating to keep Nahuatl as the vehicle. Yet the transition occurred well before the point at which the writers were able to produce fully grammatical and idiomatic Spanish texts.

In Karttunen and Lockhart, *Nahuatl in the Middle Years*, the progressive adaptation of Nahuatl to Spanish is seen as occurring in three stages: a first brief period of no borrowing; a second lasting a hundred years, until about 1650, of extensive noun borrowing; and a third, until today, associated with large-scale bilingualism, of borrowing also verbs, particles, and idioms. Seen from the perspective not of Nahuatl per se, but of the evolving speech

of the people who originally spoke Nahuatl, the phenomena seen in the present paper can be taken to represent a fourth stage, in which Spanish has been adopted, but Spanish vocabulary still obeys many of the rules of Nahuatl syntax, formula, and style.
