

The Indigenous People of Puebla: The Náhuatl Speakers and Settler Colonialism  
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## Background

In 1977 Mexico, there were reportedly nearly a million speakers and semi speakers of the indigenous language of Nahuatl in central Mexico, yet most Americans have probably never heard of the language nor people (Hil & Hill 1977). On the contrary, most Mexican Americans are unaware of their own ancestral ties to the speakers of the indigenous tribe of Mexico because of the impact of Spaniard colonialism. During the conquest, Spanish culture to the Indigenous people was accepted and incorporated into their everyday lives and was encouraged as a badge of local pride and self-identity when done successfully. As the indigenous population decreased in the first half of the colonial period and more Spaniards arrived on the land, there became increased confusion of the origins of Hispanic cultural elements despite a great number of Nahuatl ethnic historical writing during the time. The Spanish influenced within the writings were undeniable and eventually it became difficult to understand the terminology used that many documents became increasingly overlooked at in time (Lockhart 1971). "Linguistic suicide" has been a term that has been used to describe parents choosing not to teach their Native language to the children to fit in with the majority language around them, in this case to achieve fluency in the socially and economically dominant language in Mexico, Spanish (Lam & Beck, 2008). Especially when it comes to immigration to other countries such as the United States where English is the majority, there becomes a greater loss of ancestral history and cultural connection within generations. Because of this there have been increased movements of young Mexican Americans advocating for various methods of decolonizing the colonial impact and effects it has had onto their culture and self-identity.

During the US Chicano Movement, for example, the Nahuatl language was important as it was used as a source of identity and a symbol of their Mexican origin, a central way to defy colonial impact. It produced the imagined nation of Aztlan, Nahuatl for "People from Aztlan " in the movement, a symbolism for the homeland that was taken away from the indigenous people (Hansen & Tlapoyawa, 2019). Today, the existence of the Nahuatl is not taught in the US education system and the lack of higher education among rural areas in Mexico affects the practices and understanding of the indigenous people and brings the necessity of it when discussing transnationalism. To help resolve the issue many young indigenous artists are increasingly incorporating the use of the Native language within their art to raise awareness and encourage the youth to learn the language. One particular example is an indigenous Chicano artist like Tolteka from Los Angeles who raps in English, Spanish, and Nahuatl (Navarro, 2015).

Mexico is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world being home to 11 linguistic families and seven indigenous groups that all contribute to its cultural richness. For example, though Nahua in particular are the largest indigenous group in Mexico, there is not a single group as it is made up of a diverse people whose each culture is different from the other. When it comes to understanding Mexican culture and its people it is important to understand their cultural identity in the territory they live in and to support and listen to their voices (Lugo-Morin, 2022).

### Hypothesis

During my time in Mexico traveling in the territories of Puebla, Verano Poblano, and Mexico City, I will collect findings about the impact of settler colonialism has had toward the Indigenous Mexican people in mentioned areas and what they are currently doing to incorporate it in modern efforts. I will note influences of the indigenous language of Nahuatl and how diverse it is among the cultural, tradition, and performances on my journey and to see the opinions toward the Nahuatl.

### Objectives

1. Work with Dr. Little to learn more about the characteristics of the Nahuatl language and the different groups that encompass it.
2. Understand that the Nahuatl is a group of language of the Uto-Aztecan language and make up many varieties of Nahuatl.
3. Travel to Mexico and learn about Mexican Culture in Puebla
4. Collect testimonials from the people of Mexico about what they know about the Nahuatl.
5. Read articles and journals that discuss the ongoing effort of decolonization among the indigenous people of Mexico.
6. Gain testimonies of Nahuatl speakers in the region with the help of Dr. Wray.
7. Take notes of advertising, films, and political use of indigenous people who speak Nahuatl.
8. Gain testimonies of Mexican Americans' knowledge of indigenous people like the Nahuatl and their influences.
9. Gather the findings and data collected throughout the project and interpret it with Dr. Little!

### Methods for Data Collection

The methods used would be qualitative. There will be participant observations and information collected from both primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, interviews with the people of the territories about what they know about the indigenous people will be collected. Media analysis will also be utilized. I will have Dr. Wray help me during my time in Mexico to assist me in translations and interpretations of media analysis. Additionally, I will be working under the mentorship of Dr. Little who has experience with work on a language preservation project with Ch'ol in Chiapas, Mexico (Little et al, n.d).

### Expected Results

My expected results will be to see incorporations of Nahuatl in the culture and performances in Mexico's territories and develop a better understanding toward the revitalization of the Nahuatl language in modern times and the attempts being made to preserve it. Additionally, I will get a better understanding of the people and different groups that make up the Nahuatl language of the area of Puebla. I hope the outcome of this research will open a broader discussion of nativity in Mexico and within the United States.

## Literature References

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