

Políticas Lingüísticas en México. Coordinated by BEATRIZ GARZA CUARÓN. Colección: La Democracia en México. Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades, UNAM. México, D.F.: La Jornada Ediciones. 1997. Pp. 369. N.p. (paper).

Reviewed by Ken Hale, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

For me, Mexico comes to mind frequently as a symbol, a shining light, in relation to questions of language policy and concern about linguistic diversity and rights. I think of Mexico as a shining light, not because it is uniformly praiseworthy, to be sure, but rather in the sense that many extremely good ideas and programs were born there, ideas of special inspirational value for linguists who are interested in the question of how their discipline can respond effectively to the concerns of local language communities working to ensure for their native languages a position of strength in education and in other domains of intellectual life. My own work is only rarely and peripherally in Mexico, however, and there are long periods in which I am totally unaware of what is going on there. This book is very good for filling the gaps for people like me who are interested but unable to keep current on language policies, the history of language policy and attitudes, and local language statistics in Mexico.

In her preface, Beatriz Garza Cuarón appeals to the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy for definitions of the term *política* and formulates one that corresponds approximately to the idea expressed in English as "public and official policy"—encompassing, for our purposes, the actions of citizens in relation to their own languages as well as the actions of governments or states in relation to the linguistic rights of local language communities. She notes that language is a relatively new concern within the general struggle for human rights. The pressure to engage linguists in local language matters has come primarily from speakers of those languages, she maintains, and this broader conception of linguistics represents a change in the world of today.

The theme of new concerns, or newly directed attention, is picked up in Stephen Wurm's chapter, the first of two in the section entitled "Languages, Culture, and Policies: The Present Situation of Indigenous Languages." He deals with languages and cultures in contact, bringing forth interesting examples, ignored or overlooked until recently, of a striking diversity in extreme responses to language contact, including "mixed languages"—a type once thought to be impossible—and a variety of different developments resulting in creoles. The second paper in this section, Leonardo Manrique Castañeda's "Classifications of the Indigenous Languages of Mexico and Their Results in the 1990 Census," is one of the most useful in the book, particularly for those interested in the contemporary condition of local languages. It contains four appendices. The first is a classification of Mexican indigenous languages prepared by the author for the census project, and the second gives the census figures obtained for men and women, five years of age and above, associated with each language. The third appendix is a version of the second, embodying informed adjustments of the basic data obtained by the census takers; and the fourth assembles the numbers, by language, for boys and girls under five years of age who lived in indigenous language households in 1990. The material in this chapter is subject to the usual caveat about census data, but these have been subjected to about the best analysis possible by a person who is involved and knowledgeable. He cautions that the child data do not tell us the number of actual child speakers, but rather the number that can reasonably be expected to be exposed to an indigenous language at home. They are welcome data for obvious reasons. I have one minor quibble to mention, namely, the reported equivalence (pp. 61 and 64) of Pima Bajo and Ópata—these are languages belonging to different subbranches of Southern Uto-Aztecan.

Of the two chapters included in the section entitled "History," the first, by Silvio Zavala, deals primarily with the status of Spanish in Mexico since the sixteenth century, an issue not only in relation to education and bilingualism within that country itself but also in relation to the ultimate looming presence of the culturally and economically aggressive English-speaking country to the north ("so near . . .," as the saying goes). The second, by Ignacio Guzmán Betancourt, discusses "Ideas about Indigenous Languages in Viceregal Mexico," the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. It deals more literally with ideas and attitudes articulated about the languages, under three rubrics: their nature, their origin, and their quality or fitness. Of special interest for linguists is the last of these, since the worth of a language was often judged by the grammars and dictionaries that documented it. American grammars of remarkable quality were written in this period, not long after Antonio de Nebrija's grammar of Spanish and well ahead of an eventual established European tradition of vernacular grammar writing, freed then from the notion that only the classical languages have grammar.

The third section, entitled "Linguistic and Political Transformations," begins with an important and sobering dose of reality therapy in the form of an essay by José Alejos García and Elisabeth Berniers, which notes that the positive impact of agrarian reform in Chiapas was accompanied by an apparent negative effect of well-intentioned language policies, which produced a new form of subjugation by enabling "the rise of a new caste of caciques, bilingual teachers qua ideological caciques" (p. 96), and by the frustration of the stated intents of bilingual education, including that of raising the level of literacy and that of promoting local indigenous cultures. They have this grim assessment from a 1984 Ibero-American University master's thesis by Luz Olivia Pineda, and they contrast this picture with the changes brought about in the 1930s by the revolutionary government of Cárdenas, which had, among other things, the linguistic effect of according the indigenous people of Chiapas recognition as "citizens" in the language of officialdom, replacing the earlier usage, which employed the expression "subject" (of the landowners) when it did not simply practice total ellipsis of indigenous peoples from official discourse on the affairs of the human community and the relation of people to the land. This was not the only "linguistic transformation" accompanying agrarian reform. Indigenous peoples abandoned their "silence to call for justice and eventually to argue their rights" (p. 107) in their own voice. The message of this chapter, in part, is that "a proposal for vernacular language education can be effective only when one breaks with the prevailing asymmetrical structural relation between indigenous cultures and the rest of the nation and when policy is conceived cooperatively and in common accord" (p. 107). The other part of the message is that progressive sociopolitical transformation is necessary to break with a "prevailing asymmetrical structural relation" between cultures.

That this will, in reality, be long in coming becomes clear in the next chapter, Salomón Nahmad's "Impacts of the Reform to Article 4 of the Constitution on Language Policy in Mexico," in which he discusses the destructive and obstructive circumstance of the official and constitutional failure to recognize the collective rights of the many culturally and linguistically distinct Mexican indigenous communities. These have been in a perpetual situation of confrontation with the Mexican project of nation formation, whose "theses have set Mexican society up as the inheritor of the colonial authority that has planned and desired to extirpate the religions, gods, symbols of identity, languages, dress, modes of production, and ethical and moral values of the Indian peoples and to replace them with those of the western, Christian and Hispanic, model" (p. 118). In relation to languages of Mexico's fifty-six indigenous groups, Nahmad makes an observation that is not unfamiliar to linguists concerned with these matters in other parts of the world: "we protect their past because it is of use to us as the roots of national identity, but we deny and seek to destroy ([in a form of] ethnocide) their present, because it denigrates us" (p. 118). The project of "spiritual conquest" has not ended, but

continues "without our being able to conceive of a culturally and linguistically plural society and country" (p. 118). Given this background, it is understandable that the legal correctives that are seen as necessary are vast and far reaching, beyond the constitutional promise of Article 4 in 1992 to "protect and promote" the languages and cultures of indigenous peoples. It is not clear which of the principles and proposals set out in this chapter will be expressed in law. It is clear, however, that a just plural society will be won, in Mexico as elsewhere, with difficulty and only by coming to grips effectively with fundamentally opposed socioeconomic forces. The compelling doctrine according to which "who is first in time is first in right" and according to which the original inhabitants of the land have a "prior right ahead of the rest of the population" has played an interesting and complicated role in the politics of land rights. The Wik land rights project of North Queensland, for example, is predicated largely on this doctrine and has extraordinary implications for relations between European Australian and Aboriginal Australian societies. The outcome is not clear. The final paragraphs of this essay make an important and familiar point. While Article 4 of the constitution provides an enabling environment, to be sure, it is action on the part of indigenous communities, rather than constitutional discourse itself, that is fundamental in effecting change. "Rebellion and resistance are signs that recognition in discourse is not enough and that what is required is a re-organization of Mexican society in order to build a Mexico that includes the Indian peoples" (pp. 126–27). And where there have been advances in the promotion of local languages and indigenous intellectual culture, and in other areas, they have been accomplished largely by the indigenous people directly concerned, within a framework that does not yet embody the "reform that recognizes indigenous peoples as social and political unities in relation to the national State" (p. 128).

Section 4, "Official Steps toward Bilingual Education," contains informative essays by Gabriela Coronado Suzán, Ludka de Gortari Krauss, and Ernesto Díaz Couder Cabral. The first of these describes the "spaces for bilingualism" (p. 135) with an account of the diversity and functioning of bilingualism in both state-defined and community-defined contexts. In relation to formal education, the essay makes the observation that while schools provide the means of access to Spanish, the community itself, by its very communicative practices, determines the continuity of its first language. In other domains as well, it is the community that appropriates to itself the responsibility for determining the contexts and spaces for Spanish vis-à-vis local language use. The second essay treats the scope, achievements, and limitations of formal education policy within indigenous regions in the present period. Taking into consideration the enormity of the task involved in providing high-quality, ethnically and linguistically responsible education for indigenous children, teachers, and parents, this chapter presents some of the evidence in support of the assertion made at the beginning of this review that Mexico is in many respects a shining light in the arena of education for local language communities. It gives an honest picture, I believe, of the distance traveled—since the 1960s, say—as well as the daunting distance yet to be traveled. Like earlier chapters, this one includes useful charts. The third chapter of this section, by Díaz Couder Cabral, describes the objectives, political context, and achievements of the relatively new Master's Program in American Indian Linguistics of CIESAS, the Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology, and INI, the National Indigenist Institute. This program—like its antecedent in CIESAS, the Program for the Formation of Ethnolinguists—is another admirable Mexican initiative, designed primarily, but not exclusively, for native speakers of indigenous languages; its purpose is to produce linguists informed about American Indian linguistics. In its efforts to draw in students from local language communities, who are the majority, it is reminiscent of the School of Australian Linguistics established during the progressive years of the Labour Party government of the early 1970s to train Aboriginal teachers and teachers' aides in the

linguistic skills needed in their growing bilingual education programs; it is also reminiscent of the remarkable Guatemalan Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín of the same period, and of the American Indian Languages Development Institute in the Southwest of the United States.

Section 5, entitled "Results of Certain Language Policies in Mexico," comprises three contributions, including María Luisa Acevedo Conde's review of language policies from the 1940s to the present, Marguerita Nolasco's essay on bilingual education in Oaxaca and its impact on Indian participation in politics, and Ramón Arzápalo Marín's paper on language policy and questions of ethics in social interrelations in the Yucatec Maya region. The first is an account of the progression from the failed postrevolutionary philosophy of Hispanicization and marginalization of indigenous languages to the present-day progressive, albeit obstacle-beset, program of inclusion appropriate to a multiethnic and multilingual nation. Nolasco's chapter gives a more detailed account of this progression in the state of Oaxaca, rich in linguistic diversity and the home of the once influential Institute for Research and Social Integration of the State of Oaxaca (IISEO), an organization that—in its time, essentially the 1970s and early 1980s—was "the seed bed of a generation of Oaxacan Indian intellectuals" (p. 213) and had repercussions of national scope and importance. The final paper in this section begins by recounting an aspect of history that we often lose sight of, namely, the fact that in the earliest period, European invaders in the new world employed almost exclusively the indigenous languages in education—religious education, to be sure—so that the extent of scholarship in the Mayan languages, for example, was truly impressive already in the sixteenth century. The same was true even in the regions of English invasion a century later. And it is a good thing, too, for now the Wampanoag people of Mashpe and Aquinnah in Massachusetts can hope to regain their linguistic patrimony through the writings of John Eliot, compiler of the first Bible printed in the new world, and through the many, short but priceless, documents left by Wampanoags who also bequeathed to us a record of their language written in the hand of native speakers. The subsequent indigenous experiences with the English and Spanish are unhappily parallel; it is a sad and deeply disturbing fact of history, politics, and greed that so promising a program of intellectual intercultural approach was succeeded by a program of genocide.

The sixth section, entitled "Perspectives on Indigenous Language Conservation," contains four papers, the first of which, by Carlos Montemayor, deals with the function of literature and writing in indigenous languages. Here again, Mexico is an admirable example in the general panorama of local language promotion, with much activity in indigenous literature, including the extraordinary Centro Editorial de Literatura Indígena (CELIAC) in Oaxaca, only obliquely mentioned in this chapter. In the United States, there is likewise much contemporary Native American literature, but few writers compose their works in an indigenous language, notable exceptions being the Tohono O'odham poet Ofelia Zepeda and the Navajo poet Rex Jim. The next two chapters, by Agustín Jacinto Z. and Cayetano Reyes García, deal with P'urhépecha (Tarascan) and the Tarascan projects of Maturino Gilberti and Juan Medina Plaza, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and, in the twentieth century, that of Morris Swadesh, Barrera Vázquez, and Máximo Dwight Lathrop. Some rather astounding facts emerge here, including the fact that Gilberti's 4,000 pages of P'urhépecha text contain more than 50,000 lexical items, and Lathrop's writings comprise some forty-two volumes. This is a sizable corpus, to say the least. The period of the second Tarascan Project was also the time when Swadesh and his Mexican colleagues applied glottochronology and other comparative methods in the classification of the languages of Mexico. The final paper in this section, by Dora Pellicer, speaks of linguistic rights and pluralist education in Mexico. There, a wide gamut of questions is treated in relation to the asymmetries and contradictions inherent in the interplay of, on the one hand, fundamental principles of

linguistic and human equality and established tenets of science and international law, and, on the other hand, the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and educational inequalities among language communities in contemporary state structures. There is brief reference to an issue that deserves much thought and discussion. In reference to the notion of linguistic democracy, Pellicer proposes the following:

In practice this concept would address the right of minority groups to maintain and promote their language as well as the right to learn and use the majority language and whatever language meets their communicational needs. In the same way, speakers of majority languages would have among their linguistic rights that of learning one or more of the minority languages spoken within their nation, as well as any other language meeting their communicational needs. [p. 286]

It is the reciprocal here that needs to be, and will be, discussed for many years to come, I am sure. Many local language communities have principled objections to allowing outsiders to learn their languages—on a “come one, come all” basis, at least. And it is indeed questionable whether free reciprocity is, in fact, the just position to adopt in this situation. The political and economic disparity, particularly in the case of severely embattled and endangered languages, places the dominant and minority languages on such an unequal footing that all questions of unfettered access by outsiders to imperiled local language traditions cease to be matters that are automatically and simply settled by appeal to abstract and decontextualized principles of “democracy” and “the right to know.” The right of access by minority communities to the dominant language, of course, is an established international principle of human rights and holds without question.

The seventh section, entitled “Education and Languages,” contains three papers, the first of which, by Emilia Ferreiro, discusses bilingualism from a positive point of view, beginning, however, with a reference to negative attitudes to it that have prevailed in some educational structures that, in effect, scapegoated a child’s “other” language(s) for failures in the education system itself, much as African-American English has been, and still is, scapegoated in the United States. This situation must be seen in contrast to the fact that bilingualism and multilingualism are the norm, valued, and unexceptional in much of the world. Ferreiro also discusses literacy, and what she calls “bi-literacy” (p. 299), and their relevance to education in the context of the reality of bilingualism and multilingualism. Next, María de Ibarrola’s chapter discusses the repercussions of recent large-scale changes in basic education initiated in the administration of President Salinas de Gortari and formulated in the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education and the General Education Law. There are explicit references in the Agreement to the culturally and linguistically diverse character of the country and to the determination to “protect and develop the indigenous languages,” and there is express recognition that “education must adapt linguistically and culturally to each of the ethnic groups as well as to marginalized sectors and to the migrant population” (p. 309). The paper gives an honest portrayal of the hurdles that must be surmounted in implementing the principles of the new law: “The education policies, nevertheless, have suffered from serious obstacles to their realization in practice. . . . In the case of bilingual and bicultural education, both the training of teachers and general educational services are beset by the great flaws and impoverishments which characterize all rural and marginalized urban education in the country” (p. 313). The final paper in this section, by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, deals with the representation of indigenous peoples and cultures in school textbooks. The question of the role and importance of the study of history is not an issue in Mexico, since it was the past that the founders of the Mexican state had recourse to as an integrating theme for the new nation, a source of pride. The

Mexican Indian figured centrally in this past. Generally, this person was not the present-day Indian, but rather the Mexihcatl of the time of the conquest. But even the majesty of Cuauhtemoc and the national debt to Benito Juárez could not prevent the belittlement of Indian civilization in some influential Mexican historical writings belonging to the Hispanist faction that developed in opposition to the indigenist historical tradition in the postrevolutionary era. Even the latter, it should be said, was not free of negative images of indigenous culture, and in general it failed to "generate concern or interest in living indigenous people" (p. 318), despite the work of renowned figures like Manuel Gamio and Alfonso Caso, or that of Luis Chávez Orozco, whose *Historia Patria* gave Mexican children some information about modern Indian life and attempted to inspire respect for Indian people with the familiar idea that "without their effort, we would not have many of the things that are indispensable to our lives" (p. 319). In the 1970s, an interesting experiment was undertaken in the writing of public school textbooks dealing with Mexican history and contemporary life; the aim of these was to give the student an accurate picture of the Mexican countryside and socioeconomic diversity, and in an early edition, a depiction of two indigenous societies, Seri and Mixtec, was included. In the end, however, Zoraida Vázquez is rather negative in her assessment of subsequent texts, saying that, while the texts of the 1970s had mistakes in them, "it is a shame that the new books begin at point zero when they could have taken advantage of good ideas while correcting the errors" (p. 323).

The final section, "Written Literature in Indigenous Languages," begins with an essay by Víctor de la Cruz, who takes the generally accepted position that oral language in artistic form, whether poetry, rhetoric, prose, or song, is appropriately called literature. Not to accept this, he says, is to be "hung up on etymology" (p. 33). His interesting contribution develops what amounts to an incipient Zapotec literary lexicon, ranging in coverage from terminology belonging to the genres of the sacred and the didactic, to terminology belonging to the category of entertainment, including jokes and deception. The second paper, by Librado Silva Galeana, reviews contemporary literature in the Nahuatl of Milpa Alta. Of great importance in this tradition is the contribution resulting from the collaborative work of Fernando Horcasitas and the Nahuatl-speaking scholar Luz Jiménez, published under the title *From Porfirio Díaz to Zapata: Nahuatl Memoirs of Milpa Alta* (1974). The works of three other important Nahuatl scholars are also discussed. The penultimate paper, of this section and of the book as well, is by Miguel Ángel May May, of the Yucatan Regional Unit of Popular Cultures, who briefly discusses obstacles in the development of a contemporary written literature in Yucatec Mayan and the progress that has been made in spite of those obstacles. These include the establishment of a Workshop for Literature in the Maya Language, which has given impetus to the production of two journals (one bilingual, the other monolingual), now amounting to forty volumes. Individuals involved in these efforts have sought to replicate and disseminate them through other workshops, devoted largely to literacy in Maya. A familiar refrain is echoed in the final paragraph: "We Maya language writers have assumed our responsibility, to write about our language; it remains for the government to do its part. If Mexico is rich in anything, it is in languages and ethnic groups, richness which we must not allow to vanish" (p. 356). The final chapter, by Gabriel Pacheco Salvador, is on oral and written literature in Huichol. After taking up again the important theme that oral traditions are appropriately included in the category of literature, Pacheco Salvador argues that writing also belongs there, making an important point:

It is not only about rescuing the elements of form and content that we consider valuable, in order to make them accessible to other cultures or in order to enrich other literary traditions, but above all it is about giving a new impulse to our

traditions, using the advantages of writing. Nor is it about substituting the oral tradition with a new culture of written literature; rather, it is about adding another dimension to our literary culture. [p. 361]

Part of the appeal of Mexico in the context of indigenous language scholarship is the incredible variety of projects and experiments undertaken there. I realize that it is impossible to include coverage of every project or development in a book of manageable size, and it is therefore understandable that certain important projects will be omitted, perhaps for reasons of space, or perhaps because they do not properly belong to the domain of policy, or possibly for the simple reason that the contributors do not include representatives of them. For example, I would have welcomed a contribution from Jesús Salinas or Josefa Gonzáles, or both, on the exciting Oaxacan literature project, at the Centro Editorial de Literatura Indígena, A.C. (CELIAC), established to enable members of local language communities to become computer-competent and to begin writing documents, of great variety, in their native languages. There are other projects as well. Inasmuch as the sheer number of past and present Mexican language projects would have made inclusion of all of them impossible in a book of this size, it is perhaps overly fussy to complain about the absence of one or another of them. In any event, this book gives a good idea of the range of policy considerations that have influenced the development of indigenous language programs and projects in Mexico, as well as the formulation of articulated constitutional philosophy on matters involving language and cultural pluralism in the country.

References

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A Practical Grammar of the Central Alaskan Yup'ik Eskimo Language. With Yup'ik Readings by Anna W. Jacobson. STEVEN A. JACOBSON. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center and Program, University of Alaska, 1995. Pp. xii + 548. N.p. (cloth).

Reviewed by Doug Hitch, *Yukon Native Language Centre*

Steven A. Jacobson's many years of experience with both the technical linguistics of Yup'ik (also "Yupik") and with the practical considerations of teaching this language shine clearly through this finely wrought as well as beautifully typeset and bound work. It is no mean feat to present the abstract scientific facts of this grammar in a teaching format suitable for the layperson.

Jacobson spells the language name "Yup'ik," as it is written in the practical orthography, with the apostrophe showing consonant doubling. With more than 10,000 speakers, and with children still learning the language in about a third of the villages, Central Alaskan Yup'ik is the healthiest of all the Yup'ik languages and the strongest of any native language in Alaska.

In teaching grammars there is always a balancing act between the need for simplicity and the need to be accurate and complete. The act is many times more difficult with languages without a long-established literary standard or a dominant dialect. This fact is almost always not understood by the general public, even the highly educated