

## Delaware Review of Latin American Studies

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### DeRLAS' 15th Anniversary State of the Art Issue

Vol. 15 No. 3 July 15, 2015

#### **Native American Oral Narratives in Mexico and Guatemala**

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This essay is a brief survey of anthropological and folklore scholarship on oral narratives told by contemporary speakers of indigenous languages living in Mexico and Guatemala and recorded in the indigenous language since 1900. Topics covered in this essay include a brief history of the collection of oral narratives from present-day speakers of Mesoamerican languages, and the uses of those narratives as expressions of memory, in applications of the comparative method, as expressions of cultural logic, as accounts of personal experience, in performance and dialogue, and in ethnic activism. I aim to summarize work done toward understanding how oral narratives are ways of organizing experience in story form and offer suggestions for further research.

#### **The collection of oral narratives**

Several scholars provide useful summaries of work done on contemporary oral narratives in Mexico and Guatemala through the 1970's. One is Stanley Robe (1973) who constructed his *Index of Mexican Folktales* by building on Boggs' (1930) classification of Spanish folktales. Robe (1973: xv-xxi) lists all of the published collections of oral stories recorded in Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest of the United States from the early 1900's. Most are in English and Spanish but some came from speakers of Mesoamerican languages. The first generation of collectors who provided the stories in Robe's *Index* did not always take care to describe how they did their fieldwork and they often provided little information on the narrators and their communities, complicating the task of interpretation. A sampling of some of the earlier published collections of stories that probably came from Mesoamerican language speakers will reveal some of the problems. Konrad Theodor Preuss (1982) wrote down in Nahuatl stories he heard in San Pedro Jícora, Durango, in 1907 but he did not describe the storytelling context and he provided little information about the narrators and how they fit into their community. Franz Boas (Boas and Arreola 1924; Boas and Haeberlin 1924) collected indigenous language texts from narrators who included Señorita Isabel Castañeda Ramirez and a man called Lucio, both of whom were natives of Mila Alta near Mexico City and wrote their stories in Nahuatl (Boas and Haeberlin 1924; 339), but little is known about the circumstances under which Isabel and Lucio wrote their stories. Elsie Clews Parsons (1936) included 29 texts in English she collected from several narrators (Miguel Mendez, Agustín Santiago, Pedro Zamora, Isidora Angélica Quero y Toro, Eligio Santiago and Rosa Santiago) living in the Zapotec community of Mitla. However, Parsons was vague about the language of narration for many of the storytellers. While she (1936: 324) did report that Miguel Méndez told the story of "The Barren Woman" in Zapotec, she is less clear about the language of narration for other tales and does not specify if she translated directly from Zapotec to English. Radin collected stories from Mixe (1933) and Zapotec narrators (1946) but he was unclear if he worked in the indigenous languages or relied on bi-lingual informants. George M. Foster (1945) published his collection of Popolucan tales, also in English, and he said he worked in the native language. He does not include any texts in the Mesoamerican language but he did describe economic and social life of the Popolucans in Soteapan (Foster 1942). Walter S. Miller (1956: 3) published stories in Spanish the greater part of which he said came from narrators who told their tales in Mixe and who came from the community of San Lucas Camotlán in the state of Oaxaca. His published collection does not include indigenous language texts, and one knows little about the narrators and their cultural context. Several scholars published indigenous language texts in Mixe, Nahuatl, Totonac, Tzotzil, Zapotec, Zoque in issues of *Tlalocan* published between 1944 and 1963 (Barrios 1949; Cowan 1967; Croft 1957; Guerrero 1944; Harrison 1952; Horcasitas 1962; Law 1957; Martínez del Río de Izca 1962-1963; Oropeza Castro 1947; Radin 1933, 1943). Spanish translations of Zoque narratives also appear in Villa

Rojas et. al. (1975: 227-235), and Spanish versions of Totonac stories, some of which are composites of variants collected in different locations, appear in Ichon (1973: 51-101). On the other hand, Horcasitas and de Ford (1979) published the Nahuatl texts of stores collected from the Luz Jiménez.

Many in this generation of anthropologists and folklorists were concerned with the origin of stories that circulated among the speakers of indigenous languages in many parts of the Americas. Boas (1912) concluded that most were versions of European folktales, a view that prevailed for a while notwithstanding Stith Thompson's (1929) anthology of Native American tales with a preponderance of indigenous themes. By the 1940's, Ralph Beals (1943), Paul Radin (1945: 22) and George Foster (1948: 377) expressed skepticism about Boas' view referring to it as a myth or a fallacy. Beals (1943) contended that Boas' view had the effect of discouraging many anthropologists and folklorists from collecting stories from indigenous language speakers in their native tongues. Beals (1943: 9) singled out as a notable exception the work of Margaret Redfield (1935) who collected Yucatec Mayan stories, eschewed the concern with origins and proposed asking what the stories mean to the tellers and their audience (1935: 4).

Margaret Redfield's view came to prevail as a newer generation of scholars devoted considerably more effort to working in the original native languages and linking stories to their tellers and their communities (Laughlin 1962, 1977, 1980; Fought and Fought 1972; Gossen 1974, 2002; Bricker 1981; Stross 1973, 1983; Burns 1983; Taggart, 1983, 1997, 2007; Sexton 1992; Van't Hooft 2007). Many faced obstacles to publishing Mesoamerican language texts but they paid particular attention to placing the stories in their socio-cultural context, which enabled them to connect the stories to questions they posed from anthropological theory. Among the first was Robert Laughlin (1962) who wrote a dissertation on Tzotzil Maya folktales of courtship and marriage in Zinacantan and revealed a great deal about gender relations in that community. Laughlin also published a volume of dream narratives (1980) and a carefully crafted collection of oral stories in the native language with an English translation and biographies of the narrators (1977). Laughlin and many other subsequent scholars practiced the now common wisdom that "interpretation arises only in the union between form and content." (Hanks 1989b: 98) By 1985, the contributors to the supplement "Literatures" to the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Edmonson 1985) could refer to narratives recorded from contemporary as well as ancient speakers of Nahuatl (León-Portilla 1985), Yucatec Maya (Edmonson and Bricker 1985), Tzotzil (Gossen 1985), Quiche (Edmonson 1985) and Chorti (Maya) (Fought 1985). John Monaghan (2001) updated this list in his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*.

### **Narratives as Memory**

During much of the second half of Twentieth Century, many scholars rejected the advice of Boas and worked with the hypothesis that the ancient Mesoamerican cultures of the past survived into the present. Some assumed that the hypothesis was a proven fact such as with translations of the *Popol Vuh*, the ancient Quiché Maya account of creation, based in part on commentary from contemporary informants (De Ridder 1986; Tedlock 1985). More direct evidence of the survival of the ancient culture in contemporary narratives came from Gossen (1974) who found that Tzotzil Mayan narrators, like their ancient ancestors, continued to believe that there were four eras of creation and constructed narrative genres in accord with this belief, giving rise to speculation that other aspects of indigenous culture may have survived into the present. Victoria Bricker (1981) took a different approach by focusing on how contemporary Maya living in Highland Chiapas, the Yucatan and Guatemala preserve, in their mythology and their rituals, a collective memory of insurgencies and conflicts that occurred during the Colonial and Independence Period in Mexican and Guatemalan history. Maurice Halbwachs (1995) developed the theory of collective memory, which has proved to be very useful for scholars working with Mesoamerican oral narratives. For the purposes of this essay, I shall define it as "a group's own history" (Good Eshelman 2007) that is shared and thus part of the culture of a group (Ricoeur 2004: 118), with which the members give meaning (Geertz 1973; White 1987) to "the marks left by the historical events that have affected the course of the history of the groups affected and who have the power to present them in the scenario of common memories" (Ricoeur 2004: 119). Bricker (1981: 4) took as her point of departure Levi-Strauss' notion that there is a similarity between an oral narrator and a *bricoleur* because both utilize what they have immediately at hand. She contended that the oral narrator organizes the residue and crumbs of historical events into a structure that has the abstract qualities of a myth. She also observed that both myths and ritual communicate the same message, one in language and the other in action.

Continuities with the past are also an important topic among scholars of Nahua narratives. On the one hand is Enrique Florescano (1994) who argued that the Spanish Conquest destroyed the pre-Hispanic mythic reckoning of time by eliminating the ancient Nahua kings, breaking up and mixing ethnic groups, changing the settlement pattern, bringing disastrous epidemics, introducing Christianity, and subordinating the Nahua

to colonial domination. Florescano presented a version of the cultural *mestizaje* hypothesis according to which Spanish culture fused with and replaced that of indigenous Mexicans. He argued that the elimination of the ancient calendar and writing meant that “both the ritual and the oral transmission of the past lost efficiency for preserving the authenticity of their traditions and the power to transmit them with the multiplying force and the effect that they had prior to the arrival of the conquerors” (1994: 115). He interpreted the work of Victoria Bricker and Serge Gruzinski (1989) on colonial period nativistic movements to conclude that, by the end of the 18th century, indigenous groups had fused their own apocalyptic tradition with that of Europe and revitalized Christian millenarianism.

Along the same lines, Pierre Beaucage (1974), who carried out fieldwork among the contemporary Nahuatl in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, argued that the “indigenous communities in Mexico are not self sufficient but are participants in the capitalist socio-cultural system.” He considered obsolete the culture approach, which includes the collection of oral narratives and folklore, and discounted the value of looking for culture traits that are “grounded in the pre-Columbian past” (1974: 112). In his view, the Nahuatl have become proletariat with a class culture. However, Beaucage (1999) began to change his mind when he heard that the UCI (Unión Campesina Independiente or Independent Farmers Union) appeared in the Sierra Norte in 1977 and organized Nahuatl and Totonacs to invade interstate cattle pastures and plant them with corn. This turn of events was an anomaly to Beaucage’s Marxist model because, on the one hand, “it shows that yes, there is a class struggle” but on the other hand those who joined the UCI did not have a developed proletariat class consciousness because they “did not ask for better salaries, much less for socialism: they wanted land!” (1999: 40)

According to other scholars, the search for Pre-Colombian antecedents in contemporary Nahua oral narratives is a viable approach (Broda 1971; Hunt 1977; León Portilla 1974 [1956], 1985, 1990; Alfredo López Austin 1980 [1988], 1993, 1997; Burkhart (1989). Johanna Broda (1971) encourages her students at the UNAM to look for continuities between the ancient and contemporary Nahua fertility cult in many parts of Central Mexico. López Austin’s (1980 [1988]) thesis on the isomorphism between the ancient Nahuatl theory of the body and cosmology inspired many to look for narratives that contained evidence of monism. Burkhart (1989) argued that the friar’s decision to convert Nahuas to Christianity by delivering sermons in the indigenous language allowed the Nahuas to hold on to their culture of monism, as expressed in the connotative meanings of their words for ethical and moral behavior. Her work inspired scholars to examine carefully the use and meaning of Nahua words in contemporary narratives. Eva Hunt (1977) had contended that there is a common Mesoamerican foundation to many contemporary oral narratives, and oral narratives scholars (Taggart 1983: 85-113) have provided support for her contention by recording contemporary version of ancient narratives such as “The Origin of the Fourth Sun” (Sahagún 1953: 3-8; Paso y Troncoso 1903), and “The Origin of Corn from Sustenance Mountain” (Paso y Troncoso 1903; Lehman 1906: 245-257; Feliciano Velázquez 1975: 119-121). Ethnographers report traces of the ancient culture in the ethnographic interviews with Nahuatl informants who have described the underworld of Tlalocan in ways that accord with ancient accounts of the underworld in the 16th century sources (Knab 1991). The erotic images of brother and sisters, which appeared in the sixteenth century story of “Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl” (Bierhorst 1992: 34) and in the seventeenth century *Treatise on Superstitions* by Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón (Coe and Whitaker 1982: 131-144), also appear in contemporary versions of the Nahuatl Orpheus myth in the Sierra Norte de Puebla (Taggart 2007: 104-112).

These and other works also reveal some of the ways that the indigenous culture has changed as a result of the forces mentioned by Florescano. One example is the Nahua relationship between myth and ritual. At the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, the ancient Nahuas enacted in their rituals episodes from their myths (Graulich 1997, 1999). For example, the rituals that took place during the month of *Ochpaniztli* were primarily dedicated to the goddess *Toci* (Our Mother Earth), *Atlantonan* (Our Mother the water), and a female version of *Chicomecoatl*, the corn deity. The rituals involved female sacrificial victims who personified the goddesses. The rites were re-enactments of the myth of *Tamoanchan* when the goddess *Xochiquetl* picked a flower from a tree, was expelled to earth, conceived a child with *Piltzintecuhtli*, and gave birth to *Cinteotl*, the corn plant (see Quiñones Keber 1995: 29, 183). One can find traces of the myth of *Tamoanchan* in oral versions of the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. One link between the ancient myth and the biblical stories is the tree that Nahuatl employ as an adornment in courtship, marriage and baptism rituals. To be sure, the symbol of the flower tree (*xochicuauhit*) appears in contemporary accounts of Tlalocan (Knab 1991) but plucking the flower or forbidden fruit now stands for original sin, a meaning probably derived from the friars and secular clergy (Taggart 1983: 175-188).

The relationship between myth and rituals among the contemporary Nahuas is different than the one envisioned by Michel Graulich in his elegant study of the ancient rituals and texts. Rather than enacting episodes in origin myths, contemporary Nahuat use rituals and storytelling to manage their emotions in accord with their social aim of working for one in the extended family household and in the community. To achieve this aim, the Nahuat promote in oral narratives the value of love (*tazohtaliz*), respect (*icnoyot*), and compassion (*teicnelliz*) and depict in very negative terms envy (*nexicoliz*), which destroys gratitude (*tazohcamatiliz*) and love. Some Nahuat explain the meaning of their flower tree rituals as necessary to create the very same values they also express in their oral stories (Taggart 2007: 73-82; 2011)

### Comparison of Cognate Narratives

Folklorists have developed a folktale comparative method (Aarne Thompson 1961; Thompson 1946 [1977]; Dundes 1989: 57-82) greater use of which for comparing oral narratives between Mesoamerica and Spain and within Mesoamerica could contribute to an understanding of how indigenous language speaking narrators organize their experience according to a social and cultural pattern (See Beals 1943: 10; Foster 1952). Lining up the indigenous language stories with cognate peninsular Spanish ones can reveal how narrators in each setting make a story their own "sociocultural product" and demonstrate "the relation of text to power in social contexts" (Hanks 1989b: 95).

One example is the story of "The Bear's Son," which in some European versions are remarkably similar to the Grendel episode of the Old English epic *Beowulf*. (Stitt 1992: 11, 193) The story is very popular in Spain (Espinosa 1924: 275-283; Curiel Merchán 1944: 210-214, 324-327; Cortés Vázquez 1979: II: 130-141, 147-154, 142-147; Larrea Palacín 1959: 16-18, 141-147) and has become one of the most popular oral tales circulating among indigenous language speaking narrators in Mexico (Boas 1912: 241-245; Radin 1943: 22-30; Laughlin 1977: 370-372; Martin 1987; Taggart 1997). The close comparison of the peninsular Spanish and indigenous language versions of this story in Mexico reveals why it is a mistake to be discouraged from taking an interest the versions of "The Bear's Son" in the repertoires of indigenous language speaking narrators in Mexico because they are of "European origin" (Beals 1943: 8). The Spanish versions of "The Bear's Son" may look the same on the surface but, upon closer examination, it is a folktale in Spain and a myth among the Nahuat, according to Bascom's (1965: 5) classification of oral narratives. The Spanish stories are folktales because the hero lives in a world like the one of today and goes through stages of maturation, uses his power for a morally and socially constructive purpose and is ready for marriage. The Nahuat tale is a myth because the action of the story takes place in the remote past and in a different world than the one today. The hero is an anthropomorphized lightning bolt who becomes the captain of the rain gods. Narrators call him Ahuehueht (Old Man of the Water) or Nanahuatzin, a contemporary culture hero derived from Nanahuatl, the sixteenth century Nahua god who jumped into the pyre at Teotihuacan to become the fourth (or fifth sun) and who broke open Sustenance Mountain to provide corn for starving humans who appeared in the last era of creation (Paso y Troncoso 1903: 30; Lehmann 1906; Sahagún 1953: 3-8; Feliciano Velázquez 1975; Bierhorst 1992: 147-149). Moreover, the narrators employ narrative devices that convey a different relationship between them and the hero relative to narrators in Spain. The art of telling "The Bear's Son" for one Nahuat narrator is to use language to represent the hero's power without actually mimicking the hero or employing words that are themselves so powerful that no one should utter them. Narrators also employ cultural devices, such as diaphrasis or *difrasismo*, a term Ángel Garibay (1953-4:I:19) used for the ancient Nahua practice of placing two words together to "give a symbolic meaning of expression to a single thought."

More comparisons of this type within ancient as well as contemporary Mesoamerica can add to our understanding of power in gender and inter-ethnic relations. Lisa Sousa and Kevin Terraciano's (2003) carried out a fascinating comparison of Nahua and Mixtec accounts of the Spanish Conquest that reveals ethnic identity and historical memory during the latter part of the 17th century. Pierre Beaucage (1999) compared the collective memory in the Nahuat texts of the oral narratives assembled by Oral Tradition Workshop (Taller de Tradición Oral) (see below) and Tzotzil Mayan texts recorded by Laughlin and Gossen in Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula. His project is similar but less ambitious than the one on collective memory that Victoria Bricker (1981) carried out earlier examining the Tzotzil, Yucatec, and Quiché Maya narratives and ritual. Beaucage (1999, 2010) reported that narrators in both groups depicted class and ethnic categories with a lack of isomorphism, they expressed antagonism toward foreign oppressors, and they told of supernatural forces, which intervened on the side of the oppressed. One difference is that the Nahuat narrators represented a more lineal version of their history because they mentioned more conflicts beginning including the French intervention (1862-1867) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).

Power in gender relations is a theme explored in several studies of oral narratives in the contemporary Nahua areas of the Sierra Norte de Puebla and the Alto Balsas region of Guerrero. In the Sierra Norte, male

narrators in Huitzilan and Yaonáhuac tell the same stories but in different ways depending on the position of women in their families. Women have more access to land in Yaonáhuac, and the male narrators in that community represent them with more positive values relative to their culture than do narrators in Huitzilan where women have access to less land. Yaonáhuac narrators weave their more positive images of women into a more integrated vision based on the classification of cosmic forces as male or female (Taggart 1983). In general, Nahua women tell stories in more intimate situations such as among the members of an extended family. In the Alto Balsas, they stress themes of morality while men express ambiguous and amoral feelings related to their attitudes toward the Hispanic world and to recent changes in female identity (Raby 2007).

Greater attention to the use of the comparative method within Mexico and Guatemala could help us understand how and particularly why contemporary indigenous-speaking male and female narrators tell stories the ways that they do. For example, the stories that Gossen (2002) recorded from six male Tzotzil-speaking narrators are local variants of stories found in many different parts of Mexico. They are derived from *Genesis*, European folktales such as "The Bear's Son," "Blancaflor," "Juan Tonto," and the Tar Baby stories as well as the *Popol Vuh*. Very striking to one who worked in another region is how the narrators represent food, gender and sexuality. The Tzotzil narrators describe food coming from the male body, while many ancient and contemporary Mesoamericans say it came from women. The six Chamulan narrators, all male, associated women characters, who can cook big meals with few ingredients, with thunderbolts, and deer and with the Ladino Earth Lord while others connect all three to the Sun/Christ. The Tzotzil narrators generally represented women's sexuality with negativity while other Mesoamericans depicted women's power of procreation as a creative force. The examination of variation in these common themes in conjunction with a comparative study of gender relations could be fruitful for understanding "power in and of texts" which for some scholars of oral narratives "is of prime importance, linking up the textual formations... with social relations and a larger cultural system." (Hanks 1989b: 102)

### **Cultural Logic**

Some scholars, particularly those working in Mexican institutions, approach oral narratives as expressing the cultural logic of a group. Cultural logic can take many forms one being the structure of myths that Levi-Strauss (1969 [1964]) proposed for many Amerindians. According to Levi-Strauss, the human mind works by making a series of homologous and mediated binary oppositions. One can find the essence of the working of the human mind in the most "primitive" societies where narrators have not been affected by training in the Western tradition. Those who are convinced that contemporary Amerindian cultures have meaningful antecedents in the ancient past have turned to oral narratives to find a cultural logic that is fundamentally different from that of the West. Some who work with Marxist theory have contended that Amerindians in Mexico and Central America have a social code where the person is deeply embedded in the group and is obligated to carry out reciprocal exchanges even if they participate in economies with money and commodity exchange.

Many younger scholars and some mature ones have turned to Viveiros de Castro's (1998) theory of "perspectivism," which takes as its point of departure Levi-Strauss' binary opposition between nature and culture. Viveiros de Castro doubts that Amerindians attribute a "substantivist conceptualization of the categories of Nature and Culture..." (1998: 476) Amerindian thought is "not a process of differentiating the human from the animal, as in our own evolutionist mythology. The original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but humanity...animals are ex-humans, not humans are ex-animals" (1998: 471-472). Viveiros Castro finds evidence for this view in myths depicting animals as "co-substantial with humans." Therefore, to eat animals, a shaman must "de-subjectify them." (1998: 472) In the Amerindian world, non-humans "placed in the subject perspective...see themselves anatomically and culturally as *humans*..." (1998: 477) Whereas Europeans contend that humans are animals with a spirit or a mind, Amerindians "postulate a metaphysical (spiritual) continuity and physical discontinuity." (1998: 478) Or, to put it briefly, there is one culture and multiple natures. (1998: 478) The diverse natures are similar souls who adopt different skins and thus take different forms. "It is not so much that the body is a clothing but rather that clothing is a body." (1998: 482) Animal masks, therefore, are "endowed with the power metaphysically to transform identities of those who wear them, if used in the appropriate ritual context." (1998: 482) Bodily behavior can unmask just as donning a mask can transform identities. A shaman wears animal clothing to travel the cosmos much as humans put on a wet suit to travel in water (1998: 482). It remains to be seen if Viveiros de Castro's theory of perspectivism will become the new structuralism (See Turner 2009). For the moment it is the subject of intense controversy (see Ramos 2012). The careful interpretations of oral narratives told by indigenous language speakers could reveal just how and to what extent perspectivism is a useful theory.

### Performance and Dialogue

One problem with any structural theory of oral narratives is that narrators, even if they are members of the same community, tell the same stories in different ways. Scholars have taken two approaches to intra-community variation in oral narratives. One is to shift the perspective from the logical structure in a collection of narratives to the specifics of performance. The performance school of narrative study is rooted in what was known as the ethnography of speaking (Bauman and Sherzer 1975; Hanks 1989b: 111). Bauman and Briggs (1990: 70) contend that the ethnography of speaking and the performance schools represent a: "shift in analytic perspective (that) has fostered awareness of the active role that hearers also play in performance. In conversational narratives, audience member are often accorded turns at talk, thus rendering narration co-performance." The performance school has many adherents, some of which (Tedlock 1985) have applied this approach to narratives told in an indigenous Mesoamerican language. The performance approach is not without its critics one of whom is Dell Hymes who said that Tedlock's approach gave the impression that narrators do not think between performances (Hymes 2003: 36) (From McCarthy 2007: 360-361).

Closely connected to approaching an oral narrative as a performance is the view that performing stories occurs in a conversation. (Hanks 1989b: 114) William Hanks has examined Mayan dialogues in storytelling and other forms of dialogue to investigate authenticity and ambivalence (Hanks 1986) and discourse genres (Hanks 1988). This approach requires a high level of language competency but is useful because it enables one to work with theories of enculturation through narratives. One useful theory of enculturation is Jerome Bruner's (1986) cultural psychology that combines an understanding of narrative, psychology, and culture (see Brenneis 2008; Lutkehaus 2008; Mattingly 2008; Mattingly et al. 2008; Shore 2008; Shweder 2008; Susuki et al. 2008; Wertsch 2008). Bruner is a constructivist and relativist who contended that narratives are the key to understanding how "*mind* comes under the sway of *culture*" (Bruner 2008: 29). He supports his theoretical perspective with psychological observations that reveal the human propensity to understand the worlds of others by listening to their stories.

Yuribia Velázquez Galindo (in press) carried out an interesting study of enculturation through oral narratives among the Nahuatl who live in the Sierra Norte de Puebla. She examined how Nahuatl parents and grandparents use narratives to inculcate a concept of personhood that incorporates the values of mutual aid in the extended family. The narratives teach children that they live in an interconnected universe of beings, both human and non-human, with which they must carry out reciprocal exchanges. Many have reported a similar vision in other parts of Mexico and Central America, but Velázquez is one of the few who has reported on the use of narratives for its inculcation in children.

One very interesting part of Bruner's theory that could have relevance for anthropologists working with indigenous language speakers in Mexico and Central America is the relationship between thought and emotion. As a constructivist and relativist, Bruner rejects the idea that humans have prepared emotions they call up in certain situations (1986: 93-105). He addresses one of the main controversies in the anthropology of emotion concerning cultural cognition and depth psychology (Chodorow 1999; Lindholm 1981, 1982; Lutz 1988; Lyon 1995; Nuckolls 1996; Rosaldo 1983) contending that even if one granted the view that there are primary or "primitive emotions like fear, rage, hunger, and sexual arousal, or that each major drive system had its accompanying distinguishable emotion," it would still be necessary to create specific meanings or "signatures" for emotional experience (Bruner 1986: 116). He asserts that children learn the meanings of emotions as they participate with the mother in constructing tiny cultural worlds and then expand those worlds by exchanging stories to include the perspectives of many others in the course of a life. The first tiny world constructed between infant and mother involves creating and negotiating mutual expectations. In the process of "getting things done," mother and child carry out a dialogue through which the child learns syntax and meaning, including the meaning of emotion words. Bruner drew on his work with Michael Sciafe that demonstrated that normal children at the end of the first year of life "follow another's line or regard to see what the other is looking at, and when they can find no target out there, they turn back to the looker to check gaze direction again." This happens, Bruner notes, before the child has passed beyond egocentrism in Piaget's scheme. The child only "adopts an egocentric framework when he fails to grasp the structure of events." (Bruner 1986: 68) From this work, Bruner concludes that humans have within them a built-in-capacity for "taking multiple perspective: and a capacity for attunement, both of which are requirements for learning language" (1986: 109).

Recording narratives in the indigenous language and in multi-party conversations is one way to see how attunement works for inculcating and learning the meaning of Nahuatl emotion words such as envy (*nexicoliz*) in the extended family whose members are supposed to work for one (*se cosa tequitih*). To work

for one is highly valued because it is one of the main ways that they Nahuat believe that they can create love (*tazohtaliz*) among the members of a family. Multi-party conversations involve an exchange of narratives based on personal experience including dreams. In a case recorded on October 14, 2007, in Huitzilán de Serdán, the members of a large extended family told stories of envy sickness (*nexicolcocoliz*), which resulted in the deaths or the near death of close family members (Taggart 2012). Their narratives are examples of “good stories, gripping drama... (dealing with) the vicissitudes of human intention” (Bruner 1986: 13, 16). Their conversation was a dialogue in the sense that the members of this family injected comments to show their “attunement” (Bruner 1986: 115) to what the narrator is saying. The participants also took turns telling their versions of stories dealing with the same theme, and turn taking is, of course, a transaction by which the members of this family constructed and even contested a tiny culture, albeit one that is bigger than the one formed between mothers and infants who construct “tiny worlds” (1986: 114-115) but much smaller than that of the community as a whole. In all cases, the narrators described women and men who were born with twisted hearts and thus were incapable of feeling gratitude (*tazohcamatiliz*) and love (*tazohtaliz*) from others. Their bodies had died and their emotional memories (*talnamiquiliz*) had gone to the land of the dead and they returned to take the souls of the small children so that they could get into heaven. The point of their stories was to depict envy as a very bad emotion because it undermines the mutual exchange of labor in the extended family. As Hanks (1989b: 95) anticipated, the multiparty narrative exchange revealed how power can work when telling stories. Three men in the family told tales, they had heard from others, about women who came back from the land of the dead to kill their grandchildren in accord with the men’s tendency to blame women for what goes wrong in a family. The last to speak was a woman who told about her dream in which a man came from the land of the dead to take the soul of her six-month old daughter. Narrating a dream carries more authority than recounting a story heard from someone else in Nahuat culture, and so the woman effectively undermined the men’s argument (Taggart 2012). Groark (2008, 2009) also examined Tzotzil Maya dream talk to negotiate questions of volition and social opacity and negative empathy. We need more work in this area.

### Personal Narratives

Personal narratives take many forms that include illness narratives, dream narratives and life histories, which are “born out of experience” and give “shape to experience” at the same time (Ochs and Capps 1996: 20).

#### a. Illness Narratives

Illness narratives can reveal “the inter-subjective construction of meanings related to body experiences and their use in negotiating responses to social and cultural tensions” (Collier et. al. 2000: 21). Collier and his associates (Collier et. al. 2000) conducted 13 interviews of Tzotzil Mayans suffering from *chawaj*, an illness defined as “‘madness’ manifested in erratic or ‘drunken’ and asocial behavior, impairment of function, often with headache, dizziness, or fainting” (2000: 22). The interviews reveal how *chawaj* symptoms develop among those who experienced social dislocations that came from increasing socio-economic stratification or differentiation that had been taking place for some time in Zinacantan in the years leading up to the Zapatista rebellion in 1994. Allesandro Lupo (1995) also collected healers’ narratives from Nahuat in the Sierra Norte de Puebla that revealed how they ordered their observations according to their cosmological understanding.

#### b. Dream Narratives

Dream narratives are highly personal accounts of an inner experience that have a great deal of authority among speakers of Mesoamerican languages (Laughlin 1976; B. Tedlock 1992; Hart 2008: 193-198; Groark 2009; Taggart 2012). Dreams are important because they are one way of knowing about the volition of others in a world of social opacity (See Groark 2008, 2009). Dreamers often tell their dreams and, in the process of narration, the dream acquires the characteristics of a story (See Röheim 1992). The Nahuat woman, mentioned earlier, told her dream of the envious dead man, who came for her six month old child, for many years until her narration acquired the structure of a folktale. In Valdimir Propp’s (1968) terms, her dream narrative has the basic folktale structure of “a lack” and “lack liquidated” (See Dundes 1964). The lack in the narrator’s case is the threat an envious dead man posed to her daughter, and the liquidation is the narrator’s successful elimination of that threat by twice curing her daughter of envy-sickness. Her narrative has the emotional force of a compelling story because it draws on characters in real life expressing deep emotional dynamics through their actions and their imputed interior lives (Ingham 1996: 43-45).

#### c. Life Histories

There are too few life histories of indigenous language speakers in Mexico and Guatemala but the ones that do exist (Pozas 1952, ; Lewis 1964; Schwartz 1977; Sexton 1981; Friedrich 1986; Bizarro Ujpán 1992; Taggart 2007) are very useful particularly when the narrators come from richly described communities enabling the reader to put the life histories in their socio-cultural context. Life histories can reveal how a

narrator's traditional stories (folktales) are "born out of experience" as well as give "shape to experience" at the same time (Ochs and Capps 1996: 20). I shall give two examples from the life history of a Nahuatl man who lives in Huitzilán de Serdán in the Sierra Norte de Puebla. Nacho Angel Hernández has an association with an ethnographer that began in 1968 during which he periodically told and recorded oral narratives in his native language of Nahuatl. In 2004, he told his life story focusing on his experiences during and after a period of agrarian violence, when the UCI formed a chapter in his community, at the end of which his wife died in a massacre. At various points he told narratives that included versions of "Tar Baby" and the Native American Orpheus. I shall use these two stories to shed light on some of long-standing problems in the study of indigenous oral narratives in this part of the world.

"Tar Baby" is one of the stories that Boas (1912) collected from Nahuatl oral tradition and traced to Spain and Portugal, thereby discouraging the study of oral narratives from indigenous language speakers in Mexico (Beals 1943). The variants of this story are quite stable leading to the conclusion that they have the same meaning for the Nahua as they do for the Spaniards and the Portuguese. However, as Hanks (1989b: 112) points out, the meaning of a story is in "the reception of text" by the narrator and the audience. A story can mean different things to different tellers and their audience and, and to the same teller at different points in a life and so extracting the meaning from the narrative itself is misleading at best. As performance scholars have noted (Bauman and Briggs (1990), some aspects of the meaning can change for each participant with each performance. Such is the case with the versions of "Tar Baby" that circulated in Nahuatl oral tradition before and after the period of the agrarian violence that took place in Huitzilán between 1977 and 1984. The main characters of "Tar Baby" are Rabbit and Coyote. Rabbit, the smaller weaker of the two animals, gets stuck in a tar baby a woman placed over the hole Rabbit uses to enter her flower garden. Coyote, the larger and stronger animal, tries to eat Rabbit, who uses his wits to elude Coyote and eventually lead him to his death. Before the violence in Huitzilán began in 1977, the Nahuatl narrators tended to identify with Rabbit and considered Coyote as like the mestizos of their community. Coyote has a voracious appetite for meat much as mestizos have a voracious appetite for Nahuatl land and women. At that time, many Nahuatl referred to a mestizo with the derogatory term *coyot*. After the insurgency, Nacho interpreted the same story as expressing his relations with other Nahuatl during the violence when neighbors and family members no longer respected each other and were willing to murder each other, as Nacho himself experienced when his brother-in-law put him on their hit list. For this narrator, Tar Baby showed what the Nahuatl were like when they no longer lived according to the values of their culture. Boas' fallacy (Foster 1948: 377) was to pay too much attention to form and too little attention to meaning.

The second example of how life histories can help reveal how oral narratives are "born out of experience" as well as give "shape to experience" is the Orpheus story in Native American (Gayton 1935; Hultkrantz 1957; Dundes 1964) and indigenous Mexican oral tradition (Mason and Espinosa 1914: 182-185; Laughlin 1962: 228-231; Burns 1983: 121-134; Preuss 1982: 438-451, 451-463, 464-481, 481-487). According to Akë Hultkrantz (1957) the Native American Orpheus tradition originated in the Americas and is different from the one that developed in the Old World. The Native American Orpheus stories have a number of characteristics not found in those from the Old World and they include a hero or heroine who falls into a desperate state of mind following the death of a loved one, the dead who eat a different kind of food and notice human odor, and the dead who are cold or show hostility toward anyone who comes from the land of the living. Native American Orpheus stories may have ancient antecedents in Nahua culture because Sahagún (1951: 210) mentioned an ancient Nahuatl myth, only hints of which remain in the works of the chroniclers, about Piltzintecuhtli, who apparently pursued Xochiquetzal (Precious Flower) into the land of corruption.

The Orpheus stories circulating in Nahuatl oral tradition vary depending on the hero's or heroine's relationship with the dead loved one. In Nacho's community, one variant is of a husband who makes a long, difficult and dangerous journey to the land of the dead to find and recover his dead wife. In another variant, the hero and his loved one are a brother and sister. Nacho told one of each variant at different points in his life, and in conjunction with his life story, it was possible to see how he told each variant to express his concerns at the time of the narration. He told the first variant in 1970 during his courtship with Victoria, and in that variant the hero is married to a woman he loves but who is unfaithful and runs off with the devil dressed as a wealthy mestizo. The story expressed Nacho's uncertainties about the loyalties of the woman he was thinking seriously about marrying. In 1978, during the first year of the agrarian violence when members of an insurgent group had put him on their hit list, he told the second variant in which a brother and sister loved each other a great deal and never had another partner. The second story emphasized the brother's deep feelings of grief and anticipated how Nacho would express his own grief five years later when he learned that Victoria died in a massacre. By this time, Victoria had become Nacho's most loyal ally because she defended him against her own brothers who wanted to kill him for not joining the UCI.



## Language Activism

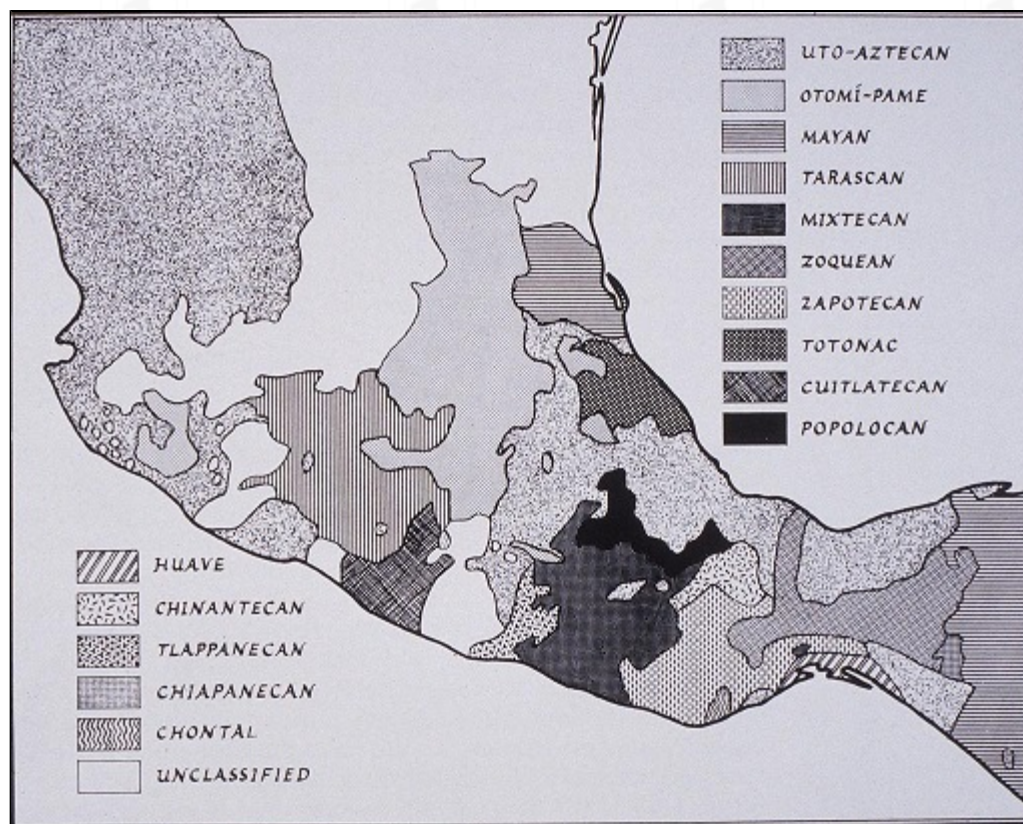


Fig 1. Map showing divisions of native language groups of Mexico at the time of the Spanish Conquest. ARTSTOR Slide Gallery. Source: University of California, San Diego

One of the most interesting developments among indigenous language speakers in Mexico and Guatemala is that they are beginning to collect and interpret their own narratives. Language activism began in the late 1970's in the Mayan area during and following the horrific Guatemalan civil war (England 2003: 734). Mayans had experienced and continue to experience a great deal of language loss. However, Nora England (2003: 733) reports that the "literacy of Mayan communities is inversely related to language retention" creating the conditions for "a significant movement of cultural reaffirmation." England (2003: 734) notes that the "principal actors in the Maya movement and in language revitalization are Mayas from different language groups who, by and large, have received a fair amount of formal education." She reports that over one hundred and fifty have been trained by two NGO's dedicated to linguistic research, PLFM (Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín) and OKMA (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib) and another "several hundred... have studied" in Guatemalan universities. See Fisher and Brown (1996) and Warren (1999) for more works on Mayan activism.

Linguistic activism developed later among the Nahuas in the Sierra Norte de Puebla when María Eugenia Sánchez de Almeida and Eduardo Almeida Costa organized the Oral Tradition Workshop (Taller de Tradición Oral) in the Nahuatl-speaking community of San Miguel Tzinacapan in 1984. The Taller consists of a number of Nahuatl youth who recorded and archived over 500 oral narratives told by their parents and grandparents (See Lupo 1998). Participants in the Taller have written a history of their own community of San Miguel Tzinacapan (Taller, 1994), which expresses an ethnic consciousness grounded in the ancient pre-Colombian past. As Nahuas become more bilingual and gain literacy, it remains to be seen if a pan Mesoamerican activism will develop in Central Mexico as it has among the Mayans in southeastern Mexico and Guatemala. The governments of several states in Central Mexico have taken an active role in promoting interest in indigenous language narratives. The ministries of Popular and Indigenous Culture in the states of Mexico, Michoacán, Hidalgo and Queretaro have organized regional contests for stories written in Mesoamerican languages. One result of their effort is the publication of an anthropology written in Náhuatl, Mazahua, Otomí, Purépecha (Peralta Ramírez et. al. 2005), with the ostensible aim of awakening interest in the writing down of stories told in the mother tongue.

**Appendix: Collections of narratives from speakers of Mesoamerican Languages**

Uzo-Aztecan

Nahuat

- San Miguel Tzincapan, Puebla (Knab 1991; Taller de tradición oral 1994)
- Santiago Yancuitalpán (Lupo 1995, 1998)
- Huitzilán de Serdán and Santiago Yaonáhuac (Taggart 1983, 1997, 2007, 2012)

Nahuatl

- Alto-Balsas, Guerrero (Raby 2007)
- Milpa Alta (Boas 1912; Boas and Arreolo 1924; Boas and Haeberlin 1924; Horcasitas and de Ford 1979)
- San Pedro Jícora, Durango (Preuss 1982)
- Tepotzlán, Morelos (Lewis 1964)

Otomí-Pame (Otomanguean\*)

Otomí

- (Peralta Ramirez et. al. 2005)
- (Fought and Fought 1985)

Mayan

Chortí

- (Fought and Fought 1985)

Mocho (Kanjobal\*\*)

- (Martin 1987)

Quiché

- (Edmonson 1985; Sexton 1981, 1992; D. Tedlock 1985; B. Tedlock 1992)

Tzotzil

- Bricker 1981; Collier et. al. 2000; Gossen 1974, 1985, 2002; Groark 2008, 2009; Hanks 1986, 1988 (?); Laughlin 1977, 1980; Pozas 1952

Tzeltal

- (Stross 1973)

Yucatec Maya

- (Burns 1983; Edmonson 1985; M. Redfield 1935; Schwartz 1977)

Tarascan (Purépecha)

- (Friedrich 1986)

Mixtecan (Otomanguean)

- (Sousa and Terraciano 2003)

Zoquean (Otomanguean)

Mixe

- San Lucas Camotlán, Oaxaca (Miller 1956)
- (Radin 1933)

Zoque

- Harrison 1952; Villa Rojas et. al. (1975)

Zapotecan (Otomanguean)

Zapotec

Mitla (Parsons 1936)

Radin (1943, 1943)

Totonac (Mayan<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)

Horcasitas (1962)

Ichon (1973: 51-101)

Oropeza Castro (1947)

Popolocan (Otomanguean)

Popolocan

Soteapan (Foster 1945)

\* See Longacre (1967) for a list of Otomanguean languages.

\*\* Longacre (1967) classified Totonac as a Mayan language

\*\*\* Fom Longacre (1967)

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