

## Nawatl of North Guerrero, Not a Descendant of Reconstructed Common Nawatl

### *El nawatl del norte de Guerrero no es descendiente del nawatl común reconstruido*

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#### Abstract

In a document from 1579 reporting on the northern part of the Mexican state of Guerrero we learn that the local language is Chontal. In addition, it is reported that some people in the area also spoke Nawatl, the language of the Aztecs who had invaded the area some 100 years earlier. Since the late seventeenth century there is no trace of Chontal in that area. My study of the local variety of Mexicano (Nawatl) and a comparison with other Nawatl dialects have shown that it still reveals traces of having been the second language to the speakers of Chontal, and that they never acquired it completely. Some of the features on which my argument is based may also show some characteristics of the extinct Chontal. Finally, I claim that a similar situation can be postulated for two other areas where Nawatl is spoken today, areas which are geographically distant from North Guerrero, namely on the coast of Michoacán and in the state of Durango.

**Keywords:** North Guerrero Nawatl, Chontal, language shift, dialectology, bilingualism

#### Resumen

*En un documento del año 1579 sobre la región norte del actual estado de Guerrero se asienta que la lengua local se llama chontal. Además, se informa que algunas personas en la región también hablan nawatl, la lengua de los aztecas que habían invadido la región unos 100 años antes. Desde el siglo XVII no se encuentra ningún vestigio del chontal en la región. El presente estudio discute la variante local del mexicano (nawatl) y presenta una comparación con otras variantes del nawatl. Esto ha mostrado que el nawatl del norte de Guerrero todavía muestra rasgos del momento en que los chontales usaban el nawatl como una segunda lengua que nunca habían aprendido completamente. Algunos de los rasgos sobre los cuales se basa este argumento muestran también, quizás, ciertas características del chontal extinto. Finalmente, sostengo que una situación semejante se puede sugerir para otras áreas donde todavía se habla el nawatl y que geográficamente se encuentran lejos del norte de Guerrero: la costa de Michoacán y el estado de Durango.*

**Palabras clave:** nawatl del norte de Guerrero, chontal, desplazamiento lingüístico, dialectología, bilingüismo

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## BACKGROUND

In the sixteenth century the Spanish invaded a culture area known as Mesoamerica, an area which covered what is today the greater part of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. They encountered the Aztec empire and reached their capital, Tenochtitlan, which was situated where we find Mexico City today. During the previous 150 years the Aztecs had succeeded in subjugating vast areas southeast and south of Tenochtitlan. Based on archaeological and not least on linguistic evidence as well as on their own historical accounts, the generally accepted hypothesis is that the Aztecs had arrived in the Valley of Mexico from the northwest.

Their language, which has had and still has several names, belongs to the Uto-Aztecan language family which is situated primarily in the southwestern corner of today's United States and the northwestern corner of Mexico (Miller 1984; Dakin 1994). In the early centuries after the Spanish invasion the language of the Aztecs was called Mexicano, later Aztec, and today the most common name is Nawatl, often written Nahuatl, an unfortunate spelling which leads to awkward pronunciations (cf. Canger 2011b). Locally we find still other names.

As a result of the immigration from the northwest of today's Mexico which took place in at least two waves of language speakers, and due to the expansion of the Aztec empire, the Nawatl language was spoken in many areas and enclaves in the sixteenth century. In addition, it had become a trade language during the Aztec dominion and possibly even earlier (cf. Dakin 1981, 1996, 2009).

In order to facilitate their task of conversion the friars arriving with the Spanish conquistadors in the beginning of the sixteenth century immediately set down to write grammars of the various languages spoken in the newly subjugated areas. Grammars were written above all for Nawatl: two Franciscan grammars in 1547 and 1571 (Olmos 1547; Molina 1571b); two Jesuit grammars (Rincón 1595; Carochi 1645), and an Augustinian grammar (Galdo Guzmán 1642). In 1571 Alonso de Molina published a "Vocabulario" Spanish-Mexicano and Mexicano-Spanish which has more than 20 000 entries in each of the two sections (Molina 1571a). In 1536 the Franciscans opened a school for the young sons of the Aztec elite where they studied Spanish, Latin, music, and the alphabetically written form of their own language. From early on Nawatl became the language of communication in New Spain concerning land feuds, testaments, history,

communication with the Spanish king, etcetera. The friars insisted before the Spanish king on making Nawatl an official language:

Faced with the plenitude of languages they met beyond the central valley of Mexico, the regulars [friars and members of a religious order] insisted the number of languages in New Spain had to be reduced. They reasoned that if they continued the program begun by the Aztecs of spreading Nahuatl, the use of other Indian tongues would decline. (Heath 1972, 23)

By 1570 the regulars had won their case. Philip II declared Nahuatl the official language of New Spain's Indians. (Heath 1972, 26)

The Nawatl dialect spoken in and around Tenochtitlan, which I have argued merits the name of *Urban Nawatl* (Canger 2011a), is thus richly documented in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some lesser-known early grammars of dialects divergent from Urban Nawatl exist: Guerra 1692 and Cortés y Zedeño 1765, describing the dialect spoken in present day Nayarit and Durango, and Pérez 1713 describing a dialect spoken then in present-day Guerrero (Pérez 2017 [1713]).

Today Nawatl dialects continue to be spoken in many non-contiguous areas that are not immediately mutually intelligible from one area to the next, but a speaker of the dialect of one area will quickly learn to understand that of another area.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what I call Urban Nawatl (also known variously as Classical, Colonial Nawatl) has received much attention due to the historical and cultural value of the multitude of written texts from the early period. We thus have several grammatical descriptions (Andrews 1975; Sullivan 1976; Launey 1979). In addition, a multitude of texts of different genres have been studied and published with comments: the *Florentine Codex* (Anderson and Dibble in Sahagún 1950–82); official documents such as wills, land documents, municipal documents, petitions (Anderson, Berdan and Lockhart 1976; Karttunen and Lockhart 1987; Sullivan 1987; Reyes García 1988); testaments (Rojas Rabiela et al. 1999); *Cantares mexicanos* (León-Portilla 2011); documents from western Mexico (Yáñez Rosales 2013). Based on studies of the first period after the Spanish invasion Francis Karttunen and James Lockhart have discussed the progression of Spanish influence on Nawatl (Karttunen and Lockhart 1976).

Many of the dialects spoken over the centuries and today have been studied by linguists and Protestant missionaries (for example, Whorf 1946;

Reyes García 1988; Langacker 1979; Wolgemuth 1981; Amith and Smith-Stark 1994; Canger 2000; Hansen 2011). Most of these studies have concentrated on a single dialect, be it the dialect spoken in Tenochtitlan in the sixteenth century or some present-day Nawatl dialect. However, there have also been comparative studies of the dialects (Hasler 1961; Campbell and Langacker 1978; Canger 1980, 1988), and of the position of Nawatl within the Uto-Aztecan language family (Dakin 1994).

More recently there has been an interest in bilingualism and the Spanish influence on the Nawatl dialects. Naturally, this influence has been on-going since the arrival of the Spanish, the early results of which have been identified in a number of studies (Karttunen and Lockhart 1976; Canger 2018). Today's situation in the bilingual communities have been explored above all in two highly informative and thorough studies by Hill and Hill (1986) and Flores Farfán (1999). While these and other studies deal with bilingualism today in Nawatl-speaking communities, the present study is not on how one language influences the other in a bilingual community, but on how one language, Nawatl, in the fifteenth century, is introduced in Chontal speaking communities as a second language, and not least how this emerging bilingualism is disrupted or deterred by the entry on the scene of a third language of power, Spanish.

Since 1973 I have studied Nawatl written sources from the sixteenth century and carried out fieldwork in many Nawatl-speaking communities with comparative studies in mind. In a book from 1980 I presented a sketch of parts of the shared grammar based on written sources and the dialects I had studied, as well as a hypothesis of dialect subgroupings and features of what I call reconstructed Common Nawatl. In collaboration, Karen Dakin and I (Canger and Dakin 1985) argued that certain phonological features reflect a division of the dialects corresponding to two waves of Nawatl speakers entering Mesoamerica. We suggested that the first wave is today represented by dialects spoken north, east, and south of Mexico City, whereas descendants of the second wave were and are found in and around Tenochtitlan/Mexico City. We suggested that the dialects spoken in the western area belong to the second wave even though they differ considerably from the Nawatl that was spoken in Tenochtitlan and its surroundings. The western area—also called the western periphery—encompasses three areas: one in the state of Durango, a few villages on the coast of Michoacán, and some in North Guerrero. We thus proposed three different dialect

areas: 1) that of the descendants of the first immigration, today situated north and east of Mexico City, 2) the dialect spoken in and around Mexico City, by descendants of the second immigration, and 3) the western periphery with three areas isolated from each other, Durango, Michoacán, and North Guerrero.

More detailed studies since 1985 of the dialects spoken today in the state of Durango (Canger 2000, 2001) and in the northern area of Guerrero (Canger 2021) have gradually led me to a different hypothesis concerning the situation of the three western dialect areas, a hypothesis which found support in a *Relación geográfica* from 1579.

### NORTH GUERRERO NAWATL

With the purpose of acquiring more detailed knowledge of his overseas possessions the Spanish king, Philip II, in the 1570s had a questionnaire constructed which encompassed some fifty questions about local government, flora, fauna, agriculture, cultural and religious traditions, and language. A map drawn up by the locals themselves was also required. Over 150 items of this questionnaire were collected from as many localities and still exist in various archives in Mexico and Spain (Cline 1972). These are generally known as the *Relaciones geográficas*.

In 1579 in the months of October, November, and December a certain *capitán* Lucas Pinto visited the region I have called North Guerrero, in order to collect information in answer to the questions in the mentioned questionnaire (Acuña 1985). One of the questions dealt with the name of every community and the language spoken in each of them. In the villages Ichcatopan, Alahuiztlan, Oztuma, Coatepec, Apaztla, Teloloapan, and Tutultepec, the responses were that their language was Chontal. It was added that some people in these communities also spoke Mexicano. We are furthermore informed that speakers of Chontal represented the original population of this area, and that the Mexicanos (i.e., the Aztecs) had come to ask for land, but had later subjugated the Chontales.

The word *chontal* is a Nawatl word meaning “stranger, foreigner,” and in Mexico two more unrelated languages of that same name are spoken, one in the state of Oaxaca and another in Chiapas. The information that the population in the mentioned area in the state of Guerrero spoke Chon-

tal thus tells us nothing about their language, but we can assume that it was not a dialect of Nawatl since it is mentioned that some of the Chontales also spoke Mexicano. Unfortunately, not a single word of that language has survived in North Guerrero. Chontal was still reported to be spoken in the area in 1687 (Mentz 2017, 143). The lack of knowledge about the language, Chontal, does not mean that we do not know anything about the Chontales. Brigida von Mentz, who for decades has studied the history and culture of what is today Morelos, the State of Mexico, and northern Guerrero, offers rich information about the Chontales (Mentz 2017).

Supported by the information in *Relaciones geográficas* my new hypothesis is that Nawatl as spoken in the mentioned area in North Guerrero in the sixteenth century was—in agreement with what was recorded in 1579—a second language of the original Chontal population. Based on features presented below, I shall claim that the population in the area never acquired Nawatl completely, most likely due to the introduction in the sixteenth century of Spanish as the new language of power. I thus imagine the following scenario: at first the Chontales spoke their mother-tongue, Chontal; sometime in the fifteenth century the area was invaded by the Aztecs, speakers of Tenochtitlan Nawatl, and some Chontales learned to communicate with the invaders in Nawatl that thus functioned as a second language for these Chontales; subsequently the Spanish entered the scene. We know that the Spaniards used Nawatl as the language of conversion, and probably also to some extent in their administration. Although we have no way of knowing whether the Spaniards who entered North Guerrero used only Spanish or some variety of Nawatl, we do know that Chontal disappeared in the seventeenth century, and that Nawatl turned out to be the primary language of the former speakers of Chontal until the twentieth century. We do not know what possible contact the population in the area has had with speakers of other varieties of Nawatl in the period until the Nawatl they had acquired in the sixteenth century became their first language. Today the adult population is generally bilingual, and Nawatl is spoken primarily by the older generation.

So, what are the features on which I base the hypothesis that the original Chontal speakers failed to acquire complete competence in Nawatl, and that this can be shown in the Nawatl spoken there today? In discussing these features, I shall compare the dialect with the generally accepted reconstruction of an earlier stage of known Nawatl dialects which I call reconstructed Common Nawatl.

### *Argument 1: Final glottal stop*

In sixteenth-century Urban Nawatl as well as in most of the dialects spoken today, we find a morpheme indicating plural of subject in the present tense verb paradigm. This morpheme is a glottal stop in Urban Nawatl as well as in dialects spoken today in areas not far from Mexico City. However, wherever we find the phoneme glottal stop in Urban Nawatl and surroundings, we find *h* as the realization of this phoneme in all other dialects north, east, south, and west of this center. This is naturally true also for the plural morpheme:

Tenochtitlan / Mexico City and surroundings:

Singular

*ni-k-i'toa* (I say it)

*ti-k-i'toa* (you say it)

*k-i'toa* (he says it)

Plural

*ti-k-i'toa-'* (we say it)

*an-k-i'toa-'* (you [pl] say it)

*k-i'toa-'* (they say it)

Other dialects:

Singular

*ni-k-ihtoa* (I say it)

*ti-k-ihtoa* (you say it)

*k-ihtoa* (he says it)

Plural

*ti-k-ihtoa-h* (we say it)

*an-k-ihtoa-h* (you [pl] say it)

*k-ihtoa-h* (they say it)

The morpheme *k-* has the meaning of “object, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular”; preceding a consonant it has the shape *ki-*.

The phoneme *’/h*, which occurs both word-medially and word-finally has historically various origins which are of no importance for the present argument. However, since occurrence of the variant glottal stop is restricted to a narrow area around Mexico City, and since the variant *h* has been registered elsewhere in dialects representing both the first and the second wave of immigration, it seems reasonable to assume that the glottal stop variant rather than the *h*-variant represents an innovation.

Two comments may be in order, however. In dialects that have *h* representing this phoneme, a purely phonetic strong glottal stop occurs utterance-finally after a vowel, and in addition the pronunciation of *h* in such dialects is no more than a light whiff. Thus, words that end in a vowel and

are said in isolation will be pronounced with a strong glottal stop marking end-of-utterance. This has confused some scholars who have collected Nawatl data; they have interpreted it as being part of the word and meaningful. Secondly, in many dialects spoken today the situation is less simple; in the dialect spoken in the Malinche area, for example, word final *w* and word final *n* are both pronounced [h] (Hill and Hill 1986, 66), another feature that can lead to confusion.

The dialect spoken in Coatepec Costales belongs to the group of dialects which have a glottal stop for the mentioned phoneme, *ni-k-i'tua* (I say it). However, in word-final position nothing corresponds to glottal stop or *h* in this dialect. According to Horacio Carochi glottal stop was pronounced differently utterance-internally and utterance-finally in the Nawatl spoken in Tenochtitlan. One may speculate that this in some way has contributed to the lack of glottal stop word-finally in Mexicano of North Guerrero; however, what matters here is that it is absent in North Guerrero Nawatl. This lack of a final glottal stop would lead to two ambiguous forms in the present tense: *ti-k-i'tua* would mean both “you (sg) say it” and “we say it”; and *k-i'tua* would mean both “he says it” and “they say it.” These potential ambiguities seem to have bothered the native speakers of North Guerrero Chontal, and they have created new forms undoubtedly to avoid these ambiguities:

Coatepec Nawatl:

Singular

*ni-k-i'tua* (I say it)

*ti-k-i'tua* (you say it)

*k-i'tua* (he says it)

Plural

*ti-k-i'tu-ka* (we say it)

*an-k-i'tua* (you [pl] say it)

*k-i'tu-'wante* (they say it)

The suffix *-ka* is known in other dialects as well as in Coatepec Nawatl with the meaning of plural of subject in the imperative, *x-k-i'tu-ka* (say it! [pl]) and *-'wante* is an abbreviated form of the personal pronoun, *ye'wante* (they) in Coatepec Nawatl. No disambiguating suffix was necessary in second person plural since the subject prefix, *an/m-*, unambiguously indicates “second person plural.”

The assumption thus is that no word final glottal stop existed in North Guerrero Chontal in the sixteenth century, and as a consequence the speakers of this Chontal did not hear—nor were they able to produce—the final

glottal stop in what I have termed Urban Nawatl, i. e., the Mexicano of Tenochtitlan. In fact, this was also the case for the Spanish-speaking friars who wrote grammars of the language. The two Jesuits who created a system of diacritics in order to indicate vowel quantity and glottal stop represent an exception to this. But with occasional exceptions, there was elsewhere no attempt to indicate the significant glottal stop or vowel length, and no indication of these two features is found in the multitude of documents from the time. However, in documents from areas where the phoneme was—and still is—*h*, we find the letter *h* representing the phoneme, at least word-medially.

### *Argument 2: Verb classes*

In reconstructed Common Nawatl verbs end in *-a*, *-i*, *-ia*, or *-oa* in the present tense; there are also five verbs ending in *-o*, apart from one or two verbs that have been reconstructed with a final *-e*; no verbs end in *-e*. With the purpose of establishing rules for the formation of tense and mood the verbs have traditionally been divided into four classes (Andrews 1975, 19–21). This classification is based partly on their shape in the present tense:

1. monosyllabic verbs ending in *-a*: *kwa* (eat)
2. verbs ending in *-ia* or *-oa*: *miktia* (kill), *poloa* (lose)
3. verbs ending in *-CC-i/a*, *-ka*, or *-la*: *itki* (carry), *maka* (give), *mo: la* (throw)
4. the rest: *ki:sa* (go out), *miki* (die), etcetera.

There are simple rules for creating tense and mood forms in each of these four verb classes. In studying the various dialects, it is thus easy to establish how the tense and mood forms are constructed. There is quite a bit of variation from dialect to dialect, but they can all clearly be shown to have developed from the reconstructed forms in reconstructed Common Nawatl (cf. Canger 1980, chapter II).

With the expectation that I should be able to do the same for the verbs in Coatepec Nawatl, I was surprised when this turned out not to be the case. The verbs did not fit the expected pattern. However, I have in fact and after many years been able to organize the verbs into four simple classes, but these four verb classes in no way correspond to the reconstructed

pattern, nor to four classes in any other dialect. For example, in one class that I now set up for Coatepec Nawatl the verbs correspond to verbs from three different verb classes in reconstructed Common Nawatl. Another example is that verbs which end in *-na* or *-nia* all belong to one class in Coatepec Nawatl while in Common Nawatl the occurrence of *n* in this position plays no role.

Another surprising feature is that in Coatepec Nawatl all verbs end in *-a* in the present tense. The many verbs which in other dialects end in *-i*, will regularly end in *-ia* in Coatepec Nawatl: *ki-neki* versus *ki-nekia* (he wants it). Likewise, the few verbs which in reconstructed Common Nawatl end in *-o*—of which there are only five—will have an *-a* added, *pano* versus *panoa* (he goes across). This latter change is not uncommon in other dialects, but I had not seen the addition of a final *-a* to verbs ending in *-i* in other dialects.

In argument 1 I showed what the lack of a final glottal stop does to the present tense paradigm. Not only did it lead to the creation of different morphemes for plural of subject, in addition the stem is abbreviated before the new suffixes: *ti-k-i'tua* (you [sg] say it), *ti-k-i'tu-ka* (we say it), *k-i'tua* (he says it), *k-i'tu-'wante* (they say it).

I wish to suggest that these anomalies in relation to the reconstructed Common Nawatl have their root in an attempt at creating something systematic, some rules, from what to speakers of Guerrero Chontal apparently was opaque in the Urban Nawatl that they heard from the invading Aztecs.

With my new view of the dialect as a second language which cannot be described as developed from reconstructed Common Nawatl, I have been able to arrive at a surprisingly simple set of rules forming all verb forms in Coatepec Nawatl (Canger 2021).

### *Argument 3: Verb class with reduplication*

In reconstructed Common Nawatl a class of verb roots exist with one of four derivational suffixes. Below is an example from Urban Nawatl:

*tzili:-ni* (it sounds, rings)  
*ki-tzili:-nia* (it makes it sound, ring)  
*tzi-tzili-ka* (it sounds, rings repeatedly)  
*ki-tzi-tzili-tza* (it makes it sound, ring repeatedly)

From Molina's dictionary I have extracted over forty examples of these verb roots which in most cases have all four derived verbs attested (cf. Canger 1980, Appendix NI). In Coatepec Nawatl less than half of these roots are known and only with the suffix *-nia* corresponding to Urban Nawatl *-ni* or *-nia*. Only one case of a reduplicated form ending in *-tza* is attested: *wa'waltza* (barks at.) This same verb is attested in Molina's dictionary alongside of *wawaloa* with the same meaning. However, no verb derived from the root *wal-* is attested with the suffix *-ni*, *-nia* in Urban Nawatl.

An obvious question is whether these derived forms could be an innovation in Urban Nawatl, or whether they in fact can be shown to have existed in reconstructed Common Nawatl.

Verbs with the suffix *-ni*, *-nia* and corresponding reduplicated forms ending in *-tza* or *-ka* are rarely mentioned in descriptions of Nawatl dialects spoken today. This may be because they have no syntactic function and form a more or less closed class, and thus are assumed to belong in the dictionary. However, how many can be found in dictionaries of a given dialect is also limited. In studying a dialect spoken in the northern tip of the state of Puebla, Sierra de Puebla Nawatl, I have identified forty or more of these roots with all four derived verbs. Since Sierra de Puebla Nawatl goes back to the first wave, whereas Urban Nawatl is identified as representing the second wave, it is clearly justifiable to see this set of derived verbs as having their origin in reconstructed Common Nawatl (cf. also Heath 1978).

The conclusion is that the speakers of Guerrero Chontal in Coatepec here again have missed what they should have inherited from Common Nawatl and have only struggled to make sense of Urban Nawatl, the language the Aztecs spoke.

#### *Argument 4: Construction: go to do / come to do*

Common Nawatl has a construction consisting of a main verb and two sets of morphemes suffixed to the main verb. This construction in Urban Nawatl and in other Nawatl dialects of associated motion indicates movement, going or coming, before the subject performs the action of the main verb:

*ki-kwa:-tiw* (he will go to eat it)

*ki-kwa:-to* (he went to eat it)

*ki-kwa:-ti* (that he go to eat it)

*ki-kwa:-kiw* (he will come to eat it)

*ki-kwa:-ko* (he came to eat it)

*ki-kwa:-ki* (that he come to eat it)

These forms are completely unknown in the Nawatl spoken in Coatepec. In the other dialects I have studied these forms exist and are in daily use. In the dialect spoken in central Guerrero, in some of these forms the suffix has been substituted by a prefix, but the general use and function are the same as in other dialects.

*Argument 5: Coatepec Nawatl is not polysynthetic*

Nawatl is a polysynthetic language (Canger 2017): nouns are compounded, we find noun + verb compounds, objects are incorporated in the verb complex, and verb complexes including two verbs are common. Below are some examples from Urban Nawatl from the sixteenth century:

<i>kal-nakas-tli</i>	house-nose-ABSOLUTIVE	corner of house
<i>kal-aki</i>	house-enter	to enter
<i>kal-kwich-ochpa:na</i>	house-soot-clean	to clean house of soot
<i>kwaw-tzakwa</i>	wood-close	to imprison someone
<i>kwaw-tzakwa</i>	wood-close	to board it up
<i>ki-kwa:-ti-yaw</i>	OBJ-eat-LIGATURE-go	to go while eating it

The following example from Sierra de Puebla Nawatl shows that polysynthesis is still an active feature in that dialect of Nawatl:

*tepos-meka-tapo:wa-l* iron-cord-number-ABSOLUTIVE telephone number

In general, polysynthetic features characteristic of Urban Nawatl also hold for this dialect and for many other Nawatl dialects spoken today.

<i>mo-metz-piloh-</i>	REFL-leg-hang-LIG-	the dove's leg gets
<i>ti-ki:sa in palo:ma</i>	act.fast the dove	caught and it hangs
<i>kal-nakas-tan</i>	house-nose-near	at the side of the house
<i>kal-aki</i>	house-enter	to enter
<i>kal-ikxi-kone:-t</i>	house-leg-child-ABSOLUTIVE	forked prop
<i>kwow-piloa</i>	tree-hang	to hang it over a stick
<i>kwow-tehko</i>	tree-go up	to climb trees

In North Guerrero Nawatl we find only few compounds:

<i>kuska'-kuwa-l</i>	necklace-snake-ABSOLUTIVE	coral snake
<i>tzu'pilu-kwawi-l</i>	vulture-tree-ABSOLUTIVE	caoba (mahogany)
<i>kwa-meka-l</i>	tree-rope-ABSOLUTIVE	vine
<i>kwa:-chichi-l</i>	head-red-ABSOLUTIVE	turkey vulture

However, no new compounds are created by speakers of Nawatl in Coatepec, and the ones quoted can therefore be assumed to have been acquired as compounds. Instead of forming compounds the speakers combine nouns with or without the Spanish word *de* “of”

<i>omil de masa:-l</i>	bone of deer-ABSOLUTIVE	deer bone
<i>tamali yelu-l</i>	tamale green corn-ABSOLUTIVE	tamale made with green corn

### *Summing up*

The five characteristics of North Guerrero Nawatl presented above show no continuity from reconstructed Common Nawatl, and they cannot be described as simplifications of known features inherited from Nawatl. They thus support the hypothesis that speakers of Guerrero Chontal in the sixteenth century used Urban Nawatl as a practical second language, and that they failed to acquire it completely before the Spanish invaded, and Spanish became the language used with authorities and the language of prestige. Subsequently their original language, Guerrero Chontal, ceased to be used, and North Guerrero Nawatl became a complete and well-functioning language, however, typologically and in many other respects different from other Nawatl dialects spoken today.

## GUERRERO CHONTAL

The features discussed above may possibly contribute to a picture of Guerrero Chontal, the undocumented mother tongue of the population in Coatepec and surroundings in the sixteenth century.

### *Argument 1: Final glottal stop*

Since it is clear that speakers of Guerrero Chontal were unable to hear and produce the final glottal stop of Urban Nawatl, we can assume that their language had no final glottal stop. On the other hand, since word-internal glottal stop in Guerrero Nawatl occurs where it would have occurred in Urban Nawatl, it seems equally likely that Guerrero Chontal had glottal stop as a phoneme, at least word-internally.

Since the speakers of Chontal seem to have been unable to accept the lack of differentiation of 3. Person singular and plural and of 2. Person singular and 1. Person plural in the present tense, we can also assume that the verbs in Chontal conjugated verbs for the subject.

### *Argument 2 concerning verb classes tells us nothing about Guerrero Chontal*

### *Argument 3: -ni verbs*

The absence of verbs derived with *-ni*, *-nia*, *-ka*, *-tza* likewise tells us nothing about Guerrero Chontal. However, reduplication is commonly used in Guerrero Nawatl with a meaning that corresponds to what is found in Urban Nawatl.

Plural:

*tuchi* (rabbit)

***tu-tux-me*** (rabbits)

*kunel* (child)

***ku-kune*** (children)

Repetition:

*chulua i-pa* (to step on it)

***chu'-chulua i-pa*** (to step several times on it)

Distributive:

*ki-tu:ka na:wi* (he sows 4 [grains])

***ki-tu:ka na'-na:wi*** (he sows four grains in each hole)

Although this seems to show that reduplication was a known feature in Guerrero Chontal, it does not present a strong case.

*Argument 4: Constructions with -to, -tiw, -ti and -ko, -kiw, -ki*

The absence of the suffixes *-to*, *-tiw*, *-ti* and *-ko*, *-kiw*, *-ki*, which in Urban Nawatl indicate movement in order to perform the action of the main verb, does not tell us anything about Guerrero Chontal.

*Argument 5: Polysynthesis*

Since speakers of Guerrero Chontal did not acquire the polysynthetic features of Urban Nawatl, it seems reasonable to assume that Guerrero Chontal was at least not strongly polysynthetic.

*Additional shared feature: vowel quantity*

Obviously features shared by Urban Nawatl and North Guerrero Nawatl cannot be used to demonstrate how the speakers of Guerrero Chontal acquired Urban Nawatl. However, it may show us something about Guerrero Chontal. That is the case with vowel quantity. In Urban Nawatl and other Nawatl dialects the distinction between short and long vowels is significant, and that is the case also for Guerrero Nawatl:

URBAN NAWATL	GUERRERO NAWATL
<i>ki-toka</i> <i>ki-tuka</i>	he follows him
<i>ki-to:ka</i> <i>ki-tu:ka</i>	he buries it

In Spanish vowel quantity is not a distinctive feature, and thus, like vowel length and glottal stop, the Spanish who wrote Nawatl in the sixteenth century did not indicate long vowel. That was not a problem for the speakers of Chontal; they heard and reproduced the difference in Nawatl between short and long vowels. This must mean that the distinction between short and long vowels was a significant feature in Guerrero Chontal.

## OTHER NAWATL DIALECTS WITH A SIMILAR ORIGIN

I shall claim that the situation for two other varieties of Nawatl spoken today, one on the coast of the state of Michoacán and the second in the

states of Durango and Nayarit, called Mexicanero, was in the sixteenth century the same as that of North Guerrero: firstly that Nawatl in those areas functioned as a second language, secondly that this Nawatl cannot be shown to have developed from reconstructed Common Nawatl, and thirdly that it only later became the mother tongue of these people. The arguments and thus the characteristics of Nawatl in those two areas are similar to the ones discussed for North Guerrero Nawatl. No source tells us what could have been the original language of the population in the two areas. From a *Relación geográfica* we learn, however, that in the coastal area of Michoacán the population spoke three or four languages, and also that they understood Mexicano (Acuña 1987, 159).

In the Nawatl spoken in the two above-mentioned areas we find the *h* variant for the phoneme *’/h*. This tells us that the Nawatl on which their second language is based was not Urban Nawatl, but some Nawatl spoken further away from Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztecs.

However, like in North Guerrero Nawatl this phoneme does not occur in word-final position in either of the two dialects. In other words, they seem to have had the same problem that made people in Coatepec create new morphemes for plural of subject. In these dialects plural of subject in the present tense is expressed with a different suffix:

Coast of Michoacán (Sischo 1979, 351, 355):

<i>ni-kochi</i> (I sleep)	<i>ti-kochi-lo</i> (we sleep)
<i>ti-kochi</i> (you sleep)	<i>an-kochi</i> (you [pl] sleep)
<i>kochi</i> (he sleeps)	<i>kochi-lo</i> (they sleep)

Mexicanero of Durango (Canger 2000, 375):

<i>ni-kochi</i> (I sleep)	<i>ti-kochí-l</i> (we sleep)
<i>ti-kochi</i> (you sleep)	<i>an-kochí-l</i> (you [pl] sleep)
<i>kochi</i> (he sleeps)	<i>kochí-l</i> (they sleep)

The suffix *-lo* exists in reconstructed Common Nawatl. It has the function of reducing the valency of a verb. When a verb has this suffix, no subject can be referred to, and the object appears in the form of subject:

<i>ni-k-no:tza</i>	S1sg-O3sg-call	I call him
<i>ni-no:tza-lo</i>	S1sg-call-“no subject”	I am being called

It is thus a known suffix, but in Mexicanero and in Nawatl of Michoacán its function was changed, and there it simply means plural of subject.

In neither of the two dialect areas under discussion can the verbs be shown to naturally belong in the four classes reconstructed for Common Nawatl.

Verbs derived with the suffixes *-ni*, *-nia*, reduplication and *-tza*, *-ka* that are found in other Nawatl dialects, are absent also in these two dialect areas. Absent are also constructions with the suffixes *-to*, *-tiw*, *-ti* and *-ko*, *-kiw*, *-ki*, which in Urban Nawatl indicate movement in order to perform the action of the main verb.

The three following features: absence of final *-h*, of constructions with verbs in *-ni*, *-nia*, and of constructions indicating movement before carrying out the action of the main verb, to me thus seem to be sufficient evidence to claim that Nawatl of the areas in question was a second language for the two groups of speakers before becoming their first language, and that these dialects cannot be shown to have developed from Common Nawatl.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The history of Coatepec Nawatl that I have sketched above is surely not unique. That a second language becomes the first language while the original first language gets lost must have taken place in many language communities around the world. There can be no doubt that many similar scenarios have occurred elsewhere in Mexico and Guatemala both before and after the invasion of the Spanish. We know that a great many languages were spoken in what is today Mexico and Guatemala, and that they became extinct without leaving any traces except in some cases a name. We know that Nawatl long before the arrival of the Spanish had functioned as a trade language thereby creating a variety of language situations. It was mentioned above that the situation today, when most Nawatl communities are bilingual and when the influence of Spanish is strong, is being studied. However, I see the situation for Coatepec sketched here as quite different from the history of two languages in a bilingual community. First of all because a source like the *Relación geográfica* which describes the actual situation in 1579 is rare and has facilitated the hypothesis presented here.

The unusual factor in the history of Coatepec Nawatl is that the presence of the second language, Nawatl, appears to have been replaced by

Spanish before it was acquired completely, while Spanish became the new language of the authorities and later of prestige. A question is whether I would have been able to arrive at the present analysis without the crucial information in the *Relación geográfica* from 1579.

Here as well as in other places I wish to emphasize the difference in situation between the case of the Chontales in the sixteenth century and that of the speakers of Nawatl in the twentieth century. The strong influence from Spanish that we see in most Nawatl dialects spoken today is the result of centuries of bilingualism, while we have no way of knowing or reconstructing the process the Chontales went through in acquiring Nawatl.

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