

CONVENTIONS OF POLITE SPEECH IN NAHUATL

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In this article I will first describe honorific morphology in Nahuatl. Then I will discuss the principles of indirection and inversion in polite Nahuatl direct address. And finally I will suggest how polite inversion may be behind two splits, one morphological and the other lexical, which have led to ambiguities and thence to strategies of disambiguation.

Introduction

Nahuatl is a language that has appropriated pieces of its noun and verb morphology for the expression of politeness and deference. It augments this monliteral use of morphology with avoidance of certain forms and with nonliteral use of lexical material. Virtually every element of its honorific system has some other nonhonorific use or meaning. Of those elements and conventions I am about to describe, Nahuatl communities today vary in which elements they use and the extent to which they use them. Such variation probably also existed in centuries past, but the extant texts from which we can learn something about polite usage in the past appear more consistent than current usage. The best study of modern Nahuatl honorific usage is Hill and Hill 1978, which deals with several communities in the Puebla/Tlaxcala area. Other information about modern usage is to be found in Pittman 1948 and Whorf 1946. A recent study of sixteenth-century usage in Tetzcohuco is Karttunen and Lockhart 1987.

Noun morphology

Nahuatl has several elements, which for our purposes here we can consider suffixes, that convey information about the relative usefulness or worthwhileness of nouns to which they are added. There are three diminutives: *-tōn*, *-pīl*, and *-tzīn* (While *-tzīn* is attested with a long vowel or its reflex in spoken Nahuatl everywhere today, there is some

question of its length in older Nahuatl. See the entry in Karttunen 1983). When *-tōn* is added to a noun, it implies inadequacy, while *-tzīn* is an affectionate diminutive. Thus, with the stem *pil-* 'child' we get the contrast:

piltōntli 'helpless little child'
piltzintli 'dear little child'

From the noun *chichi* 'dog' is derived *chichitōn* 'puppy'. In my experience puppies and even grown dogs are called *chichitōn* almost to the exclusion of anything else, which seems to reflect rural Mexican attitudes toward domestic animals.

The grammarian Horacio Carochi devotes a section to the addition of diminutive *-pil* to the stem *pil-* 'child'—mainly, I think, to illustrate vowel-length contrasts. (See the entry for *-pil* in Karttunen 1983.). It is not nearly as well attested historically nor so common in contemporary use as *-tōn* and *-tzīn*. Apparently it is/was a rather neutral diminutive, expressing nothing negative but not as emotionally positive as *-tzīn* either.

Two additional elements that can be added to nouns have negative connotations: *-pōl* indicates that something is large and useless, while *-zol* (with an undisputed short vowel) is added only to inanimate nouns and indicates that the thing is worn out and useless. It is related to a verb *ihzoloā* 'to become worn out'.

To summarize, there are three elements that express uselessness:

-tōn 'small and useless'
-pōl 'big and useless'
-zol 'old and useless'

There is a non-negative diminutive:

-pil.

There is one diminutive that is also freighted with a sense of endearment and preciousness:

-tzīn.

These attitudinal elements are by no means used with equal frequency in Nahuatl. One really needs to go to Carochi to find the diminutive *-pil*. (Compounds with the noun stem *pil-* are everywhere, but that is another matter not to be confused with the one under

discussion here.) One finds *-pōl* mainly in placenames such as Acapulco; Jane Rosenthal reports that people use in referring to themselves in confession (Hill and Hill 1978: 143). As for *-zol*, it occurs about as often as one might expect in contexts having to do with old clothes and paper. Its restriction to inanimate nouns means it is not used as an insult in referring to people or domestic animals. On the other hand, there is no such restriction on *-tōn*, which enjoys higher frequency of use.

The one member of this set that is used constantly is *-tzin*. It has what appears to be a pair of contradictory meanings; namely, it is a diminutive, but it is also used as the honorific marker for nouns. In many contexts it seems clear which is intended. If one is referring to God, to a Christian saint or indigenous deity, to a priest, one's compadres, or an elected official, then surely the honorific is implied. If one refers to one's humble home or one's three maguey plants or to a drink of pulque, then it seems to be the diminutive. But what if one refers to one's beloved children or one's aged grandparents? Here the preciousness and the smallness seem to converge, as they do in Mexican Spanish use of diminutives such as *abuelitos*, *ancianitos*, *difuntitos*, *antepasaditos*, etc. The question arises, are honorific *-tzin* and diminutive *-tzin* two different but homophonous forms, or are they somehow "the same thing"? Morphologically they behave like "the same thing" in that the additudinal elements form their plurals in a special way, differently from Nahuatl's other suffixes, and honorific *-tzin* forms its plural in this special manner just like diminutive *-tzin*:

sg: *-tzin*

pl: *-tzi-tzin*

(Otherwise plural reduplication in Nahuatl repeats the initial (C) V of the noun stem, not of the following suffix.)

On the other hand, a feature of honorific *-tzin* that sets it off from the other attitudinal suffixes is that it is also added to postpositional constructions and particles:

ixpantzīnco 'before him-H'

ināhuactzīn *notahtzīn* "with my father-H".

(Hill and Hill 1978: 127)

In these constructions the honorific refers to the person, not the postposition.

ahmōtzīn 'no, not-H'

quēmahtzīn 'yes, indeed-H'

ihhquitzīn 'thus, so-H'

(Hill and Hill 1978: 136 have 'ihcōntzīn < *ihhqui-ōn-tzīn* 'thus-there-H'.)

Here the honorific refers to no one, just to the general context of the conversation, as for instance between compadres.

Yet another piece of noun morphology Nahuatl puts to honorific use is the nonspecific human prefix *tē-*. Nahuatl actually has two *tē-* prefixes. One is the nonspecific human object prefix for transitive verbs. For instance, the verb *chīhua* 'to make (something)' is transitive and must take an object prefix. If the prefix is *tē-* 'someone', the sense of the construction is 'to make someone; to create, beget, engender someone'. From *tēchīhua* one can form a nominalization: *tēchīuhqui* 'creator of people; engenderer, progenitor'. This particular nominalization is very common in polite Nahuatl speech both for referring to God and to people. However, the nominalization as it stands is not honorific and needs *-tzīn* to make it so:

notēchīuhcāuh 'my progenitor'

notēchīuhcātzīn 'my progenitor-H'

However, the nonspecific human possessor prefix *tē-* 'someone's' carries an honorific sense in addition to its literal generic one. Mainly one finds it with kinterms, which rarely, if ever, are used in the unpossessed citation form given here:

tahtli 'father'

nāntli 'mother'

In politely referring to mothers and fathers in general, what is commonly used is *tētahhuān*, *tēnānhuān* 'fathers and mother of someone'. The same sort of usage, heavily lexicalized is found in the kinterms for 'elder brother/cousin' and 'younger sibling/cousin'. (See the note on *-tēiccāuh* in Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 47.) Lexicalization of forms with polite *tē-* allows them to then take another, specific possessive prefix:

teōtl itēnāntzīn 'the mother of God-H'.

Literally, this common way of referring to the Virgin Mary means 'God-his-someone's-mother-H'.

Verb Morphology

So far we have looked at nouns. Two of the attitudinal elements that can be attached to nouns can also be worked into verb constructions. Related to *-pōlis -pōloā*, used in expressing contempt:

neutral: *timotlalōz* 'You will run.'

pejorative: *timotlaloopolōz* 'You-P will run'

neutral: *xiquīza* 'Leave, go away.'

pejorative: *xiquīzpōlo* 'Get out of here.'

(Both examples from Andrews 1975: 116-117.)

Conversely, *tzinoā*, from *-tzin* is used in honorific verb constructions, which are much more common in Nahuatl than pejorative ones. Indeed, most manipulation of verb morphology has to do with deferential speech and has no pejorative counterpart (other than failure to use the proper degree of honorific speech in a situation that calls for it, i.e., insult by omission).

When speaking politely in Nahuatl, one uses verb forms that seem to say literally that the person one is speaking to or of performs actions upon him/herself for his/her own benefit or that he/she causes him/herself to perform the action. (Nahuatl, unlike English, makes no gender distinctions in the third person singular). That is, one puts the verb into either derived applicative (sometimes called benefactive) or causative form. For instance, upon greeting someone who is sitting down, instead of saying simply, 'Don't get up', (using the verb construction *ēhuaticah*), the polite thing to say is 'Don't cause yourself to get up' ("Tlā ximēhuilitiecan," Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 24).

Intransitive verbs used honorifically most often (but not always) take a causative suffix, the basic suffix for which is *-ltiā*:

chōca to weep

chōcaltīā to make s.o. weep, to cause, s.o. to weep

However, there are three things that can happen, all of them optional (although some verbs tend toward one form more than the others).

(1) If the stem ends in short *a*, it may change to *i*:

chōca-ltiā > Chōquiltiā

(2) If *-ltiā* follows *i* (either because the verb stem ends in *i*, or because *a* has changed to *i*) the *l* after the *i* may drop out, in which case the *i* lengthens in compensation:

miqui-ltiā > miquītiā

chōqui -ltiā > chōquītiā

(3) Alternatively, the *il* sequence may drop out:¹

miqui-ltiā > mictiā

chōqui-ltiā > chōctiā

This means that for verbs ending in short *a* there are four possibilities, while for those ending in *i* there are three:

Stem: chōca	Stem: miqu(i)
chōcaltīā	_____
chōquiltīā	miquiltīā
chōquītiā	miquītiā
chōctīā	mictīā

These three options apply only to stems ending in *i* and short *a*.

Verbs that end in *iā* and *oā* drop final *ā* and add *-ltiā*. Verbs in *-oā* clearly have compensatory lengthening, but verbs in *-iā* don't seem to:

(i)htoā: (i)htōltiā
choloā cholōltiā

BUT

tlāliā tlāliltiā

The class of verbs that end in *ā* and take a glottal stop to form the preterite stem shorten *ā* before *-ltiā*:

¹ Loss of *-il-* also may be seen with the nonactive derivation and in de-verbal nouns derived with *-liz-tli*.

cuā cualtiā
māmā māmaltiā

In some cases, there may be a change of consonant in the verb stem:

ahci ahxitiā
mat(i) Machtiā

A few verbs use forms ending in *-liā* and *-huiā* as causatives:

tlācat(i) to be born
tlācatiliā to engender or to give birth to s.o., to cause s.o. to be born
temō to descend
temohuiā to lower s.t., to cause s.t. to descend²
tlehcō to ascend
tlehcahuiā to raise s.t., to cause s.t. to ascend

Transitive verbs used honorifically most often (but not always) take an applicative suffix. Usually, one adds the suffix *-liā* to the verb stem:

caqui to hear s.t.
Caquiliā to understand s.o. (lit: 'to hear s.t. with respect to s.o.')

piya to look after s.t.
piyaliā to look after s.t. for s.o.

māmā to bear s.t. on one's back
māmāliā to bear s.t. on one's back for s.o.

Sometimes adding *-liā* brings about a change in the last vowel of the verb stem. One of the most common changes is that stem-final *a* changes to *i* (short vowels only):

chīhu(a)-liā > chīhuiliā
chōca-liā > chōquiliā
zaca-liā > zaquiliā

The spelling changes above involving *c* and *qu* are the familiar Spanish-

² The long final *ō* of *temō* shortens before *-huiā*. When *-huiā* is added to other verbs ending in *ō*, the *ō* changes to short, *a*, as in *tlehcahuiā* < *tlehcō*.

based spelling conventions, but, just as with causative derivations, sometimes there are also real changes of pronunciation of the stem itself:

mōtla-liā > mōchiliā
 quetz(a)-liā > quechiliā
 tlāz(a)-liā > tlāxiliā

Verbs in -iā (and a few -oā) drop final ā, but there is no compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel:

celiā-liā > celiliā
 tēmoā-liā > tēmoliā

Verbs in which -oā is preceded by *l* usually drop the whole -oā and add an entirely different applicative suffix -huiā:

piloā-huiā > pilhuiā
 xeloā-huiā > xelhuiā
 (i)hcuiloā > (i)hcuilhuiā

Some other verbs that end in -oā drop the -oā and add -al-huiā:

(i)htoā-al-huiā > (i)htalhuiā
 yēcoā-al-huiā > yēcalhuiā

For some verbs of this type, the *a* of *al-huiā* changes to *i*;

pachoā-al-huiā > pachilhuiā
 ilacatzoā-al-huiā > ilacatzilhuiā

And finally, some verbs use the causative form in place of the applicative:

namaca to sell s.t.
 namaquiltiā to sell s.t. to s.o. (not: to make s.o. sell s.t.)

Causative and applicative derived verbs are always transitive. Used

honorifically, they are cast as reflexive, that is, the object of the verb is identical with the subject:

quicui he/she takes it

quimocuīlia³ he/she-H takes it (literally: 'he/she takes it for *his/her* own benefit')

ticochi you sleep

timocochītia you-H sleep (literally: 'you make *yourself* sleep')

Of course, some verbs in Nahuatl are potentially reflexive to begin with, and there needs to be a way to clearly distinguish a genuinely reflexive form from an honorific one. The honorific verbalizer *-tzīnoā* mentioned above is used for this purpose. When, in addition to a reflexive prefix, a potentially reflexive verb also has *-tzīnoā* it is unambiguously honorific as well:⁴

cāhua (transitive) to leave s.t. behind, to abandon s.t.; (reflexive to remain

timocāhua you remain

timocāuhtzīnoa you-H remain

There are only three reflexive prefixes in Nahuatl:

(first-person singular): *no-* myself

(first-person plural): *to-* ourselves

(everything else): *mo-* your-, him-, her-, itself; your-, themselves

Notice that honorifics are second- and third-person phenomena. Hence, of these three prefixes, only *mo-* is appropriate to honorific verb usage. One expresses respect to one's interlocutor or toward a person or object of discussion, but it should not be directed toward oneself. (The only use of honorific apparatus with the first person that is occasionally encountered occurs in contexts something like: 'When I have died-H, let my corpse-H be laid in state-H before the altar-H'.) For this reason one very rarely sees *no-* or *to-* in an honorific context, and moreover there is no normal occasion to use *-tzīnoā* with first-person reflexive verbs.

³ The verb *cui* is idiosyncratic in that its short stem vowel lengthens before the applicative suffix *-liā*.

⁴ (Another use of *-tzīnoā* is to make an already honorific verb doubly so. Andrews 1975: 116-117 calls this usage "reverential").

Obviously, the sequence *-tzin-* is ubiquitous in polite Nahuatl, as are verbs with the prefix *mo-* paired with either the causative or applicative suffix. Thus, understanding the actual propositional content of such sentences involves looking inside the envelope formed by these honorifically-used morphological elements:

anquimocaquiltiah in *itlahtōltzin* in *tlahtoāni*
 'you-H hear the speech-H of the ruler'
 (literally: 'you-H cause yourselves to hear the speech-H of the ruler')

With respect to honorific verb morphology there is one further feature. Nahuatl has a pair of directional prefixes that can be attached to the verb:

huāl- 'in the direction of the speaker'
on- 'in the direction away from the speaker'

Using the verb *choloā* 'to flee', these examples show the literal sense of directionals:

choloah 'they are fleeing'
huālcholoah 'they are fleeing hither'
oncholoah 'they are fleeing thither'

However, *on-* is also used in Nahuatl as a respectful distancing element which has nothing to do with physical movement and everything to do with social deference. (See Hill and Hill 1978: 125.)

Nonmorphological honorific conventions in direct address

In addition to the use of prefixes and suffixes, Nahuatl has less overt ways of expressing politeness and relative status. In direct address, at least in some communities, it is polite to avoid using one's interlocutor's name. If one greets a person by name or mentions a person's name while making a request, one implies that that person is younger or socially subordinate.

It is also polite to avoid mentioning one's exact relationship to the person one is addressing. One may address a priest as *totahtzin* 'our father-H' because in this case *tah-* (the stem of *tahli* 'father') is a title comparable to *tēcu-* 'lord' in *totēcuiyo* 'our lord'. However, in some communities at least, one does not address one's parents with

tah- 'father' and *nān-* 'mother'. In fact, in times past what well-born, well-brought-up children did use in addressing their parents was quite counterintuitive. (See below.)

Another convention of polite speech is the use of third person in direct address (Hill and Hill 1978: 125).

The essence of these three things —avoidance of names, avoidance of mention of actual relationship, and avoidance of second-person verb forms— is indirection. A result of indirection is a considerable amount of euphemism. If one may address all children who are not one's own as 'my dear children' but should not so address one's own children, what does one say? If it is impolite to call one's sister 'dear sister', how does one address her? In the first of the Bancroft dialogues, we have a case of a woman calling her adult married sister 'my dear daughter'. The real relationship only becomes clear when she goes on to inquire about the health of her brother-in-law, who —being absent— can be referred to as what he actually is (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 107). Elsewhere, in a play about the visit of the Magi, the three kings all address each other as 'dear older brother' although this could not be literally so (Horcasitas 1974: 298, 312; Gardner 1982: 115).

From indirection, polite Nahuatl takes the step to inversion. Again in the Bancroft Dialogues, the mother of the bride makes a speech of thanks to the governor for his presence at the wedding feast and addresses him as 'my dear child' although there is nothing to suggest that he is a precociously young governor. On the other hand, ladies-in-waiting were conventionally addressed as 'aunt', and subordinates in the royal court were addressed as 'our progenitors' (the form discussed above).

Making great that which is small and pretending that the subordinate is one's elder seems gracious enough to us. Also, making small that in which we actually take pride fits with our own intuitions. (We conventionally say, "Welcome to my humble abode," and ye are capable of responding to a compliment on a piece of apparel with, "What! This old thing?") In the Bancroft Dialogues the parents of a young noblewoman sought as bride for the king of Tetzcohuco refer to her by slightly pejorative term *ichpocatl* 'little girl', and to us this has the ring of false modesty of a familiar sort. But Nahuatl inversions can be quite alien to us. In the mid-sixteenth century, according to the Franciscan friar-ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagún— well, well-brought-up noble boys not only addressed their fathers as 'my lordship, my noble-man' but also as 'my younger brother H' while their sisters addressed their mothers not only as 'noble lady' but as 'my baby-H' (using

the stem *conē-* 'offspring of a female' which is used not only of human babies but of all newborn animals.) Other terms of polite address directed to mothers included 'aunt' and 'grandmother'. (See Gardner 1982: 106-7, where the passage from Sahagún is reproduced.) Likewise, the parents of the royal bride-to-be in the Bancroft Dialogues refer to the king as 'our nephew-H', and he refers to her as 'our elder sister-H'. Were it not for the element *-tzin* warning us to take nothing literally, we could be misled about the relationships of the various characters in the Dialogues.

Survival of honorific speech forms

One might think that honorific speech was so tied to Aztec court life that it would not have survived the sixteenth century except possibly as grafted onto Christian devotional literature. According to Geoffrey Kimball (personal communication), the only bits of honorific morphology in use in Huastecan Nahuatl are nonproductive relic forms used in connection with religious observance that appear to have been introduced by Christian evangelists, who spread these forms from elsewhere in Mexico. Yet the opposite is true in other regions. At least in some communities honorific conventions have survived and apparently undergone further elaboration, as we can see in the Hills' 1978 article. In the towns of the Puebla/Tlaxcala region they studied, speech has settled into a four-level hierarchy for direct address and a three-level one for respectful third-person references.

Their Level 1 is morphologically unmarked and is used with children, familiar agemates who are not linked through the institution of *compadrazgo*, and subordinates.

Level 2 introduces *-tzin* for nouns/pronouns (specifically the second-person pronouns of direct address) and the distal prefix *on-* with verbs.

Level 3 adds to the conventions of Level 2 the reflexive *mo-* prefix paired with the causative or applicative verb suffixes of full-blown honorific speech.

Level 4 is used with one's *compadres* in such a morass of polite, deferential speech that it is no wonder that *compadres* tend to avoid each other. *Compadres* use all the apparatus of Level 3 but carry on direct discourse in the third person and punctuate their speech with honorific titles such as *mahuizzohtzin* 'his/her honor' (which the Hills record as "māhuizotzin") and the Spanish loan word *compadrito*. (Note the Spanish diminutive suffix *-ito*.)

Obviously for third-person honorific speech (talking about a respected person or thing-holy scriptures or the church, whether as building or institution) there is no distinction between Level 3 and Level 4.

Asymmetry of Nahuatl attitudinal expresions

Nahuatl has clearly made up its honorifics from bits and pieces of itself used nonliterally. There is nothing that does not have some other more basic, sometimes contradictory sense. From morphological material at hand (affectionate diminutive *-tzīn*, nonspecific human *tē-*, distal *on-*, reflexive *mo-*, the derivational endings for causative and applicative constructions), the language has built an elaborated set of conventions for expressing esteem. The language has equal potential for building a symmetric structure of insult, yet there has been negligible movement in this direction beyond deriving pejorative *-pōloā* from *-pōl*. Putting people in their places involves locating them on the honorific scale. The Hills list a dozen factors that move interlocutors up and down the scale. By talking down to a person in terms of honorific morphology one heaps insult on injury. But taking the Nahuatl convention of inversion into account, one also can locate a person below oneself by apparently talking up to him/her. Nahuatl politeness can be an obsidian blade concealed in a velvet glove. For an adept individual there is really no need of the sexually-loaded fighting words of Spanish. It can all be done much more incisively than that. Noncomprehension of this has led people to characterize Montezuma's speeches to Hernán Cortés as fawning and craven. Awareness of the potential gulf between what Nahuatl speakers said and what they meant led perceptive Catholic priests of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to seek careful instruction in pronunciation and the conventions of polite Nahuatl speech lest they commit gaucheries and be laughed at behind their backs (Carochi 1645: 2v-3r; Karttunen and Lockhart 1987: 29).

I would like to conclude with a two instances of what may be lexicalized inversion. As the Hill point out, "An element with the scope of reference ranging from diminution and endearment to 'the dignity of the great' is unexpected, to say the least (but cf. Classical Nahuatl pilli 'child; prince, nobleman'). The association of diminution and endearment is a natural metaphor, well-known from other languages, but we are unable to give an example of another language where reverence and esteem are associated with diminution and endearment." (Hill and Hill 1978: 143).

If the affectionate diminutive sense of *-tzīn* were the original one, and

its use with the high and mighty were part of the same inversion convention that led children to call their fathers 'dear little brother' and their mothers 'dear baby', while citizens called their ruler 'child', 'grandchild', and 'nephew', as we have evidence they did at the height of the Aztec civilization, then it could have become lexicalized with a second and overtly contradictory meaning. (I.e., "we are saying that this person or institution is small because it is too great to even mention" changes to simply mean "this person/institution/context is held in high esteem".) This would perhaps be a one-way street. The unquestionably great under certain circumstances might be made out to be small, observing the polite convention of inversion; but if *-tzin* were originally honorific in sense, it seems to me less likely to have devolved by inversion into a diminutive for young children and inanimate objects unless it were universally used with a very wry sense of humor.

This position derives some support from the report of Geoffrey Kimball (personal communication) that in Nahuatl as spoken in the Huasteca the affectionate diminutive use of *-tzin* is fully productive, whereas honorific *-tzin* is limited to church-related nouns such as the names and epithets of the persons of the Trinity and the Virgin Mary. There are other features of church-related vocabulary in Huastecan Nahuatl that suggest that these words were introduced into the area not by native speakers of Nahuatl, but by evangelists who learned and transmitted them as unanalyzed forms. (An example of what appears to be introduced spelling pronunciation in Huastecan Nahuatl is *tekohtli* 'lord'; possessed form *-tekoh*. There is no motivation for the second syllable of these forms except the ecclesiastical 16th-century spelling convention of spelling *tēuctli* (/te:kʷt'i/) as "tecuhtli". Compare Huastecan Nahuatl *nektli* 'honey', corresponding to Central Mexican *neuctli* (/nekʷt'i/), where the only dialectal variation involves labialization (Kimball ms.: 24).) Moreover, according to Kimball, the honorific use of reflexive, causative, and applicative morphology is absent in Huastecan Nahuatl. Taken together, this suggests that the conventions of marked honorific speech did not develop in the Huasteca. Honorific *-tzin* appears only in introduced form. Yet attitudinal *-tzin* and the other attitudinal suffixes are an integral part of Huastecan Nahuatl, indicating a prior, more basic status for them.

In the section of the Hills' article I just quoted, they also mention the noun stem *pil-*, which in addition to its sense of 'child' also means 'nobleman, member of the governing class'. Nahuatl usage almost always disambiguates the two senses. *Pil-* in the 'child' sense is virtually always in possessed form: *nopilhuān* 'my children'. The only

freestanding *pil-* forms meaning 'child' are *piltōntli* and *piltzintli* mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Unpossessed *pilli* means 'member of the nobility'. In direct address to distinguish between 'my child-H' (perhaps, as used by the mother of the bride mentioned above to the adult governor) and 'my nobleperson-H', there is a unique vocative form for the latter which doubles honorific *-tzin*:

nopiltzin 'Oh, my child-H'

nopiltzintzin 'Oh, my noble person-H'

(A male speaker would add the stressed male vocative suffix *-e*. Notice that this honorific doubling is different from the plural reduplication of *-tzin*, which is *-tzitzin*.)

In a lecture several years ago at the University of Texas Miguel León-Portilla suggested that the 'child' sense of the stem *pil-* is related to the verb *piloā* 'to hang, suspend something or someone' and has to do with dependency. (Lines of descent in Nahuatl are known as *tlācamecatl* 'person-rope'.) Dynasties, of course, can be seen as linear dependencies, and that would be enough. But the inversion by which rulers are called 'children' is sufficiently attested. I would hazard the opinion that *pilli* 'noble person' is a lexicalization from polite use of *pil-* 'child', the primary meaning of which was 'offspring, dependent', and that the avoidance of freestanding *pilli* in the 'child' sense together with the double *-tzin* form unique to this stem are strategies to disambiguate the result of the lexicalization.

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