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AZTEC STUDIES
I
Phonological and Grammatical Studies
in Modern Nahuatl Dialects

WITH ARTICLES BY:

Forrest Brewer
Dow F. Robinson
William R. Sischo
Carl Wolgemuth

EDITED BY:

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It has been almost two years since we first approached the S.I.L. field workers whose articles are represented here and suggested that we cooperate in the preparation and publication of phonological and grammatical studies in Nahuatl dialects currently spoken in Mexico. Their articles represent four of the seven Nahuatl dialects in which S.I.L. workers are currently working.

Tentative conclusions from the dialect testing teams now engaged in measuring degree of intelligibility between Nahuatl dialects suggest that we must deal seriously with almost a dozen mutually unintelligible Nahuatl areas of speech. Dialects definition is an obvious necessity if S.I.L. is to accomplish its goals of literacy materials and Bible translation for indigenous peoples. The structural justification, however, for such dialect definition is not to be found exclusively in the testing devices for measuring intelligibility; rather, it is this set of descriptive articles, with others to follow in subsequent volumes, which will provide the phonological and grammatical clues for differentiating modern Nahuatl dialects.

A second and related purpose for publishing sets of articles on related dialects of one language family is to provide the raw materials for a pan-Nahuatl grammar based on "competence," not simply on "performance." (Chomsky, 1965).

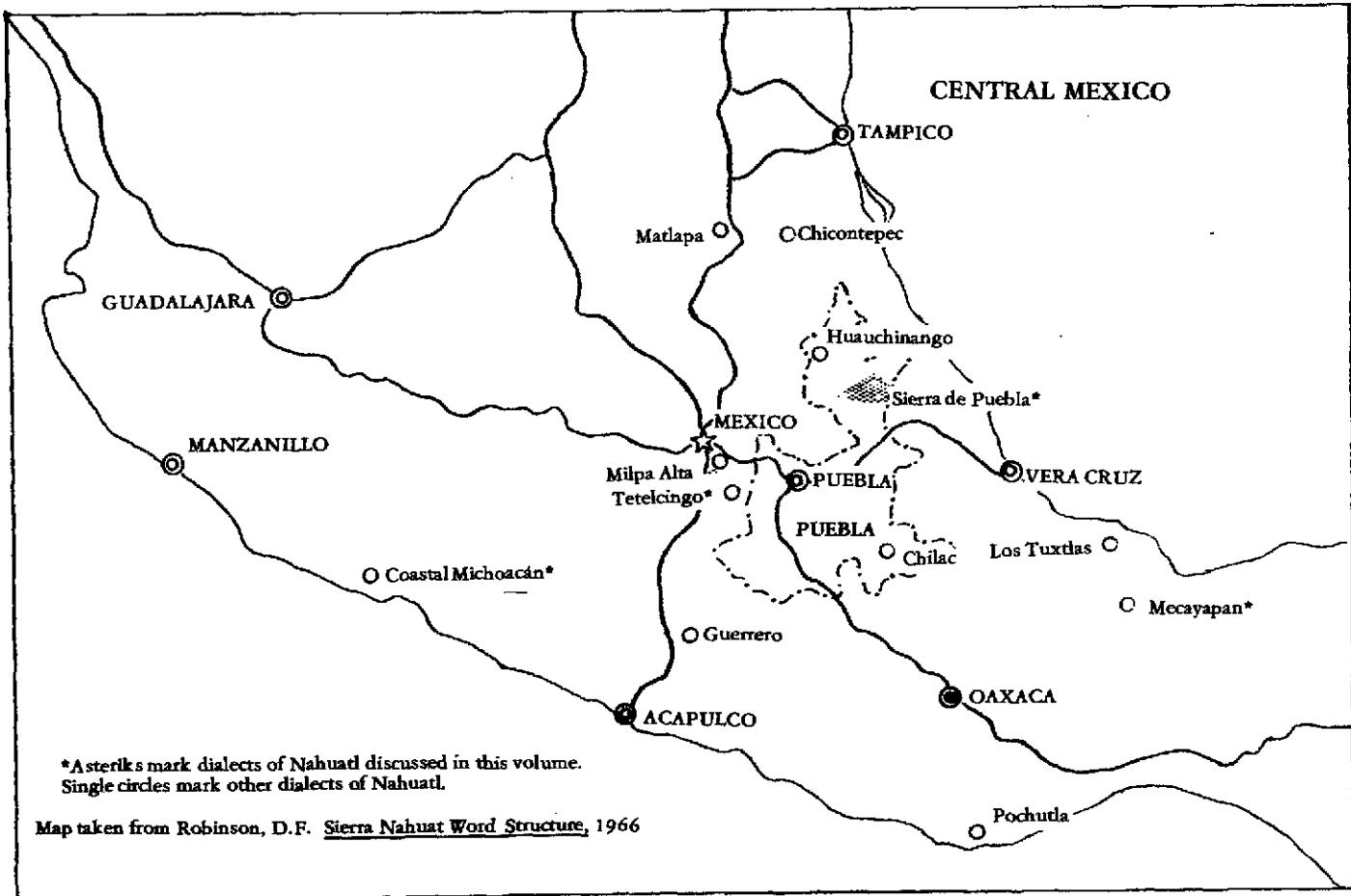
Wolgemuth's study, with its heavy reliance upon phonetic detail, presents the bare outline for what may prove to be the crucial factor in defining phonological differences among Nahuatl dialects, i.e., a laryngeal phenomena manifested as glottal action, vowel length, voicelessness, and the phoneme /h/. Robinson's article sets forth an analysis of phonological levels in Nahuatl, using Pike's tagmemic model of 1955. Each level of the "phonological hierarchy" is defined in terms of a different prosodic feature. Brewer's study of Tetelcingo Nahuatl, perhaps the most divergent of Nahuatl dialects from the viewpoint of testing intelligibility, is an inventory of verb and noun morphemes and constructions, emphasizing co-occurrence restrictions. The final article by Robinson and Sischo on Michoacán Nahual is especially useful because of the sparsity of data available of the so-called "-l" dialect of Nahuatl, i.e., the /l/ corresponds to the /tl/ in other Nahuatl dialects. The underlying grammatical structure shows surprisingly little difference with that of Puebla (Robinson, 1966) and southern Veracruz (Law, 1966). Our thanks to each field worker who cooperated in making this volume a reality.

Dow F. Robinson
Tlalpan, Mexico
April, 1969.

References cited in Editor's Note:

- Chomsky, Noam. Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. 1965.
Law, Howard. Obligatory Construction of Isthmus Nahuatl Grammar, 1966.
Pike, Kenneth L. Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, 1955.
Robinson, Dow F. Sierra Nahuatl Word Structure, 1966.

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*Asterisks mark dialects of Nahuatl discussed in this volume.
Single circles mark other dialects of Nahuatl.

Map taken from Robinson, D.F. Sierra Nahuat Word Structure, 1966

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	ISTHMUS VERACRUZ (MECAYAPAN) NAHUAT LARYNGEALS Carl Wolgemuth	
0.	Introduction	1
1.	Glottal action	1
2.	The /h/ phoneme	3
3.	Voicelessness in allophonic variants	5
4.	Reduction	5
5.	Vowel length	7
6.	The o/u variation	10
II.	PUEBLA (SIERRA) NAHUAT PROSODIES Dow F. Robinson	
1.	Phonemes	17
2.	Syllables	18
3.	Micro-segments	19
4.	Meso-segments	21
5.	Macro-segments	24
6.	Mega-segments	26
III.	MORELOS (TETELCINGO) NAHUALT VERB STEM CONSTRUCTIONS Forrest Brewer	
0.	Introduction	33
1.	Verb Stem Components	33
2.	Stem classes	41
3.	Summary affix inventory	42
IV.	MICHOACÁN (PÓMARO) NAHUAL CLAUSE STRUCTURE Dow F. Robinson and William R. Sischo	
1.	The four major verb clause systems	54
2.	Indicative clause system	56
3.	Causative clause system	59
4.	Referential clause system	62
5.	Causative-referential clause system	65
6.	Derived verbal clauses	68
7.	Nominal clauses system	70