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Contents

NEW THEMES IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Juan Maiguashca, New Social Orders, Local Knowledge and the Logic of Place in Spanish America, 1830-1930 11

Mark Thurner, An Old New World for the History of Historiography 29

Alan Durston, Indigenous Languages and the Historiography on Latin America 51

Margarita Garrido, Do Recognition and Moral Sentiments Have a Place in the Analysis of Political Culture? Honor, Contempt, Resentment and Indignation in the Late Colonial Andean America 67

Carla Maria Carvalho de Almeida, Jurandir Malerba, Rediscovering Portuguese America: Internal Dynamics and New Social Actors in the Historiography of Colonial Brazil. A Tribute to Ciro Flamarion Cardoso 87

Felipe Soza, The Association of Chilean Historians in the United Kingdom, 1980-1989 101

Notes on Contributors 119
Indigenous Languages and the Historiography on Latin America

Alan Durston

Abstract

The historiography on Latin America is increasingly cognizant of the fact that the post-conquest development of indigenous languages cannot be understood in terms of a linear process of decline, and that there are valuable sources in these languages from unexpected times and places. An important segment of the historiography on colonial Mexico has long made intensive use of indigenous-language sources, and indigenous languages are beginning to appear on the historiographical radar elsewhere. This article surveys the treatment of indigenous languages and indigenous-language sources in the historiographies on Mexico, Peru, and Paraguay. It argues that the most promising new trends in the field include greater attention to the social history of language, to the use of indigenous languages by non-Indians, and to their use in nation-building processes.

Keywords: historiography; Latin America; indigenous languages; Nahuatl; Quechua; Guarani.

I. Introduction

The historiography on Latin America is just beginning to reflect the post-conquest vitality of indigenous languages, long neglected despite the fact that several countries have indigenous-language speaking majorities today or have had them within living memory. It is only among students of colonial Mexico that a true historiography based on indigenous-language sources has developed. This historiography is concentrated in Central Mexico (the Nahuatl speaking area), Oaxaca (a multilingual area), and Yucatan (inhabited by Yucatec Maya speakers). For these areas there is a unique bounty of texts written in indigenous languages by indigenous authors during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including thousands of notarial documents, a type of source that exists nowhere else in significant numbers. In the 1970s an historiographical school focusing on such sources began to emerge under the leadership of the late James Lockhart, one of the most influential historians of colonial Latin America.

More recently, indigenous languages have been taking on greater prominence in the historiography on other parts of Latin America, particularly Peru and Paraguay. This is partly a result of new research on unknown or little-known sources, particularly from the late colonial and national periods, but it also reflects a growing interest

1 I thank Juan Maiguashca for encouraging me to write this essay and for his requests for improvement and clarification. It also benefitted greatly from critical readings by Jeremy Mumford, Mark Thurner, Camilla Townsend, and Yanna Yannakakis. I also thank Capucine Boidin and Bridget Chesterton for their help with the section on Paraguay.

2 This is the case with Bolivia, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru, and perhaps other countries as well. Indigenous languages have been and remain strong in the southeastern Mexican states.
in issues arising from the continuing vitality of indigenous languages. What can we learn about, and from, the ebb and flow of indigenous languages over time? How was inter-lingual communication managed in colonial and national societies, and what were the social and cultural effects of linguistic diversity and multilingualism? Who used indigenous languages, in what contexts, and why? What Peter Burke calls the "social history of language" – an historical sociolinguistics – has received little attention in Latin America.³

This essay seeks to identify key trends in how the historiography has used sources in indigenous languages,⁴ and in how it has approached the social history of indigenous languages. My definition of ‘historiography’ includes the work of scholars in disciplines other than history but who are centrally concerned with processes of change in Latin American societies. However, it does not extend to research on non-alphabetic texts. The main development in this area over the past few decades has been the decipherment of Maya glyphic writing, but most of the extant texts are inscriptions dating centuries before the Spanish conquest.⁵ The Andean khipu or knotted string record is the subject of a booming field of research, and it is now known that khipus continued in use well into the twentieth century in some parts of Peru. However, the consensus is that khipus did not record linguistic information, so it cannot be said that they are ‘written in’ indigenous languages.⁶

The article is organized geographically, focusing on the three areas where indigenous-language documentation is most abundant: first, Mesoamerica, where there are sources in a number of different languages, second, the Andes (mainly highland Peru, my own area of expertise), where Quechua is the best represented language group, and, third, Paraguay (Guaraní).⁷ The Mexicanist work provides a baseline for examining what has been done in the other two areas. I make no claim to offering a comprehensive and systematic survey of such a vast field – readers will find many omissions. This is especially the case when it comes to Mesoamerica, where my account is limited to the most influential Anglophone scholarship. I begin with some general remarks on the history of indigenous languages in Latin America accompanied by an overview of the historical sources available in them.

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⁴ This is not a survey of historical research with indigenous sources – many historical texts of indigenous authorship were originally written in European languages, and many indigenous-language texts are the work of Europeans, creoles, and mestizos. My focus is on research whose methodology centrally involves direct study of indigenous-language texts. For an important general study of indigenous writings in Latin America, see M. Leinhard, La voz y su huella. Escritura y conflicto étnico-cultural en América Latina 1492-1988, 3rd ed. (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1992).
⁵ For a recent overview see D. Tedlock, 2000 Years of Mayan Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), part I.
⁷ Mesoamerica is a cultural region covering central and southern Mexico and northern Central America. The sources and research come overwhelming from what is now Mexico, so I will speak interchangeably of ‘Mexico’ and ‘Mesoamerica’.
The parts of the Western Hemisphere that were colonized by Spain and Portugal, and continue to be, among the most linguistically diverse in the world. Mesoamerica is particularly striking for the number of distinct language groups packed into a relatively small area. Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya and Mixtec – the three best documented Mesoamerican languages – belong to three apparently unrelated language families (Uto-Aztecan, Mayan, and Oto-Manguean). The Andean region (understood here as the highlands and coast of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia) appears less diverse, dominated as it is by the Quechua and Aymara language families, but a number of other languages unique to the region became extinct over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The linguistic diversity of the South American lowlands, particularly the Amazon, is proverbial, although here linguists have identified two very large and extended families – Arawakan and Tupian – that are present over the entire region.\(^8\)

Efforts to determine when and how certain languages and language groups spread over large areas are ongoing, and can be of great interest to historians. One example is the debate regarding how varieties of Quechua were established from Colombia to Northwestern Argentina. An important shift in thinking on this topic took place in the 1960s and ’70s, when the conventional model according to which Quechua originated in Cuzco and spread with Inca rule in the fifteenth century was debunked. Instead, it was proposed that Quechua first developed in central Peru and spread north and south in different waves, with most of the expansion taking place in pre-Inca times.\(^9\) This model is currently being refined by new research that places greater emphasis on the transformations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – the time of the Inca and Spanish conquests – while accepting that Quechua was already present throughout much of the Peruvian highlands, perhaps as a result of the expansion of the Huari empire in the late first millennium CE.\(^10\)

Some expansions took place after the arrival of Europeans. Expeditions accompanied by indigenous allies, new economic activities and commercial networks, migrations, and all sorts of upheavals associated with European conquest and colonization could result in the use of an indigenous language in new contexts, and its consequent transformation. In many parts of colonial Latin America indigenous languages served as lingua francas, being used for communication both between Indians and Europeans and between Indians who spoke different languages.


\(^9\) In particular A. Torero, *El quechua y la historia social andina* (Lima, Universidad Ricardo Palma, 1974).

A brief digression on the term ‘lingua franca’ may be useful here. In Anglophone usage, a lingua franca is a language that is widely used as a ‘bridge’ for communication among speakers of different languages. This implies that many users acquire it as a second language for specific purposes such as commerce, but it may be a ‘native’ or vernacular language for others. The etymology of ‘lingua franca’ is uncertain, but it originally designated a mixed language used in Mediterranean commerce. In French- and Spanish-language scholarship the preference is to restrict the term ‘lingua franca’ to this original meaning and to instead use ‘vehicular language’ (langue véhiculaire, lengua vehicular) for the sociolinguistic concept. Of course, neither term was used in colonial Latin America, but the expression lengua general/língua geral emerged in the mid-sixteenth century to refer to indigenous languages that were widely used, and had a meaning approximate to lingua franca.

Some ‘general languages’ had already served as lingua francas prior to the Iberian conquests – Nahuatl is a case in point – while others only appear to have acquired this role afterwards. Perhaps the clearest example of the latter is Tupinambá, or Tupi, a language spoken along much of the Brazilian coast when the first Europeans arrived. It was used by the early settlers and their offspring, and later acquired lingua franca functions in much of the interior as it was carried inland by mestizo slave raiders and colonists, their indigenous allies, and Jesuit missionaries. In the seventeenth century a form of Tupinambá became the official language of the Portuguese-controlled parts of the Amazon basin. Local populations who had originally spoken a variety of other languages used it to communicate with each other and with the Portuguese. In the process the language was transformed, and the variety that resulted is known to scholars as Língua Geral Amazônica (modern Nheengatu). By this point the original speakers of Tupinambá had all but disappeared, only their language lived on in a new form.

In those areas where Spain and Portugal established a strong presence during the sixteenth century, missionaries soon adapted their national varieties of the Roman alphabet to write the ‘general languages,’ as well as some of the less general ones. Printing presses were established in Mexico City and Lima partly for the purpose of publishing grammars, dictionaries, and catechetical works in indigenous languages for the use of the clergy. In Mesoamerica, native elites wrote their languages alphabetically for a variety of purposes, including administrative record-keeping and recording community histories and even pre-Christian religious lore. Their Andean

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12 Samarin, “Lingua Franca”, 373.
15 For recent English-language overviews and anthologies see Literatures (Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians vol. 2), eds. M. S. Edmonson and P. A. Andrews (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Mesoamerican Voices: Native-Language Writings from Colonial Mexico, Oaxaca, Yucatan and Guatemala,
counterparts were less prolific: there is a small corpus of letters and petitions of indigenous authorship from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Quechua, in addition to catechetical works and plays written by priests.\textsuperscript{16} Outside the Andean and Mesoamerican areas there is not much in the way of non-missionary indigenous-language writings from the colonial period, the main exception being Guarani in Paraguay. For reasons that will be discussed below, Guarani leaders began to produce administrative documentation in both Spanish and Guarani in the mid-eighteenth century – prior to that, Guarani writing had primarily been the instrument of Jesuit missionaries.\textsuperscript{17}

The Bourbon reforms of the second half of the eighteenth century, followed by the independence wars of the 1810s and '20s and the chaotic construction of the Latin American republics, are reflected in significant changes in the nature of the indigenous-language record. Bourbon policy was hostile to indigenous languages, and a 1770 royal decree even called for their eradication.\textsuperscript{18} Indigenous-language writing dropped off at various points between the mid-seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century due to a variety of factors, in particular the Hispanicization and sociopolitical decline of indigenous elites.\textsuperscript{19} But while there was less writing going on overall, new genres appeared during the Age of Revolution. Both independence leaders and royalist forces published manifestos in several different indigenous languages during the independence wars.\textsuperscript{20} The upheavals of the early national period (roughly 1820-1880) are associated with a florescence of political writing in Yucatec...
Maya (during the Caste War, 1847-1901) and Guaraní (during the War of the Triple Alliance, 1864-1870).  

New circumstances affected writing in indigenous languages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a period when many Latin American states were expanding into territories over which they had previously had no real control, conquering and often exterminating their indigenous inhabitants. This process took place on a particularly large scale in the Amazon basin and Southern Cone, but it occurred all over Latin America, and it made possible a new wave of Catholic missionization and the arrival of the first modern ethnographers. While it was devastating for the native populations involved, one side-effect was that they, and their languages, entered the alphabetic record for the first time, or did so to a much greater extent than in the past.

The Mapuche of southern Chile and Argentina provide a striking example. The only colonial-period texts in Mapudungun, the Mapuche language, are missionary works: the Mapuche themselves had little need for writing because they managed to remain independent until the 1880s. During the first decades of the twentieth century a corpus of Mapudungun texts, including biographies of Mapuche leaders, appeared in publications overseen by missionaries and ethnographers. While orally based, these testimonies were written down by the first generation of literate Mapuches, typically the sons of the last independent chiefs. The collection and publication of Mapuche testimonies was promoted and overseen by Chilean and European missionaries and ethnographers under the guise of recording a disappearing culture for science and aiding the civilizing process. However, it has been argued that the Mapuche intellectuals working with them were simultaneously engaged in the project of writing Mapuche history.

The turn-of-the-century period also saw the beginnings of a phenomenon that would have multiple implications for the writing of indigenous languages throughout the first half of the twentieth century: the rise of indigenista nationalism and regionalism. Latin American intellectuals developed an interest in indigenous languages as part of a nativist reaction against the growing sway of the US. This did not translate into much actual writing in indigenous languages by the intelligentsias of the Latin American capitals, who were generally monolinguals in the dominant language. But at the same time that nativist nationalism was on the rise, regional elites who did speak indigenous languages were responding to the growing sway of central states, and to spatial and economic integration, in ways that resulted in a literary boom in indigenous languages.

A representative example can be found in the Zapotec-speaking town of Juchitán in southern Mexico. Howard Campbell notes that local intellectuals started writing

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21 On Yucatec Maya documents from the Caste War, see V. Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: the Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), ch. 4 and appendix A; for Guaraní texts from the War of the Triple Alliance see http://www.staff.uni-mainz.de/lustig/guarani/.


about, and in, Zapotec when they moved to Mexico City for political, educational, and employment opportunities, first around the turn of the century and then, on a much larger scale, after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). In the 1930s Juchitán intellectuals founded a Zapotec language academy and published a literary journal (written in both Spanish and Zapotec) in Mexico City. Exposure to the metropolitan context during the indigenista era made them aware of their distinctiveness, and eager to craft and promote a regional/ethnic identity. During this same period intellectuals from the Peruvian highlands, especially Cuzco and Ayacucho, were writing Quechua plays and poetry. In some key respects these authors differed from their Juchitán counterparts: they did not self-identify as indigenous, and they tended to have a much more antagonistic relationship with the national capital. Nonetheless, they also had much in common: they were members of bilingual provincial elites who found cultural capital in their indigenous ‘mother tongues’ just as they were being integrated with, or subordinated to, national/metropolitan society.

Aside from a flowering of indigenous-language literature, the first half of the twentieth century saw the appearance of the first public education materials. Catechisms and other texts for religious instruction had, of course, abounded in many languages since the sixteenth century, but it wasn’t until the early twentieth century that it was suggested that the state ought to publish primary education textbooks, including literacy primers, in indigenous languages. Mexico’s revolutionary government led the trend, publishing textbooks in several different languages and recruiting the services of US linguists, many of them working for an evangelical missionary organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, to develop orthographies and educational materials for the less-known languages. In Mexico and Peru, and probably elsewhere, the indigenista era overlapped with periods of rural upheaval and reformist movements that sought to mobilize or co-opt indigenous peasantries, resulting in the reappearance of the kind of political pamphletry in indigenous languages that flourished during the independence wars.

I will not attempt an overview of indigenous-language writing after the middle of the twentieth century, but a few generalizations can be made. The bulk of this material consists of transcripts of oral narratives taken down by anthropologists and linguists from indigenous informants. The advent of the tape recorder led to the publication of thousands of texts, but direct writing in indigenous languages declined during the mid-twentieth century. In the case of Quechua, and probably other lan-

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guages as well, this decline is related to that of the bilingual provincial elites and their intellectual projects. This was also a period of accelerating urbanization throughout Latin America, with the attendant demographic decline of indigenous languages – between 1940 and 1993 the percentage of Peruvians who spoke Quechua dropped from 47% to 18%. However, the revival of indigenous identities that has been taking place all over Latin America over the last two or three decades is rapidly changing the picture as far as indigenous-language writing is concerned.29

III. Mesoamerica and the New Philology

When James Lockhart launched what became known as the ‘New Philology’ in the 1970s there was already a significant body of scholarship by anthropologists and linguists on colonial texts in Nahuatl and Mayan languages. This scholarship was concerned with unlocking pre-conquest Mesoamerican worldviews and focused on the alphabetic ‘codices’ – lengthy manuscripts of an historical, ethnographic, or religious nature.30 Lockhart and his students, by contrast, privileged the abundant and largely unstudied archival materials in Nahuatl – documents like wills, land sales, and town council records – to write the history of colonial Mexico from an indigenous point of view. The richness of these sources resides not just in the fact that they are in indigenous languages, but also that they are detailed internal records produced by indigenous authorities and scribes. A series of major studies of Nahua towns and provinces based primarily on such sources was carried out in the ’70s and ’80s by Lockhart and his students and associates. In a second phase of the New Philology, Lockhart’s students went further afield and successfully repeated the process of locating and analyzing hundreds or thousands of indigenous-language documents outside the Nahua area – the main examples are Matthew Restall’s work in Yucatan (with Yucatec Maya) and Kevin Terraciano’s in Oaxaca (with Mixtec).31

Their work is, above all, social history, with special emphasis on indigenous modes of sociopolitical organization and their vitality and resilience under Spanish rule.

29 Itier, “Quechua, Aymara and Other Andean Languages”, 162.
Lockhart and his students and collaborators have shown that the indigenous-language sources often present a very different picture from the Spanish documentation, one that suggests far greater continuity with pre-conquest society. ‘New Philology’ might seem an odd designation for this historiography. The term originally established a contrast between the work of Lockhart and his students and earlier work with sources in Mesoamerican languages. There is now a rich historiography that employs indigenous-language sources to illuminate sexuality, gender and family, local religion, and understandings of history in colonial Mesoamerica, among other topics. How much of it should be classified as ‘New Philology’ is unclear, and it seems best to restrict the term to scholarship using large masses of archival documents in an indigenous language to produce broad social histories, along the lines pioneered by Lockhart.

A significant segment of this scholarship in undeniably philological in nature. Much effort has been dedicated to textual editions, and the representative works contain chapters on language and writing. Lockhart and Terraciano have provided fascinating analyses of the development of writing systems, showing how alphabetic writing coexisted and intermingled with indigenous pictographic scripts before replacing them towards the end of the sixteenth century. Lockhart and some of his students have also sought to correlate the growing presence of Spanish loans in indigenous-language texts with *longue durée* social and cultural change, understood as a process of Hispanization. These efforts have produced many important observations, but the method has not been widely imitated due to an emphasis on teleological ‘stages’ and a narrow focus on lexical borrowing as the crucial form of linguistic change, not to mention the difficulty of finding the necessary documentary series. There has been less attention in the New Philology to semantic change (the transformation in meaning of indigenous words). The profound semantic and ideological transformations in indigenous languages and cultures associated with Spanish religion and legal-administrative institutions were not prominent themes in the Mesoamerican historiography in general until relatively recently. The work of two anthropologists – Louise Burkhart (on conversion) and Susan Kellogg (on law) – constitute important early exceptions.

I will conclude this section with some reflections on recent work that places Mesoamerican languages at center stage in a different way from the New Philology. A fuller sense is emerging that Mesoamerican languages did not merely hold their ground in the face of the Hispanic onslaught, but expanded into and were transformed by new contexts and uses. More attention is also being given to how colonial rule resulted in the transformation of relations among indigenous languages, and to the factors that dictated language choice in contexts such as law, administration, and conversion. A book by anthropologist William Hanks examines what he calls *maya reducido* – the ‘reduced’ or reordered Yucatec Maya of colonial-era texts. Hanks argues that networks of key concepts were introduced or transformed as part of the joint colonial projects of town-formation (*congregación*) and Christian conversion. In 2012 a special issue of the journal *Ethnohistory* was dedicated to the uses of Nahuatl in colonial multilingual and multiethnic contexts: as a lingua franca, as a language introduced into new areas as a result of the Spanish conquests, and as a language used by the clergy and other non-Indians. The issue reflects a novel emphasis on the mobility and malleability of Nahuatl. In her introduction, Yanna Yannakakis raises the issue of multilingualism: “How did colonial subjects deploy different languages in everyday life, and why might they have chosen to use one language rather than another?” It is no coincidence that the question is posed by a specialist in the Oaxaca area, where Mixtec, Zapotec, Nahuatl, and little-known languages such as Chocho could coexist in a single community. A distinctive historiography is emerging that explores the conditions of the exuberant multilingualism of the local archives.

Historical research involving Mesoamerican languages and Mesoamerican-language sources in the republican period seems very thin on the ground. Dennis Tedlock’s *2000 Years of Mayan Literature* dedicates a four-page epilogue to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, noting that sources from this period are of difficult access and that Mayanists have gravitated towards earlier texts. Important studies of political texts in Mesoamerican languages from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries do exist, but it appears that comprehensive research and debates concerning such

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39 W. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (University of California Press, 2010).
42 Needless to say, there is an abundant ethnographic literature employing mostly oral indigenous-language sources collected throughout the twentieth century.
43 Tedlock, *2000 Years*, 399-402.
44 León-Portilla, *Los manifiestos*; Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King*, ch. a and appendix A; Laughlin, *Beware the Great Horned Serpent*; Morris, “Language in Service of the State”.
sources and the post-independence social history of Mesoamerican languages have yet to develop.

IV. The Andes

My discussion of the Andean historiography is limited to research involving Quechua, by far the best documented of the Andean languages. The study of colonial Quechua texts got off to a late start relative to the Mesoamerican scholarship, a consequence primarily of the paucity of texts of indigenous authorship. This is illustrated by the editorial history of the Huarochirí Manuscript, a unique compendium of the religious lore of the province of Huarochirí written by an indigenous noble around 1608. While the wealth of this text as a source on Prehispanic culture is comparable to that of the most famous Mesoamerican codices, and its existence has been known since the nineteenth century, the first direct Spanish translation of the Huarochirí Manuscript was only published in 1966, and it took until 1991 for an English translation to appear. Basic research in Quechua historical linguistics did not take off until the 1960s.

The scholarship on Quechua stands out for its attention to how the language has been used and transformed by non-indigenous agents. Almost all of the extant Quechua texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including those of indigenous authorship, employ or are heavily influenced by a written standard developed by the church for Christian instruction and liturgy. A key enterprise in Quechua philology since the 1970s has thus been to understand the semantic transformations promoted by the Spanish clergy in order to make better use of the colonial sources. There is now a substantial literature on missionary uses and transformations of Quechua during the colonial period, and debates about translation have intersected with the historiography on Andean religion.

45 Quechua is actually a family of closely related languages, but what Mannheim calls Southern Peruvian Quechua dominates the written record (The Language of the Inka, "Introduction").
48 See R. Cerrón-Palomino, Lingüística quechua (Cuzco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos “Bartolomé de Las Casas”, 1987), ch. 3.
The use of Quechua as a vehicle for regional and national identities by non-indigenous elites has been a central theme in the study of the late colonial and national-period literature. A purist and archaizing literary language, imagined as the Quechua of the Incas, began to develop in eighteenth-century Cuzco theater, which is interpreted by Bruce Mannheim as the expression of a form of creole patriotism that existed among Cuzco’s elite. Much of the independence-war literature employs this language – fliers printed by patriot leaders were often written to sound as though they was coming out of the mouths of the Incas. Some of these texts explicitly refer to Quechua as a basis for national identification. ‘Inca Quechua’ is represented most extensively in a corpus of historical theater written in the early twentieth century and that expressed the Cuzco elite’s claims to national leadership as heirs of the Incas. César Itier’s two-volume study of these plays, which includes critical editions of five key texts, appears to be the most in-depth study of an indigenous-language corpus written during the national period, and is widely cited by scholars of twentieth-century Andean cultural history. Itier stresses that the charisma of the “language of the Incas” was a double-edged sword: the impulse to “cultivate” a presumptively archaic and pure Quechua has detracted from its standing as a language of multipurpose communication.

A recent edited volume whose purpose was to bring together linguists and historians working in the Andes shows numerous avenues for cross-fertilization between Quechua philology and Andean history. It also exemplifies the principle that the post-conquest history of indigenous languages cannot be understood in terms of linear decline, however gradual. A chapter by historian Adrian Pearce argues that Quechua expanded demographically in the mid-nineteenth century. The political instability and economic involution that followed independence favored a resurgence of the indigenous population that may have had a linguistic correlate in the retreat of Spanish, such that in the southern highlands Quechua became the primary medium of communication and expression even among urban elites. The evidence is anecdotal as there is no census information, but Pearce’s picture of a Quechuaizing elite in nineteenth-century highland Peru is compelling and of clear importance for the general social and cultural history of the region.


Mannheim, *The Language of the Inkas*, 71-74. César Itier has a different understanding of the social context of these plays, arguing that they were directed at an urban indigenous elite. See his “Quechua y cultura en el Cuzco del siglo XVIII: de la ‘lengua general’ al ‘idioma del imperio de los incas’.”, *Del siglo de oro al siglo de las luces. Lenguaje y sociedad en los Andes del siglo XVIII*, ed. C. Itier (Cuzco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos “Bartolomé de Las Casas”, 1995), 90-102.

Itier, “Quechua y cultura”, 102-106; Durston, “Quechua Political Literature”.

Itier, *El teatro quechua en el Cuzco. Tomo I* and *El teatro quechua en el Cuzco. Tomo II*.


*History and Language in the Andes*, eds. Heggarty and Pearce.


Pearce’s hypothesis is supported by the fact that Spanish monolingualism was virtually non-existent
V. Paraguay

The Christian literature in Guaraní produced by the Jesuits missions in Paraguay has been an object of study for some time, going back to Bartomeu Melià’s 1969 doctoral thesis, *La création d’un langage chrétien dans les Réductions des Guaraní au Paraguay*, recently republished in Spanish.\(^59\) This may well be the first in-depth study of a missionary effort to develop a Christian variety of an Amerindian language. Perhaps because they date from later periods, colonial Guaraní texts of a political and administrative nature – in particular letters and petitions – have only recently attracted attention. The fact that they number in the hundreds comes as quite a surprise.\(^60\)

Eduardo Neumann has studied the circumstances that led the Guaraní elite to start writing such texts in the middle of the eighteenth century. As the Jesuits started losing control over the missions, Guaraní leaders had to establish their own relationship with geographically distant crown authorities in the absence of a well-developed lay bureaucracy of the sort that existed in the Andes and Mesoamerica. Also peculiar to the Paraguayan context was the fact that it was a highly unstable military frontier: the missions were under constant attack by independent indigenous groups and the Guaraní had to collaborate with the colonial authorities to coordinate defensive actions. For all of these reasons Guaraní leaders needed writing to communicate with Spanish officials, emphasize their loyalty to the crown, and relate their past services, especially those of a military nature. Although many of the Guaraní scribes wrote Spanish, they also found it convenient to do so in Guaraní because of the existence of the Jesuit written tradition.\(^61\)

Capucine Boidin is studying Guaraní translations of letters and decrees produced by Rioplatense (Argentine) independence leaders in the 1810s with an emphasis on the development of key political concepts.\(^62\) While Boidin situates these documents in relation to Guaraní political literature from earlier and later periods, she also stresses that the development of a ‘language of political modernity’ in Guaraní was part of a global process. The introduction of new concepts such as liberal understandings of ‘nation’ or ‘citizen’ in Guaraní cannot be seen in isolation – the political vocabulary of Spanish was undergoing a similar process of transformation at this time. A research project led by Boidin and Itier has undertaken comparative study of how these developments are reflected in independence-era writings in Quechua, Guaraní, and other major South American languages.\(^63\)

in a major highland town like Ayacucho as late as 1940 (Durston, “El teatro quechua en la ciudad de Ayacucho”).

\(^59\) B. Melià, *La lengua guaraní en el Paraguay colonial, que contiene la creación de un lenguaje cristiano en las reducciones de los guaraníes en el Paraguay* (Asunción: CEPAG, 2003).

\(^60\) Melià, “La lengua guaraní dependiente”.


\(^63\) Entitled LANGAS (General Languages of South America), the project is developing an online reposi-
Interest in the Guaraní-language press of the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) is also a recent phenomenon, but research is proceeding apace. Wolf Lustig is making articles from Guaraní-language newspapers of the period available on-line, both in facsimile and as transcriptions-cum-translations. 64 “The wartime Guaraní-language press was just that: it had not existed prior to the war and it disappeared when it ended. However, it resulted in a lasting construction of the Guaraní language as a warrior language, consolidating its centrality to Paraguayan national identity. 65 Paraguay’s other great external conflict, the Chaco War of 1932-1935, did not produce a Guaraní-language press, but it led to an upsurge in Guaraní’s status as the national language reflected in, among other things, the appearance of nationalist poetry and drama in Guaraní. 66 There is thus a characteristic and persistent correlation between Guaraní writing and war.

VI. Conclusions

Growing attention to the national period, to the use of indigenous languages by non-Indians, and to the transformations undergone by indigenous languages as they occupied new spaces and roles are among the more promising trends in the field. They open up a wider range of sources and have great potential to intersect with key concerns in the broader historiography. This is particularly the case with research on indigenous languages as carriers of nationalism and modern political ideologies, which can illuminate debates about political culture and political participation in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin America. There is a large literature on the involvement of indigenous peasantries in nation building processes, but this literature rarely asks how key concepts and discourses were expressed in indigenous languages.

Somewhat unexpectedly, these trends are more developed in the scholarship on Quechua and Guaraní than in the older and far more abundant Mesoamericanist literature. It is precisely the scarcity of early sources, especially texts of indigenous authorship, that has pushed Andeanists and Guaraní scholars to pay more attention to later sources, and to sources of non-indigenous authorship. By contrast, a colonial Mesoamerican embarrassment of riches led to a focus on pre-conquest continuities and to the development of methodologies that required large masses of texts – in other words, to approaches that are not easily applied to later periods or to other parts of Latin America.

The distinctive histories of Quechua and Guaraní have also played a role in stimulating certain lines of inquiry. Quechua’s dramatic and poorly understood expansions and contractions, as well as its strong presence among mestizo and creole popula-

tory of texts with a sophisticated search tool (http://www.langas.cnrs.fr/temp/index.htm) and has organized a series of international workshops.

64 http://www.staff.uni-mainz.de/lustig/guaraní/.
tions, have provoked interest in the social history of language among Andeanists. Guaraní’s demographic strength, added to Paraguay’s modern history of large-scale military mobilizations, have resulted in the language having a major presence in the written record during periods of conflict. Late colonial and republican political languages are now the most prominent theme in Guaraní studies. Stressing the distinctiveness of these histories and documentary records, however, is not an argument for regional exceptionalisms. Issues that are all but unavoidable for scholars of Quechua and Guaraní are often relevant to research on other major languages, which also experienced late resurgences and acquired special prominence during times of upheaval and political change.

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