



Book Review: Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán (eds.), Arte de el Idioma mexicano (1713): gramática, didáctica, dialectología y traductología; Madrid, España: Iberoamericana – Vervuert, 2017. 338 pages. ISBN 978-84-8489-988-4

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Book Review

Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán (eds.), *Arte de el Idioma mexicano (1713): gramática, didáctica, dialectología y traductología*; Madrid, España: Iberoamericana – Vervuert, 2017. 338 pages. ISBN 978-84-8489-988-4 (Iberoamericana), ISBN 978-3-95487-520-7 (Vervuert), ISBN 978-3-95487-672-3 (e-Book)

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This volume, published by the publishing house Iberoamericana/Vervuert, within the framework of the series *Missionary Linguistics/Lingüística misionera* is the first critical edition of an underdocumented grammar of Nahuatl written in 1713 by Augustinian friar Manuel Pérez. One of the specificities of this *Arte de el idioma mexicano* lays in the many instances of Nahua dialect variation made available by this monograph, particularly from the varieties spoken in the Mexican valley and at the intersection between the modern states of Puebla, Morelos and Guerrero (called by the author “Tierra Caliente”). More specifically, Friar Manuel Pérez describes the Chiautla de la Sal (Puebla) dialect, where he acquired most of his first-hand knowledge on *Mexicano* (i.e. Nahuatl) from native speakers.

The volume divides into eight chapters. Five of them focus on the historiographic analysis of Pérez’ work, inside and outside the text, including an interesting study of “peritexts” and “paratexts” (addresses to the reader, prologues and epilogues, etc.) which provide relevant information about Pérez pedagogical approach, translation strategies, and institutional or social goals, in the craftsmanship of such *Artes*. The last chapter includes the transliteration of Manuel Pérez’s *Arte* itself (p. 245–312). The five appendices add useful samples about others of Manuel Pérez’s works, such as fragments of *El Farol*, *El Catecismo romano*, or *Sentir*, in order to contextualize better the sociolinguistic context which surrounded Pérez’ life and *obra*.

The comprehensive introductory study written by Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán starts with a vast “Introduction” about the reasons why one should reprint and/or read this *Arte de el Idioma mexicano* by Friar Manuel Pérez. As a matter of fact, many most valuable missionary books, as this one, were not reprinted for many reasons, even if they were successful in their own

time, as it seems to be the case for Pérez work. One of the main purposes of the two editors, Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán, is to find out if Manuel Pérez's *Arte* contains or not new data and insights on Colonial Nahuatl. They also try to fathom to what extent this monograph has much to teach us on the epistemology of indigenous languages documentation in Colonial times, throughout the main components of grammar (morphophonology, inflectional morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, translation, etc.). Their answer to this question is fairly positive and exiting. Handling firmly this empirical and epistemological compass in hands, they compare previous descriptive works done by missionaries – for example, the well-known Carochi's *Arte de la lengua mexicana* (2001 [1645]) – with Manuel Pérez's monograph on this peripheral dialect, located in the lowlands, rather far in space and time from the shadow of classical Nahuatl. Furthermore, they compare Pérez' insights and data with contemporary dialectological information, mainly from the Balsas area (Guerrero), a region which Pérez apparently used to visit. In this respect, the section "Vida y obra" (life and work) gives a comprehensive account of Pérez's biography and his achievements in early Nahuatl studies, from a historical point of view. They show to what extent Pérez was linking his expertise and practice of Chiautla Nahuatl with his teaching at the Royal University of Mexico, where he used to give lectures on Nahuatl for more than twenty years. This historiographic standpoint highlights many interesting phenomena about languages in contact, language ideologies, institutional constraints and evaluative tasks for testing proficiency in Nahuatl among priests and clerks, all linked with his educative goals in the public sphere, according to New Spain's native language policy, during this period Mexicans call nowadays "la Colonia".

The second chapter entitled "Arte" is divided into six sections. First, this chapter provides a short review of the twelve earlier grammars written before Pérez's monograph. It shows how Manuel Pérez follows the standard model for missionary grammars: it contains 22 chapters enriched with "necessary notes", even if his initial goal was to write a "small volume" (p. 65). Nevertheless, systematic indexation of first-hand data with called "asteriscos" (star keys) helps the reader to spot new facts, in a very useful way for contemporary readers. It takes into account the explicit and the implicit sources used by Friar Manuel Pérez, enhancing the theoretical and theological influences his craftsmanship may have received. It also makes available the critics he addressed to previous grammarians, as when he attacks Carochi's statement about the nonexistence of Nahuatl syntax (Carochi 2001 [1645]: 14; Zwartjes & Flores Farfán 2017: 95). Next, Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán tackle Manuel Pérez's way of presenting the dialect he has been studying, from the

standpoint of phonology, morphology and the lexicon, comparing his work with Juan Guerra's, and addressing questions of languages in contact (including contact with Colonial Spanish). Manuel Pérez's *Arte* provides a huge description of Nahuatl according to the grammatical tradition for describing the "Mexican language", which goes from orthography and phonology to syntax. It includes, for example, a contrast between optative and subjunctive constructions in Latin, Spanish and Nahuatl, because the earlier Spanish translations have induced confusions (p. 103). The last section of this chapter shows how Pérez work aroused echoes among his readers, including positive and negative criticism, corrections and improvements. One of the new insights he brought in the field of the art of *Artes* concerns dialect comparison, and the pragmatic nuances for reverential forms, marked by the suffix *-tzin* outside of the Mexican valley, still available nowadays in modern variants.

Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán's chapter "La variedad de 'Tierra Caliente'" delves into the dialectological description of lowlands Nahuatl by Manuel Pérez, unique in its kind, as he was the first author to study Nahuatl variation from this area in the XVIIIth Century. It analyzes in detail the phonology, morphology and lexicon of the lowland varieties, and it also provides annotations and comments flowing from Pérez' *Farol*. It also handles issues linked to cultural pragmatics – a dimension to which Manuel Pérez was well aware. In addition, it offers a comparison between Pérez dialectology and Guerra's Mexican *Arte* of Jalisco – a Western variant (1900 [1692]), the differences between Spanish and Mexican marked by Pérez. Last but not least, this chapter explores the issue of languages in contact in Pérez's monograph, e.g. how Spanish may interfere with Nahuatl plural constructions (p. 171).

The chapter "El *Cathecismo Romano* y la traducción" develops, in four sections, a study of the many translation strategies developed by Pérez, such as "the inclusion of loans, circumlocutions, neologisms, and the resemantization of Prehispanic concepts" (p. 185). It reminds us that one of the goals of Pérez work was to facilitate the understanding of Catholic concepts, avoiding misunderstandings, and to reach this goal, he positioned himself from the Nahuatl speaker perspective. He explains, for example, how concepts as "Alma" (Soul) or Angel (Angel) are untranslatable into Mexicano (footnote 12, p. 189).

The chapter "Conclusions" ends the introductory study from a critical standpoint. Even if Pérez work was not "revolutionary" in metalinguistic terms, and even if the information about Nahuatl variation remains rather unsystematic (sometimes in a somewhat approximate way, and often ideologically construed), his many details and star keys (at least 47) make of this work an important and rather original Nahuatl handbook, for this period.

The editors' chapter six "Criterios de edición" and chapter seven "Referencias" provide more primary and secondary sources.

The final chapter contains the "*Transliteración del Arte*", where the reader will find a careful and more intelligible edition of Pérez' work than anywhere else, with relevant footnotes. In this so-called *transliteration*, or exposition of his grammatical doctrine, we confirm that Pérez considers variation as an "imperfect" or "adulterate" way to speak, in more than a dozen of allusions (e.g. p. 273, 308), according to the spirit (or prejudices) of his time. Nevertheless, his contribution to Nahuatl dialectology *avant la lettre* should not be underestimated, even if his main purpose was to provide a grammar with fresh materials for the sake of language tutoring among clerks and priests.

In short, this volume is an important contribution to the historiography and editing techniques of Colonial grammars of native languages in Latin America. It also brings a lot to the comparative study of linguistic terminology and descriptive models in missionary grammars, and to the historiography of Amerindian grammar writing. Some sections of the critical introduction enclose treasures for modern typologists, as the pages on morphosyntactic categories, on the intricacy of TAM categories and telicity *avant la lettre* (pp. 88–95). Otto Zwartjes and José Antonio Flores Farfán apparently enjoy observing how a missionary linguist did his best to handle "exotic" Nahuatl lexical and grammatical categories with the technical resources of his time, mostly limited to the Latin-Greek tradition, and how he fought his way through current doctrines. Nevertheless, both editors show a deep respect and sincere empathy for Friar Manuel Pérez's impressive endeavor at trying to sketch an underdocumented variety of Nahuatl with first-hand data, for the sake of his sacerdotal and academic duties, and to update the state of the arts of the *Arte* itself, through his original and first-hand contribution.

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