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DOI: 10.31499/2306-5532.1.2022.262070

UDC: 811.11-112

## LANGUAGE POLICIES IN NEW SPAIN AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LEARNING OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES BY CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES

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*This article presents the results of the historical-pedagogical study, which objective was to determine what kind of language policies was promoted in New Spain and what was their impact on the learning of indigenous languages by Catholic missionaries whose work was to evangelize indigenous peoples. The study was carried out using the documentary-bibliographic research method. The authors have found that the requirements of the Spanish Crown regarding the need for the learning and use of Amerindian languages by the conquerors, vary from the recommendations not only of their acquisition, but also the insistence on the creation of their grammars and vocabularies in the first stage of the conquest, until the outright prohibition of its use in the Colony in the later stages. Likewise, at various times in the development of New Spanish language policy in the 16th century, Nahuatl had the same status as the official language (general and franca) on a par with Castilian and it is to be assumed that under certain circumstances it could become the language of general use in the Colony. This fact vindicates the importance of the work of Catholic missionaries to learn Nahuatl (and other American languages), elaborate the Nahuatl-Castilian and Castilian-Nahuatl vocabularies, create the grammars of these languages, as well as compose the ecclesiastical texts in them. Nevertheless, the highly fickle and inconsistent language policies for New Spain, upheld by the Spanish Crown and ecclesiastical authorities, have had little influence on the issue of indigenous language learning by friars (and other colonizers). They all the time continued to learn these languages (sometimes with the support of the commanders, and at other times*



*without their consent). Therefore, the language policies promoted in New Spain, did not have imperative impact on the interpretation of the doctrinal texts to the indigenous languages by Catholic missionaries. They composed the texts (dictionaries, grammars, sermons, catechisms, confessionals, etc.) of an invaluable amount helping to preservation of the original cultures of the American continent, inciting a true fusion of two cultures, creating the hybrid philosophical-cultural field in New Spain.*

*Key words: linguistic education in New Spain; novohispanic language policies; the status of Nahuatl as the official language in the Colony; the learning of indigenous languages by catholic missionaries.*

*У статті представлені результати порівняльно-педагогічного дослідження, метою якого було визначити, яким чином мовна політика, що впроваджувалася в Новій Іспанії, впливала на вивчення мов корінних народів католицькими місіонерами в XVI столітті. З цією метою авторами проаналізована мовна політика, що впроваджувалася в Новій Іспанії та з'ясовано, як вона впливала на тлумачення католицькими місіонерами-євангелізаторами доктринальних текстів мовами корінних народів. Дослідження проводилося за допомогою документально-бібліографічного методу. Автори виявили, що мовна політика, втілювана в Новій Іспанії в XVI столітті, не мала наказового впливу на вивчення мов, культур, перейняття філософської думки індіанських народів священниками (а також світськими колонізаторами), а також тлумачення ними християнських текстів мовами корінних племен. Авторами з'ясовано також, що, не зважаючи на сувору заборону цих мов з боку влади у певні роки колоніального періоду, місіонери склали на науатлі, отомі, сапотекі та ін. велику кількість текстів (словників, граматики, проповідей, катехізисів, сповідей тощо), сприяючи тим самим зберегання самобутньої культури американського континенту, спонукаючи до справжнього злиття двох культур, створюючи гібридне філософсько-культурне поле в Новій Іспанії.*

*Ключові слова: лінгвістична освіта в Новій Іспанії; новоіспанська мовна політика; статус науатль як офіційної мови в колонії; вивчення мов корінних народів католицькими місіонерами.*

**Introduction.** The “discovery” and “conquest” of the American continent by the Europeans, without a doubt, have been the most relevant events of the 16th century. Furthermore, in order to interact with the conquered peoples, the “victors” had to find ways to establish communication with the natives of the Americas, as well as converting them into the predominant European religion that was Catholicism, “saving their souls”. Thus, evangelization through an interpreter<sup>1</sup> was one of the first steps: “In the first year of the coming of the friars, Father Fray Martín de Valencia came to Mexico, and taking a companion who knew a little of the language, he went

<sup>1</sup> It is essential to highlight the interpretation work of Gerónimo Aguilar and Doña Marina in the first years of the conquest.



to visit the peoples of the freshwater lagoon [...], and then in writing and with an interpreter, they preached them and baptized some children" (Polanco-Martínez, 2000).

But there was some suspicion about the fidelity of the message transmitted by the interpreter "[...] because sometimes he leaves something to say, and other times he adds and composes his own, and other times he says and represents the businesses that are treated differently than the business he asks for it, and thus reasoning loses much of its being and grace, and of the spirit with which it has to be explained"<sup>2</sup> (Córdoba, 1942). For this reason, the religious soon became convinced that the main thing was to understand and speak the languages of the Indians themselves in order to be able to preach directly in them, and they insisted on studying them. Later, in the middle of the 16th century, the friars, with the help of their indigenous disciples, wrote Nahuatl vocabularies and grammars, as well as catechisms, confessionals, sermonaries and other didactic texts to teach Christian doctrine to the natives: "[...] Gante composed in Nahuatl a doctrine that is going on, very copious and long" (Córdoba, 1942). Some texts circulated in handwritten copies, others were printed in the capital of New Spain.

Notwithstanding the firm conviction of the missionaries in the need to translate religious texts into Amerindian languages, the Spanish Crown and the ecclesiastical authorities that paid special attention to evangelization, did not maintain their fixed position on this matter: linguistic policies<sup>3</sup> of the colonial period were fickle and swayed from the idea of allowing preaching in local languages to strictly forbidding any use of these.

Therefore, already in 1502, the Catholic Monarchs in their *Pragmatics* had forbidden the translation of the Bible into Spanish. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the first generation of missionaries in New Spain from translating into native languages (mainly Nahuatl) the texts of the Sacred Scripture, especially the Epistles and Gospels for liturgical use. These works were published in Mexico in the sixteenth century, some of them were lost, but most of them there are references in other texts: *Gospels of the whole year in the Mexica language (Evangelios de todo el año en lengua Mexica)* by fray Alonso de Molina, *Epistles and Gospels in the Misteca language (Epístolas y Evangelios en lengua misteca)* by Fray Benigno Fernández, or the *Christian Doctrine and Epistles and Gospels in Mixtec language (Doctrina cristiana y Epístolas y Evangelios en lengua Mixteca)* by Fray Domingo de Santa María. Even the first bishop of Mexico (1528-1548) fray Juan de Zumárraga in his *Brief Doctrine* (1544) recommended the direct reading of Sacred Scripture in vulgar languages (León-Azcárat, 2015, p. 199).

How were the language policies in New Spain? What was their effect on the learning of indigenous languages by Catholic friars and subsequent evangelization of the natives? To the problem of the linguistic policies of the Colony dedicated their works Aguirre-Beltrán, 1983; Alcántara-Rojas, 2013; Bono-López, 1999; Brea-Claramonte, 2008; Camus-Bergareche, 1993; Estenssoro-Fuchs, 2015; García-

<sup>2</sup> Here and below, the translations from Spanish to English were made by the authors of this article.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to clarify that although there is no specific body of laws for linguistic matters in New Spain, the linguistic legislation of the Crown linked to education and evangelization can be traced (Bono-López, 1999, p. 18).



Icazbalceta, 1998; Gimeno-Gómez, 2002; Gonzalbo-Aizpuru, 1990; González-Rodríguez, 1992; Guzmán-Betancourt, 2001; León-Azcárat, 2015; Lisi, 1990; Murillo-Gallegos, 2012; Polanco-Martínez, 2000; Tanck-de-Estrada, 2000; Wright-Carr, 2007; Zavala, 1996.

The objective of the work which results are presented below was to determine what kind of language policies was promoted in New Spain and what was their impact on the learning of indigenous languages by Catholic missionaries whose work was to evangelize indigenous peoples. The study was carried out using the documentary-bibliographic research method.

**Main text.** In order to transmit the Christian message to the natives, the evangelizers also had to understand the Other and with the Other, since in all the processes of teaching-learning, emission and reception, writing and linguistic rewriting, the friars were accompanied by those same Nahuas, Mayas, Otomi, etc., whom they wanted to convert (Alcántara-Rojas, 2013). So that for a greater approach to the Indian, his evangelization the missionaries<sup>4</sup> promoted the learning of the local languages (Otomí, Tarasca, Tlapaneca, Huasteca, Ocilteca, Matlatzinca, Totonaca, Mixteca, Pame, etc.), but mostly only those that belonged to one of the dominant pre-Hispanic groups (Nahuatl, Zapotec, Mixtec, etc.) (Wright-Carr, 2007, p. 12). These languages were called general.

For Extensoro (2015), the notion of general language develops in America when in Europe it disappears as a qualifier of Latin or of languages that rose to the status of national languages. The colonial experience was selecting the general languages with disparate criteria: some of them, such as Nahuatl, had this role without receiving that name. It was about using the fewest possible languages to evangelize the greatest number of people:

*[...] In the expression of a general language, there are embedded concrete experiences and theoretical speculations aimed at explaining the irregular geographic dispersion of languages and providing the conditions of communication in unknown territories [...] the genetics of a general language were explained, or either for having risen to that rank from a general language status, or for having been taken up for adoption. In these two ways, the cases par excellence are Hebrew and Latin (or Greek) (Estensoro, 2015, pp. 15-36).*

In the Americas, “[...] languages played a decisive role as a common language between settlers and indigenous people, and as an interface with the administration,

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<sup>4</sup> The word “missionary” comes from the word “mission” (Latin *misio* means commitment, effort, care, expense) coined by the Jesuits at the beginning of the 16th century and which, with use, acquired a triple meaning: personal, operational and territorial, so that the Jesuits receive a personal “dispatch”, which leads them to carry out a task at the service of the propagation of the faith in a given territory. During the Middle Ages, the terms for the Church’s task of propagating the faith were *conversio infidelium* (conversion of the infidels), *praedicatio gentium* (preaching of the peoples), *promulgatio Evangelii* (promulgation of the Gospel), *propagatio fidei* (propagation of faith), *apostolatus* (apostolate), *labor evangelicus* (evangelical work), *annuntatio evangelica* (evangelical announcement) and *novella Christianitatis plantatio* (new plantation of Christianity) (León-Azcárate, 2015, p. 197).



they were defined, in each case, as a general language or a more general language” (Estenssoro, 2015, pp. 15-36). Nahuatl was named general language:

*The most general languages that run throughout that province [of the Holy Gospel of Mexico] are Mexican<sup>5</sup> and Otomí, and this Mexican runs through all of New Spain, which whoever knows it can go from Zacatecas and from much later to the Cape of Nicaragua, which are six hundred languages, and in all of them you will find someone who understands you, because there is no town (at least on the royal and passenger road) where there are no Mexican Indians or those who know that language, that is true big thing (Estenssoro, 2015, pp. 15-36).*

However, when speaking of Amerindian languages, the term “lingua franca” (lingua franca) is also used, which serves to “[...] designate all those languages that are used in multilingual contexts as a common instrument of communication, is the case of languages of international use such as English [...] is the name given to a Romance-based pidgin commonly used in the Mediterranean basin, especially on the North African coast, until the end of the last century” (Camus-Bergareche, 1993, pp. 417-426).

It is also important to clarify that the concept “lingua franca” refers to a language in common use among the representatives of various nations for whom this language is not considered their mother tongue, while the “general language” is valid as their mother tongue for the vast majority of inhabitants and is imposed (from “above”) for common use. From this perspective, it is worth highlighting the sociolinguistic status of Nahuatl in New Spain: on the one hand, it is the lingua franca, which was used by different indigenous peoples to interact, and on the other, it is the mother tongue of many of the “conquered”, which is imposed as a general by the Spanish Crown.

Thus, its use and dissemination was established in 1570 by Felipe II through the promulgation of a certificate declaring that Nahuatl should be the official language of the New Hispanic Indians: “[...] so that the said Indians could all learn the same language and that this was the Mexican that could be removed more easily because it is a general language” (Wright-Carr, 2007, p. 10).

In 1580, the use of Nahuatl was reaffirmed in the Ordinances for the Royal Audience of Charcas (Ordenanzas para la Real Audiencia de Charcas) referring to the general language chairs so that the priests who had to administer the sacraments and teach the doctrine “[...] also had the intelligence of the said language, for being the main means to be able to do its jobs well and unload our conscience”<sup>6</sup> (Gimeno-Gómez, 2002, pp. 491-513). In particular, the use of Nahuatl as a lingua franca for many years attests to documents of indigenous peoples (public deeds, judgments, etc.) written in Nahuatl, as well as letters written by local notaries who translated the words of the Indians addressed to local authorities and even to the king.

The discussion about the convenience of learning general languages by

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<sup>5</sup> Nahuatl language was also called Mexican language.

<sup>6</sup> These are the *Ordenanzas of the chairs of general language of the Indians (Ordenanzas de las cátedras de lengua general de los indios)*, Badajoz, September 23, 1580, Encinas, pp. 205-206 and 213-215.



missionaries or the use of Spanish in evangelization continued throughout the New Spanish period. This controversy is reflected in the laws<sup>7</sup> related to education and evangelization. At the beginning, the task of Indians' instructing (both in doctrine and in Castilian language) was only entrusted to the religious. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars directed the parishes of the Indians, called "doctrines", and were in charge of evangelization and teaching. Teachers were often bilingual or trilingual<sup>8</sup>. In this work, the Texcoco school, the College of Santa Cruz of Tlatelolco school, the Pátzcuaro school, the Tepotzotlán school and the San Gregorio school in Mexico stand out (Gonzalbo-Aizpuru, 1990, p. 11). The Crown even sent thanks to the missionaries "for the good work they did". Thus, in the Royal Decree of August 1538 addressed to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, it is recognized that the children of the natives who attend the College of Santa Cruz of Tlatelolco, "[...] have a lot of ingenuity and ability and take good said doctrine, and that certain religious of the Order of San Francisco and other people who are in charge of them have been a great cause for this" (AGI, Lib. 3, p. 188).

On the other hand, as early as 1511, in the Sermon of Montesinos the Crown deployed "a revisionist policy in relation to the American world [...]": in the Laws of Burgos (Law XVII) the landowners (encomenderos) are ordered to teach the Castilian language to the Indians (Gimeno-Gómez, 2002, pp. 491-513). Likewise, Law IX underlines the importance for the religious instruction of the natives so that they have basic knowledge of the Castilian language:

*[...] Those who have Indians are obliged to show a boy the one who seems the most skillful of them to read and write and the things of our faith so that he later shows the other Indians because they would take it better than he did. I will say that what other neighbors tell them [...] because the King my lord and father and I have been informed that some people use some Indian boys as pages, we declare and order that such people [...] be forced to show them to read and write [...]* (Muro-Orejón, 1956, p. 42).

In turn, in the Granada Ordinances of 1526, it is regulated that "[...] there should be no lack of an interpreter in the expeditions that are organized of discovery and conquest, so that they make the Indians understand the message of the Crown "by languages of interpreters" as many times as necessary" (Gimeno-Gómez, 2002, p. 493).

The teaching of Castilian to the Indians supposed the establishment of educational centers for this purpose. Emperor Charles V (1516-1556) favored this process and in 1535 ordered that schools be established under the charge of the mendicant orders, to teach "Christianity, good customs, the police, and the Castilian language" to the children of the indigenous nobility:

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the *Indian Laws* were born as legal documents of various kinds: ordinances, provisions, certificates, instructions, letters and other kinds of provisions, emanating from the monarch or other lesser rulers (Wright-Carr, 2007, p. 6).

<sup>8</sup> Although in the Royal Charter of 1770 the official goal for America and the Philippines was that "[...] once and for all, the different languages used in the same domains are extinguished, and only Castilian is spoken", later certificates of 1778 and 1782 stopped insisting on this mandate and put emphasis on the first letters by promoting, but not forcing the castilianization. As a result, teachers were often bilingual (Tanck-de-Estrada, 2000).



*As it has been understood of our real will, one of the main things that we wish ourselves is in every possible way to try to attract the natural Indians of the Indies to the knowledge of our God and to give order in their salvation and instruction and conversion to our saint Catholic faith and that they also take our police and good customs [sic], and having talked and discussed many times in it one of the most important means that it has seemed that we could have to achieve this work and make in it the fruit we want, is to try and give order as those people are taught the Castilian language, because known more easily they will be able to understand and be doctrine in the things of the Christian religion and get everything else that suits them for their way of life, and as the Religious treat and converse more ordinarily with them as people who understand in their conversion and instruction, it seems that they will be able to understand more well than other people in teaching them in said Castilian language and that they will take it from them with more will and will subject themselves to learning it with greater love because of the love they have for them because of the good works they receive from them [...] (Zorita, 1985, pp. 106-108 [Book 1, Title 10, Law 9]).*

Although in the first stage of the conquest, the acquisition of the Amerindian languages by the conquerors turned out to be indispensable and happened spontaneously, the use of these languages in the colony represented serious inconveniences for the Crown. Hence, through the Royal Decree of July 17, 1550, it is recommended to “introduce Castilian” as the language of evangelization to avoid the dispersion of theological contents when they are translated into indigenous languages, and because chairs where priests were trained for this purpose with prior knowledge of indigenous languages are not enough: “[...] we order that the Indians be given teachers who teach those who voluntarily want to learn it, so it is believed that this need could be performed by sacristans” (Recopilación de las Leyes, 1973, Ley XVIII, Tit. 1, Lib.).

However, in the instructions delivered to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (1535-1550), is noted the difficulty in teaching Castilian: “the Indians being so many, it is not possible for now to order how they learn our language”. Hence, it is suggested that “[...] To take advantage of the conversion of the natives it is very important as long as they know our language, (that) the religious and ecclesiastics apply themselves to knowing their language and for this they reduce it to some art and easy way as possible to learn it”. Later, in the same text, it is indicated that all the means should be put in place to encourage that learning, even in the schools where Spanish children were studying “[...] it seems that it would be convenient for there to be some exercise with which they learn the language of that land, because those of them who came to be priests or religious or to have public offices in the towns could better teach and confess the Indians and understand them in the things that they will deal with” (CODOIN, pp. 423-445).

Towards the end of the reign of Felipe II (1556-1598), the use of indigenous languages in evangelization was favored, regardless of the proposal of the Council of the Indies to make Castilian mandatory because “indigenous languages were inadequate to explain the subtleties of the Catholic faith”. The monarch indicated that:



“It does not seem convenient to urge them to leave their natural language, teachers may be appointed for those who voluntarily want to learn Castilian, and give order as to how they keep what is commanded not to provide the parishes but to those who know that of the Indians” (Zavala, 1996, pp. 24-25).

In fact, knowledge of local languages became so important that Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585) authorized in a Brief (Breve) the ordination of illegitimate sons as priests, provided they were knowledgeable of indigenous languages<sup>9</sup> (Gimeno-Gómez, 2002, p. 497). Likewise, the first bishop of Guatemala Francisco Marroquín (1537-1563) encouraged the Franciscan missionaries to be instructed in the native languages: “[...] the care and diligence that these Fathers have had and have to teach the Indians, not the creed in Latin, nor the commandments in romance, as used up to now, but all the Christian doctrine, built and declared in their mother tongue, which they drink like water” (Abad-Pérez, 1992, p. 48). At the same time, the Franciscans decree that “[...] there should, whenever possible, study the languages of New Spain, especially Mexican and Otomí, putting together three or four or more who hear it and whoever teaches it; and this is the case of those who here take the habit as of those who come from Spain” (García-Icazbalceta, 1996, p. 66).

In addition, the position of the Council of Trent regarding the indoctrination of the Indians was very clear: “[...] each one has to be instructed in a way that he understands; the Spanish in Spanish, the Indian in his language [...] Therefore, do not force any Indian to learn the prayers or the catechism in Latin [...] and if one wishes, he may also add the Spanish that already many of them dominate”. Likewise, later in chapter 16, when dealing with the sacrament of confession, it is recognized that many priests, by ignoring indigenous languages, “overlook many sins that are totally ignored [...] for that reason if do not understand well, refer the penitents to those who are more knowledgeable or learn what they do not know, because it is not a good judge who judges what he do not know”, therefore, each bishop will designate the people who must examine “the future parish priests of Indians in their knowledge and expertise of the indigenous language” (Lisi, 1990, pp. 129, 135, 213).

Hereafter the position of the First (1555), Second (1565) and Third (1585) Mexican Councils on the convenience of indoctrinating the Indians in their languages (the most used in each region), and not in Latin or Castilian. Each bishop was to ensure the translation of the doctrine into the most common languages of his diocese and to examine the clergy for their knowledge of indigenous languages. Those who did not show sufficient mastery would have a period of six months to learn the language of their parishioners; if they did not comply, they would be removed from their curates. The natives had to recite the doctrine in their own language before receiving the waters of baptism, to ensure understanding of the foundations of the faith:

*[...] we order and command that two doctrines be ordered, the one brief and without gloss... and the other with a substantial declaration of the articles of faith and Commandments and Mortal Sins with the declaration of the Pater Noster and they are*

<sup>9</sup> It is the *Brief (Breve)* of January 25, 1576. RAH, Colección Mata Linares, tomo 97, fol. 562 (Gimeno-Gómez, 2002).





*translated in many languages and printed [ ...] It is necessary for the conversion of the natives to know their languages... and we order that all priests put great diligence in removing the languages of their districts, under penalty that, being negligent in this, they will be removed from the town in which they are and will not be provided in others (Concilios primero y segundo, 1981, p. 199).*

Regardless of this position of the ecclesiastical authorities in favor of the preservation of the Indians languages, at the end of the 16th century, through the Royal Decree of June 4, 1586, the Crown continued to insist on the prohibition of doctrinal teaching in native languages:

*[...] the great difficulty that there is in being the Indians taught [...] in their languages, because they are not common, plain and intelligible even for the Indians themselves, that those of some provinces do not understand the others and that the languages are poor in words, nouns and verbs to mean many important things, it would be convenient to provide and order that all Indians be taught and forced to know the Spanish language [...], without it being understood that for this reason those who should be priests cease to know and learn their languages, if not before to teach them more easily (Real cédula al virrey del Perú, 1586, p. 87).*

Likewise, from 1569, with the arrival of the Inquisition in New Spain, restrictions on biblical translations increased. Thus, in 1576, the General Council of the Inquisition of Seville prohibited the book Ecclesiastes in the language of the Indians (Eclesiastés en lengua de los indios) and any translation of Sacred Scripture into any vulgar language, including that of the Indians:

*On the occasion of the prohibition of the handbook Ecclesiastes in the Indian language and any other of the Sacred Scripture in the said language or in another vulgar one than V.S. sent by letter of May 10 of last year, some books of Epistles and Gospels in the vulgar languages of the Indians were collected in this Holy Office and later it seemed that it was a harmful thing and that the doctrine of the Indians would be greatly diminished, because without them the ministers could not preach or teach to them, nor could others learn the language and manner of their doctrine again and thus made an appeal for them to return to them and with the agreement and opinion of the oldest and most learned ministers and better languages of which it consisted 'in scriptis' were returned to them with an order to remove them from the Indians who had them because they also seem to not have them and thus some bodies from the said book Ecclesiastes and Hours have collected in the said language for which they have no need [...]; so the Indians are not allowed one of any of these books but only the primer of the doctrine, because in this all are agree (González-Rodríguez, 1992, pp. 109-110).*

In this way, the Spanish Inquisition did not allow Sacred Scripture in its native versions to be not only in the hands of the Indians but also in that of their evangelizers or ministers. The only alternative offered was the publication of a sermonary and a doctrine that would be valid for all. The prohibition on translating the Holy Scriptures into vernacular languages, including those of the Indians, was repealed in 1782 on the



condition that the new translations by the Apostolic Chair were approved or produced by Catholic authors with annotations from the Holy Fathers or Catholic doctors who avoid doctrinal deviations. This prohibition prevented the Indians from being able to understand better the meaning of the Scriptures in their own language and from having direct access to those biblical texts that could have a liberating meaning for them. It meant that their own language had no value as a transmitter of the holy words (González-Rodríguez, 1992, p. 111).

At the beginning of the 17th century, Felipe III (1598-1621) continued with the linguistic policy that supported the use of indigenous languages in the teaching of Christian doctrine. The policy of Felipe IV (1621-1665) was ambivalent. On the one hand, he promoted the compulsory learning of indigenous languages by priests of the Indian villages; on the other, he issued certificates in 1634 and 1636 to promote the teaching of Castilian. King Carlos II (1665-1700) continued to promote the foundation of schools for the teaching of Castilian to the Indians: “[...] so that in all the cities, towns and places and villages of Indians, schools and teachers are set up to teach the Indians the Castilian language, and in large places two schools, one for boys and one for girls”. Only Indians who knew the Castilian language could hold government posts in the Indian towns (Wright-Carr, 2007, p. 8).

Therefore, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the fear that “they would attempt some heresy and give false understandings to the plain doctrine that until now they have been taught and preached”, the Castilian language policy<sup>10</sup> continued, but without having acceptance in the New Spanish society: both the friars and the Spanish (and other European) civilians continued to learn the *lingua franca*. Furthermore, chairs were created for this purpose, and the obligation of the religious to learn the language of the Indians who were to be evangelized was decreed (Polanco-Martínez, 2000).

The insistence in the period from 1754 to 1770 to teach only in Castilian, was not to the liking of the families in power of the New World, in part because of the attitude of the ecclesiastical and governmental authorities towards the indigenous languages, considering them “barbaric”, and partly because they want the instruction to be in their own language, one that was different from the language of the metropolis, “because it seems to them that their language has more salt or because it seems sweeter to them because it is from their homeland” (Tanck-de-Estrada, 2000, p. 347).

**Conclusions.** Subsequently, the provisions of the Spanish Crown regarding the need for the learning and use of Amerindian languages by the conquerors, vary from the recommendations not only of their acquisition but also the insistence on the creation of their grammars and vocabularies in the first stage of the conquest, until the outright prohibition of its use in the Colony in the later stages.

Likewise, at various times in the development of New Spanish language policy in the 16th century, Nahuatl had the same status as the official language (general and

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<sup>10</sup> These are the Royal Decrees of 1603 (2), 1605, 1618 (2), 1621, 1622, 1629, 1634 (2), 1636, 1637. These Decrees were grouped in Book I, Titles 13, 15 and 22 and Book VI, Title 1 of *Compilation of the laws of the kingdoms of the Indies (Recopilación de las leyes de los reinos de las Indias)*, 1681 (Muro-Orejón, 1956, pp. 319-322).



franca) on a par with Castilian and it is to be assumed that under certain circumstances it could become the language of general use in the colony. This fact vindicates the importance of the work of Catholic missionaries to learn Nahuatl (and other American languages), elaborate the Nahuatl-Castilian and Castilian-Nahuatl vocabularies, create the grammars of these languages, as well as compose the ecclesiastical texts in them.

Unlike the colonial authorities, the humble religious understood the meaning of Nahuatl as the most common means of verbal communication in New Spain. They were the true bridge between two worlds: they lived with the natives for a long time, they learned their culture, their language, they soaked themselves in their vision of the world, they created new hybrid concepts in their texts. They thought that:

*This Mexican language is the general one that runs through all the provinces of this New Spain, since in it there are many and different particular languages of each province, and in parts of each town, because they are innumerable. Nevertheless, everywhere there are interpreters who understand and speak Mexican, because this is the one that runs everywhere, like the Latin one throughout the kingdoms of Europe [Mendieta 1997: 239-240].*

The study carried out showed that the Catholic missionaries since their arrival in the New World and throughout the colonial period had no doubt about the need to learn Amerindian languages and cultures. They have done it naturally in contact with the native peoples. Likewise, the highly fickle and inconsistent language policies for New Spain, upheld by the Spanish Crown and ecclesiastical authorities, have had little influence on the issue of indigenous language learning by friars (and other colonizers). They all the time continued to learn these languages (sometimes with the support of the commanders, and at other times without their consent).

Therefore, the language policies promoted in New Spain have not had imperative impact on the interpretation of the doctrinal texts to the indigenous languages by Catholic missionaries. They composed the texts (dictionaries, grammars, sermons, catechisms, confessionals, etc.) of an invaluable amount helping to preservation of the original cultures of the American continent, inciting a true fusion of two cultures, creating the hybrid philosophical-cultural field in New Spain.

In future research, it is pertinent to find out what interlinguistic problems the friars faced when creating ecclesiastical texts in Nahuatl and what was the way in which they learned and used Nahuatl for their purposes, in the asymmetry of Nahuatl with European languages.

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Received: January, 10

Accepted: March, 30