

## INVESTIGACIÓN/RESEARCH

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### THE VALUATION OF THE LANGUAGE IN BILINGUAL SPEAKERS (NÁHUATL-SPANISH). A CASE STUDY

**Cinthia Jazmín López Nájera**<sup>1</sup>: Autonomous University of Puebla  
[asuminajera@gmail.com](mailto:asuminajera@gmail.com)

**Olivia Castillo Castillo**: Benemérita Autonomous University of Puebla.  
[olivia.castillocas@correo.buap.mx](mailto:olivia.castillocas@correo.buap.mx)

**Guillermo Carrera García**: Autonomous University of Puebla.  
[guillermo.carrera@correo.buap.mx](mailto:guillermo.carrera@correo.buap.mx)

#### ABSTRACT

The vitality of a language depends on its native speakers, but, what happens when these native speakers decide to stop using it? This article shows the first results of the study made among bilingual speakers (Náhuatl-Spanish) from the community of San Miguel Canoa, State of Puebla in Mexico, where more than 60% of the population know the Náhuatl language (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, INEGI, 2010.) At the same time, it states that the active users of the language are people over 25 years old. The analysis of this work (Appraisal Theory) shows a meaningful correlation between the loss of language (Náhuatl) and its valuation made by the native speakers.

#### KEYWORDS

Language - appraisal theory - náhuatl-spanish bilingualism.

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<sup>1</sup> **Cinthia Jazmín López Nájera**: Degree in Communication Sciences from the Faculty of Communication Sciences BUAP, with honorable mention. Collaborator International University Film Festival of Puebla. [asuminajera@gmail.com](mailto:asuminajera@gmail.com)

# LA VALORACIÓN DE LA LENGUA EN HABLANTES BILINGÜES NÁHUATL-ESPAÑOL. UN ESTUDIO DE CASO

## RESUMEN

La vitalidad de una lengua depende de sus hablantes, pero ¿qué sucede cuándo los hablantes deciden ya no hacer uso de ella? En este artículo se reportan los primeros resultados del análisis realizado a entrevistas de hablantes bilingües —náhuatl-español—, de la comunidad de San Miguel Canoa, en el Estado de Puebla en México; en donde más del 60% de su población reporta conocer la lengua náhuatl (INEGI, 2010) y al mismo tiempo manifiesta que los usuarios activos de la lengua se encuentran en hablantes mayores de 25 años. El análisis de este trabajo: Teoría de la valoración; (Martin & White, 2003; Eggins, 2005; Matthiessen, 2013 ), muestra una significativa correlación entre la pérdida de la lengua náhuatl y la valoración que hacen los hablantes de la misma.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Lengua - teoría de la valoración - bilingüismo náhuatl-español.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any natural language allows us to value everyday experiences, as well as the relationship with the language itself. This paper aims to describe the assessment made by a family of the San Miguel Canoa in the State of Puebla in Mexico regarding the status of decreasingly vital Nahuatl-Spanish bilingualism in the community of this municipality.

The methodology used for this research is based on the Appraisal Theory (Theory of Valuation) (Martin & White, 2003; Eggins, 2005; Matthiessen, 2013) as well as some of the procedural aspects in the language. In particular we are interested in exploring particles that function as discourse markers (Fraser, 1999; Portolés, 2000). We consider that both issues contribute to the construction of social meanings through their linguistic realization.

The case study with which we work is based on a series of open interviews in which some members of a family of the community narrate different themes. Subsequently a verbatim transcript of each interview was conducted, and those occurrences that met the two central variables in this study were selected: elements of assessment and discourse markers.

One of the central issues that follows this study is the decline of bilingual speakers in the region of San Miguel Canoa among younger generations. The hypothesis of this work is that there is a direct correlation between the valuation that speakers make of their mother tongue and the linguistic vitality in the community.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The approach of this research is qualitative and is based on the correlation of language loss and the valuation made by the speakers of the same. For this, the Appraisal theory was used as an instrument of discourse analysis in free interviews

to members of the Romero-Monarca family. In this work, only the interviews to two female members of the family are presented. Data collection took place between 2013 and 2014.

Another variable for analysis refers to the procedural aspects present in these interviews, that is, those particles that function as discourse markers to guide the participant in understanding a topic.

### 3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The place of dialogue

The Auxiliary Board of San Miguel Canoa is located on the western slopes of the Malinche or Malintzin (seismically active volcano with a height of 4420 meters above sea level; *Malintzirr* in Nahuatl: *Venerable Lady Grass*); this population is located 12 kilometers from the city of Puebla.

The National Institute of Geography and Statistics reported in the census of 2010 that the Canoa region had a total of 10,151 people over 5 who knew Nahuatl. The active speakers of the language are reported in a range of older than 25 years, showing a trend of gradual loss of language in the younger generation, despite recognizing their knowledge.



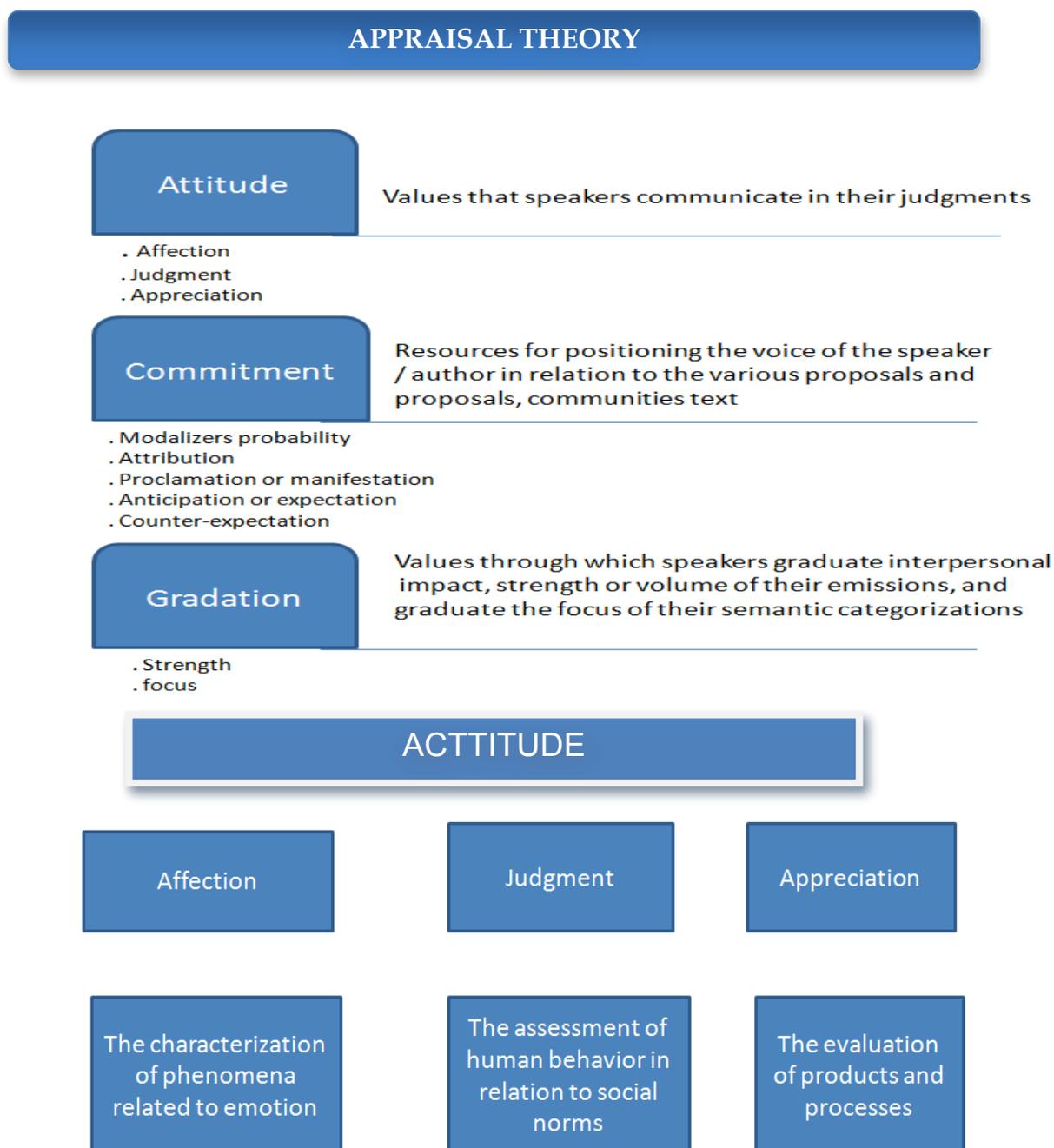
#### 3.2. The participants

The completion of this study was made possible thanks to the collaboration of a bilingual family of the community, particularly the oldest person (GM) (1936) and of a second generation (IR) (1977), both participants are women, mothers of a family, and thus are those who pass the language or who choose not to do so.

#### 3.3. Appraisal theory

The Appraisal theory arises under the Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994; 2004); deals with linguistic resources through which speakers come to express, negotiate and naturalize particular intersubjective and ultimately ideological positions (White, 2003, p.1).

The theory has three subtype valuations: Attitude, Commitment and Gradation. Each of these is divided into subsystems. Attitude refers to the values that speakers communicate in their judgments; Commitment is used to position the speaker's voice in relation to the various propositions communicated by a speech; finally, the gradation is a resource where speakers communicate values that graduate the interpersonal impact.



This paper is about the Attitude subsystem given the relevance of the three categories for the objectives stated.

### 3.3.1. Affection, judgment and appreciation

The *affection* expresses the characterization of phenomena in relation to emotion (Martin & White, 2003). Affection relates to emotional response and the emotional disposition of the speaker. It is done typically by mental processes of reaction.

The *judgment* is an assessment of human behavior in relation to social norms and includes the meanings which serve to evaluate positively and negatively the human behavior in relation to a set of institutionalized norms. The social norms that come into play in the *judgment* take the form of rules and systems of values and social expectations defined more or less accurately. Because of its close relationship with social values, this subsystem is divided into three categories (Martin & White, 2003; White, 2003): the first is the *judgment of social sanction*, which includes the claim that some set of rules explicitly encoded by the (legal and moral) culture comes into play. The second is the *judgment of social esteem*, and refers to the evaluations under which the person judged will have a higher or lower esteem within their community, but these assessments have no legal or moral implications. And finally the *explicit or implicit judgment*, the judgment of indication (explicit) corresponds to the assessment made by a lexical item that charges the value judgment (corruptly, lazily ...). The judgment of indication (implicit) is activated by superficially neutral or ideational meanings which have the ability to evoke judgment responses in the culture (according to the social / cultural / ideological position of the reader).

Furthermore, the *appreciation* is in charge of the assessment of objects and products (before human behavior) relative to aesthetic principles and other systems of social value (White, 2003). Thus, while the judgment assesses human behavior, the appreciation evaluates the discourses, abstract constructs and natural objects.

### 3. 4. Discourse markers

For the purposes of this study we follow the definition of Fraser for discourse markers (MD):

"... I define discourse markers as a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have a core meaning, which is procedural, not conceptual, and their more specific interpretation is 'negotiated' by the context, both linguistic and conceptual. There are two types: Those that relate the explicit interpretation conveyed by S2 with some aspect

associated with the segment, S1; and those that relate the topic of S2 to that of S1. "(Fraser, 1999, p. 1).

In this sense, the MD must be analyzed in terms of what they indicate or mark, beyond what they describe, that is, they are not only expressions that function as indicators at the level of the discourse in question but that the MD indicate *concepts* or *procedures*

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the analyzed corpus it can be observed a clear trend to judgments by the speakers. As it's shown in the following:

(1) The same, for education, for education with parents, now they say, then, that and no, that is no longer used, that it is hard to do, that they cannot say, then the easiest is, you speak to them in Spanish. The same *for the embarrassment, they no longer want to be Mexican ...* (laughs). *They wanted to be from other place, and now unfortunately, almost the majority, namely those of today, the boys of today no longer speak it; and if they come to understand perhaps, but they no longer speak, therefore we as parents talk to them more in Spanish.* (IR)

In (1) three judgments of moral sanction are distinguished, the first quotes the speech of an absent third party to justify the reduction of the use of Nahuatl in young people,

already they say, then, that and no, that is no longer used, it is hard for them, they cannot say it (IR)

The second identifies a possible explanation to why young people choose not to use their mother tongue, through:

because of the embarrassment, they no longer want to be ... Mexicans (IR)

The third explains the reason for the abandonment of the Nahuatl language in young people, recognizing the responsibility of parents in the process of disuse.

*we as parents speak to them more in Spanish* (IR)

Procedurally, entons is characterized by two dominant features, on the one hand it expresses a cause-effect relationship, and secondly, it introduces a consequence or derivation— hence the possibility of commuting then by inconsequence— (Castillo, 2009) as we can see in (1), where (IR) it shows the logical consequence of the arguments of the young people who have decided not to speak Nahuatl.

In the case of *o sea*, it is a reformulator / explanatory element (Portolés, 2000), in which procedurally (IR) it guides the interlocutor to the predictable outcome of why young people no longer speak Nahuatl.

The same speaker quotes a discourse referred to in (2):

(2) Well, I've heard girls who oh no, I'm not from there, that is, so they do not ask them, as because there are people just like you who are interested and want to ask them and now to say the least, oh no, I'm not from there. Possibly because they no longer speak to their parents and because maybe, this, somebody, *there are people who take it as a joke, that is, they begin to make fun and then that way they feel bad and they prefer not to talk.* (IR)

In (2) there are two judgments of social esteem, the speaker cites the discourse of young people to exemplify a rejection of belonging:

Oh no, I am not from there;

is not that I'm not from there (IR)

Also it is noted as social judgment the loss of social prestige than others grant the Nahuatl language:

*there are people who take it as a joke, that is, they begin to make fun of them that way and then they feel bad and prefer not to talk (IR)*

Procedurally *bueno* references a conversational mode and functions as a marker of introduction to give an explanation to the interlocutor.

In (3), the speaker who is the eldest of the family and who primarily use the Nahuatl language, makes a positive assessment of her tongue:

*(3) As a, as a native, that is, still, well, part, in the clothing not so much, but in the dialect yes, and no I'm not sorry, I do not feel sorry, pus to speak Nahuatl. Even in my work, between the chatter and all I speak in Nahuatl, and then ask me what it means and now I tell them what it means (IR)*

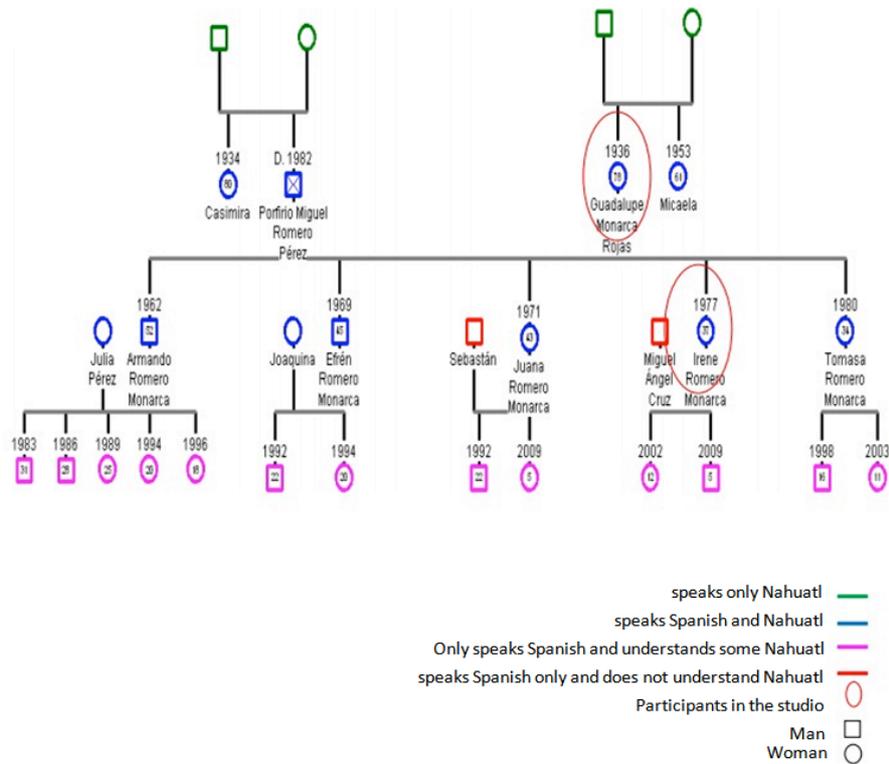
In (3) there is an explicit judgment where the speaker identifies your identity ascription because of their language,

*as a native, that is, still, well, part, in the clothing not so much, but in the dialect yes (IR)*

A judgment of social esteem where the valuation the speaker makes of her tongue prevents the loss of it is identified,

*and no I'm not sorry, I do not feel sorry, pus to speak Nahuatl (IR)*

In the following family tree of the participating family the loss of the Nahuatl language in the younger generation is appreciated.



Individuals belonging to the green color show the only use of the Nahuatl language, while those marked with blue are shown as the first bilingual generation (Nahuatl-Spanish). Already in the third generation we can see clearly how the Nahuatl language is lost and there is a revival of it, for although the individuals of such generation report to know the Nahuatl language, in their daily lives they have decided to use only the Spanish as a language only, eliminating bilingualism.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the Theory of Valuation (Martin & White, 2003; Eggins, 2005; Matthiessen, 2013) an analysis to free interviews of members of a Nahuatl-Spanish bilingual family was made. From the first results some language resources that contribute to the correlation between the loss of a language (Nahuatl) and the valuation made by the speakers of the same were observed.

Thus it was identified that the judgments (of moral sanction, social esteem and explicit) appear as one of the reasons for the loss of vitality of a language. That is, it is the speaker who through an internal and external evaluation decides to speak their language or not. Moreover, they themselves through these judgments determine whether or not to continue with the vitality of Nahuatl and bilingualism in young generations.

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## **AUTHORS**

### **Cynthia Yazmin Lopez Najera**

Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP). Degree in Communication Sciences from the Faculty of Communication Sciences BUAP, with honorable mention. Collaborator International University Film Festival of Puebla, a platform for young artists contributing to the preservation and dissemination of local and international culture. Youth Councillor of the Municipality of Puebla.

### **Olivia Castillo Castillo**

Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP).  
Candidate PhD in Linguistics from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Language teacher at the BUAP Sciences. Degree in Communication Sciences at UNAM. Diploma in Business Communication at the Complutense University of Madrid. TC Research Professor at the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the BUAP.

### **Guillermo Garcia Carrera**

Autonomous University of Puebla. PhD candidate in Language (BUAP) Sciences. Master in Language Sciences. Research Professor at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, BUAP. Professor at the University of the Americas Puebla (UDLAP). He has published some books in collaboration theory and individual.