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Maya and Nahuatl in the Teaching of Spanish: Expanding the Professional Perspective

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Abstract

Indigenous languages of the Americas are spoken by millions of people 500 years after the initial period of European conquest. The people who speak these languages and the customs they continue to practice form a rich cultural texture in many parts of Spanish America and can be important components of an instructor's Standards-based teaching. This article discusses the influence of Maya and Nahuatl languages and cultures on the language, literature, and history of Mexico and Central America. Examples of this influence range from lexical and phonological traits of Mexican Spanish to the indigenous cultures and worldviews conveyed in texts as varied as the Mexican soap opera "Barrera de Amor" and the stories by Rosario Castellanos of Mexico and Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala. The examples given here relate to classroom teaching at multiple levels, particularly as they apply to the Standards of Communication and Cultures. The appendices provide lists of selected resources for Spanish teachers.

Evo Morales, the Aymara-speaking president of Bolivia, and Rigoberta Menchú Tum, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace prize and a native speaker of the Mayan language Quiche, give a public face and voice to a significant reality. In the 21st century millions of inhabitants of "Spanish-speaking" countries communicate in the languages of their Indian ancestors. When we speak of National Standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project [NSFLEP], 1999) in the context of Spanish, then, we must not ignore the fact that most Spanish-speaking countries are in fact multilingual societies. Even in communities where indigenous languages are no longer spoken, their influence is felt in language, culture, and literature. This article offers examples from Maya and Nahuatl cul-

tures and languages that can help Spanish teachers understand and incorporate indigenous knowledges and worldviews in their teaching.

Because this article addresses the incorporation of indigenous languages and cultures into a Standards-based curriculum, it is organized around two of those Standards: Communication and Cultures. This is not to say that a better understanding of indigenous cultures does not bear on the Standards of Connections, Communities, and Comparisons. Indeed, such knowledge can help students make connections between their Spanish curriculum and fields such as history, anthropology, and philosophy. Since indigenous languages are spoken in many Hispanic communities in the United States (see, for instance, Fink, 2003), this knowledge may help Spanish learners better understand and connect to these communities. Many of the themes and topics raised in this article will also suggest comparisons between the impact of indigenous languages in Spanish America versus the United States, and a particularly interesting subject to explore in advanced classes is the juxtaposition of Spanish as a majority language when compared to indigenous languages with Spanish as a minority language in the United States. To adequately explore the incorporation of indigenous viewpoints into all of the Standards, however, is beyond the scope of a single article, hence the choice to focus on Communication and Cultures.

In order to further reduce the scope of this work, we concentrate on two indigenous groups, the Maya and the Nahuatl. Both groups are in and of themselves complex and multifaceted, and it should be recognized that the information provided here gives but a glimpse into Maya and Nahuatl cultures. Accordingly, the two cultures are not treated uniformly in the following sections. The section on Communication, for instance, examines principally the influence of Nahuatl on Mexican and Central American Spanish and looks more briefly at the influence of Maya on the Spanish of Yucatán. In the section on Culture, the description of Nahuatl influences focuses more on popular culture, while the description of Mayan influences deals more with literature. Two appendices are provided to give a sense of the wealth of information available on Maya, Nahuatl, and other indigenous cultures, and to serve as a resource for Spanish teachers looking to incorporate elements of these cultures and languages into their classrooms.

Communication

From the standpoint of communication, a familiarity with indigenous languages of the Americas is of primary importance because they are still spoken by millions of citizens of “Spanish-speaking” countries, often in monolingual communities. However, some knowledge of indigenous languages is helpful even to those interacting only with monolingual Spanish speakers. Various indigenous languages have exerted an influence on the Spanish spoken in surrounding areas, and knowledge of this influence is often necessary to effectively communicate in these communities. This section will focus on the influence of Nahuatl and Mayan languages in Mexico and Central America, but it should also be noted that languages such as Quechua and Guaraní have had a great influence on the Spanish of the Andean region and of Paraguay, respectively.

Nahuatl Influences in Mexican Spanish

Nahuatl's influence on Mexican Spanish begins at the level of phonetics and phonology, as Nahuatl loan words in Mexican Spanish contain sounds and structures not found in other varieties of Spanish. These include the consonant cluster *tl* [tl], found in place names such as Tlalpan and Mazatlan and in *tezontle*, "volcanic rock," and *tlapalería*, "hardware/paint store," from Nahuatl *tlapalli*, "color," and *tz* [ts], found in words such as *quetzal*, a bird native to Central America, and the place name Tzapotlan. The letter "x" in Mexican Spanish can represent not only a velar fricative [x], as in México, but also a voiceless alveopalatal fricative, similar to English "sh." This distinct sound is found in place names, such as Tlaxcala and Xochimilco, and in the word *axolotl*, a type of salamander; it is sometimes pronounced as [s] rather than as the fricative in "show."

Words of Nahuatl origin may also contain sounds in syllable-final position that are not permitted in that position in native Spanish words. The phoneme [w], for instance, is found in syllable-initial position in many Spanish words, such as *huevo*, [we'âo], but is not generally permitted before another consonant. In Nahuatl loan words such as *Cauhtémoc*, [kwawte'mok], the sound [w], represented by the spelling -uh-, is found in that very position. The same is true for the affricate, spelled "ch." Found syllable-initially in Spanish words such as *coche*, "car," in Nahuatl loan words it can also be syllable-final, as in Tenochtitlan.

The preceding paragraphs give some indication of the number of Nahuatl loan words found in modern Mexican Spanish. Many words of Nahuatl origin have been incorporated into its basic vocabulary; familiarity with these words is important not only because of the contribution they represent to this variety of Spanish, but also because heritage speakers of Mexican origin may use these forms rather than the standard Spanish terms. A few examples include *cuate* (Nahuatl *coatl*) instead of *gemelo* for "twin," *zacate* (Nahuatl *zacatl*) instead of *pasto* or *hierba* for "grass," and *chapulín* (Nahuatl *chapollin*) instead of *saltamontes* for "grasshopper." However, the scope of Nahuatl influence is not limited to modern-day Mexico; Bills and Vigil (2000) discuss the continuing presence of Nahuatl borrowings in the Spanish of New Mexico and southern Colorado. It is also worth noting that many words used in standard Spanish are of Nahuatl origin, including *tomate* (Nahuatl *tomatl*), "tomato"; *chicle* (Nahuatl *chictli*), "chicle gum"; and *galpón* (Nahuatl *calpulli*), "storehouse."

Mayan Influences in the Spanish of Yucatán

While Mayan languages have not had as widespread an influence on the Spanish language as Nahuatl has, they are widely spoken today throughout southern Mexico and Central America, and the Spanish spoken in these areas often contains Mayan elements. Among the most obvious of these are place names, which are also the Mayan words most likely to be encountered by students in basic courses. The archaeological site of Uxmal, for instance, has an "x" pronounced as a voiceless alveolar fricative, like English "sh," just as many Nahuatl place names do. The meaning of Uxmal, derived from Maya *ox*, "three," and *mal*, "the number of

times an action is repeated, indicates that the city may have been constructed or occupied three times. Likewise the site Dzibilchaltun, whose name also contains a sound [ts], spelled here “dz,” not found in standard Spanish, is derived from Maya *dzib*, “writing”; locative *il*, “place”; *chal* “flat”; and *tun*, “stone,” meaning approximately “the place with writing on flat stones.”

The influence of Mayan languages is not limited to place names, however. Many family names in the Yucatan and in Central America are of Mayan origin and are spelled using an orthography that reflects the phonetics of Mayan languages. One element that may surprise those unfamiliar with these languages is the presence of long vowels, generally spelled as double vowels. Family names such as Caamal and Poot, for instance, are pronounced by lengthening the vowel that is spelled as double; care should be taken not to pronounce them following English spelling conventions. Borrowings from Maya into the Spanish of Yucatan include *pepen*, “butterfly”; *tuch* “bellybutton”; and *xux*, “wasp,” along with many other words describing flora and fauna native to Yucatan. See Amaro Gamboa (1999) and Suárez Molina (1996) for more extensive lists of *mayismos*, “Mayan borrowings,” in Yucatecan Spanish. Mayan borrowings used more widely include *cenote*, from *dzonot*, “sinkhole,” and *pibil*, which describes a method of cooking in an earthen oven.

Classroom Applications

This linguistic information about Nahuatl and Maya may seem most relevant for upper-level phonetics or linguistics courses. Nonetheless, students at any level of study can be made aware of the many borrowings from other languages present in modern-day Spanish. A deeper understanding of the meaning of Mayan place names, for instance, can help students connect with the culture that provided those names. A class activity on this topic might compare Latin American and U.S. place names, both of indigenous and non-indigenous origin. This sort of activity could spark students’ interest in linguistics and in the ideas of naming: how do different cultures name places? Likewise, the fact that both Mayan and Nahuatl orthographies differ from both English and Spanish can help students gain an understanding of different systems of writing; a look at the Mayan hieroglyphic writing system would provide an even broader view.

The fact that some Spanish borrowings from Nahuatl, such as *tomate*, *chocolate*, and *coyote*, have also made their way into English could become a point of discussion. For instance, students can discuss whether English borrowed these words directly from Nahuatl or via Spanish, and why languages borrow words in the first place. Another point for discussion in more advanced language classes is why Mexican Spanish—versus other varieties of Spanish—contains such a large number of borrowings from Nahuatl; this sort of discussion raises students’ awareness about the sources of language variation. A comparison of the large number of Nahuatl borrowings in Mexican Spanish versus the relatively small number of indigenous words found in American English—can the students name any?—can also lead to a discussion of the cultural differences between the colonial societies of the two countries.

Cultures

The Maya and Nahuatl peoples have occupied privileged spaces within the spectrum of Mesoamerican cultures since pre-Columbian times. This situation is especially true for the Nahuatl-speaking peoples who founded the Aztec Empire. Indeed, one of these Nahuatl-speaking groups, the Mexica, gave its name to the modern nation of Mexico; in the colonial era, the Nahuatl language was called simply *mexicano*. This historical importance of Nahuatl is also highlighted by the fact that numerous documents in and about the language were printed throughout the Colonial period, including the first published grammar of Nahuatl, Alonso de Molina's *Arte de la lengua mexicana* (1571). From the perspective of literary publication, it is interesting to note that the latter appeared 15 years before the first published grammar of English. Some 13 grammars of Nahuatl were published during the colonial period, with Carochi (1645) remaining a seminal study of the language. Spanish-Nahuatl bilingualism was also common in the colonial period, as evidenced by the Nahuatl-language texts written by such luminaries as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. Parodi (2006) calls the process by which Spaniards and criollos in colonial Mexico adapted and adopted aspects of Nahuatl culture "indianization," noting that the cultural exchange worked in both directions.

Spanish language policy shifted in the middle of the 18th century to favor the exclusive use of Spanish (see Heath, 1972, for discussion). The implementation of this policy, especially in schooling, led to a decrease in bilingualism and to a stronger association between the use of Spanish and a higher level of education. Despite this sociolinguistic shift, however, Nahuatl language and culture continue to be important components of Mexican identity. In the last century, there has been a resurgence of pride in Mexico's indigenous past and an identification with Nahuatl culture in particular. There are many examples of this trend, including the popularity of Nahuatl names such as Xochitl, "flower," and Cuauhtemoc, "descending eagle." In 2006, the Mexican telenovela or soap opera, "Barrera de Amor," was recognized by the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas for featuring dialogue in Nahuatl. Manifestations of this pride in Mexico's indigenous past are found not only in popular media, however, and not only in Mexico. Writing in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, contemporary Mexican author Sealtiel Alatríste notes that the letter "x" in Mexico has Nahuatl origins and proclaims "México se escribe con equis, y hay que estar orgulloso" ["Mexico" is written with an "x," and there is reason to be proud of that fact.] (Alatríste, 2000). The growing body of scholarly work on both classical and modern varieties of the language reflects an appreciation for Nahuatl in academic circles as well (see Hernández de León-Portilla, 1988; Hidalgo, 2001; and Sell, 1996).

Nahuatl's historical importance and its current identification with Mexican national identity make a familiarity with the language a prerequisite both for those interested in contemporary Mexican culture and for those studying the country's history. Introducing this rich culture in the classroom at any level of instruction can begin as simply as using names such as Xochitl and Cuauhtémoc in role plays and examples. The use of Nahuatl place names, such as Teotihuacan, Xochimilco,

and Chapultepec, also gives students a passive exposure to that culture's mark on the Mexican landscape. There are also many materials available for learning more directly about Nahuatl culture. For younger students, there are several children's stories and songs that draw on Nahuatl themes. For the high school or college-level learner, class activities could be created around any number of movies, documentaries, and popular songs that incorporate Nahuatl cultural perspectives and even Nahuatl language. To give just two examples, Mexican-American singer Lila Downs sings in Nahuatl, as well as Mixtec and Zapotec, on her 2000 album *Árbol de la vida/Tree of Life*, while the California-based rock band Ozomatli, whose name is derived from Nahuatl *ozomatli*, "monkey," touches on indigenous views of death in the song "Cumbia de los muertos" [Cumbia of the Dead]. In addition, there are many Spanish-language Web sites dedicated to Mexico's Nahuatl heritage that could be explored in or outside of class. These and other selected classroom resources are provided in Appendix A.

Mayan Cultures

Inside the Government Palace on the main square of Mérida, Yucatán, is a series of dramatic paintings by Fernando Castro Pacheco; they depict the history of Mexico, the origin of man in Mesoamerica, and the struggles of the Mayan people. One painting in particular is accompanied by a surprising statement. It reads: "La conquista de Yucatán duró 20 años y al final la cultura del conquistado conquistó al conquistador." [The conquest of Yucatán took 20 years, and in the end the culture of the conquered conquered the conqueror.] Both the statement and the painting are telling. Even a cursory visit to today's Yucatán peninsula as well as to the Mexican state of Chiapas and to Central America reveals that the Mayan presence in speech, dress, choice of food, and religious traditions remains strong. There are also manifestations of this culture and concern for the people who maintain Mayan traditions in the literature of the region.

Rosario Castellanos, one of 20th century Mexico's best known feminist authors, and Miguel Angel Asturias, the 1967 Nobel laureate from Guatemala, are two of many writers who have embraced aspects of Mayan life in their writing. Castellanos is frequently featured in literature texts for her essays and poetry about the Mexican woman, and Asturias is well known for his surrealistic novel, *El señor presidente* [The President] (1946), about a fictional Latin American dictator. Both have an equally important role in making aspects of pre-Columbian culture a part of contemporary Spanish American literature.

Rosario Castellanos and the World of Chiapas

Castellanos was born in Mexico City but spent much of her childhood in Chiapas. Her Mayan-themed works include *Oficio de tinieblas* [Rites of Darkness] (1962) and *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] (1957), both novels. This article examines a single story, "El don rechazado" ["The Gift Refused"] found in *Ciudad Real* [The City of Kings] (1996), a collection of short stories that form part of the Chiapas focus in the writing of Castellanos. The book is dedicated to

the National Indigenous Institute, and “The Gift Refused” is about an anthropologist assigned to work in an Indian Aid Mission in Ciudad Real (in reality San Cristóbal de las Casas, the former capital of Chiapas).

“The Gift Refused” is narrated in the first person by José Antonio Romero, an anthropologist who is thrust unexpectedly into the suffering of the native peoples when a 12-year old Indian girl takes him to her mother, who is unconscious and has a newborn in her arms. The mother, Manuela, recovers from puerperal fever at the Mission Clinic, and Romero tries to help her daughter, Marta, but is spurned in his efforts. In the end the anthropologist is puzzled by having his offer of help refused. This story highlights the gulf of misunderstanding between Whites and Indians in Chiapas and mistreatment of Mayans in Mexican society. Romero has been sent to an Indian Aid Mission but doesn’t speak the language. Manuela has been forced to flee to the city with her daughter because she was widowed shortly after becoming pregnant, and the *patrón*, “overseer” of the lands where her husband worked, claimed her husband owed money. In the city Manuela ends up working for a heartless woman innkeeper who will not even let her give birth inside and sends her off to a stable.

“The Gift Refused” presents the legacy of Indian abuse in Chiapas and the double vulnerability that women endure. The story uses vocabulary specific to the region: *ladinos*, “non-Indian mestizos or whites,” and *caxlán*, “anyone not Tzotzil Indian,” and confirms the continuation of indigenous languages and the cultivation of maize, but the main focus on Mayans is to register a protest on their behalf. The work subtly but surely underscores the legacy of the conquest and the failure of the Mexican government to adequately address the needs of the country’s original inhabitants. The anthropologist reflects on his needs as a man for much of the story and can empathize only so far with the hapless Manuela. The cruelty of the Whites is ferocious, with the rural *patrón* holding a pregnant widow responsible for her husband’s supposed debts and the innkeeper denying a woman a safe place to give birth. The story offers a condensed look at what happened to Indians in Chiapas since the arrival of the Spaniards: they are conquered, demeaned, mistreated, and misunderstood. The colonial *encomienda*, “use of Indians to work the land in colonial times,” gives way to debt peonage. Women suffer both labor and sexual exploitation. Suspicion and resentment dominate. The 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, more than 30 years after the stories in *Ciudad Real* were written, makes the depictions by Castellanos all the more poignant and foreboding. Asking students in advanced classes to connect the historical dots can be a consciousness-raising exercise. A sample timetable can be created by charting Chiapas in the news from 1960 to 1994 and beyond. For example: In the 1960s, the Catholic Bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz, sought to ally indigenous communities and the church to confront problems of exploitation and discrimination faced by the Tzotzil. In 1976, oil reserves were discovered in Southern Chiapas. (Did it bring economic relief to disadvantaged groups?) And in 1992, the portion of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 that was to assure the land rights of indigenous peoples was repealed by President Salinas de Gortari.

Miguel Angel Asturias and Mayan Themes

Asturias, in conveying the culture of the ancient Maya, has stirred controversy. Nonetheless, he is acknowledged as a student of Mayan texts and as the co-translator (from a French version!) of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Maya Quiché, a work that surfaced after the conquest and is preserved in Maya Quiché, transcribed in Latin letters with a parallel 16th-century Spanish translation. Many of the *Leyendas de Guatemala* [Legends of Guatemala] (1930) by Asturias show the assimilation of Mayan concepts, and a brief look at one of these legends will indicate some of what Spanish teachers should know about Mayan life and thought. “Leyenda de la Tatuana” [Legend of the Tattooed Woman] as anthologized in *Voces de Hispanoamérica* [Voices of Spanish America] (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004) is a tale about an almond tree, “*el Maestro Almendro*,” capable of both human and arboreal form, who divides his soul between four roads and then finds that one of the roads (*el Camino Negro*, the Black Road) has given his portion of the soul to a jewelry trader in town. The rest of the story tells how Master Almond, now in human guise, seeks to recover a portion of his soul and how the jewelry merchant who has bought a beautiful female slave with the “little piece of soul” dies, and how the slave and Master Almond meet, only to be seized by the Spanish colonial Inquisition. When both the almond tree—in his human form—and the slave are scheduled to be burned at the stake, the Master scratches a tattoo of a ship on the slave’s arm, telling her that if she repeats the design she can escape in the ship. This she does, and the next day the officials find only a dry almond tree with two or three pink flowers in the cell. To some readers the story’s conclusion might seem like magic realism, the Spanish American form of writing that blends seemingly magical events with a weight of realistic detail. To others it may seem like an example of surrealism. But seen from the perspective of Mayan culture, it is a triumph of Mayan beliefs over Spanish will.

The legend presents several curious aspects for “Western” readers. What is crucial to full comprehension of the story is some degree of understanding of Mayan history and traditions. It is easy for those unfamiliar with Latin America’s indigenous past to see something assumed to be part of their own cultural context and to misinterpret its meaning. As Heusinkveld (1993) explains,

In many Catholic churches in villages throughout the Yucatán peninsula, one may still find the Mayan cross, a symmetrical cross with vertical and horizontal pieces of equal length. The church has permitted the use of this cross throughout the years, even though it is now known that the four points represent Mayan wind gods of the north, south, east and west!” (p. 28)

In “Leyenda de la Tatuana,” Asturias himself created explanatory notes, some of which are referenced in the anthology version. He wrote, for example, that a tattoo might have magical properties that could render a person invisible and that the *Popul Vuh* spoke of trees that could walk and could grow so tall that people could reach the sky by climbing them. Within this scheme Master Almond is a

“tree who walks” (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004). Asturias also mentioned Xilbalbá, the Mayan underworld (a subterranean world *not* hell), the place of death and the place where four roads—red, green, white, and black—all met (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004). All of these—magic tattoos, walking trees, an underworld that is not the same as hell, and roads that bear the names of colors—are unusual ways of looking at the world for many of those who read this story. What then are the Mayan underpinnings that a teacher can provide to aid comprehension of this piece of Spanish American writing?

First, students should put themselves in the framework of the Mayan cosmivision, which is fundamentally non-Western. They should try to envision the concept of tree as life, as sky-reaching and as something sacred, like the *ceibo* (or *ceiba*) tree. Then the concept of four roads (like the four directions) and four colors should be illustrated. The ancient Maya conceived of each direction having a specific color. An excellent Web site to explain and illustrate these precepts is the bilingual site of Organización Tips S. A. de C. V., “Maya Discovery/Mundo Maya Online,” at <<http://www.mayadiscovery.com>>. Asking students to look up features such as the *ceibo*, “a tree,” the four roads, and Xilbalbá and to bring visual representations of them can be a good pre-reading exercise. Additional classroom resources are given in Appendix A.

Several of the metaphors and images of the legend require a Mayan world-view to make sense. For example, just three lines into the story Master Almond is described as knowing, “the vocabulary of obsidian, a stone that can speak, and how to read the hieroglyphs of the constellations” (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004). Ancient Mayans had a written language that they recorded in codices, on ceramic pieces, and on stone. Their glyphs, much more than picture writing, recorded time and historical events and gave evidence of their extraordinary astronomical knowledge, including the creation of a calendar more accurate than the one used in Europe at the time of the conquest. To underscore the extent of Mayan written knowledge, teachers can remind students that originally there were many more than the three extant Mayan codices we have today. (There are four codex records if the Grolier fragments are included.) Unfortunately, Mayan libraries were destroyed by the Spanish conquest. In 1562 in Maní, Yucatán, a zealous Bishop, Diego de Landa, had 27 rolls of Mayan glyphs completely burned, believing that they were works of the devil (Landa, 1978). Despite the loss of codices, many inscriptions in stone remain, and today Mayan slabs and stelae, carved by flint, jadeite, or obsidian still speak to those seeking to read the ancient texts and to understand Mayan ways.

The Asturias story also mentions the name of a month, one of the 20 months of a year. This is a reference to the Mayan calendar, the vigesimal basis for numeration and a concept of time that is circular rather than linear. The complex Mayan reckoning of time with interlocking ritual and sacred calendars is fundamentally different from the Christian calendar, something that several of the Web sites listed in the references explain. Another part of the legend describes landscape in this fashion: “The trees wove along the roadside a capricious “güipil” decoration (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004, p. 368). But what is “güipil”? Weaving

and color were and are an essential part of Mayan life. A search for descriptions of *güipil* or *huipil* can help American students discover that the huipil is a garment worn today in Yucatan (and with variations elsewhere) and is appreciated for its beautiful borders of color. Some are even part of museum exhibits of art. Seeing brightly-colored *huipil* designs in books, tourist brochures, videos, photos, or as display items can help bring the Asturias image to life.

Perhaps one of the most curious references in the legend occurs when the merchant is depicted as “palúdico y enamorado” [stricken with malaria and in love], the chills of his infirmity combining with the trembling of his heart (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004, p. 368). But the malaria-bearing mosquito is no stranger to Mayan stories. He appears in the *Popol Vuh* as the creature who gathers information and is directed to suck men’s blood (Chapter eight, Part II) and who pierces a water jar at the behest of the Hero Twins (Chapter six, Part II).

Conclusion

The foregoing are simply a few examples from an anthologized work by a famous author and most likely to be used in college and advanced high school classes. But teachers of all levels can find resources about Mayan literature and culture. Mayan stories handed down by tradition and written today in Roman letters or translated from Mayan into Spanish, English, and other languages are available in many versions. There are both documentaries and feature films that show aspects of Mayan culture. Gregory Nava’s motion picture *El Norte* (1983), which follows the journey of two Mayan siblings from Guatemala to California, is perhaps the best known of these, and Appendix A contains a list of many others.

There are various Web sites that can serve as sources for information about Mayan and other indigenous cultures. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) site for lesson plans at <<http://edsitement.neh.gov>> has an excellent unit with many links called “Descent into the Mayan Underworld.” For a comparative context, “Common Visions, Common Voices” in the same NEH site can lead to a unit with Mayan trickster stories and Native American (U.S.) trickster stories. Mayan folktales are also available via LANIC (Latin American Network Information Center), at <<http://lanic.utexas.edu>>, which serves as a gateway to multiple venues about indigenous language, literature, and culture. One tip for those seeking information is to look under the heading “Anthropology” as well as under “Language” and “Literature.” Also, federally-funded resource centers and native communities can provide valuable insights. The Web page of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, <<http://www.scolt.org>>, provides a list of current Title VI Language Resource Centers. University area studies centers also have an outreach mission and can provide resources and services for language teachers. For instance, the Duke-UNC Consortium in Latin American & Caribbean Studies offers a Yucatec Maya Program, Maya Culture Boxes, and many films suitable for K-12 use, including a 60-minute video in Yucatec Maya, with subtitles in English or Spanish. A listing of Latin American studies centers is given in Appendix B. Often overlooked as sources of information, native informants can be an important link to the community and can engage student interest. Increasing

numbers of Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States are from indigenous communities, and many of them live in the increasingly “Hispanized” U.S. South.

In the seminal essay “Nuestra América” [Our America] published in 1891, José Martí, Cuba’s national hero and most universal writer, in calling for Latin American literary independence from Europe, described a preference for “nuestra Grecia” (our Greece) over “la Grecia que no es nuestra” [the Greece that is not ours] (Chang-Rodríguez & Filer, 2004, p. 218). The context makes clear that when Martí wrote “our Greece” he was referring to the ancient cultures of the Americas. Just as one would need to know something of Greek and Roman mythology to read many classics of Western literature, so one must understand the roots of thought of the Mayas, Incas, and Aztecs, and of course many more, to read the literature of the new continent with success.

Several purposes are served when Spanish teachers actively incorporate aspects of indigenous language, literature, and culture in their instruction. First, they convey the reality of Spanish American life in the 21st century. Secondly, they help students to go beyond a Eurocentric concept of the Americas. And thirdly, they restore to a place of importance the indigenous contributions to modern Spanish America, just as noted researchers, writers, artists and musicians in Mexico, Central America, and beyond have done in their works. In looking at indigenous material as part of a Spanish curriculum, teachers will broaden their professional perspectives and will more faithfully fulfill their obligations to Standards-based teaching.

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Appendix A

Selected Resources: Language, Culture, and Literature

Books and Compilations

- Barón Larios, J. (Compiler). (1994). *Tradiciones, cuentos, ritos y creencias nahuas*. Mexico City: Gobierno del Estado de Hidalgo, 1994.
- Bierhorst, J. (2001). *Latin American folktales: Stories from Hispanic and Indian traditions*. New York: Pantheon.
- Castellanos, R. (2003). *Ciudad Real*. (Mass Market Paperback). Mexico City: Punto de Lectura.
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- Instituto Nacional Indigenista. (1992). *La milpa de Don Ricardo: Relato de niños nahuas*. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista
- Leander, B. (1991). *In xochitl in cuicatl: Flor y canto, la poesía de los aztecas*. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista
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- Nye, N. S. (1995). *The tree is older than you are: A bilingual gathering of poems and stories from Mexico*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing.
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Music and Spoken Word

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- Ce-Acatl (Producer). (2005). *¡Ma'titla'tocan Nahualla'tolli! ¡Hablemos Náhuatl!: Diálogos de apoyo para practicar la lengua náhuatl del maestro Xochime* [CD]. Mexico City: Ce-Acatl, A.C.
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Videos

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- Herrera, E. (Director). (1992). *Concheros somos* [Motion picture]. Mexico City: Ixtaca.
- Instituto Nacional Indigenista (Producer), & Colin, J. C. (Director). (1985). *Hach winik* [Motion picture]. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista
- Klein, R. (Director). (1974). *Chac: The rain god* [Motion Picture] (Available from Milestone Film & Video).
- Lane, B. (Director). (1993). *Los hijos del águila* [Motion picture]. Mexico: Ethnoscope.
- Martínez Suárez, C. (Director). (1995). *Sueños y palabras sabias de las comunidades Tzotziles y Tzeltales* [Motion picture]. Mexico: Video Tropic Sur.
- Noyola, A. (Director). (1992). *Xocen, el centro del mundo* [Motion picture]. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.
- TaraspanGLISH Migrants Video Project (Producer), & Sámano Chong, J., & Soto Sosa, J. (Directors). (2002). *Cortos taraspanGLISH* [Motion picture]. Mexico/ USA. (Available from the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.)

Web Sites

- Schwaller, J. F. (1999). *Nahuatl gateway*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.mrs.umn.edu/academic/history/Nahuatl/gateway.html>
- Nahuatl Tlahtokalli (Nahuatl Academy of Language). Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://nahuatl.info/nahuatl.htm>
- Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas. (2006). *Website of the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (Mexico)*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://cdi.gob.mx/index.php>
- Maya Discovery. *Mundo Maya Online*. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from <http://www.mayadiscovery.com>
- Ojo de agua. Producciones videográficas. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.laneta.apc.org/ojodeagua/>
- Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. *Redes indígenas*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/ri.html>
- Salvador, R. J. (2003). *How can I learn Nahuatl?* Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfafq/nahuatl.html>

Appendix B

Selected Online Latin American Studies Resource Centers

- Harvard University, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://drclas.fas.harvard.edu/index.pl/resources/outreach>
- Indiana University, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from http://www.indiana.edu/~clacs/html/cultural_competency.html
- Michigan State University, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from http://www.isp.msu.edu/CLACS/film_list.htm
- University of Arizona, Center for Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://las.arizona.edu/outreach/outreach.html>
- University of California, Berkeley, Center for Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://socrates.berkeley.edu:7001/Outreach/education/index.html>
- University of California, San Diego, Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://cilas.ucsd.edu/outreach/index.php>
- University of Florida, Center for Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://www.latam.ufl.edu/outreach/index.html>
- University of New Mexico, Latin American and Iberian Institute. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://lail.unm.edu/teachers.php>
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, Consortium in Latin American & Caribbean Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from http://www.duke.edu/web/carolinadukeconsortium/K-16_community/index.html
- University of Pittsburgh, Center for Latin American Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/clas/outreach/k-12.html>
- University of Texas at Austin, Latin American Network Information Center. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/k-12/>
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/outreach.html>