

## Structural Convergence and Typological Change in Nahuatl

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In this paper, we demonstrate the structural convergence of Nahuatl toward Spanish, leading to a change in the former language’s typological profile. In our understanding, convergence is when languages come to share multiple structural characteristics as a result of language contact. The type of multilingual setting is responsible for the directionality of convergence. E.g., long term stable multilingualism provides ideal conditions for multidirectional convergence where all languages involved play the role of both source and recipient of different features, while unbalanced bilingualism, as in the case of Nahuatl, tends to result in primarily unidirectional convergence, i.e. one language is the chief source of shared features. The term *convergence* is used variably in the literature; in a diachronic perspective, it often describes a result e.g. the languages in Kupwar are so similar because they have converged. Here, however, we treat on convergence as a process and focus its mechanisms: borrowing (form-meaning combinations, morphosyntactic pattern replication), imposition, adjustment in numerical distribution of feature variants, and (contact-induced) grammaticalization.

The synchronic distribution of convergent phenomena in the various varieties of modern Nahuatl and the diachronic trajectory of convergence can best be understood by studying older and modern Nahuatl varieties simultaneously. This study is grounded in our extensive corpus of written colonial Nahuatl texts, coupled with present-day ethno-historical and linguistic data from both strongly urbanized (central Puebla, Tlaxcala, Estado de Mexico) and more peripheral rural communities where traditional modes of subsistence are still preserved (Huastecan region in northern Veracruz, Sierra Negra in Tlaxcala, southern Puebla). The corpus of colonial texts in Nahuatl, contains several thousand documents/texts of many genres (including literary and encyclopedic works in Nahuatl, colonial dictionaries, annals, mundane documents) and spans the 1540s to the 1820s. The corpus of modern ethnolinguistic data consists of some recording from 1980s and 1990s, but its core has been collected between 2012 and 2015, and includes spontaneous speech, traditional stories, and structured interviews on many topics.

Analysis of this corpus shows that over the past 500 years, intense and continuous language contact has seen, first, the creation of a large number Nahuatl neologisms with the influx of Spanish culture, followed by a long phase of moderate to heavy lexical borrowing and lexical calquing. Only relatively recently (in the last 20-40 years, depending on the variety) can we observe a dramatic increase in contact-induced changes on the structural level in Nahuatl. These are based largely on the model provided by Spanish, and as the convergence of Nahuatl toward Spanish has progressed, a shift in the Nahuatl’s typological profile can be observed. In the oldest sources, the language displays a clear polysynthetic profile, but modern Nahuatl in the varieties most affected by contact more closely resembles an agglutinating language.

Word count: 450