

**Sonny Angelo Castro Yáñez (Universidad de Guadalajara)**

*Book Review*

**“Insights in the Research of English, Nahuatl and Spanish: Languages and Cultures in Mexico”** Edited by Margarita Ramos Gódinez and Rosa Yáñez Rosales H.  
*2016. Universidad de Guadalajara. \$220 paper. ISBN 978-607-742-704-9.*

*Insights* is an accurate term to describe this first compiled book by former-students and professors of the *Maestría en Lenguas y Culturas Inglesas* (MELCI), as it is a well-developed step further into the advances of linguistic research in Latin America and specifically, Mexico. It provides a perspective of the linguistic situation in Mexico where the role and study of national languages such as Nahuatl and Spanish deals with a foreign language such as English and the linguistic and cultural relationships among these that can lead to a better understanding of the Mexican linguistic state. The book reports matters currently discussed as it is the necessity to adapt linguistic and language teaching studies and theories to local contexts, the role of English as an imperialistic force and its influence on foreign speakers and the changes in foreign countries in terms of weak language teaching areas such as pronunciation and interculturality, and finally it addresses the importance of investigating endangered indigenous languages as a tool for revitalization: “Documenting the language and studying it also contributes, in a way, to its maintenance” (Rodríguez & Yáñez 195).

The book is divided in three main sections: a) phonemes, morphemes and structures, b) attitudes, ideologies, and alternatives, c) variation through time and space. In the first section Meza studies teaching pronunciation in Mexico analyzing the different actors involved in ELT in Mexico whereas Rodríguez applies a contrastive study of compound verbs and phrasal verbs in English and Nahuatl. In the second section Mugford and Serrano focus on disagreement strategies used in Monterrey, Mexico. Lomelí elicits the attitudes towards English as a dominant language in Mexico. The third and fourth chapters of this section are dedicated to Chicano literature. Guzman’s study proposes the use of Chicano literature in the English language classroom whilst Ramos and Quintero’s research demonstrates the opinions, attitudes and beliefs towards interculturality through Chicano literature. The third section discusses in Rodríguez and Yáñez’s chapter a revisitation to linguistics studies in Nahuatl from a diachronic perspective, dialectal zones in Mexico and its linguistic differences and its role and vitality nowadays.

Concerning Nahuatl, Rodríguez & Yáñez’s study unfolds a detailed diachronic description of research studies made in Nahuatl since the Colonial period (17th century) to the present time. Afterwards it exposes a complete comparison from the phonetical, lexical, morphological and syntactic levels of the different dialectal zones of Nahuatl. This procedure allows the authors to discuss language variation in a diachronic and synchronic perspective and finally it demonstrates the current role and language vitality of Nahuatl in Mexico. It is in this context that Rodríguez presents a contrastive study between Nahuatl and English related to the use of directional particles in verbs in both languages. By the analysis of written data such as classical Nahuatl grammars and narrative texts in English from the 19th century, Rodríguez compared these two non-related languages. The chapter proposes new meanings to particles in Nahuatl language (speed) and establishes semantic patterns that can be classified for meanings and functions as

a technique to categorize them and for a better approach when teaching them to native and non-native speakers.

With regard to Spanish studies, Mugford and Serrano lay out how pragmatic theories might be unable to describe non-English speaking contexts such as disagreement strategies found in an oral corpus (PRESEA) of a dialectal zone of northern Mexico (Monterrey). Mugford and Serrano proved how different positive politeness discursive behaviors are used as a pragmalinguistics strategy to display disagreement, how *face* is protected by this mean and how closeness and cooperation are displayed within the same disagreement strategies.

Regarding English, Meza disserts about some specific problems of ELT in Mexico as it is the factors that affect teaching pronunciation, this is carried out through the gathering and analysis of a corpus composed by a school syllabus, grading tests and a survey of teachers and students' beliefs and attitudes towards learning and teaching pronunciation in the classroom.

Lomeli's research examines the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of Mexican speakers towards EFL by applying a questionnaire to English learners and teachers and a subsequent comparison with research in linguistic imperialism. The study suggests that cultural and linguistic imposition of English determines speakers' linguistic and cultural identity, and it demonstrate how English can be seen as a danger to native languages or there is a possibility to revert this trend assuming English not as a dominant language, but as a tool to know and value other cultures and languages stressing the urgency to: "raise cultural awareness and appreciation of cultural differences and promotion of native languages" (Lomelí 124).

Guzman's research delves into the issue of incorporating the intercultural competence in the language classroom by suggesting an applicable methodology and acknowledging the advantages in implementing activities to acquire and develop intercultural skills in the EFL class. This is proposed through the use of *Chicano literature*.

Ramos & Quintero's study is correlated to Guzman's, as it presents students and teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards interculturality by the application and the quantitative and qualitative analysis of a survey with the results being categorized and contrasted with previous studies. The study demonstrated the need to change students' negative attitudes towards interculturality in the language classroom and how teachers' beliefs and college formation can be an inflection point to model students' perceptions and language environment regarding teaching intercultural competence by focusing on *cultural awareness* and *rich socialization*.

It is worth to mention that the focus of the book tends to be to English, as it is shown by the number of chapters presented. The main contributions to language learning are made in the field of ELT, not mentioning how the studies in other languages could be used in the language classroom. However, the main limitation that the book presents is the necessity to explore deeper the topics and results presented in each chapter, that is the reason this book can be considered

as the first volume from future works expanding the contributions already exposed. This is by mentioning the need of more studies in English, Nahuatl and Spanish to understand specific items of language and their relations and function in discourse.

The book brings attention to the need to modify and propose linguistic theories outside of the English-speaking world. It suggests superficially the application of linguistic policies to protect local languages and the impact that English could have in undeveloped countries where it has a social and cultural prominence over national languages. It remarks the importance in teaching pronunciation in ELT and the lack of these aspects in teachers' formation or schools' syllabus or grading criteria. The book also brings into the table the possibilities to expand language variety of Nahuatl and its possible impact on language use and position in people's perception and prestige.

The book can be of interest to language teachers as it raises the awareness in the importance of teaching language without diminishing other languages or cultures. It makes teachers conscious about students' perceptions and attitudes towards their linguistic identity, English as an imperialistic instrument and how Chicano literature is a valuable resource to teach interculturality in the language classroom and a positive influence for linguistic and cultural empathy to others. It is relevant to researchers that are interested in Mexican national languages and the relations originated for the inclusion of English, historical studies in indigenous languages and current studies regarding language vitality and beliefs/attitudes towards them.

*Insights...* is a contribution to the understanding of foreign language learning problems that arise in México. It details where teaching approaches can be failing, and it expresses the usefulness to integrate the intercultural competence and the necessity to change students' opinions towards this by working since language teachers' formation. It expands linguistic theories where Mexican context must be analyzed in a specific pragmatics framework, contributing to the understanding of Spanish in Mexico. It adds to the knowledge of the influence of English in the Mexican context and how it is perceived by EFL students and teachers and the different opinions and attitudes by arising the idea of *cultural awareness*. And it is a valuable source for new meanings and functions of English and Nahuatl in the semantic field, it provides a better understanding of Nahuatl verbs, the previous studies, the dialectal varieties and its linguistic differences through the time, its current status and the importance of future researches to expand the limited knowledge about indigenous languages.