Spanish Hesitations in Náhuatl

This proposal focases on an essential component of oral discourse: hesitations.

> Hesitation phenomena (also: delay phenomena; engl. hesitation phenomena) refer to those phenomena in speech that are assumed to be caused by a delay (or a repair) in language production, meaning that they have a potential hesitation character and function as routines for bridging gaps. (Reitbrecht 2017: 17, translation: ARGT)

According to Reitbrecht (2017) Hesitation phenomena—characterized by pauses, repetitions, false starts, and self-corrections—are integral to perceived spoken fluency and competence These elements, essential for speech planning, take on unique forms in each language, but Nahuatl, a language increasingly influenced by Spanish, has opted for borrowing hesitations from Spanish. As Náhuatl is spoken within a Spanish-dominated linguistic context, it has progressively adopted elements of Spanish, including hesitation markers, which can be understood as the borrowing of a complete lexical class into the language.

This study investigates how hesitation phenomena from Spanish are utilized in modern Náhuatl, revealing a deep integration of Spanish linguistic elements. We have created a corpus of four L1-Nahuatl speakers of the variant of Chicontepec, Veracruz, who are retelling a picture story. Our focus is to analize oral speech from contemporary Náhuatl speakers. The research identifies the types of hesitations used. We have discovered that these are mostly Spanish-derived, such as *este* (uh), *o sea* (I mean), and *pues* (well), within the structure of Náhuatl discourse. Some examples of our sample are the following:

(1) *Achtohui,* ***pues****, niquittac itztoya ce* ***eeh****, ce ichpocatl tlen itoca****:::*** *Mixtli.*
First, ***pues****, I saw there was a* ***eeh****, a young woman, whose name wa****:::****s Mixtli.*
(2) *Zampampa****::****,* ***puez*** *monequi* ***ah*** *xicnehnehuilican* ***puez*** *canin initztozeh.*
Pero, ***pues*** *era necesario* ***ah*** *pensar* ***pues*** *donde vivir.*
(3) *Cualli tlaxtlahuah, todo,* ***osea como*** *<vacilación>, nopa tlamantli*
They pay well, ***osea como****, those things.*
(4) *Quena huacca* ***este*** ***ti-*** *ticnequi* ***este*** *ma monamictican.*
Yes, then este, you, you want este that we get married.

Pues 'well', *osea como* 'like', *este* 'um' are Spanish hesitations. This use reflects not only the linguistic borrowing but also the ongoing hispanization of Náhuatl in elements that are between the pragmatic level, prosody and the lexicon.

Furthermore, the study situates hesitation phenomena within the broader framework of linguistic competence and performance. Borrowed hesitations in Náhuatl are examined not merely as markers of delay but as tools for navigating bilingual or plurilingual communication, reflecting the cognitive and cultural interplay between Spanish and Náhuatl.

The findings underscore the Janus-faced nature of hesitations: while they facilitate speech production, they also signify the pressure of maintaining linguistic identity in a dominant Spanish-speaking environment. This research contributes to understanding how linguistic borrowing extends beyond vocabulary to include functional and discourse-oriented elements. It also invites further exploration into how hesitation phenomena shape perceptions of fluency and authenticity in Náhuatl, offering insights for language preservation and pedagogy in plurilingual contexts.

References

Reitbrecht, Sandra. 2017. Häsitationsphänomene in der Fremdsprache Deutsch und ihre Bedeutung für die Sprechwirkung. (Schriften zur Sprechwissenschaft und Phonetik 10). Frank & Timme Berlin.