SPANISH AND P’URHEPECHA: MUTUAL INFLUENCES IN AN ONGOING CASE OF LANGUAGE CONTACT IN CENTRAL WESTERN MEXICO

Martha Mendoza*

* Associate Professor of Linguistics & Spanish. Florida Atlantic University
Correo electrónico: mmendoza@fau.edu

Abstract
Spanish in Mexico is in contact with numerous indigenous languages still spoken in its territory. Such is the case of P’urhepecha in the state of Michoacán, a language isolate part of the sixty eight indigenous language groups remaining in the country today, with as many as 125,000 speakers. Both Spanish and P’urhepecha have been influenced by each other’s presence through centuries of close contact. Over time, Spanish has been modified mostly with respect to its lexicon, while P’urhepecha has experienced both lexical and grammatical influences. Examples of the lexical influence of P’urhepecha on the Spanish of Michoacán are nouns like huarache ‘sandal’, tacuche ‘suit’, and corunda ‘tamale’. Examples of the massive lexical influence of Spanish on P’urhepecha are words such as pensarini ‘think’ < Spanish pensar, butella ‘bottle’, mesa ‘table’, televisioni ‘television’, etc. To this date, however, the contact between Spanish and P’urhepecha has not yet been sufficiently investigated. Thus, the present study provides an overview of the history and current state of the contact between these two languages in conjunction with a synchronic analysis of some of the major linguistic features, both lexical and grammatical, that have been borrowed by each from the other, as well as a few considerations on the possible future that this situation of close linguistic interaction may bring for the minority language, including the impact of government attempts to provide bilingual education in Spanish and P’urhepecha, all this with the intention of contributing to the study of language contact between Spanish and the indigenous languages of Mesoamerica.

Key words: language contact, linguistic borrowing, endangered languages, P’urhepecha, Mesoamerica.
Resumen

El español de México está en contacto con numerosos idiomas indígenas que aún se hablan en su territorio. Ese es el caso del purépecha de Michoacán, un idioma aislado que forma parte de las sesenta y ocho agrupaciones lingüísticas que aún quedan en el país, con alrededor de 125 000 hablantes. El español y el purépecha se han influenciado mutuamente a través de siglos de estrecho contacto. Con el paso del tiempo, el español se ha visto afectado principalmente con respecto al léxico, mientras que el purépecha ha experimentado tanto influencias gramaticales como léxicas. Algunos ejemplos de la influencia léxica del purépecha en el español de Michoacán son sustantivos como *huarache* ‘sandalia’, *tacuche* ‘traje’ y *corunda* ‘tamal’; también existen ejemplos de la considerable influencia del español en el purépecha, tales como: *pensarini* ‘pensar’ < español *pensar*, *butella* ‘botella’, *mesa* ‘mesa’, *telebisioni* ‘televisión’, etc. Sin embargo, el contacto lingüístico entre el español y el purépecha aún no ha sido investigado suficientemente. Por lo tanto, el presente estudio provee un panorama de la historia y la situación presente del contacto entre estos dos idiomas y un análisis sincrónico de algunos de los principales rasgos lingüísticos que cada uno ha tomado del otro, así como algunas consideraciones sobre el futuro que esta situación de estrecho contacto lingüístico puede traer para la lengua minoritaria, incluyendo el impacto de los intentos gubernamentales por proveer educación bilingüe en español y en purépecha, todo esto con la intención de contribuir al estudio del contacto lingüístico entre el español y los idiomas indígenas de Mesoamérica.

Palabras clave: contacto lingüístico, préstamo lingüístico, idiomas en peligro, purépecha, Mesoamérica.
1. INTRODUCTION

As a global language, Spanish is in contact with numerous other languages throughout the areas where it is currently spoken. A particularly important area of linguistic contact between Spanish and those other languages is Latin America, where Spanish is either official or co-official and the dominant language. In Mexico, Spanish is in contact with many indigenous languages still alive in its territory. Such is the case of P’urhepecha (also known as Tarascan), which is part of the sixty eight language groups with multiple variants belonging to eleven linguistic families that are still spoken in the country today (INALI). It is the language of the P’urhepecha people, who originally inhabited an area covering most of the state of Michoacán and a considerable portion of the states of Jalisco and Guanajuato, in addition to a smaller area of the state of Guerrero, in present day Mexico (Perlstein Pollard 4-5). The Aztecs were never able to dominate the P’urhepecha, who, by the time of the Spanish Conquest, had developed quite an advanced civilization. To this date, the situation of language contact between Spanish and P’urhepecha has not yet been sufficiently investigated, especially when it comes to the transfer of non-lexical elements, but such study could definitely open up a most significant window into issues of language contact and language shift and the role of Spanish as a dominant language in the decline of an indigenous minority language.

To be sure, throughout the history of their contact, both Spanish and P’urhepecha have been influenced by each other’s presence. Centuries of close interaction have modified the linguistic landscape of each of these languages. However, in this exchange Spanish has been altered mostly with respect to its lexicon, while P’urhepecha has experienced a wider range of influences, both lexical and grammatical. Examples of the lexical influence of P’urhepecha on the Spanish of the state of Michoacán are nouns such as huarache ‘sandal’, huarache’, tacuche ‘suit’, chocho ‘grasshopper’, charanda (type of alcoholic drink), and tecata ‘crust’, as well as names of trees, plants, and flowers, and numerous toponyms. Examples of the massive lexical influence of Spanish on P’urhepecha are words such as pensarini ‘think’, butella ‘bottle’, kafe ‘coffee’, mesa ‘table’, telebisioni ‘television’, and many others.

---

1 I would like to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to the late L. Gómez Bravo for his generosity and invaluable insights into the P’urhepecha language.
Thus, the present study provides a brief overview of the history and current state of the contact between these two languages in conjunction with a synchronic analysis of some of the major linguistic features (lexical and grammatical) that have been borrowed by each from the other, as well as a few considerations on the possible future that this situation of close linguistic contact may bring for P’urhepecha, given its position as the subordinate language, including the impact of government attempts to provide bilingual education in Spanish and P’urhepecha, all this with the intention of contributing to the study of language contact and shift between Spanish and the indigenous languages of Mesoamerica.

P’urhepecha data included in this paper were collected from five different oral and written sources: a transcription of a collection of twenty six oral folk tales from different P’urhepecha regions which include the main dialectal areas; a pedagogical booklet designed to aid in alphabetization programs in P’urhepecha-speaking areas; two master theses (one of them published) which focus on lexical borrowings from Spanish into P’urhepecha and vice versa, and the author’s elicitation sessions with native speakers from the P’urhepecha Plateau. The data include both lexical and grammatical borrowings.

2. THE P’URHEPECHA LANGUAGE

At the present time, the majority of P’urhepecha speakers are found in the state of Michoacán in central western Mexico. With perhaps as many as 125 000 speakers,2 P’urhepecha represents a language isolate, i.e. a language with no known relatives among the languages of the world. P’urhepecha speaking communities may be divided into four main geographical areas: the Lake Pátzcuaro region or región lacustre, the Tarascan/P’urhepecha Plateau or meseta tarasca/purépecha, the Ravine of the Eleven Towns or Cañada de los Once Pueblos, and the Zacapu “swamp” region or Ciénega de Zacapu, all of them in the western part of the state.

P’urhepecha is an agglutinative type of language as well as an inflectional language with a system of cases, including genitive, objective (marking of the direct or indirect object), and locative. P’urhepecha possesses an extremely rich

---

2 The INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) reports 124,494 P’urhepecha speakers as of the year 2010.
morphology. Where other languages may use adverbs, prepositions or auxiliaries, P’urhepecha employs morphological means to express meanings like causation, direction, manner, relative orientation, repetition, voice, volition, and many others. There are a myriad of suffixes that participate in productive derivational processes related to such meanings; many of these attach to verbal roots, as can be seen in the following example: From the verbal root piré ‘sing’ (infinitive: piréni), one can derive pirépani ‘to go singing’, pirépuni ‘to come singing’, pirépuanguani ‘to return singing’, piréanchani ‘to feel like singing’, pirékuekani ‘to want to sing’, pirépanchani ‘to wish to go singing’, pirépunchani ‘to wish to come singing’, and pirépireni ‘to sing and sing, to go on singing’, among many others (Mendoza, “Derivational resources”; Mendoza, “Spatial language”).

P’urhepecha is especially known for its body part suffixes, which express complex meanings related to spatial location and orientation (Mendoza, “Spatial language”; Friedrich, “On the Meaning”; Friedrich, “The Tarascan”). As an example of the grammatical use of body parts to express location, let us consider:

(1) Atara-kua parha-jtsi-ku-s-ti mesa-rhu³
cup-NOM container.upright-head-INTR-PRF-ASSR.3 table-LOC
‘The cup is on the table’

This sentence may be translated literally as: “The container, which is vertically oriented with respect to the plane of the table [an elevated horizontal surface], is on the head of this surface.” Notice that the verb, parhajtsikusti, obligatorily contains a body part, jtsi, to describe the cup’s exact location, in this case the table’s surface (referred to in P’urhepecha as its “head”).

A further example is the following:

(2) Markadori icha-rhu-ku-s-ti mesa-rhu
marker longish.horizontal-nose-INTR-PRF-ASSR.3 table-LOC
‘The marker is (lying) on the edge of the table’

This sentence actually expresses something translatable as: “The marker [a longish and rigid object], set in a horizontal position with respect to the plane of the table [an elevated horizontal surface], is on the nose [the edge] of

³ Examples are not provided in phonetic transcription but using a practical P’urhepecha orthography. Note that in what follows: j = [x], x = [S], rh = [ɽ], and i = [i]; the symbol ‘ after a consonant marks aspiration.
this surface.” In (2), the body-part suffix has been changed from jtsï to rhu to illustrate further semantic possibilities via the use of body parts in this language: jtsï ‘head’ refers to the main part of the topmost surface of the table, whereas rhu ‘nose’ designates its edge(s) (Mendoza, “Spatial language”).

3. THE CONTACT BETWEEN SPANISH AND P’URHEPECHA

In the state of Michoacán, Spanish and P’urhepecha coexist to this day and have done so for almost five hundred years since the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. Spanish Conquistadors arrived in Michoacán as early as 1521 (Krippner-Martínez 2-3) and the first Franciscan missionaries arrived in 1525 (Warren 19). Franciscan and other missionaries took to the task of evangelizing the indigenous people of the region, and by 1558, the first grammar of P’urhepecha, written by Maturino Gilberti (Gilberti), a Franciscan missionary of French origin (Warren 20-21), was published. His grammar also constituted the first grammar of an indigenous language published in the Americas (Warren 5).

The situation of close contact between the Spanish of Michoacán and P’urhepecha has been resolved, for the most part, in favor of Spanish, the prestige language and the dominant language of Mexico. As previously mentioned, the original territory inhabited by the P’urhepecha included sections of the modern states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Guerrero, and Jalisco. Nowadays the areas where P’urhepecha is spoken have been reduced considerably to basically the four regions of the state of Michoacán named above; but, in these territories, the contact between the two languages continues. In contact areas, where there is still a large presence of indigenous people, there exists increased bilingualism, as most of those who speak P’urhepecha also speak Spanish, and, even in more isolated areas, it is not uncommon to find P’urhepecha speakers who know Spanish, since it is needed for any dealings with the outside, Spanish-speaking, world. Moreover, in some places, there has been an increasing shift towards Spanish on the part of the younger generations, who tend to abandon their native tongue in favor of the dominant national language. By contrast, mestizos, even in the areas of contact, are

---

4 Thomason (9) makes the following relevant observation: “Intense pressure from a dominant group most often leads to bilingualism among subordinate groups who speak other languages, and this asymmetrical bilingualism very often results, sooner or later, in language shift.”
usually exclusively monolingual in Spanish. As could be expected, a situation of diglossia has developed in many P’urhepecha-Spanish bilingual regions (Ragone and Marr), where P’urhepecha serves the functions of a low variety—informal communication among friends and family members—while Spanish represents the high variety, as the language of school, commerce, church, and government (Demišová 69-70).

The state of bilingualism that prevails in contact areas between P’urhepecha and Spanish has made it possible for both languages to influence one another. However, in this interchange, Spanish is by far the language that has contributed the largest number of elements to the other. Spanish in these areas is the language of prestige, used almost exclusively in education, especially beyond elementary school, government, and the media. There are some local radio stations that broadcast in P’urhepecha, but their broadcasting range and influence are rather limited.

P’urhepecha has not only borrowed a fairly large number of lexical items, especially nouns and verbs, but also grammatical elements, such as the Spanish items hasta, para, and como. By contrast, the Spanish spoken in the area has basically acquired only lexical vocabulary that refers, for the most part, to local flora and fauna, and certain cultural objects. Nevertheless, the state of Michoacán is full of toponyms that betray its P’urhepecha heritage. Typical town names such as Aporo, Angahuan, Angangueo, Pátzcuaro, Pichátaro, Tacámbaro, Tingambato, Tiríndaro, Turícuarro, Ucareo, etc. all come from P’urhepecha, yet Spanish speakers may not even be aware of such origin since these names have been thoroughly adapted to the phonological rules of Spanish. Some examples of the formation of these place names, and their possible etymologies, are the following: Acámbaro ‘place of magueys’ (< P’urhepecha akamba ‘maguey’ + rhu (locative suffix)); Jerécuaro ‘place of nests’ (< P’urhepecha xerekua ‘nest’ + rhu); Sirio ‘place of corn’ (< P’urhepecha tsiri + o (locative suffix)); Zirándaro ‘place of paper (where paper is abundant)’ (< P’urhepecha siranda ‘paper’ + rhu) (Demišová 51, 100).

4. INFLUENCE OF SPANISH ON P’URHEPECHA

Throughout its long history of contact with Spanish, P’urhepecha has borrowed numerous lexical items from it, some of them having entered the language at a much earlier period (uakasi, trigu) than others (telebisioni, te-
lefonu), considering that speakers have continued to adapt their language to face the new socio-political reality in the aftermath of the Spanish Conquest and into the modern era. Given the scope of this paper, the diachronic evolution of such lexical borrowings is not considered, focusing rather on providing a synchronic view of the kinds of terms that have been incorporated into the P’urhepecha lexicon over time.\(^5\)


Other common borrowings into P’urhepecha are months of the year and days of the week: en eru, febreru, marsu, juniu, juliu, agostu, septiembre, noviembre, diciembre, sabadu, lunesi, martesi, biernesi, etc., and higher numbers: sinkuenta < cincuenta ‘fifty’, sientu < ciento ‘one hundred’, mili < mil ‘one thousand’.

---

\(^5\) For a discussion of neologisms and Spanish loan words in P’urhepecha in the first centuries following the Spanish Conquest, see Villavicencio (“Palabras nuevas”).

\(^6\) In what follows, the P’urhepecha word is written to the left of the < sign and the Spanish word to its right.

\(^7\) The list of Spanish borrowings into P’urhepecha constitutes a representative sample, but it is not meant to be exhaustive as one could certainly find many other examples.
Though fewer in number, there are also borrowed verbs and adjectives, such as: desmaiarini < desmayar ‘to faint’, pensarini < pensar ‘to think’, kambiarini < cambiar ‘to change’, kumplirini < cumplir ‘to fulfill’, arreglarini < arreglar ‘to fix’, interesadu < interesado ‘interested’, and enkantadu < encantado ‘enchanted’.

At present, even the interjection ai ‘ay’ has been adopted from Spanish.

However, it is important to note that, even with all the influx of Spanish terms into P’urhepecha, the items borrowed for the most part refer not to basic vocabulary (Swadesh)\(^8\) but rather to such cultural items as technological innovations and social and government institutions in mestizo society. In fact, out of the list of one hundred items that Swadesh (283) proposes as having basic status, none appear to have come from Spanish.

Borrowings do need to conform to the phonotactic rules of P’urhepecha: for instance, in this language words cannot end with a consonant, so the ending –i is added to words like nación or televisión to make them conform to this rule: nasioní, telebisioní. Also, an unstressed final –o in Spanish generally becomes –u in P’urhepecha (for example, monu, platu, ratu, sapatu, and so on). Furthermore, the adoption of some of these words has resulted in the introduction of phonemes that historically were not part of the indigenous language, for instance initial b-, d-, and g-, as in butella, gasolina, or desmaiarini, but which are now commonplace.

Borrowed nouns typically behave just like any other P’urhepecha noun, for instance accepting case suffixes; consider the example:

(3) ... ch’a no ma kama-síni periku-níi? (Soto Bravo 36)\(^9\)

> ‘Aren’t you (formal) carrying a parrot?’

We observe that here the objective case suffix -ni has been applied to periku < Sp perico ‘parrot’, as it is the direct object of the verb kamasíni. Another such case is ratu < Sp rato ‘a while’, which becomes easily integrated into the

---

\(^8\) Swadesh (275) defines basic vocabulary as “that of universal and simple things, qualities, and activities, which depend to the least degree possible on the particular environment and cultural state of the group.” .

\(^9\) Several examples, like this one, are taken from a collection of folk tales (Soto Bravo) as narrated by native speakers from different P’urhepecha speaking regions. The example in (3) comes from San Luis (Surén), which is located in the dialectal area corresponding to the meseta purépecha.
P’urhepecha NP, co-occurring with the indefinite article *ma*, in a postpositional phrase such as:

\[(4) \text{ Ma ratu jimbo a while in ‘In a while’}\]

In addition, the plural suffix –*echa* is attached to words of Spanish origin, according to the inflectional rules of P’urhepecha, as in *sabaduecha* ‘saturdays’ < *sabadu + echa*, or *telefonuecha* ‘telephones’ < *telefónu + echa*.

### 4.1 Spanish Grammatical Influence

The differential effects of language contact on the two languages in question, Spanish and P’urhepecha, are evident when we consider that functional elements have been borrowed from the former into the latter but not vice versa. A minority language like P’urhepecha has not only adopted a wealth of lexical items from Spanish but also certain grammatical elements, such as the prepositions *para* ‘for’ and *asta* (written without *h*) ‘until’, which are now commonly found in P’urhepecha. This constitutes a significant development since, as exemplified in (4) above, P’urhepecha is a postpositional language; other examples of postpositions are: *anapu* ‘of, from (origin)’, as in *Paskuarbu anapu* ‘from Pátzcuaro’; *jingoni* ‘with’, as in *juchiti erachi jingoni* ‘with my brother’; and *uerratini* ‘from (spatial or temporal)’, as in *Morelia uerratini* ‘from Morelia’. As the examples show, postpositions perform similar functions to those of prepositions in languages like English or Spanish. In addition, P’urhepecha postpositions play a major role in the grammatical marking of case, for two of them are directly involved: *jimbo* is employed for the instrumental while *jingoni* is used for the commitative (*Villavicencio, P’urhépecha kaso*).\(^\text{10}\) So far, the introduction of prepositions in P’urhepecha appears not to have had a discernible impact on the expression of case marking; however, it has definitely affected other areas of its grammar, a topic to which we now turn.

\(^{10}\) P’urhepecha possesses the following grammatical cases: nominative, genitive, objective, locative, instrumental, and commitative; the nominative presents zero-marking; the instrumental is marked by –*mbu* or its full form *jimbo*, and the commitative by –*ngoni* or the
The following are examples of the use of *para* in sentences containing a purpose clause. In these the subordinate clause typically appears in second position and is introduced by *para*:

(5) Rita tsiri pa-xa-ti para tsikat-echa-ni t’iré-ra-ni (“Rafa ka Rita” 13)
    corn bring-PRG-ASSR.3 for chicken\PL-OBJ eat-CAU-INF
    ‘Rita is bringing corn in order to feed the chicken’

(6) Ts’ïma uánikua uakasì-cha-ni kama-m-p-ka para jini t’iré-ra-ni (Soto Bravo 13)
    they many cow-PL-OBJ bring-HAB-PRT-SBJ for there eat-CAU-OBJ
    ‘They brought many cows in order to feed them there’

(7) Ka ima ts’ame arhi-ni [...] arhata para=kini (j)atsi-cha-ku-ni (Soto Bravo 19)
    and that coyote say-INF open.mouth for=2OBJ put-throat-3OBJ-INF
    ‘And the coyote says... open your mouth in order for me to put [another piece of fruit] in your mouth’

(8) [...] para-ka ima t’ire-pirin-ga eka k’arhima-pirin-ga jini xanaru
    for-that he eat-CND-SBJ when be.hungry-CND-SBJ there road jimbo (Soto Bravo 33)
    in
    ‘[...] so that he would eat when he was hungry there on the road’

(9) Ji axa-s-p-ka para-ka=jtsï ju-pirin-ga (Soto Bravo 7)
    I send-PRF-PRT-ASSR.1/2 for-that=you come-CND-SBJ
    ‘I had sent (word) for you (formal) to come’

---

full form *jingoni*, while the genitive, the locative, and the objective are marked only by the endings *–ri, –rhu–o, and –ni*, respectively (Villavicencio, *P'orhépecha kaso*).

---

11 Example from San Jerónimo Purenchécuaro, located in the Lake Pátzcuaro region.
12 Example from J. Jesús Díaz Tzirio, located in the meseta purépecha.
13 Example from Puácuaro, located in the Lake Pátzcuaro region.
14 Example from Zopoco, located in the Cañada de los Once Pueblos.
In these sentences, the subordinate clause may be non-finite (examples (5), (6), and (7)) or finite (examples (8) and (9)). When there is a finite clause, the particle *ka*, akin to Spanish *que*, is attached to *para*; however, when *para* introduces an infinitival phrase, *ka* is not added. Unlike its Spanish counterpart, *para* in P’urhepecha can itself take different markers carrying particular morphosyntactic information. Despite this added complexity, the syntax of *para* in the examples above seems rather straightforward, as it consistently acts as a subordinator introducing purpose clauses like the ones shown here.

Although in the data surveyed for this paper, *para* consistently behaves as a purpose clause subordinator, it may have other functions. For instance, Caldera (133-58) reports the use of *para* in modal constructions of necessity with the verb *jatsini* ‘have, have to’, where the borrowed preposition serves as a linking element between *jatsini* and its lexical verb complement, as in the following example:

(10) María jatsi-s-p-ti para k’urhunda arha-ni (Caldera 145)

   have.to-PRF-PRT-ASSR.3 for tamale eat-INF

   ‘Maria had to eat tamales’

This use of *para* is not found in Spanish and could thus be interpreted as an example of contact-induced innovation. This is comparable to the phenomenon observed by Chamoreau (“Contact-induced change”) related to a new way of forming comparative constructions of superiority in P’urhepecha by employing foreign material, in this case *mas... ke entre* < Spanish *más... que entre* (Lit. more... than between), whose specific function is found neither in the recipient language nor the source language and, therefore, constitutes another instance of innovation. Thus, given that P’urhepecha continues to evolve in a situation of intense and prolonged contact, it is possible that *para* will be shown to have yet other functions as more studies are conducted.

Let us now turn to another preposition adopted from Spanish. *Asta* (Spanish *hasta*) is also employed as a subordinating conjunction, but it introduces an adverbial type of clause:

---

15 Chamoreau (“Contact-induced change” 53) defines contact-induced innovation as: “structure that emerges as a consequence of contact between two languages and that diverges from the patterns of both the model language and the replica language.”
In (11) and (12), we clearly see how asta acts as a subordinating conjunction, connecting the two parts of the sentence; in both cases, the second clause provides adverbial information that modifies the verbal action of the first clause: jurhiata inchajtsïkuni ‘the sun sets’ in (11), and niantapka ireta jimbo ‘he arrived in town’ in (12).

It should be noted that one important syntactic consequence of the introduction of Spanish prepositions such as para and asta into the grammar of P’urhepecha is that this allows for a greater degree of specificity in the marking of particular types of clauses via the increased availability of subordinating elements. As a result, particular types of syntactic constructions get associated with more specific linking elements: Purpose clauses are introduced by para while some adverbial clauses are marked by asta.18

Another example with asta is the following:

(13) Ka asta jamberi=ŋa desmaiari-ni (Soto Bravo 36)19
    and even even=EVD faint-INF
    ‘And that she even fainted’

---

16 Example from the island of Yunuén, located in Lake Pátzcuaro.
17 Example from Zopoco, located in the Cañada de los Once Pueblos.
18 This development seems to be analogous, for instance, to the increase in the number and specificity of causal connectives, such as since, because, therefore, thus, and then, documented in the history of English (Traugott). Among the possible factors responsible for this change, Traugott (265) includes the influence of other languages, noting: “It is surely not accidental that the new markers of the antecedent-consequent relationship in Middle English are possible calques from French (e.g. for = car, syn = puis que).”
19 Example from San Luis (Surén), located in the meseta purépecha.
This last example illustrates an interesting case of grammatical double marking which has become rather common in P’urhepecha due to grammatical borrowings of this sort and may constitute a sign of further changes to come: The adopted element *asta* is immediately followed by a native element with a similar function. Thus, the meaning of the P’urhepecha word *jamberi* is in effect duplicated by Spanish *asta*. In cases like this one, there does not seem to exist a significant semantic difference between (13) and the corresponding sentence without the borrowed word, i.e., *Ka jamberiŋa desmaia-rini* ‘And that she even fainted’, but more research would be needed to settle this particular question.

Other such cases are *bien sesi* ‘well’ and *mas sanderu* ‘more’, where the first element of the pair is from Spanish (the adverbs *bien* ‘well’ and *más* ‘more’) and the second from P’urhepecha, both seemingly grammatically (and semantically) equivalent.

Another grammatical element from Spanish that has entered P’urhepecha is the manner adverb *komu* < Spanish *como* ‘like, as’.

There exist yet other documented cases of grammatical markers borrowed from Spanish, such as the conjunctions *o* ‘or’ and *pero* ‘but’, and others (Chamoreau, “Grammatical borrowing”).

---

20 There exist yet other documented cases of grammatical markers borrowed from Spanish, such as the conjunctions *o* ‘or’ and *pero* ‘but’, and others (Chamoreau, “Grammatical borrowing”).

21 Example from Puácuaro, located in the area of Lake Pátzcuaro.
ment with an equivalent function. Perhaps this represents a transitional stage where the two markers coexist before the eventual elimination of the native element in favor of the newcomer. In fact, Thomason (152) considers double marking to be “sometimes a transitional phenomenon that occurs when one construction is being replaced by another,” although she also mentions that on occasion it may become permanent. In P’urhepecha, at this point, it is difficult to predict with any certainty what the future of this kind of grammatical juxtaposition will be, that is, whether the native element will give way to the newcomer or whether the two elements will continue to permanently appear side by side as a single but complex unit. The crucial point to keep in mind here is that the double marking data in P’urhepecha accord with widely attested mechanisms of contact-induced language change (Thomason).

We will mention one more possible contact-induced change that may prove to have far-reaching repercussions for the syntax of P’urhepecha: the question of word order. It could indeed prove quite instructive to investigate whether the abundance of modern examples of SVO [subject verb object] word order in P’urhepecha (Chamoreau, “Grammatical borrowing”) is due to a possible shift in progress from SOV [subject object verb] word order and whether this may be due to the influence of Spanish, where SVO is the default, as well as what the long-term consequences of such change could be for other areas of its grammar, such as its system of postpositions, given that an SVO word order usually implies the presence of prepositions. The typological future of P’urhepecha is certainly being written now.

5. INFLUENCE OF P’URHEPECHA ON SPANISH

As mentioned above, the influence of P’urhepecha on Spanish is largely confined to the lexicon; the great majority of lexical items borrowed from P’urhepecha into the Spanish of Michoacán are nouns denoting culinary specialties, plants, trees, some animals, cultural artifacts, and numerous place names. A few of these borrowings have actually become part of Mexican Spanish overall. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that Nahuatl is undoubtedly the

---

22 The question of whether the Spanish spoken by native P’urhepecha speakers who acquire it as a second language has also been affected grammatically is an interesting one but lies outside the scope of this paper.
indigenous Mesoamerican language that has exerted by far the greatest lexical influence on the Spanish of Mexico, as well known nahuatismo like tomate, chocolate, aguacate, and tamal demonstrate, so, in comparison, P’urhepecha may be said to have remained a rather minor influence.

Examples of P’urhepecha words that have become part of the Spanish of Michoacán are the following (Chávez Rivadeneyra, Demišová):23 atapakua (type of culinary dish)24 < atapakua (type of culinary dish), chancharra (type of ant) < xancharu (type of ant), chapata ‘wheat tamale’ < ch’apata ‘wheat tamale’, chünde (type of basket; ‘buttocks, behind’ (informal)) < xundi ‘basket’, chocho ‘grasshopper’ < chocho ‘locust’, churipo (a beef stew dish) < churípu (a beef stew dish), corunda (type of tamale) < k’urbunda ‘corn tamale’, gorupo ‘chicken mite’ < kuru ‘chicken mite’, guanengo/huanengo (type of woman’s shirt) < uanenyu ‘woman’s shirt’, guangoche (type of wide net for carrying a load) < uanochi ‘sack’, guare (any indigenous woman) < uarhi ‘woman’, guinduri ‘ocelot’ < uinduri ‘ocelot’, guiñumo ‘pine tree dead leaves’ < uinumu ‘pine tree dead leaves’, janamo (type of stone used in construction) < xanamu ‘volcanic stone’, napis ‘acorn’ < napisi ‘acorn’, pirecua (any P’urhepecha song) < pirékua ‘song’, puscua (cooked corn to make a drink known as atole/atol) < puskua ‘cooked corn’, tamo ‘corn chaff’ < tamu ‘corn chaff’, tecata ‘crust’ < t’ekata ‘wood splinter’, toquero (corn that is still tender) < t’ojkeri (corn that is still tender), uchepe (type of tamale) < uchepu (type of tamale), yácatu (type of prehispanic structure found in Michoacán) < iakata ‘pyramid’.25 It is certainly the case that many of these words would not be recognized in areas outside of Michoacán, and even within this state some are more widely known than others.

Moreover, there are various names of plants and trees that are of common use in bilingual P’urhepecha areas as well, some of which may have no equivalent in Spanish: apárecua < aparhekua ‘nettle’, carámeceu < karamekua (type of ornamental plant), cirían < siriani ‘Calabash tree’, cuéramo < k’uermamu (type of tree), cundemba < kundemba (type of small tree), tarántacua < tarántakua (type of rubber tree), timbiriche < tumbirichi (bromelia plant), tiripo < tiripu (dodder plant), etc. (Demišová).

---

23 In all of the following examples, the Spanish word is written to the left of the < sign and the source P’urhepecha word to its right.
24 For those terms for which a direct equivalent is not available, an approximate description with the phrase ‘type of’ is given.
25 As was the case with Spanish borrowings into P’urhepecha, the examples of P’urhepecha loans into Spanish do not represent an exhaustive list.
The word guangoche (type of wide net for carrying a load) < uayochi ‘sack’ has apparently given rise to the Mexican Spanish adjective guango ‘loose, baggy’ (Santamaría 573). This is the one adjective widely used in the Spanish of Mexico that could perhaps be traced back to P’urhepecha. One more adjective, possibly of the same origin, also used as a noun, is zataco/sotaco ‘short (person), shorty’ < sataki ‘short’ (Velásquez Gallardo 182). In addition, there are also some proper names taken from the indigenous language, such as the female names Erandi and Eréndira.

Other examples of purepechismos, besides the adjectives guango and sotaco mentioned above, which are used in the Spanish of wider Mexico are (Chávez Rivadeneyra, Demišová): charal (type of small fish found in lakes) < charari (type of small fish found in lakes), cbacuaco ‘oven, chimney’ < chakuakua (small window through which smoke can escape), charanda (alcoholic drink from Michoacán) < charbanda ‘reddish soil’, tacuche ‘suit, elegant outfit’ < takusi ‘fabric, clothing’, tambache ‘bundle, pile’ < t’ambache ‘basket made of sticks’ (Santamaría 1001), and buarachinguarache (type of sandal) < kuarbachichi ‘sandal’. In fact, buarache could possibly constitute the only example of a word of clear P’urhepecha origin known outside of Mexico’s borders; it can actually be found in Webster’s New World Dictionary as an Americanism of Mexican origin in the plural form (huaraches).

As was the case with Spanish borrowings into P’urhepecha, P’urhepecha borrowings into Spanish are adapted to conform to the phonotactic rules of the receiving language; for instance, final –u gets changed to –o (churipo, guanengo) and initial u– [w–], when followed by a vowel, changes to gu– (guare, guanengo).

Other Spanish grammatical rules, such as plural formation, apply categorically as well: guares (guare + s), corundas (corunda + s), uchapos (uchepo + s). This gives rise to examples such as “los purépechas” (the P’urhepecha), where plurality is in fact expressed twice, due to the juxtaposition of the P’urhepecha plural suffix –echa and the Spanish plural ending –s.

6. THE FUTURE OF THE CONTACT BETWEEN P’URHEPECHA AND SPANISH

Given the unavoidable mutual influences exerted by the two languages on each other, clearly reflected in their linguistic borrowings, it is pertinent to
ask ourselves what this situation of long-term linguistic contact may potentially bring for P’urhepecha in the years to come, given its position as the subordinate language vis-à-vis Spanish. Although it is quite difficult to make any firm predictions about the outcome of the contact between the two languages, the future of P’urhepecha in some respects does not appear too promising. Many P’urhepecha speakers, especially the younger generations, do not feel inclined to continue speaking their own mother tongue, as many see Spanish as a more useful and prestigious choice. For instance, in his discussion of the state of general decline of P’urhepecha in Charapan, a town located in the P’urhepecha Plateau, García Mora (59) makes the following observation: “Quizás, en Charapan [el purépecha] fue una lengua que perdió funcionalidad. ¿Para qué me sirve conocerla y menos hablarla? se preguntarán los charapenses en búsqueda de mejores horizontes sociales y económicos.”

In addition, many people migrate from P’urhepecha areas to Spanish monolingual urban areas or to the United States, where they experience yet another situation of linguistic contact, in this case vis-à-vis English, which in many instances triggers a process of shift towards this other language. Hidalgo (57) observes that Mexican census data between 1930 and 1990 show that “all Indian languages are losing ground to Spanish; the preference for Spanish is revealed in the decrease of monolinguals and increase of bilinguals.” Most tellingly, a newspaper article from La Voz de Michoacán, the main paper in the city of Morelia, capital of the state, in 2008 reported that, in the area of the Tarascan Plateau or meseta tarasca, only one out of ten P’urhepecha people speak their mother tongue anymore, and it is only older adults who do. The status of the language in general is deemed “incierto” (uncertain) at this point. Additionally, Chamoreau (“Contact-induced change” 53) indicates that, “Purepecha presents a situation of intense contact and the characteristics of a shift situation, since the changes are mainly in phonology and morphosyntax.”

With an overall rate of bilingualism at present as high as 85%, P’urhepecha is considered a medium-vitality language by Cifuentes and Moctezuma,
who express some reservations about the state of the four indigenous languages traditionally associated with Mexican national identity: “Interestingly enough, the languages that have been used as symbols of nationalism in the past two centuries (Nahuatl, Maya, Purhepecha and Zapotec) do not exhibit the symptoms that guarantee vitality” (Cifuentes and Moctezuma 242). Although the situation is definitely not homogenous in all Purhepecha communities, without a doubt, more needs to be done in terms of governmental and educational policies designed to aid in language conservation and promotion so that Purhepecha can get the support it merits and the opportunity to thrive now and into the future. Moreover, although bilingual education is supposed to be in place in Purhepecha areas, it is the case that bilingual education is applied inconsistently and sometimes not at all (Chávez Rivadeneyra 96-98; Ragone and Marr 117), and, according to Demišová (68, 72-76), the type of bilingual education applied is the transitional type, where the indigenous language is only employed as a helping strategy in achieving the goal of having students master the Spanish language.

In addition, there is a great lack of well-trained educators who can deliver bilingual curricula. The SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública), Mexico’s Department of Education, produces and publishes texts in Purhepecha for use in elementary schools; these texts are distributed free of charge to children attending school in the areas where Purhepecha is spoken. The textbooks are available for all six grades of elementary school. However, a further problem arises due to the fact that the texts follow linguistic conventions that have been recommended by linguists working with the SEP but which are at odds with what the indigenous communities are familiar with from years of using Spanish (i.e., Spanish orthography) to write Purhepecha. One such example is the use of p in a word like the postposition jimbo ‘in’, which is written as jimpo, given that there is a stop voicing rule that applies after nasals. As one can imagine, this rule may be clear to the linguist but not necessarily so to the untrained native speaker. The end result is that these official textbooks are often abandoned altogether in favor of other materials prepared by the school teachers themselves, with the consequent lack of standardization and academic rigor.

Other than elementary-school textbooks, there exists a critical need for all kinds of pedagogical materials in Purhepecha, such as dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks for higher levels. Such materials are essential as teaching tools to be able to impart the knowledge of the language to others and as research tools for linguists in the fulfillment of the discipline’s goals of documenting,
analyzing, and helping to preserve as many of the world’s languages as possible. It is encouraging, however, to see that in spite of all the present obstacles, there are important efforts on the part of various P’urhepecha communities and organizations, some of them with aid from the federal or state government, to continue promoting the P’urhepecha language and pass it on to the newer generations. Some of the activities that have been organized are language workshops and literary contests, where the winning author gets a prize that includes a monetary reward. Especially significant is the fact that there are now a few institutions of higher education in the state of Michoacán that offer language courses and/or content courses in P’urhepecha. For instance, Michoacán’s state university in Morelia offers several P’urhepecha language courses; its academic program consists of up to nine semesters, where students can advance from beginners to intermediate and advanced level. The courses are open to both heritage and non-heritage speakers. P’urhepecha heritage students thus have an opportunity to formally learn the language of their ancestors, and, as a consequence, they usually report feeling a sense of pride and satisfaction because the language is given an important place in the mainstream society.\footnote{However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the survival of any endangered language crucially depends on intergenerational transmission, without which any other efforts may end up proving insufficient (cf. Nettle and Romaine 178).}

7. CONCLUSION

P’urhepecha is a language with no known relatives today, and its detailed study should add to the body of work that seeks to provide us with a better understanding of the linguistic characteristics of the languages of Mesoamerica while the study of its contact with a dominant language like Spanish can shed light on the specific ways in which languages are transformed in such situations. From this brief survey, we find that such intense and prolonged contact between the Spanish of Michoacán and P’urhepecha has resulted in numerous Spanish borrowings that have become part of contemporary P’urhepecha and has also contributed to the adoption, to a lesser extent, of P’urhepecha terms in Spanish. Interestingly enough, whereas P’urhepecha has adopted from Spanish not only content words (nouns, adjectives, and verbs) but even grammatical elements, such as \textit{para} and \textit{hasta}, Spanish has not done the same,
limiting its borrowings from the indigenous language mainly to nouns designating cultural items, flora, fauna, and a relatively large number of toponyms.

The hegemony of Spanish as a dominant global language continues to call into question the very survival of the various indigenous languages in Latin America, and P’urhepecha is no exception. In spite of the positive steps that have been taken towards the goal of preserving the language, sound educational and cultural policies will be necessary to counteract and possibly even reverse any situation of language shift that may be taking place in the remaining P’urhepecha-speaking communities. Finally, further research is needed to determine what other linguistic features besides the ones discussed here may have been transferred from Spanish to P’urhepecha (as well as from P’urhepecha to Spanish) and just how much the P’urhepecha language might have been affected typologically by Spanish, and whether all of this will prove to have major effects on other areas of its grammar in the years to come.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: first person</td>
<td>INTR: intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: second person</td>
<td>ITR: iterative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: third person</td>
<td>LOC: locative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSR: assertive</td>
<td>NML: nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CND: conditional</td>
<td>OBJ: objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAU: causative</td>
<td>PL: plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVD: evidential</td>
<td>PRF: perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAB: habitual</td>
<td>PRG: progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF: infinitive</td>
<td>PRT: preterite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT: interrogative</td>
<td>SBJ: subjunctive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WORKS CITED**


