

Enseñanzas de las interpretaciones de Malintzin en la actualidad Teachings of the interpretations of Malintzin in today's context

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Abstract:

In *Three Times Three.. In Malintzin's Code: Nine Approaches to her figure*, Yasnaya revisits one of the characters whom possibly a large part of Mexicans encounter during their early years of history class in primary school. That female character, proficient in the Spanish language, "facilitated" the interaction between the Spaniards and the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán during the conquest, from which the term "malinchista" or "malinchismo" derives, denoting disdain towards things about Mexico. While the semantic process of words results from multiple factors within language and society, Yasnaya proposes a reclamation of the figure and name of the character from which these adjectives arise, Malintzin.

Keywords:

Malintzin, Spanish, Indigenous languages, Mexico, multilingualism

Resumen:

En *Tres veces tres. En clave Malintzin: Nueve aproximaciones a su figura*, Yásnaya retoma a uno de los personajes con el cual posiblemente gran parte de los mexicanos se encuentran cuando cursan los primeros años de clase de historia en la escuela primaria. Aquel personaje femenino con dominio de la lengua española que "facilitó" la interacción de los españoles con los habitantes de Tenochtitlán en tiempos de la conquista, y de la cual deriva esa palabra usada para el desprecio de lo que se tiene o lo perteneciente a México: "malinchista" o "malinchismo". Si bien el proceso semántico de las palabras es resultado de múltiples factores de la lengua y la sociedad, Yasnaya hace una propuesta de reivindicación a la figura y nombre del personaje del cual surgen estos adjetivos, Malintzin.

Palabras Clave:

Malintzin, Español, Lenguas indígenas, México, multilingüismo

Introduction

As is well known, Yásnaya is currently one of the most important figures in the field of linguistics in Mexico, particularly in matters concerning indigenous languages. Her political activism, ranging from tweets, books, appearances in interviews, podcasts, etc., has always encouraged her audience not only to rethink the current linguistic situation of Mexico but also the historical and political context in which events occur that have a direct impact on the language, as she would say in one of her titles alongside Gloria Anzaldúa and Ruperta Bautista, "the linguistic is political" (Putsktu'u: Ja putsk jëts ja tu'u).

Malintzin: A New Look at an Overlooked Icon

In "Three Times Three," Yásnaya revisits one of the characters with whom possibly a significant portion of Mexicans come across during their early years of history classes in primary school. That female character, proficient in the Spanish language, who "facilitated" the interaction between the Spaniards and the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán during the conquest period, and from whom derives the word used to express disdain towards things about Mexico, "malinchista" or "malinchismo". While the semantic evolution of words is the result of multiple factors within language and society, Yásnaya proposes a reclamation of the name of the character from whom these adjectives originate, Malintzin.

The text, as its title suggests and in response to the constant reexamination of the colonial era in Mexico,

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consists of nine chapters in which the figure of Malintzin is approached from various perspectives. Although the book is divided into nine chapters, it primarily explores three axes: her role as an interpreter, as a woman, and as a historical figure.

Nine approaches to Malintzin

The book begins with "A Name: Malintzin and Malinche," dedicating this chapter primarily to understanding the process behind the names of Malintzin and the reasons for their existence. Subsequently, the significance of each of the interpreter's names is intertwined with Chapter Two, "Dance as Text," which describes Malintzin's role based on two different narratives: one from oral tradition, the dances of communities from various towns, and another from written tradition. As a result of oral traditions and dances, the example of Oaxacalifornia is presented, a place recreated by Zapotec communities from the Sierra Norte Oaxaca, Mexico, in Los Angeles, United States. Yásnaya recounts the importance of the Dance of the Malinche and the honor felt by those chosen to represent her, mirroring the sentiments in Teotitlán del Valle in Oaxaca, where girls enter a long queue from birth to eventually have the opportunity to represent Malintzin in the famous Dance of the Feather. While this chapter highlights the importance of the Dance of the Malinche, Yásnaya emphasizes the reconstruction of narratives surrounding Malinche. She mentions the trial initiated by María Jaramillo (Malintzin's daughter), and historical vestiges found in the Lienzos de Tlaxcala, which position the interpreter as a figure of great importance during the wars. These opposing arguments, coupled with the transformation that the figure of Malinche underwent over the years and in written tradition, are illustrated with the example of the official and national impoverishment of Malintzin's figure at the hands of the Mexican writer and Nobel Prize winner in literature of the '90s. In this regard, as a demonstration of the accreditation of an "official history," in the following chapter titled "Malintzin and the Conquest," Yásnaya argues that the current perception of Malintzin as a traitor and guilty of the conquest is simply a distraction to diminish the importance of the role of the Mexican state as the current oppressor of indigenous peoples. In this sense, it would be pertinent to expand the vision to the various distractions currently faced by the Mexican state and society, as reading indigenous peoples synchronically within a system of racist and colonialist oppression also serves as a distraction from the actual obstacles and systems that not only occur in the Mexican state.

In Chapter Four, "Betrayal," the following questions are posed: Who can be considered "her people" for a woman

who, in her puberty, was sold as a slave, trafficked by Tenochcas, and handed over by her Mayan owners to the Spaniards? To whom did Malintzin owe loyalty? The answers and reflections surrounding these questions are developed throughout this chapter, presenting relevant data about Malintzin's social environment and origin, Olutla on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, belonging to Coatzacoalcos, among others, to question whether betrayal was ever indeed Malintzin's role. Similarly, in Chapter Seven, "Love," Yásnaya highlights, as in "Betrayal," another of the misconceptions created about the interpreter of the Spaniards. Neither Malintzin nor Hernán Cortés came from societies where marriage was seen as the result of a romantic relationship. On the contrary, in Malinche's context, marriage served as a facilitator of rights and better conditions in the new social system, a situation like that still experienced in many societies today. Contrary to the novelization of the Conquest period, Malintzin's marriage to Juan Jaramillo does not represent an episode of love and tragedy; rather, it is a kind of recognition from Cortés towards her.

Chapters five, six, eight, and nine are worth comprehending as a cohesive unit, as they not only continue the approach to Malintzin but also propose a parallel critical perspective.

The fifth chapter, titled in Mixe as "Ku' ää," which in Spanish the author translates as "who possess the language" or "who owns the language" along with chapter eight, "Interpreters," seeks to describe the potential linguistic path that Malintzin traversed during her role as an interpreter. Additionally, it proposes the valorization of this intellectual pursuit's contemporary activity, as historian Yanna Yannakakis named it "the art of being in between." In "Ku' ää," the current situation of Mexico's linguistic landscape is glimpsed, wherein despite the predominance of Spanish, there exist territories where multiple languages coexist. This plurilingual situation, as mentioned by Yasnaya, should be considered natural, as it was what allowed Malintzin to attain the significant role she played. Yásnaya adds that a plurilingual situation would enable the construction of societies with greater sensitivity and intercultural understanding, which is currently urgently needed within Mexican language policies, as the health, educational, and judicial systems, among others, still exclude individuals who, for various reasons, have languages different from Spanish. In this regard, chapter eight, "Interpreters," emphasizes the importance of specialists within the various processes involving Indigenous languages and Spanish to prevent the violation of rights that currently occur not only in legal proceedings but also in healthcare, education, and all branches of public administration.

The remaining two chapters, Chapter Six, "Warp and Weft" and Chapter Nine, "Malintzin Indigenous?", primarily propose reflection and reevaluation of what is understood as indigenous. In chapter six, the historical importance of the huipil in creating identity and collective belonging is highlighted. Yásnaya reminds the reader that the significance of this garment is not recent, as reflected in the *Liezos de Tlaxcala*, where Malintzin is depicted wearing huipiles. Therefore, despite the discrimination that members of communities may sometimes face when wearing it due to it being considered a symbol of backwardness and poverty, the importance of this garment transcends its beauty. The lines of this chapter encourage reflection from the present context to the past, that is, to return to the value that garments like huipiles, or multilingualism, mentioned in chapter five, had for identity in the case of huipiles and the progress of communities in the case of languages.

In the last chapter, the question "Malintzin Indigenous?" is addressed, which, although redundant, is a question that all "indigenous" people ask themselves when acknowledging themselves as "indigenous." In this section, Yásnaya concludes the book with one of the themes that mobilized her political activism, the importance of self-identification. The Mixe linguist addresses the category "Indigenous," which in various languages and Mixe has no equivalent word. Therefore, in her final lines, she sows the seed of mobilization with which she seeks to reverse and re-establish symmetrical intercultural relationships.

Conclusion

through nine approaches, Yásnaya leads us to a fairer understanding of the figure of Malintzin, one in which the character of Olutla, a woman and a polyglot, is comprehended and recognized for her role as an interpreter within the context in which she operated. Reinterpretations from current cultural-political contexts would fall back into the error of viewing her solely as the woman in love with the white man on horseback. On the other hand, integrating the resemantization of Malintzin into the current context of women or Indigenous peoples to avoid the cancellation of her figure would deprive us of the details and richness of the character and the period she represents, as demonstrated in readings of the *Lienzos de Tlaxcala*, where the importance of the woman lay not solely in her gender but in her role within the alliances formed during this historical period. As mentioned by archaeologist Margarita Cossich Vielman and historian-anthropologist Federico Navarrete Linares, among other researchers on the topic, the conquest of

Mexico demands a continuous dialogue regarding the conflicts and alliances that took place during those times so that the richness of the subject can be fully explored. Similarly, this applies to the historical figure represented by Malintzin.

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