

Main Lexical Features of the Oaxacan Variety of Spanish in the 19th/20th Century (Mexico)

This work offers a description of the main lexical characteristics found in the Mexican Spanish variety by focusing on the language use of official exclusively male text producers in multiethnic and multilingual Oaxaca de Juárez from 1890 to 1911. Relevant works of Spanish linguistic historiography still postulate the beginning of an “español modern” from the 18th/19th century onwards. But the present qualitative study shows, based on a corpus, that diverse lexical variation was still realized in official documents in the 19th/20th century, as *rubio* and *claro* to characterize exclusively foreign sex-workers or as a limited lexeme repertoire to describe nose(shape), whereas a broad repertoire to characterize skin color is conspicuous. Furthermore, the data helps us to consider a variety that is still conspicuously absent in Spanish language history.

Keywords: Spanish language history, Mexican Spanish, Oaxacan variety, Lexical variation

Lexikalische Merkmale der diatopischen Varietät des Spanischen in Oaxaca de Juárez im 19./20. Jahrhundert

Der Beitrag analysiert lexikalische Merkmale der sprachlichen Varietät des mexikanischen Spanisch, indem sie sich auf den Sprachgebrauch offizieller ausschließlich männlicher Textproduzenten im multiethnischen und mehrsprachigen Oaxaca de Juárez zwischen 1890 und 1911 konzentriert. Während einschlägige Werke der spanischen Sprachgeschichtsschreibung den Beginn eines „español moderno“ ab dem 18./19. Jahrhundert postulieren, kann die vorliegende qualitative Studie unter Rückgriff auf ein eigens erstelltes Korpus vielfältige lexikalische Variationen aufzeigen, wie bspw. *rubio* und *claro* zur Beschreibung ausschließlich ausländischer Prostituierten oder ein limitiertes Lexemrepertoire zur Bezeichnung der Nasen(form), wohingegen ein breites Repertoire zur Charakterisierung der Hautfarbe auffällt, die in offiziellen Dokumenten realisiert wurden. Darüber hinaus helfen uns die gefundenen Daten, eine Vielfalt zu berücksichtigen, die in der spanischen Sprachgeschichte bislang immer noch zu wenig berücksichtigt wird.

Schlüsselwörter: spanische Sprachgeschichte, mexikanisches Spanisch, sprachliche Varietät von Oaxaca, lexikalische Variation

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1. Approach to the linguistic history of Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico

Mexico is currently the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world (see Flores Farfán 2000: 87). At the same time, with its multilingual and multiethnic population, it exhibits significant linguistic and cultural diversity. In the 21st century, in

addition to the official language Spanish, 68¹ Amerindian languages from 11 different language families are listed as official languages of the Mexican state, which in turn can be subdivided into more than 350 linguistic varieties (see INALI Secretaría de Cultura 2018).² It is therefore not surprising that in the linguistic discussion of Spanish in Mexico, the focus is in particular on language contact phenomena between the Ibero-Romance language and various Amerindian languages, other multilingual aspects in Mexican speech community, or revitalization tendencies of Amerindian languages. Mainly the Amerindian languages of Mexico with the currently highest active number of speakers are being investigated, leading to numerous works on language contact Nahuatl-Spanish (Flores Farfán 2017), Maya-Spanish (Uth 2021), Mixtec-Spanish (Pfadenhauer 2021) or Otomí-Spanish (Zimmermann 2010). The above also applies to the current, multiethnic and multilingual population composition in the state of Oaxaca. In the state with the highest number of speakers of Amerindian languages, approximately 31.2 % of the population speaks an indigenous language in 2020 (see INEGI 2020). Linguistic works on the communicative space of Oaxaca focus on socio-, ethno-, and plurilinguistic aspects in the context of the current Spanish-Zapotec cultural and communicative contact (Schrader-Kniffki 2008), although most of the other Indo-Mexican languages of Oaxaca are also studied synchronously in relation to Spanish (Herrera Zendejas 2014).

The southern Mexican city of Oaxaca de Juárez is the capital of the state of the same name, which borders the state of Guerrero to the west, Puebla to the northwest, Veracruz to the northeast, and Chiapas to the east. The speech community of this very region is the focus of this article. Oaxaca is located in the Valle Central of the Sierra Madre del Sur, at the intersection of the three valleys Valle de Tlacolula, Valle de de Zimatlán and Valle de Etlá. The geographically peripheral location (see Murphy/Winter/Morris 1999: 5) of the southeastern state in general and that of the city of Oaxaca in particular led for a long time to a low historical, linguistic focus on this region. For a long time, the focus of linguistic and historical research on the speech community or state of Oaxaca was directed towards the prehispanic era and the colonial period, the independence phase, and the revolution. The phase from the mid-19th century to the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century has only recently become the focus of scholarly discussion.

In addition to a large number of recent publications on the (socio-, ethno-, and contact-) linguistic relationship between Mexican Spanish and Amerindian languages in general, there have been, esp. since the relevant “Atlas lingüístico de México” (Lope Blanch 1990–2000), numerous (socio-)linguistic works examining diatopic,

¹ The number vary depending on the level of interest and the distinguishing criteria used (see Flores Farfán 2008: 33).

² Indigenous languages were first officially defined in the 1992 Constitution. It was not until 2003 that they were recognized as **lenguas nacionales** alongside Spanish in the “Ley general de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas”.

diastratic, and diaphasic aspects of Spanish in Mexico in the phonetic-phonological, morpho-syntactic, and lexical domains (e. g., Moreno de Alba 2003, Alvar López ⁴2000, Lope Blanch ⁴2010, 1983). Although Spanish in the communicative space of Oaxaca has sporadically found its way into general dialectological (Moreno de Alba 2003) or specific-local (Martín Butrageño 2019, Espinosa Vázquez 2008) studies, it has not been sufficiently investigated to date. Garza Cuarón (1987) continues to be the most exhaustive study of synchronic lexical and phonetic-phonological variation as well as morpho-syntactic variation in Oaxaca City Spanish.

In research on historical linguistics, the multilingual situation in the communicative space of Oaxaca is increasingly gaining wide attention. Also diachronic and/or historical-synchronous works on Spanish in the Oaxaca region focuses on language contact phenomena or linguistic-applied aspects in the interdisciplinary intersection between linguistics and translation (e. g., Schrader-Kniffki/Yannakakis 2021). On the one hand, historical (socio-)linguistics study of Spanish in the present-day state of Oaxaca is still young. On the other hand, it focuses mainly on the colonial era of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (1535–1821). Diachronic and/or historical linguistics work for Spanish in other regions of Mexico also focuses on the colonial period (Company Company 2005, García Carillo 1988). On the one hand, a lack of research interest in the language history of Oaxaca can be justified by the fact that the linguistic features of Spanish in the communicative space of Oaxaca supposedly coincided with those of other Mexican varieties (Alvar López 2010: 89). On the other hand, it seems important to me to point out that in Spanish linguistic historiography the beginning of **español moderno** is postulated from the 18th/19th century onwards (see Lapesa 2008: 352–387, Cano Aguilar ⁷2008: 255–266). For a large number of linguists, this means that the Spanish of the 19th and 20th centuries no longer needs to be studied in Spanish, diachronic and/or historical linguistics works, since essential developmental processes of the Spanish language had stabilized from the 18th century onwards as it is, and language development was consequently already complete: “Con el siglo XVIII puede decirse que concluyen los grandes procesos históricos constitutivos de la lengua española. A partir de entonces, no sólo estamos ante el español moderno, sino, sobre todo, ante una lengua que ha alcanzado su estabilidad [...]” (Cano Aguilar ⁷2008: 255).

However, this limiting perspective on Spanish language historiography fails to recognize the dynamic and transformative character of language (see Pons/Toledo y Huerta 2016). Considering the Mexican variety of Spanish as a fully developed language at the end of the 19th century seems to me to be thought too short, considering the manifold ethnolinguistic contact situations in the Mexican communication space in general and in the state of Oaxaca in particular. Further, linguistic policy measures,³ such as the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua, founded in 1875, must also be taken into account in the study of the Spanish language history in

³ For a detailed discussion of Mexican language policy, see Zimmermann (³2004).

the region of Oaxaca at the turn of the century; after all, since its installation there has been numerous attempts to standardize⁴ Mexican Spanish as a whole and to establish it on an overall social and institutional level (see Villavicencio 2010: 1101). Finally, with this article I would like to contribute to the language history research of Spanish in the communicative space of Oaxaca in the time of the so-called Porfirian era (1876–1911) by pointing out possible occurring linguistic variations in the present corpus. This is the first linguistic examination of the “registros fotográficos de mujeres públicas”, which have not yet been analyzed linguistically on a lexical level.⁵ The so-called **registros** contain profile-like libretas of, sex workers, among others, which were made by official employees of the state in the course of the introduction and establishment of the state-regulatory system (Bailón 2012: 267); this being one of many measures to modernize Mexico at the time of the Porfirian⁶ era. The aim of this paper is to collect genuine lexical variation linguistic data on the state of language in Oaxaca de Juárez at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the underlying corpus.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data formation

The data basis of this study is formed by historical, work-related libretas, which were made at the time of presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) in the southern Mexican city of Oaxaca de Juárez to control, monitor and classify sex workers who were present in the public sphere. The libretas studied here come from the collections “registros de mujeres públicas” and “registros de prostitutas” from 1890 to 1911, which are archived in the “Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca” (AHMCO). The corpus relevant to the analysis was compiled by me during three research stays in Oaxaca de Juárez (February 2018; August 2018; February/March 2019).

In the period studied here, 1890 to 1911, there are a total of 935 libretas of sex workers in the AHMCO of which 212 libretas were selected by me due to their completeness, i.e., a complete profile-like description of the sex workers, and readability.

2.2 Transcription

Although there are no universal transcription rules for the implementation of paleographic transcriptions, i.e., accurate, faithful reproduction, I agree with Arias Álvarez et al. (2014: 31) and Tanodi (2000: 260) that rules should be established for the

⁴ On the term linguistic norm see Polzin-Haumann (2013: 45).

⁵ For phono-graphical features of the linguistic variety of Spanish of Oaxaca de Juárez see Harjus, L. (in press).

⁶ In November 1876, General Porfirio Díaz, a native of Oaxaca de Juárez, came to power through non-constitutional means.

paleographic transcription of handwritten documents. In this paper, I am guided by transcription rules derived from science of history⁷ as well as those introduced by the Comité internacional de Diplomática and the initiators of the Red CHARTA project, among others.

Finally, for an exhaustive historical linguistics analysis of the documents at hand, I conducted a paleographic transcription of the libretas with the MAXQDA software (see chapter 2.5), which is essential for linguistic studies (see Dipper/Kwekkeboom 2018: 102). Accordingly, punctuation is set or omitted according to the original (see Branca-Rosoff/Schneider 1994: 29), abbreviations, such as *id.* (for “*idéntico*”), were retained as they appear in the historical original. In addition, the orthography, the hyphenation, and the concatenation remain without the addition of hyphens, as well as majuscules and minuscules. Likewise, in the transcription of crossed-out or corrected elements, I followed the same procedure. Illegible passages caused by yellowing or torn paper have been marked as illegible [unreadable] in the transcription by square brackets and italics. In case the illegibility refers to individual graphemes, I show these in square brackets.

2.3 Signature and Citation

The signatures of the transcribed documents of the entire corpus are composed of the following information according to the listed order:

Abbreviation *L* for “*libreta*” to designate the document type; Year of origin of the respective “*libreta*”; Numbering according to the transcription order; Nationality of the sex worker (legend: **M** = Mexico, incl. Oaxaca; **LA** = other Latin American countries, followed by the initial letter for the respective country; **USA** = United States of America; **EUR** = Europe and followed by the respective country abbreviation, e.g. **ESP** = Spain, **ITA** = Italy, **FRA** = France, **AUT** = Austria). If an example is cited from the corpus, the respective signature is placed after it.

2.4 Methodology of the data analysis

In accordance with qualitatively oriented linguistic research projects, this article also considers the criteria of intersubjective comprehensibility of methodological analysis steps. The goal of qualitative content analysis is the systematic, rule-guided segmentation, categorization, and coding of communication content as well as formal and linguistic aspects in written material (see Mayring ¹²2015: 15). In this paper, I choose an inductive approach, which is why the structured bundling of information is an important part of this systematic procedure. In a subsequent

⁷ This is an orientation to the transcription rules in history and not an unreflective adoption of the rules. By the fact that the historical-scientific interest lies differently than in the linguistics not primarily in the language, linguistic changes are permitted in the historical-scientific-paleographic transcription. However, this is not adopted for the investigation aimed at here.

step, these are assigned to so-called categories, so that an inductively derived system of categories emerges in a cyclical process of checking and matching on the material (see Kuckartz ³2016: 47). Thus, I follow a data-driven approach by developing categories or subcategories inductively on the data material through open coding (see Flick ⁶2014: 388). Therefore, the inductively derived main category ‘Linguistic Variables’ emerged with three subcategories ‘Lexic’, ‘Morphosyntax’, and ‘Phonography’. In turn, these are divided into further subcategories, as lexems for *hair/hair color, face* or *physical conditions/diseases*, of which only the first subcategory ‘Lexic’ is presented in this paper. On the basis of lexical realizations in the libretas studied here, the linguistic analysis that is presented in chapter 3 can contribute to the Spanish language history of Mexico.

2.5 Technical realization

The technical realization of the qualitative analysis, as well as the transcriptions of the libretas, is done with the software MAXQDA (version Analytics Pro) for computer-assisted qualitative data and text analysis. Such software programs are not only used in social science studies, but also increasingly leveraged in linguistic work in Romance studies (see Montemayor Gracia 2017). The corpus on which this study is based represents a closed corpus (see Bendel Larcher 2015: 53), which – as explained earlier – was compiled according to predefined criteria and was not extended by additional texts or images. This allowed managing the data and further processing it in the software program following the transcriptions.

3. Main lexical features

Mexico, like Spanish America as a whole, does not form a linguistically homogeneous area. Therefore, the present account does not claim to provide a complete dialectal-sociolinguistic breakdown of Mexican Spanish at the time of the Porfirian era. In any case, a detailed account of all the characteristic features of Mexican Spanish is not feasible based on the material examined here, because although the documents were produced in Oaxaca de Juárez, it is not known where the exclusively male scribes came from. Nevertheless, it is for sure that they were at least in Oaxaca de Juárez, which is why I consider the language studied here in the libretas part of the language history of Mexican Spanish. With this in mind, the following chapter focuses on some selected structural features of Oaxaca de Juárez Spanish at the lexical level.⁸

⁸ The linguistic features presented here do not occur exclusively in Mexico and/or Oaxaca. However, reference is not made each time to diatopic distribution throughout the Hispanophone region. For a detailed account of diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic occurrences see Lapesa (2008), Penny (2000), Lipski (1994), Moreno Fernández (1993), Fontanella de Weinberg (²1993), and Lope Blanch (1968).

The lexis of Mexican Spanish, like the vocabulary of American varieties⁹ as a whole, is characterized by diatopic, diaphasic, and diastratic variation. As mentioned at the beginning, the analysis of historical documents, does not claim to be exhaustive.

Work on historical lexicology in Latin America, such as by Vázquez Laslop, Zimmermann, and Segovia (2011), is manifold. Pioneering contributions to (historical) lexicology in Mexico have been made by Lara (esp. 1997; 1990), Lara, Ham Chancle and García Hidalgo (1979), Company Company/Van Eerdewegh (esp. 2002), and Lope Blanch (1990–2000; 1969), among others. Current projects and digital historical dictionaries, such as “Corpus Histórico del Español en México” (CHEM), “Corpus Electrónico del Español Colonial Mexicano” (CORECOM), and the “Corpus Diacrónico y Diatópico del Español de América” (CORDIAM) project, led by Company Company/Bertolotti, contribute to the comprehensive linguistic analysis of historical documents as well, and they allow a broad access to historical corpora for the purpose of diachronic studies. So far, the only historical linguistics work available on lexis for the Spanish variety in the state of Oaxaca is by Schrader-Kniffki (see e.g., 2021 for the 17th century).

The analysis of the 19th/20th century historical documents available here shows a wide variation in lexis. Lexical peculiarities can be discerned, among other things, in the designation of body regions, because the libretas were used as a kind of identity and permission card. In the section hair and hair color, in addition to the common designation of hair as *pelo*¹⁰ (see e.g. L1890–4-M; L1895–9-EUR-AUT; L1900–3-M; L1910–5-LA-CUB) the lexeme *cabello* (see e.g. L1899–2-M; L1899–3-M; L1899–4-M; L1899–7-M) is also used in the historical documents. The lexeme *cabello* derives from the Latin noun *CAPILLUS* and is first documented in 1050, according to the etymological dictionary of Corominas (1983: 113). In her synchronic study of the urban variety of Oaxacan Spanish, Garza Cuarón states that both denominations are used synonymously, and their use is not diatopically restricted (1987: 53).

Regarding the naming of hair colors, it is noticeable that the lexeme *güero*, which even today occurs almost exclusively in Mexico (see Moreno de Alba 2003: 544) and semantically corresponds to the adjective *claro* (Garza Cuarón 1987: 53), does not occur in the documents available here. The lexemes *rubio* (see e.g. L1893–16-EUR-ITA; L1898–5-M; L1902–7-M; L1905–13-EUR-ESP; L1905–5-LA-CUB; L1905–12-USA) and *claro* (see e.g. L1892–13-EUR-ESP; L1907–10-M), on the other hand, are used in the corpus to describe light and blond hair, respectively. The lexeme *rubio* is used to describe blond hair throughout the Spanish speaking world region, except for Guatemala (*canche*), parts of Central America (*chele*), Venezuela (*catire*), and

⁹ For an overview of Spanish heritage vocabulary in Spanish American lexis and borrowings from indigenous and African languages into American Spanish, see, for example, Buesa Oliver/Enguita Utrilla (1992) and Moreno de Alba (1992).

¹⁰ CHEM dates the written use of *pelo* for 1831.

Ecuador (*gringo*) (see Moreno de Alba 2015: 544). In this context, it is noticeable that the writers only refer to the hair color of non-Mexican. Instead Spanish American and European sex workers are described as light or blond hair, respectively. This aspect is interesting because, among other things, one of the government action was to construct a global-dynamic modern-urban Oaxaca, which was to be achieved in the brothel milieu through international migration of light-skinned women (see Bailón Vázquez 2012: 133).

The lexeme combination *castaño oscuro/claro* (see e. g. L1890–2-M; L1892–20-M; L1893–11-EUR-ESP; L1893–8-EUR-ESP/LA-CUB; L1895–8-EUR-ESP; L1901–5-EUR-ESP; L1901–9-LA-CUB; L1903–7-M) is also used in the corpus to describe hair color. Garza Cuarón notes in her synchronic study that these lexemes are used exclusively by individuals from higher social groups (1987: 53). The remaining social groups use the term *coyuche* (Garza Cuarón 1987, 53), which, however, does not occur in the historical corpus presented here.

In the category face, lexical peculiarities in the description of the ears, cheeks, and nose are particularly observant. In a libreta from 1901, the sex worker is additionally described as *nopal macho* (see e. g. L1901–13-M). This added designation is positioned above the photograph contained in the libreta. Consequently, it is not explicit which descriptive category it refers to. In her corpus, Garza Cuarón (1987) explains the use of the lexeme *nopal* as follows:

“Se dice oreja en todos los niveles; el lóbulo de la oreja siempre recibe el nombre de nopal o nopalito, motivado tal vez por la forma y consistencia de la hoja del nopal” (Garza Cuarón 1987: 54).

Also in my corpus the lexeme *nopal*, which originally comes from Náhuatl (NO-PALLI) and thus belongs to the so-called indigenisms¹¹ (see Lope Blanch 2010, 86), is supposed to describe the sex worker's earlobe in more detail. This explanation is suggestive because, despite the uniform and limited vocabulary used to describe sex workers, individual lexemes were used to document specific physical characteristics of sex workers in writing for the purpose of recognition in libretas. The adjectival suffix *macho* possibly refers to the hermaphroditism of some plants, which includes the plant genus *Opuntia* (cactus family). The lexeme *macho* in this context could therefore be a reference to peculiarities in the structure of the earlobe, since at least in plants bisexuality has an effect on the flower structure.

Other lexical characteristics of the urban variety of Oaxacan Spanish in the 19th/20th century include the preferred terms *carrillo* (see ex. L1890–6-M; L1893–6-M;

¹¹ Indigenisms refer to borrowings from indigenous languages of Spanish America into Spanish. Most of them refer to flora and fauna, toponyms and hydronyms, and objects of daily use. For a study of the vitality of indigenisms in Mexico, see Lope Blanch (1979). Indigenisms from the Náhuatl in particular have found their way into Mexican Spanish (see Moreno de Alba 2008: 522), whereas indigenous languages have had little influence on Mexican Spanish at the phonetic-phonological and grammatical levels.

L1900–3-M; L1906–5-M) for cheek, and *chata* (see e.g., L1890–4-M; L1895–2-M; L1902–8-M; L1907–12-M; L1911–2-M) and *aguileña* (see e.g., L1893–13-M; L1893–16-EUR-ITA; L1894–1-EUR-ESP; L1898–4-M; L1906–11-M) to describe the nose. The etymological origin of the lexeme *carrillo*, first dated in European Spanish for 1241, is not clear. Corominas assumes that *carrillo* is a diminutive of *carro* (³1983: 135). In CHEM, the use of *carrillo* in Latinamerica is documented for 1626 at the earliest. Garza Cuarón, in her work for 1980, points out that the lexeme *mejilla* is used exclusively by the upper social class and *carrillo* tends to be used by the middle and lower classes (1987: 55). In the historical corpus presented here, too, the lexeme *carrillo* is used in the majority of cases instead of *mejilla* (see e. g. L1903–4-M; L1903–6-M; L1906–10-M).

About the designation of the nose(shapes), we can also observe a limited lexeme repertoire. In particular, the lexemes *chato* and *aguileña* are used for description. For the description of skin color, an extensive vocabulary is used in the corpus. A large lexical variation can be observed especially in the designation of light-skinned sex workers: *blanco* (see e.g. L1902–5-EUR-ESP), *blanco amarillento* (see e.g. L1906–3-LA-CUB), *claro* (see e.g. L1910–5-LA-CUB), *rosado* (see e.g. L1903–15-M), *pálido* (see e.g. L1904–4-M), etc. What is striking in the corpus here is that the skin color of foreign sex workers in particular, but also of sex workers from other Mexican cities, is predominantly described with the lexeme *apiñonado* (see e.g. L1899–6-M; L1902–3-M; L1903–3-M; L1906–2-M). The skin color of the sex workers of Oaxaca City, on the other hand, is mostly characterized as *morena* (see e.g. L1890–3-M). Semantically, this is significant because the lexeme *apiñonado*, while referring to a darker skin color, is nevertheless somewhat attenuative, as the following definition by the “Academia Mexicana de la Lengua” emphasizes: “adj. Del color del piñón. Se dice, por lo común, de las personas ligeramente morenas”.

Other lexical peculiarities can be found in the terminology of physical conditions or diseases; the sex workers had to participate in regular health checks by selected physicians in order to obtain or prolong the authorization to work as a sex worker. It is therefore interesting that the terminology is limited to only a few lexemes, such as *enfermedad* (see e. g. L1892–24-M) or *enfermó* (see e. g. L1892–19-M), and no detailed information is given about health impairment. Consequently, among other things the use of the lexeme *enfermedad* and its derivatives can be classified in such a way that gender-related physical limitations, such as menstruation and pregnancy, were also expressed exclusively by the euphemism *enfermedad*. Garza Cuarón, in her recent study, also points out that the verb *estar enferma* can denote menstruation or pregnancy in the urban variety of Oaxacan Spanish (1987: 62; 97).

The only disease explicitly mentioned in the libretas at the time of the Porfirian era is chickenpocks, which has been documented in Spain since the 16th century and is currently known as a disease in some Spanish varieties (see Henríquez Ureña 1938: 318). In the libretas, the lexeme *picada de viruelas* (see for example,

L1892–12-M; L1892–20-M; L1897–3-M; L1908–4-M) refers to a disease still common in the red-light milieu in the 19th/20th century, which was also attributed to the lower social classes in Oaxaca de Juárez in particular (see Garza Cuarón 1987: 59).

In the libretas from the 19th/20th centuries, there are also variations at the lexical level in the denomination of sex workers, which is also oriented according to the respective class category and type of prostitution within the profession. On the one hand, the lexeme *pupila* (see, for example, L1898–1-LA-CUB; L1903–8-M; L1905–4-M; L1906–6-EUR-ESP; L1909–1-M; L1910–2-M), is used in the corpus at hand to refer to the sex worker. This very lexeme derives from the Latin 'pupillus' and denotes an underage orphan girl and is first documented for the year 1490 (see Corominas ³1983: 483). On the other hand, there are also numerous examples of the designation of sex workers with the lexeme *mujer/muger pública* (see for example, L1892–21-M; L1894–2-M; L1895–2-M; L1895–1-USA; L1898–4-M; L1907–5-M; L1911–1-M). In this context, it is interesting to note that the lexeme *prostitución* and its derivatives tend to be used in libretas only to title the respective register book as *registro de prostitutas* (see e.g. L1890–8-M; L1895–2-M) or in the collocation *tiene permiso para ejercer la prostitución* (see e.g. L1893–13-M; L1896–3-M; L1911–1-M). In her recent study of Spanish variety in Oaxaca City, Garza Cuarón points out that speakers of higher social groups use the lexeme *prostituta*, whereas *pública* is used in the middle and lower social classes (1987: 65). From an historical linguistics point of view, it is interesting that the Latin etymon 'prostituere' semantically already refers to the fact that an action is performed in public or that something is put on display. The Latin-derived lexeme *prostituere* and thus its derivative *prostitución* are historically attested since the year 1490 (Corominas ³1983: 479). On the lexical level of libretas, it can also be noted that the lexeme *público* semantically emphasizes the public nature of the sex worker's profession. In this context it is not surprising that the use of the lexeme *prostituta* is low in the corpus, because this lexically does not linguistically express the public aspect in an obvious way.

The terminology used to designate or not designate ethnic groups in the libretas is another important aspect, because the Mexican Constitution of 1824 and that of the state of Oaxaca as of 1825 no longer permitted designations, such as "indígena", for ethnic labeling (see Overmyer-Velázquez 2007: 79). The problem that resulted from this legislation was that henceforth other terms had to be found to designate Mexico's indigenous population. Eventually, by 1824, denominations such as *los antes llamados indios*, *los ciudadanos naturales*, *los vecinos naturales*, and *de razón indígena* were common (see Villavicencio 2015: 913–914). For the year 1792, the lexeme *natural de* is recorded in CHEM¹². In the libretas analyzed here between the years 1890 to 1911, the paraphrase of indigenous sex workers as *natural de esta ciudad* (see e.g. L1892–1-M; L1890–7-M; L1892–8-M; L1892–19-M; L1892–25-M; L1892–27-M)

¹² See <http://www.corpus.unam.mx:8080/unificado/index.jsp?c=chem#>, last accessed 10th July 2023.

and natural y vecina de esta ciudad (see e.g. L1892–20-M; L1892–22-M) are found exclusively in 1892.¹³

4. A sort of conclusion

The aim of this article was to contribute to the Spanish language history in the communicative space of Oaxaca on the threshold of the 19th/20th centuries. The first linguistic lexical study with the so-called libretas contained in the “registros fotográficos de mujeres públicas” has been able to show that linguistic variation was present in the communicative space of Oaxaca at the lexical level during the Porfirian era. There are examples of lexeme variation referring to hair and hair color in general and unequal lexeme variation in the use of hair color to describe Oaxacan, Mexican and foreign sex workers. Furthermore, I pointed out that a limited lexeme repertoire, e.g., *nariz chata/aguileña/normal/recta*, were used in the category face, while we could observe an extensive lexical variation in designation of light-skinned sex workers. Moreover, the analysis of the historical documents allows to conclude that there was a limited use to express gender-related physical limitation by using the lexeme *enfermedad* and its derivations. All in all, it should be noted that the use of the analyzed lexical variation in the libretas may indicate lexical peculiarities.

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¹³ (Ethnic) uniformity and equalization at all socio-political levels was an essential component of the construction of a modern Mexico in general and Oaxaca in particular at the time of the Porfirian era (see Overmyer-Velázquez 20016; 2005). Consequently, it is not surprising that only in the first years of the libreta creation can such terms for ethnic identification be found. These paraphrases were not used at all to designate the origin of sex workers from other regions of Mexico or from abroad.

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