

Deconstructing Chile's colonization: Digital re-edition of Indigenous language textbook

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At first glance, it is merely a printed textbook for religious education in a foreign language. But the genesis of the 1903 edition of "Kurze biblische Geschichte für die unteren Schuljahre der katholischen Volksschule" (short biblical history for the lower years of Catholic elementary school), published in the language of the Indigenous Mapuche, provides special insights into the time of missionary work by

the Bavarian Capuchins in Chile.

A digital re-edition project implemented by the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt KU, which has now come to a conclusion, focuses especially on the ambivalent translation and dissemination history of the work.

Through its freely available digital publication, it also contributes to a shared dialog on the colonial past and the revitalization of the Mapuche language and culture in Chile. For the project, the Center for Latin American Studies (ZILAS) at the KU has cooperated with the Andrés Bello Central Archive of the Universidad de Chile in Santiago.

"With this project, we want to make a contribution to the decolonization of mission archives by revealing the intercultural processes of their creation. The digital re-edition makes a previously hard to access record of exchanges between the Bavarian Capuchin missionaries and the Indigenous Mapuche people of southern Chile at the beginning of the 20th century widely accessible," explains ZILAS Director Prof. Dr. Miriam Lay Brander.

The underlying volume in the Mapuzugun language comes from the provincial library of the Bavarian Capuchins, which passed to the KU in 1999. For further discussion, the open-access format makes the re-edition available free of charge in German-, Spanish- and English-speaking countries. In Latin America, access to fee-based databases or access to university libraries quickly poses major barriers.

The re-edition also offers numerous links to other archives and repositories in Chile and Germany, thus providing a deeper insight into the political, cultural and intellectual interconnections of the topic.

"For our project, we were able to collaborate with Chilean literary

scientist Andrea Salazar Vega, who herself has Indigenous roots. With her trilingual knowledge, she quickly recognized that the version published in Mapuzugun was based on both the German and Spanish versions of the work, which had been published decades earlier," explains project collaborator and anthropologist Romy Köhler. This suggested that there had been an intensive content-related exchange on the text of the book between the German Capuchin missionaries and the Mapuche.

Before the Bavarian Capuchins began their mission to the Chilean Mapuche in 1896, they were rarely involved in elementary education. Father Félix José de Augusta therefore resorted to an established work that had already been published in its fourth edition by the publisher Herder in 1860. Later, a license had to be obtained from Herder in order to print the textbook in Mapuzugun.

In a first step, the manuscripts were sent from Chile to Germany. In the preface, Father Augusta mentions briefly that "two Indigenous Catholics" helped him "very effectively" with the translation. It seems, Augusta writes further, that the translation accurately reflects the mode of expression: "...for when I read it aloud in my chapel, they interrupted me several times and exclaimed enthusiastically: Yes, yes, that is how the Mapuche speak."

The two Indigenous people who helped Father Augusta to translate the text into Mapuzugun were the chief's sons Pascual Segundo Painemilla Ñamcucheu and José Francisco Kolün. The former had previously received his elementary education from Italian Capuchins and had also mastered Mapuzugun in writing, which had originally been passed down only orally. Both spoke Spanish.

In order to reproduce the phonetics correctly, the textbook contained an outline for the correct pronunciation of certain Mapuzugun sounds.

"Even though Father Augusta is named on the title page as the sole author of the translation as was customary at the times, the two Indigenous people also contributed considerable input to the cross-cultural translation. The re-edition also rectifies this information on authorship," explains Romy Köhler.

The re-edition presents the German original, the Spanish and the Mapuzugun translation in three parallel columns, supplemented by a fourth column with the images, thus allowing future text-based research in the context of the Mapuche colonization, in which processes of appropriation and transformation of local ideas also become visible.

For example, a look at details of the text illustrates a struggle over terms and a particular form of strategy for the mission. For some formulations were deliberately translated into expressions that correspond to the cultural environment of the Mapuche. "Pichi Che" as a term for the "child of God," for example, comes from the family environment and is an affective form with which mothers address their toddlers.

Although no documentation of this process has yet been discovered, Köhler assumes that an in-depth discussion regarding content must have taken place between the priest and the Indigenous translators on such aspects.

But what were the motivations for the missionaries to publish a textbook in the Indigenous language, and why did the Indigenous people participate in it? In the introduction, Father Augusta writes that the Indigenous children already spoke Spanish well and did not need a text in Mapuzugun for pure text comprehension: "However, this one will serve as a friend to accompany them to their sad huts, where they can read it and teach it to their relatives and acquaintances who do not understand Spanish."

As Romy Köhler explains, this shows the missionaries' absolute desire to reach beyond the territory of the mission schools and into the family cores. At the same time, there was a tendency among Indigenous people to send their children to mission schools in communities occupied by the Chilean military early on. On the one hand, from a strategic point of view, it was desirable for young people to take on institutional education—also to avoid later discrimination. On the other hand, it was initially considered a privilege in the rural Mapuche communities to send a child to school instead of to work in the fields.

The textbook written in Mapuzugun, however, should not obscure the fact that the language of instruction in the mission schools was Spanish. "The mission brought schooling and literacy in Spanish, but also alienation from parents and ruptures with local religious beliefs and practices in a general climate of loss of identity," says Köhler.

Against this backdrop, Mapuzugun increasingly disappeared as a means of everyday exchange. This, he says, became increasingly apparent to authors of Indigenous background who had moved to Chile's major cities in the mid-20th century. Since then, remarkable initiatives to revive the Mapuzugun language have emerged. It is a testimony to colonial history that the very missionary textbook that is the subject of the study represents one of the few printed records of the Mapuche language for the early 20th century.

More information: Alejandra Natalia Araya Espinoza et al, Nizolke zugu Dios ñi Nütxam pu Chilemapuche ñi zugun mew : Kritische digitale Re-Edition der Edition Araucana der "Kurze Biblische Geschichte für die unteren Schuljahre" in Deutsch, Spanisch und Mapuzugun , *Universitätsbibliothek Eichstätt-Ingolstadt* (2022). [DOI: 10.17904/ku.edoc.30265](https://doi.org/10.17904/ku.edoc.30265)

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