Prologue

I am thrilled for the opportunity and the privilege to share this book with students and scholars of sociolinguistics. After one hundred years of intense query in linguistics, the time is right for the disciples in the field to move on from the fundamental perspectives advanced by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours de linguistique* générale (1916), where he proposed the distinction between synchrony and diachrony. We have advanced to newer conceptualizations proposed by the social sciences in general and sociolinguistics in particular, which in turn will allow us to see the possible outcomes of change in a historical sociolinguistic perspective. Synchronic analysis focuses on description of the regular internal dynamics and mechanisms that govern language behavior in general, while diachrony is concerned with the development and evolution of language through history. The diachronic approach attempts to make sense of history and the processes that are conditioned by speakers' behavior. Sociolinguistics has contributed with an additional dimension that connects social meaning to both language and history.

As linguistic corpora become available to a wider audience, the challenge of looking into authentic texts from the past has turned into a truly gratifying experience that aids in understanding the dynamic relationship between the spoken and the written language. The examination of large subsamples of variants aids in the description of a language system, e.g. colonial Spanish, and in refining the methodology used to corroborate or reject postulates on language evolution, attrition, variation and change across historical periods. The analysis of language data is also conducive to reconstructing the intersections of history, society, and language. Two documents retrieved from the Henry E. Huntington Library have been extremely useful to initiate the historical analysis of the Mexican colony: the first one is the *Segunda Carta de Relación* by Hernán Cortés (1522), published in Seville in the House of Jacobo Cromberger; the other one is a rare inquisitorial manuscript known as *El Abecedario* (1571-1700).

The advantage of the historical sociolinguistic approach at hand lies in the availability of native speakers on both sides of the Atlantic who may still share the intuitions their ancestors had about the use of variants that made history in the history of language. I am hopinig that this book will contribute to gaze at the role of history in linguistic studies. In the beginning, I thought that I was going to have an up-close and private look at the deep roots of the peninsular Spanish tree; now I believe that some features of late medieval and pre-modern Spanish are still alive and well. The exploration of challenging perspectives is making me rise through higher spheres of inquiry and contentment. Having access to original or paleographed manuscripts is an adventure similar to searching for lost treasures in sunken vessels or ancient cities surrounded by mysterious tales

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and legends. A manuscript belongs to history and the social context in which it stemmed, and cannot be ignored if we wish to understand the content and the form. The literal transcription of manuscripts may vary according to the scholar who found the precious gem in search for invaluable information. Some scholars choose to modernize superficial aspects of a manuscritpt to make it more accessible to readers. For this reason, transcriptions vary from collection to collection; some components can be rescued *in toto*, while others are permanently lost. In the selection of subsamples, I respect the collector's guidelines, e.g. adding or omitting accent marks, using abbreviations for honorifics such as *vuestra merced* (*v.m.*), etc. Coordinators and collectors of manuscripts may have different perspectives when transcribing verb forms; for example, some of them follow the modern rules for accentuation (*él se cayó allí*, 'he fell over there') even when the original manuscript appeared unaccented. Following modern rules of orthography, others only place the accent marks when there is a difference in meaning, as in *yo voto* ('I vote') vs. él *votó* ('he voted').