

## Book Review

# *Indigenous America in the Spanish Language Classroom*, by A. Fountain, 2023

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In military and government language programs, linguistic proficiency without historical and cultural literacy constitutes a strategic vulnerability. Anne Fountain's *Indigenous America in the Spanish Language Classroom* offers a timely, practice-oriented framework for embedding Indigenous histories, epistemologies, and contemporary voices into Spanish instruction. Our central appraisal is that Fountain operationalizes decolonial and content-based pedagogy for secondary and postsecondary contexts with remarkable clarity, ensuring direct applicability to Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) courses and Foreign Area Officer (FAO) training. The book's most significant contribution lies not in presenting superficial "cultural add-ons," but in reframing Spanish as a pluricentric language whose lexicon, pragmatics, and textual traditions are inseparable from Indigenous presence and influence.

## SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

Following a rich introduction—"Why I Wanted to Write This Book"—which situates the work within its research origins, goals, and methodological scope, Fountain organizes the volume into six chapters, two appendices, and a glossary. The progression moves from historical foundations to classroom application, creating a coherent pedagogical arc. Early chapters leverage colonial-era documents to complicate students' understandings of conquest, foregrounding Indigenous agency—alliances, resistance, and negotiation—rather than rehearsing teleological narratives. Later chapters introduce authentic materials (currency, idioms, textiles, environmental symbols) and primary texts ranging from the Popol Vuh to voyage accounts. The final chapters distill ten actionable teaching principles and curate museums, archives, and digital platforms for extended study. The appendices expand the implementation toolkit, particularly for instructors adapting to hybrid and online modalities.

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### Chapter Highlights:

- **Chapter 1** (Conquests and Their Impact on Indigenous Languages and Cultures) establishes historical foundations by examining colonial documents that reveal Indigenous communities' active roles during European contact—alliances, cultural resistance, and negotiation—challenging reductive conquest narratives.
- **Chapter 2** (New Perspectives of the *Quincentennial* and the Twenty-First Century) interrogates Spain's internal debates on human rights during the conquest, linking these to contemporary discourses on historical justice and memory. Topics such as food history and art analysis invite cross-cultural reflection. From the rediscovery of the sixteenth-century Spanish priest Bartolomé de Las Casas' critical perspective, the years following the 1992 celebration promoted new debates and assessments of the indigenous contributions and sacrifices of many surviving indigenous cultures and language groups.
- **Chapter 3** (Ideas for Language Classes) pivots to pedagogy, introducing authentic materials—currency, idiomatic expressions, textiles—that reflect Indigenous influence on modern Spanish. Applied scenarios extend to professional domains such as healthcare, law, and interpretation, with clear transferability to military translation and liaison work.
- **Chapter 4** (Spanish American Literature with Indigenous Perspectives) emphasizes literary engagement, guiding educators in presenting Indigenous and colonial texts (e.g., *Popol Vuh*, Books of Chilam Balam, writings by Columbus, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Bartolomé de las Casas, Rosario Castellanos, Miguel Angel Asturias, José Martí, and many others) to foster critical reading and linguistic growth. Although many were destroyed by overzealous conquerors, priests, and missionaries, some original texts have survived in early translation attempts into Spanish and can be used in today's classrooms to spark interest and generate discussion and debate.
- **Chapter 5** (Ideas for Latin American Studies) broadens the lens to Latin American studies, advocating for inclusion of Indigenous languages, film, and media. Notably, Fountain foregrounds Afro-Indigenous histories and the linguistic diversity of the Amazon region—critical for regional security and area studies programs. Though, in broad strokes, Fountain also provides long lists of language families distributed in impressive numbers over all of the Americas (numbers close to 1000 as of 2019).
- **Chapter 6** (conclusions and resources) synthesizes key ideas into ten practical takeaways and provides curated resources, including museums and digital archives. Appendices offer additional texts and flexible digital tools responsive to online learning demands.

### ANALYTICAL EVALUATION: STRENGTHS

Three features merit particular recognition:

1. **Integration of Theory and Praxis:** Fountain pairs historical inquiry with concrete classroom tasks, lowering adoption barriers for instructors new to Indigenous-centered content.

2. **Multimodal Material Selection:** The inclusion of lexical items, iconography, and pragmatic conventions demonstrates how Indigenous contributions permeate everyday Spanish, supporting interpretive and presentational communication outcomes.
3. **Resource Accessibility:** Curated lists prioritize adaptability—essential for programs with heterogeneous learner profiles and mission constraints. For military educators, these features align with scenario-based learning, culture-general competencies, and regionally focused preparation.

## CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT: AREAS FOR GROWTH

While robust, the text is most naturally suited to intermediate and advanced learners; novice-level instructors will require clearer scaffolds to manage cognitive load and avoid essentializing complex histories. Guidance on assessment could be strengthened: beyond material selection, sample rubrics for performance tasks (e.g., interpreting primary texts, analyzing visual artifacts, mediating cultural information) and strategies for evidencing intercultural growth (reflective journals, portfolio artifacts, structured debriefs) would enhance usability. Additionally, the promising treatment of Afro-Indigenous histories could be amplified through case studies from the Caribbean and Amazonia that center linguistic repertoires shaped by sustained Indigenous–African contact. Finally, explicit discussion of ethical sourcing and positionality—how instructors select texts, name power dynamics, and involve community knowledge-bearers without tokenism—would deepen the book’s critical rigor.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR DLI/FAO CONTEXTS

For defense, diplomatic, and government settings, we propose a three-part adoption model:

1. **Foundations Module (2–3 weeks):** Introduce colonial archives and Indigenous-authored sources, guiding inquiry into authorship, audience, and purpose.
2. **Language-in-Use Module (3–4 weeks):** Analyze lexicon, pragmatics, and iconography in contemporary Spanish across regions (Andes, Mesoamerica, Amazonia), culminating in scenario-based tasks (e.g., briefing a partner force on cultural protocols).
3. **Applied Field Module (2–3 weeks):** Engage with museum collections or digital archives to produce bilingual interpretive products (exhibit captions, public-service announcements, mediation summaries).

Assessments should combine interpretive analyses, presentational products, and interpersonal role-plays simulating liaison work—aligning language performance with cultural decision-making.

## PEDAGOGICAL THROUGH LINES

Fountain’s approach resonates with scholarship asserting the inseparability of language and culture and the efficacy of content-driven teaching for advanced proficiency development. Instructors adapting this text should foreground three throughlines:

- **Contextualization:** Language forms (words, idioms, discourse patterns) should be situated within historical and geopolitical frames. For example, explaining how certain terms emerged during colonial encounters helps learners grasp meaning beyond literal translation.
- **Critical Reading:** Students learn to evaluate sources and perspectives, especially when comparing Indigenous and colonial narratives. This builds analytical skills and prevents simplistic or biased interpretations.
- **Transfer:** Cultural insights should migrate into professional domains—healthcare, law, security cooperation—so learners can apply them pragmatically. For instance, understanding Indigenous protocols can inform diplomatic or humanitarian missions.

This his three-part model ensures that studying Indigenous narratives isn't just academic; it becomes actionable knowledge for real-world tasks. Learners practice intentional listening and reading to extract cultural meaning and apply it in professional scenarios.

## CONCRETE CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

- **Primary Text Seminar:** Students annotate selections from the *Popol Vuh* and a colonial voyage narrative, then mediate contested meanings in structured debate.
- **Material Culture Lab:** Learners analyze currency, textiles, and public iconography to map Indigenous semiotics in everyday Spanish, producing an infographic brief for a hypothetical partner unit.
- **Language & Ecology Case:** Teams examine environmental terms and Indigenous stewardship concepts, crafting bilingual advisories relevant to humanitarian assistance or disaster response.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Two pragmatic constraints persist:

1. Adoption in rigid curricula will require administrative buy-in; while Fountain's appendices offer adaptable entry points, instructors and curriculum developers may need to crosswalk activities to existing outcomes and contact hours.
2. Novice-level adaptation will benefit from spiraled tasks and explicit vocabulary supports to reduce extraneous load while preserving conceptual rigor.

Future work could develop military-specific scenarios (pre-deployment cultural briefs, area studies modules, liaison communication drills) and, most importantly, the creation of an open-source mini-corpora of Indigenous-influenced Spanish for text analysis.

## CONCLUSION

*Indigenous America in the Spanish Language Classroom* is a significant contribution to culturally responsive Spanish pedagogy, offering implementable tools for instructors in defense and government settings. Its sustained attention to Indigenous narratives encourages learners to interrogate power, identity, and history while building communicative proficiency. For programs tasked with preparing culturally astute language professionals, Fountain's text provides both direction and depth—inviting instructors to move beyond surface-level facts toward ethically grounded, analytically rich engagement with the Spanish-speaking world.