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Oralizing Literacy

A New Model for Peripheral Ethnolinguistic Education

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The 19th century started the transformation of a new structure of social economy that laid the foundation for a new structural economic order. Within this period, literacy was considered the most appropriate technique to accomplish that social transformation, giving birth to the mythical sequence of literacy-modernization-development. The 19th century conceptual construction of the term literacy: "a central instrument and vehicle in the efforts to secure social, cultural, economic, and political cohesion in the political economy of the expanding capitalism" (Graff 1979: 25) has also governed the moral bases of the 20th century, which continues today, by projecting education as the most significant factor for social stability and hegemony. In response to a structure that models institutional canons such as education, literature, politics and economy, the peripheries - or the other - emerge as a contestatory voice usually based on sociohistorical contexts that have forced a local system to behave under foreign ways. This paper places focus on the emergence of postcolonial ethnolinguistic literary and educational substrate works, whose purpose is to reshape the oral tradition of their peripheral source culture, questioned and judged by an outside superstrate canon. Based on the fact that oral traditions still depict significant functions and uses within their own systems (Maxwell 1983; Opekwho 1992; Aikman 1999; Lang 2000), oralizing literacy will be presented as a new model for peripheral ethnolinguistic education that redefines both the use of oral genres and literacy technique into an "oracy" system of literary and literacy practices of their own.

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1 Introduction

The peripheries emerge in response to the idea of the centre—a structure that models institutional canons such as politics, economy, literature and education. This contestatory voice is usually based on sociohistorical contexts that have forced a local system to behave under foreign ways.

This paper places focus on the emergence of literary and educational postcolonial ethnolinguistic substrate works, whose purpose is to reshape the oral tradition of their peripheral source cultures, to place orality into the superstrate system of literacy and literatures. With this in mind, a model that will provide insight into the redefinition of orality and the adaptation of literacy techniques into an “oracy¹” system of both literacy and literary practices will be proposed. Toward this end, oralizing literacy will not be conceived in terms of the ontological paradox of meanings ascribed to orality and literacy but, rather, under the epistemological view that both orality and literacy have within a given substrate group. Thus, the model can be organized according to sociocultural and political norms of the particular ethnolinguistic group for whom they are intended.

In order to understand this epistemological perspective, I will provide the reader with significant examples showing the way in which out-school² training elements of source cultures transmit knowledge of their own. The discussion will also examine this peripheral model as the result of a transformation produced by interfaces and interactions that are usually implied within systems contact.

Finally, the merits of this proposition belong not only to this paper but also to the different approaches taken by postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups that are culturally threatened by their European counterpart system of communication and expression. Both individuals and societies affected directly and indirectly have inspired this peripheral model.

2 Theoretical Context

Within the power of literacy, orality—better known as oral tradition—is considered to be analogous to illiteracy, a term that usually characterizes those who cannot read and write (Okpewho, 1992). The illiterate status of people resulted from the dialectical relation between literacy and “oracy” was strongly shaped by the change of the 19th century into a “new (western) society.” This social change laid the foundations for a new structural economic order. According to Graff (1979), this period “represented one central instrument and vehicle in the efforts to secure social, cultural, economic, and political cohesion in the political economy of the expanding capitalism” (25). This conceptual construction of the term literacy has also governed the moral bases of the 20th century, which continues today, by projecting education as the most significant factor for social stability and hegemony. Hence, the “myth” that literacy, as the centre, strongly contributes to the (economic) development, whether of individuals or of societies, was constructed.

However, such a thing called “the centre” cannot exist in the analysis of peripheral systems relegated to a world of “oracy” wherein there is no notion of illiteracy unless one lives in a literate milieu (Gallardo, 1984: 168). The notion and status of illiteracy, founded within a monolithic social setting marked by the absence of literacy, is

¹ In this paper, “oracy”—as opposed to literacy—refers to a system of learning that combines both the redefinition of orality (traditional genres of the sources culture) and the adaptation of literacy techniques into literacy practices.

² By out-school I mean those everyday activities that within a particular ethnolinguistic group transmit socio-cultural learning that differ from those transmitted at school.

misconceived within an oral world. The analysis of systems based on outside canons usually provides inadequate conceptual definitions and findings and, what is worse, the imposition of an alien system unto a different one without a period of transition and adaptation brings nothing but disruption (examples of systems' imposition is given below). Not in vain does David M. Smith, in his study of illiteracy examined from an ethnographical viewpoint, argue, "[i]n different societies or cultural contexts, the inability to read and write does not have the same meaning or importance" (in Rassekh, 1991: 228). Hence, there is no centre of analysis, or of construction, when juxtaposing "oracy" and literacy systems. Each system differs in functions and uses that flow naturally in the formation of its own dynamic sociocultural structure. As Lang (2000) points out, "[e]ach literary canon is an arbitrary formation, and the more we learn of the periphery of the international system, the less we can assert about its alleged centre" (234). Orality then, within a particular linguistic and cultural system, is an oral literacy system on its own and, as such, it contributes significantly to the construction of a new model of cultural and linguistic transmission and/or maintenance of language, culture and identity of marginalized ethnolinguistic groups.

Whether or not orality springing from within is conceived as a new model of oral literacy, the real fact is that several ethnolinguistic groups have maintained, either consciously or unconsciously, significant elements of their oral traditions. These elements include, but are not limited to, styles of speech, sociocultural dynamics of group, moral values and so on, to transmit certain knowledge of their own because literacy has failed to do so. This failure is due, first, to literacy's moral and economic basis imposed through a schooling system which, according to Graff (1979), was and still is "the most effective vehicle for the creation and maintenance of the moral economy [for a moral 'modern society']" (33); and, second, by the undefined functions of literacy within different sociocultural and economic groups, communities and regions. The continuing use of orality to transmit knowledge differently from the literacy system questions the mythical sequence of 'literacy-modernization-development,' evidencing its imperative need to be reanalyzed inasmuch as its requirements, function(s) and use(s) vary among different systems.

In postcolonial societies, for example, creole and indigenous minority³ groups who still engage in a strong oral tradition have experienced marginalization as the result of the structure of stratification that literacy reinforces within the urban industrialized societies to which they originally do not belong. In fact, these groups have not experienced the mythical sequences of literacy-modernization-development paradigm. Neither has literacy eradicated their oral traditions, which is viewed, by the literate world as an expression of illiteracy. As opposed to the sociolinguistic situation of the superstrate colonial groups, the peripheral sociolinguistic situation of colonized minority groups gives rise to a crisis of ethnocultural identity usually needed by the latter groups to find out what has been lost. As ironic as it might sound, it is the realization of loss within substrate groups that establishes the basis to recover or reshape significant elements of the traditional source culture. The content and meaning of that redefinition, however, is by no means universal among postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups, inasmuch as they are a product of their own sociolinguistic contexts. What the substrate groups do share is crisis and, therefore, the need to find new cultural elements to redefine those systems in crisis.

A similar approach to the concept of crisis, albeit regarding the sociolinguistic situation of creole groups, is discussed by Lang (2000) when he contends that, "[t]he

³ There are different factors to take into account when using the term "minority groups." In this paper, however, the term refers to substrate groups, regardless of their size, whose sociocultural and economic systems have been undermined by unbalanced power relations and dynamics of groups.

common feature [creoles] share is not their emergence, but that they are at turning points in their history, in crisis or in catastrophe” (238). For my discussion, the relevance of the concept “crisis” in situations of unbalanced power relations and dynamics of groups is not the disaster of the substrate system itself but, rather, the awakening towards the construction of a new canon of its own. For this construction, a common feature among postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups is the element of orality, the strongest mechanism of transmission before the imposition of the colonial schooling system—literacy. As opposed to the latter, orality and the sociolinguistic capacity of substrate groups for persistent use of peripheral genres become significant elements for examining the relationship between “oracy” and literacy in terms of their functionality and use(s), and in terms of the role(s) these systems have within postcolonial substrate ethnolinguistic groups. In the following section, I will discuss the way in which some postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups culturally threatened by the mythical power of literacy—its educational and literary canons—have redefined orality into an “oracy” system to ensure this model a place within literary and/or educational works.

3 Current Understanding of the Orality/Literacy Interface

According to Okpewho (1992), oral literature simply means “literature delivered by word of mouth; . . . utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciate degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression” (4). Unlike written literature, the essential character of oral literature is found in the performance we are able to see, or hear, or participate in. Oral debates, storytelling, songs and other oral activities are fields of performances that to some degree are objects of a group evaluation of some sort. History shows that orality, even within superstrate literature linguistic groups, has been present among different cultural groups in very similar ways (Okpewho, 1992). The fact that the same methods to perform *riddles*, *proverbs*, *tongue twisters*, *fairytale*s, *poetry*, *music*, etc., sometimes with similar content, can be found across cultures provides motive for the argument that these oral performances are “universals” across ethnolinguistic groups. However, the purpose of these potential types of universals of communication differs among written and oral cultures. Since an analytical and abstract imperative to acquire knowledge governs the former, oral performances are rather used to the social entertainment of an audience who will be judging the aesthetics of the event. Within an oral economy of knowing, “[k]nowledge becomes a social possession [learned through verbal acts] and the knower holds it in communal trust” (Maxwell, 1983: 11). In a dynamic of this type, an oral “truth” is constructed communally through social behaviours rather than through mental process.

In order to redefine the fundamentals of orality and to place this system into the world of literacy, different postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups have taken distinct approaches that indeed overlap in one common element: the use of language. In this paper, two approaches are discussed: The first approach concerns literary works—the construction of an oral literary canon through which, elements of the peripheral source culture can be transmitted, and the second focuses on education—the teaching of language and culture of marginalized ethnolinguistic substrate groups.

With regard to literary constructions, several African scholarly works show the emergence of an oral literature, which does not necessarily intervene into the canon of written literacy. Okpewho (1992) explains how it is possible that a complex system of information about African origins, identity, ways of behaving and living, and cultural continuity emerges from various forms of oral literature practised in African society. Through a potential synchronic template of how an African oral literature emerges, the author provides insight into a new peripheral voice of literariness. The following Lango passage from Uganda is an example of *repetition*, a significant and valuable element that

demonstrates the uniqueness of African orality, as opposed to the standard canons of European literature.

We overcome this wind.	<i>We overcome.</i>
We desire the rain to fall, that it be poured in showers quickly.	<i>Be poured.</i>
Ah! thou rain, I adjure thee fall. If thou rainest, it will be well.	<i>It is well.</i>
A drizzling confusion.	<i>Confusion.</i>
If it rains and our food ripens, it is well.	<i>It is well.</i>
If the children rejoice, it is well.	<i>It is well.</i>
If it rains, it is well. If our women rejoice, it is well.	<i>It is well.</i>
If the young men sing, it is well.	<i>It is well.</i>
A drizzling confusion.	<i>Confusion.</i>
If our grain ripens, it is well.	<i>It is well.</i>

(Okpewho, 1992: 72)

Repetition in this chant, as well as other African stylistic oral features discussed by the author, can have distinct functions according to the aim(s) of a particular oral performance, or it might represent a fundamental element of African languages structure used by the speakers to express a particular understanding of their worldview. In any event, these features seek the audience's active involvement and participation with the performer, characteristics that are not present in written texts.

In some African indigenous languages, tonality is an extended oral feature. Hence, sounds are of special significance when expressing meaning within an oral culture. That is, "[b]ecause of its sound, the oral word is of the same order of reality as the object to which it refers" (Maxwell, 1983: 2). The next two Bemba *proverbs*, an ethnolinguistic group from northern Zambia, show the association of oral words (sounds) and their effects on the conscious reality of a people:

- (a) *Uushilumbula mfwa ni mukamwenso*
 "the one who doesn't talk about death is motivated by fear"
 - (b) *Nkalamo tailumbulwa*
 "one does not mention the lion"—for fear of calling one up.
- (Maxwell, 1983: 2)

In these examples, the relation among oral linguistic features and their referents is strongly related to the epistemological understanding of Bemba people towards real and spiritual phenomena. For oral people, as the Bemba, sounds have direct significance in the sense that things and/or events are heard before than seen, connecting sounds with their people's interiority. The power of the invocative Bemba meaning is neither based on the oral word itself nor on the object to which the sounds refer but, rather, on the existential relation of the two within Bemba culture. Similarly,

Every sounding object resonates in the interior of its hearers, insinuating an inwardness of its source. This accounts for the oral proclivity to accommodate a knowledge of everything else to what is best known—other persons—without differentiating between subjects and objects, persons and things (Ong, 1967: 84-5).

Features and functions of African orality can also be found in postcolonial creole societies. Despite the complex ethnolinguistic and socioeconomic background in which creole languages originated, their African oral inheritance still operates within the system of crystallized creole languages. As among the Lango and Bemba people, features of oral literature in creole societies are also recognizable by the structure and functions of *rhymes, proverbs, chants, dialogues, etc.*, expressed through their creole languages.

Moreover, as it is fundamental within African ethnolinguistic groups, the essential character of a creole oral literature is also found within the dynamic of performance-audience.

From a linguistic and literary point of view, the best example of the performative mode in Caribbean creoles is the formula *Cric? Crac!*. According to Lang (2000), this formula “refers to [a] mode in which the oral speaker launches a challenge to his or her audience, the *Cric?*, expecting in response a *Crac!* meaning both that the audience is tuned in, but also that the audience knows more or less what will follow” (206). An example of the *Cric? Crac!* model within the written tradition of Haitian Kreyol is Sylvain’s Haitianization of La Fontaine (206-14). This literary work not only depicts the oral performative character of the *Cric? Crac!* formula and its existing relation with the audience, but also the redefinition of a literary hypertext into a local ethnotext, with a literary canon of its own, its own audience and values, and within its own sociopolitical cultural context.

As in Haitian Kreyol, oral genres and contestatory literary works against the imposition of the colonizer literary system have also been preserved in Sranan, a creole language of Suriname. The following Sranan *poem* shows the imperative need to preserve a creole living spirit by looking into its own sociocultural system:

Duman

Mi no wani / wan ati
 di n’abi kra,
 mi wani / wan yeye d’e libi.
 Mi n’e wet / susu
 di n’e fit mi,
 m’e wer / mi eygi krompu.
 Mi n’e sdon / luku
 a fesi fu sma,
 m’e luku ini / mi eygi spikri.

(J. Schouten-Elsenhout, 1910-1992, cited in Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction, 1995 vol. 15: 75)

Man of Action

I will not heart
 without a soul,
 I want a living spirit.
 I wear no shoes
 which do not fit,
 I wear my very own clogs.
 I do not look
 at another’s face,
 but in my very own mirror.

As for the Bemba sounds in *proverbs* are of special significance when expressing meaning, the above Surinamese *poem* functions as a catalyst of sociolinguistic Surinamese norms and values. Although features and functions of African orality can also be found in creole societies, postcolonial minority groups affected by an unbalanced power relation with their European counterpart reshaped some functions of African orality to have a sociocultural effect within their own creole system. As in the Surinamese *poem*, the social and political function of creole orality within creole groups drives towards the construction of a creole literary canon within a functional system of their own.

Like some African groups, a certain number of postcolonial indigenous groups have also survived the imposition of literacy and its traditional canon of literary judgments. However others, caused by different factors, have had enormous difficulties dealing with oracy on the one hand, and with literacy and education on the other—a point that I will address later. With regard to indigenous oral survival, Mayan people from Central America have maintained and adapted their oral traditional way of life and understanding of the world, even through a process of acculturation. Burns (1983) points out that, for the Yucatec Mayan people from Mexico, the understanding of life and the universe is expressed through verbal art performances whose full wealth is exemplified in conversations. The passage that follows depicts the dynamic of questions-and-answers found in Mayan conversations of different types. In addition, this passage is an example of closeness for a *riddle-telling* session after a conversation among *milperos* (corn

gardeners) and, therefore, is unique and does not have any equivalent in Western European literary tradition:

Don Pas: "Let's hunt."	<i>Co'ox dzon.</i>
Don Felipe: "My rifle's broken."	<i>Ca'ach in dzon.</i>
Don Pas: "Where are the parts?"	<i>Ce'enil u ca'achah?</i>
Don Felipe: "I burned them."	<i>Tin toocah.</i>
Don Pas: "Where are the ashes?"	<i>Ce'en u ta'anil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Eaten by a falcon."	<i>Ma'akil tumen cos.</i>
Don Pas: "Where's the falcon?"	<i>Ce'en u cosil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Went to the sky."	<i>Bin ca'an.</i>
Don Pas: "Where in the sky?"	<i>Ce'ex ca'anil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Fell."	<i>Huuti.</i>
Don Pas: "Then where did it fall?"	<i>Tu'ux tun huutil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Went in a well."	<i>Bin dzono'ot.</i>
Don Pas: "Where's the well?"	<i>Ce'ex u dzono'otil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Disappeared."	<i>Tzu'utzi.</i>
Don Pas: "Where'd it disappear?"	<i>Tu'ux tzu'utzil?</i>
Don Felipe: "Into your belly button."	<i>Yok a tuuch.</i>
Don Pas: "True."	<i>Ahah.</i>

(Burns 1983: 18)

Conversations are fundamental genres of the Mayan conception of speech inasmuch as dialogues carry out the imaginary and symbolic power that allows the Maya to build a literary system of their own. What best proves the significance of verbal expression through conversing stories among Mayan people is the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred literary work (a bible for the Western culture) of Quiche Mayan people from the highland of Guatemala. Originally in pictographic text (Estrada, 1994), the *Popol Vuh* presents "the gods Tepeu and Gucumatz creating the world by holding a conversation" (Burns, 1983: 20). In contrast to the monologic Western European construction of canon, a dialogic pattern prevails for the Maya, and for other indigenous people with similar conversing exchanges, which translates into an oral literary point of view of their own.

As with the above peripheral oral literary canon, the substrate postcolonial ethnolinguistic diaspora has also focused its attention on literacy and education through the teaching of oral languages and cultures of marginalized ethnolinguistic groups. While the first approach is meant to defend orality as a system of literary expressions, the second approach searches for literacy practices of its own by looking beyond the Western traditional moral and economic canon of the school system. Due to both the ontological nature of orality and literacy, as well as the sequential literacy-modernization-development myth of the traditional European schooling model, new literacy practices have not been easy to acquire. For this task, orality has not been redefined ontologically, but rather, epistemologically as a potential system of "oracy" or literacy practices.

After several attempts to the historical development of an educational model for ethnolinguistic minority groups in Latin America, Aikman (1999) explains that:

The 1990s has seen the blossoming of conceptual approaches to education for indigenous peoples, which recognize the intercultural nature of their lives. With this recognition has come the need for a re-examination of several issues, such as the interface between different cultural traditions, the relationship between language and culture, and the relationship between 'oracy' and literacy (2).

Since the creation of CRIC (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca) in 1971, indigenous communities within the region of Cauca, Colombia, have been actively contributing

through systematic literacy practices to the construction of an educational model of their own. The decline in transmission of indigenous languages, caused by the prevalent European mode of literacy, has jeopardized the holistic indigenous view of language, culture and cosmos. In order to recover that aspect, Cauca indigenous groups have redefined the imposed concept of literacy into their local holistic view and sociolinguistic needs. In other words, what for postcolonial ethnolinguistic African and creole groups means the emergence of an ethnotext, for postcolonial indigenous peoples means the emergence of an “ethno-education,” with an educational model of their own, their own audience and values, and within their own sociopolitical cultural context.

The passage that follows belongs to a Nasa *song*, an indigenous group from the Cauca region in Colombia. The generational transmission of this song through literacy practices is an example of the above ethno-educational system:

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe //Bis
ip'pukate u'pa'.

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe
khaskwe pudna u'pa'. //Bis

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe //Bis
atu d'iite u'pa'.

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe //Bis
kiwe v'il'il'na u'pa.

...

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe //Bis
teesu v'ihyan u'pa'.

Mis'kwe c'ida h'uz'kwe
nasa yuhte ta's'na.

(In C'AUY'CE – Revista de Etnoeducación del CRIC, 1997: 38-40)

This song explains that, within Nasa families, the *mis* is a female cat whose favorite place to be is in the *Mis'kwe* (a home-loving burner). When the *mis* is near the *Mis'kwe*, the *mis* purrs—a Nasa sign that the *mis* is spinning wool. When the *mis* cleans her body with her hands, it means that the Nasa have to clean the house because a guest is coming over. If the *mis'* cleaning behaviour continues, it means that the Nasa have to keep cleaning the house. The lessons of this *song* are a daily reality within Nasa families, and the transmission of cultural values to their children is a fundamental component of their own educational system. For the Nasa people, the “oracy” system extends beyond its ontological nature in the sense that it functions as a way of acquiring literacy practices, wherein orality has recognized utility within indigenous communities.

In her study of literacy and education among the Arakmbut people of Peru in 1994, Aikman (1999) points out that literate Arakmbut students, fearing that some of the older generation was not concerned about learning myths and songs from the elders, started the adaptation of literacy into the knowledge system of their people. They decided to work with elders to register significant Arakmbut oral genres and transcribe them in such a way as to reinforce Arakmbut epistemological functions. Thus, despite the ontological paradox that implies the transcription of living sounds, “oracy”, like any other system of communication and learning, becomes a system of its own, which can be organized according to the sociocultural and political norms of the ethnolinguistic group for whom they are intended.

Nevertheless, the lack of international exchanges and political will of change has not permitted other substrate linguistic groups to redefine orality and adapt literacy techniques into literacy practice with goals and aims of their own. The so-called

Intercultural Bilingual Education programs (IBE) for Latin America and the Caribbean emerged in response to several years of indigenous demands for communal rights to control their own education and destiny. Founded in non-indigenous premises, however, these programs are conceived primarily in terms of schooling, a concept inherently embedded in literacy (Aikman, 1999). For example, in Guatemala and Peru, IBE programs were implemented for years in indigenous communities whose native language was taught as L2 (second language) a few hours weekly. Additionally, in several locations the teachers were non-indigenous and monolingual in Spanish, or were indigenous but spoke a language other than that of the community in project. These circumstances locally began to change primarily because of indigenous community members' intervention. Nevertheless, their desire of founding the basis for the construction of an educational system through the validation of indigenous knowledge, language and cultural practices, has made for indigenous groups, very difficult to perceive the inequalitarian potential of IBE programs, which may perpetuate the existing unbalanced power structure. In Bolivia, for instance, certain primary schools focus the teaching of literacy in the native language by way of preparing students for the eventual shift into a Spanish schooling literacy system whose curricula do not include the teaching of the native language. The latter is an example of inequalitarian IBE, which would facilitate indigenous linguistic and cultural assimilation. In Chile, the IBE is also perceived as an extension of the "hyper-educational" Spanish Chilean system. Hence, the tendency of reflection is to conceptualize indigenous interculturality and bilingualism around the adaptation of the prevalent educational literacy system, rather than redefining the concept of literacy imposed by the hyper-educational canon into the local holistic cultural view and sociolinguistic needs of indigenous people. According to Cañulef (1998):

A pesar que existen diferentes concepciones, se evidencia que a la conceptualización [de interculturalidad y bilingüismo] le falta la perspectiva indígena local –una aymarización o atacameñización [o mapuchización] del concepto- que obedezca a objetivos sentidos y concretos. La pregunta que demanda una respuesta consensual es para qué sirve la educación intercultural bilingüe [e]n las regiones con fuerte presencia indígena [donde] la preocupación central de la población es el etnodesarrollo (84)

Despite the existence of different conceptualizations, it is evident the lack of local indigenous perspectives –an aymaraness, atacameñeness, or a mapucheness of the concept- which obeys to concrete and realistic objectives. The question that requires a consensual answer is for what intercultural and bilingual education is useful in regions of high indigenous presence where peoples' main preoccupation is the ethno-development [the translation is mine].

As for the indigenous groups of Cauca, Colombia, is fundamentally significant the emergence of an ethno-education with its own model, audience and values as well as within its own sociopolitical and cultural context, for indigenous groups in Chile, it is fundamental to pragmatically conceptualize their own education into the potential emergence of an ethno-development. In the Chilean case, the division of qualified indigenous⁴ and indigenous human resources into governmental agencies, universities, NGO's and local indigenous organizations obstructs both professional and local exchanges for an interdisciplinary view of the indigenous model. The emergence of a voice to express indigenousness in Chile depends on the oralization of literacy conceived as an autonomous system. This offers a redefinition of indigenous orality and the

⁴ Non-indigenous free thinkers and/or professionals involved in a current of thought called "indigenism," organized and developed around the image of indigenous people. Through indigenism, indigenists express the preoccupations and aims of the Indians.

adaptation of literacy techniques into literary practices and defies the efficiency of the hyper-sociocultural linguistic canon imposed on sociolinguistic substrate groups.

There are two peripheral systems referred to above that point to the redefinition of the fundamentals of orality to transpose this system into the world of literacy. The first concerns literary works and the construction of an oral literary canon of its own to transmit elements of the peripheral source culture. The second focuses on education and the teaching of language and culture of marginalized ethnolinguistic substrate groups. Both overlap in their use of language as a system of communication and transmission of cultural genres. Both offer a response to the imposition of the prevalent narrow Western perspective of literary and educational works.

4 Conclusion

As described above, the peripheral model cannot be conceived of properly without bringing language into play. Although the unbalanced power relation that characterizes postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups in all senses of the intercultural contact is paradigmatic, their diglossic language situation emphasizes this unequal interethnic relationship. The differentiation into “high” and “low” language system derived from the idea of written versus oral cannot only be understood by matters of cultural differences but also—and more importantly—by the division of economic labor activities. As Goody (1982) points out, “[s]ome jobs (the scribal, bureaucratic, academic jobs) needed literacy; to many productive jobs, especially in the rural areas, it was far from essential” (in Tannen, 1982: 212). Although far from being functional, the conceptual and moral idea of literacy searching for socioeconomic stability and hegemony was imposed into substrate oral groups, becoming another contributing factor, then, to the endangerment of substrate systems.

Linguistically speaking, the ultimate stage of endangerment into which a substrate ethnolinguistic group can find itself is language death. Culturally, the last stage of endangerment is more difficult to determine since, depending on the circumstances, the adoption of a superstrate language might provide a wider voice to defend the substrate cultural lifestyle. If the ethnolinguistic minority group has lost both language and culture, the model proposed above may be difficult to implement, however not impossible, after the rediscovery of substrate linguistic and cultural elements, especially if group members are still alive. Oralizing literacy is a theoretical framework intended to both revitalize linguistic and cultural elements from the minority group’s source culture and adapt the superstrate literacy techniques into literacy practices relevant to the minority culture.

It is important, however, to consider that despite the common diglossic language situation and sense of cultural crisis shared by postcolonial linguistic minority groups, their sociohistorical context differs considerably. In some groups, the diglossic situation has been more stable than in others, providing a better value of the native language and culture within the substrate group. Positive attitudes will simplify the task of redefining the oral tradition to construct an “oracy” system in which literacy practices contribute to the emergence of an Africanness, Creoleness and/or Indigenouness. Other substrate groups, however, undermined sociolinguistically and economically, have less preserved pride towards their own system. Influenced by the ontological Western breach between orality and literacy, they see themselves as depositories of an illiterate and marginalized ethnolinguistic system. Nevertheless, where oral practices still exist to transmit knowledge, oralizing literacy might help to revert catastrophic situations of loss. If, within the “oracy” system of postcolonial minority groups, literacy practices are bound to the out-school conception of learning, it might provide a starting point in recovering the values of their own culture.

From the above approaches, literary works seem to express a more stable peripheral voice of literariness. From an emic⁵ point of view, oral literature, as opposed to the semantic load that implies the construction of a peripheral educational work, emerges more connected to its poetic and aesthetic nature, more detached from the educational purpose of its counterpart approach, and more focused on the oral genre differences as opposed to Western secondary literary systems. Peripheral educational works, on the other hand, deal with the ontological paradox of literacy systems, a written world that, mythically, will overcome marginalization. From an etic point of view, however, both peripheral literary and educational works overlap in the diglossic paradox of their existence that seeks to decide the type of textuality that better represents their own sociolinguistic and cultural template. I agree with Maxwell (1983) and his contention that any system in transformation “implies interface and interaction of independent systems” (xv). For this discussion, the encounter of superstrate and substrate systems is the interface, and their respective written and oral channel of communication is the interaction. Oralizing literacy is a transformational model that results from that interface and the interaction responding to the paradigmatic intertextuality that any system in contact lives. From this perspective, both substrate literary and educational works together represent the peripheral contestatory voice to national models of literary and literacy works, and to the mythical centre from which the superstrate model judges the periphery.

In light of the above, due to the 19th century’s transformation of a new structure of social economy, education was seen as the most significant factor for social stability and hegemony. Literacy was considered the most appropriate technique to accomplish that aim, giving birth to the mythical sequence of literacy-modernization-development. In addition to the new analytical and abstract way in which to acquire knowledge, the power of printing practices questioned the oral traditions of the colonized ethnolinguistic minority groups. Judged by an outside canon, postcolonial ethnolinguistic groups inherited an undermined sociolinguistic and cultural system in which orality was considered analogous to illiteracy. Nevertheless, systems in crisis usually enter a dialectical relation of their existence between themselves and their oppressive groups. What has been lost enters into play, awakening some substrate groups toward the recovery of their own system.

According to their specific sociohistorical context, ethnolinguistic minority groups in Africa and the Caribbean center the redefinition of their own systems on literary works that, as opposed to the European canon of literature, provide a new peripheral voice of literariness. In Latin America, on the other hand, indigenism is more revitalized through a peripheral model of indigenous education. Their differences rest on the level of conviction that enhances positive attitudes toward the redefinition of the source culture. However, they also rest on the needs and aims of the new emergent system. Acquiring positive attitudes is not an easy task, especially when the substrate system has been deeply eroded. Nevertheless, in the event that elderly members of the substrate system are still alive and oral genres are still in function and use, the model proposed might help to revert catastrophic situations of cultural loss. This thesis is not based on the ontological paradox between orality and literacy but, rather, on their epistemological view within the substrate system, which leads me into the paradigmatic intertextuality that any system in contact lives. This latter paradigm is emphasized even more through the diglossic language situations of substrate groups.

The way in which the above postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority groups have redefined orality is based on interfaces and interactions implied within the contact of independent systems. Oralizing literacy is nothing more—a transformation that results

⁵ As opposed to “etic” (imposition of external categories onto phenomena intended to be explained), an “emic” point of view refers to the understanding of culture and their members’ categories).

from that interface and interaction responding to the paradigmatic intertextuality that any system in contact lives. Nevertheless, its emergence as a new peripheral model for ethnolinguistic education places both substrate literacy and educational works at a local contestatory voice against the mythical centre construction of national models. Finally, it is not my suggestion that oralizing literacy is the only solution for postcolonial ethnolinguistic minority systems; it does, however, bring the problem to the surface, and provide an epistemologically practical peripheral approach toward facing the actual situation of minority linguistic groups.

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