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Documenting Verbal Practices. Pilagá Text Collection

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The Pilagá collection of texts is the result of several projects which have provided the means to record and build an archive of linguistically annotated and representative Pilagá language textual corpus. This is the first systematic initiative entailing the construction of a text archive in the original language, translated into Spanish and English. The texts represent a diverse sample of Pilagá narrative involving around twenty speakers from all the Pilagá communities in the center-west of the province of Formosa, Argentina. Pilagá (belonging to the Guaycuruan family) is an endangered language spoken by less than 5,000 people of different age groups. This article addresses the organization and classification of the texts included in the collection, with special attention to the narratives and descriptions. Some methodological issues are presented in connection with text elicitation and cataloguing, with discussion of some features such as subtypes and themes. These texts not only represent the tradition and social memories of a hunter-gatherer society, but also reveal the symbolic construction of the moral landscape, beliefs, spiritual connection to the universe, and their convergence with aesthetic expressions of verbal art.

Keywords: oral discourse, ethnography, indigenous peoples, Chaco, Argentina.

1. Introduction

This article seeks to provide insight into a corpus of texts in Pilagá (ISO 639-3 plg), within the framework of theoretical-descriptive research into this language, focusing on discourse and verbal art, a research field not previously explored in depth in this language.

The Pilagá live in the Gran Chaco region. Chaco, in the heart of South America, comprises a vast lowland territory ranging from southeast Bolivia and the southwestern area of the Mato Grosso in Brazil northwards to the westernmost area of Paraguay and northeast of Argentina southwards. It is

a plurilingual region where twenty languages belonging to seven linguistic families are spoken with differing degrees of vitality. There are 4,465 Pilagá speakers, most of whom are located in the province of Formosa, in the north-east of Argentina (INDEC, Argentine Statistics and Census Institute, 2001). This language is the third in number of speakers in the Guaycuruan linguistic family, which likewise encompasses Toba (ISO 639-3 tob), also known as *Qom* in Argentina, where there are 69,452 speakers of this language, in addition to those in Bolivia and Paraguay; and Mocoví, with a population of 15,837, and about 2,780 native speakers in the provinces of Chaco and Santa Fe (Argentina), according to official Census data (INDEC-ECPI 2004-2005). Kadiwéu (ISO 639-3 kbc) – belonging to the Mbaya-Guaycuruan branch – is spoken in southern Mato Grosso, a frontier region between Paraguay and Brazil. Considerable grammatical description of the languages in this family has been conducted over the last decades. Moreover, as an outcome of several documentation projects on Guaycuruan languages, Toba, Mocoví and Pilagá, information on grammatical structures based on naturalistic data and archived texts in high-quality audio and video recordings has been made available to the public (Messineo n.d., Galdieri et. al. 2007, Juárez 2019, Vidal & Payne 2019).¹

Empirical research on discourse in native American societies, a scholarly trend initiated primarily by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz, has focused on practices associated to narrative and verbal art, as their main topics (Gumperz & Hymes 1972; Bauman & Sherzer 1974). This field previously involved a gap in ethnolinguistics that was not bridged until the 70's either by anthropology or linguistics (Golluscio 2019: 15).

In the South American region, research is increasingly dedicated to a variety of structural, discursive and social aspects, associated to the performance and transmission of traditional verbal art genres in indigenous societies, both in the languages of Amazonia (Briggs 1990; Graham 1995, Hill 1990, 1992, Prieto 2018) and of the Southern Cone (Patagonia and Chaco): Golluscio on Mapuzungun (Golluscio 2006, 2018) and Malvestiti (2005); (Golluscio 2011) on mythic Vilela narrative; verbal art in Toba or Qom language

¹ In the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in available audio and video records of Pilagá, Wichí, Chorote, Nivaçle, Mocoví, and Ayoreo languages incorporated to the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) within the framework of the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) and the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (HRELP). Likewise, Toba/Qom, Mocoví, Pilagá, Maká and Chorote materials can be found in the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), which, in 2009, donated a copy of these resources to the Laboratorio de Documentación Digital en Lingüística y Antropología (DILA) – National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET) (Golluscio & Vidal 2018). The documentation project was funded by the National Science Foundation Documentation of Endangered Languages (DEL) Program (Project Number 1261837) and granted to Doris Payne (University of Oregon) as PI and Alejandra Vidal as Co-PI.

(Messineo 2004, 2008, 2009, 2014), among others. Some incipient investigation into verbal practices is also being carried out into other languages in the region (Tapiete, Tupi-Guaraní, see Ciccone 2016a, 2016b; Ayoreo, Zamuco family, see Durante 2018). Research into discourse takes on particular significance as regards our knowledge of indigenous peoples and their languages (Sherzer & Urban 1986; Sherzer & Woodbury 1987; Urban 1991). While contributing to an understanding of social exchanges found in speech interactions, it reveals complex dialogical relationships between language, culture and history. In particular, the study of narrative practice centers on the text as a product and as a *locus* where language emerges in its social and expressive uses and in its functions for a society, at a particular time (Sherzer 2020 [1987]; Briones & Golluscio 1994; Golluscio 2019). For the study on folklore and verbal art in native societies, Bauman proposed the term *performance* since “it transmits a dual sense of artistic action – the making of folklore, and of artistic event – the situation of execution, which includes the performer, the artistic form, and the audience, which is central to the approach to folklore developed there. This use was consistent with the conventional meaning of the term *performance* and was useful in highlighting the fundamental re-orientation from folklore as the material content to folklore as communication” (cf. Bauman 1975, in Golluscio 2019: 130).

These studies presuppose the knowledge of a considerable number of formal aspects in these languages and of the historical, social and cultural context in which discourse is produced, and achieved by extended interaction with the communities and their speakers.

The Pilagá language collection of texts we refer to in this paper is the result of several projects which have provided the means to record and build an archive of linguistically annotated and representative Pilagá language sample over the last twenty years.² Over the last decade of this process, research into the Pilagá language has taken on a new direction in view of the theoretical developments and scope of documentary linguistics (as a result of the seminal work done by Woodbury 1995, 1998, Himmelmann 1998) and the need to preserve linguistic and cultural archives. Certainly, the endangered nature of many indigenous languages has shown not only the relevance but also the urgency of broadening documentation in enduring formats and attaining more in-depth knowledge of the topic.

This article addresses the organization and classification of the texts included in the collection, with special attention to the narratives and descriptions in the Pilagá corpus. It is worth noting that not all the texts have

² The Pilagá data in this archive has been collected starting in the late 1990's and continuing to 2019. Research since 2014 has partially been supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation (Grant BCS 1263817) and by the Argentinian CONICET.

the same degree of spontaneity since they are the result of semi-guided elicitation. Likewise, they were collected in several stages, initially with the purpose of reinforcing linguistic analysis on the basis of a sample of naturalistic data and were only later converted into annotated digital archives within a collection now housed in a repository (Vidal & Payne 2019).³

We firstly propose to establish a preliminary classification of narrative and descriptive texts. Our aim is to present some of the characteristics of these narratives and to discuss the features that distinguish each group. This study is thus a first step to the study of narrative texts and the stylistic and prosodic resources used as part of a project funded by the Argentine National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET).

The article is broken down into four sections. Following this introduction, an explanation is given as to the context in which these texts were provided, in addition to the entextualization process and the criteria used in cataloguing and archiving them as part of a collection (§2). A preliminary classification and description of the textual corpus is then set forth (§3). Sections §3.1 to §3.2.2 provide a review of the different subgroups of narrative and descriptive texts. In §4 the discussion of text characterization is again taken up in the light of the characterization put forward in §3. The paper ends with a few final reflections and ideas for future directions (§5).

2. Textual Corpus

The corpus includes over seventy texts and thirty thousand words distributed across a total of more than three thousand seven hundred lines. With a view to contributing to the usage and dissemination of the material gathered in this linguistic documentation, it was necessary to make up an open access heritage and build archive metadata. This meant applying minimum and preliminary curatorial criteria for classification, in line with the guidelines required by the AILLA, where the digital documentation collection has been housed since 2019. It should be noted that to be able to understand some characteristics of the texts it is necessary to provide some of the context in which they were produced and collected, and subsequently transcribed *in situ*.

Text-transcription was undertaken in both phonological and alphabetical versions. The alphabetical version follows the conventions agreed on by Pilagá representatives since 1996. This alphabet is currently used in schools seeking to provide intercultural bilingual education in Pilagá and Spanish. The phonological transcription was developed out of Vidal's dissertation research on Pilagá from 1995 to 2000 (Vidal 2001). The documentary

³ The Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA). University of Texas, Austin.

recording of texts gathered during interviews was undertaken in the Pilagá settlements. On a few occasions they were elicited and recorded in individual working sessions (with the presence of just the researcher and the consultant). Certainly, despite being specifically requested by the researcher, the contributions by the forty narrators were entirely voluntary. As pointed out above, many of these texts went from analog to digital format (the format varied over the years, along with technological changes in language recording and archiving) and others were recorded directly in digital devices more recently. The transcription itself was conducted with the help of several native speakers, respecting the original orality features they presented. For transcription, we broke down the texts into lines to facilitate the comparison of morphosyntactic and stylistic features. Line breakdown coincides with longer pauses. The affective and performative component of these texts, such as the use of onomatopoeias, interjections and appreciative vocabulary, was not overlooked in the process of literal entextualization.

The recorded texts were performed in front of an audience, sometimes their own family or other adult speakers who got together for the event, and occasionally in front of non-indigenous participants as well. There was no prior planning of the elicitation sessions. It is therefore to be expected that the storytellers should have used mechanisms such as opening and closing remarks in narratives, hesitations and false beginnings. All the performances were audio-recorded, and in a few instances video-recorded. The audios and videos were deposited in the archives along with their transcriptions, with Spanish and English translations.

3. Pilagá Texts in the Corpus and Their Classification

Determining the allocation of some of the texts in the corpus to a certain genre is challenging. One problem this classification poses is that for most Pilagá texts there are multiple combinations of narration and dialogue, description and explanation, or narration and explanation, which makes the identification of a dominant sequence type for a particular text very difficult. Taxonomy underlies the criteria of users who, according to Renkema (1993), are able to distinguish different genres. In this connection, the author considers the genres are social codifications speakers quickly identify in a communicational situation immersed in a particular historical context. Pilagá speakers easily recognize the narrative genre but do not assign names to either narratives, testimonies or descriptions simply because there is no such difference between them. Even more, the argumentation is part of some narratives, such as testimonies, but no speaker would consider that there is a change either in the genre or the narrative sequence in such cases.

We initially grouped the texts under the label of “narrative” (§3.1.1), as opposed to another thematically and functionally different group we have called “descriptive” (§3.2). Due to the theme and the intention of the narrator (as the *storyteller*), we have identified sub-groupings of narrative texts, breaking them down into animal tales, magical tales and life stories or testimonies, and of descriptive texts into itineraries and description of the natural environment.

3.1. Narrative Texts

The Pilagá corpus comprises approximately thirty-two entirely narrative texts involving three hours of audio recording. Though there are passages where the dialogical sequence prevails in brief conversations between the characters, as happens in *The Fox and the Pichi* (dwarf armadillo), certain specific features ascribe these texts to the narrative type. Depending on each case, these are identified by the predominant use of the third person (chiefly in animal and magical tales) and the first person (in accounts having testimonial characteristics). Other features are their straightforward plot and the presence of clearly supernatural factors, either because of the prominence of animals able to speak or marvelous creatures with the capacity to create benefits for the earth’s inhabitants.

At first glance we will recognize in these texts some similarities with well-known folktales. Palleiro (2019: 14) claims that “animal tales are distinctive expressions of the most diverse cultures. They can be found both in early Eastern cultures and in Greco-Roman antiquity, as well as from the Christian Middle Ages up to the present times in itineraries which show intercultural crossroads between Eastern and Western traditions [...]. Such crossroads can also be found in Argentinean animal tales, which reflect the intertwining between European and vernacular indigenous cultures, in an original blend which is the distinctive feature of national identity”. A clear example of this is the tale of *The Toad and the Fox*, where the two main characters run a race. It is the fox that makes fun of his opponent, considering him an unworthy rival. In the end, the “weaker” of the two characters is the winner, despite having been shown from the start as incapable of this victory. If the plot sounds familiar to us, similar to the well-known tale of *The Hare and the Tortoise*, it is because it shows evidence of the “variant” (Chertudi 1967: 9) by means of which a vital element is changed in the story (in this case, the animals who are the main characters) without changing its plot. Despite the similarities between one account and the other, what stands out is the lack of a didactic moralizing ending, for the Pilagá tale has no moral. As will be seen in the section devoted specifically to animal tales, the traditional structure adapts to their unique features and is different from other types of texts. The

narrator (i.e., the *storyteller*) is present in the performative marks, the way time and space coordinates coexist in fiction and reality showing that the main role of these animal stories is to entertain their listeners.

Magical tales stir us with its solemn tone seeking to explain phenomena impossible to relate to human limitations. It is here where their beliefs about the divine, the immortal, the spiritual beings are found. In the following section we will explore the way the narrators structure their tales, and why this differs from the animal narratives.

Lastly, testimonial accounts, with their use solely of the first person referenced in verbs and pronominal forms, are the most likely to touch the listener and strike a responsive chord, blurring the line between narrator and protagonist, with a succession of narrative sequences, hesitations or ramifications towards other topics that might make it difficult to opt for a single topic to characterize them. Also, it will be shown that the testimonies, such as the one by Toribia Acosta, provide a thesis defended by arguments interwoven in the narrative, where, apart from the function of retelling personal experiences, they denounce the injustices endured.

3.1.1. Animal Tales: the Centrality of the Fox

As previously mentioned, one of the key aspects of these tales is that the main character is the Fox, always depicted as being malicious and evil, using his cunning and deceit to take advantage of other more 'helpless' animals. These characters do, however, despite their naivety, manage to demonstrate the smartness required to outwit the Fox. Identifying the fox as the personification of a rogue reminds us of the adversities experienced by the anti-hero prototype. His punishment will inexorably lead to the failure of the rogue, aka the fox, for events he brings on himself, with the characters around him playing practically 'antagonistic' role. It is they who are eventually victorious in an ending that mainly seeks to provoke laughter and entertainment in the listeners.

The similitudes between these animal tales of the Pilagá collection and those in other traditions make it easier to identify a sequential structure consisting of an initial situation, a complication, a resolution and a coda. As a differentiating feature, the situations at the start of these animal tales always begin with the wily fox meeting an animal skilled in some activity the fox is no good at – or, perhaps, an animal he considers weaker than himself, which will lead to a contest of some nature. There is no conflict displaying explicit enmity (except in *The Fox and the Duck*, where the fox wants to devour the rosy-billed duck's young), but the fox's arrogance and malice lead to the complication, where he will try to win and be crowned as the victor over his temporary rival. This tense situation will come to a head, not with a happy ending but with a "fair" ending: the fox will be outwitted, and the "helpless" animal

will continue placidly on its way, as it would have done had the ‘complication’ not come along.

On the other hand, in Pilagá animal tales the narrator takes on significance. In an effort to interact in a living dialogue and arouse the interest of the audience, the narrator resorts to “pre-textual nuances or patterns stored in their living memory” (Palleiro & Fischman 2019: 28). We will now consider a few prototypical discourse phenomena under the category of “performative marks”.

Although these marks, like onomatopoeias and other typical features of this style, also tend to appear in other text types, in animal tales they occur with greater frequency, on some occasions, several times within the same narrative. According to Palleiro & Fischman (2019: 80), this is because the narrator needs to hold their listeners’ attention and elicit reactions from them, in this case, laughter or derision, to fulfill their purpose of entertaining them. The use of onomatopoeias in narrative tales is reminiscent of the performative characterization of verbal art (Bauman 1977; cf. Palleiro & Fischman 2019: 9) as a particular way of communicating, where both the poetic and the aesthetic are fundamental in capturing listeners’ attention.

The direct style or direct discourse represents a diacritical value in these narratives. An example of this direct style is the interaction between the characters in the tale titled *The Fox and the Pichi*. In this tale, the narrator textually reproduces both the fox’s question and the answer given by the pichi. The interaction appears between inverted commas and preceded by the declarative verbs *asked* and *said/answered*. As an illustration, the first two lines of this text are transcribed in (1) below.

- (1)⁴ a. w’o so’ n-lo’ makon’e de-tafaya-pe-ge’
 EXIST CLF:FAR POS.INDF-day at.that.time 3-talk-IPFV-DIR:IT
 One day, the fox talked

⁴ The writing system used for examples is a modified IPA representation, with <y> for IPA /j/, <ñ> for /ɲ/, <č> for /tʃ/, and for the bilabial fricative allophone of /w/. These are adaptations to the practical orthography. Abbreviations are: A roughly active set of verbal person markers, ABS absent, AUG augmentative, B roughly stative set of verbal person markers, BDET basic determiner, CAUS causative, CLF classifier, CN noun class, COL collective, COMPL completive, CONJ conjunction, DEM demonstrative, DDEM complex demonstrative, DES desiderative, DIM diminutive, DIST distal, F feminine, HOR horizontal, HUM human, INDF indefinite/nonspecific, INTG interrogative, INTJ interjection, INTSF intensifier, IT itive, LOC locative, M masculine, NEUT neutral deixis, NEXIST non-existing, NMLZ nominalizer, NO.EXT non-extended, NPROG non-progressive, NVIS non-visible, OBJ object, ONMP onomatopoeia, PAUC paucal, PL plural, POS possessive, PROG progressive, PROX proximate, RCG recognitional, RDEM recognitional demonstrative, DEM simple demonstrative, SG singular, SUB subordinator, SUJ subject, VEN ventive, VERT vertical, VIS visible. All data were collected by Alejandra Vidal together with Pilagá native speakers.

b. so' n-egaŋa-wa ∅-et'ae "ñ-egaŋa-wa
 CLF:FAR POS.INDF-fellow-human 3-say POS.1-fellow-human
 to his partner. He asked him: "Partner,

c. čaqa-ga da' ga'-m'e qad--enat-afak'
 INTG-CLF:ABS SUB CLF:AUS-DEM POS1.PL-think-NMLZ
 what are you thinking of doing?"

(2) a. qanč'e ∅-et'ae so' napam
 and. 3-say CLF:FAR armadillo
 then

And the dwarf armadillo replied:

b. "As! s-anaŋa-n-aq."
 INTJ 1-sow-NPROG-PL
 "We are going to sow." (*The Fox and the Pichi*, 01. lines 1 and 2)

Onomatopoeias are characteristic of this direct style, as the narrator imitates the sounds produced by the characters in the story. In animal tales, onomatopoeias are diverse, ranging from the noise of applause ("They all clapped their hands, *waah!* They applauded", in *The Toad and the Fox*, when the fox wins the race) to the imitation of possible animal sounds ("And like that, *paaf!* He hit him and *ow, ow, ow!* The fox rolled off. He had been lied to", *The Fox and Companion*, the noise of the blow and the fox's pain).

On the other hand, the indirect style is also frequent. The clearest example can be found in *The Fox and the Pigeon*. The narrator introduces the fox's question, which is not expressed explicitly in this case. The obvious difference between the direct style compared to the indirect style leads us to hypothesize on the narrator's preferences when telling the story. We might suppose this because the direct style, where they emulate the characters' voices, perhaps to achieve a better interpretation of their personalities, allows them to entertain their listeners more effectively.

(3) qanač'e so' waŋayaqal'ačiyi wada'get so' doqoto'
 and.then CLF:FAR fox crossed CLF:FAR dove

And then the fox crossed paths with the dove.

- (4) a. qanač'e yi-nat-ek nae' čaqa-na noqo' na'
 and.then A3-ask-DIR:SP.REF INTRG DEM-F when CLF:NEAR
 And asked her:

- b. an-'ame-tape-iyi da' tošomaq-yi-lo na ad-'ai'te
 2-paint-PROG-DIR. SUB be.red-COMPL-OBJ.PL CLF:NEAR POS.2-eyes
 STRAIGHT.LINE
 "What you paint your eyes with to make them so reddish?" (*The Fox and the Pigeon*, lines 4 and 5)

This is also due to the performative nature of storytelling, where the person narrating the tale plays the role of the character and makes the fictitious coordinates in the real world of their own, creating an "unfolding" of a speaker, who goes from experiencing a historical situation here and now to a person producing the fictional universe (Palleiro & Fischman 2009: 31).

In addition to the performative marks, the narrative is characterized by the presence of a number of exophoric and endophoric deictic elements locating the events within the time and space coordinates of the tale. One of these is *ho?* an exophoric adverbial 'proximal' (PROX) with 363 instances in the corpus. For instance, in (5) and (6) the deictic (DEM) *ho?* functions primarily as an exophoric locative, as in (5). But it can also have a temporal function, as in (6). The DEM is often, but not always, accompanied by a physical gesture.

- (5) Či qo-i-lot-ake-i ha-ʔn kʔodaē ho?
 then SUJ.INDF-A3-see-DES-INTSF F=CLF:NEAR wild. DEM1:PROX
 pepper

(The bird) looked and looked for pepper there (07 *The Fox and the Waqaw*, line 1.24)

- (6) Qanč'e naeʔ-gaʔ aw-men ho? ñ-egaʔa-wa
 then INTG-CLF:ABS 2-sell DEM1:PROX POS1-companion-HUM
 "So what will you sell now, my companion?" (*The Fox and the Pichi* 01, line 1.7)

Though the DEM *ho?* is primarily exophoric, it can also be endophoric. In (7) it functions as an anaphoric discourse form, referring back to the situation of being authorized to find a particular document.

- (7) a. *hayem ka? sepa čʔe algún documento*
 1SG before seem.to.me then some document
- b. *da? da? Ø-ek-a so? sala-nek*
 SUB SUB 3-go-LOC:specific CLF:DIST chief-M
 "I believed that ... that the chief came back with the document."
- c. *da? qomi? y-alofo-na-lo.*
 SUB 1PL 3-show-NPROG-PL
 "So that he could show us."
- d. *da? ka? epaʔa autorisaw ho? Ø-eta-t.*
 SUB before it.seems authorized DEM1:PROX 3-say-PROG
 "He was saying that he seems authorized for this." (067 Toribia Acosta. Lines 46–48)

Lastly, two significant aspects emerge as being part of the storyteller's judgment. The first of these are the closing remarks of the story, which appear once the difficulty has somehow been overcome, and in general refers to the end of the narrative, alluding to the fact that, otherwise, there is no certainty where it would end. A clear example of this is the last line of *The Fox and the Pichi*, where the narrator considers it best to bring the story to an end there ("I don't know what time I will finish telling this! That's why I will conclude here", *The Fox and the Pichi*). The second aspect is the narrator's assessment, which alludes to the length of the tale ("I believe this story is not long", *The Quitilipi and Pitogüé*) or to a particular situation occurring in the narrative ("This is what I tell, what I give you is *uh, how long it is!*", *The Fox and the Pichi*).

3.1.2. Magical Tales and the Spiritual Universe

In this group of texts, the characters no longer represent individual personalities, as happens in animal tales, but all belong to the magical and spiritual universe of the Pilagá. Recurrently, action in these stories takes place in the forest, a location recognized as sacred due to the large number of spirits dwelling there. In Pilagá culture, the shaman is the main figure, as

the person able to receive knowledge from the stars because of their meta sensitive and meta empirical experiences (Idoyaga Molina 1983: 32), which allow them to perceive souls and have contact with the dead. The divine, on the other hand, is personified in terrestrial bodies coming closer to the inhabitants of the earth as this author calls humans lacking in magical or sacred powers.

Similarly to animal tales, magical tales preserve, to a certain extent, a traditional structure, i.e. the initial situation, followed by a complication, and lastly, an outcome. However, while animal tales have a simple plot with characters interacting without many changes throughout the narrative, in magical tales this becomes more complex as they are led along by their characters. The mention of the Pilagá cosmivision is necessary to enable to organizing the recurrent characters in these magical accounts into two groups: inhabitants of the earth, understood as people or animals not endowed with “magical” powers but who are a part of these tales, on the one hand; and spiritual entities, who are all those inhabiting a celestial territory and having undoubtedly magical gifts, on the other. All the actions performed by these characters will be a link in the structure. The following example from *The Horned Owl (qutilipi)* and *the Female Great Kiskadees (pitogüé)* will provide better example of this phenomenon.

The story tells of the qutilipi going fishing every morning. Upon his return to the home, he shares the catch with his pitogüé wives, he orders every trace of fire to be doused, leaving their home in darkness. The nocturnal qutilipi has large, bulging eyes, and believes this might scare his wives, which is why he prefers them not to see him. So far, the initial situation is identifiable, with the pitogüé wives having no special magical power. As birds belonging to the earthly fauna, it might be said they are earthly inhabitants. In the magical tales in this corpus these characters represent routine, order, but they can be subject to sudden changes because they have no magic powers to defend themselves.

It will be the qutilipi, the central bird character actually having magical powers, who will cause the complication in this tale. One night, a breeze kept the flames from going out altogether. Though not explicitly mentioned, it is easy to infer this might be some supernatural force. Note that also, an onomatopoeia, *qapok*, is used to denote the action of the fire rekindling from the sparks:

(8) a.	qač'e	kopa'a	kal'io'	qač'e	sega'
	and.then	later	before	and.then	apparently

- b. qo-i-petet-owe eso dole' qapok kal'io'
 INDF.SUJ-3-blow-DIR:INWARD CLF: far fire ONMP before
"After a while, the fire burned as if someone had blown it" (The Quitilipi and the Pitogüé, 011. line 19)

As a result of the quitilipi's supernatural eyes, chaos breaks out between him and his wives, who fly off in panic. This kind of complications will not be happily resolved in all the tales, and will depend on the developments, which means the ending is usually more surprising than in animal tales. In this case, the quitilipi reveals he has the power of creation, making piranhas sprout from the piece of yuchan tree, so no earthly inhabitant will ever again approach and feel dismayed by his eyes.

In animal tales it *is* in fact possible to anticipate the way events will turn out, because the complication and outcome do not vary substantially from text to text. In magical tales, instead, the plot or the way in which the story develops is more complex. Although a certain structure may be recognized, it is not possible to use it to predict the narrative nuclei or the outcome. In some cases, as in this one, it is the earthly inhabitants who are harmed. Yet, there will be others who will benefit from the creation of medicinal plants or actions by wise shamans who will free them from the spirits of disease. In this sense there is a certain regularity in the structure if it is outlined according to what character and what actions are highlighted at a particular time in the narrative.

Narrator representation, though, does not follow a regular sequence, but varies from one text to another. The inscription of the narrator occurs at the beginning (*Wa' hayem sete' s'afat eso kiedkiek con eso wotakie'*, 'Well, I want tell the story of the lesser horned owl and the female great kiskadees'), but in most magical texts it is a heterodiegetic narrative (narrated by an omniscient voice that does not take part in the events of the story). As seen in animal tales, the narrator might opt for using the indirect style to replicate the voice of the characters, as happens in *The Spirit of the Alpaca*, which refers to the story of an impossible love a spirit feels for a human being and how, moved by their feelings, this spirit tells them the secret of how they might be together. The following examples are taken from this same text:

- (9) a. *Qanač'e y'at so' siyaŋawa y'aŋakačiyi qanač'e enak da' l'aqtak he'e.*
 "The older man answered with firmness, he said: well then show me your power."
 b. *Qanač'e enak da' l'aqtak so' paeyak he'e onet'oe qomle, awawo'e*
 "And the spirit responded and said to him: well, you have to get the costumes for yourself, a wisteria headpiece, a necklace, a gourd."

- c. *Qanač'e da'yem qanač'e aw'onaŋan qanač'e yiset da' ña'awena'am.*
"And to finish, furthermore you need to sing to be just like me." (025 Spirit Alpaca.
 Lines 2 to 4)

3.1.3. The Narrator as the Main Character: Testimonies

In the Pilagá corpus we have identified nine testimonies where the main characters are the storytellers themselves. These accounts are developed in first person and seek to show the veracity of the events by means of historical data, anecdotes and specific arguments.

The basic narrative structure of the testimonies differs considerably from the texts described above. This is due to their requiring greater plausibility in their storytelling, for they must convince their listeners that the events they are telling actually happened at some time in their lives. This also means descriptions and plots are more frequent when attempting to provide evidence of the thesis underlying the narrative. These texts can have a variety of functions, but the most recurrent is to denounce the injustices undergone by the Pilagá community, as is clear in the following examples.

The tale told by Toribia Acosta was recorded during a ceremony commemorating her father's death held at Kilometer 30, the name of a Pilagá community in the province of Formosa. The text reveals more complex performative characteristics which can be accessed in the audio and video recording, and which we feel should be analyzed for comparison of proxemic and performative aspects in this testimony, a task which, for reasons of space, will not be done in this paper. In her testimony, Toribia explicitly puts forward several arguments supporting the viewpoint of the narrator as the central character. She provides an eye-witness account of the violence suffered, while claiming ownership of those lands for her family, with the account clearly identifiable as belonging to the testimonial genre, more explicitly than in other texts. A study of this text led us to recognize the narrator uses the direct style, as does the narrator in animal stories, though with a very different intention. In animal tales, the narrator mimics the sounds of animals or makes the characters' words his or her own, in an effort to entertain the listeners and make them laugh. Instead, Toribia Acosta uses the direct style, illustrated in (10), to endow her testimonial account with the voice of the judge interrogating them for taking over and occupying a land that, according to the legal authority, does not belong to them.

- (10) a. *Seta so'y'aqtak, kanč'e qopa'ta qamte mat'e nkese qosele'ek.*
"Later to change the subject he said something in jest."

b. *Judge ¿hega' ami' ete' noko?*

‡Judge: “How many of you?” (067 *Toribia Acosta*. Lines 36 and 37).

She thus defines the profile of the antagonist in the tale and builds a valid argument to denounce the injustice being suffered. On the other hand, it is also possible to recognize the thesis, understood as the “proposition representing a controversial or questionable declaration in a given discursive context and supported by narrative elements: conflict, characters and events” (Carranza 2020: 95). Another text, *Naming his daughter*, sets out a situation that led to controversy. The narrator, who is likewise the main character in the tale, shares that he and his wife decided to register their daughter with her aboriginal name. This proposition is the thesis of the testimony. It is the Registrar at the Vital Records Office who represents the antagonist, like the judge in Toribia Acosta’s account, and who turns it into a controversial statement creating conflict. This thesis is supported by the events that then lead to Ignacio Silva, the child’s father, being given a negative answer, followed by the insistence of Sister Nelly, the nun, who submits a note, the intervention of a government representative maintaining that the law approving this type of registrations should be observed, and eventually the express order received by the Vital Records Office director to consent to the request made by the little girl’s father. The outcome shows these arguments were sufficient to ensure the situation was resolved in favor of the narrator, who was able to give his daughter the name he had planned on.

3.2. Descriptive Texts

Lastly, the Pilagá corpus involves approximately thirty-five texts with a predominance of descriptive-explanatory sequences. The descriptive texts therefore cover topics ranging from the formulation of travel routes to the characterization of their environment. This, in turn, triggers two types of different structures, depending on the predominant theme of the descriptive text. Because of this difference, we suggest the existence of two subgroups: those aimed at instruction (3.2.1) and those aimed at explanation (3.2.2). Though the features distinguishing and enabling this subclassification of descriptive texts are demonstrable, their pedagogical nature remains stable in both cases, seeking to guide their listeners in their surrounding universe.

3.2.1. Instructive Description: Travel Routes

The texts in this group are characterized firstly by the use of constructions used to express Path of motion along with location and motion verbs,

In these hunter-gatherer communities, demonstration and imitation are basic strategies for instruction. Hunters start to be instructed at the age of twelve, at first in the company of an older adult, and after a number of expeditions, they set off on their first experiences as hunters under the supervision of an older adult. Thus, as mentioned by Sugiyama and Mendoza (2018), this situation is characterized by gestures, eye contact, and scant verbalization, supposedly to avoid scaring off any prey. To become a good hunter-gatherer, it is important to distinguish among the species and their customs and properties.⁵

However, in the descriptive text named *The wax* some recommendations for successful hunting are given, using the second person of the verb. This is probably due to the fact the narrator imagines or recreates a scene where an instruction is being given, talking directly to a listener, the person being instructed. This latter phenomenon is clearly shown in (13), describing how the wax arrow is a good weapon for hunting.

- (13) a. *so'* *moe* *yi-set* *da'* *aw-k'i-ye* *da'*
 CLF:FAR bee.wax 3-be.able SUB 2-eat-COMPL SUB
 The wax can help you to survive
- b. *aw-ayate-n* *eda* *a-n'-pi-aʃak*
 2-know-NPROG SUB POS.2-B.3-gather.shellfish-NMLZ
 "The wax can help you to survive if you know how to hunt"
 (047 *The Wax*, Line 1)

4. Contrasting Structures, Themes and Characters

In the preceding sections, we have proposed a preliminary classification of texts according to types and themes. In this section, we will return to the issues raised in §1.

The first of these issues, we have noted that the texts can be distinguished according to their narrative or descriptive type, in addition to recognizing four differing thematic groups, each with characteristics of their own.

As for the characteristic aspects of narratives and descriptions, the structure of narrative texts is clearly distinct, with an initial situation, a complication, a resolution and an outcome. In magical stories, instead, the characters are those who define the structure: in the final situation we will have the earthly inhabitants, the complication that will take place thanks to the

⁵ Under that assumption they were elicited, as a way of teaching the researcher how to recognize them.

intervention of a creature with spiritual or magical gifts, with the outcome involving a process of creation or change in the earthly environment. Descriptive texts, on the other hand, begin by establishing the theme. In the texts we consider as travel trajectories, an imaginary path is traced using verbs of movement and verbs of static position to help with the actual location inside and outside the community.

Likewise, in narrative texts we find the predominance of chronological chain of events, and dialogical sequences. The pedagogical and depictive function of descriptive texts means they revolve around a single theme, characterizing the typical traits of the species and the natural habitat or environment. Travel paths will likewise involve explanatory sequences with instructive nuances, relating to the function they have as orientation guides.

The descriptions, as has been seen, can be broken down into two groups according to their structure: on the one hand we have travel paths that instruct the listener about places and, on the other, texts characterizing or explaining topics also related to the habitat, the environment. Travel paths are also characterized by the dynamism provided by the presence of static location and motion verbs while in descriptive texts there is a predominance of static location verb sequences. However, the instruction or teaching function is maintained in both cases.

Accordingly, it can be held that narrative texts are different either in structure or function. The themes have made it possible to sub-group them.

On the other hand, the storytellers involved demonstrate great versatility. In animal texts, performative marks are more noticeable, ranging from the use of direct and indirect styles to false beginnings. Even within the narrator's relative omniscience they make value judgments at certain moments in the narrative. In magical tales, these marks are not so frequent, and narrators may opt for either the third person verb or the first, in addition to which direct or indirect style uses will also be rare. In the case of testimonies, the narrator is necessarily the protagonist and, unlike what happens in animal tales, will use direct style to confront the opinion of the characters, which will generally be contrary to their own.

5. Closing Remarks

In this paper we have sought to provide insight into some of the texts that make up the Pilagá Collection. We have not considered verbal practices in all their complexities or genres specific to this language. The texts we referred to were first produced orally and then turned into an object of study and included in an archive. The texts were produced by native speakers who have given them a distinctive style. Most Pilagá speakers were preliterate un-

til little less than fifty years ago and, at the time these textual records were captured, many of the speakers who produced them had no literacy skills in any language, while a few young people who gave voice to some of the records that make up the collection today, did evince literacy skills in Spanish. Nor were the narrators selected for being especially good storytellers, although many of them actually turned out to be good at it.

The features surveyed such as direct/indirect style and the change in the use of grammatical persons, among others, depend on the particular discourse style of each storyteller. Likewise, features linked to themes and structure depend more on the type of text.

The need to recover the verbal practices of peoples having a long oral tradition as part of their intangible heritage (UNESCO 1989) is a priority, as cautioned by Woodbury (2003, 2011), among others, for whom the objective should be the direct documentation of their discourse, the full range of local genres, relegating language description to a secondary plane. This recommendation makes a lot of sense when it is languages in danger of no longer being transmitted that are at stake. Undoubtedly, linguistic description is a highly idealized and culturally constructed activity in academic circles and practices. This degree of idealization leads us to wonder whether our view of the categories with which we approach the organization of the textual material collected does not perhaps have a universalizing predisposition that needs to be called into question.

Allied to this problem is our concern for the organization and cataloguing of the texts in the corpus: What particular features of the narratives or the descriptions should be taken into account when classifying the texts in a corpus characterized by the diversity of possible registers, where not everyone agrees as to the traditional sense of ‘folktale’ (Aarne–Thompson 1961 [1928]). This leads to the reflection upon the relevance of the classification categories in this case, in addition to the uniformity of style or gender features of what we have chosen to refer to as “narrative” and “descriptive” genres for the study of Pilagá discourse.

We have presented an initial study of Pilagá verbal art through texts, more specifically of those we have dubbed narrative and descriptive. Issues relating to the typology of genres from the perspective of Pilagá culture, whether linked to ancient or modern practices, have not yet been addressed, and it is time for an empirical investigation of this topic from a Pilagá discourse-centered point of view.

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Documentando prácticas verbales: colección de textos Pilagá

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Resumen

La colección de textos pilagá es el resultado de varios proyectos que han proporcionado los medios para registrar y construir un archivo lingüísticamente anotado y representativo del arte verbal de esa comunidad de hablantes.

Esta es la primera iniciativa sistemática para construir un archivo textual en lengua original, traducido al español y al inglés. Los textos representan una muestra de la diversidad de la narrativa Pilagá, de aproximadamente veinte hablantes de todas las comunidades Pilagá del centro-oeste de la provincia de Formosa, Argentina. El Pilagá (perteneciente a la familia Guaycurú) es una lengua en peligro de extinción, hablada por menos de 5000 personas de diferentes grupos etarios.

Este artículo trata acerca de la organización y clasificación de dichos textos; particularmente, los del género narrativo. Los textos narrativos del corpus oral han sido agrupados, en primer lugar, según su estructura y estilo y, luego, por subgrupos temáticos, sin perder de vista lo anterior. Este trabajo proporciona un curso de entrada a las discusiones en torno a la clasificación de textos de un *corpus* diverso, en el contexto de la documentación de una lengua en peligro, y expone además la metodología adoptada y los criterios de organización de los registros.

Palabras-clave: discurso oral, etnografía, poblaciones indígenas, Chaco, Argentina.

Документовање вербалних пракси.
Збирка текстова на пилага језику

Александра Видал и Сабрина Масијел

Резиме

Збирка текстова на пилага језику је резултат неколико пројеката који су омогућили да се сниме и изгради архив којег чини лингвистички анотиран и репрезентативан корпус текстова на језику пилага. Ово је прва систематска иницијатива која је омогућила успостављање архива текстова на оригиналном језику, као и у преводу на шпански и енглески. Текстови представљају разноврстан узорак прича на пилаги и укључују око двадесет говорника из свих заједница које говоре пилагу, у централно-западној покрајини Формоса у Аргентини. Језик пилага припада породици гвајакурских језика и припада угроженим језицима – њиме говори мање од 5000 људи различите старосне доби.

Рад је усмерен на организацију и класификацију текстова који су укључени у збирку, а посебна пажња посвећена је причама и описима. Указано је на извесне методолошке аспекте повезане с прикупљањем и каталогизовањем, с дискусијом о неким одликама као што су подтипови и теме. Ови текстови не само да представљају традицију и друштвено памћење ловачко-сакупљачког друштва, него и откривају симболичну конструкцију моралног пејзажа, веровања, духовне везе са универзумом и њихово приближавање естетским изразима вербалне уметности.

Кључне речи: усмени дискурс, етнографија, аутохтони народи, Чако, Аргентина.

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