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Languages of the Americas 1

Diasporas and Shared Knowledge: the case of regional, endangered, autochthonous languages

Introduction

The following group of texts deals with some methodological issues involved in generating knowledge-sharing (*ciberayni*[1]) materials for a dispersed cultural diaspora (*archipiélago cultural*[2]) and a *retorno* programme, where exiles return to a country of origin to contribute their expertise. It suggests the use of an "iterative relay" (*relevo iterativo*) and provides examples of talks given in 2002 and 2003 in Paris and London. The first, originally in Spanish, deals with the Andean languages, focusing on their historical evolution, and the second provides an overview of the Amazon languages, as well as relaying, in English, selected parts of the first talk. The two example documents (transcribed talks) appear together here in order to demonstrate the "relay." The second attempts to pick up from the first, repeating in another language, in another country and to an audience with a different make-up, essential parts of the preceding talk but exploring other areas of interest to the London audience. It is hoped that readers will continue the relay by presenting talks which extend or deepen the theme of "Languages of the Americas" and sharing that talk and

perhaps also any subsequent discussion in some common language (e.g. English and Spanish), or alternatively widening into other themes: art, technology, socio-economic development of Latin America, local studies, cultural history and so on.

Members of the Latin American diaspora in Europe—émigrés and exiles—and their friends have formed some hundreds of organisations in the last few decades. During the course of each year, and in the main independently of each other, these associations present talks and other events which relate to the cultures of their members (i.e. Euro-Latin American cultures) or to the cultures of the regions and countries from which they came. Yet few of the talks and events are shared with other members of the diaspora or recorded, in whatever media, for purposes of research, education, sharing with the "folks back home," historical record, etc. The two articles which follow are but a sample of the many hundreds which could be shared publicly, used for education within the diaspora or back in Latin America or for other purposes.

Several barriers have traditionally existed which prevent a wider dissemination. Until recently a cost-effective medium was not available. Now the Internet and CDs or DVDs, which can be copied, offer a solution. However converting a talk—sometimes given quite informally—into something which can be of value in another language and another country is labour intensive. Without specific funding or superhuman effort on the part of the President or Secretary of the organisations (in these cases, the Peruvian Cultural Centre in Paris and the Anglo-Peruvian Society in London) the work is best done by a team. The specialist who gave the talk is often a busy academic who because of intense pressures in his University would not have time to participate, other than perhaps undertake an optional review of the proofs. He has given the talk and permission for its dissemination, probably free, and that should be enough! Teamwork offers the prospect of breaking down a time-

intensive chore into do-able chunks: two people to record the talk and the questions which sometimes follow, two to transcribe it, two to translate it (unless a truly bilingual and biliterate translator is available from amongst the association's members it is preferable to have one specialist / native-speaker in the original language of the talk and another in the language into which it is being translated), an editor who will convert the talk into a written document, erasing the oral blips and doing general sub-editing, a multi-media editor where graphics, sound, video and animations are concerned, and a DVD producer, where for example a slide show or musical event needs to be transferred into that medium.

The choice of topics for talks, of course, is simply a local matter: whatever informs, entertains, amuses or educates the association's members. Especially when new to a country, members are often in acute need of information about culture, language, employment, human rights etc. In the longer term a deeper and sharper appreciation develops, of not just the host country's but also of one's root or home culture. Languages are the example given here. The many hundreds of other talks and lectures given through Europe each year, whose topics can be seen as being almost randomly generated, offer a rich resource in, for example, education programmes both for Latin Americans and their children in Europe and for input into universities, colleges and schools in Latin America.

It is suggested below that some coherence could be provided to this apparently random collection without a centrally coordinated network. The sequence of articles, given here as an example, is not part of a planned series. It could be described better as an iterative relay (the *relevo iterativo* see below) developed to share knowledge amongst communities or diasporas which are geographically, socially and politically fragmented. The sequence deals with the languages of the Americas: initially those of

Peru and the Andes. Many of these are endangered—in danger of dying out. These languages are cultural assets not only for Latin America but also for its global diaspora. They are also indispensable resources in the development process.

Critical knowledge and diasporas

A link is being made here between the survival of endangered languages and the cultural and socio-economic development of diasporas of émigré and exile groups, located mainly in global cities. A method (the *relevo iterativo*) is suggested whereby diaspora associations collaborating with academic specialists can build up circuits of knowledge which are critical to the well-being of the diasporas and that of the countries or areas from which they come (the "root homeland"). By way of example, subsequent articles apply this method to the sharing of knowledge about the actual and ancestral languages of Latin Americans in Europe, starting with the Peruvian and Andean languages. As most members of diaspora groups and, critically, their children are—with notable exceptions—less likely to be going to university, this sharing of knowledge will have to take place, and is taking place, through less formal, non-university channels.

Although the use of the internet has been mentioned above (and you are presumably reading these articles online in *EnterText*), access to the Web is difficult for low-income groups or simply unavailable in parts of Latin America. A fixed-place, traditional print library is similarly of limited usefulness where a diaspora is spread out across a continent, as is the case for Latin Americans in Europe. The diaspora is both geographically dispersed and socially fragmented. In the case where traditional print may also be an "inappropriate" medium, reproducible compact disks or DVDs may be an effective alternative. However, without a collegiate environment in which to study, such media may have little effect. Local multi-community

universities might provide a solution (for example, the proposed multi-lingual Sikh University based in London and the Punjab).

Diasporas as recognised virtual regions

Diasporas have a twin interest in development : their own and that of the areas they have come from, whether these are recognised states, e.g. Bolivia, or not, e.g. "Kurdistan." Recent systemic approaches to international relations theory, together with advances in cultural and development studies, permit us to focus on the role of diasporas in the development of, for example, global cities on the one hand and "root homelands" on the other. Individuals are seen as members not just of nation-states (and of course some may be "stateless") but also of epistemic (producing their own identity or classification) and other groupings. This is reflected in the sense of multiple identity felt by many living in European cities today. The European Union (EU) encourages regional diversity (e.g. a Europe of the Regions) and "lesser-used" languages. However "non-communitarian" or non-EU communities and their "lesser-used" languages such as Quechua, Shipibo and the other languages in this review, may not be—usually are not—included .

Migration and Language

Critical to this multifaceted make-up are the languages which come to be spoken during processes of migration. It is the endangered languages which also "come to be forgotten" in this same process. Andeans shift from Aymara or Quechua to Spanish as they migrate from the mountains to the capital city and may shift again into English or some other first-world language as they move on. This process of urbanisation and global migration is, of course, one of the principal factors which places ancestral languages in danger.

It is hoped that the extra-mural activities of academics talking to diaspora groups (as in these documents) will help the cause, the survival of endangered languages. Another support should be programmes which facilitate the written output of the speakers of these endangered languages, which at the same time are often diglossic, autochthonous, indigenous or regional. In some instances speakers have migrated as far as European global cities—Paris and London are the examples treated here—where they comprise "minorities within minorities" producing a linguistic "double-diglossia." The speakers in Europe of these endangered languages do not necessarily form geographical communities, even less so enclaves or ghettoes. This geographical dispersal produces a challenge for any programme which aims to contribute to knowledge-sharing of this type.

American regional or indigenous languages in Europe

Although there are centres of established academic excellence, for example at Liverpool, Paris and St. Andrews, the thousand or so languages of the Americas have been relatively neglected by latin-americanists in Europe. What little is published is largely unavailable either to the provincial Latin American student or to the dispersed speakers of these languages in Europe. Throughout Europe, North America, Australia and in other areas in which the Latin American diaspora has located (some authors refer to these dispersed areas as a cultural "archipelago") there is a natural constituency of Latin American exiles and émigrés whose root parental-languages are the regional or indigenous languages (and not, for example Spanish or Portuguese) of Latin America. For example it is estimated that in 1900 seventy per cent of Peruvians spoke Quechua; thus there is a high probability that a Peruvian émigré or exile of today is descended from Quechua-speakers.

The study of these languages has therefore a potential audience in Europe. However, few Latin Americans in Europe choose to study them and none of the languages or associated cultural studies are on the national school curriculums. Unsurprisingly, some would say, yet it is the aspiration of many educators in European global cities to offer just such an inclusive curriculum, which would challenge the alienation felt by many of the children of exiles from not just Latin America but areas of prime migration (such as Algeria in the case of France).

Cohesive and coherent methods: the *relevo iterativo* approach

The *relevo iterativo* (iterative relay) approach to sharing knowledge has several characteristics:

- It emphasises the role of cultural associations—in this case Latin American—in mediating academic content to the non-academic needs of members, and of bringing academics—specialist latin-americanists—into contact with an émigré population, who in the main are not, nor have they been, university students, nor do many have the means to be so.

- It encourages the pooling and sharing of recordings (termed *ciberayni* from the Quechua: mutual reciprocity in labour) made across Europe and the sequencing of lectures on self-evolving themes. Though not organised as a series, the topics are kept on track because cultural associations respond to the needs and interests of their members.

- European universities teach Latin American cultural studies, development studies, etc., but do so, mostly, as studies of the "other," whereas the reality is that the "other" is in effect an actual constitutent of "us," and is present in fragmented cultural communities across Europe and elsewhere. The aggrandisement of the university sector over the last decades has failed to

recognise these demographic changes. The creation of new universities, often by renaming but not re-resourcing existing colleges in 1992 and again currently in the UK, has missed a vital opportunity to remodel the university for a population with global links. Iterative relaying can redress the balance.

Socio-linguistic complexity exported and the *retorno*

Visitors to Peru comment on the complexity of its cultural and linguistic make-up. Over sixty languages are spoken throughout the country. More recently, these languages have been spread overseas. Over ten per cent of Peruvians live abroad, contributing to the cultural mix of global cities. Los Angeles, New York, Paris and Barcelona are just some of the cities where Peruvians have settled in significant numbers.

This émigré population is seen by the Peruvian government and international organisations such as UNESCO as a brain-drain, but also a potentially rich resource if only a way could be found to harness expatriate knowledge and technological skills and transfer them back to Peru. A Government-sponsored *retorno* programme encourages skilled Peruvians living abroad to return. However, those who are already settled in new careers and with established families find it difficult to do so. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been developing other programmes. One of these, the Andean Education Programme, has sponsored various initiatives involving Peruvian expatriates: a virtual university Europe-Andes, study-travel programmes in Europe, an education network using the internet, etc. However, for a variety of reasons, mainly bureaucratic and financial, these programmes so far have had minimal impact. They may yet succeed, as may the Government's *retorno* programme but the feeling is that they are fighting up-wind against the prevailing neo-liberal models which favour multi-national investment and globalised locations.

A newer approach is rooted in the work of Latin American community associations in Europe who wish to send back something more than "money and old clothes." They are linking their efforts with European specialists on their countries (e.g. Peruvianists), and with their own post-graduate students often on scholarships at European universities (*becarios*). In this scheme the associations host or sponsor specialist yet accessible talks, lectures or conferences and convert them into databases of knowledge which can be used in, for example, Latin American universities. The "new" aspect is that they are organised on the basis of an international relay (*relevo*). Like passing on the Olympic flame, the baton or responsibility for building up the series is carried forward by several organisations in a relay. The database is built up progessively or iteratively, with necessary repetition. The information is shared via text-files or web-pages for those who have computers. For the majority who do not have personal computers, copiable CDs, and in the future DVDs, may be the way forward.

Beyond universities and the professions

The purpose of this international series of talks is to share knowledge, crossing over and beyond the walls of academia and escaping the intellectual gravity (and *gravitas*) of professional groups. The challenge is to find ways of bringing acutely necessary and valuable information to those who need it, not just in Latin America but throughout the Latin American diaspora in Europe and elsewhere. The idea is that virtual minority groups can compensate for the absence of an educational infrastructure and explicit circuits of knowledge within their community by networking (relaying) together existing cultural associations, academic specialists, postgraduate students and others, whilst at the same time forging links with more formal institutions and networks such as universities and cultural attachés at their

embassies. The second article describes the first steps in the implemention of a non-centred education network and database, which is designed to grow by itself and not to need expensive coordination and administration. The example taken is that of generating education materials on the theme of Peruvian languages. One set of target users are the children and grandchildren of Latin Americans in Europe. A secondary use is to support language maintenance programmes in Peru.

Handing on the baton

The first steps, then, include converting two oral talks to a distributable mode on CD/DVD and via the internet, as here. The first talk which follows is one given in Paris to the Peruvian Cultural Centre by Cesar Itier with the title "Quechua, Aymara and other Andean Languages." The second is a talk to the Anglo-Peruvian Society, London on the subject of "The languages of Peru" focusing on their history, the present situation and on language policy for their future survival, which itself follows on from the Paris talk. As there is no overall coordinator who might see to the development of the themes, each association and author or speaker has responsibility for "handing on the baton," rather like a relay race or relaying the Olympic flame. The Latin American associations in Europe, which otherwise have little or no relation to each other now have a project over which they can collaborate. Presenting talks to audiences from this cultural archipelago demands that content connects with the high-to middlebrow and avoids dumbing down. Handing on the baton influences the direction and content of the sequence. The materials thus develop a quality different from that which would have evolved in a series of university lectures.

Finally, unlike the case of most learned journals, in this instance copyright remains with the authors and / or organising institutions. The digital versions of images, moving or still, and other materials may be used where original copyright has

been cleared for educational and non-commercial purposes or for programmes with

similar aims. The network (or database of relays) at this stage is not a separate

persona juridica but space on several internet servers, which are managed by

organisations with often-similar aims. You become a member by contributing an

article, talk, letter, question, answer, comment, improvement or other communication.

The network is not coordinated but works on the basis of organic evolution.

Documents on the servers constitute a "public library." It is proposed that a

copy of the catalogue for this electronic library be deposited at the LANIC (Latin

American Information Centre at the University of Texas) and UNESCO sites. There is

an argument that the National Libraries, which have direct interests in the materials

(e.g. Peruvian National Library in the case of these documents), should also hold the

catalogue, if not the documents themselves.

Note: "DIASPORAS AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE: the case of regional, endangered, autochthonous languages" is a working paper, the first in the 'iterative relay' sequence, THE LANGUAGES OF LATIN AMERICA (Andes).

Two transcribed talks follow here, extending the sequence:

    2   QUECHUA, AYMARA AND OTHER ANDEAN LANGUAGES
    3   LANGUAGES OF PERU

Work is in progress on the following relay documents:

    4   SHIPIBO-CONIBO and the ECOLOGY of the UCAYALI
    5   LANGUAGES OF COLOMBIA

Handing on the baton: suggested further talks in the relay:

    6   LANGUAGES OF BOLIVIA
    7   ADVANCES IN HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS
    8   THE SHIPIBO LANGUAGE

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[1] *Ciber-ayni* is adapted from *Ciberayllu*, a Spanish-Quechua compound indicating online community. See *Ciberayllu* online journal at www.andes.missouri.edu/andes/Ciberayllu.shtml, www.ciberayllu.org or www.ciberayllu.com. *Cyber* originally from cybernetics (orig. Greek: steersman) and *ayni* (Quechua), the Andean system of mutual reciprocity or labour-sharing.

[2] The concept of a cultural archipelago is developed in an article by Ulises Juan Zevallos Aguilar "Hacia una topografía del archipiélago cultural andino" to be found at http://www46.homepage.villanova.edu/ulises.zevallosaguilar/jalla/X.html. This formed the substance of the keynote address to the JALLA (Jornada Andina de Literatura Latinoamericana) conference in Cuzco, Peru, in August 1999.