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MODERN GUATEMALAN MAYAN LITERATURE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT:
BILINGUAGING IN THE LITERARY WORK OF BILINGUAL MAYAN AUTHORS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Director:

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My dissertation examines the revival of written Mayan language literature in Guatemala since 1980 - a literature created by Mayan authors who write in Mayan languages and also in Spanish. I explore the impact of socio-political context on the choice of literary language, and review how these bilingual authors express their world view and culture through their use of language-specific vocabulary, syntax and style in their literary texts. Bilanguaging in their texts in each language is an epistemological statement, and evidence of a dialogical and aesthetic communicative process of social transformation.

In Guatemala, new written Mayan language literature has developed since the political conflicts of 1954-1996, and follows a long tradition of oral literature, pre-colonial glyph writing and early colonial alphabetic writing, with characteristic themes, genres and stylistic features. I describe the contemporary linguistic situation, the movement to preserve Mayan languages in writing and the corresponding need for Mayan-language literacy. I also discuss the need for translation into Spanish, as a lingua

franca that both Ladino readers and speakers of different Mayan languages can access, and also as the only language that has been taught in schools.

I evaluate recent transcriptions of Mayan oral literature and their translations into Spanish to show how their themes and styles form a foundation for written literature. I then analyze bilanguaging in the works of three authors: Humberto Ak'abal (K'iche'), Gaspar Pedro González (Q'anjob'al) and Victor Montejo (Jakaltek) who write in Mayan K'iche', Q'anjob'al, and Popb'al Ti' and who themselves re-write/translate their works into Spanish. This process of writing in two languages itself reflects the dual world views the authors inhabit. I compare the Spanish and Mayan language texts to demonstrate lexical and syntactic asymmetry, and show how the Spanish text includes Mayan lexical borrowings, syntactic structures and stylistic features in order to foreground the Mayan voice in the Spanish text.

I conclude by discussing the significance and the viability of this emerging literature as an expression of cultural linguistic rights and de-colonial epistemological transformation in the socio-political context of Guatemala.

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Modern Guatemalan Mayan Literature in Cultural Context

Bilanguaging in the Literary Works of Bilingual Mayan Authors

Hana Muzika Kahn

INTRODUCTION

Bilanguaging in modern literature written by bilingual Guatemalan Mayan authors is the focus of this dissertation. I refer to texts written in Mayan languages and translated into/rewritten in Spanish by the authors, and to the diglossic use of more than one language within texts in each of the languages. I also draw attention to the double meaning implicit in the word “bilanguaging” itself: *bilangue* in the physical sense ‘double tongue’, ‘forked tongue’, and its association with the manipulation of meaning and the play of power between writer and reader.

Previous studies of early and modern Guatemalan Mayan literature have selected specific historical periods and authors for anthropological, linguistic, sociopolitical and literary analyses, but these studies have thus far remained largely in the domain of anthropological linguistics, without a significant integrated input from literature researchers. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the issue of bilingualism, translation and self-translation in works by Mayan authors. In my dissertation, I show how Mayan literature is in the process of self-definition and then explain the multiple meanings, slippages of meaning, asymmetries and silences embedded in modern translated/transformed Mayan texts written in Mayan languages and Spanish by Humberto Ak’abal, Gaspar Pedro González and Victor Montejo. I place these meanings

within the sociolinguistic context of contemporary Guatemala and also show how they relate both culturally and stylistically to a historic tradition of Mayan literature.

The literature I study here has grown out of the Mayan revitalization movement, which itself developed as a resistance to the violent anti-Maya attacks of the 1954-1996 period of insurgency and, in particular, the armed conflict of the 1980s, during which 200,000 Mayans were killed and many more forced into exile. The current Mayan Movement represents the first massive overt resistance accompanied by explicit demands by Mayans for legislative changes and the recognition of Mayan rights. Despite Guatemala's independence from Spain in 1821, the situation of subjugation to the dominant Spanish-speaking ruling class remained the same for the indigenous people, and the current movement is a clear reaction to the threat of annihilation. The aspect of this movement which concerns me here is the effort to preserve Mayan languages and culture in writing by transcribing oral tradition and in new kinds of literary texts. In order to take into account the inter-related multilingual, sociopolitical characteristics of these texts, and to identify and interpret their cultural and linguistic idiosyncracies, I use a comparative approach which incorporates methodology and research from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, translation theory, literary theory and post-colonial studies.

From a broader perspective, I view this literature in the context of world-wide movements to prevent language loss, in particular, indigenous languages at risk from colonial language domination, and the concomitant loss of cultural patrimony. I argue that the study of indigenous literatures is no longer a peripheral and minor realm of Comparative Literature but aligns itself with a fundamental struggle against the homogeneity of globalization, and that indigenous literatures, in their demands for

inclusion, require that we reconsider our assumptions about literary canons. I also make it clear that Comparative Literature is the natural habitat for Translation Studies and Post-Colonial Studies¹ and that literary analysis, particularly in the case of such heteroglossic texts, is further enriched by the insights and methods of linguistic analysis and the application of discourse analysis to the written text. Marion Gymich points out that narratology has always relied on linguistic evidence, but “there have been relatively few efforts to integrate the insights and methods of the discipline of linguistics into the narratological study of texts” (63). In my study, the inclusion of linguistic criteria is particularly productive because many of the key concepts of post-colonial literature (ethnicity, identity) are constructed via language, and because the process of validation and revitalization of Mayan languages is itself a central theme of the texts.

The use of multiple languages in literary texts is not new, but the socio-political context, its impact on us, and our reactions shift constantly. I suggest that most recently, literary bilanguaging has increased due to a massive increase in world-wide emigration and exile in the twentieth century, following world wars, regime changes and growing population mobility. Consequently many bilingual authors have been forced to write in a language other than their native language, and describe their own experience of loss of mother tongue and shift in communicative ability when writing in another (an other) tongue. Eva Hoffmann (*Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*), André Aciman (*Letters of Transit*), Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands La Frontera*), Elias Canetti (*The Tongue Set Free*), Bharati Mukherjee (*Jasmine*), Alurista (Alberto Urista) (*Spik in Glyph*), and Věra Linhartová (*Twor*) are among the writers who thematize loss of

¹ Haun Saussy argues for this inclusivity in the introductory chapter of *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*.

language in personal accounts of emigration, exile, linguistic hegemony, and in doing so, develop new forms of literary polyglottism, which functions as a form of resistance and identity assertion while also creating multiple dimensions of meaning.²

In the post-colonial era, the reaction to language loss has been a growth in national language revitalization movements. In nineteenth-century Europe this was already a central issue in countries incorporated into the German-speaking hegemony of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and one example bears some similarity to today's Guatemala. Božena Němcová, the Czech writer and activist, code-switched between Czech, German, Slovak, Slovenian, Serbian, Polish, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Latin and French for the purposes of instruction, clarification, painting an image, self-identification, and as a poetic device. She finally made a political/linguistic statement by writing her novel, *Babička* (1855), in Czech instead of German, at a time when, as she wrote, alternating between Czech and German, “V Moravě pry nikdo “aus der bessern Klasse” nemluví moravsky, “nur das gemeine Volk” ‘In Moravia apparently nobody “from the upper class” speaks Moravian, “only the ordinary people”’ (Macurova 92). It was the culture and language of these “ordinary” people that Němcová believed it was important to preserve.

The same issue appears in the post-colonial literary works of writers from the African continent. Steven Ungar explores how “an economy of difference and loss” and an associated “logic of transmission bear on translation faced by Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian writers following the formal end of colonization under France in 1962” (131). He writes in particular about Abdelkebir Katibi, Assia Djebar and Abdelwahab Meddeb

² I discuss this topic in detail in “Writers in Exile: The Effects of Polyglottism” *Exit 9 II:1* (1994) 105-120

and other post-colonial writers “whose writings disclose a cultural layering that casts their authors as occupying an “in between” space between Arabic, French and other languages” and who, by writing between languages, seek to “destabilize hierarchies of the colonial period that fixed Arabic language and cultures as inferior to their French equivalents” (132). Meanwhile, in the former British colonies, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o publishes *Decolonizing the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) and, after several novels and plays in English, begins to write in his native Gĩkũyũ. In the Ivory Coast, Ahmadou Kourouma writes in a hybrid French, into which he incorporates Malinké words, speech patterns and rhythms (*Les Soleils des Indépendances* 1976) – a phenomenon which Boris Boubacar Diop views skeptically as a trap whereby French will incorporate Malinké, thereby leading to the demise of the language itself (personal communication). Diop himself, from Senegal, wrote several books in French, but in 2006, he published his first book in his native Wolof, *Doomi Golo*. Like the Guatemalan writers I will discuss, Diop emphasizes the difference between writing in his native language and in French; points out the influence of oral narrative on written narrative in Wolof; refers to the socio-political dominance of French as the official language, co-existing with over twenty other languages; and discusses the problems of writing in a language in which the population is not literate.

The intersecting concerns of world language loss, post-colonial resistance to linguistic domination, and the growth of indigenous language and cultural revitalization movements have been addressed in recent years in conferences by organizations such as the Foundation for Endangered Languages, whose annual conference, held in a different country each year, was held in Antigua, Guatemala in 2002. Within the United States, the

biannual Symposium on Teaching Indigenous Languages of Latin America, which began in 2008 at Indiana University, Bloomington, reflects a growing interest in the United States in the study of indigenous languages. Conferences on indigenous literatures within the Americas include the biannual symposium of the Latin American Indian Literatures Association, and a growing number of new conferences bring together North and South American indigenous writers, for example, “Discursive Practices: The Formation of a Transnational Indigenous Poetics”, recently sponsored by the University of California, Davis. Indigenous literature is also starting to find its way into the larger, world literature conferences: I have organized a panel on Indigenous Literature for two years (2006 and 2007) at the annual conference of the American Comparative Literature Association, and the Mid-Atlantic Comparative Literature Association also hosted an Indigenous Languages and Literatures session at its 2005 conference. Within Guatemala, the Asociación Cultural B’eyb’al organized two Congresses of Indigenous Literature of America in 1999 and 2001 and plans another in 2009.

The published material on modern Mayan literature is mainly available in conference proceedings and journal articles, and I refer to this material briefly in the following chapter descriptions, and more at length in the relevant chapters.

Chapter 1 Sources and Development of Modern Mayan Literature in Social Context

In this chapter I examine the foundational characteristics of traditional Mayan literature which reappear in modern literature. My discussion of early glyph engravings and codices is based on the research of Karen Bassie-Smith and Kathryn Josserand, together with the interpretative work of Adam Herring. In examining early colonial

alphabetic writing, I have used Dennis Tedlock's translations of the *Popol Vuh* and *Rabinal Achí*, as well as his anthropological linguistics research. His work provides valuable insights into the comparative poetics of Mayan literature and has been fundamental in the framing of my approach. My research on modern Mayan literature is informed by prior work by Gail Ament, Arturo Arias, John Beverly, R. McKenna Brown, Linda Craft, Laura Martin, Jorge Rogachevsky, Dennis Tedlock, Enrique Sam Colop, and Robert Sitler.

I conclude this chapter by discussing the current socio-linguistic situation in Guatemala. The response to Mayan demands for official status for their twenty-two languages³ and for the use of these languages in an authentically pluricultural, plurilinguistic society were met by the 2003 Language Law of Guatemala, which did not grant official status, but did respond with some positive policy statements. This represents a change of attitude, if not in implementation, which provides further impetus for the Mayan writers who have begun to publish works in their own languages in the last fifteen years.

Chapter 2 The Writing of Oral Tradition

Gaspar Pedro González claims, as do many other Mayans, that Mayan oral tradition is the foundation of modern written literature. Consequently I analyze a selection of oral narrative works for the purpose of showing both their generic categories and their narrative content, but I also show how, when these works are transcribed and translated, they reveal fundamental differences in style and content between languages.

³ Achi', Akateko, Awakateko, Chalchiteko, Ch'orti', Chuj, Itza', Ixil, Jakalteko, Kaqkchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil, Uspanteko.

An analysis of a selection of recent Mayan and Spanish dual-language published oral narratives foregrounds their linguistic, stylistic and cultural features and shows how these preserve the characteristics of oral tradition for the audiences to whom they are addressed. I refer to studies of genre (Fernando Peñalosa, Carlos Montemayor, Antii Aarne and Stith Thompson, Gaspar Pedro González) and to theories of performance (Dennis Tedlock, Roman Jakobson, Richard Bauman). In the texts studied, there is no consistent format for writing about the performance or the oral narrative, nor is there a formal approach to the problem of translation from Mayan source language to Spanish target language. I refer to a large body of anthropological linguistic research, cited in the chapter, and I argue that both the mode of transcription and the subsequent translation into Spanish of the recent publications intended for the general reader frequently inadequately convey the full potential meaning of the original narrative, even if we take into account that oral narrative, by definition, changes with each performance.

Chapter 3 Modern Bilingual Mayan Writers: Writing, Re-writing, Translating: Approaches to (Self) Translation

This chapter is an analysis of textual translation and transformation of the literary work in relation to the identity of the intended readers, by Mayan authors writing in Spanish and Mayan languages. I draw analogies to comparable situations in other contexts and I then question who the intended audience of this modern literature is, given limited Mayan language literacy and the difficulty of publishing in Mayan languages, and bearing in mind the genre and ideological focus of the literary text. I consider which language authors write in first, and whether the second language text is a translation or a re-writing. I discuss the linguistic differences between their languages, before considering

the factors which inform the translation choices they make, how their message changes between source and target language, and the implicit message behind their decision not to translate in certain cases. Post-colonial translation theories, (by Susan Bassnett, Lawrence Venuti, among others) provide useful criteria for a comparative analysis of texts written by authors in two languages, and help to define the intentionality behind some of the discrepancies between the texts in the two languages an author uses. This is an area which has not yet been explored in Mayan literary analysis, and it provides the basis for my analysis of the three authors studied in this dissertation.

Chapter 4 Humberto Ak'abal : K'iche' Poet

Humberto Ak'abal was born in 1952, in the K'iche' town of Momostenango, in the western highlands of Guatemala. All his works appear in monolingual Spanish editions, and he has also published the following bilingual K'iche' /Spanish collections, which are the focus of my analysis:

Chajil Tzaqib'al Ja' /Guardián de la Caída de Agua “Guardian of the Waterfall”
Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2004

Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de palabras “Weaver of Words” Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2001

Ajyuq' / El animalero “Bestiary” Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2000

Akabal's poems, on themes of Mayan life lived in close contact with the natural world, Mayan world vision and spirituality, and Mayan loss of language and empowerment, appear in K'iche' and Spanish, facing each other, so that the reader is invited to enter the realm of each, and also made aware of a potentially inaccessible domain. If the reader does not speak one of the two languages, the co-existence and confrontation of the two

voices is a socio-political statement in itself. My analysis considers the visual framing of the poems and the conceptual differences between them, and emphasizes the semantic, phonological and syntactic differences in the languages. The structure of the poems in K'iche' includes frequent parallelisms and repetitions which are not always duplicated in the Spanish version. Moreover, the use in the Spanish texts of K'iche' words and phrases, many of which are powerfully onomatopoeic, has a strong sensory impact, further enhancing the reader's consciousness of the presence of K'iche' behind the Spanish and foregrounding the author's K'iche' language and culture.

Chapter 5 Gaspar Pedro González : Q'anjob'al Writer, Literary Scholar and Activist

Gaspar Pedro González is from the Q'anjob'al region of northwestern Guatemala and has published poetry, fiction, testimonial writing, and literary articles since 1996. His belief that Mayan literature will be revived by developing written literature based on the oral tradition and grounded in the Mayan world view, notably the Mayan calendar, is exemplified in the content and structure of his works, and in the increasingly discursive progression of his literary style . In this chapter I first discuss González's own theories of Mayan literary genres, described in *Kotz'ib' / Nuestra Literatura Maya* "Our Mayan Literature" and I explain the central place that the Mayan calendar has in his work. I then examine his poetry, *Sq'anej maya / Palabras mayas* "Mayan Words" and fictional works *S'beyb'al jun naq maya qanjobal / La otra cara* "A Mayan Life", *El retorno de los mayas* "The Return of the Mayas", and *13 B'aktun / El fin de la era* "13 B'aktun. The end of the era". My analysis of these works demonstrates how the Mayan Q'anjob'al language and culture, including culture-specific concepts and customs, lexicon and

syntax, discourse patterns, and narrative structure, permeate the themes and language of his Spanish-language texts.

Chapter 6 Victor Montejo : Jakalteco Writer, Anthropologist, and Politician.

Victor Montejo was born in 1951 in Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango, in the Jakalteco region of the Cuchumatán mountains in northwestern Guatemala. In 1982, after a military conflict in the town where he was teaching, he was imprisoned and later went into exile in the United States. He completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology and is now a faculty member in the Department of Native American studies at the University of California, Davis. He has published testimonial work, stories based on oral tradition, essays, short stories, poetry and anthropological research, and he has run for political office in Guatemala. In keeping with the focus of my research on bilingualing in the literary works by bilingual authors, my analysis of the literary work of Montejo is based on two works based on oral tradition: *Q'anil, el hombre rayo /Komam Q'anil: ya' k'uh winaj* "Man of Lightning", an epic narrative in poem form, and *El pájaro que limpia el mundo y otras fábulas mayas / No' ch'ik xtx'ahtx'en sat yib'anh q'inal* "The Bird Who Cleans the World", a book of fables; and two testimonial works: *Testimonio: muerte de una comunidad indígena en Guatemala* "Testimony: death of an indigenous community in Guatemala" and, co-authored by Q'anil Akab', *Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del mayab' (Guatemala)* "A very short testimonial account of the continuing destruction of the Maya land (Guatemala)". I am particularly interested in assessing the interplay in these works of authorial voice, language use and literary form as a function of the content and the intended audience, and also in showing how Montejo balances his multiple, sometimes conflicting identities - as a poet, as an anthropologist

who is both the subject and the object of his critical writing, and as a testimonial writer who now seeks to play an active political role.

My goal in this dissertation is to analyze bilanguaging in the works of these writers so as to demonstrate the cultural-linguistic tensions expressed in their work in two languages; to exemplify the profound importance of linguistic rights and the validation of cultural literary expression in Mayan languages; and to show how the progression from oral to written expression, with the historical background of a pre-Conquest written tradition, makes clear the need for a comprehensive Mayan poetics based in its own socio-cultural context. Finally, my remarks on the particular situation in Guatemala point to parallels in other socio-political linguistic situations and the corresponding literary manifestations of the current world-wide concern for linguistic identity and preservation in the face of globalization.

In the chapters that follow, all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The analyses refer to both Spanish and Mayan-language texts, but I should emphasize that I have restricted my analyses of Mayan language texts (K'iche', Q'anjob'al and Popb'al Ti') to the scope that my limited knowledge of them permits.

Chapter I

Sources and Development of Modern Mayan Literature in Social Context

Mayan literature written in Guatemala since 1980 is evidence of the first significant literary self-representation in modern times by Mayan writers, in particular the bilingual writers who write in both Mayan languages and Spanish. This new Mayan literature is considered a “foreign” body of work, and is not (yet) included in the mainstream of Guatemalan literature, whose writers have until recently been almost exclusively Ladino (mestizo). Print culture in Spanish is “the hegemonic site of cultural representation and synthesis” (Beverly and Zimmerman 146), with very little input from the Mayan community from the seventeenth century until the emergence of modern testimonial literature.

The first modern work by Mayan authors to reach public attention was Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, published in English as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. This work was mediated by Elizabeth Burgos and written in Spanish. It was followed by testimonial poems by Enrique Sam Colop and Caly Domitila Cane’k, and the novel *El Tiempo Empieza en Xibalba* “Time Begins in Xibalba” by Luís de Lión, all written in Spanish. These, and subsequent literary works which will be the topic of this dissertation, in addition to their mixed literary heritage and styles, show the effects of a remarkable heteroglossia, due to the interweaving influences to which their authors have been exposed and the explicit sociopolitical motives which have inspired their writing. The characteristics of this new literature, and of the traditional genres from which it has

developed, differ in many respects from those of Guatemalan literature by non-Mayan authors and from the Eurocentric western literary canon.

Mayan writers have, in some respects, taken over the themes of earlier indigenist writing in Guatemala. However, self-representation marks a radical change in voice and ideological perspective from the earlier ladino, non-Mayan indigenist writers. The latter include some of the progressive writers of the “Generation of the 1920s” such as Miguel Angel Asturias, for whom the “Indian question” and related social inequities were crucial, and Mario Monteforte Toledo in the 1930s, who saw indigenismo as “a source for spiritual revitalization in the face of years of dictatorship, of economic debilities, and strong class, caste and ethnic divisions” (Beverly and Zimmerman 150). Indigenismo was also a significant element in the ideological tendencies of the Saker-ti literary group of 1944-54, which, like earlier groups, sought to change the contradictory and out-dated institutions and beliefs which maintained the state of backwardness and social injustice in Guatemala.

The texts studied in this dissertation are written in both Spanish and Mayan languages and published in dual-language editions. This linguistic literary development presents tantalizing questions about genre formation, literary discourse, and the pervasive presence of Mayan world view. It is too soon to talk of a new literary canon because there are simultaneous changes in the cultural infrastructure. Rapid changes in cultural and linguistic assimilation coincide with the Mayan revitalization movement; the tenuous system of bilingual education and Mayan literacy; and economic pressures which affect the production, publication, distribution and consumption of Mayan language books, are all factors which greatly affect opportunities for writers at every level. Mayan authors

today have been educated in Spanish in a Spanish school system, with a curriculum of world literature, but intentionally and explicitly prefer to draw their literary inspiration from Mayan sources. Their writing is, therefore, a conscious construction and expression of Mayan identity.

In order to show how traditional Mayan genres and the current socio-political climate affect modern Mayan literature, this chapter presents an outline of the foundational characteristics of traditional Mayan literature. I define pre-Colombian writing, and I use studies of recently-deciphered pre-Colombian hieroglyphic writing on sculpture and ceramics and in books to show how early and modern writing styles can be compared through discourse analysis methods. I also discuss colonial-period alphabetic Mayan texts which have recently been re-translated by native Mayan speakers, because studies suggest that they were based on earlier hieroglyphic texts and, moreover, they demonstrate continuities in written style and content which influence today's writers.

The final part of this chapter is a presentation of select data on the current socio-linguistic situation in Guatemala. This situation forms a cultural infrastructure which first determines authorial choices of genre, theme, style and language, and in turn affects the production, publication, distribution and consumption of Mayan literature.

Pre-Colombian Writing: Development and Influence on Modern Writing

The term “Maya” comes “from the Yucatec Mayan word for ‘calendar cycle’ and the priestly title of those practitioners who reckoned this cosmic order” (Herring 34). The Spanish invaders who first encountered the Yucatec Maya when they landed on the

Mesoamerican mainland applied this name to all the distinct groups they encountered across what is now known as Guatemala. The distinct groups living in this area identify themselves by the names also used for their languages: K'iche', Kaqchikel, Mam, etc. It is ironic that the cohesion now provided by the name "Maya" in the current revitalization movement should be derived from the very colonizing powers it seeks to resist.

Modern Mayan poetry, narrative and testimonial writing include references to Mayan deities and calendrics which can be traced directly to the earliest written texts. Furthermore, studies of the narrative structure of pre-Colombian texts show features of discourse structure which are still in evidence in modern ritual language. Indeed, many of these features appear throughout all modern discourse genres. In addition, all publishers now use Mayan numerals for pagination, and illustrate the text with glyphs. This practice serves as a reminder of the long history of Mayan writing, but also alludes to the powerful combination of painting and glyphs and the performative-interpretative function of early texts. To demonstrate these roots of today's literature this section describes and explains relevant aspects of early Mayan writing.

Literacy in Mesoamerica began with Zapotec writing in 600 or 400 B.C.E., and some scholars believe that Olmecs (1200 B.C.E. in the Veracruz, Tabasco area) had developed a writing system earlier. The immediate roots of the Mayan civilization are attributed to the Izapan culture, on the western and southern edges of the Mayan world, extending to Kaminaljuyú, to the west of present-day Guatemala City. Izapan stone monuments show an iconography and writing system similar to those which emerge in the sites known as properly Mayan (Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* 22). Until recently, experts believed that Mayan writing developed during the Early Classic period, C.E. 300-600,

with hieroglyphic texts sculpted on stone and stucco, painted on pottery and plaster, and inked on long strips of paper which were folded like screens to make books (Ibid.). The earliest object written in hieroglyphs was believed to be Stela 29 at Tikal, erected in 292 C.E. However, in February 2006, news was released which dates writing back to 300 B.C.E. At San Bartolo in northeastern Guatemala, archeologists recently discovered a column of written glyphic words apparently associated with an image of a maize god. The San Bartolo writing is so far undecipherable, unlike that on more recent monuments and written texts, but, according to the report by John Noble Wilford, it shows unquestionably that 2,300 years ago the cultures of Mesoamerica “were telling their history and ideology through script and art” (*New York Times* F3 2.10.06).

Writing continued in books and on plastered walls of buildings during the Late Classic (600 – 900 C.E.) and Post-Classic periods (900 C.E. – Conquest), although during the last period there was a decline in carved inscriptions on monuments. Mayan hieroglyphs, which are characteristically accompanied by images, and the glyphs themselves, consist of logographs representing entire words, with some glyphs themselves incorporating pictorial clues to the meaning of the word - ideographs, and also phonetic symbols representing syllables, usually of vowel-consonant combinations. In 1999, Michael Coe stated that over 140 signs with phonetic value have been established (*The Maya* 220). The language of the inscriptions and books is Cholti, a now extinct branch of Mayan Ch’olan.¹ Given that the texts were probably but not exclusively

¹ “Nowadays there is substantial evidence that nearly all Maya hieroglyph texts were written in an eastern Ch’olan language, which has been labeled as “Classic Maya” or classic Ch’olti’an” (Houston, Robertson, and Stuart 2000) by linguists. The closest modern relative of this language is Ch’orti’, which is spoken in a relatively small area in Eastern Guatemala” (Kettunen and Helmke <http://www.mesoweb.com/resources/handbook/WH2005.pdf>, 12) Further information on the Cholti Maya, “a now extinct group who were predecessors of the Ch’orti Maya of today” is available in a summary of a talk by Judith Storniolo to the Pre-Columbian Society at the University of Pennsylvania

intended for oral reading, “configured for social settings and formal “readings” or “listenings” that we can only dimly reconstruct” (Houston 3), it appears that the reader used the information in the images for the content, and the information of the glyphs for a shorthand factual reference, like stage directions, and used both to create the spoken performance.² This would explain why written alphabetic texts of the same material are much longer, since they inscribe into the text much of the information compressed into the glyphs. Although we know little about how these readings occurred, it appears that in ancient Mesoamerica,

“reading” could, and probably most often did, imply a social act. What visual and ethnohistoric evidence for reading practice has been recovered suggests an activity assayed within groups of people, a kind of oration prompted and guided by the written document. Scholars cogently invoke the practice of “recitation literacy” to describe this form of interpreting texts. However the inscribed slab’s text may once have been received – read out loud by an interpreter to an assembled group, scanned quickly by the reader’s eye – the orality of the raconteur’s voice and timing was encoded directly into the signs on the slab’s face. (Herring 48)

This underlies the “dialectical relationship between writing and the pictures” described by Dennis Tedlock: “In Mayan languages the terms for both writing and painting are the same, the same artisans practice both skills, and the patron deities of both skill were twin monkey gods bearing two different names for the same day, translatable as One Monkey and One Artisan” (*Popol Vuh*: 27). Adam Herring explains in detail the dual concept of art and writing encoded in the term *ts’ib’*, which refers to “a form of calligraphic visuality, a particular visual idiom by which the Maya submitted the world’s

Museum <http://www.precolumbian.org/talk0507.html> Adam Herring adds that the ancient language seems to have been a “prestige language distinct from the vernacular” (48).

² Many linguists stress repetition and coupletting in ancient script and the oral, formal discourse of modern Mayans as evidence of the close relationship between Mayan script and oral language (Houston 3).

surfaces to the rationalizing logic of human pattern and cultural meaning” and whose cognates in English include “line,” “stripe,” “painting,” “drawing,” “brushwork,” “design,” “inscription,” “patternwork,” “writing” (7).

Pre-Colombian Books

Only four Mayan written documents are known to have survived from the Pre-Colombian period to this day, because most of them were destroyed by early Spanish priests in an effort to eradicate the un-Christian beliefs of the native peoples. While it is known that books existed during the Classic period, because there are depictions of them on painted pottery of the period, three of the four remaining texts are all from the fifteenth-century Post-Classic period. They are known as the Dresden, Paris, Madrid and Grolier codices. The Dresden Codex was probably written just before the Conquest, and Karl Taube has shown that it is Aztec-influenced. Similar in date, the Madrid and Paris codices are poorer in execution. The Grolier Codex was discovered and authenticated more recently, and the paper has a radio-carbon date of C.E. 1250. It consists of half of a twenty-page table concerned with the Venus cycle, and appears to have Toltec-Maya-style glyphs and images of deities.

In spite of evidence that the Mayan books included a wealth of different information, including histories, prophecies, songs, scientific information, and genealogies, these four remaining documents are all similar in their focus on astronomical and astrological tables, ritual, mythological and historical events, all of which are also common, fundamental elements of contemporary oral tradition and written literature of today. It is quite impressive that we should judge a whole body of ancient

literature on the basis of four small books, but it is unlikely that more will be discovered, even though stone inscriptions continue to emerge. The books that have been found in tombs have disintegrated so badly as to be indecipherable, or else the plaster with which the pages were coated has dissolved and then hardened into a solid mass, making it impossible to open the books.

The Narrative Structure of Pre-Colombian Hieroglyphic Texts

Pre-Colombian hieroglyphic texts consist of images accompanied by textual material, intended to be used in a reading aloud, a performative act. Stephen Houston refers to Dennis Tedlock's opinion that "The text never stood alone, but would have served as a partner in spectacle and performance" (Houston 2). Neither text nor image can stand alone; they complement each other in the type of information given. Karen Bassie-Sweet refers to research showing "that in Maya art the text tells the story by naming and the image tells the story by qualifying or describing" (38). Enrique Sam Colop, in his unpublished dissertation, *Maya Poetics*, points out that the choice of material (stone, ceramic, book material) and location (for a monument) are also significant, as is the voice and expression of the speaker/performer (16). Kathryn Josserand states that the iconography in a frame illustrates the principal actor and the central event described in the text (14). Bassie-Sweet describes this framing device of scenes on Maya monuments as literary stories, which are organized by means of the placement of the blocks of texts. Sometimes the sentences are written above, beside or above the image, or broken into several blocks of text placed within the image area. "This framing convention identifies the actor and the action of the image as the subject and event of the accompanying text" (39).

Josserand's information is based on a discourse analysis of hieroglyphic texts at Palenque, and explains how the narrative is structured: the normal order of information in the glyph text is Date, Event, Actor, or, in grammatical terms, a temporal indicator, followed by a verb and subject. Topics include events at the end of *katuns*³, information about characters' parentage, blood-lettings, life-histories, ceremonies, dedicatory events, ball games, sacrificial events, connections of dates to numerological or astronomical cycles, and anniversaries of events. However, Josserand points out that the plot of these events may not follow a sequential time-line, but rather foregrounds the main event by placing it prominently in a sentence, or by repeating it. This feature of temporal organization in narrative structure, and the foregrounding/backgrounding of significant and subsidiary events is, according to Josserand, similar to the plot-preview found in contemporary Chol narrative, and I will discuss it later in the context of contemporary Mayan literature.

The episodes in the pre-Colombian narrative are organized in a structure similar to poetic stanzas, each of which is composed of couplets or parallel sentence formations, and the poetic style consists primarily of various forms of repetition. "Whereas our poetry is governed by patterns of meter and rhyme, theirs is revealed in patterns of repetition and coupleting, stanza structures and parallel constructions and in word play of many kinds"(Josserand 15). Josserand and other researchers point out that the repetition is not regular – there may be single statements, and on other occasions, the information may be repeated three or four times. Moreover, it may take a variety of forms, including identical repetition of information, substitution of verb, noun, name of person or place, or the use

³ *Katun* : a period of 20 years in the Mayan calendar.

of elaborate metaphors.⁴ A variety of techniques are used for emphasis: marked word order foregrounds certain words by moving them to a more significant position at the beginning of a sentence, or by using them in a ‘higher’ syntactic category, and special poetic or metaphoric phrasing or elaborate verb phrases are used to highlight the main character. Clearly, as Stephen Houston points out, it is problematic to assume a direct influence of pre-Colombian texts on modern texts, but nonetheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the research on both glyph texts and later alphabetic texts shows basic similarities between the poetics of these early texts and modern oral tradition and now, in turn, the growing body of written literature.

Colonial-period alphabetic texts have also shown evidence of stylistic continuity from earlier writing. In the introduction to his poetic K’iche’ version of the *Popol Vuh*, published in 2002 as *Popol Wuj* to reflect K’iche’ pronunciation, Enrique Sam Colop points to several indications that the alphabetic version was based on a previous hieroglyphic text. First, he points to the insertion of vowels in order to make it easier to read syllables, which was a characteristic of glyph writing. Second, the use of caption texts as framing devices for segments of the text suggests that the alphabetic writers of the *Popol Vuh* were re-creating a previous glyph text which used the typical caption texts for framing, as described by Josserand (see above). Third, there are many references to an ancient text which the ancestors used to see, or understand, past events and predict the future. Finally, the theme of astronomical calculations indicates to Sam Colop that the original text was one of the pre-colonial glyph books (*Popol Wuj* 13).

⁴ Josserand gives the example of the metaphor “touching the earth” for “birth” (16).

Current Situation: an Overview

Modern Genre Development

In their 1990 discussion of *testimonio*, John Beverly and Mark Zimmerman focus on the act of witnessing, the situation of violence, and the need for a facilitator to record the words of an illiterate witness:

The general form of the *testimonio* is a novel or novella-like narrative, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness of the events she or he recountsthe production of a *testimonio* generally involves the recording and/or transcription of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist. The word suggests the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. That connotation is important, because it distinguishes *testimonio* from simple recorded participant narrative. In René Jara's phrase, *testimonio* is a 'narración de urgencia' – a story that needs to be told – involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, exploitation, or simple struggle for survival, which is implicated in the act of narration itself. (*Literature and Politics* 173)

Linda Craft, in *Novels of Testimony and Resistance*, makes it clear that post-modern genres in Central America are under reconstruction, and particularly addresses the forms which fall between the previously differentiated forms of novel and testimonial. She suggests that the social upheavals of recent years are reflected in new genre forms, and that the most notable changes are in the multi-discursive style which focuses on content rather than aesthetics - a content which details the lifestyle and suffering of the indigenous population.

Craft's work was published in 1997, and consequently, one development which her work does not cover, because it has appeared more recently, is the increase in writing by Mayan writers themselves, without the intervention of a spokesperson / ethnographer to facilitate *testimonio* writing. We also see a significant change from indigenist writing

by Ladino writers who speak on behalf of the indigenous, to writing by indigenous writers who wish to speak for themselves without an intermediary. Craft reviewed some of the works mentioned earlier in this chapter: Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* and also Luís de Lión's novel *El Tiempo Empieza en Xibalbá*, both published originally in Spanish. Menchú's testimony to Elizabeth Burgos-Debray was given in Spanish originally, and the text has not been translated into Menchú's native K'iche. De Lión wrote only in Spanish, and his work has not been translated into his native Kaqchikel,⁵ although both authors have been translated into other languages. Similarly, Caly Domitila Kanek⁶, a Kaqchikel speaker, published testimonial poems in Spanish but did not write/translate them into Kaqchikel.

The sociopolitical background of new Mayan literature explains the substantial testimonial element in all the works I present in this dissertation. However, *testimonio*, testimony and testimonial are terms whose definitions are flexible. If indeed *testimonio* is a genre, it must be seen as a genre in transition, and moreover, one whose identity fluctuates between autobiography, memoir, fictional novel and non-fictional documentary.

During the 1990s, following the growth of works categorized as testimonial in Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America, critics discussed *testimonio* with reference to four criteria: realism; political motivation; popular voice; and veracity. Further discussions have addressed the witness-writer –reader relationship; the authenticity of the oral narration transformed into written edited text; and the identity of the intended reader.

⁵ It is unclear how fluently de Lión spoke Kaqchikel.

⁶ Pen name of Calixta Gabriel Xiquín. She has written under both names. She is bilingual in Spanish and Kaqchikel.

Linda Craft raises the aesthetic question of whether *testimonio* is literature, given the traditional boundary between art and documentary. She points out that “the traditional boundaries between the two opposing concepts have broken down in postmodern culture” (24). John Beverly adds that “the testimonio implies a radical break (as in the structuralist notion of *coupure*) with the novel and with literary fictionality as such. In other words, testimonio is not a form of the novel” (“The Margin at the Center” 37), but a “non-fictional, popular form of epic narrative” (Beverly and Zimmerman (26). A significant difference between the novel and testimonio is that the novel is a closed form in time and place, whose subject and plot end with the last page, whereas the testimonio continues, the witness/narrator and the situation continue their life beyond the text (Beverly “The Margin at the Center” 37). Craft emphasizes that despite the fact that testimonio is related to documentary evidence, it is literature by virtue of certain aesthetic qualities: it incorporates some formal strategies ranging from “more grammatical and syntactical corrections to the use of the flashback, a change in the rhythms of the language, ruptures of chronological time, and other *nueva narrativa* techniques (24). Beverly comments on other ways in which the *testimonio* is reworked to achieve literary goals, including “greater figurative density, tighter narrative form, and the elimination of digressions and interruptions” (“The Margin at the Center” 38) but, as will become clear in my textual analyses, such a reduction of repetition would counteract the intended effect of conveying an authentic Mayan voice and style.

The extent to which these strategies are used also affects how/whether the intermediary (writer/ artist/ intellectual) for the witness/speaker is identified by the reader as the author of the text, displacing the original witness, and the degree to which the

published text authentically conveys the original testimony. Readers tend to assume that similar criteria of accuracy and reliability apply to literary and to legal testimony, but, clearly, must be aware that manipulation and distortion of the facts can occur under both circumstances, particularly when oral testimony is converted to written form. Beverly takes for granted that literary testimony is fiction which imitates reality, and points to “the semiotic intensification of a realist-effect” (“The Margin at the Center” 37).

Another controversial issue is the identity of the writer, who, when *testimonio* was first defined, was an intermediary for an illiterate witness. However, as I will show in later chapters, *testimonio* is now being written by writer- witnesses who narrate their own and their fellow-community members’ participation in the events described. Moreover, they combine Mayan genres and Western genres, and write both both factual and fictionalized accounts, further mixing a hybrid generic form.

Testimonio has from the beginning been an act of political participation in popular movements and the struggle against violence, military dictatorship and repression. It gives voice to the subaltern – but emphatically claims to represent the community, rather than the individual, thus differentiating it from the personal autobiography, and leading to disagreements about what, exactly, constitutes veracity in a personal testimonial narrative.

Another topic which has not received much attention is that of the intended reader. As an intended instrument of social transformation, the *testimonio* is usually directed at the literate, empowered public, rather than to the witness’s fellow subaltern community, and so loses its potential for local consciousness-raising and social cohesion.

The testimonial narratives which will be discussed here are all, with the exception of one, written in Spanish only, serving to inform the reader about events in the Maya community, but without giving the members of that community access to the text in a Mayan language – or, indeed, in oral form. As a result, I suggest that *testimonio*, while giving voice to the subaltern and expressing popular-democratic ideas, is not really a popular-democratic form, but may be yet another exotic item for the hegemonic society.

Since Craft's research, far more writing by indigenous writers has appeared. Much has been published in conference proceedings; by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala "Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala" (ALMG); by commercial publishing companies such as Cholsamaj and Yax Te', and many new companies, increasingly in Mayan hands; by educational institutions such as the Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL) and Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (OKMA) and also privately by individual authors. A significant number of these works have appeared in indigenous languages as well as in Spanish, a development paralleled by the work of the ALMG to standardize the written forms of the twenty-two indigenous languages. Authors have written personal testimonies or works which may be categorized as testimonial novels, as I discuss in chapters on Victor Montejo and Gaspar Pedro González; poetry which includes a substantial testimonial element; verse and prose re-writings of oral narratives; and literary/socio-political analysis. Mayan socio-political rights and the preservation of Mayan culture are the central focus of the majority of the works produced in the last twenty years. Although these were the themes of earlier indigenist authors, the Mayan authors are identified as a distinct cultural entity in Guatemala, separate from the mainstream literary canon, are published by different publishers, and face particularly

difficult obstacles to publishing their work. It is noteworthy, for example, that mainstream publishing houses (notably Artemis Edinter) have published some of Humberto Ak'abal's work in Spanish, but none of his work in K'iche'.

The current sociolinguistic situation in Guatemala

Language rights are both themes in the works of all the writers studied here, and practical considerations in their daily lives and those of all Mayan-language speakers. Mayan activists have joined the global movement to protect the linguistic rights of indigenous peoples, which has produced such documents as the United Nations Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Indigenous people have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. (Article 14, quoted by Stanton 70)

The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights goes into further detail:

Article 3

1. This Declaration considers the following to be inalienable personal rights which may be exercised in any situation:
 - The right to be recognized as a member of a language community;
 - The right to the use of one's own language both in private and in public;
 - The right to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin;
 - The right to maintain and develop one's own culture;
2. This declaration considers that the collective rights of language groups, may include the following, in addition to the rights attributed to the members of language groups in the foregoing paragraph, and in accordance with the conditions laid down in article 2.2
 - The right for their own language and culture to be taught;
 - The right of access to cultural services;

- The right to an equitable presence of their language and culture in the communication media;
- The right to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socioeconomic relations.

These principles are reflected in the language of the Ley de Idiomas Nacionales de Guatemala “Guatemalan National Languages Law” passed in 2003⁷. This law promotes changes in social attitudes, but does not legislate institutional change or enforcement.

Moreover, Guatemala, like other countries with a large indigenous population, faces the unsolved problem of inadequate administrative and financial contributions by the state to implement the recommendations of this law. For the indigenous population, the main deficiency of the law is the statement regarding the official language. The first article recognizes only Spanish as the official language of Guatemala, and although it establishes that individuals may speak their own languages and guarantees respect for all the 26 languages, it does not legislate any further rights. It states that the “Mayan, Garifuna and Xinka languages are essential elements of national identity; their recognition, respect, promotion, development and use in public and private spheres are directed towards national unity in diversity and support intercultural relations among fellow citizens” (Article 3). Following the promulgation of this law, Mayan activists expressed dismay that their languages were still not given equal status with Spanish and regarded the statements promoting multiculturalism with skepticism.

Article 17 and 18 support the use of all the languages for mass communication and in all civic activities, such as courts of law and legislative bodies, and Article 26 states that public servants in the different language communities should receive language

⁷ See “Ley de Idiomas Nacionales de Guatemala” at <http://alertanet.org/>

training. There are no studies to show whether and/or how these recommendations have been implemented. In addressing language research and preservation, the law refers to the Academia de Lenguas Mayas as the government body with the authority to carry out language reforms, including, for example, the establishment of local language place names – a topic referred to in the chapter on oral tradition. The ALMG is an active organization which has been responsible for documenting all the Mayan languages, standardizing the alphabets, and creating language programs and research throughout the country.

The law also states (Article 13) that the national education system must promote respect for and the development and use of Mayan languages. All three of the authors studied here, however, write about the lack of Mayan language education, and about the assimilation policy in practice in the schools, where Mayan children receive their education in Spanish only. Without adequate budgetary support for a clearly defined educational policy, then, this article of the 2003 Language law has remained largely theoretical. Already in 1991 an Education Law recognized the right of all indigenous peoples to receive an education in their own language, but the majority Guatemalan vote overthrew this law. In 2003, when the Language Law was passed, a new Vice-Ministry of Bilingual Intercultural Education was established, so that Bilingual Intercultural Education could be implemented throughout the country (Motivo educativo 2). It issued a statement recognizing that approximately 60% of the population is Maya and that speakers of the most widely-spoken languages (Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam y Qeqchi), constitute 80% of the national indigenous population (Motivo educativo 1). However, the statistics produced by the Ministry of Education suggest that Mayan children spend few

years in school: in areas with over 50% indigenous population, children stay in school for 2-5 years and then 40% drop out (Mineduc 2004). The data available (most recently in January 2008) are based on statistics from 2001, and it has been impossible to obtain statistics on bilingual education. However, my informal observations in several schools in Kaqchikel and K'iche' linguistic areas (Tecpán 2006, Quetzaltenango 2004, Guatemala City 2003) indicate that it is rarely implemented, and then only in the first grade, with the exception of some notable examples in the area of Santa Cruz del Quiché, which have been supported by educational support given to teachers by the non-government organization Ajb'atz Enlace Quiché.

Department of Education materials and bilingual programs are limited, and there is a shortage of qualified teachers. Many schools are able to opt out of providing bilingual education by stating that parents have voted against it, and others do not have the personnel or materials to provide it. For elementary-school teachers, training now includes introductory courses in Mayan languages, as a token of respect for their students' background, and to facilitate communication with mono-lingual Mayan students, but not as a requirement to teach in the languages or to teach the languages themselves. Consequently, there are still extremely limited opportunities for Mayans to learn to read in their own languages. The (Spanish) literacy rate for adult Guatemalans aged 15 and over is 69% , according to the most recent statistics for 2005 (World Bank), but there are no statistics for literacy levels in Mayan languages..

Paradoxically, then, Mayan writers find themselves writing in Mayan languages without the prospect of a readership now or in the future. Some of them have written children's books, but the children are not learning to read them, nor do they have access

to books. Publication of books in turn is limited by the lack of readers, and it is notable that at this point all three of the authors studied here have published more books in Spanish than in their native languages. Fernando Peñalosa, then editor of Yax Te' Foundation, wrote in 2004 that publishing the first work of Gaspar Pedro González in a dual-language edition, Q'anjob'al and Spanish, was a significant cultural achievement and source of pride, but an economic disaster: few copies were sold, because few Q'anjob'ales read in their own language. They were happy that a work of literature was published in their language, however, even though they could not read it. Peñalosa commented that this book brought prestige, but no cash ("La literatura maya: Tres perspectivas" 2). Now, in 2008, Laura Martin, current editor of Yax Te', states that at least 4000 copies of the Spanish edition, and about 900 of the bilingual edition have been distributed, showing that there is still relatively little demand for the Q'anjob'al version.

Conclusion

This brief overview of the sociolinguistic context within which the Mayan authors are writing shows the difficulty they face in making the effort to write their works in their native languages for a native-language readership. Doing so is a deeply personal expression, an exercise of the right to a write in their mother-tongue and a political statement of cultural linguistic validation through writing. Notwithstanding this effort, the literature which seeks to preserve the Mayan culture and language is increasingly written in Spanish, which has greater literacy rates, and which has the advantage of reaching a wide audience both within and outside Guatemala.

It is in these circumstances that we see the development of literature by Mayan authors who seek to make innovations in both genre and language. Genres, as Craft points out, are always under construction. They are hybrid forms which reflect the themes of the works, the authors' motives, and the market which supports the publishing of these works. Given the situation of language loss in Guatemala, literary language choice remains a conflicted issue among writers, the reading public, and literary critics. There are a growing number of writers who identify themselves culturally as Mayan, who may not be literate in their Mayan language – and indeed may not be fluent speakers – and who claim the right to write as Mayans in Spanish. Maya Cú, for example, has published two books poems in Spanish, the first of which was entitled *Poemaya*. She is an activist who received her education in Spanish, but identifies with her Mayan Q'eqchi' background. Those writers who are able to write in Mayan languages, including those studied in my research, do so explicitly in order to revive and preserve a Mayan written literary tradition, (even though they are acutely aware of the shortage of readers), and also to ensure the survival of the oral tradition in written form.

The production and consumption of Mayan literature in Guatemala is at a turning point in its development. Beverly and Zimmerman suggest that “perhaps José Carlos Mariátegui’s judgement in his *Siete Ensayos* on a similar impasse in Andean culture in the 1920’s that ‘an indigenous literature will come into being when only when the Indian peoples themselves are in a position to produce it’ still holds some truth” (150). In modern Guatemala, the evolution of Mayan literature and emerging new genres will be a function of the literary creation by a growing number of authors in the context of specific sociolinguistic and economic factors and their influence on the literature market. Viable

and sustainable Mayan literature will continue to be affected by official policies on language rights and their implementation in the plurilingual, pluricultural educational curriculum, which will in turn determine the survival and/or growth of the reading public.

Chapter 2

The Writing of Oral Tradition

The urgency of preserving Mayan culture in writing, voiced by Leticia Velázquez Zapeta at the First Congress of Indigenous Literature of America in 1999, is an opinion shared by many participants in the Pan-Maya movement – but it is a paradox of this movement that its demands (inclusion of indigenous peoples in the political and economic process, access of indigenous people to education in general, and to Mayan language literacy in particular) may result in the erosion of native languages and cultures and therefore pose a grave risk to their preservation, because Mayans may be increasingly assimilated into the Ladino community. In today's Guatemala, younger Mayans seeking upward mobility move to urban areas, urge their children to speak Spanish, lose contact with traditional customs, and become Ladinized at the expense of Mayan culture. In order to balance socio-economic equality with Mayan cultural preservation, the culture must be preserved in forms - in writing and other media - which make it accessible and meaningful to Mayans who are moving away from a traditional way of life; to children who spend more time being educated in school than with their parents and learn through reading as much as through oral tradition; and to the wider national and international community, which has hitherto ignored or underestimated its existence.

Until now, the culture has been maintained by passing it on through the oral tradition in Mayan languages - indeed, Velázquez Zapeta points out that not writing has to some extent been a form of cultural resistance (138), or, in Brian Bielenberg's terms, a form of self-defense against exploitation (5). Manuel de Jesús Salazar Tetzagüic also

considers that this literature is an expression of self-preservation in face of the colonial invading language and culture: “podemos considerar a la literatura maya como la manifestación plena de un lenguaje que en un momento crítico de su evolución, tomó por atajos ocultos para conservarse ante el avance del idioma invasor” ‘We can think of Mayan literature as the complete expression of a language which, at a critical time in its development, went into hiding in order to preserve itself when faced with an invading language’ (20).

However, today, this oral tradition, preserved hitherto largely because of the marginalization of the Mayas, is increasingly threatened as the Mayan life-style changes in response to globalization and Mayas demand inclusion in the state. In addition to the desire for preservation, committing the oral tradition to writing is itself a statement about the value the language holds for its speakers, a value which they wish to project beyond their own community. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that despite the increased demand for and access to bilingual, bicultural education, there is still a shortage of written materials in Mayan languages and cultures for children to learn from or for literate adults to read.¹

In response to this situation, the present generation of Mayan writers and researchers express the need for more written literature, and state that new written Mayan literature should be based on the oral tradition. Two parallel and simultaneous developments have appeared: 1. A new written literature by Mayan authors, which is consciously and intentionally influenced by the style, content and social communicative

¹ Unfortunately, even when these materials exist, access to them is limited by their cost, by the logistical problems of distribution, and by the shortage of libraries.

function of oral tradition, and which is examined in later chapters of this dissertation; and
 2. the writing of oral tradition, which is discussed in the present chapter.

There are a growing number of publications of oral tradition stories, legends, myths and other genres, which have been recorded and transcribed, some for research purposes and others for general publication. In some cases the material is produced for both purposes. Two Guatemalan universities have centers for the study of oral tradition: San Carlos University has a Center for the Study of Folklore, with an archive of popular stories which were published beginning in the 1980s,² and the Instituto de Lingüística y Educación at the Universidad Rafael Landívar “Rafael Landívar University Institute of Linguistics and Education” has also developed a similar collection.³

But how is oral tradition defined in Guatemala? Gaspar Pedro González gave a definition in his presentation at the 2006 ACLA conference: “son bienes de los grupos sociales que se heredan por medio de la palabra hablada” ‘it is the wealth which societies inherit through the spoken word’. This brief statement synthesizes the following characteristics: oral tradition belongs to the community, with collective, rather than individual authorship; it is passed down from one generation to another; and it depends on the spoken word, in dialogue between two or more people. Implicit in this definition is the mutability of the spoken word, according to social and historical circumstances and the identity of the interlocutors, in contrast to the unchanging written word.

² Cuentos Populares de Guatemala, Primera Serie. (Colección Archivos de Folklor Literario) Guatemala. Centro de Estudios Folklóricos de la Universidad de San Carlos. 1982.

³ Instituto de Lingüística y Educación, Universidad Rafael Landívar: Colección Lírica y Narrativa Tradicional de Guatemala listed on website and available for purchase:
<http://www.url.edu.gt/PortalURL/Contenido.aspx?o=1083&s=53&sm=c7>)

As such, oral tradition closely reflects social changes, as Celso A. Lara Figueroa points out in his collection of transcriptions collected in Huehuetenango in the 1970s and 1980s. This collection had to be interrupted because of the violent conflicts of that period, and consequently serves not only to document the historical collective memory of the communities, but also reflects “la desarticulación del mundo indígena por la violencia de los años recientes” ‘the fragmentation of the indigenous world as a result of the violence of recent years’ (4). In such collections, the underlying roots grounded in the Mayan worldview remain constant, but the narratives evolve according to circumstances. Changes in narrative form and content may also be the consequence of cultural mixing, through immigration from other countries, or through internal migration of members of remote communities, who travel to find work in the cities or in coastal plantations. Thus, cultural and linguistic groups mix who are otherwise isolated from each other, and consequently, as they tell each other their oral histories, they develop more variations in forms and content of traditional narratives. Indeed, it is clear that Mayan oral tradition is a hybrid of the many cultures which have interacted in Mesoamerica, with some tales preserving the memory of Conquest-era European tales which have since been forgotten in Europe, incorporating words and symbols foreign to Guatemala (palaces, princesses) and a style similar to medieval European ballads. An article in *Oralidad* introduces one such story, “De la mujer embarazada” ‘The pregnant woman’, by pointing out that it includes many elements of sixteenth-century Spain, preserved in oral tradition thanks to “una dinámica cultural de resistencia al olvido” ‘a cultural resistance to forgetting’ (Pérez Alonso 48).

These characteristics of oral tradition emphasize its profound significance in preserving culture, and explain the rejection by recent Mayan critics of the popular term “folklore,” which they believe trivializes and diminishes the genre, and epitomizes the patronizing attitude of the hegemonic western literary critic:

Durante muchos años la sabiduría popular ha recibido este calificativo (*folklore*), ubicándola en una categoría inferior: artesanía en contraposición al arte; tradición oral frente a la literatura erudita. (González, *Kotz'ib* '99)

For many years, popular wisdom has been given this name (*folklore*), placing it in an inferior category: craft as opposed to art; oral tradition as opposed to learned literature.

In addition, the term “folklore” is distasteful to indigenous people because they are aware of their exploitation by tourists eager to experience the exotic, and the resulting tendency to adapt and change traditional crafts in order to produce the most marketable products for foreign tastes.

If the survival of oral tradition is indeed at risk, if writing oral tradition is an adequate means of preserving it, and if new written literature is taking over the role of oral tradition, it behooves us to define the current situation. This chapter presents an analysis of Mayan oral tradition framed by the preservation concerns of the Mayan movement. The introduction has provided a detailed explanation of the current situation, and the rest of the chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I discuss different analytical approaches to oral tradition, first in terms of genre classification and then in terms of poetics. In the second part, I discuss a selection of recent Mayan language and Mayan-Spanish dual-language publications of oral narratives, to evaluate how these

written texts fulfill the purpose of both preserving and promoting Mayan oral tradition to both the Mayan and the non-Mayan community. To conclude, I consider the process of transition from oral tradition to a new written literature and suggest that continuity can be evaluated by means of the following criteria: communicative function, narrative content, underlying world view, and poetics. Underlying my approach is an appreciation for the profound significance of oral tradition in Mayan culture today, and the importance of preserving it for future generations voiced by Velázquez Zapeta:

La vida de los pueblos originarios de América, se registra en su oralidad; su biblioteca está en la lengua de los ancianos; su archivo está en la palabra hablada más que en la escritura. Pero es preciso que todo quede registrado en las letras antes que desaparezca. (Velázquez Zapeta 141)

The life of the native peoples of America is recorded in their orality; their library is in the tongue of the ancients; their archive is in the spoken word more than in writing. But it is critical that everything should be recorded in writing before it disappears.

Part 1. Analysis of oral tradition.

A. Genre classification.

Research on Mayan oral tradition has focused on two areas: genre classification by category of narration and, more recently, analysis based on performance theory. Mary Magoulick suggests that a shift occurred from the former to the latter in the 1960s (1), but while this may be the case for ethnographic studies, literary studies of the 1980s and 1990s by Gaspar Pedro González, Fernando Peñalosa, Enrique Sam Colop and Carlos Montemayor focus on classification systems and do not discuss performance in

detail. These classification systems are influenced by the work of previous researchers in western countries, in particular the widely-accepted classification system of Antti Aarne, published in 1910, and then again in 1928 in an expanded form, and in English translation by StithThompson. The Aarne-Thompson system was designed for European stories, and its criteria are the narrative and character content of the tales, rather than the message or its function. Peñalosa and González emphasize in more recent critiques that such classification should be embedded within Mayan culture rather than adapted to conform to the widely-used pre-existing European systems.

Peñalosa, whose studies and anthologies of Mayan stories are based on narratives translated into European languages, points out that Mayan stories all show evidence of cultural fusion, and that most of the Akatek stories he studied share characteristics with stories from Mexico, other Central American countries and the United States. In his 1994 collection *Q'anjob'al Tales and Legends*, translated into English largely from previous collections by Pedro Miguel Say, and Saqch'en,⁴ Peñalosa classifies the stories according to the following categories: Tales of Wonder, Tales of Scoundrels, Tales of Deceit, Animal Stories, and Legends . He points out that, in addition to the traditional stories which originated in Guatemala, others are of European origin and have been adapted and integrated into the Mayan canon - for example, tales from Grimm's Fairy Tales or Aesop's Fables, or from the same African source as some of the North American South Br'er Rabbit stories. Peñalosa also shows how characters and themes are often transposed and transformed from their original sources and used in different contexts; he gives the example of the Hansel and Gretel story, which is transformed into a religious story in one

⁴ Saqch'en is the Mayan name of Ruperto Montejo Esteban. His publications appear under both names.

community (*El cuento popular maya* 12). What all these tales have in common, however, is an emphasis on social mores and values. The moralizing aspect is a characteristic which, according to Claudia Dary's study in the San Carlos University Literary Folklore Archive, is the result of "adulteration" of local stories by contact with Spanish and other immigrants (341). Other researchers do not comment on whether moralizing is a Mayan or a foreign characteristic, nor does Dary make it quite clear whether she refers to the inclusion of an explicit moral, or a general didactic approach. She does, however, comment that for research purposes it is easier to analyze an oral narrative which has not been previously written and then re-absorbed into oral culture, thereby being exposed to influences outside the original source culture (341). The researcher's wish for a mythical "purity" of culture can impose a value judgement which does not take into account or, even worse, excludes, the vast range and complexity of cultural influences.

In his 1996 summary of the classification system, Peñalosa revises and renames the previous categories: Animal Stories, Ordinary Popular Stories, Jokes and Anecdotes, Formula Stories, and some additional types which include religious, magic and supernatural themes. Carlos Montemayor is more selective in his definition of oral tradition, and in *Arte y Trama en el Cuento Indígena* he differentiates between oral literature and oral communication, stating that the term "literature" refers more to the art of the text, than to whether it is written. In his critique of oral literature, Montemayor selects short stories, and does not include other genres. His classification system is based on plot and character, and includes the following categories:

1. cuentos cosmogónicos (cosmogonic tales)

2. cuentos de entidades invisibles (tales of invisible beings)
3. cuentos de prodigios (tales of wonders)
4. cuentos sobre la naturaleza de animales o plantas (tales about the nature of animals or plants)
5. cuentos de animales (animal tales)
6. cuentos de la fundación de comunidades (tales about the founding of communities)
7. cuentos de transformaciones y hechicerías (tales of transformations and spells)
8. adaptaciones de temas bíblicos y cristianos (adaptations of biblical and Christian themes)
9. adaptaciones de cuentos populares indoeuropeas (adaptations of popular Indo-European tales)

It is clear, then, that definitions of what constitutes Mayan oral tradition vary; that characteristics such as language register, the proficiency and style of individual story-tellers, and the difference between oral performance and written text are not taken into account systematically; and that there is little in the way of definition and consistency in the use of terms such as orality, oral literature and oral tradition. In addition, methodologies of collection, transcription and translation vary considerably, and classification systems differ in function of their academic, cultural, linguistic and literary perspectives. Moreover, as the following examples show, a discrepancy between the

Western and the Mayan approaches to classification can be seen in a field of study so far dominated by non-Mayans.

Gaspar Pedro González has developed an extensive list which includes a wider range of oral tradition forms, emphasizing that, for the Maya, the transmission of culture is not restricted to certain narrative genres (such as legends, myths and tales), but, since culture is *beyb'al* “a way of life”, its literary expression is correspondingly all-inclusive. In effect, this amounts to a wider body of genres being accepted into the pool, in contrast to the separation of high and low forms of the traditional Western literary canon, and an acknowledgment that all genres have didactic, entertainment and cultural transmission value. Indeed, we are reminded of the arbitrariness of the qualitative distinctions traditionally made between Western genres, and have to consider generic differences as graduated steps on a continuum, which, as Bahktin points out, all have their origin in spoken words (*Speech Genres* xv).

It is with this frame of reference that González lists the following generic forms in his introduction to Mayan literature:

Historias, Creencias, Proverbios, Plegarias o rezos, Fábulas, Adivinanzas, Cantos, Consejos, Chistes, Dichos, Trabalenguas, Himnos y alabanzas, Enamoramientos, Pedidos, Apodos, Toponímicos, Parecidos, Añoranzas, Conjuros, Burlas, Siseos, Insultos, Bolas o chismes, Predicciones, Arengas, Ceremonias, Awases, Recetas de alimentos, Medicinas naturales...⁵

(*Kotz'ib' / Nuestra Literatura Maya* 104-8)

Stories, Beliefs, Proverbs, Supplications or prayers, Fables, Prophecies, Songs,

⁵ I do not yet have a full explanation of some of these genres.

Counsels, Jokes, Sayings, Tongue twisters, Hymns and prayers of adoration, Love poems, Marriage petitions, Nicknames, Place-names, Analogies, Love songs, Spells, Tricks, Criticisms, Insults, Lies and gossip, Predictions, Arengas, Ceremonies, Counsels for the young, Food recipes, Natural medicines....

This is clearly a much broader list of categories than mentioned by Peñalosa or Montemayor. It includes some of the more common myths, legends, and stories, but also includes categories not included in Western literary genres, such as jokes, spells, insults and several ritual forms. In his speech to the First Congress of Latin American Indigenous Literatures, González includes six fragments of oral tradition, to illustrate the generic variety:

1. “El origen del maíz” (“the origin of maize”) (K’eqchi’)
2. “La canción de la danza del arquero flechador” (“the archer’s dance song”) from an eighteenth-century Maya manuscript.
3. “La Cola del Perro” (“the tail of the dog”) from a folktale re-created by Victor Montejo.
4. Beliefs and proverbs in Mam.
5. “Txaj”, a fragment in Q’anjob’al.
6. Extract from “Nacimiento y Cuidados del Niño en Tunuyaa” (“birth and care of the child in Tunuyaa”).

González here includes texts from different periods and linguistic groups, of differing lengths. This selection includes some of the extracts in *Kotz’ib’ / Nuestra Literatura Maya* (113) and adds several new texts.⁶ His purpose is to demonstrate that

⁶ Significantly, González includes here “The archer’s dance song” (#2). The long and extensive tradition of dance dramas, such as *Rabinal Achí*, recently translated and annotated by Dennis Tedlock with a wealth of additional detailed commentary, overlaps that of oral narratives, and has been studied in depth by Maury Hutcheson. The dramas include traditional speeches, actions, dances, and symbolic costumes, but are such

this is a literature which is fundamentally didactic as well as artistic. At the same time, the variety of examples show the broad range of speech genres which make up the oral literature. Linda Ament raises the same issue of linguistically and culturally grounded classification systems in her discussion of Spanish and Mam editions of collected works, edited by Rainer Hostig and Luis Vásquez Vicente: “The Spanish editions follow a Western classification system of myths, legends, stories, beliefs, histories, life stories and customs, while the authors choose to organize the selections in the Mam version according to their understanding of Mam logic and reasoning” (Ament 28). She goes on:

In the Mam categorization, subdivisions, included under the broad heading of *tqanil* recount historical events; the origins of flora and fauna; previous generations’ suffering from natural disasters and ethnic oppression; ancient agricultural and labor practices; and creation myths and legends, “los cuales son tomados como reales tanto por los narradores como por los oyentes” (XVIII) (which are accepted as real by both narrators and listeners). *L’aj* corresponds to the Western category of cuentos or stories, while *kytxol* (“furrow”) “es la linea trazada desde muy antiguo [sic] que rige la vida social de los mames...” (XVIII) (is the line going back to ancient times which governs the social life of the Mams). *Kawb’il* and *t-xanil* have to do with advice that the elders give to younger generations, and with beliefs governing proper behavior, respectively. Narrations of premonitory signs are categorized under *techil*. (28)

In the collection Jootay from the Tz’utujil-speaking town of San Pedro la Laguna, two genres are presented: “Nawalin taq tzii; Palabras inventadas” ‘Invented Words’, and “Piixaab, Prevención y Corrección de los abuelos para los niños” ‘Prevention and Correction by Grandparents for Children.’ It is noteworthy that a single word *Pixaab* exists specifically for this Tz’utujil genre, for which a lengthy translation is necessary in

a broad topic in themselves that I have chosen not to include them in this study. However, I do wish to point out that I am acutely aware of the importance of this genre, and do not wish to preclude the possibility of including it in a broader, in-depth study of Mayan literary genres.

both Spanish and English. The introduction also mentions the existence of fables, animal allegories, moral tales, proverbs, and aphorisms, and the intention to bring to the world “nuevos géneros literarios, propios de la cultura maya” ‘new literary genres, characteristic of Maya culture’ (*Jootay* 11). The preface to the Tz’utujil oral tradition collection *Nawalin taq tzij* refers to stories, tales, advice, beliefs, cultural values, economy, and speeches, which are to be used to bring to the public the wisdom of the ancestors in order to bring peace. Kaqchikel genre examples listed by Salazar Tetzagüic include “ojer tzij, antiguo relato” ‘old story’; “ejemplo” ‘example’, which has a moral; “ajawa”, the equivalent of a tale in Spanish literature; and legends and fables, a very popular genre among Mayas (46).

A comparison of these Mam, Kaqchikel, Tz’utujil categories with González’s Q’anjob’al categories above, and again with the categories mentioned earlier shows clearly that there is an epistemological gulf between the Spanish and Mayan approaches to categorization, a powerful “indicator of epistemological conflicts at work within narrative transculturation” (Ament 29). These conflicts are grounded in the function attributed to the oral tradition as a whole, as well as in culturally-specific approaches to categorization.

Thomas Beebee, in his work on genre formation and development, suggests that since genre classification has evolved as genres themselves have diversified, a productive approach today is to assess the “use-value” or function of the text, which acknowledges the dialogic notion of multiple communicative levels within the text and between author, text and reader, rather than focusing on the content and formal features and rules of production. (7) This approach would certainly take into account cultural and linguistic

differences and would be equally appropriate for oral and written texts, in recognition of the epistemological variations which determine speech genre categories, and which result in the inclusion and mixtures of genres and styles in a system which is quite alien to the traditional Western canonical hierarchy. As Velázquez Zapeta insists, using the example of oral communication of Maya medicine, the Mayas have a holistic approach to oral tradition:

no solo está la atención en la salud en sí misma, sino trasciende a otros campos, por ejemplo. Se transmite una historia, la vida de los antepasados, revive siempre el pasado en el presente y se proyecta también al futuro. En la práctica de la medicina, surge la transmisión de la cosmovisión, se asumen compromisos de parte de los jóvenes para mantener viva nuestra historia de pueblo. (139)

attention is given not only to health itself, but it extends to other fields, for example. There is the telling of a story, the life of the ancestors, the past always lives again in the present and also projects into the future. The practice of medicine leads to the passing on of our world view, and the young people accept responsibility for keeping alive the history of our people.

B. Poetics

The preceding discussion of genre categories shows that Mayan oral tradition is an all-inclusive body of speech genres and registers, whose content may range from obscene jokes to ceremonial ritualistic discourse, without formal categories based on distinctions between what is considered artistic and everyday speech. The researchers, Claudia Dary and Fernando Peñalosa, for example, repeatedly emphasize that a European system of definitions and categorization cannot be applied to Mayan narratives without considerable modification and without taking into account the social context. This must be considered not only in discussing the genre categories, but also the poetics of the

Mayan languages. Everyday speech includes artistic forms and ritualistic formalities which would not be considered part of everyday speech in the west. Indeed, Laura Martin discerns a high level of artistry, including word play, metaphors, and parallelism in her studies of ordinary Mocho conversation (“Discourse Structure and Rhetorical Elaboration in Mocho Personal Narrative” 146-7). Peñalosa finds some parallelism in contemporary oral narratives comparable to that of Classical Guatemalan poetry, although he points out the risk of comparing speech from different social registers. He mentions that Robert Laughlin finds little evidence of poetic form in his studies of Tzotzil oral tradition (“Cuentos populares entre los Indígenas Akatekos de Guatemala” 71). Peñalosa attributes this to the fact that it is not produced by the same educated aristocratic elite which produced the ancient poetry, and points out that the stories that Peñalosa himself has transcribed from Pedro Say circulate among traveling salesmen and agricultural workers. Common sense would suggest that any comparison of poetic style must take into account the social context, and linguists including Dennis Tedlock, Laura Martin, Darius Swann and Arnold Krupat have written on performance representation and audience reaction.⁷

The definition of the distinction between ordinary speech and literary genres may depend on the particular specialty of the researcher in question, and the choice of materials which have hitherto been the subject of research. Carlos Montemayor points out that the definition of oral tradition “no parece distinguir suficientemente las fronteras entre arte de la lengua (escrita o no), y comunicación oral” ‘does not seem to differentiate clearly enough between language art (written or not) and oral communication’ (*Arte* 7)

⁷ See chapters by these authors in Kay Sammons and Joel Sherzer, eds., *Translating Native American Verbal Art Ethnopoetics and Ethnography of Speaking*. U.S.A.: Smithsonian Institute, 2000.

and suggests that this may be because, hitherto, literary studies of oral tradition have been made by ethnographers rather than literary critics. Karl Kroeber also objects that Native American narratives were considered as cultural, rather than artistic objects, and therefore were not taken seriously by literary critics (quoted in Magoulick 1). It is certainly true that there are no studies of Mayan oral poetics by literary critics, and that, in fact, it is linguists who have done this work, including the analysis of rhetorical devices and literary forms in discourse analysis of conversations, ritual speech and oral narratives. Consequently, the statement that modern written literature is a continuation of oral narrative is open to very broad interpretation, and may refer to the authors' general goal of cultural transmission and preservation, to narrative content, to narrative style, or to discourse style, depending on individual perspectives.

The written oral tradition materials I analyze in this chapter include spoken speech genres of all kinds, which are used in various contexts: conversations between two people; conversations in the intimacy of the family circle; conversations in the extended family or community groups; and ceremonial speaking. Depending on the context, the speech is more or less of a performance showing a range of oral style: the speech register differs in degree of formality, and the language varies in complexity and narrative style. Research in performance theory and ethnopoetics has focused extensively on understanding and representing oral tradition on its own terms, so as to reflect its role within the community and to discern the aesthetic qualities inherent in the work. This research is based on Ramon Jakobson's communicative model of performance as a function which includes not only the addresser, message and addressee, but also depends on the context, the code used, and the mode of contact between addresser and addressee

(Jakobson “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics” 11). In addition, Richard Bauman refers to the communicative competence of the performer, “an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content” (Bauman 11) and emphasizes that the significance of performance lies in its ability “to transform social structures” (Bauman 45)⁸.

Much of the field research has developed forms of transcription which encode the qualities of the oral performance. However, even this approach has its limitations. Dennis Tedlock, referring to Jakobson’s concept of context and contact in performance, emphasizes that the poetics of an oral performance are phenomenological, since each performance is different, depending on context, time, performer and audience (*The Spoken Word* 17) and reminds us that therefore any transcription, however faithful it is to the performance it represents, is an ephemeral sample. While he emphasizes this again in his introduction to his English translation of the drama *Rabinal Achí*, he discusses in great detail the costumes, masks, movements, setting, timing, rhythm and volume of speech and acting details of the performers, in order to underscore the meaning given to the written text in the performance he witnessed.

Peñalosa also points out that the context of each performance and the culture of the speaker and audience affect the register used, and that many tales today, including those in the collections which he edits, are told among groups of peasants or travelers, with everyday, often coarse themes and language. He notes, as mentioned earlier, that

⁸ Citations of the works by Jakobson and Bauman listed below are from

<http://www.anthropology.emory.edu/Linglanth/performance.html>

Jakobson, Roman. “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics.” *Style in Language* Ed. Sebeok, T.A. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960. 350-77

Bauman, Richard. “Verbal Art as Performance” *Verbal Art as Performance* Ed. Bauman, Richard. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 1977. 3-58

ancient indigenous poetry, performed by and for an aristocratic class educated in poetics, was in a more elevated aesthetic register, as is the ritual language and style of today's ritual ceremonial speeches. Are the differences we observe, then, a function of a different approach to categorization of everyday speech versus aesthetic language, a difference between classes, or simply differences between individual speakers? Apart from this comment by Peñalosa, studies do not mention a hierarchy of values applied to the Mayan genre categories researched, no class structure of high/low literary forms, but only a consciousness of the difference in linguistic and stylistic complexity between ritual and non-ritual language.

Studies of oral performance, as opposed to a written, detemporalized text, assess criteria relating to tempo and rhythm, both of which affect the transmission of the material and the listener's ability to remember it. Heidi Johnson points out that the pace of an oral performance of Zoque narrative is a little slower than a fluent reader's eye and that "no textual presentation as yet devised can convey the full richness of an oral performance" (49), although Dennis Tedlock's inclusion of stage directions in *Rabinal Achi* seems to address this concern.

Laura Martin comments on expressive uses of prosody, such as vowel lengthening and pitch rise and fall, which, together with complex discourse figures, appear in Mocho conversation she has analyzed, and demonstrate that "in conversation are found the roots of all other discourse genres and the models for all the rhetorical devices that constitute the poetry of the most elegant speech forms" (117). Dennis Tedlock notes other techniques which are used for achieving verisimilitude in oral narratives, including stress patterns, use of silences, intonational contours and stretching out vowel sounds (*The*

Spoken Word 18). This indicates the need for understanding – and, in the present context, preservation, at the level of dramatic performance as well as content.

Mayan narrative structure includes a spiraling or frequent return to the central topic, which is also common in everyday conversation, but in a story serves to re-tell and remind both performer and listener of plot elements. Written transcriptions of oral narratives are generally short and rarely more than 4-5 pages long – but this may reflect some editing-out of repetitions deemed redundant or unnecessary in the written form. Syntactic and semantic parallelism or patterned repetition, considered aesthetically pleasing and functional as a linking device, occur in all levels of oral narration, but more particularly in ritual discourse, poems and prayers:⁹

Repetition is the central rhetorical device in all forms of Mayan talk, occurring at every structural level, and fulfilling multiple functions. It regulates the rhythm with which new information is introduced. It is closely associated with discourse unit definition as the chief device for negotiation of topic change in conversation and of episode boundaries in narrative. Repetition is also an important signal of cooperative discourse participation. Co-conversationalists, as well as narrators and their audiences, repeat lexical items, morphosyntactic structures, semantic content, and conventional formulae, to produce a constant background of verbal responses. (Martin “Parallelism and Ritualization of Ordinary Talk” 109-110)

It is apparent that the various forms of semantic and syntactic parallelism discussed have the same mnemonic function and artistic effect in Mayan texts that meter, alliteration and

⁹ The formatting of oral narrative in written verse form visually highlights poetic features such as parallelism for the reader, and is a common practice in anthropological transcriptions since the work of Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock, but rare in texts published for the general reader, with the exception of ritual discourse, such as the *Wedding Discourse* (Ajpacajá Tum, Florentino Pedro).

formal rhythm structure have in traditional western poetics.¹⁰ “It is in combined syntactic and semantic parallelism that the dialectic between the formal and material aspects of poetics come somewhere near a balance” (Tedlock *The Spoken Word* 218).

Framing devices or formulaic phrases to open and close the narrative and to separate it from reality and the surrounding conversation are also used for coherence in performance. Frequently the speaker introduces a story, and the audience responds with a formulaic rejoinder. During a narration, reportative markers such as K’iche “cha” “they say” or “it’s said” are repeated frequently, to emphasize that the narrative is not an invention of the speaker, but part of a tradition that s/he is passing on.

Ament’s analysis of the transcriptions by Hosnig and Vásquez Vicente notes that Mam oral narration employs frequent repetition; oscillation between tenses; and an easy slippage between first-person singular, third-person singular, and third-person plural subject nouns. In the context of a performance, the narrator acts the different parts of his characters. It is clear to the audience which of the characters is speaking. At times, for dramatic effect, the action is narrated in the present tense, to bring it closer to the audience (29).

The grammar of Mayan languages lends its own system of coherence to speech genres – for example, noun classifiers which accompany nouns in Q’anjob’al and Popti’ reinforce the idea of the category of the noun they introduce (class, gender and age of

¹⁰ Peter Auer discusses the importance of the speech rhythms in remembering oral genres, and lists four categories applicable to western genres – which studies discussed here have not applied to studies of Mayan oral tradition: speech rate (the number of syllables per second); density (the ratio of stressed to unstressed syllables); rhythmic tempo (duration of the rhythmic interval); and rhythmic density (ratio of beat to off-beat syllables) (31).

person, including the form of respect due, and type of object, material, animal, plant, etc.). Moreover, the use of prefixes and suffixes allows extensive opportunities for parallelism – a sort of syntactic cross-referencing of concepts throughout a text.

The phonological characteristics of Mayan languages, in particular the wide range of onomatopoeic names of animals, birds, and natural phenomena, create sound symbolism in oral narratives, and are also used extensively in written poetry, as noted in the poems of Ak'abal and González.

Plot, setting and characterization are also determined by the mode of transmission. As mentioned above, plot is generally short, although it may be repeated in several variations, and setting, when it is described, is realistic – frequently a familiar rural place - or a magical setting (for instance, inside a mountain) – but without great detail. Since tales are commonly set in a location known to the listeners, there is no need for the narrator to describe the setting – for example, tales about Lake Atitlán and the surrounding volcanoes told in local communities to an audience of farmers and fisherman living in communities around the lake. Human characters in narratives are local people, peasants, or travelers, described with few details of personal traits, and in little psychological depth – it is their actions in the family and social context which are significant, rather than individual psychological development or the development of personal relationships. On the other hand, moral tales describe anti-social behavior or childhood disobedience and their consequences, and trickster tales emphasize cunning and wits. Peñalosa observes a syncretism of indigenous, European and Christian Biblical themes, and states that certain characters and scenes clearly show the influence of German tales - for example, the inclusion of princesses, palaces, and journeys across the

sea, all of which are described with Mayan characteristics by narrators who have no first-hand knowledge of their European antecedents.¹¹

The salient features of oral tradition which emerge from the ethnographic research indicate that, as a performance art, it has oral and stylistic characteristics which fulfill communicative, didactic and aesthetic functions. The question is now, how these functions are fulfilled in the recent publications of written versions. The paradox of preservation through the written word is how much of the style and content can be preserved, and how much is lost in the detemporalized, unchanging written page.

Part 2. Written publications of oral tradition

A. Writing oral tradition.

In 2000, Walter Mignolo wrote of the development of “a new epistemological landscape from which Amerindian categories have been ignored or taken as objects of study, not as “energy” for thinking.” Furthermore, he states, “we should keep in mind that for historical reasons related to education there is not yet in regions of Latin America with a dense Amerindian population a significant and public cultural production of transnational impact (with the exception of Rigoberta Menchú in Guatemala)” (*Local Histories/Global Designs*150). The marginalization of the Maya, and their own protection of their cultural integrity by restricting knowledge locally to the oral tradition (in addition to the lack of educational opportunities mentioned by Mignolo) have resulted in the widely held misperception that Mayan culture died with the ancient Mayas. Certainly, as

¹¹ This influence can be attributed to the popularity of the Grimm Brothers stories in pre-contact Spain (Laura Martin, Personal Communication 3.13.08)

Mignolo comments, modern Mayan culture has had little “transnational impact” and its production, accessible mainly to those to whom it belongs, rather than a western public, is not considered significant by outsiders. Mayan culture has resisted such western hegemonic assumptions, and it is only recently, largely as a consequence of the violence and threat of annihilation of 1954-96, that Mayan intellectuals have voiced the need to transcribe their culture into writing, in order to gain recognition and respect both in Guatemala and worldwide.

Simultaneously, it is becoming increasingly clear that, in the face of increasing globalization and the effects of acculturation, it is necessary to preserve the knowledge which is part of oral tradition and to pass it on to the next generation in writing:

De esta manera se hace presente a nivel escrito todo el conocimiento cultural, siendo ésta una de las mayores riquezas del Pueblo Maya, lo que en años atrás se ha venido transmitiendo de generación en generación por la oralidad, constituyéndose como medio necesario para la sobrevivencia y transmisión de los conocimientos artísticos, filosóficos, medicinales, agrícolas entre otros.

(ALMG : <http://www.almg.org.gt/publicación/tradición.swf>)

In this way we present in writing all the cultural knowledge which is one of the greatest riches of the Maya people, and which has been passed down through the years from generation to generation, creating the medium needed for the survival and transmission of artistic, philosophical, medical and agricultural knowledge, among others.

Whether the oral tradition written publications I discuss are, in fact, accessible to the Mayan public – adults and children - for whom they are written, is a topic for further research, but certainly they are available for purchase, for those who can afford them, in

Guatemalan bookstores and in the offices of the organizations which publish them, and they are beginning to find their way into research libraries in other countries. Publishers such as Yax Te' Books make donations of books to some educational institutions in Guatemala but generally these books are not available in schools and public libraries.

I discuss two monolingual K'iche' works, and six other dual-language works, all of which are intended for use in schools and libraries or for purchase by the general public. Since my focus is on how these publications preserve and transmit oral tradition to Mayan and non-Mayan communities, I do not include materials from research archives, unless they have been included in publications for the general public. The focus of my discussion is the way in which these works inscribe oral tradition in writing; I first examine the presentation of the book, including cover, illustrations, and page numbers, and review the explanatory material including the introduction, preface, glossary, and other information relevant to the collection and transcription of the oral material. I then discuss the genres selected, and the way in which the original orality is presented in the language and form of the text.

I would like to point out that all the texts discussed are formatted as continuous prose text, with punctuation added by the transcribers or editors as seems appropriate for a text that is to be read. Given the fact that the original narratives are performed to an audience (thereby closely resembling drama, as I have mentioned before) and that we can assume, on the basis of oral tradition research, that this performance includes extensive repetition which is edited out of the written text, we have to be aware that we have little or no indication of the expressive form or of the parallelism of the oral performance, nor does the general reader used to silent reading easily perceive parallelism in a text

formatted as continuous prose. Moreover, we have no indication of the ways in which an audience may react, and subsequently change the dynamic of the narration.

B. Mayan-language oral tradition collections

The Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala has produced a monolingual volume of Oral Tradition in each of the Mayan languages of Guatemala, in collaboration with each linguistic community. In this chapter, I examine the presentation format of one of these, the K'iche' volume, produced by the ALMG team based in Santa Cruz del Quiché'. This book was researched, collected from elders in communities throughout the K'iche' region, and transcribed, by researcher Rosa Josefa Chay Ordoñez, a K'iche' native of Cantel, near Quetzaltenango. The text is in K'iche' only, although the title page and introduction are in K'iche' and Spanish, and the introduction explains that it was prepared for the K'iche' community, in order to pass on the knowledge of the ancestors. It covers topics such as astronomy, the calendar, medicine, spirituality, and mathematics; community activities such as home-building and agriculture; and life-cycle traditions including marriage and child-rearing. The stories are accompanied by detailed illustrations, which depict Mayans in the activities described in the stories, and are followed by brief questions. The book conveys a seriousness of purpose – it is intended for study rather than entertainment – and the front cover emphasizes this point with a three-photo collage showing a Mayan ceremony, a painting of a woman's face (possibly representing a female deity from the Popol Vuh), and a grinding stone – all symbols of K'iche' culture. The back cover shows three drawings of Mayan men, women and children in situations relevant to the passing down of oral tradition – a family listening to

the grandparents talking, women in the market, and a man and a woman collecting their harvest.

This framing of the narratives, pagination using Mayan dot and bar as well as Arabic numerals, and a weaving design below the text on each page, all serve to foreground K'iche' culture. However, no mention is made of individual narrators or their communities, there is no description of the recording process or the context of the narration, nor is there any introductory material reviewing the content of the narratives or the culture of the K'iche' community, such as is found in some of the other works reviewed, which were edited by non-Guatemalan researchers. In this work, the text stands alone and the compiler evidently assumes that the reader already knows the background material provided in such introductions. At the time of this research, it was not possible to obtain the Spanish translation prepared by Ms. Chay Ordoñez of the K'iche' volume she researched, and I cannot therefore compare the texts. The Oral Tradition texts prepared for the other linguistic communities have the same format, but were not reviewed for this study.

In terms of the community impact of these texts, it is worth pointing out that 1,000 volumes of the *Tradición Oral K'iche'* were printed. According to ALMG information, the K'iche' area has 80,000 inhabitants, 70% of whom are Maya, and 30% Ladino (mestizo.) In March 2008, the ALMG listing of available texts is the same as that posted in August 2006. It does not mention this K'iche' publication at all and, of the other Oral Tradition volumes, it lists the following availability: Popti: 132; Mopan: 25; Poqomam: 3; Poqomchi: 21; Sakapulteko: 26; Tektiteka; 48; Tzutujil: 25; Uspanteko: 35. The question then remains as to how, after the efforts of the organization to produce these

texts, the intended goals of preserving and passing on the traditions to the Maya communities can be accomplished. The organization does not list current availability of any texts other than those of the eight linguistic communities just mentioned, and since financial and logistical difficulties make it unlikely that more than a very small minority of the designated readers will actually be able to read these works, it is most likely they will be used largely for research purposes.¹² This means that the purpose for which they were produced is not being accomplished. The texts have not been digitized for use on the internet, which further limits their accessibility to communities which are far from urban areas but do now have increasing access to the internet. The mission of the ALMG is to promote the Mayan languages, but at the same to gain wider recognition and respect for Mayan traditions, a goal which would be furthered by making translations of these works, and publishing them in dual-language editions for the Spanish-speaking population of Guatemala, both Ladino and non-K'iche' Mayan.

Another book of K'iche' tales and legends was published in 1995 by editors Emmerich Weisshaar and Rainer Hostnig, but in this case, separate texts were produced in K'iche', Spanish, and German. 700 copies were printed in K'iche' and this text is readily available, but the Spanish version is sold out.¹³ The editors, who are German-speaking, from Austria and Germany, worked with a research team of K'iche' speakers who collected and transcribed the texts in the communities of Zunil, Nahualá, Cantel and

¹² In future research I propose to survey numbers and titles of Mayan-language books in a sample of schools and libraries. A preliminary survey of one school and the town library in the Kaqchikel-speaking town of Parramos and the public library of the city of Antigua found no Mayan-language books in either the school or the library. Two library foundations which support libraries throughout Guatemala informed me that their libraries do not own Mayan oral literature publications.

¹³ It is common for the demand for Spanish-language texts to greatly exceed that for Mayan-language texts.

Joyobaj. The original goal of the research was a linguistic study, but the editors express the hope that the collection will inspire community interest in the oral tradition heritage.

The list of collaborators includes the name, age, place of origin, occupation (where known), and function in the preparation of the text. The narrators are from Nahualá (3), Joyabaj (1) and Zunil (4), but some of the recording, transcription and translation was carried out by natives of Cantel, as well as other communities – all of which have significant dialectical differences in K'iche'. There is no doubt that here, as in the other texts under review, regional accents, as well as local lexical and syntactic particularities, are compromised when the oral narrative is written, and the editors refer to the difficulties they encountered in using research assistants from different communities. They also point out in the introduction to the K'iche' version that while they chose to use the recently adopted official alphabet, they found it difficult to find native speakers able to correct the written version and to use the standardized spelling.¹⁴

The editors emphasize that, because stories are told informally, depending on the context, they chose research assistants who were then able to record stories told by their relatives in normal circumstances –for example, while harvesting, or gathered together with the family around the fire in the evening. Of all the publications reviewed, this is the only one which includes dialogue between the listener and the narrator during the narratives. Given the importance of the listener's interaction with the narrator in an oral

¹⁴ Resistance to standardization of lexicon, grammar, as well as alphabetical symbols and spelling, has been an ongoing phenomenon, reported since the Summer Institute of Linguistics attempted to produce standard Mayan language translations of biblical texts (Henne 1985). Substantial differences exist between communities which have remained isolated from each other and which retain a strong sense of pride and local identity in their dialect. As I mention in my discussion of Ak'abal, a K'iche' teacher from Cantel who was reading some of the poems with me had difficulty understanding certain words in poems written in the K'iche' of Momostenango, about 1-2 hours away.

narration, this has been included in some of the narratives, even though it interrupts and sometimes alters the flow of the plot. Furthermore, since the listener frequently knows the plot of a story being told, plot sequence in Mayan narrative is not necessarily linear or chronological, but may spiral through variations or digressions, and foreshadowing is common. Many of the stories end with a moral, in keeping with the didactic purpose of oral tradition, but the editors of the text point to consequences of behavior which are sometimes surprising and follow a different logic than western tales. Weisshaar and Hostnig also state that the narrator's presentation style is retained, including frequent repetitions, often in parallel couplets, and the use of "they say," with references to the ancestors, whose words are being passed down. However, the editors do acknowledge some stylistic compromises in transcribing the oral text in order to ensure that the written text will be a readable book – a statement which is repeated in works edited by Perla Petrich. Given the difference between the participatory process of listening to a performance, often as a member of a group, and the process of reading a text, usually silently, alone, how much to retain / duplicate / change is the most problematic issue in the transformation from oral to written words, and is resolved to conform to the abilities and needs of the intended reader.

The effort to duplicate as much as possible the original context of oral narrative is also reflected in the visual accompaniment to this text. Illustrations include images of local indigenous clothing and culturally symbolic weaving designs, and photographs of local people, communities, masks used for local dance-dramas, and other works of art. While the illustrations do not depict the plot or setting of individual narratives, as in other

written oral tradition editions, they provide a cultural back-drop which reinforces the world-view of the written texts.

The narratives themselves are divided by content-descriptive genre, as are those of Peñalosa, rather than by place of origin:

1. Legends about origin.
2. Lords of the forest and Lords responsible for rain.
3. La Llorona.
4. Men who changed into animals.
5. Inauspicious and auspicious animals.
6. Men who left to seek their fortune.
7. Arrogant and hard-working people.
8. Abandoned children.
9. People who grew rich.
10. Good and bad women.
11. Misuse of food.
12. Picaresque tales and fables. (Weisshaar and Hostnig xi)

A comparison of the presentation of these two monolingual texts suggests that they are designed for different readers – Weisshaar and Hostnig's presentation better

meets the requirements of research-oriented readers since it is more explicit and analytical in introducing and explaining their position, whereas this position and the issues they mention are implicit in Chay Ordoñez's ALMG work. Availability of funding, and the benefit of a team of researchers, make a substantial difference.

Hopefully, a comprehensive study of the Mayan-language texts will lead to an evaluation of the style and content presentation, and establish standards which meet the current needs of the different readers, both researchers and general readers, of these texts

C. Dual-language Mayan language - Spanish texts

1. Presentation of the texts

The dual-language publications of oral tradition are produced predominantly by the publishing houses of Cholsamaj and Yax Te', but some are also produced by local community groups.¹⁵ They focus on, respectively, the following language groups: Tz'utujil, K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Q'anjob'al, Chuj, and Akatek. Perla Petrich and Ochoa García have edited two volumes of narratives: *Tz'ijonik / Cuentos del Lago* "Stories from the Lake" and *Ri Qat'it Ik' / La Abuela Luna* "Grandmother Moon" from the Lake Atitlán area, with the support of the same local study group of Tz'utujil educators. Perla Petrich, a French academic who specializes in oral history and Latin America, and Carlos Ochoa García, a K'iche' native of San Pedro, Totonicapán who has written elsewhere on Mayan legal rights and on Mayan emigration to the U.S.A., dedicate their work to the maintenance of Mayan cultural heritage – moral values, Mayan world-view, life-style, work methods and ethics, social responsibilities and punishments – and

¹⁵ *Jootay / Literatura Maya Tz'utujil* "Maya Tz'utujil Literature" is published by the community itself with funding from PRONEM-UNESCO.

also to the recognition of the value of oral tradition. The pedagogical importance of this work is emphasized in both books, but *Ri Qat'it Ik' / Abuela Luna* focuses specifically on astronomy and stories illustrating the relationship of man to nature.

Significantly, the study group which produced this collection, made up largely of young teachers, is part of a Lake Atitlán cultural preservation program in the Study Center of San Pedro la Laguna. The same town is home to two local groups, known as the Grupo Tz'utujil Jootay, and the Tz'utujil Tinaamitaal, each of which have produced a collection of Tz'utujil oral traditions, published respectively by PRONEM_UNESCO and Cholsamaj.¹⁶ Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the Tz'utujil stories outnumber those in K'iche' and Kaqchikel in the four collections of oral tradition from the Lake Atitlán region, and that there are both repetitions and variations of the same narratives.

While the two editions produced directly by the Tz'utujil groups provide little information about the narrators, transcribers or translators, the two volumes edited by Petrich and Ochoa García provide the narrator's name, age, and place of origin and the name of the compiler and translator. This may reflect cultural norms in crediting individuals (the European editors), rather than the social group (the Tz'utujil group) for the narrative performance, and also suggests that the Tz'utujil group wishes to foreground the community ownership/authorship of the oral tradition.

There is considerable similarity in the presentation of these four dual language collections; all foreground the Mayan-language text by using larger font and by placing it

¹⁶ San Pedro la Laguna also has a thriving artists' group, one of whom, Juan González Chavajay, painted the book covers. The artists, several of whom are related to him, are represented on a San Francisco-based art information and sales website, Arte Maya Tz'utijil, at <http://www.artemaya.com/index.html>

in the center column of each page, while the Spanish translation is in smaller font and takes less space on the page; in one case, it is placed in a small box at the base of the page. As in all Cholsamaj editions, dot and bar numerals and weaving designs appear throughout. Maya paintings appear on the cover, and each text has pen and ink or pastel illustrations.

(2) Texts

Tz'ijonik / Cuentos del Lago

The narratives of *Tz'ijonik / Cuentos del Lago* are organized by language (Kaq'chikel, K'iche', and Tz'utijil) and by the towns of origin. Within these categories, the genres are mixed, and there is some duplication of stories told by different narrators. The editor, Perla Petrich, writes that the function of the stories is to teach, entertain, provide aesthetic pleasure, transmit moral values, transmit knowledge of world-view and understanding of the origin of the world, give information about life-style (work, agriculture, household activities, raising of children), and explain social responsibilities. Many of the stories explain natural phenomena, such as the origin of the volcanoes surrounding the lake, or features of the lake itself, including superstitions about rain spirits and underwater spirits of the dead which pull down the canoes of the lake fisherman. Since the lake is deep and has unpredictable currents, it is easy to understand the existence of many stories about fishermen and about spirits and fish which live in the lake. Among the stories which transmit moral values are those which also refer to natural powers, and emphasize the importance of respecting the spirits by paying tribute when fishing or harvesting. For example, in "Ri rutojik ri wa'in" / "El Pago de la Comida"

‘Payment for Food’ a fisherman is punished by the Lord of the Lake, and returns to tell people “es bueno usar el pom y la candela para que no hayan sufrimientos al morir a causa de un trabajo hecho aquí en la tierra” ‘It is good to use incense and a candle so that as a result of work done here on earth there is no suffering at the time of death’ (Petrich, *Tz’ijonik* 29).

Several stories illustrate the value of hard work, whether for a newly married couple, who have to demonstrate to their parents-in-law that they are a worthy addition to the family, or for individuals. There are two variations of a well-known story of the lazy man who changes places with a buzzard because he believes the bird has an easier life, and then learns the hard way that he must wait to eat carrion while the transformed buzzard works hard (to the amazement of his wife) and then happily finds dinner waiting for him when he returns home at the end of his workday. This collection also includes the only story I have found about a lazy daughter-in-law, who trades places with a wild cat. The cat works hard, is integrated into the family, and even baptized.

A related category of stories narrates the cleverness of an animal (traditionally, the rabbit) or human (for example, a young man who is attracted to a girl) and the outwitting of the more foolish, gullible victim – the coyote, or the girl’s father.

Among stories about supernatural powers, Petrich and Ochoa García present an unusually high number (10) stories about “characoteles” – humans who are born with the power to transform into animals, and who meet with other characoteles at night, often to plan attacks on others. Other characters with special powers, such as the young men who

know how to make rain, lose them when a relative discovers them, or gain special powers to wish for riches to escape their poverty.

The other large category of stories concerns the traditions surrounding asking for a woman's hand in marriage and the marriage ceremony. It is interesting to observe that the narrators, aged between 29 and 75, all refer to marriage customs, and describe the process of discussions between the bride and groom's families, but also comment that times are changing, and that today couples often arrange their own marriage. All of the narratives emphasize the importance of working hard to impress the parents-in-law with the ability to carry a heavy load of firewood, or grind corn with a grinding stone, but, perhaps surprisingly, also allude to potential incompatibility between the couple or, in the case of the 28-year-old male narrator, between the bride and her mother-in-law, and the resulting separation. In addition to the narratives describing marriage traditions, the editors include three stories of seduction, in which young men outwit the father of the woman.

It is clear that the narrators of these stories are concerned to pass on not only the traditional customs, but also to mention recent developments as well as the exceptions to the rules of behavior. The style of narration is informal, and always emphasizes that the narrative represents the community rather than an individual, with frequent use of the second-person plural, or of "dicen" (they say) and conclusions such as "Así es lo que yo he visto en mi vida y solamente eso es lo que puedo decir" 'This is what I have seen in my life and that is all I can say' (Petrich 131).

Ri Qat'it Ik' / La Abuela Luna

The narrative style is similar in *Ri Qati't Ik' / La Abuela Luna* “Grandmother Moon”, also edited by Petrich and Ochoa García, but here the theme is nature and the universe: the moon, sun, stars, and weather. The narratives mix myth, realism, daily life, ritual practices and animal-human transformation, with practical, moral, philosophical and spiritual instruction and guidance. They include myths of origin, realistic descriptions of nature and rural life, signs which farmers need to know for planting and harvesting, and stories on the importance of understanding and respecting nature. The unifying concept is the sacred character of nature and the universe and the importance of passing on this cultural knowledge in order to maintain harmony and balance.

In this collection also, organization is by language and town of origin:

Kaqchikel: 3 narratives from Santa Cruz la Laguna

K'iche' 3 narratives from Santa Clara la Laguna

Tz'utijil 2 narratives from Santiago Atitlán

2 narratives from San Pablo la Laguna

19 narratives from San Pedro la Laguna

The narrators are identified by name and age, and the Spanish translation is followed by the name of the compiler and translator. The final 19 narratives, all from San Pedro la Laguna, are attributed to a group of four people, aged 60-70. There is no information about their relationship or the context of their collaboration, but they explain that it is their duty to accept and explain carefully the sacred knowledge given to them by the

grandfathers and grandmothers, who in turn received it from the Creator, and which is guarded by a *Nawal* “protector spirit” (Petrich, *Ri Qati’t Ik’* 60).

Five narratives (17, 27, 51, 63, 64) contain legends and beliefs about the moon, “our grandmother moon.” The moon is personified, both guards and protects living creatures, and knows everything – narrator Andrés Chiyal Martín says she is united with Jesus Christ –and evokes strong personal attachment. Understanding the cycles and appearance of the moon helps to predict weather patterns, so that farmers know when to plant or harvest, and also signals the arrival of illness and death. When the moon is waning or in eclipse, or seems sick, because of the red color she takes on during an eclipse, people are afraid, and make loud noises (with drums, pots and pans) in order to awaken her and bring her back.¹⁷ Two of the narratives by Tz’utijil speakers also refer to mistrust of the moon, because she tells lies about people, to God (51) and to the Sun (64). The sun, *q’ij* (the name means both sun and day) is known as both “Father Sun” and “Grandfather Sun” and seems more trustworthy than the Moon.

This collection includes narratives about the wind, the stars, and the volcanoes and earthquake tremors in this region, but the most common topic is the weather, with six narratives specifically about the rain, and seven others on associated themes – fog, rainbows, lightning. Many names exist for the wind, which is particularly important for fishermen on the lake and also for farmers:

Ruxulaa’ juyu’ “smell of the mountain, a fresh wind”

Xokomeel “a light wind which is dangerous in the center of the lake”

Iiq’ or tijol ya’ “wind which eats the lake”

¹⁷ See “La luna se muere / Kakam ri qati’it” ‘The moon is dying’ (Ak’abal Tejedor / Ajkem 84-85).

K'amol ya' "wind which carries away the lake"

Saqiiq' "white wind' which is gentle and refreshing"

Ruxulaa' jab' "rain smell". (Petrich, *Ri Qati't Ik'* 75-6)

In addition to these descriptive names, which are explained in a short account of wind varieties, narrator Antonio Chacom describes others, such as the *ruxlab' juyub'*, "a calm, fresh wind", and the *nimakaq'iq'* "the strong, destructive wind". In speaking of the wind, *Chocom*, he refers to *kaqiq* "Sacred Wind", whose *Nawal* "spiritual guardian" is San Lorenzo, to whom the farmer must pray before planting so that the wind does not flatten the harvest (Petrich, *Ri Qati't Ik'* 37-44). The devastating effects of hurricanes in Central America make it clear why farmers emphasize respect for the wind and rain. As an example of didactic narrative, this piece is a model of communicative teaching: it includes definitions of terms, descriptions of the effect of different winds, a lengthy description and explanation of a planting ceremony, and a short cautionary tale about a girl who complained about the wind to exemplify the underlying theme throughout of acceptance of and respect for the Sacred Wind. The names of the different winds include:

Chee' tukujab' (chee' tukul jab') "stick for stirring the rain, rain spinner"

Q'eq'al jab' "black rain"

Risimal jab "fine hair rain"

Xokomeel jab' "wind rain"

Nk'eje' raal chiiij (karneelo) "the sheep's son is born"

Ruxulaa' juyu' "mountain aroma". (Petrich *Ri Qati't Ik'* 15)

The collection includes a K'iche' version of a rain legend about the presumption of one of the rain *nawals*, who changed his white robes for black, and caused a cloud to cover the sun's face and heavy rain to fall, with the result that Saint Gabriel had to intervene. Like some of the wind narratives, this account incorporates Christian saints into the Mayan cosmos, and translates the term *nawal* as "angel", an example of the same religious syncretism noted in the association of the Moon with Jesus Christ.¹⁸

The strong element of Mayan religious background is especially noticeable in *Ri qamam q'ij ri qati't ik' / Nuestro abuelo sol y abuela luna*, "Our Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon), whose characters duplicate the exploits of Jun Ajpu and Ixb'alanke in the *Popol Vuh*, and demonstrate the downfall of pride. Twin brothers bring the meat they hunt to their grandmother, but their other brother eats it, leaving them nothing. Finally they trick him into accompanying them, and he ends up trapped high in a tree, changed into a monkey. The brothers leave, and travel to other communities, where they are punished for their action. However, as in other tales, there is also a mixture of non-Mayan elements – the boys are thrown into a tiger cage, to be killed and eaten as punishment. This is a rare narrative example of punitive methods, apart from the fact that tigers¹⁹ do not exist in Guatemala. Later, they are put in an oven, like Hansel and Gretel's witch, and like Jun Ajpu and Ixb'alanke who, in the *Popol Vuh*, leap head first into the oven prepared for them in Xibalba. The up-dated story also brings to mind the fact that the Maya do not cook on stoves with large ovens like those of European countries, but

¹⁸ The term *nawal* generally refers in K'iche' to the animal spirit counterpart of the human, but in Jakalteq Popti' two terms are used: *nawal* is the nefarious character of that spirit, while *tonal* is its beneficent character.

¹⁹ When the Spaniards first arrived in Mesoamerica, they mistakenly gave the name *tigre* to the jaguar.

today's listeners may think of the oven-like *temascal*.²⁰ In a fusion of the *Popol Vuh* Xibalba episode and the New Testament resurrection account, the boys' bones are ground up, but they are reborn on the third day.

The occasional admixture of themes and actions from non-Mayan sources is also apparent in lexical borrowings in the Mayan text: *pero* "but" and *porque* "because" are used throughout, as are terms for which there may not be a ready equivalent, such as *maldecir* "to curse". Some are simply Spanish words incorporated, pronounced, and spelled as Mayan – *na qasta* for "no gusta" 'does not like.' However, the reverse is more frequently the case. In the narratives about rain and wind, the Mayan names mentioned above are incorporated into and explained in the Spanish text, with the exception of the more common *nimaq' iq'*, which is easily translated as "viento fuerte" 'strong wind'. Other terms also retained in the Spanish belong to rituals and spiritual beliefs – for example, *Ajaw* "God", *xukulem* "ceremony", and *ajq' iij* "Mayan priest".

The introduction to this collection emphasizes that the Spanish translations of the texts reflect local idioms and oral syntax, but the original Mayan speech has been faithfully transcribed. In some cases this means that the Mayan text, with its tendency to parallelism and redundancy, is longer than the Spanish translations, but in others, the Spanish text incorporates longer explanations, which are not necessary for the Mayan speaker/listener/reader.

Formally, the Spanish text is unable to reflect all of the structural and grammatical particularisms which are significant in the Mayan text. Most outstanding is the expression

²⁰ Laura Martin has suggested that the "oven" in which the boys were locked up may be a reference to the local *temascal* or *chuj* (sweat bath) and therefore not a foreign concept (personal communication.)

which every narrator uses repeatedly to state that the narrative is knowledge passed down through history by the ancestors: *ri e qat'it qamam* “our grandmothers and grandfathers”, which is translated into Spanish with the collective noun, “nuestros abuelos” ‘our grandparents’. In the Spanish single collective plural noun *abuelos* the masculine dominance in the plural is all the more culturally striking, when we observe that in the Mayan text, both the grandmothers and grandfathers are mentioned, and the female *qat'it* “grandmother” always precedes the *qamam* “grandfather”.

The following text gives further examples of differences (my italics):

Are' taq k'u zb'itaj wa' ri tzij kumal che ri kati't, k'ate k'u ri' xkimajij uchomaxik rij ri kachalal jasa kakib'an che re porque sun a kuya' ta wi ke ri e staq chikop ke e kitzukuj cha', xuquje' are' taq xa'lax wa' ri e keb' alb'omam i'l xe tz'ilo'x rumal wa ri ju kachala ri katijow ri kirikil chikiwach cha', pero na kakiriq taj jasa kaib'an che re cha'.

Dicen que cuando terminaron de decir estas palabras a la abuela empezaron a buscar la forma de derrotarlo porque no les daban su comida. Cuando nacieron estos dos muchachos el hermano que comía sus animales, los trató muy mal. Pero *dicen* que no encontraban qué hacer. (Petrich *Ri Qati't Ik'* 29)

They say that when they finished saying these words to the grandmother they began to find a way to defeat him, because they were not giving them their food. When these two boys were born the brother who was eating their animals treated them very badly. But *they say* that they could not think of what to do.

In the oral performance, and in the above example, the rhythm and tempo of the narration is frequently indicated by lexical markers (*Are....cha'*) at the beginning and end of parts of the narrative, as in the example above. The Mayan text has an additional *cha* in the

middle of the paragraph which is not translated into Spanish. The Mayan text initiates paragraphs or new ideas with *kakib'ij* “as they say” or *are' taq k'ut*, or *k'ate k'u ri'* “then”, but the Spanish text frequently omits this repetitive form, although it is included in this example. The Mayan *cha* concludes the paragraphs “they say, it is said”. However, in the Spanish translation, rather than marking the first and last words, syntax requires that *dicen* be incorporated within sentences, and in many cases, the Spanish translation does not repeat it as consistently as does the Mayan text. Thus, we can see that translating into Spanish oral style causes the loss of certain aspects of Mayan oral style in the Spanish text. The result is the loss of framing which provides both a lexical and a rhythmic beginning and end to a new idea.

Punctuation, on the other hand, may be incorporated in the Spanish text, but largely omitted in the Mayan text, which is frequently written as continuous prose broken up only by paragraphs marked by the above-mentioned forms. Clearly, there is no formal, consistent standard for incorporating punctuation in oral narrative transcriptions and translations. Finally, Spanish borrowings can be seen here in the use of the conjunctions *porque* “because” and *pero* “but” in the Tz'utujil text. These terms are commonly used and fully integrated into many Mayan languages.

Jootay / Literatura Maya Tz'utujil

As mentioned earlier, this collection includes fables, animal allegories, moral tales, proverbs, and aphorisms, and is divided into two sections, designated by their genres: *Piixaab* / Prevención y corrección de los abuelos para los niños y jóvenes (Prevention and correction: advice by elders for children and young people) and *Nawalin*

taq Tz'ijj / Palabras inventadas “Invented words”. In keeping with the goal of foregrounding Maya culture, the Spanish translation is in small font in an inset square on the Tz'utujil page. Published by the Grupo Tz'utujil Jootay, working in the Proyecto Movilizador de Apoyo a la Educación, this is a collaborative effort of thirteen youths and adults from San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá, whose names are listed only on the editorial page. The individual narratives are attributed to the transcriber, not to the narrator, and the Spanish translations are followed by the translator's name. The preface pays respect to all the poets, living and dead, who have interpreted and kept alive their communal knowledge:

Los consejos que aquí se presentan, están basados en la vida cotidiana de la gente de la comunidad, que nos ponen en contacto con un mundo donde la transmisión oral es un medio importante de aprendizaje de la vida social, religiosa y profesional. (*Jootay / Literatura Maya Tz'utujil* 10)

The counsels which are presented here are based on the everyday life of people in the community, who put us in contact with a world where oral transmission is an important means of learning about social, religious and professional life.

In Tz'utujil, both the title of the collection, “Jootay,” and “Piixaab”, the title of one section, are potent reminders of the cultural differences between the Spanish and Tz'utujil readers of this book, and the strong sense of identity which motivates the preservation of the Tz'utujil narratives in the original language. *Jootay*, “sprout, re-growth,” is an evocative agricultural metaphor for the new growth of Maya Tz'utujil culture, expressing hope, renewal and vulnerability. The Spanish title *Literatura Maya Tz'utujil* is referential without any of the cultural connotations of the Tz'utujil. Similarly,

we note that *Piixaab* is a genre of advice by elders to children and youth so significant that the form has its own name in Tz'utujil, but it requires a lengthy descriptive title in Spanish: *Prevención y corrección de los abuelos para los niños y jóvenes* "Prevention and correction: advice from elders to children and young people".

In *Piixaab* the brief pieces of advice (often only one or two pages long) focus on obedience to parents, with reminders that parents always want only the best for their children; on the dangers of disobedience (the disobedient fish wanders off and is caught in the fisherman's net, and the fawn who leaves home is attacked by dogs); on respect and consideration towards others, especially elders; on moral values – appreciation, and giving thanks to others and to nature; and on practical reminders about healthy work habits (eating and drinking enough when working hard in the field). They include medical and health advice, and information on farming practices and environmental protection.²¹ Underlying all this is the belief in the social structure of the community, the value and dignity of hard work, and a profound respect for others and the land itself. The rural community depends on a strong sense of role identity; at birth, the child's umbilical cord is buried so that the child will grow to love that place in his/her future work: for the boy, in the field, so that he will be attached to his work on the land, and for the girl, in the patio, so that she will be attached to her work in the house (*Jootay* 87). For the reader who enjoys food, perhaps the most appealing is the alliterative chant-like "katel ki' katel k'ay," a cook's prayer to the pacayas cooking on the stove to ensure that that they taste good (*Jootay* 88).

²¹ Author Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, who now works for CONAP, the Guatemalan National Council on Protected Areas, speaking to me in January 2006, pointed out the irony in the fact that the government is developing new environmental protection laws without taking into account the long tradition of environmental protection already developed and passed down orally in Mayan communities.

The second part of this collection consists of fourteen moral tales created to guide and motivate the listener/reader. Eight of these are allegories which demonstrate the importance of good interpersonal and family relationships – for example, the dog and cat who, instead of fighting, are happily playing after rescuing each other (*Jootay* 100) and the slaughter of the fat pig who foolishly mocked his fellow pig for being too thin (*Jootay* 105). Obedience to parents and elders is stressed frequently in cautionary tales about disobedient animals who meet a sad fate, but a realistic tale with human characters points to the importance of a father's responsibilities towards his family, and one, non-fiction page of advice refers to the importance of maintaining gender roles by planting the umbilical cord of boys in the fields, and that of girls, in the home, so that each will grow attached to their place of work

Four of these tales (*Jootay* 95, 108, 114, 128) reflect the world-view of Mayans who express their dependence on and respect for nature. We learn about appropriate ways to cut down old rather than young trees in a way which does not damage the land (basic forestry conservation principles) and about the need to demonstrate appreciation of and respect for the moon and earth for the service they give to man. "K'ixtaan" (114) portrays the fear of the lunar eclipse, as people afraid that the moon will leave them try to restrain her by banging pots and pans – as they do in Ak'abal's poem "Ri Q'at'it Ik / Abuela Luna", mentioned earlier in connection with stories in the Oral Tradition book of the same title.

These fourteen fictional narratives, chiefly in the form of animal allegories, are explicitly didactic, and by focusing mainly on interpersonal, both family and community relationships, demonstrate the importance of social cohesion in the local rural context. By

extension, respect for nature is essential for survival and a powerful unifying force for the community. The values expressed, and some of the plots themselves, are very similar to those of oral tradition and written texts from other Mayan areas.

Nawalin taq tzij / Tradición oral Tz'utujil

This collection (referred to henceforth as *Nawalin*) comes from the same town as the previous one, but has a broader range of genres, including traditional tales, discussions on economy and work, animal and human allegories, and mythical beliefs. The stories are generally 2-5 pages long, and were obtained through interviews with community elders. Tz'utujil and Spanish are on opposite pages. While the preface states that the twenty-five narratives are designed to be teaching material for first- and second-grade school children, the content, format and language are clearly intended for the teacher or other adult reader.

Themes include social values and justice, education and gender roles (parents each train their children in gender-appropriate work), medical practices, community cooperative labor, and local myths, including a version of the same story found elsewhere (*Jootay* 26), of the young woman who went to the village dance wearing a beautiful dress which her poor father was given by a stranger, and who was then whisked away by a whirlwind, never to be seen again, thereby giving the mountain above San Juan de la Laguna its name: “under the young woman” (*Nawalin* 35). While the descriptions of local customs emphasize the advantages of mutual help, for example, in home-building, and the value of birth ceremonies conducted by special priests *ajq'ijjaa'*, they are

followed by commentaries deploring the loss of these customs and the resulting deterioration in community and family life (*Nawalin* 25, 29)

Two narratives are about snakes with magical powers who help people - in one case, to grow rich, and in another, by offering a fang for a healer to use in cures. (*Nawalin* 40, 44) Other magical themes include transformation, the dangers of “characoteles” (humans who transform into animals at night), and the risks of going out alone after dark. Since the setting of the narratives is local, it is noticeable that places are named by their different Tz’utijil and Spanish names in each language version – for example, Xe’kuku’ juyu in Tz’utijil has the Spanish colonial saint’s name, San Juan la Laguna. A similar dual system appears in the naming of people – for example, Kulax is the Tz’utijil rendition of Nicholas.

The distinguishing feature of this collection is the emphasis on explanation and preservation of Mayan world-view and life practices, followed by commentaries which compare the advantages and disadvantages of modern customs. As in the previous collection, there is considerable interest in environmental conservation, but this is developed in greater detail, particularly regarding the pervasive problem of water contamination caused by uncontrolled human and animal waste disposal and the indiscriminate use of chemical products (*Nawalin* 94-105). The underlying theme is that Mayan people, who share similar beliefs, must all work together to preserve the integrity of their life style.

As mentioned earlier, it is striking that San Juan la Laguna should have provided the speakers, local researchers, and source material as well as attracting foreign

researchers, for four published collections of oral tradition, a disproportionate number when compared to other areas. This may well be related to the development of this town, in particular, and the area around Lake Atitlán, in general, and may be an indirect result of the increased accessibility, and economic advantages resulting from the tourist industry. It may also be helpful that Perla Petrich, who is affiliated with the University of Paris, and is the editor of two of the collections, lives on Lake Atitlán. By contrast, with the exception of the ALMG publications and the work of Weisshaar and Hostnig, the research on oral tradition has been largely confined to academic publications, and these are not necessarily available in Guatemala or in the languages spoken by the people from whom they originally came. It has been a common complaint that researchers took advantage of the opportunities offered for research in Guatemala, but, as Robert McKenna Brown points out, their “research agendas, methods and publications mainly served, with a good deal of impunity, English-speaking Western academia” (165). Brown eloquently advocates for the collaboration of researchers with their subjects and local support staff. He stresses the importance of explaining techniques and procedures to local assistants, so that they can conduct their own research, and of translating and making the results of research available to the population studied:

As a sociolinguist studying language maintenance and shift during this period, I discovered that it was not enough simply to report the decreasing use of Mayan languages. Ethically, I was compelled to share the tools of my field with the Maya and to assist them when possible in finding ways of maintaining and promoting the use of their languages (165).

In recent years, more Mayas have been receiving training, conducting research and publishing in this field, so that the situation reported in the early 1990s by Brown is changing.

Conclusion

In order to adequately meet the goals of preservation and diffusion expressed by the pan-Maya movement, the writing of oral tradition requires careful standardization of criteria for editing, and for reproducing linguistic, stylistic and performance characteristics. Some of these criteria are frequently omitted – for example, acknowledgement of the narrator and the place of the narration, and details of the oral performance – leaving a rather simple, bare-bones narrative structure. Of course, critics point out that including these criteria suggests personal authorship rather than community ownership of the narratives. Stylistic features, such as repetition and parallelism, are largely edited out of texts intended for the general reader, on the grounds that the reader has less tolerance for and less need of repetition in order to grasp and remember the text. Also, the continuous prose formatting of the texts obliterates the expressive features of the oral narration. All of these features could be included by means of additional notes, or stages directions such as those included by Dennis Tedlock in his translation of *Rabinal Achi*, although, with drama as with oral tradition, a paradox of capturing it in writing is that it freezes what is otherwise a fluid expression which each performer develops according to the situation. These are fundamental conflicting risks and benefits of writing the oral tradition. The need for preservation of the oral tradition ironically requires that it be written so that the literature is not lost as the Maya become Ladinized.

Beyond the textual presentation of oral tradition, further questions remain about its audience. For whom is it preserved? Who is the intended reader of these texts? Are these texts accessible to that reader? And – does the writing of oral literature really help to preserve it, or does it lead to greater appropriation of the cultural heritage by the hegemonic other? After surveying the collections which have been published in recent years, it is clear that the publication of written forms of oral tradition preserves and makes at least some aspects of it available to a wider public, although not necessarily the Mayan public on whose behalf it was written. In order to fulfill the expressed goals of these collections, they must be made accessible in both Mayan languages and in Spanish, so that Mayans of different language groups have recorded forms of their own traditions, and so that both Mayans and non-Mayans can read them all in a common language. Furthermore, as I have pointed out, relatively few of the Mayan languages are represented in the bilingual publications of oral narratives. Even though the ALMG has produced monolingual Mayan language volumes for each linguistic community, they are not widely available to the general public, nor are they distributed through libraries or schools.

It is evident that the research and production effort which goes into these texts is not followed up with adequate distribution, and the Mayan public for whom they are developed does not have access to them. Given the cost of printing, and the limited personal access to books on the part of the majority of the population, it seems as if greater efforts should be made to provide these books through schools and public libraries. Another critical factor is that literacy rates are low generally, and literacy in Mayan languages is minimal. Preservation efforts would be even more faithful to the

original oral forms, and distribution would reach a wider public, if instead of being limited to print form, the materials were also produced as performances for the media: radio, television and the internet. This would overcome the financial barrier to book acquisition, allow for a more creative, integrated approach to the production of oral narrative performances, and also ensure access for the population which is illiterate in Mayan languages. An example of this kind of approach is the outreach to schools of TIMACH, an organization in Quetzaltenango which promotes research on the *Pop Wuj*²², works with the local radio station, and presents dramatizations of the *Pop Wuj* to local schoolchildren. Other possibilities include the use of new communication technologies – for example, a web-based archive of oral literature materials has been developed by the non-government organization in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Ajb’atz Enlace Quiché, which has facilitated the creation of computer laboratories in school districts and continues to work extensively with schools and teacher-training programs in the K’iche and Tz’utujil language communities. The organization has also created a portal for the Ministry of Education Department of Bilingual Intercultural Education, which includes the above-mentioned materials and others developed by the ALMG www.ebiguatemala.org

In the following chapters on the work of Humberto Ak’ab’al, Gaspar Pedro González and Victor Montejo, my analysis will show how these authors are developing a written literary canon which is founded on the oral tradition. The traditional oral genres discussed at the beginning of this chapter give way to new genres, including the novel and the testimonio, and new poetic forms. While this development reflects in part the political motivation of the authors, their education in the Guatemalan Spanish system,

²² TIMACH uses this spelling, *Pop Wuj*, to refer to the *Popol Vuh*, to reflect the traditional k’iche’ pronunciation. I have already commented on Sam Colop’s spelling *Popol Wuj*.

and their exposure to European and world literature, their writing shows continuity with the Mayan oral tradition in its underlying world-view, in its emphasis on an explicitly communicative function, in its inclusion of oral narrative content, and in its use of Mayan language, and certain Mayan literary stylistic features.

Chapter 3

Modern Bilingual Mayan Writers: Writing, Re-writing, Translating

Approaches to (Self) Translation

This chapter identifies the writing, re-writing and translation issues inherent in the production and publication of literature in both Mayan languages and Spanish by bilingual Mayan authors. The first part relates translation practice to cultural theory, considering both historical and modern texts, and compares the Guatemalan situation to that of other countries with multilingual communities and bilingual writers. I then question who the intended audience of modern literature is, given limited Mayan language literacy and the difficulty of publishing in Mayan languages, and bearing in mind the genre and ideological focus of the literary text. In addition, I consider which language authors write in first, and whether the second language text is a translation or a re-writing. Finally, I discuss the linguistic differences between their languages, before considering the factors which inform the translation choices they make.

For the writer, the process of self-translating an original literary work from a subaltern language to a dominant language raises similar linguistic associations and choices to those s/he faces in the process of writing about his/her culture in the language of the dominant culture. The modern bilingual writers whose work I study do both: they write in both Mayan languages and in Spanish; they offer explanations and notes, and write critical texts on the topic of Mayan languages/literatures; and they themselves translate their work (in most cases). I claim that their self-translation is, in fact, a form of

re-writing, informed by the awareness of the cultural identity of the reader in each language, and qualitatively different from non-authorial translation. The translations of their work into other languages, frequently from the Spanish rather than the Mayan language text, demonstrate this difference.

My discussion takes into account theoretical studies of translation, linguistic studies of Mayan languages, and comparisons with bilingual authors from different geographical areas and situations. In my chapter on genre, I discussed pre-colonial and colonial texts which were written in Mayan languages for a Mayan audience. Translations of these texts have been widely studied and critiqued, and new editions respect changing translation norms. The most frequently translated and transcribed text is that of the 1703 transcription of the *Popol Vuh* (*Pop Wuj*). Dennis Tedlock, whose 1985 annotated English prose translation reflects the speech patterns and style of spoken K'iche', produced a second edition in 1996 with extensive changes arising from newly available information. In 2003, Dennis Tedlock published a new English translation of the play *Rabinal Achi*, which I mentioned in my discussion of oral narrative performance. Other translations are modified by the expertise of bilingual linguists who are native speakers of Mayan languages, such as Enrique Sam Colop, who in 1999 published his own annotated verse text in K'iche', *Popol Wuj*.

A recurrent topic in discussions of *Popol Vuh* translations is whether the text should be written in prose or verse form, since it is assumed that originally it was a glyph text, remembered and passed down orally with the characteristic poetic style of ancient Mayan texts: transcribing the prose in verse form highlights the parallelism. On the other hand, Dennis Tedlock critiques Edmunson's earlier verse translation for its imposition of

couplets throughout the text, occasionally at the expense of accuracy. Adrian Inés Chávez is credited with writing the first modern version of the *Popol Vuh* in K'iche' (1979), followed by the ALMG (1998) and Sam Colop (1999). The modern K'iche' versions of the old K'iche' text differ in their approach to contemporary usage: while the ALMG 1998 version makes adaptations to facilitate comprehension, Sam Colop's 1999 version respects the integrity of the original to the point of reproducing original errors which appear in the first transcription made by Ximénez in 1703 (ALMG: 342). It is noteworthy that Ximénez himself had been unable to translate some of the vocabulary (Baten Ajanel 332)

Progress in the deciphering of glyph texts, and studies by the growing number of Mayan linguists and anthropologists have ensured greater accuracy and culturally appropriate choices in recent translations of early documents. Moreover, the growth of the revitalization movement has led to heightened motivation to make these early documents accessible in written form to the Mayan community, and to a concern for translations based directly on the original Mayan texts, rather than the former reliance on the French or Spanish versions by writers such as Brasseur de Bourbourg, whose published transcription of the *Popol Vuh* contains some errors, as does his French translation. In addition to these conservation efforts, there are efforts to include the *Popol Vuh* in the school curriculum, and the activist organization TIMACH in Quetzaltenango is committed to supporting *Popol Vuh* research, presenting dramatic performances to schools in the area, as well as promoting Mayan education and culture in the schools and through conferences.

Increasing awareness of these issues has led, for example, to the re-printing in 2002 of Adrian Recinos' 1950 translation of the *Memorial de Sololá, Anales de los Kaqchikeles*. The new preface emphasizes that Recinos' annotated translation was made from the original sixteenth-century Roman alphabet version in Kaqchikel. Recinos, in his 1948 introduction, refers to the circuitous route of previous translations of the *Memorial*: Miguel Angel Asturias made a Spanish translation of Georges Raynaud's French translation of Daniel Brinton's 1885 English translation, which was based on the original Kaqchikel with help from Bourbourg's 1855 French translation of the manuscript he appropriated while in Guatemala! (*Memorial de Sololá* 10). It is small wonder that today's Maya movement emphasizes re-establishing an authentic connection with the earlier written literary tradition by a return to original texts, and making an effort to re-appropriate both the early glyph texts and the Roman alphabet texts from those who took them from Guatemala during and after colonial times.

At the same time as we see the growth of new translations of early written texts, there is also an impetus to transcribe texts of the oral tradition in native languages and to translate them into Spanish, not only as subjects of linguistic and anthropological research, but as a means of preserving and validating this literature in writing, and bringing it to a new reading public of Maya literature in both languages. I discuss this in my chapter on Oral Tradition, but here I will expand on some of the ways in which translation and transcription of oral tradition transform the form and content of the literary text in different ways. In the first place, accurate transcription depends on variables such as the use of recording equipment, the authenticity of the situation in which the story is recorded, the ethnicity and native language of the ethnographer, the

experience and skill in transcription of the ethnographer, and his/her ability to make a translation based on knowledge of the cultural tradition of the oral narrative. Many early transcriptions were made by German and American linguists and anthropologists, working with the help of native speakers who provided detailed lexical explanations. The results of such research were generally published, with translations and detailed analyses, in professional journals or books abroad, and rarely in Guatemala. A notable exception is the 1995 collection edited by Emmerich Weisshaar and Rainer Hostnig and discussed in the previous chapter. This work was produced with the collaboration of the Cooperación para el Desarrollo Rural de Occidente, Totonicapán, sponsored by the collaboration of the Proyecto Educación Bilingüe Intercultural Maya, and funded by German and Austrian agencies. This unusual example of international cooperation has an informative introduction detailing the criteria used to select both qualified transcribers and translators, and the decisions informing the translation process:

Para facilitar la comprensión se debió optar por una versión más libre, con lo cual lamentablemente se perdió algo del modo narrativo característico del quiché. Por otro lado se trató de conservar al máximo los giros y palabras usadas en la traducción realizada por los recopiladores para mantener el español característico de los indígenas” (Weisshaar iv).

In order to make it more comprehensible, we had to choose a more free translation, which unfortunately led to some loss of the characteristic Quiché narrative style. On the other hand, we tried to preserve as far as possible the expressions and words which the transcribers used in their translation, so as to keep the characteristic indigenous Spanish usage.

In recent years, Guatemalan linguists have themselves undertaken this work. The Guatemalan publisher Cholsamaj and the ALMG, the Colección Intercultural Luis

Cardoza y Aragón, and the American publisher of Guatemalan indigenous texts, Yax Te', have all published collections of oral histories in monolingual and dual-language editions, intended for both the Mayan reading public and the Spanish-reading public. Many – but not all - of them identify the translator, such as Saqch'en, who was also the collector of the stories from San Pedro Soloma, or Fernando Peñalosa, who translated stories by Pedro Miguel Say with the help of Juan Gaspar Baltazar (see Say). Most of the collections are from the K'iche', Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi' and Popti' language groups. In general, collections which are assembled by teams of local community members, or those published by linguists of the ALMG, are prefaced by an introduction which explains their purpose: a typical example is the following, from *Ojer Täq Tz'ijob'elil re K'iche'* / *Tradición Oral K'iche'* "K'iche Oral Tradition", collected and transcribed by Rosa Josefa Chay Ordoñez:

Este texto está dirigido a las personas que cohabitan en los pueblos que conforman la Comunidad Lingüística K'iche' con el objeto de dar a conocer y enriquecer los conocimientos sobre la cultura que nos legaron nuestros abuelos....Queda en manos de maestros, estudiantes, dirigentes y padres de familia la responsabilidad de conocer, transmitir el legado cultural de nuestros ancestros (*Ojer Täq Tz'ijob'elil re K'iche'*9)

This text is written for people who inhabit the towns which form the K'iche' Linguistic Community, with the purpose of providing them with information and enhancing their knowledge about the culture which our elders bequeathed to us... The responsibility of learning and passing on the cultural legacy of our ancestors lies in the hands of teachers, students, leaders and parents.

The community education intent behind the collections is apparent in many of the introductions, as is also the desire to spread knowledge and understanding of the Mayan people and their cultural riches outside the community. To this end, a number of the

publications list the name, age, language and origin of the narrator, as well as the name of the translator and/or transcriber - for example, *Tzijonik / Cuentos del Lago* “Stories from the Lake”, edited by Perla Petrich. However, these collections do not have notes, or any introductions explaining the cultural content or language of the stories. One exception is in the introduction to Ajpacajá Túm’s transcription of a K’iche’ Marriage Ceremony Speech, in which the writer explains some of the metaphors commonly associated with the bride and groom in K’iche’ (12). Another exception is Victor Montejo’s *Q’anil*, which is an adaptation, rather than a translation, of several versions of a Popti’ legend, which he has transcribed and synthesized and to which he has added an introduction and detailed notes.

Apart from the above-mentioned works, the recent editions of collections of oral tradition are presented for the general reader and for educational purposes, as another literary genre, rather than as research. Their focus is the textual content, with translations into an equivalent local version of spoken Spanish. Further research would require back-translating to determine the criteria used in making the translations in these publications, and how effectively they represent the original version. However, the emphasis on local language, whether in Mayan or Spanish, reflects the same self-identification frame of reference which I will discuss in the context of modern written literature.

Fernando Peñalosa, in his 2001 introduction to Maya stories, points out that the same story-teller will use different rhetorical and stylistic devices when telling the same story in his native language and in Spanish (*El Cuento Popular Maya* 21) He also notes that when oral histories are written in continuous prose, the format obliterates the parallelism which the original listener perceives. While it is not strictly an aspect of

verbal translation, the performance aspect of an oral narrative is indeed an intrinsic part of the narrative, and some readers would prefer that a description be included in these publications, in much the same way as stage directions appear in the text of a drama. Moreover, if the stated goal is to preserve oral tradition, it is critical that the words themselves be accompanied by a reference to their context and mode of performance. A related issue is raised on the subject of translation of ancient Mayan texts, whose structure encodes the “now” of the oral performance - for example, in the use of present tense verbs in the incompletive aspect. The reading of such ancient texts was performed by a scribe familiar with the text and its format, who read a series of actions each successively occurring in the present. However, when translated directly today, the text seems awkward to a contemporary reader. Herring suggests a more dramatic approach to the translation: “They would read better if rendered in the orality they so closely recorded, the living voice of the rhetorician’s enunciation or the singer’s colored tones” (49). A similar approach might be valuable in the transcription and translation of oral tradition. Since currently the modern translations of transcriptions of oral narratives published for the general reader (as opposed to ethnographic works) preserve only the words used when the transcription was made, a more dramatically-appropriate approach would include references to the performance itself, and even include references to modifications to the narratives which reflect changing circumstances.

Modern bilingual authors

The production of original written literature in Guatemala, following the long oral tradition, is the work of bilingual authors who are producing works in Spanish and Mayan languages, in dual-language editions featuring their own self-translations. Clearly,

all translation practice is grounded in a cultural perspective inseparable from the political situation. As is the case for new translations of early Mayan texts (whether they were originally glyph or alphabetic), and for the transcriptions and translations of oral tradition, the production of new written literature is closely linked to the Maya movement.¹ Whether a Mayan language or Spanish is the original or the target language in translation, the linguistic form the writer chooses for the text is informed by the political purpose of the text in question. For this reason I consider the Spanish text, whether it is a primary text or a translation from a Mayan language, as an intentionally Mayan-informed text. In both cases, the author is writing as a Maya, about the Mayan people, and seeking to appropriate a literary form on behalf of the Maya for the sake of cultural preservation. Translation and original text play an equally crucial role in drawing attention to the problematic nature of cultural transmission, and suggest some parallels with other countries with multi-lingual writers in a post-colonial situation.

In this context, an article by Vanamala Viswanatha and Sherry Simon, on developing literature in Kannada, a Dravidian language of southern India, provides a useful comparison between Guatemala and the multilingual situation in India. The authors show how, in successive colonial and post-Independence periods, Kannada writers have presented subtle changes in the way they selectively translate between English and Kannada. While the writers studied in their article all aimed at the enrichment and validation of the Kannada language and literature, the major change has

¹ “The Maya movement promotes association based on linguistic groups and then, building on that base, hopes to foster a pan-Maya, even pan-Native American identity. By so doing it hopes to peacefully unite Guatemalan Indians into a power base that can exert a proportional influence on Guatemalan politics and so claim social and economic justice for all Maya people” (Fischer and Brown 15). Cojtí’ Cuxil defines its goals as territorial political and legal autonomy, linguistic and cultural revindication, educational reform, civil and military revindication, economic parity, and the application of constitutional rights (see Fischer and Brown 30-48 and also Cojtí 45-53)

been from the assumption of English superiority to that of equivalence between the two languages, and more recently, to one of critical questioning of the relationship between the two. The authors mention Tejaswini Niranjana, a translator and post-colonial critic, who proposes that translation should play a “*critical*” role, and produce a disruptive text. “This ‘interventionist’ mode of translation is an expression of the contemporary difficulty in conceptualizing cultural relations, of the crisis in modes of cultural exchange” and forces the reader to confront this issue. In much the same way as in contemporary Guatemala, “translation comes to play a crucial *cognitive* role in drawing attention to the problematic nature of transmission and transfer” (Viswanatha and Simon 174).

The same article, comparing the bilingual literary situation in India with that of Canada, proposes a series of frames which inform translation of literature of French Quebec to English Canada, and which we may usefully adapt to our analysis of translation and writing practices of today’s Mayan writers:

These frames could be called *ethnographic*, *emergent* and *pluralistic*. In the first place, translation negotiates between cultural entities which are different by nature, separate historical worlds, between which only relations of a cordial tolerance could be envisaged. In the second, difference is a result of a conscious political effort of self-fashioning, corresponding to a movement of political nationalism. And the third refers to the complex realities of the present (always more difficult to encapsulate) in which many micro-identities circulate across the barriers of national culture, making translation a reflection of the dramas of hybridity and self-doubt characteristic of much cultural expression today. (Viswanatha and Simon 175)

In Guatemala, while the “emergent” frame described here as “a conscious political effort of self-fashioning” closely corresponds to the Mayan literature appearing today, there is also clear emphasis on the fact that “translation negotiates between cultural entities which are different by nature, separate historical worlds” – that the Mayan and Spanish languages represent totally different world-views and historical experiences, with what could certainly not be described as “only relations of a cordial tolerance” between them. The notion of a “*pluralistic*” frame, encompassing multiple identities crossing national identities, is one which the 2003 Language Law proposes, but it has not (yet) become a reality.

The political/cultural environment influences the linguistic form of both original text and translation, but this form in turn varies according to genre. Specifically, as the genre becomes more referential, the political agenda becomes more explicit and the poetic function diminishes. Consequently, we find that though the writer conveys Mayan concepts and stylistic practices in all of his work, the relationship to source and target language shifts, and the translation mode changes according to the genre. This will become clearer as I show which works the writers studied have produced in each language. Gaspar Pedro González wrote his novel *S'beyb'al jun naq Maya Q'anjob'al / La Otra Cara* first in Spanish, and, according to Gail Ament, it was later translated into Q'anjob'al.² He himself states that he writes his poems first in Q'anjob'al,

que me parece expresar con mayor claridad y exactitud esa estética maya del habla. Por eso no siempre encontramos mucha belleza en castellano, pues es una traducción de imágenes similares pero no exactas” (Personal communication to Laura Martin).

² Gaspar Pedro González recently stated that he wrote the novel first in Q'anjob'al (Personal Communication 2006.)

which I think expresses more clearly and precisely the Mayan aesthetic of speech. That's why we don't always find much beauty in Spanish, since it's a translation of images which are similar but not exactly the same.

His testimonial novel *Retorno de los Mayas* is published in Spanish only. Ak'abal wrote his first poems *El Animalero* in Spanish, and later was able to translate them into K'iche' and publish them in a dual-language edition. His later works appear in dual-language or Spanish-only editions. Victor Montejo has published poetry in Popti' – Spanish and Spanish-only editions, and his prose work appears in Spanish-only or English-only editions. Other writers, mentioned earlier, for example Luis de Lión, or Calixta Gabriel, write in Spanish only, although they identify themselves as Kaqchikel Maya. Maya Cú, a Mayan activist with roots in the Q'eqchi community, was born in Guatemala City and speaks and writes poetry in Spanish only.

Clearly, a number of factors are at play here: the market determines what the writer is able to publish, for which audience, and in which language; writers are not necessarily literate in their native language, and, even more to the point, have been trained in school to write Spanish and have studied the Spanish-language literary canon. Finally, the emergence of new Mayan writers and literature in Mayan languages is an intrinsic part of the Mayan revitalization movement, so that writing and translation are political acts.

We witness, then, a variety of motives and a mixture of intended audiences in both the original writing and in the translation. In particular, the prose works, including the novel, essays, and the testimonial and testimonial novel - genres which are not

traditional in the Mayan literary canon³ - are primarily directed at a Spanish-speaking and international audience with the intention of raising awareness of the Mayan life, while these same works, if/when published in Mayan languages, serve as re-affirmation and validation of Mayan cultures through the literary work. Their awareness of a foreign audience determines the way the authors present culturally-specific concepts which are unfamiliar to that audience, and results in a hybrid style in which, on the one hand, the author is intentionally using formal characteristics familiar to the Mayan oral tradition, and, on the other hand, s/he is explaining cultural elements which the non-Mayan reader would not otherwise understand. The other question which arises, and is not fully accounted for, addresses the didactic component of the works. To what extent is the strong didactic component of many of these works an intrinsic characteristic of Mayan literary style, or is it a specific response to the current situation?

If we look at these texts as the production of bilingual authors, we can see that the language is

self-reflexive, a tool for crossing boundaries in space and in time offering several levels of style, a vehicle for conveying information otherwise inaccessible to non-speakers of a foreign language (via translations). All of these features of language offer the poet limitless possibilities to express the complexity of this world vision...” (Kürtösi 121)⁴

³ I refer here to the definition of testimonial as “a novel or novella-length narrative, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness in the events she or he recounts. The unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life episode (e.g. the experience of being a prisoner)” (Zimmerman 173). The modern genre has its roots in earlier written forms of chronicles, annals, and other historical accounts, including those by Mayan writers which chronicle their history, but is generally more limited in historical time period, develops more aspects of personal experience and also includes information about the author’s community life and customs.

⁴ The writer here refers to bilingual Hungarian-Canadian poets, in a situation which is politically different but linguistically similar to that of the Mayan writers.

However, in the post-colonial context, there is clearly a deeper political subtext and an interplay of cultural power which defines the language of the original as well as the nature of the translation. The translations are “products of the interaction between cultures of unequal power, bearing the weight of shifting terms of exchange” which “provide an especially revealing entry point into the dynamics of cultural identify-formation in the colonial and post-colonial contexts” (Viswanatha and Simon 162).

A consideration of the theories I have discussed and the variety of examples suggests that although it would be very satisfying to define one clear theoretical approach applicable to the writing, rewriting and translation of contemporary Mayan literature, the reality is that in this rapidly evolving situation, the authors themselves vary in their approach from one work to another and from one genre to another. There are many ways to skin a Jaguar.⁵

Translation methodology

Most of the works I analyze here have been self-translated by their authors, and in other cases, I have mentioned their translators. In translating from a source language to a second language, both the independent translator and the bilingual author must choose which cultural elements to use, however difficult these may be for the sensibilities or cognitive framework of the audience, and then choose between either highlighting or muting those which are unfamiliar. Similarly, linguistic features, such as dialect, culture-specific lexemes, grammatical markers and literary poetic devices may be emphasized, domesticated, or simply avoided altogether. A text written for an audience in the source

⁵ I could not pass up the chance to make my own translation/ transformation of this distasteful proverb.

culture may be too difficult for an audience in another culture, and the author/translator must maintain a text which is balanced and not overly mystifying.

María Tymozcko analyses at length the techniques that translators and authors use in order to give the kind of para-textual commentary needed by an outside audience. She writes that a common solution is for the author/translator to embed the text in a series of explanations in order to explain the cultural and literary background, thereby manipulating the text at two or more levels simultaneously. S/he may do this by means of an introduction, footnotes, critical essays, glossaries, maps, historical information, embedded texts, or self-commentary (19-40). This multiple layering can be seen in a particularly illustrative essay, *Footnotes to a Double Life*, by Ariel Dorfman, in which the author's original text is the basis for a longer text of footnote commentary on his Spanish-English language experience and choices, and, indeed, the original text serves merely as a pretext for the essay/footnotes (Dorfman 206-217).

In the case of the Guatemalan texts, in addition to some of the above mentioned textual and para-textual techniques, publishers have added drawings based on Mayan paintings, original sketches, and photographs, and have included Mayan numerals and glyphs to the original texts as further visual foregrounding of the textual content. These serve as a reference to the pre-colonial Mayan writing found on sculptures and vases and to the four surviving pre-Colombian texts known as the Dresden, Grolier, Paris and Madrid codices, in which the illustrations and glyph text formed an integrated whole. In this sense, they are a reminder of the tradition of written literature, but, even more specifically, they illustrate a feature of the text either directly or by association. The use of Mayan numerals in itself is a reminder that the Mayas use a vigesimal (twenty-based)

numerical system, rather than a decimal system, and that the Mayan word for twenty is the same as the word for human being, the being with twenty fingers and toes. Indeed, Dennis Tedlock, intentionally writing in Mayanized English, uses the term “vigesimal being” when referring to humans in *Breath on a Mirror: mythic voices and visions of the living Maya*.

Mayan literary works are frequently preceded by prefaces by the authors or others, which allude to the theme of language and cultural revitalization. In cases where the author knows that the audience is uninformed about the historical/political or spiritual background, s/he will give an explicit explanation of specific cultural practices within the source text – as does Gaspar Pedro González in his novels. For example, in *S'beyb'al jun naq Maya / La otra cara* he includes a description of birthing customs, and in *Retorno de los Mayas* the protagonist writes of the significance for him of the Mayan Calendar, and refers to Mayan calendar dates in narrating the days of his journey into exile. Tymozcko points out parallel examples in the work of Chinua Achebe, whose *Things Fall Apart* includes a lengthy account of the Feast of the New Yam, and of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose *A Grain of Wheat* includes a version of the colonial history of Kenya. Similarly, Julia Alvarez includes explicit references to events of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. This raises the question of whether the content is primarily motivated by the dominant language reader's lack of knowledge, and therefore whether this content should be absent in the native language text (when one exists).⁶ On the basis of my discussion with Gaspar Pedro González, I suggest that these prose texts, novels with a strong testimonial and/or anthropological component, have a

⁶ I am indebted for this question to Laura Martin, who thereby helped me to formulate my position on this issue.

double motivation: they are primarily directed at the non-native reader, in order to promote knowledge and understanding of the community described, but they are also directed at the native-language reader, serving as a confirmation and validation of his/her culture and history in the written literary canon, as well as a means of passing on community tradition in the same way as oral tradition.

In addition to these methods, the author/translator confronts the problem of translating unfamiliar lexical items. These may correspond to the material culture (food, tools, clothing, etc), the socio-political structure (customs, law, history, legends), or the natural world (weather, plants, animals, birds, landscape). In the absence of a direct equivalent, the choices are to completely omit the item, to find a rough equivalent in the receptor culture, or to import the word untranslated (code-mixing), either with or without an explanation. Authors/translators choose various techniques to clarify the terms used, either providing an explicit explanation, a footnote, or an explanatory classifier. At times the context is sufficient; at other times, with the benefit of contextual clarification, the receptor language can absorb the lexical item – and incorporate it as a loan transfer or calque. For example, Ngugi wa Thiong’o incorporates into his novels many terms for items typical of Kenya Gikuyu culture – such as plants, tools, clothes, music and dances – in much the same way as do Guatemalan authors in this study.

Mayan words for concepts relating to Mayan spiritual beliefs and the calendar are frequently untranslated in the Spanish works of all the authors studied here; they appear marked in italics, with explanations in the text, as in *Retorno de los Mayas*, or footnoted, as in *Q’anil: El Hombre Rayo Komam Q’anil / Ya’ K’uh Winaj*, or unmarked, as in the poems of Ak’abal. For example, “nawal” is a Nahuatl term adopted into Mayan

languages and a fundamental concept in Mayan culture, as mentioned in my discussions of Ak'abal and González. The Mayan “*nawal/tonal*” complex is comparable to the Aztec belief, and varies in different Maya cultures, according to Dennis and Jean Stratmeyer (130). The Jakalteek use the term *nawal* to refer to the individual who has occult, usually negative powers, including the ability to self-transform into an animal counterpart, and *tonal* to refer to the animal counterpart. Montejó explains that *tonal* is translated by the Popb'al term *yijomal spixan*, Spanish *cargador del espíritu*, which he translates as “alter ego”, and that a person's “tonal” is determined by his/her calendar date of birth (*Q'anil* 109, *El Q'anil* 93). The K'iche', according to Stratmeyer, have fused the two beliefs into the beneficial aspect of the animal/spirit counterpart, and use *nawal* to refer to the animal spirit accompanying the human. This is the context in which Ak'abal and González use the term. However, in his poem about Q'anil, Montejó applies the term *nawales*, as did Lafarge in his ethnographic work, to the humans with the power to transform, rather than to the animal counterpart, and focuses on their malevolent powers by translating *nawales* in the Popti' text into *brujos* “sorcerers” in the Spanish text.

Code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) (switching from one language to another at any level of inter- or intra-sentential discourse) has been widely researched in oral discourse, but has not yet received wide attention in literary criticism or theory, with the exception of some studies of plays and dialogues in narrative texts. Cecilia Montes-Alcalá points out that in an analysis of some Chicano plays “code-switching was more limited and less frequent in the plays than in oral discourse, and the primary functions were stylistic” (196). Chicano literature as a whole has intentionally reflected Chicano speech patterns, with either an assumed audience which will understand the language, or

with an assertively multi-cultural agenda. Gloria Anzaldúa's works, especially *Borderlands La Frontera*, foreground Spanish code-switching in order to emphasize her perspective as a Mexican-American and the historical loss of Mexican identity of the borderlands.

Montes-Alcalá's own analysis of her written journal provides some useful categories of code-switching which can be applied to the literary work. She distinguishes between situational and metaphorical code-switching, the former occurring when it is necessary to change language because one of the interlocutors does not understand the first language, the latter occurring not out of necessity but to fulfill an emphatic or contrastive function, marking the difference between the writer's domain and that of the other - a "we code/they-code distinction." Metaphorical code-switching may take a variety of forms, which Montes-Alcalá lists as follows:

Direct quotes, emphasis, elaboration, clarification, parenthetical comments, change of topic, interjections, reiterations, message qualifications, idiomatic expressions, parenthetical uses, exclamations, repetition, symmetric alternation, linguistic routines. (Montes-Alcalá 197)

The literary work may include both situational and metaphorical code-switching, depending on the textual context. A conversation may represent a speaker mixing lexemes and morphemes, integrating them so as to form a new expression (e.g., *loncheamos* – *lonch* + *eamos* – we have lunch), or the narrative may simply include lexemes which express unfamiliar items, in situations which Montes-Alcalá defines as lexical need. Clearly, every situation could be defined as a lexical need, and the specific need to use a code-mix may vary, from a real absence of an equivalent term, to the desire

on the author's part to foreground the source-language term. Guatemalan authors most frequently use the type of mixed code-switching quoted above ("loncheamos" when quoting the conversation of Mayan speakers. For example, in *S'beyb'al jun naq maya q'anjob'al / La otra cara*, the agricultural workers who have come from the mountains to work on coastal plantations speak Spanish mixed with lexemes and morphemes from Mayan languages.

While in the informal journal writing of Montes-Alcalá there are many forms of code-switching which are typical of oral discourse, the texts studied in this dissertation generally restrict their use of code-switching to a very specific range of culturally determined lexical items, quotations and exclamations, onomatopoeic lexemes and toponymical items. The latter have particular importance in post-colonial contexts, where place names were changed from their original names to names in the colonial language, thereby losing both their semantic and grammatical formation. In an example of such grammatical and semantic shifts of meaning in other areas, Franz Boas describes some Kwakiutl Indian geographical names made up of compounds which include suffixes indicating the relative position of islands, mountains, and parts of rivers. However, he points out that Eskimo does not have parallel locative suffixes, and so cannot form similar names. On the other hand, Kwakiutl does not accept attributive names such as the Nahuatl "Popocatepetl" (smoking mountain) (see Boas "On the Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl").

In the case of Guatemala, there are many theories of the origin of the Spanish name of the country. The generally accepted theory is that it developed from the Nahuatl

“Cuauhtemallan” ‘Place of Forests’ probably derived from the K’iche’ name “Quiché”⁷: ‘Many Trees’, and adopted by the colonizers from their Nahuatl interpreters (Tedlock *Breath on a Mirror* 23; Herring 34).⁸ Another theory is that it is derived from a different indigenous word “Quhatezmalha,” ‘mountain which vomits water’, an allusion to the Agua “Water” volcano, which destroyed Ciudad Vieja (Santiago de los Caballeros), the first Spanish capital of the colony.⁹ Miguel Angel Asturias writes that it comes from the indigenous “Coctemalan”, meaning ‘milk stick’,¹⁰ but later points out a different opinion, that it comes from “Quauhtemali, meaning ‘rotten stick’.¹¹ The name which today’s Mayans use is “Iximulew” ‘land of corn’, but Miguel Angel Velasco Bitzol attributes this name to the initiative of Mayan linguists, who created a neologism to compensate for the fact that Mayans had no exact Mayan language equivalent for the whole territory known as Guatemala, and suggested that “Iximulew” was an appropriate synthesis of the Mayan world view, and a reminder of the *Popol Vuh* description of the creation of mankind in this land from yellow and white corn.¹²

Such a variety of speculation about the choice of name for the country is an indicator of the symbolic value that place names hold in Guatemala / Iximulew. The use

⁷ The spelling of “Quiché” has now been changed by the ALMG to “K’iché”. The new spelling is used to for the language, but the town of that name has retained the earlier spelling.

⁸ “When Mexicans came to these mountains from the west in later times they called this whole country Guatemala, which meant “Many Trees “ in the Mexican language” (Tedlock, *Breath on the Mirror* 23)

⁹ “Se cree que la palabra Guatemala deriva de la voz India Quhatezmalha, que significa montaña que vomita agua, en alusión al volcán Agua, que destruyó la Ciudad Vieja (Santiago de los Caballeros), primera capital española de la capitania general” (*Enciclopedia Hispánica* 7:221). (It is believed that the word Guatemala comes from the Indian Word Quhatezmalha, which means mountain which vomits water, in allusion to the Agua Volcano, which destroyed the Ciudad Vieja (Santiago de los Caballeros), the first Spanish capital of the provincial military government).

¹⁰ “El autor de la *Recordación florida* pretende que de la voz *Coctemalan*, que quiere decir *Palo de leche*, viene Guatemala.” Asturias, Miguel Angel *Leyendas de Guatemala* Madrid: Ediciones Oriente, 1930: 198

¹¹ “El bachiller Domingo Juarros pretende con otros autores que la etimología del nombre Guatemala viene de *Quauhtemali*, que, en dialecto mejicano, significa *Palo podrido*.” Idem p. 198

¹² Velasco Bitzol, Miguel Angel “La escritura de los idiomas mayas en los medios de comunicación masiva” *Estudios Sociales* No. 58. *Segundo Congreso de Estudios Mayas*. Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar, 1977: 204.

of place names in the texts studied is intentional, and draws attention to the fact that many communities are reverting to their pre-colonial Mayan names, and rejecting the Nahuatl or Spanish names imposed after colonization. Studies of Mayan place names show that many are compounds, incorporating elements which describe a feature of the place and elements giving a geographical location. Even though in many cases community members no longer ascribe meaning, other than a place designation, to the place names, linguistic analysis shows that they originally had a specific semantic designation (Hopkins 172).¹³ Growing awareness of the meaning of the original Mayan place names has added to the incentive to reject the Spanish and/or Nahuatl names, which may be a translation of the original, or, more frequently, a Christian saint's name. The Academia de Lenguas Mayas has supported studies of original toponyms in several areas for this purpose.

Grammatical differences between Mayan languages and Spanish lead to a loss of meaning in translation because certain expressions simply cannot be duplicated. There are many linguistic studies of Mayan languages, but there has been little focus so far on how the differences impact literary translations, or how to determine strategies for translating some of the particularities. Studies of other languages are illustrative in this context. For example, in a study of English and Okanaga, Jeanette Armstrong shows how English isolates verb tense, whereas Okanaga has more fluidity in referring to time. The same comparison holds true for Spanish and Mayan languages. Moreover, English uses gender-based pronouns, which do not exist in Okanaga. Jeanette Armstrong

¹³ Replacing toponyms is clearly a universal phenomenon, in all areas which have undergone colonial domination, as is the effort to return to original names. The theme is poignantly developed in Brian Friel's play *Translations*, in which British soldiers re-name Irish place-names, which the local Irish must then learn and adopt as their new home.

discusses American Reservation English, “Rez English,” and shows how it reflects the structure and syntax of Okanaga, and reveals grammatical differences between the languages (174-195). In another example, José Antonio Mazzotti, discussing Quechua poetry by Arguedas, points out that, unlike Spanish, Quechua is a radically grammatical rather than a lexical language, since meaning is expressed by means of suffixes rather than lexemes (101). Consequently, the poet does not need such an extensive vocabulary to express shades of tone. In the Mayan languages, factors such as the agglutinative structure, the particular use of verbal tense and aspect, and the use of categories of nominal classifiers all provide discursive cohesion and embed meaning in forms which evade translation.

Kathryn Josserand, in a comparative analysis of discourse features of Palenque pre-Conquest hieroglyphic texts and modern Mayan Chol narratives, shows that there is a striking similarity between the ancient and the modern Mayan texts, and Mesoamerican narrative texts in general. She points out that changes in word order and word play are used extensively in order to foreground peak events; metaphors are often used to convey information; characters may be replaced by substitute, related characters; and elements are moved to different, more or less significant parts of a sentence, depending on their significance. Furthermore, narrative plot focuses on an arrangement of elements which highlights the peak event, rather than proceeding in linear, sequential event-lines, and the use of coupleting and tripleting is widespread. These features constitute a Mayan narrative discourse which is radically different from that of Spanish – or English. Dennis Tedlock has aptly demonstrated these sequencing and highlighting features in his

Mayanized English style throughout *Breath on a Mirror : Mythic Voices and Visions of the Living Maya*.

In terms of writing style, the author/translator faces multiple constraints, including the limitation on how much of the information load in the original text to transfer to the translation. Adapting multiple layers of information can lead to a translation that is much longer than the original text, and certain elements must be eliminated, depending on the distance between the source and receiving cultures. All this is a function of choices determined by the ideological agenda of the author/translator and the background of the audience. Inevitably, the translation is an interpretation which reveals the author's political position – and creates a genre shift away from a purely literary towards a more didactic form. Depending on the literary canon of the audience, this may detract from the aesthetic value of the text – even where the author explicitly states that the written text is a re-making of an oral tradition which includes both stories and teaching.

While all the literary texts presented in this dissertation are published in Spanish, and many in bilingual Spanish-Mayan-language editions, they are not published in monolingual Mayan-language editions. Since Spanish is the dominant language, while the Mayan languages are the subaltern languages, the relationship of author to reading public shifts between languages, and results in textual asymmetries. Both the act of translation, and the content itself, respond to a cultural and historical moment and negate the possibility of textual equivalence. Translation by the Mayan writers from the dominant Spanish into the subaltern language is a seizure of power from the language of the dominant literary canon, since Mayan-language use has been repressed since colonial times. On the other hand, translation into the dominant language validates the existence

of Mayan literature, and presents Mayan authors and their work as translations from Mayan languages (as opposed to assimilated Spanish literary texts).¹⁴ It also responds in part to the socio-economics of the publishing market and reading public – if an author wants to sell books and have a reading public, they must be in Spanish until a sufficiently large Mayan-language reading public develops in each of the Mayan languages. Certainly, Spanish functions as the lingua franca for Mayan-language speakers, and we have not even considered the possibility of translations of works from one Mayan language to another.

It is instructive to compare the present situation in Guatemala with the national language revival movements of nineteenth-century Europe. Vladimir Mačura describes the situation in the nineteenth-century Austro-Hungarian empire when the Czech revivalist movement led to the publication of translations from German works as a first step towards developing a literary language, and then, later, to the production of original works such as, for example, *Babička* by Božena Němcová, mentioned in my Introduction. The Czech literary audience was a hypothetical entity at first, composed of a few patriotic individuals, but grew to full general acceptance in the twentieth century (64-70). In post-colonial nations such as Guatemala, there is a limited literary audience for indigenous languages, because there has been no literacy education in these languages until recently, but the drive to publish in these languages is a necessary step towards creating that audience. In Guatemala there has been little incentive to translate Spanish-language literary works into Mayan languages - indeed, until recently, the only significant effort to

¹⁴ I emphasize here that the poetry, novels and testimonial literature, whether written first in Spanish or in Mayan languages, and then self-translated, are explicitly Mayan literature. In this sense, therefore, the Spanish text is always a cultural translation.

create Mayan translations was driven by organizations with religious motivations such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, seeking to convert Mayan-language speaking peoples.

The creation of a new Mayan literary language is explicitly based on the lexicon and style of oral tradition. Since there are no established literary language norms, the transition from oral to written is frequently problematic. Translations into Spanish are frequently opaque, because they take into account differences in genre and thought patterns as well as lexical incongruencies. “Untranslatability seems to have a lot more to do with the absence of poetological equivalents than with the absence of semantic or syntactic equivalents” (Lefevere 25). Bearing these factors in mind, it is clear that the use of the code-switching forms we will describe has a particular intentionality and specific functions. It is important to distinguish code-switching resulting from a lack of competence in a language (and therefore the need to use words, phrases or grammatical forms in one language to compensate for those lacking in the other) from code-switching resulting from a conscious choice on the part of fluent bilinguals, enabling them to foreground particular attitudes and roles, and to identify with a particular group (Hamers 148).

For the bilingual speaker and writer, the use of mother-tongue code-switching is a step towards a stage at which words and things are intrinsically related, whether we perceive this from an individual developmental perspective, or from a socio-historical perspective. In individual development, the first language acquired has a load of emotional and perceptual experiences which are linked to early concrete bodily experiences within those primary relationships during which the child develops language

even before he can speak. Amati Mehler refers to the return to this language as a “word-bath,” with its connotations of emotional warmth, comfort and attachment (569). The socio-historical context of the first language is a bond of the community which has shared the same experiences, so that speakers know that certain words and expressions are immediately understood by their interlocutors.

However, for the reader of the literary text, suddenly confronted with a word from the author’s first language, the experience is one of entering unfamiliar territory. The reader is forced to leave the comfort zone of his/her own language and to investigate the difference confronting her. Rigoberta Menchú, in her testimonio, repeatedly refers to secret knowledge which she will not reveal (I, Rigoberta Menchú 9, 20). In the same way, the use of code-switching confronts the reader with the unknown. It is both a challenge and an invitation, and may, indeed, subvert the whole text, as Michel Foucault suggests: “The manifest discourse is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this “not said” is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said” (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 25). In my opinion, code-switching functions as the “not said” that Foucault describes, in the sense that it reminds the reader of what s/he does not understand, and keeps the text in a state of indeterminacy. The reader must examine the intention of the author in producing the code-switching, and not only the meaning of the specific code-switch itself (174-195). Dennis Tedlock discusses the practice of translating proper names and place names from the “Popol Vuh” in *Breath on the Mirror*. He points out that not translating names can lead to an impression of exoticism which may not necessarily add to an understanding of a significantly-charged name, and that, on other occasions, keeping the native-language name can give an

otherwise perfectly commonplace name an exaggerated or false importance (xi). Indira Karamcheti, writing about Aimé Césaire's naming of local places, flora and fauna of Martinique, problematizes the choice between original name and translated name, and asks what the translator should do, in order not to make exotic something which should be ordinary, but which by its very name is exotic to the outside. Can this be done, she asks, without plugging into codes of domination and exoticism? (186). On the other hand, when the names carry particular semantic or phonological significance, the use of original names may often have great poetic and/or onomatopoeic value, as in, for example, both Ak'abal's and González's poems about birds.

There is, in fact, a double layer of indeterminacy in the bilingual texts: the Maya and Spanish texts are not identical, mirror-images of each other, but approximations, translations, relocations. As Lawrence Venuti points out, a translation must always retain an element of difference, a reflection of the "otherness" of the original, so that the reader remains aware of its linguistic and cultural origin (*The Translator's Invisibility* 21). The bilingual authors are keenly aware of their double voicing, and, moreover, they point out that sometimes they write first in Spanish, and sometimes first in Mayan, and so the translation process can go both ways.

Gaspar Pedro González states that for him it does not matter which language he starts in, since he is fluent in both; the principle is that he thinks in Mayan (Personal interview 2006). However, the Mayan lexical code-switching and discourse quotation appear only in his Spanish texts, so as to foreground the Mayan language and concept, whereas the reverse is obviously not the case. While the plot and theme of the text remain the same, the text itself differs according to the bias affecting the translation choices

made by the author. “The result is...that translations very often have a different lexical texture from unmarked prose in the receptor culture” (Tymoczko 25). In González’s and Ak’abal’s texts, the result is “Mayanized Spanish.” Clearly, those expressions which are marked Mayan code-switching or quotations in the Spanish text lose their markedness in the Mayan text – for example, “Kakam la ‘ik”, the cry of the villagers observing a lunar eclipse in the poem of the same name by Ak’abal, is marked as a K’iche’ quotation in the Spanish translation, but is unmarked in the K’iche’ text. Furthermore, the Mayan-language text often includes Spanish-language loans, calques, or code-switches which are marked with socio-historically charged significance. Such marked expressions in the Mayan text cannot be translated into the Spanish since they already exist in the Spanish lexicon, and, without extra-textual commentary, it is impossible to convey the significance of lexemes whose importance lies only in their markedness when absorbed into Mayan languages.

A striking example of this occurs in the school episodes of *Sb’eyb’al* in which the Q’anjob’al text includes several Spanish loan words related to school. As I discuss in the chapter on the work of González, the use of the Spanish words in the Q’anjob’al text itself underscores the fact that everything about the school experience is foreign to Lwin, who is in a Spanish environment for the first time in his life. The alienating experience of being marginalized by the dominant culture is repeated many times – a striking example is the use of “mundo” ‘world’ in “Q’anej”, the first poem of González’s collection. The poetic voice speaks of reclaiming the word (his language), and then sitting on the edge of the world to contemplate. The Q’anjob’al version incorporates the Spanish word “mundo” to stress that the speaker’s marginalization is from the Spanish, not the

Q'anjob'al world. This subtlety is lost in the Spanish and English translations of the poem.

The following chapters, which analyse in detail the works by Humberto Ak'abal, Gaspar Pedro González, and Victor Montejo, show how these authors express their double identity, and how they define and practice their roles as bilingual writers addressing a different audience in each language.

Chapter 4

Humberto Ak'abal : K'iche' Writer

Humberto Ak'abal was born in 1952, in the K'iche' town of Momostenango, in the highland region of Totonicapán in western Guatemala. He now writes in Spanish and K'iche', although when he first began to write, he wrote first in Spanish and later translated into K'iche'. Once he became known as a published writer, he began to write in K'iche' first, and then translated his poems into Spanish. It is not clear whether he writes all of his work in K'iche', because many of his poems and his short stories have not appeared in K'iche'. All his works appear in monolingual Spanish editions, and he has also published the following bilingual K'iche' collections, which are the focus of my analysis:

Chajil Tzaqib'al Ja' /Guardián de la Caída de Agua. Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2004

Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de palabras. Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2001

Ajyuq' / El animalero. Guatemala : Cholsamaj. 2000

The bilingual editions of Ak'abal's self-translated poetry permit the reader to read in two languages, and grasp the significance of the K'iche'/Spanish double voicing, or dialogized heteroglossia. If the reader does not speak one of the two languages, the co-existence and confrontation of the two voices is a socio-political statement in itself. My analysis is based on the assumption that each language is a different world view, characterized by its own objects, meanings and values, and that therefore there is a conceptual space between the poems in each language, which reveals a slippage of

meaning between the poems. Sometimes this is a function of semantic, phonological and syntactic differences in the languages; at others it is a clearly intentional manipulation on the part of the author. The structure of the poems in K'iche' includes frequent parallelisms and repetitions which are not always duplicated in the Spanish version, for reasons of structural differences between the languages, so that some of the formal emphasis on certain elements is lost. Moreover, the use of K'iche' words and phrases in the Spanish text, and the reader's consciousness of the presence of K'iche' behind the Spanish, accentuate the non-K'iche' reader's sense of an inaccessible domain to which the Spanish text gives only partial access.¹ Doris Sommer calls these spaces "transitional tropes of secrecy" by means of which

writers can maneuver texts into unanticipated passes that make even bullish readers stop to ponder the move. The performances can wrest control from readers who may be enchanted by the surprising turns and feel disoriented, dependent, even relieved from the anxiety of needing to know it all. Then the hard work of interpretation can begin; it will attend to what cannot or should not be explained away, because culturally differentiated limits on interpretation can be the very information that should fuel contemporary rhetorical analyses.

Reading for historically constituted and asymmetrical particularism in texts – and in our own situated responses – is the urgent task on our multicultural agenda.

(Attitude, Its Rhetoric 213)

¹ Later in this chapter I discuss Ak'abal's statement that he himself translates his poems from K'iche' to Spanish in order to make them accessible, and I suggest that he cannot fail to be aware of the areas of inaccessibility.

These particularisms² will be the focus of this chapter. I will show that Ak'abal speaks to us both when we understand and when we do not understand his words: that his poems in K'iche and Spanish both include and exclude the reader of each language while inviting her to share in the linguistic and cultural experience on both sides of the linguistic barrier, and that this is itself an essential part of his central theme: the revindication of his language and culture in face of the dominant language and culture of Guatemala.

Ak'abal's language, K'iche', is one of twenty-four indigenous languages spoken in Guatemala, which include twenty-two Mayan languages,³ plus Xinka and Garifuna. K'iche' (the official spelling of the language previously known as Quiché and K'ichee) has over 1,000,000 speakers (Odilio Jiménez 5), more than any of the other Mayan languages, but since it is wide-spread, over an area of 7,918 square kilometers (www.ebiguatemala.org/filemanager/list/26) it has many dialects which differ considerably from each other.

Ak'abal went to school in Momostenango until he was twelve, and then, because of family circumstances, he went to work selling candy in the streets of Guatemala City. A year later, he returned home to work with his father as a weaver in Momostenango, in order to help support the family, and he later also worked in a garment factory "maquila" in the capital. His writing is grounded in the experiences and environment of his home

² In a similar approach, Munro Edmunson (*Meaning in Mayan Languages*) refers to the significance which should be given to culturally specific semantic individuality (compare Sommer's particularisms), which is frequently overlooked in general anthropological and linguistic theories. Edmunson discusses the particularistic semantics of the *Popol Vuh*, which refer to "ideas peculiar to the Quiché Maya, and are organized around their special view of corn farming, hunting, priesthood and parenthood" (242).

³ They are: Achi', Akateko, Awakateko, Chalchiteko, Ch'orti', Chuj, Itza', Ixil, Jakalteko, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil, and Uspanteko.

and in the culture and history of the Maya K'iche'. He writes that he is still "hungry" for the childhood he missed, and that he is largely self-taught, learning from both oral and written literature. His love for poetry developed with his love of independent reading throughout his youth – he describes saving his money to buy his first book, *A Portrait of Dorian Gray*, and of reading some books of classics he found hidden in his grandfather's attic:

Mi abuelo, que aún vive y tiene 97 años, es un sacerdote indígena con muchos conocimientos. En mi pueblo aún se usa el calendario de 260 días. Me fui nutriendo de la cosmogonía de mi abuelo. Aprendí con él a leer los relámpagos, las tempestades, a calibrar el viento, a comprender el lenguaje de los pájaros, el comportamiento de los animales, el rumor de los ríos. (Jiménez 2)

My grandfather, who is still alive and is 97 years old, is an indigenous spiritual guide with much knowledge. In my town we still use the calendar of 260 days. I grew up absorbing my grandfather's cosmology. I learned from him to read the lightning, storms, to measure the wind, to understand the language of birds, the behavior of animals, the sound of rivers.

This background clarifies the themes in Ak'abal's work, and also explains the oral qualities of his language. As he points out, poetry has always existed in Mayan cultures, but until now it has been oral. At the end of the twentieth century, authors began to commit their poems to writing in order finally to overcome the obstacles facing Mayan culture since the Spanish conquest: "al presentar nuestros textos en forma escrita, para compartirlos, rompemos el silencio y las barreras impuestos durante siglos" 'by presenting our texts in written form, in order to share them, we break the silence and the barriers imposed on us for centuries' (Jiménez 1).

As mentioned above, Ak'abal's poems were first published in Spanish monolingual editions, before appearing in bilingual K'iche'/Spanish editions. It is noteworthy that there are no monolingual K'iche' editions of his work available. This is probably because there is no market for them: there is a long tradition of oral literature, but literacy in Mayan languages is minimal, books are not available, and consequently the habit of reading has not been developed.⁴ Ak'abal did not receive support for his poetry until two established ladino indigenist writers, Mario Monteforte Toledo and Luis Alfredo Arango, promoted his work and arranged for its publication. Ak'abal's first collection of forty-seven poems, *El animalero* was published in Spanish in 1991 by the Ministry of Culture and Sports, where Arango was on the board of directors. In 1992, the year of the Quincentennial, in an atmosphere of heightened awareness and sensitivity to indigenous issues, a selection of the poems was republished. In 1995 the collection was published with a K'iche' title before the Spanish one: *Ajyuq / El animalero*. At the same time, the place and date of publication were written in both Spanish and K'iche' and also in Mayan glyphs, a custom which has been adopted in all his later books. Following several Spanish editions both in Guatemala and abroad, in 2000 Ak'abal began to publish his poems in bilingual K'iche' and Spanish collections. Some of these poems were those he had already written and published in Spanish and then translated into K'iche', while others were written originally in K'iche' and self-translated into Spanish. However, as Gail Ament points out, even if the original poem was not first written in K'iche', Ak'abal

⁴ Mayan language literacy is very limited because, despite laws establishing bilingual education, the system is inadequately supported and has only been established in a few elementary classes throughout the country. This means that of the Maya children who attend school, only a very small proportion have any access to classes in their native language, which are generally limited to kindergarten and first grade. Most are placed in classes where they are immediately expected to work in Spanish, and certainly those who have a couple of years of bilingual education are not yet able to read and write in their native languages.

always “carries an original in his mind or in his heart” (174). The decision to write the poems in K’iche’ was risky – but for the author it implied a free range of expression and a statement of identity. Leslie Bethell, writing about the growth of indigenous language writing, remarks that the choice to write in a native language rather than the official language “allows the author an attitude towards the official imported language of his or her country, either by exulting in autonomy and refusing to admit even a word of it, or by incorporating it dialectically for sarcastic or other ends” (301).

Ak’abal acknowledges that in order to be read he must publish in Spanish, and he also wishes Spanish-speakers (who include speakers of other Mayan languages for whom Spanish is a *lingua franca*) to hear what he has to say. Even though he wishes to make it clear that the Mayans have been excluded from mainstream culture, he does not express the wish to reciprocate by excluding Spanish-speakers from his K’iche’ text: he is not interested in reversing the exclusion of one culture by another. On the other hand, there is little doubt that his use of the bilingual texts allows him to incorporate humor, irony and tenderness, as well as the uniqueness of certain aspects of Mayan culture.

Ak’abal’s language development was similar to that of most Mayan children: he spoke K’iche’ at home, and when he went to school, he was immersed in the Spanish system. This includes immersion into a system of cultural values and systems – for example, the use of the Roman calendar, as opposed to the Mayan calendars. An example of this acculturation is evident in the K’iche’ text “Ixb’e’ q’ij re junio” (*Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* 148) in which the borrowing of the Spanish *junio* “June” in the K’iche’ text reminds us that the Maya have their own calendar system, and have no vocabulary for the Roman calendar months. Elsewhere, Ak’abal attempts to compromise

on the calendar vocabulary, by changing *lunes* “Monday” to *luq’ij*, in a new version of *Ajya’ol Tz’ij / El Pregonero* “The Town Crier” when it is re-published in a later edition. This substitution is a linguistic hybrid of the Spanish phoneme “lu” from *lunes* with the addition of K’iche’ *q’ij* “day”, and represents an attempt to appropriate the word, and all that it represents culturally, for the language he is reclaiming.

Since Ak’abal, like other Mayan schoolchildren, first learned to read and write in Spanish, he did not learn literacy in his mother tongue. When he first began to write in K’iche’, he wrote as he thought fit, without conforming to any accepted standards. Although gaining acceptance of the recently standardized written forms of Mayan languages⁵ and promoting Mayan language literacy are among the goals of the pan-Maya movement in Guatemala today, Ak’abal himself makes it clear that he does not want to be limited to an institutionalized form of written K’iche’, but prefers to retain his freedom as a writer – a freedom which he uses to occasionally play with word spelling, even of his own name: Arango points out that “Ak’abal” means “dawn”, but the author’s poem *Dawn* is entitled “Aq’ab’al / Amanecer” (*Chajil / Guardián* 22).⁶

Like today’s schoolchildren, Ak’abal did not read K’iche’ in school, nor were K’iche’ books available. Modern written literature in the Mayan languages of Guatemala

⁵ Any form of standardization is fraught with difficulty, given the number of local dialects in each language. This is documented in reports from the Summer Institute of Linguistics during the 1950s, when linguists were attempting to develop Bible translations in a standard form of K’iche’, but were faced with strong resistance from speakers of different dialects. During my research a K’iche’ teacher from Cantel (about an hour away from Ak’abal’s home in Momostenango) who was reading Ak’abal’s poems with me had trouble understanding some of Ak’abal’s vocabulary.

⁶ Laura Martin points out that in the official K’iche’ alphabet the word for dawn is written Aq’ab’al, and that post velar occlusives previously written *k* are now written *q* in the official alphabet (personal communication March 2008). The apostrophes are the same, but the *k* has been changed from the *q* used in Ak’abal’s poem title “Aq’ab’al.” Arango’s reference was to “Ak’abal” (only one apostrophe, following *k*), which suggests that he is referring to the pre-official-alphabet convention for writing the post-velar as “k”. Whether in fact there is an intentional play on word spelling here, or just confusion because of the varieties of spelling before and after the recent establishment of the official alphabet, is open to speculation.

began to appear in the 1970s, with the translation into K'iche' of the Popol Vuh by Adrian Inec Chávez, and with translations of the Bible and other religious texts into Mayan languages by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. At the same time there was a growing interest in the oral tradition of literature, and the recording and transcription of Mayan narrative and poetry was undertaken, first by foreign anthropologists and more recently by Guatemalan anthropologists and linguists. This has been facilitated by the development by the Asociación de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) of a standard written alphabet (mentioned above), which previously did not exist for Mayan languages – pre-colonial glyph Mayan writing was effectively destroyed by the Spanish colonizers, notably Diego de Landa. Since the 1980s, interest has increased in Mayan literature, and in the promotion of Mayan language reading and writing. Two publishing houses, Yax Te' Books⁷ in the United States, and Cholsamaj in Guatemala have focused on promoting Mayan literature, while others have published other materials in Mayan languages. Cholsamaj has published all the bilingual editions of Ak'abal's works, in addition to some in Spanish only. In addition, the Guatemalan publisher Artemis Edinter has published his works in Spanish-only editions, and works have also been translated into six other languages, and published widely in Europe.

Ak'abal, like many Mayan authors today, was faced with complex challenges of printing and distribution costs, creating a reading public and developing popularity in Guatemala. Before 2000, his collections were published by Artemis Edinter in

⁷ Yax Te' Books was originally Yax Te' Press under the direction of Fernando Peñalosa in California, and then was incorporated as a non-profit organization Yax Te' Foundation. In 2003 it transferred to Cleveland State University, and under the direction of Laura Martin it became Yax Te' Books. Since 2006 it is no longer affiliated with Cleveland State University, but is still under the direction of Laura Martin, with co-director Nadine Grimm, and is now informally affiliated with the Maya Education Foundation, a non-profit organization in Vermont.

Guatemala, by Editorial Praxis in Mexico and by other companies in Europe, but since 2000 six collections of his poems have been printed in Guatemala by Cholsamaj.

Cholsamaj is a publishing house which began in 1991 as Maya' Nimajay CHOLSAMAJ / Centro Educativo y Cultural Maya, Sociedad Civil; in 2003 it became a non-profit foundation. Its objective is to publish works by the Mayan people of Guatemala for the society as a whole, and to promote the transition of Guatemala from its official condition as a monoethnic, monolingual and monocultural Hispanic state to a pluralistic and inclusive state which acknowledges and grants equal rights to people of Spanish, Maya, Xinka and Garífuna heritage. The name Cholsamaj is a neologism from the Kakchiquel Mayan language, CHOL - order, and SAMAJ- work, translated as Planning and Systematization. Cholsamaj puts its own logo, a Mayan glyph for a scribe, in its publications, and collaborates with other Mayan organizations promoting social change and progress. It will be interesting to see the growth of Cholsamaj's collection in the next few years, and the corresponding effect of the increased availability of Mayan-language literature by Ak'abal and other writers in Guatemala. This may correlate with current efforts to promote Mayan language literacy, and will depend on the efficacy and success of the government bilingual education program.

The presentation and language of the books are an expression of the author's affirmation of K'iche' culture - his awareness and acceptance that Spanish is needed for the wider public to understand his poems, but that K'iche' is his native, first language, while Spanish is his second language. With successive publications, this prioritizing of K'iche' – what some critics have called “Mayanization” - has become clearer. For example, the cover of a 2001 edition of *Ajkem tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* “Weaver of

Words”, shows the K’iche’ title in a large, colored font the design of which imitates the watercolor illustration, while the Spanish title below is in a simpler, smaller green font. In the text, the Spanish version of each poem appears first, and is then followed on the facing page by the K’iche’ version. However, the 2004 edition of *Chajil Tzaqib’al Ja’ / Guardián de la Caída de Agua* “Guardian of the Waterfall” reverses the order, so that the K’iche’ version always appears first.

Other aspects of the presentation of the books reflect the same foregrounding of K’iche’ culture and language by emphasizing weaving, animals, Maya language and numerology and art in the illustrations, paper background, and pagination and publication information. In *Ajkem tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* (2001), the paper is printed with a pale green background of a weaving design – alluding to Ak’abal’s weaving of wool and of words, the textual (text-ual) metaphor of the book’s title⁸. The lower edge of each page has a different glyph for each section of the book – for example, a bird glyph in the section *Uxaq ch’xuquje’ kismal taq chikop / Hojas y plumas* “Leaves and Feathers”. In *Chajil Tzaqib’al Ja’ / Guardián de la Caída de Agua* each page has a weaving design printed across the lower edge.

Page numbers throughout the books are written using both the Maya dot and bar system and Arabic numerals. The frontispiece and end page of each book carry the information about the date and place of printing in a glyph stela, in alphabetized K’iche’ with dot and bar numerals, and in Spanish according to the Roman calendar. The glyph and K’iche’ give dates according to the Mayan calendar, while the Spanish uses the

⁸The weaving metaphor has particular significance, since Momostenango, Ak’abal’s home town, is renowned for hand-woven wool blankets.

Roman calendar. Thus the reader of ancient and modern glyphs, the reader of modern alphabetized K'iche' and the reader of Spanish can all read this information - effectively demonstrating that Guatemala is a pluriethnic, pluricultural and plurilinguistic state. Moreover, all the aspects of visual presentation on the page recall the history of pre-Conquest literary glyph texts, in which phonetic symbols, numerals, conceptual symbols and images were closely integrated.

The themes of Ak'abal's poems are his personal experience of life in his hometown – themes of nature, birds and animals, music of the marimba, spinning and weaving, and everyday activities, imbued throughout by a profound consciousness of his identity as a Maya K'iche' and his insistence on expressing that identity in his own language – “belonging expressed as be-longing” (Sommer, *Belonging and Bi-Lingual States* 84), a longing for cultural and linguistic acceptance and integrity. For this reason it is valuable to examine the bilingual texts, in order to assess examples of code-switching and foregrounding of certain words in either language, and to evaluate the poetic significance of inescapable phonological differences between the languages, especially when the use in K'iche' of onomatopoeia, alliteration and anaphora cannot be duplicated in Spanish. The frequent occurrences of synesthesia and metonymy are also difficult to translate into Spanish, particularly because the concepts of transformation and interconnectedness are implicit in K'iche' but not in Spanish. And, from a different frame of reference, it is also instructive to consider the process whereby Ak'abal has rewritten some of the K'iche' poems in successive editions, while retaining the same text in the corresponding Spanish.

The predominant trope in the poems is the everyday rural life of the Maya people, with frequent references to a long history of suffering, bloodshed, poverty, exploitation and suppression of language and culture. Ak'abal explicitly identifies himself in the Spanish text as *indio*, a term which has acquired a pejorative connotation,⁹ and in poems such as “Dejame / Chinaya kanoq” “Leave me” he metaphorizes the experience of oppression and the need for autonomy. The poem illustrates both semantically, in the use of imagery, and syntactically, in the use of syntactic parallelism, the author's insistence on the empowerment of the Maya speaker speaking his own language.

Dejame

Puedo caminar solo.

Para soñar me basta
la sombra de los árboles.

Me impide avanzar
el peso de tu mano
sobre mi cabeza.

(*Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* 490)

Chinaya kanoq

⁹ Linda Craft points out that the term ‘indio’ has become a general slur, which “has come to denominate almost all of the socially and economically (not just racially) marginalized groups of the rural areas in Central America... It has come to mean an unsophisticated, crude or ignorant person of the urban as well as rural lower classes” (13).

Kinkwinik kib'in nutukel.

Xu we kinwaj kinachik'
kinq'oyi' pa ri kimujal ri che':

Xa man kinkwintaj kinb'inik
rumal ri ura'lal ri aq'ab'
puwi' ri nujolom.

(Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras 491)

Leave me

I can walk alone.

To dream all I need
is the shadow of the trees.

Holding me back
is the weight of your hand
on my head.

The last two lines convey the two-sided attitude of/toward the colonizer, as paternalistic protector and oppressor, whose hand on the head of the colonized speaker

subjugates him and does not allow him to become independent. In contrast, the protective shadows of the trees both protect him and nurture his dreams. The message of the poem is enhanced by the linguistic structure of the K'iche' version, which foregrounds the identity of the speaker by using a parallelism of the first-person possessive prefix “nu” at the end of the first and last lines: “nutukel” ‘my alone’ (emphasizing the speaker’s independence, as in English “all alone”) and “nujolom” ‘my head’, and also by the repetitive use of the first-person verbal prefix “kin” throughout the poem.

“Ajya’ol tzij” “El pregonero” (The town crier *Chajil* 168, *Guardián* 169) expresses explicitly the author’s desire to speak in his mother tongue. He remembers how the town crier used to wake up everyone in his town early Monday mornings, beating a drum (both the Spanish and the K'iche' poems repeat the onomatopoeic *tuntun* three times) and shouting out official orders in K'iche'. The beating drum reminds him of how a new-born child is slapped and then begins to cry. Like the baby, whose cry is a sign of life, and the town crier, who speaks to the people, Ak'abal wants to speak, to assert his right to life and to communicate to his people – with his own voice, his own language, and not with a microphone, symbol of non-K'iche' culture.

This poem was originally published in 2001 and then again in 2004, and shows some marked changes in the K'iche' text, without any corresponding changes in the Spanish version. All the changes reflect a greater emphasis on the personal possessive connection of speaker and language. The 2001 *ch'awik* “speech, to speak” and *tzij* “word, language” are changed in 2004 to *nuch'ab'al* “my language”, whereas the Spanish remains *la palabra* “the word”. The addition of the first-person possessive prefix *nu* “my” accentuates the bond between the K'iche' speaker and language, just as its absence

in the Spanish text reflects the lack of bond for the Spanish speaker. This is further highlighted by the striking addition to the 2004 text of the qualifier *uki'al* “its sweetness, savor” to *ri waq* “my language” in line 18, without a corresponding addition to the Spanish text. It is clear that the Spanish reader, while gaining access to the general message of the poem, cannot share in the possession of and delight in the language which s/he cannot read, a subtle but significant feature of the diglossia in Ak'abal's bilingual texts.

In his introduction to this collection, Luis Alfredo Arango calls Ak'abal a spokesperson of his people who was destined to be a “cargador de los signos del tiempo” ‘keeper of the time symbols’ (Ak'abal, *Chajil* 13) – one of the members of the hierarchy of Maya spiritual guides who interprets the sacred Calendar. The poems include many references to Mayan spiritual beliefs, including that of the Nawal, the spirit, often embodied as an animal, which accompanies each human being.¹⁰ In “Kaminaq Juyub’/ Cerro de los Muertos” ‘Hill of the Dead’ (*Chajil / Guardián* 262) he suggests that perhaps the sorrowful birds in the old cypress trees are the spirits (*Nawal*) of the ancestors, and that they are not singing but mourning, because they too are Indians. There is a powerful concentration of sensory images in this poem – the wind, the smell of blood, the sight of birds on old cypress trees, the sorrowful birdsong which is the sound of weeping. Ak'abal repeatedly emphasizes the interconnectedness of animals, humans and spirits, here united by their common identity – which in the Spanish poem is *indio* “Indian” and in the K'iche' poem is *ajwinaq tinimit* “a person of the land”. The lexical difference between the K'iche' and the Spanish nomenclatures is itself significant of the

¹⁰ Nawal (also spelled nahual) is a term of Nahuatl origin incorporated into Mayan languages and Spanish.

difference in cultural perspective, and emphasizes that the speaker in Spanish is not identical to the speaker in K'iche'. The K'iche' voice in the poem is the subject, while the Spanish voice is speaking about the K'iche' *indio*.

Sorrow for the Maya condition is a theme of many of the self-reflective poems of Ak'abal. In "Nawal ixim" 'Spirit of Maize' the *Nawal* is an integral part of the poet's being, but grows sad when it perceives the world through the poet's eyes.

Nawal ixim

Kab'in chwij.

Telen, telen, telen...

kinn'o che kab'in pa nuk'ik'el.

Talalan, talalan, talalan...

kaxojow are chi kinlalatik.

Nawal ixim

kach'aw pa ri nuch'ab'al.

K'o jujun mul ri kekuloq

che ri ilem pa ri nub'oqoch

xa ne'kuchap b'is. (Chajil / Guardián 212)

Nawal ixim

Ronda en mí.

Telen, telen, telen...

Lo siento en mi sangre.

Talalán, talalán, talalán...

baila cada vez que canto.

Nawal ixim

habla en mi lengua.

De vez en cuando

sale a mirar por mis ojos

y se pone triste (Chajil / Guardián 213)

Nawal ixim

It haunts me.

Telen, telen, telen...

I feel it in my blood.

Talalán, talalán, talalán...

It dances each time I sing.

Nawal ixim

speaks in my tongue.

From time to time
 it comes out to look through my eyes
 and grows sad.

The K'iche' title "Nawal ixim" 'Spirit of corn' is used for both the K'iche' and the Spanish poem. It represents an image which is too powerful to be adequately translated, since the words embody the Mayan cosmovision and the myth of creation of man from maize as well as the concept of *Nawal*, the individual's spiritual "other". Moreover, keeping the term in K'iche' also reminds the reader who can have only partial access to this linguistic domain that there are cultural secrets which are concealed from him. The untranslated K'iche' words are repeated in the heart of the poem (line 6), just as the *nawal* "spirit" itself remains within the poet.

Both the *nawal* and *ixim* "maize", which, according to the Popol Vuh, the gods used to make their third and final version of human beings, are central to Maya spiritual beliefs. "Nawal ixim" thus alludes to divine creativity as well to human subsistence. It is expressed in the rhythmic sound of the loom - "telen, telen, telen" - as the weaver creates his weaving, (a reference to Ak'abal's own weaving experience and that of the townspeople of Momostenango), dances as the poet sings, - "talalán, talalán, talalán" - and is essentially the poet's muse in his own tongue, looking at the world through his eyes. It is also the voice of the land since Guatemala is known as *Ixim ulew* or *Iximulew* "land of maize" in K'iche'.¹¹ The use of the K'iche' words, and the enforced accent on

¹¹ See note 37 in Chapter 3, following my discussion of Velasco Bitzol's comment on the creation of the name "Iximulew".

the third syllable of “talalán”, so that it is pronounced with the emphasis on the final syllable as it is in K’iche, effectively impose the sound and rhythm of K’iche’ on the Spanish version of the poem – resulting in the “español k’icheizado” ‘K’icheized Spanish’ that Luis Alfredo Arango refers to in his introduction to the collection.

The same language effect appears in “La luna se muere / Kakam ri qati’it” “The moon is dying” (*Tejedor / Ajkem* 84-85), in which the women shout in fear as the lunar eclipse occurs, and everyone in the community rushes out to make noise and light fires in order to save the moon from death. The theme is expressed in identical terms in several stories in *Ri Qat’it Ik’ / La Abuela Luna*, which I discussed in my chapter on Oral Tradition. In his text, Ak’abal incorporates the K’iche’ phrase “kakam la ik” ‘the moon is dying’ without translation into the Spanish poem, quoting the cry of the women, but we notice that he uses only one word, *luna* to refer to the moon in Spanish while in the K’iche’ poem he uses two: *q’atit* and *ik’*. The selective code-switching masks from the Spanish reader the double significance of *q’atit* “grandmother moon” in Mayan cosmology. In K’iche, the alliterative “k” sounds of “kakam la ik” are also onomatopoeic, mimicking the sound of the grandmother (moon) choking to death as her face turns the color of blood. This extends to the double meaning of the description of the moon after the eclipse – in the Spanish, “recobra su brillo” ‘recovers her brilliance’, but in K’iche’ the “grandmother” recovers from her illness. The moon is personified in both versions, but the Mayan symbolic cultural identity is missing in the Spanish text: there is a culturally determined domain expressed by the words to which the reader does not have access, and which the K’iche’ writer can only communicate in his own language.

Ak'abal refers directly to this difference in the ironic "Diferencia /Jalajoj ub'ixik" (*Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de palabras* 128-129) and leaves us to draw our own conclusions from the meaning of the K'iche' and Spanish insults. We note the one-way need for translation: the Ki'che' insult is quoted and then translated into Spanish in the Spanish version, but not vice versa:

En nuestra lengua decimos

Maj unan

(no tenés madre)

Los castizos dicen

Hijo de la gran puta.

Pa ri qa tzijob'al

Kaqab'ij

Maj unam

Ri kaxlan taq winaq kakib'ij

Hijo de la gran puta.

In our tongue we say

You don't have a mother.

The Spanish speakers say

Son of a bitch

(literally : whoreson, or son of the great whore)

We also note that in the Spanish text, Ak'abal uses the term *castizos* “pure-bloods, nobles” to refer to Spanish-speakers in terms of social class, but in K'iche' they are *kaxlan* or ‘foreigners’ (the term *kaxlan* is itself borrowed from Spanish *castellano*).

In another example of the manipulation of (un) translation to both visual and auditory effect, Ak'abal places the word *nawal* untranslated in the center/heart of the Spanish version of “Robo / Elaq” “Theft” *Tejedor / Ajkem* 502 -3) and asserts that “they” (the colonizers) have stolen everything else but will never be able to steal the *Nawal*. The presentation of the K'iche' word in the center of the Spanish text reflects the centrality of this cultural concept which has remained unchanged (untranslated) by colonization.

De lo que no han podido
adueñarse es del Nawal

Ri man e k'owinan taj
xa are ri', ri Nawal

What they have not been able
To take possession of is the Nawal

In other poems Ak'abal describes the relationship of the Mayan people to their land, *ulew*, and the loss of land during colonization. In “Maj jun kojilowik / Y nadie nos ve” ‘And no-one sees us’ (*Chajil / Guardián* 242-3) he describes, using the first-person plural, how the Maya people have been left without workable land and remain silent, invisible and marginalized. Violent clashes over land claims during 2004 indicate

that these issues are far from settled between Maya, and ladino land-owners and the government.

Ak'abal writes about every aspect of everyday life, including farming, weaving, festivities, food, and hard physical labor. He writes about the tumpline used by the Maya throughout Guatemala to carry heavy loads – and in “Ri patan / El mecapal” ‘The headstrap’ (*Chajil / Guardián* 253-4) it becomes a metaphor for colonial subjugation (literally, placing under a yoke) of the colonized subject. As elsewhere, the poetic voice identifies himself as one of the *winaq tinimit* “person of the land”, translated again into the pejorative Spanish “indio,” whose burden keeps him bent over so that he cannot see the sky.

While many of Ak'abal's poems allude to the difficulty of life, the majority of his poems are, in fact, rather bucolic descriptions of country life, farming, weaving, plants, birds and animals; they are full of visual imagery, onomatopoeia and synesthesia. These poems illustrate the sensory and spiritual impact of the natural world, which the Maya consider sacred, and the corresponding profound respect, appreciation and sense of mutual dependence with which the Maya approach all natural phenomena. Ak'abal particularly favors birds: one 122-page section of *Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* is entitled “Uxaw che' xuquje kismal taq chikop / Hojas y Plumas” ‘Leaves and Feathers’ and includes poems describing many species, colors, songs, and characteristics of birds. Another of his collections is named for a bird *Chajil Tzqib'al Ja' / Guardián de la Caída de Agua* “Guardian of the Waterfall”. These poems stand alone as beautiful nature poems, but they also draw attention to the iconic presence of birds in traditional Mayan

beliefs and their representation in literature and art. The bird, *tz'ikin*, is the name of one of the twenty sacred days in the Mayan calendar, and is characterized as a visionary intermediary between heaven and earth. Consequently, any mention of birds, in particular when they are flying in the sky, between heaven and earth, carries this implicit association. Ak'abal also makes a reference to the importance of birds in the solar calendar in his poem "Mam" (*Ajkem tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* 372-3) The calendar day Mam belongs to "el Gran Abuelo" 'the grandfather, priest-shaman' who is also year-bearer of the 365-solar year. "Mam" is also the day of birds, on which all kinds of food are prepared for birds to eat.

Furthermore, birds play a significant role in the narrative and symbols of early Mayan texts. In the *Popol Vuh*, "Tz'ikinaja" 'Bird House' was the name of the palace which belonged to the second in rank among all the Quiché lords. The "ajtz'ikinaja" (those of the Bird House) are a branch of the Quichean family known today as the Tzutujil, neighbors of the K'iche'. They speak a language in the same linguistic family, and belong to the group of thirteen tribes which, together with the Quichés, originally came from the East (Tedlock *Popol Vuh* 337). Today, the Tz'utujil weave huipiles (women's traditional blouses) on which they embroider birds of every local variety. These huipiles, which show the birds in great detail and vivid colors (photo below) evoke the traditional role of this community, and also represent the significant role of Mayan women in preserving traditions through the images and symbolism of their weaving. Ak'abal himself alludes to the close association of weaving and words (text – textile) in the title of his collection *Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* (weaver of words) and, indeed,

the Tzutujil weavers of these bird huipiles weave textile poetry which parallels that which Ak'abal weaves in his verbal texts.



(my photo, Tzutujil huipil)

Images of birds are also prominent in pre-Columbian Mayan paintings and sculpture – indeed, 251 bird images can be found in Justin Kerr's database of photographs of Mayan vases on the website of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies (FAMSI):

(http://research.famsi.org/kermaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&vase_number=&date_added=&ms_number=&site=&icon_elements%5B%5D=Birds&x=29&y=9)

In these images, many of the birds are clearly identifiable, as in the vase photographed below, in which Erik Boot has identified the Great Horned Owl, mentioned by Ak'abal in several poems (see later) and compares it to owls on other vases photographed by Kerr.



Kerr 6994 <http://www.mayavase.com/com6994.pdf>

Other birds are part of anthropomorphic figures, in which gods and nobles are part bird or wear symbolic bird head-dresses. Birds are thus an intrinsic element in these paintings, both as part of the animal kingdom, and as spiritual entities, either in individual roles, or as a spiritual aspect of a human character. In addition to this presence of birds in the early Mayan texts and iconography, there are multiple references to birds in oral tradition, repeating the early narratives and playing a fundamental role in the relationship of humans with spiritual beings and with the world around them. These multiple layers of significance suggest a rich subtext for Ak'abal's bird poems, which must be considered in the descriptions and characteristics of the different birds, particularly those who are the bearers of messages, those with whom the poet identifies, and those who are personified in the poems.

These poems are also notable for the sound symbolism of their onomatopoeic features and the rhythm and emphasis contributed by repetition and parallelism. One of

Ak'abal's best-known poems, "Xirixitem chikop" 'Songs of birds' (*Chajil / Guardián* 49)

is a series of bird songs:

Klisklis, klisklis, klisklis...

Ch'ok, ch'ok, ch'ok...

Tz'unun, tz'unun, tz'unun...

B'uqpurix, b'uqpurix, b'uqpurix...

Wiswil wiswil wiswil...

Tulul, tulul, tulul...

K'urupup, k'urupup, k'urupup...

Ch'owix, ch'owix, ch'owix... (1-8)

Each of the thirty lines of the poem repeats a different bird call three times, and in many cases, the bird call is the name of the bird itself. These bird calls are repeated in many other poems in this collection. Dennis Tedlock, discussing the complex effects of the poetic use of ideophones such as animal sounds, refers to several K'iche' bird songs, and mentions that some of them involve reduplication at the level of entire sound sequences, while others involve a slight change in a consonant or vowel (including unvoicing) which communicates not only the presence of the bird which makes that sound but also the further meaning of present danger: the routine "xaw, xaw, xaw" becomes "xaw xIW" (second syllable unvoiced) (Tedlock, "Ideophone" 114). Ak'abal himself explains: "El idioma k'iche' es una lengua...poética, guttural y muy rica en

onomatopeyas. Intercala música entre sus palabras, los nombres de los pájaros los tomamos de su canto, de modo que nombrar a un pájaro es cantar con él” (Quoted in Rogachevsky 2). (The K’iche’ language is poetic, guttural, and rich in onomatopoeias. It interposes music between words, we take the names of birds from their song, so that naming a bird is to sing with it.).

Jorge Rogachevsky, contrasting K’iche’ bird names with the western approach to naming/appropriating objects of the natural world, qualifies the phonological qualities of K’iche’ as a reflection of its intimate relationship to, and acknowledgment of, the communicative qualities of nature, resulting in a dialogue with and not an appropriation of nature. Rogachevsky’s opposition of western and K’iche’ language development in terms of domination of versus integration with nature is somewhat extreme, however. Such examples of integration/dialogue with nature and corresponding identification through sounds (ideophones) occur to some extent in all languages, particularly those spoken in areas where people are in close contact with the natural world. Nonetheless, is evident that the Mayan worldview does lend itself to a greater incidence of this type of naming. Moreover, Rogachevsky’s remarks point to the loss in translation of the enormous significance of the phonological qualities of K’iche’ – indeed, the word *Xirixitem* in the title “Xirixitem chikop” of the poem quoted above, is itself an evocative onomatopoeia for “birdsong.” Neither the title nor the poem itself are translated – indeed there is no apparent need for Ak’abal to translate the poem into Spanish for the non-K’iche’ reader –these are local birds which clearly sing in transliterated K’iche’. As pure onomatopoeia, the poem is unique – even in the triple dot punctuation at the end of each

line, which suggests the continuation of the song as each bird flies away, but which, for the reader, is now unvoiced.

These birdsongs, transcribed in K'iche, evoke the peculiar nostalgia associated with mother-tongue sounds and the sounds of home – the “be-longing” referred to earlier (Sommer, “Be-longing”) – especially if we are used to hearing birdsongs. An original recording of “Xirixitem chikop” made by the author is available online:

<http://www.cedma.com/archivo/akabal/index.html#> Ak'abal's reading/singing of another of his song poems, “Xalolilo, lelele” (*Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* 419) (also untranslated onomatopoetic birdsong) is available on a You-Tube video,

<http://www.literaturaguatemalteca.org/akabal3.htm#>, with an introduction in which Ak'abal points out that the poem he is about to read is untranslatable. In the printed text the title is followed by a bracketed explanatory subtitle “B'ixonnik re ajyuk” ‘shepherd's song’ which, however, is not translated into Spanish.

In a number of the bird poems the poet explicitly identifies himself with the bird. These poems follow a schema beginning with a brief introduction in which the bird is first introduced, followed by a development which elaborates on one aspect of the bird's characteristics (song, appearance, location, etc.), and concluding with the insertion of the first-person voice which identifies with the bird: “soy un pajarito sin alas” ‘I am a little bird without wings’ (398), “yo tuve uno” ‘I used to have one’ (378), and “a veces quisiera volverme chocoyo” ‘sometimes I'd like to become a chocoyo = species of corn-eating bird’ (390). In “Chikop ri tinimit / Pájaro de pueblo” ‘Village bird’ (466-7), the poetic voice identifies with a village bird, describes its eyes as dark and cautious, those of

a “winaq aj juyub” (person from a wild, mountainous place) translated into Spanish as “indio.” The woman he looks at every day does not notice him, because he is “indio”.

The birds also affect the everyday life and beliefs of the community: the *tukur/tecolote* “owl” is a messenger of the gods, and his song (note the onomatopoeic long “u” sound of the K’iche’ *tukur*) announces the approach of death, surely an association with the Lord of the Underworld, whom Eric Boot, as mentioned above, identifies in several iconographic depictions with an owl head-dress (4). Even the air is afraid to hear the owl hooting: “Los chuchos aúllan, la luna se apaga. ¡Hasta el aire siente miedo!” “Ke’ wu’ ri tz’i, kachup ri ik’. Xuquje’ kuxi’j rib’ ri kaqiq!” ‘the dogs howl, the moon grows dark. Even the air is afraid!’ (*Ajkem Tzij / Tejedor de Palabras* 410-411), and if he doesn’t sing, or sings a love song which doesn’t presage anything, the old grandmother sighs that she just has to keep on living (324-5) since the owl is not yet announcing her death.



K8797

Kerr 8797 Plate with owl.

http://research.famsi.org/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&vase_number=8797&date_added=&ms_number=&site=&icon_elements%5B%5D=Birds&x=28&y=12

On the other hand, in “Ri Torol Jab’ Los azacuanes” (*Chajil Tzaqib’al Ja’ / Guardián de la Caída de Agua 20-21*) the *azacuanes* “glebes” are migratory birds whose passage signals the beginning and end of the rainy season on April 16 and October 16. The K’iche’ bird name *Torol Jab’* signifies literally “free from rain”¹² and this poem celebrates the birds’ flight north, because now the dry season will begin. The importance of the cycle of seasons is reflected in this poem – and just as time is marked by the repetitive annual journeys of the multiple flocks of birds,¹³ so the K’iche’ poem itself repeats the twittering of the birds flying overhead in the repetitive onomatopoeic “ik” and “ki” prefixes and suffixes. Unfortunately, this is impossible to duplicate in the Spanish translation:

Ri Torol Jab’

Ri torol jab’ ke’kikotik kaok’owik

ki kiya retal che ri saq’ij petinaq

lik’iken ri kixik’ keb’ek.

-Xb’e ri ri jab’.

¹² Several explanations are given for *azacuán* (Sandoval 99), which suggest that the name exists in both K’iche’ and Kaqchikel, and means “precursor of rain”, rather than the association with the end of the rainy season that Ak’abal refers to in this poem.

¹³ Charles Andrew Hofling analyses the close relationship between cyclicity in Mayan conceptions of time and space and similar patterns of repetition in Mayan discourse structure (164). This association appears briefly in this poem, but is more evident in the longer narrative texts of Gaspar Pedro González.

Keb'ixonik, ke'tzenik, ke'etz'anik,
 konojel junab' ka ok'ow pawa taq b'e.

¡Sib'alaj eje'lik
 ki kiqin ri kaqan

Los Azacuanes

Los azacuanes pasan contentos
 anunciando el verano
 van con sus alas sueltas.

-Las lluvias se han ido.

Cantan, ríen, juegan;
 cada año pasan por estos caminos.

¡Y qué bonitos
 todos descalzos!

The Glebes

The glebes pass by happily
 announcing the summer,

they fly with their wings free.

-The rains are over!

They sing, they laugh, they play;
each year they pass this way.

And how pretty

All barefoot!

The parallelisms which are so evident in this poem in the K'iche' version are not duplicated in the Spanish version, which, while it expresses lexically the same content, does not reflect in its phonology the sensation of repeated flights, and flocks of birds flying, playing, laughing and singing. In other poems, Ak'abal is able to imitate more of the parallel structure – for example, in “Guardabarranca / Chalsiwan” ‘Guardian of the Ravine’ *Ajkem Tzij/ Tejedor de Palabras* 408-9) the poem begins with *Barrancos* “ravines” and ends with the word *guardabarranca* – the name of the bird who guards the ravine. From the opening line, which describes the ravine full of birdsong, the poet takes the reader deeper into the ravine and simultaneously further into himself, ending with the one *guardabarranca* birdsong tied to his heart. Although the K'iche' version allows for even more repetition, the Spanish version here creates a vivid impression of flocks of birds swooping throughout the ravine, the repetition of *cantos* “songs” in each of the three first verses reflected in the three-fold repetition of “chochí, chochí, chochí” and “tuktuk, tuktuk, tuktuk,” followed, as seen earlier, by the three periods, representing the

continued but unheard song as the birds fly on, and emphasized by the alliterative and rhythmic initial /c/ sounds (my bold lettering): “**C**uanto más hondos, más **c**antos les **c**aben” ‘the deeper they are, the more songs they can hold.’ The noisy song-filled ravine, a metaphor for the poet’s heart, grows still at the end as it holds only one song close, ending, in K’iche’, with the closed final consonant “n” of the last two lines “jun” and “ri chajilsiwan,” a progression from heard melodies to those unheard. As Keats would remind us, “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter” (“Ode to a Grecian Urn”). The bird poems by Ak’abal are a multi-sensory synaesthetic experience of sound, sight and the sensation of the rush of wings, deepened by the knowledge of the profound significance the birds play in oral history, and in the traditional literature and art of the Maya.



Hummingbirds: Justin Kerr

<http://research.famsi.org/uploads/mayavase/4675/image/4675.jpg>

Just as one aspect of the bird poems is the repetition of the familiar names which not only identify the species, but are frequently the sound of the songs themselves, which means that the speaking of the poem becomes a re-living of the experience described, in a similar way Ak'abal refers to the names of familiar places close to Momostenango, which are known for particular activities. Recognition of place names creates an immediate bond of intimacy between members of the same linguistic community, especially in cases where the original Mayan names were replaced by Nahuatl or Spanish names during colonial times.¹⁴ Ak'abal deliberately includes his Spanish readers in the K'iche community by the use of these place names –for example, the baths of “Payuxu” (p. 223) San Andrés Xemul (p. 227), and “Paxo'l la'” (p. 235) and, possibly unconsciously reminding us, with his different spelling of the same place, the “Payaxu” (p. 229), (my bold), of his independence from standard K'iche spelling rules established recently by the Asociación de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala. (All the page references here are to *Chajil Tzaqab'al Ja' / Guardián de la Caída de Agua*.) While the use of place names itself is hardly unusual in nature poetry, it has particular resonance in Guatemala, where Mayan organizations, such as the ALMG just mentioned, have been promoting research into the original K'iche' toponyms and a return to the names for towns and villages which were re-named in Spanish and Nahuatl in colonial times.¹⁵

¹⁴ See discussion in Chapter 1.

¹⁵ Compare the post-colonial renaming of towns and countries in the African continent shortly following independence.

The examples given so far have shown how Ak'abal includes K'iche' words in the Spanish poems. He also represents very clearly the voice of the K'iche' speaker speaking Spanish – “Castilla”, as the Maya call (Castilian) Spanish, as Arango points out in his introduction: “un español k'icheizado hasta en su sintaxis; es un español que viene de regreso de los baños de Payaxu y de los quemaderos de copal-pom del WAJXAQ'IB B'ATZ. “Castilla” le decimos en el pueblo, y no está en los diccionarios” ‘Spanish which is K'icheized right down to its syntax; it's Spanish on its way back from the Payaxu baths and the incense burners of WAJXAQ'IB B'ATZ. “Castilla” is what we call it in the village, and it's not in the dictionaries’ (*Chajil / Guardián* 15).¹⁶

A number of poems representing the *castilla* speaker have phonetic transcription of his pronunciation, mixing speech registers and including grammatical errors, sometimes to comic effect, as, for example, the words of the K'iche' preacher in three lines of the following poem. I have added my comments in italics immediately each line of my English translation:

Hermanos, vamos a leyer

En la pistola de San Pablo

A los ebrios.

Chaqil Tzaqib'al Ja' / Guardián de la Caída de Agua
156/157

Brothers, we are going to read

¹⁶ *Waxaqib' B'atz'* (8 B'atz') is the first day of the sacred Mayan Cholqij calendar, dedicated to B'atz', the Master Spiritual being, and is considered to be the most important day of the year, hence the fire ceremonies and incense-burning to celebrate the New Year.

*leer (to read) misspelled as leyer to reflect
mispronunciation)*

In the pistol of Saint Paul

*epístola (epistle) misspelled as “pistola”(pistol) to reflect
mispronunciation*

To the drunkards

*Hebreos (Hebrews) misspelled as ebrios (drunkards) to
reflect mispronunciation*

This ironic vignette presents the absurd situation of religious colonialism: a K’iche’ catechist (who may have already drunk the communion wine) (mis)preaching Christian doctrine to his fellow Mayans in Spanish.

In both Spanish quotations in the K’iche’ poems and throughout the Spanish poems, we find examples of *guatemaltequismos* - Guatemalan Spanish, such as the *vos* second-person pronoun instead of Castilian *tú* which is defined by Sandoval as a vulgarism which is commonly used in Guatemala and several other Central American countries (http://academic.csuohio.edu/guatespn/sandoval/dict_V-568-606.pdf); “milpa” ‘corn, cornfield’ (29) which comes from the Nahuatl words *milli* “piece of cultivated land” and *pan* “on” (<http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/> and http://academic.csuohio.edu/guatespn/sandoval/dict_m-042.pdf); singular imperative verb forms such as “volá” ‘fly’ (47) and “mires” ‘look’ (57); idiomatic uses such as the adjective “mero/a” ‘pure, itself’ in “en la mera tarde” ‘in the very afternoon’ (45) (http://academic.csuohio.edu/guatespn/sandoval/dict_m-042.pdf); and the partitive of pleonastic possessive use in “buscar una mi gallina” ‘look for my hen’ (45) which is discussed by Laura Martin (see “Mayan Influence in Guatemalan Spanish”). By using

this hybrid Spanish Ak'abal emphasizes and legitimizes the cultural experience and language of the speaker, even though it is not, as Arango points out, in the dictionaries.¹⁷

Despite the clear and strong Mayan identity of his poems, Ak'abal is not a political activist, and, indeed, prefers to remain in his hometown, remote from the capital and political turmoil. However, his work and his public actions inevitably make a political statement. In January 2004, he was awarded the Miguel Angel Asturias National Prize for Literature, in recognition of his contribution to Guatemalan literature. He refused the award, expressing his profound distaste for the racist theories of Miguel Angel Asturias' thesis *Sociología guatemalteca: el problema social del indio* "Guatemalan Sociology: The Social Problem of the Indian". This thesis was presented to the Universidad Nacional de Guatemala, and published in 1923 when Asturias received his law degree. It was written in the context of an idealized project of perfecting Guatemalan society, including improving the lives of the underprivileged. He describes the *indio* as ugly and degenerate, devoid of personal and social values, and blames the repressive conditions of the colonial period for the degeneration of the race. "It is a matter of an exhausted race. Thus in order to save it, there is first a need for a biological remedy prior to economical, psychological or educational remedies. The Indian needs life, blood and youth! Let the same be done with the Indian as with other animal species when they show symptoms of degeneration"(103). This is not a widely-known document, and precedes the work he produced after his stay in France, where he came under the influence of George Raynaud and began to write his fictional work about the

¹⁷ Arango here means that it is not in dictionaries of formal Spanish of the Academy. Many of these terms may be found in works on Guatemalan Spanish, including Lisandro Sandoval's *Diccionario de guatemaltequismos* available in print (see Sandoval), and online at <http://academic.csuohio.edu/guatespn/sandoval/dictionary.html>

Maya, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. In 1971, Asturias approved a reprint of his thesis, and wrote a foreword in which, while he modified his views on the efficacy of misgenation as a solution to indigenous conditions, he did not modify his original characterizations of people and society. Indeed, the characteristics described in the thesis are incorporated into his novels. That a writer who in 1923 wrote that the intermarriage of German immigrants with Mayans showed clearly how the race could be improved did not see fit to retract his views in later years would create a scandal if it were made public beyond the muted voices of Maya protesters, but certainly suggests an interesting research perspective on Asturias' narratives.

In view of his distaste for the title of this award, and its association with the early ideas of Asturias, Ak'abal stated that he would feel dishonored if he were to accept the award: "Cuando yo conocí la tesis a mí me lastimó muchísimo. El con esa tesis ofendió a los pueblos indígenas de Guatemala y yo soy parte de esos pueblos" (Juan Carlos Lemus, "Ak'abal") 'When I learned about the thesisit was extremely painful for me. In that thesis he offended the indigenous people of Guatemala and I am part of those people.' Ak'abal pointed out that the racial discrimination evident in Asturias' work is still very much in evidence in Guatemala today. Arturo Arias, discussing Ak'abal's refusal and referring to several widely-publicized examples of discrimination, suggests that Guatemalan society may be changing as a result of the growth of a new wave of resistance to discrimination on the part of the Maya: "from within this transformative subalternity arises a consistent discourse that is effectively constructing new relations of power/ knowledge within a decentered festival of globality" (*Taking their word* 180).

In fact, Ak'abal himself, in his interview with Juan Carlos Lemus, tries to claim an apolitical position, but at the same time expresses some resentment that the Academia Maya, which nominated him, did not ask for his permission, and states that in any case he dissociates himself from any organization which imposes linguistic norms, as does the ALMG. He asserts that he is strongly against any form of racism, and denies that his poetic vision is limited to an ethnic perspective: “Si yo estuviera ligado en poesía a una cuestión étnica, entonces no traduciría yo mismo mis poemas al español. Al contrario, yo mismo los traduzco, justamente para hacerlos accesibles. No soy radical.” ‘If I were committed in my poetry to an ethnic position, then I wouldn’t translate my own poems into Spanish. On the contrary, I translate them myself, precisely in order to make them accessible. I am not a radical’ (Lemus “Ak’abal. ‘No gracias’”).¹⁸

Ak'abal's interview with Lemus was published in the national newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, on January 25, 2004, and on the same day Lemus published an ironic commentary, entitled “El “affair” Monsieur Ak’abal” in which he suggests that the refusal of the literary prize will bring Ak'abal far greater publicity than an acceptance, and also that Ak'abal had manipulated his popularity in foreign countries in order to compensate for the derogatory reactions his poetry elicited in Guatemala.¹⁹ However, the action has also elicited support from other indigenous writers – one of whom pointed out that if the

¹⁸ I would argue, as I show in my analysis, that Ak'abal is acutely aware of ethnicity and consistently foregrounds Ladino-Maya differences. His self-translation into Spanish is undeniably motivated by the desire to make his poetry accessible to the Spanish speaker, but also with the intention of making that reader perceive the world from the Mayan perspective, and, at the same time, realize that some aspects of the Mayan world are not open to the outsider.

¹⁹ Lemus suggests that Ak'abal grew his hair long in order to appeal to European artistic tastes. Elsewhere, Ak'abal mentions that following his grandparents' tradition he himself had long hair as a child (it prevented stuttering and protected him from evil spirits) until his teachers suggested he go to a girls' school. He also mentions the prejudice he encountered in the military and in the workplace as a long-haired male (*Prensa Libre*, *Confesiones*). During this period other Latin American countries imposed penalties for long-haired men – including Ecuador, where my husband was arrested for having long hair in 1972.

National Prize for Literature needed to be named after a national writer or work of literature, it should be the *Chilam Balam*²⁰ instead (Ronald Flores).

This discussion of the reaction to Ak'abal's statement about the literary prize points to the heightened sensitivity to the Mayan cultural movement in Guatemala today and the ambivalent and conflicting reactions towards it among both Mayas and non-Mayas. While Ak'abal has not published texts which explicitly refer to his views on the future of Mayan culture in Guatemala, as have Victor Montejo and Gaspar Pedro González, his position is nonetheless clear: a large portion of his poetry, in content, form and language, refers to the repression and suffering of the Mayans, and calls for a change in the present situation. His antipathy for the name of Asturias reflects the acknowledgment that the Mayas are not heard when they speak for themselves, and have been falsely represented by those who claim to speak on their behalf, with the implicit complicity of those empowered to make literary canonical decisions.

While Ak'abal, as I have mentioned earlier, does not wish to play an activist role, as a poet his most powerful tool is language: poems written in K'iche', an appropriation of a western literary modality for his literary creation, and poems written in Spanish which reflects the K'iche' style and voice. My analysis of Ak'abal's work has focused on examples which demonstrate the significance of the bilingual text, both as a political statement, and as a powerful communicative tool in the hands of the author: he can, according to his translation choices, give the reader access -or withhold access - to texts

²⁰ The *Chilam Balam* is a collection of Mayan texts, written from the sixteenth century on, on a variety of subjects, including prophecies, pre-Conquest history, the Spanish Conquest, calendrics and medicine. The books are named for the *chilam* 'prophet-scribe' who wrote them. The books of *Chilam Balam* are, together with the *Popol Vuh* and the *Memoriales de Sololá*, considered the most important early Mayan written texts.

which are transformed in sound and meaning through translation and re-writing. The apparent simplicity of Ak'abal's poems belies the layering of metaphorical significance which the context provides. Reading his poems in bilingual editions in conjunction with each other is to observe their differences in vocabulary, sounds, and structure, and the interplay of exclusion and inclusion of the reader by means of code-switching and borrowing, and, finally, to grasp the need for the author to communicate in K'iche' the epistemological basis of his personal world view. The reader's interpretations are a function of the dialogue between the texts, between the K'iche-speaking voice and the Spanish-speaking voice which confront each other on facing pages and switch back and forth within the poems in a reflection of the particular socio-linguistic situation of the individual author, and within which written Mayan language literature is developing in Guatemala today.

Chapter 5

Gaspar Pedro González: Q'anjob'al writer, literary scholar and activist

Gaspar Pedro González believes that Mayan literature will be revived by developing written literature based on the oral tradition and grounded in the Mayan world view, notably the Mayan calendar. This chapter examines his poetry and fiction to demonstrate how the Mayan Q'anjob'al language and culture, including culture-specific concepts and customs, lexicon and syntax, discourse patterns, and narrative structure, permeate the themes and language of his Spanish-language texts.

Background

Gaspar Pedro González is from the Mayan Q'anjob'al region of northwest Guatemala. He has been publishing, poetry, novels, testimonial writing, and literary articles since 1996, as well as teaching Mayan language, literature and cultural studies at the Mariano Galvez University and San Carlos University in Guatemala City. He is a former Director of Arts and Culture in the Guatemalan Ministry of Culture and Sport, and until recently worked at FODIGUA, the Fund for Indigenous Development of Guatemala.¹ He is a board member and past President of the B'eyb'al Cultural Association, a Mayan organization whose name, B'eyb'al, means "tradition and journey through life in Q'anjob'al".² and whose goals are to preserve, protect and revitalize Mayan culture. In 1998 and 2000, this organization convened the first and second

¹ FODIGUA (Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena Guatemalteco), was created in July 1994 to support and strengthen the development of the Mayan community through a variety of projects in economic production, formation and training of human resources, institutional change and creation of infrastructure.

² Robert McKenna Brown elaborates on González' explanation of B'eyb'al, and describes it as cultural tradition, a path which has been created and perfected through time, in contrast to the western term "folklore" which carries less weight and prestige (*Una breve reseña* 247).

Congress of Indigenous Literature in America. Preservation of Mayan culture, in González's opinion, now depends largely on its being written and printed, given the rapidly diminishing numbers of Mayan language speakers. Moreover, the print medium will give Mayan languages both more exposure and more prestige in world literature, as he has argued his book *Kotz'ib' / Nuestra literatura maya* "Our (Mayan) literature"³:

En el caso de la literatura oral, es preciso su revitalización y su registro dentro del sistema de la escritura, pues son portadores de valores incalculables que pueden desaparecer si no se conservan a través de medios escritos. (109)

In the case of oral literature, revitalization and recording in the written system are critical, since they carry incalculable values which may disappear if they are not preserved by means of the printed media.

González writes in both Q'anjob'al and Spanish and states quite clearly that his intention in writing is to revive the oral tradition in both form and content. He is completely bilingual, but regardless of which language he uses to write in first, he states that he thinks in Q'anjob'al, and his writing is conceptually Q'anjob'al in both organization and content, although he recognizes that there are certain concepts that are difficult to communicate in Spanish (Personal interview 2006). For González, Mayan literature must incorporate the Mayan world vision – otherwise, even if it is written in a Mayan language, it is not authentic Mayan literature.

³ Note the asymmetry between the Q'anjob'al title, which means simply "our writing / literature" and the Spanish title, which adds the word "maya" to the translation in order to clarify the identity of the writer and his community. Apart from the title, the text itself, does not exist in Q'anjob'al.

González's first novel, *Sb'eyb'al jun naq maya qanjobal / La otra cara* "A Mayan Life"⁴ was written and published first in Spanish, as has been the norm for Mayan authors who wish to publish. It was later translated into Q'anjob'al and is now available in Spanish only and in dual-language texts. His second novel, *El retorno de los mayas*, is published in Spanish and English, but not in Q'anjob'al. His third novel, *13 B'aktun: El fin de la era* "13 B'aktun : End of the Era" was published in 2007 in Spanish. The title refers to the Mayan calendar year, (2012 in the western calendar) and will be translated in 2007-09 by Robert Sitler, who specializes in Mayan culture and literature and is himself writing a book on the significance of the year 2012.⁵ It is noteworthy that these three works have been designated by western critics as novels, and for convenience I will use these terms to refer to them, but this is not a genre which exists in Mayan literature. In fact, they are hybrids, mixing elements of different forms of the novel and elements of the Mayan genres referred to by Gaspar Pedro González as "ik'ti" 'fiction' and "ab'ix" 'history of the community', in the case of the *Sb'eyb'al jun naq maya qanjobal / La otra cara* and *El retorno de los mayas*, and "txum" 'vision of the future' in the case of *13 B'aktun: El fin de la era* (Personal communication, 2008).

González's poems are published in a Q'anjob'al / Spanish dual-language edition as *Sq'anej maya / Palabras mayas*. The same poems, except for one, appear in a Q'anjob'al/ English dual-language edition as *The Dry Season / Q'anjob'al Maya Poems*. His other works of literary criticism and Mayan literary history, which include articles and his history of Mayan literature, *Kotz'ib' / Nuestra Literatura Maya*, are published in

⁴ The title of the published English translation of this novel is translated from the Q'anjob'al title. The Spanish title, *La Otra Cara*, is "The Other Face." The Q'anjob'al title uses the same noun *b'eyb'al* "tradition and journey through life" used in the title of the B'eyb'al cultural organization – (see previous page).

⁵ For further information on Robert Sitler's work see <http://www.stetson.edu/%7Ersitler/CV/index.htm>

Spanish-only versions. Most of the above works have been published by Yax Te' Books, based in the United States, as a result of the initial support of the original director, Fernando Peñalosa, who first became familiar with González's writing through his work with Q'anjob'al immigrants in Palo Alto. Yax Te' (the name is the Q'anjob'al translation of *Palos Verdes*) has published an extensive list of works by Mayan authors and distributed these in both the USA and in Guatemala. It is currently directed by Dr. Laura Martin and Nadine Webb. Based at the K'inál Winik Center at Cleveland State University until Dr. Martin's retirement in 2006, it continues as a web-based distribution agent for books by Mayas and about Mayan culture.

It is notable that not all of González's works are published in dual-language editions, because there is a limited market for written Q'anjob'al texts, and little financial support to develop the infrastructure necessary for such a market - for example, through the development of a readership by means of bilingual education and Q'anjob'al literacy, through the enabling of access to books at low cost, and through subsidies to public libraries. Moreover, the potential Q'anjob'al-reading population (about 77,700 in 1998) is much smaller than that in K'iche' (about 2,000 in 2000) (Gordon http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Guatemala). González points out that "The Q'anjobal version of the books I have published is the one which has been slower to sell out – we might be in the 5th or 6th edition in Spanish but still the first in Q'anjobal – the Q'anjobals who learn to read and write do so in Spanish" (Personal interview 2007). The discrepancy between the distribution of the Spanish edition (about 4000) and of the dual-language Q'anjob'al –Spanish edition about (900) was mentioned earlier, in Chapter 1.

I should also mention here that González himself has designed and painted the covers of all of his published books, using a variety of motifs from glyphs to colorful pictures of Mayans bearing burdens on their backs as they travel through the woods.

Q'anjob'al Language Influence in the Spanish Text

According to information from 1996, Q'anjob'al is spoken by 112,000 speakers in nine townships in the western highland department of Huehuetenango: Santa Eulalia, Soloma, Santa Cruz Barillas, San Juan Ixcoy, San Pedro Soloma (sic) (*Gramática Q'anjob'al* 8). Since González emphasizes that he thinks from a Q'anjob'al perspective even when writing in Spanish, it is clear that the strong influence of Q'anjob'al in the Spanish text is intentional and marked, and based on socio-psychological criteria. "While utterances have both referential and intentional meaning, it is the speaker's intentions that ultimately convey meaning" (Gross 1284). The influence of Q'anjob'al can be observed in lexical borrowings, including derivatives and composite words; transcription of regional, rural accent and pronunciation of Q'anjob'al speakers; and onomatopoeic expressions and exclamations, as well as in the rhetorical style of the poetic or narrative language. Thus, although the Spanish text is presented as a translation of the Q'anjob'al text, in fact it represents a shift in identity on the part of the author. "This action is performed linguistically, for example through the choice of lexis, grammar or pronunciation (broadly speaking, stylistic choices within one language variety) or by choice of language" (Sebba and Wootton 276). The same authors use the terms "we code and they code" to refer to a change of identity in language, in which "we" refers to

the ethnic language of a community, and “they” refers to the language of the wider society in which “we” is the minority.⁶ In the case of González, it is clear that Q’anjob’al is the “we code” which penetrates the “they code” of the Spanish text. Consequently, behind the text on the page, we find a metatext, the socio-political motivation to foreground the Q’anjob’al language and culture so as to de-colonize it from the dominant Spanish language and culture.

Oral tradition as the foundation of a written literary canon

In his publications on Mayan literary history and in a personal interview, González expresses the opinion that Mayan oral tradition is the foundation of the new written literary canon. As I show in my analysis of his fiction and poetry, he himself incorporates the characteristics of oral tradition into his own writing and he is motivated by his acute awareness of the need to produce written texts in Maya languages in order to help them to gain and maintain the validity and prestige he believes they deserve in world literature.

In *Kotz’ib / Nuestra literatura Maya* he lists types of materials found in the oral tradition: legends, myths, stories, histories, social practices, prayers, ceremonial chants, fables, word games, songs, advice on social behavior, jokes, sayings, tongue-twisters, hymns, traditional love sayings, formal marriage requests, nicknames, place-names, laments, charms, insults, predictions, proverbs, spiritual beliefs, food recipes, natural medicine, “awases” (typically Mayan taboos), religious ceremonies, etc. and emphasizes that their

⁶ See my previous note on the addition of “maya” in the Spanish title of *Kotz’ib / Nuestra literatura maya* to clarify the identity of “our” literature:

function is to provide education, establish social values and norms, and contribute to social cohesion:

La mayoría de los elementos de la oralidad constituyen los mecanismos de perpetuidad de las normas de convivencia entre los miembros del grupo. Se llama literatura oral porque es como una biblioteca en donde se encuentran guardados los conocimientos, experiencias y la sabiduría de las generaciones que dejan sus legados a las generaciones futuras. (*Kotz'ib* 108)

The majority of the elements of orality constitute the means of perpetuating the social norms among members of the community. It is known as oral literature because it is a library which keeps the knowledge, experiences and wisdom of generations who pass on their legacy to future generations.

He points out that the human characters in oral narratives are ordinary people in a rural setting, and that the plots juxtapose the human and spirit world in a narrative style which is both measured and mysterious. The underlying concept is an animistic world view, emphasizing a harmonious interrelationship of all elements, all under the rule of the Maya Ajaw, Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth. In 1998, as the President of the B'eybal organization, he organized the first Congress of Indigenous Literature of America. In his presentation to the Congress, "La literatura maya contemporánea: como base la oralidad" 'Contemporary Maya literature: Orality as the Foundation' he points out a number of obstacles to overcome, including 1) the perception that there is no Maya literary tradition and that oral tradition is a secondary, inferior genre, and 2) the fact that there have been

few studies of stylistics of oral or written Mayan literature. González argues for the need for a re-evaluation of the characteristics of oral tradition and its role in societal cohesion.

González seeks to demonstrate that, in fact, there is a body of Mayan literature, but that it has been hitherto ignored. He includes a brief sample anthology of texts by Mayan authors:

1. “Txaj / Rezo” – a Q’anjob’al prayer with Spanish translation
2. A series of Mam proverbs, with Spanish translation
3. “Li xchaaljik wi’ li ixim / El origen del maíz” ‘The origin of corn’ in Q’eqchi’ with Spanish translation
4. A Popti’ poem by Victor Montejo, with Spanish translation
5. A Chuj poem translated into Spanish
6. Several poems by the author, in Q’anjob’al with Spanish translation.
7. A birthing tradition, translated from K’iche’
8. “Canción Pastoril”, an onomatopoetic K’iche’ poem by Humberto Ak’abal
9. A poem in Spanish by Q’eqchi’ poet Maya Cu
10. An extract from the author’s novel *La Otra Cara*

This is one of the earliest samples of works by modern authors from the Mayan linguistic groups that gives evidence of the variety of styles and themes in contemporary Mayan literature and that shows how closely related it is to the oral tradition.

González attributes the lack of awareness of existing literature to the destruction and repression of Mayan culture since the Conquest, and to the Mayan internalization of the Ladino negative concept of their culture, which Marilyn Henne refers to in her 1985 M.A. thesis “Why Mother Tongue Literature Has Failed to Take Root among the Maya Quiche.” In Henne’s opinion, Mayas feel that it is a waste of time to work on learning and writing Mayan languages, because Spanish is the language of economic and employment opportunities.⁷ González points out that contemporary writers have been educated in a Spanish language system which perpetuated this Ladino negative concept,⁸ and consequently are more familiar with world literature than with Mayan literature. Lacking a background in or respect for the Mayan literary canon, they find it difficult to detach themselves from the influence of world literature. Furthermore, there are still comparatively few published books of Mayan literature and stylistics readily available in Guatemala for use as a foundation for literary studies.

A related problem is that the developing interest in oral literature has led to transcription and studies by people who were not linguistically and/or culturally qualified, and who underestimated the skills needed to do their work accurately and completely. González refers to the complex techniques of transcribing and translating the sequence and structure of multi-dimensional oral texts:

Estos constituyen un nivel de contemplación de la oralidad y no como simples cuentos o relatos pasajeros, sino abordarlos “como espacios epistemológicos de formulación de las lógicas culturales, de sistemas de representaciones de espacios

⁷ Henne’s research was based on her experience with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Moreover, it was conducted during the 1970s, before the Mayan revitalization movement gained force. While her conclusions may still hold true in many communities, it is not clear whether the circumstances of her research affected her results.

⁸ González incorporates an example of this in his novel *Sb’eyb’al Jun Naq Maya’ Q’anjob’al / La otra cara*, and documents the issue in his 1995 thesis.

cognitivos.” Todo ello supone experiencias en los campos del análisis de sistemas taxonómicos, análisis en el campo semántico y acercamiento terminológico conceptual dentro de la visión del mundo particular de cada comunidad o grupo. (*Literatura Indígena de America Primer Congreso* 98)

These constitute a level of contemplating orality not as simple stories or transient narratives, but approaching them as “epistemological spaces for formulating the logical structures of cultures, of systems of representation of cognitive spaces.” All this presupposes experiences in the fields of analysis of taxonomical systems, analysis in the field of semantics, and an approach to the terminology of concepts within the particular world vision of each community or group.

These issues are also raised in publications by other scholars, including Sam Colop and Victor Montejo. In more recent years, largely in response to these concerns, university-trained Mayan linguists have become involved in university and government and non-government agency-sponsored research, transcription and translation of oral tradition literature. González’s concerns about the standardization of the written forms of Mayan languages have also been addressed in recent years. The ALMG (Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala, founded in 1990) has established norms that are being used in many publications, although these are not yet universally accepted, due to the multiplicity of regional differences and sensitivities.⁹

As mentioned earlier, there have been relatively few studies by literary critics or scholars of the stylistics of modern oral or written Mayan literature. Those available have hitherto been written by linguists, and are scattered in American and European journals and collections. Few are available in Spanish in Guatemala and therefore are largely inaccessible to Mayans themselves. González’s typology consists of a description of

⁹ See my discussion in Chapter 2.

content and purpose, and refers to phonological particularities of Mayan vocabulary, but does not include any stylistic analysis. The most detailed analytical work to date is Sam Colop's dissertation on Mayan Poetics, but this has not been published; it is not available in Guatemala, nor is it available in Spanish or a Mayan language. I will refer to this work in my discussion of González's poems and novels, in order to demonstrate how the author incorporates traditional Mayan style into his works.

The calendar as the central focus of present-day Maya culture

In keeping with his theory that written literature should be based on the oral tradition, the goal of which is to pass on cultural beliefs, González incorporates references to and explanations of the Mayan calendar into all of his literary works in order to demonstrate that the calendar has been an intrinsic element of Mayan tradition since earliest times and is the core of the entire system of world vision and spirituality.

As González writes:

Este tema tan amplio y complejo del tiempo, de sus elementos y su filosofía, constituyen uno de los principales contenidos de la escritura maya. También constituye el centro generador de la cultura maya actual, puesto que el ordenamiento secuencial del tiempo en relación con las deidades en permanente accionar sobre la vida de los hombres, hace posible la existencia. (*Kotz'ib* 52)

This broad and complex theme of time, its elements and philosophy, constitutes one of the principal elements of Mayan writing. It also constitutes the creative center of present-day Mayan culture, since the sequential order of time in relation to the deities in permanent interaction with the lives of men makes existence possible.

The glyph signs for the twenty deities who govern the days are reproduced in *Kotz'ib*, together with an explanation of the numerical calendrical system. The Mayan calendar

consists of cyclical periods of thirteen days, each one governed by the sign of one of the deities. The completion of this series of twenty multiplied by thirteen is equivalent to the period of human gestation, 260 days. González gives a brief explanation of the attributes of the day gods, each one of whom governs one complete cycle of the sun and affects all the activities of that day, in conjunction with the power exercised by the thirteen numbers. “El q’inal (tiempo) estaba constituido por eras, ciclos, soles o creaciones hechos por el Corazón del Cielo y Corazón de la Tierra” ‘the q’inal (time) was made up of eras, cycles, suns or creations made by the Heart of the Sky and the Heart of the Earth’ (*Kotz’ib’* 48). The approaching end of the current cycle is the topic of his most recent novel, *13 B’aktun*.

The dates of events and an explanation of their significance in the lives of characters in González’s novels are an integral part of the narrative. Lwin, the protagonist of González’s first novel, is born on Thirteen Ajau, and dies on the same date one hundred years later, according to the Mayan calendrical year. As Ament points out,

The number thirteen is the highest cog on the numerical wheel of time, and on the day Thirteen Ajau, this number meshes with Ajau, the most prestigious cog on the twenty days of the contiguous wheel of time. To be born on this date augurs strong leadership qualities in the newborn child. (18)

Equal significance is given to the birth date of the child protagonist of *El Retorno de los Mayas* with an additional reference to the loss of tradition and traditional naming caused by the Spanish Conquest:

Yo nací en un Lajun Kixkab’, Diez Terremoto. Según la tradición, en realidad, éste debió ser mi nombre, pero a causa de este proceso que hemos sufrido, trajeron nuevos nombres de santos y fue parte de lo que nos impusieron. (28)

I was born on a Lajun Kixkab', Ten Earthquake. According to tradition, in reality, this should have been my name, but because of this process that we have suffered, they brought new names of saints and it was part of what they imposed on us.

Throughout González's novels, the characters seek guidance from the spiritual guide when they undertake a journey or new activity, to find out when is the most propitious date. For example, when Mekel is planning to travel to the coast in order to earn money to pay off his debts, the soothsayer tells him that he should travel on the days of the deities Watan, Elab', Tox, or B'en (*Sbey'b'al* 59) and later, the community gathers to pray to "Tú B'en, Tú Chinax, Tú Tox, Tú Elab" (*S'beyb'al* 217). While activities are mentioned in conjunction with the Maya date when they occur, González's text illustrates the difficulty of living side by side with a society which uses a different calendar system and vocabulary. The concept of time differs between Maya and Ladino – a character looks ahead and speculates that something will happen "dentro de pocos días o meses" 'within a few days or months' (*S'beyb'al* 87), as if there were little difference between the two, and the Q'anjob'al text includes such borrowings as *semana* "week". Later, in *Retorno*, the narrator complains that the western calendar which he learns to use in school is meaningless for his people.

References to the calendar are integrated closely into the narrative of *S'beyb'al*, but in *Retorno* and *13 B'aktun* these are more explicitly included as authorial narrative voice explanations:

Heb' Komam Ora son el conjunto de seres espirituales que controlan el sistema de vida de los hombres y de los seres en el mundo maya a través del tiempo, desde los días hasta la eternidad. (*Retorno* 25)

Heb' Komam Ora "Our Lords the Day Gods" are the group of spiritual beings who control the system of the lives of men and beings in the Maya world throughout time, from each day into eternity.

Just before they leave their home to escape the military attack that will force them into exile in Mexico, the child exile and his mother rush to pay a parting visit to the graves of their family members, and the pace of events slows to include the prayers to the gods and a conversation in which the mother explains to the child that every day, even this one, has a god. The narrative voice throughout relates to the reader directly, testimonial-style, to describe not only events but fundamental aspects of culture. Each section of the day-by-day testimonial of the escape to Mexico is capped by the day name in Q'anjob'al.

POETRY

A. Themes

The author's poems appeared in a Q'anjob'al-Spanish dual-language edition, *Sqanej Maya / Palabras Mayas* in 1998, and in a Q'anjob'al-English dual language edition, *The Dry Season* in 2001, as mentioned above. The themes fall into three broad categories: Mayan culture, nature, and personal relationships. Of these, the first is the most often represented, in poems about the revitalization of his Mayan language and culture, Mayan history and ethnicity, the Mayan calendar and spiritual beliefs, and in social commentary and two legends. Rolando Castellanos Portillo, in his preface to the first edition, comments that these poems revive the Mayan identity and that González is "heredero del consejo de los abuelos que con un poco de chilate fermentado construían el

mágico mundo de la palabra” ‘the heir of the counsel of the elders who with a little fermented chilate¹⁰ would reconstruct the magical world of the word’ (Prefacio, not paginated).

The poet conveys the Mayan world view both explicitly by describing the interconnectedness of the inner and outer worlds, of the perceived and perceiver, of the spiritual and material world, and of human beings and the animal, natural world, and implicitly, by encoding these perceptions in multi-sensory imagery. In “Heb’ Maya / Los Mayas,” ‘The Mayan People,’ (4) González refers to pre-colonial and post-colonial history. He mentions the knowledge – mathematics, astronomy, writing - of the ancient Mayan people, and their survival of five hundred years of conquest, destruction and misery. He describes the present in poems which refer to the poverty, suffering, exploitation and fear of the indigenous people, especially during the violence of the late twentieth century, and the difficulty that the “indio” has in overcoming the negative self-image he has internalized. In “B’ay kajanhin / Mi mundo” ‘My World’ (68), a poem strikingly similar to Ak’abal’s “Ripatan / El mecapal,” González uses the metaphor of the head-strap to describe the man whose vision of the world beyond is limited by the heavy load which weighs him down so that he cannot see above the horizon – a metaphor for the Mayan in the Ladino society.

Several poems refer to Mayan spiritual beliefs and, particularly, the Calendar. In “Stxolil Q’in / Calendario” (16) the poet names and lists the characteristics and significance of the days of the calendar; “Cham Ajtum / El Oráculo” ‘The Soothsayer’ (84) is a prayer by a priest to those gods and to the ancestors. González’s poems teach

¹⁰ *chilate* is a fermented corn drink

and also draw the reader to view the world from his perspective. Many of the poems are ostensibly about nature, but metaphorize the dualistic vision of the universe – animal poems allude to the *nawal*, the spiritual double of the human, and poems about birds refer to their mythological significance. For example, the hummingbird, of which there are sixteen varieties in the western highlands of Guatemala,¹¹ also appears in many traditional narratives and images as a symbol of the human-spirit connection.

Some of the poems refer to Maya myths: the deified sun and moon, and the noise-making and fear when there is a lunar eclipse, as in “K’u Yetoq Xajaw / El Sol y la Luna,” ‘The Sun and the Moon’ (26), which resembles Ak’abal’s “Kakam ri qat’it / La luna se muere” ‘The Moon is Dying’ (discussed in my chapter on Ak’abal.) The creation of mankind in the four colors of maize, which represent the four corners of the world, is described in “Ixim ixim / El maíz,” ‘Corn’ (12), but the title itself, with the Q’anjob’al repetition of “ixim” ‘corn, maize’ is a striking reference to the central cultural/linguistic importance of maize in Maya culture: the first “ixim” is a noun classifier which is used only for nouns which belong to the ‘maize’ category. This, and the other fourteen noun classifiers¹² which are particular to Q’anjob’al, are fundamental categories embedded in the grammar of the language and indicate the conceptual framework of the linguistic community.

Lexical and Phonological Influence of Q’anjob’al: Loans and Onomatopoeia

¹¹ Guatemala Birding Resource Center <http://www.xelapages.com/gbrc/index.htm>

¹² The fifteen types of classifiers which exist in Q’anjob’al apply to the following categories: maize; animals; trees and wood; stone and metal; water; earth; plants; man; woman; older men; older women; rain; palm, reeds and paper; fire and heat; salt; girls and young women; boys and young men. (Ruperto Montejo 101)

González's poems refer to certain concepts for which there are no equivalents in Spanish, and which are therefore named in Q'anjob'al. Such lexical code-switching in the Spanish poems serves as a reminder to the reader of the different world s/he confronts, and also as a linguistic resistance to transparent translation and appropriation/assimilation of the Mayan world view.¹³ The majority of the loan words are names of gods, day gods, and spirits and spiritual beliefs in three of the longest poems in the collection, "Heb' maya / Los Mayas" 'the Maya people' (4), "Stxolil Q'in" 'Calendar' (16) and "Cham ajtxum / El oráculo" 'The Soothsayer' (84). Such loan words include "Ajaw" 'Supreme Being', "Xib'alb'a" the Maya 'Underworld', the names of the twenty day gods, names for calendrical time periods, and "Nawal" 'animal spirit companion of the human'. All of these terms are foreign to the non-Maya reader, and could well be explained in a glossary or footnotes since the author's motive is to inform others about the Maya world, as well as to write in Q'anjob'al for his own community. On the other hand, "some readers may prefer the ambiguity and otherness that the occasional untranslated word provides, finding that they enhance the poetic experience – surely at least as important a goal as informing others about the Mayan world" (Laura Martin, personal communication). However the final text is presented – with or without notes – the reader is confronted with a world different from his/her own.

The phonological influence of Q'anjob'al can be found in the poems about everyday rural life, for example, in onomatopoeic expressions in a poem about boys hunting birds at night, such as "t'in pooq" "pumul pak'al" (20-21), which are not

¹³ The implications of this confrontation may be lost on the non-Mayan-language reader, who is unaware of the significance of the terms. However, the alternative of an annotated edition is rejected by those who consider notes cumbersome and a distraction from the aesthetic effect of the poems.

translated, but in which the plosive consonants and glottal stops convey the sounds of the sling shots and the dead birds falling to the ground. We hear “jjuuuy! jhiiip!” as the villagers chase the sun away from the moon during an eclipse, and the rolling sounds of thunder “ikunununununununununun!” and the swishing of the rains “xhxhxh” (38-9). “Jun sq’in no tz’ikin / Fiesta de Pájaros” ‘Festival of Birds’, a poem similar to Ak’abal’s “Xirixitem chikop”, includes many native birds named in Q’anjob’al for their songs – for example “tuk tuk, xher, k’itk’it”. The wild birds resist linguistic domestication!

The following poem, which serves as an example of the features I discuss here, is the first in both the Q’anjobal/Spanish collection *Sq’anej Maya’ / Palabras Mayas* ‘Mayan Words’ written in both languages by the author, and also the first in the Q’anjob’al/English collection *The Dry Season / Q’anjob’al Maya Poems*, which includes the same poems except for one, and is translated into English by Mayan scholar R. McKenna Brown. The poems and their translations exemplify a number of aspects of oral tradition style, and also some features which cannot be adequately translated from Q’anjob’al.

The theme of this poem is literary creation, through the rediscovery and savoring of the word. The poet finds the broken remains of his written Q’anjob’al language, the pre-colonial Maya writing, and rejoices in the pleasure of being able to write again. The theme of recreation of historical written Mayan language is reflected in the poetic devices which the author uses in order to link his modern verse with the written and oral tradition.

Q’anej

- 1 Ka chin mitx’on jun q’anej,
- 2 haton juntí yetoq

3 max hajos jun b'ulan echelej;
 4 junti yetoq max hamaqb'en aj
 5 yoq' tz'ikin yul tzima;
 6 junti yetoq max hapixkan ok yin ch'en ch'en
 7 tzetaq max yun jek' payxa
 8 Mam Icham

9 Ka chin sayon ek' ch'olanlaq
 10 wek' hinsik'on aj sq'axepal q'anej:
 11 haxka nab'alej k'aynaqkantoq xolaq un,
 12 ma haxka sq'axepal pojil tz'aqb'il tx'otx'.

13 yet max hinkawxane aj junelxa koq'anej,
 14 yin xam hintz'ib'b'al,
 15 ka chi kokalontoq yetoq paj pichi,
 16 Mam Icham.

17 Yetoq skal junoq te koson
 18 ka chon ay woqan stilaq jun mundo ti'
 19 konumnon jalon koq'anej,
 20 Mam Icham.

Sqanej Maya 2

La Palabra

1 Y tomo la palabra:
 2 ésta, con la que

3 tallaste los cerros de signos;
 4 ésta con la que enjaulaste
 5 los gorgoros en jícaras;
 6 ésta con la que amarraste a las piedras
 7 nuestra historia,
 8 Abuelo viejo.

9 Escudriño los rincones
 10 y voy pepenando lo que queda de ella:
 11 como recuerdos traspapelados,
 12 o como fragmentos de alfarería.

13 Una vez reconstruída, la palabra,
 14 en la punta de mi pincel,
 15 le echamos un poco de chilate fermentado,
 16 abuelo viejo.

17 Y al compás de nuestro tambor
 18 nos sentamos a la orilla del mundo
 19 a rumiar nuestra palabra,
 20 Abuelo Viejo.

Palabras Mayas 3

The word

1 And I speak now the word,

2 This one, with which you carved mountains of glyphs,
 3 This one, with which you saved the birdsong in gourds,
 4 This one, with which you bound our history to stone,
 5 old grandfather.

6. I rummage through every corner
 7 and gather up what's left of it:
 8 memories buried under papers
 9 or fragments of clay pots.

10 Once the word is recovered
 11 on the point of the tongue of my brush
 12 we add a little fermented corn drink,
 13 old grandfather.

14 And to the beat of our drum
 15 we sit on the edge of the world
 16 to savor our word.

The Dry Season 3

The Q'anjob'al word is foregrounded throughout the poem by repetition, as a means of emphasizing its significance and also to recreate a series of exclamations as the word is rediscovered in a series of places. In order to do this, the first verse sets a pattern of syntactic and semantic parallelism. After the initial reference to the ancient word, the Mayan language, which the poet is reclaiming, he refers to it in lines 2, 4, and 6 by

repeating “junti yetoq” in Q’anjob’al and “ésta” in Spanish, translated as ‘this one’ in the altered English linear structure of lines 2, 3, and 4. This ritualistic build-up of repetitions, a core feature of traditional and modern Mayan rhetorical practice, is a verbal reflection of the visual image of the high “mountains of glyphs” on the mounds of earth and stelae that the poet is remembering in the synecdoche of these lines. Synecdoche appears again, with synaesthesia, later in the third verse of the poem, when the poet conflates the images of tongue and brush with speaking and painting (glyphs) and adds to the multisensory metaphor the fermented corn drink, which evokes a ritual alcoholic drink, and is at the same time a reference to the sacred Maya corn, which becomes the poetic muse. Bakhtin uses the same taste metaphor: “each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life” (*Dialogic Imagination* 293) to convey the potency of the meanings associated with each word we use, and, indeed, González’s choice of words here evokes multiple social and cultural references.¹⁴

The continuity of the historical word is emphasized by the phonemic end parallelism of the “ej” in “q’anej” (line 1) and “echelej” (line 3), which cannot be repeated in the Spanish “palabra, signos” and the English translation ‘word, glyphs.’ Lexical parallelism can be seen in the repetition of “Q’anej” in each verse of the Q’anjob’al, always at the end of a line, but is completely missing in verse 2 of the Spanish and English, and differently placed in verse 3. Lexical parallelism is also exemplified by the final line repetition of the soothing, alliterative “Mam Icham” at the end of verses 1,3 and 4, translated as “Abuelo Viejo,” in the Spanish and ‘old grandfather’ in the English, both of which lack the assonance of the Q’anjob’al. The

¹⁴ The image is repeated in *Retorno de los Mayas*, page 2.

phrase is missing from the final verse of the English translation, because the editors felt that “it echoed the sound of a fading drum beat” heard in silence at the end of the poem (Brown, Personal Communication).¹⁵ This brings to the foreground an issue prevalent in all of González’s works- the many differences between the texts in different languages, including the impossibility of translating the fifteen Q’anjob’al noun classifiers such as “Ixim” ‘corn’, as already mentioned earlier, and consequently omitting references to the Mayan world vision embedded in the linguistic structure. It would seem that, rather than translations in the accepted sense of the term, they are re-writings, new editions of the text, in which the author collaborates, but which incorporate additions and changes.

In an example of morphological parallelism, the first lines of verse 1 and 2 begin with the verbal prefix “Ka chin” in Q’anjob’al, which is again reflected in line 15 “ka chi” and line 18 “ka chon,” but the different verbal structure permits no such repetition in the Spanish or English. In many respects, the translations of the poem have the same form and content as the Q’anjob’al, but inevitably, some of the traditional poetic style is lost in translation. In terms of content, it is significant that the English has opted for an explanatory translation, “fermented corn drink” (line 11), for a food item which is unfamiliar to the English-speaking reader. The alternative, according to R. McKenna Brown, the translator, would have been to use the somewhat more familiar “chicha” and to add an explanatory note (Personal Communication). Although I do not intend, in this study, to focus on the English translations of the works, but rather to use them for the English-speaking reader, they do raise important issues of choices the translator faces in the same way as the writer does who is himself/herself writing in two languages. In this

¹⁵ This is a typical kind of Mayan rhetorical device, where the sense impression is present through the absence of a specific reference, in the context of parallelisms (Laura Martin, Personal Communication).

case, it was an editorial decision to include some cultural information in the preface to the poem collection, but not to interrupt the reading by footnotes, and not to include a glossary of unfamiliar terms. Even more culturally significant, “Mam Icham” becomes “viejo abuelo” in González’s Spanish text, and is translated as ‘old grandfather’ in Brown’s English translation. Neither the Spanish nor the English fully conveys the traditional importance in the Mayan community of the older generation, who hand down the oral tradition of knowledge through their words. It is noticeable that in Q’anjob’al, the two words “Mam Icham” are capitalized, as a mark of respect, but they are not systematically capitalized in Spanish, and not at all in English.

NOVELS

S’beyb’al Jun Naq Maya’ Q’anjob’al / La Otra Cara / Journey of a Q’anjob’al Maya

El Retorno de los Mayas / The Return of the Mayas

Introduction

Gaspar Pedro González’s first novel was published in 1992 in Spanish, *La Otra Cara*, translated into English as *Journey of a Q’anjob’al Maya*, in 1995, and published in Q’anjob’al as *S’beyb’al Jun Naq Maya’ Q’anjob’al* in 1996.¹⁶ It is available in Spanish-only, English only, and in Q’anjob’al-Spanish dual-language editions, but not in Q’anjob’al alone. Some confusion arises from the differences in translation of the titles – readers are often not aware that the Spanish version is the same book as the English and

¹⁶ I will refer to this work as *S’beyb’al* henceforth.

Q'anjob'al: the Q'anjob'al title, translated literally as the English title *Journey of a Q'anjob'al Maya*, foregrounds the life-journey of the protagonist, whereas the Spanish title *La Otra Cara*, literally 'The Other Face' alludes to the ethnic and cultural differences between ladino and Maya, and metaphorizes the cultural transformation which occurs during the protagonist's life. Moreover, at the time of writing, González chose this title in Spanish in order to resonate with a contemporary publicity campaign by the Guatemalan tourist agency which was trying to attract tourists with the slogan "The Face of Guatemala," and in order to emphasize that there was another "Face of Guatemala" which tourists were unlikely to encounter.

The novel's protagonist, Lwin, is born to a traditional Maya Q'anjob'al couple, Mekel and Lotaxh, and after going to school, develops an awareness of the social inequities inherent in his community. The novel is part autobiography – indeed, it is dedicated to Lotaxh and Lwin, the author's parents. In the novel, the protagonist is named Lwin, and his mother, Lotaxh, so that, as the author writes, his parents continue to live through the novel. It is also part historical-political fiction, part testimonial and ethnographic commentary, and explores many aspects of Maya life. The second part includes Luín's decision not to leave his community in order to continue his education, but to work on the land instead, and shows how through a combination of reading books which his friend sends him, and growth in his awareness of the socio-economic conditions of his community, he develops assertive political opinions and becomes a community leader. The journey, and the metaphorical change of face, represent the changes that the Mayan community experiences in the modern confrontation with Ladino

society, as well as the struggle for self-identification and resistance to assimilation which accompany increased participation in the non-Mayan world.

El Retorno de los Mayas 'Return of the Mayas,' published in 1998, shows a dramatic change in style and language. Gaspar Pedro González wrote this work in Spanish only, and it was later translated into English. Given the significance for the author of preserving the Q'anjob'al literary tradition, it is all the more remarkable that he did not write this book in Q'anjob'al. However, he explains that the material is too painful, and that it seemed to him that it would have desecrated the language to write these events in Q'anjob'al (Personal communication). It is a first-person narrative of the escape from home in the Cuchumatán mountains of northern Guatemala, the journey to Mexico, and the later return in adulthood of a child whose family is forced into exile by the armed conflicts in Guatemala. Written in testimonial style with a first-person narrator, it includes extensive ethnographic commentary and incorporates Q'anjob'al code-switching followed by Spanish explanations of the unfamiliar expressions.

The style, structure and narrative voice of these testimonial novels of Gaspar Pedro González reflect his conviction that the new, written Mayan literary canon must be based on the established oral literature tradition, in order to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage, promote community education, maintain social values and norms, and contribute to social cohesion in the Mayan communities of Guatemala. González writes in both Q'anjob'al and in Spanish, but maintains a strong Q'anjob'al voice in the Spanish text by transcribing orality into the written text, by incorporating commentary on certain culture-specific elements, and through the use of loan words and code-switching.

Hereafter, I discuss the multiple linguistic and stylistic levels of *Sb'eyb'al Jun Naq Maya' Q'anjob'al / La Otra Cara* (González 1996) and define the place of this new genre in contemporary written Maya literature. For the purposes of this study, I refer to the dual-language Q'anjob'al-Spanish version, in which the two languages are printed on facing pages, since it is González's own voice in the two versions/languages that he has written/translated which concerns me. As mentioned, no Q'anjob'al-only version has been published.

González has written extensively about the significance of oral tradition, and he spoke on this topic at the first conference of *Literatura Indígena de América*, which he coordinated in Guatemala in 1998:

Entre los Mayas, semejante a lo que ocurrió en el Viejo Continente, la oralidad está sirviendo de base para reconstruir una identidad, que está siendo trasladada a la escritura por parte de los escritores actuales. Muchos de estos "materiales" de la oralidad, son incorporados como elementos tanto en la prosa como en el verso, con un nuevo enfoque y una nueva interpretación y dimensión artística.

("La literatura oral maya": 97)

Among Mayas, just as in the Old World, orality serves as the basis for reconstructing an identity, which is being relocated into writing by present-day writers. Many of the oral "materials" are incorporated as features of both prose and poetry, with a new focus and a new interpretation and artistic dimension.

These remarks apply to the prose work of the author himself. In the first place, as in some of the publications of Ak'abal and Montejo, the dual-language Q'anjob'al/Spanish edition confronts the reader with the two languages on facing pages, a visual representation of the double cultural and linguistic reality which is the theme of the text. The author writes from the perspective of an oral tradition narrator, with the goal of

preserving cultural memory, and weaves into his plot many traditional stories, prayers, and rituals. In a fictionalized testimonial style, he also records the contemporary living conditions and political status of the Mayan characters, and comments on Maya-Ladino relations and the potential for socio-economic change. And finally, he inscribes orality into his text through extensive use of dialogue and code-switching, using Q'anjob'al words for culturally-specific terms in the Spanish text. These characteristics of the novel create a new, hybrid form of testimonial novel which reflects the contemporary socio-historical context in which it is written, and is directed to both the Q'anjob'al and non-Q'anjob'al reader. The text both transcribes and describes oral culture as it is integrated in Mayan life and also seeks to inscribe traditions which may be lost if orality gives way to writing.

This work, considered the first Mayan novel,¹⁷ thus represents a radical change from earlier ethnographic approaches to recordings and transcriptions of oral literature, and to some of the works published in recent years, which I discussed in the chapter on Genre and Oral Tradition. It reflects a development which Mikhail Bakhtin, discussing the development of the *Bildungsroman*, identifies in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English and German realist novel as the immense, new influence of folklore, which “interprets and saturates space with time, and draws it into history” (“The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism” 52-3). Bakhtin also argues that the *Bildungsroman* incorporates the nationalist aspirations and emphasis on the vernacular which developed in Europe in the nineteenth century. González himself

¹⁷ This is indeed the first novel to be published in Mayan language. However, the first novel written by a Mayan author, from a Mayan perspective, although not in a Mayan language, was *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* “Time begins in Xibalbá” (1985) by the Kaqchikel Mayan author Luís de Lión (discussed in Chapter 1).

concludes, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that orality is a means of preserving social norms and knowledge, so that they can be passed down from one generation to the next.

It is this broad concept of oral literature as a library containing the legacy of knowledge, experiences and wisdom of past generations which I apply to *Sb'eyb'al*. The novel narrates the life of a Q'anjob'al Maya man in Jolomk'u, a Q'anjob'al village in the Cuchumatán mountains of western Guatemala. The life of Lwin, the main character, from his birth to his death, provides the framework for a narrative which includes his education at home and in school, the rural community life-style, significant life-cycle events including birth, marriage and death, a variety of events which contrast Mayan and ladino culture, and episodes which illustrate the socio-economic conditions of the Mayas.

While the title in Q'anjob'al, *Sb'eyb'al Jun Naq Maya' Q'anjob'al*, and the title of the English translation both refer to the "Journey of a Maya", and the Spanish title *La Otra Cara* "The Other Face" refers to the double identity the Maya confronts when he enters the Ladino world, the plot is designed not to show the personal development of one individual in the style of the early Western bildungsroman,¹⁸ or the odyssey of an epic hero who overcomes life's obstacles, but the life journey of a Mayan who represents the experiences of his community, as a testimony of Mayan life; the reader follows Lwin's gradual development of awareness of and commitment to the socio-economic and political rights of the Mayan people. This post-colonial novel is a new genre, both in form and particular socio-cultural content and in its voice, while at the same time

¹⁸ The chief difference is in the lack of emphasis on the individual, whereas in other respects it resembles the type of Bildungsroman defined by Bakhtin as the novel of emergence, in which man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence. "Man...is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to another. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man." ("The Bildungsroman" 23).

incorporating the basic cyclical structure and repetition found in traditional Mayan texts and oral narrative. Although in some respects it is similar to a testimonio, such as that of Rigoberta Menchú, in that it depicts many aspects of daily community life and life-cycle events, it is not written in the first person, nor does it make a claim to represent the author's personal experience or that of his community. It is a fictional narrative in a realistic setting, in which the reader is aware at all times that, although Lwin is the main character whose life the reader follows from birth to death, the focus is not on his *individual* personal character development, but rather on his emerging role as a *representative* of and spokesman for his community, and always in the context of the Mayan struggle for equal rights.

In his novel, González compensates for the loss of oral performance by the extensive integration of direct speech into his plot. The teachings of mother to son and grandfather to grandson, as well as the marriage petitions, are not only contextualized, with descriptions of time and place, but dramatized as dialogue between the two speakers, a form which González uses almost exclusively in *13 B'akt'un*. Within the narrative framework of the life of a Mayan man, the predominant theme of the novel is the customs and beliefs relating to Mayan world view, which are normally narrated in oral narratives: "plegarias, rezos, consejos" 'supplications, prayers, counsels' (*Kotz'ib' / Nuestra Literatura Maya* 104-8).

Mayan spiritual beliefs are integrated into the novel both in brief interactions between characters and in specific events which focus on ritual prayers and ceremonies. In his everyday life with his mother, the young Lwin learns about respect for others, farming, animals, and their significance within the Mayan world view:

Esta es la flor de chilacayote – decía ella. –Es amarilla, significa nuestra alegría; esa, la flor de la campanitas es violeta, es el color del Gran Espíritu, el color de su morada y del mundo que queda después del límite de la muerte. Este es el color rojo, lo llevamos en nuestras venas, es el nombre de lo bello y agradable a nuestra vista, forma parte de nuestra existencia, tómala.

(*Sb'eyb'al* : 107)

This is the flower of the chilacayote – she would say. It's yellow, which means our happiness; that one, the bluebell flower, is violet, the color of the great Spirit, the color of his home and of the world which lies beyond the boundary of death. This is the color red, we carry it in our veins, it's the name of all that is beautiful and pleasant in our eyes, it's part of our existence, take it.

When the child Lwin begins to ask about the existence of God, Mam Tyoxh, his father takes him to be taught by his grandfather. This three-day episode of spiritual initiation includes rituals, a journey, and instruction about Mayan beliefs. In this passage, the narrative includes the words of the grandfather, and describes in the third person the child's sensations and reactions – an unforgettable intuition of sublime immanence in nature (*Sb'eyb'al* 147). González here transmits not only the content of the teaching, but also the context – the time and place, as well as the characters involved: Lwin and his grandfather. While it is true that there exist written transcriptions of this oral teaching, as I have discussed in the chapter on Oral Tradition, González is acutely aware of the need to write not only the words of the oral teaching but to recreate its performance in order to communicate the full significance of the oral tradition.

Other comparable episodes include prayers of thanks to God during communal activities, when individuals gather with their neighbors to help at planting or harvest time; a tree-cutting; the dedication of a new house; and other life-cycle events such as a

wedding and the birth of a child. The Mayan calendar is present throughout the novel, calendar dates of events are always mentioned, and, indeed, the spiritual guide is always consulted when choosing a propitious date for a journey or special occasion.

One significant example is the arrangement of Lwin's marriage to Lotaxh, the traditional "pedido": the asking for the bride's hand in marriage by the family of the prospective groom. The grandparents act on Lwin's behalf, bringing gifts and requesting a meeting with Lotaxh's family. They receive the customary rejection before being accepted and participating in a gathering at which parents and grandparents discuss the marriage and give their advice and blessing to bride and groom. The formalities of arranging marriages vary within communities, and the practice is beginning to disappear.

González writes to ensure that the tradition is written and can be passed on in the community memory.

The ritual is described in Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, in several published collections of oral tradition, and also in Ajcpajá Tum's *Ceremonia Maya*, which, rather than a narrative, is a transcription of the speeches of a spiritual guide specializing in the rituals of arranging marriages. In Tum's transcription, although the sequence of events is the same as in González' narrative, the speeches are all made by the guide rather than by the family members themselves, the responses are not recorded, and the ritual is considerably more formal and longer than the one in González' novel. In spite of this textual difference in voice and participation, we see similarities in the attitudes, in the apologies and expressions of respect, and in the bringing of gifts, and the same importance is given to counsel from the elders. In González's novel, as in the episode

with Lwin and his grandfather, the reader sees the ritual in context, with a full description of the events, dialogues, and characters, rather than the speech of the marriage broker alone. On the other hand, González's prose text does not reflect the full poetic rhetorical style, full of syntactical and lexical parallelism, of the speeches spoken by a specialized spiritual guide and recorded by Ajpajá Tum.

Such community life-cycle events in the novel illustrate traditional customs and the narratives used to maintain these traditions. Oral narrative also serves as a record of the history of the community and of the conditions in which they live. The novel includes references to mistrust between Mayas and Ladinos, police abuse, Mayan subsistence farming conditions, the need to earn money by working on coastal plantations and the conditions in these plantations, administrative corruption, land rights abuses, disparities between the Mayan and Ladino children in schools, and the alienation of the Mayas from the political system of their country.

Through these episodes, González's novel maintains the function of oral literature by narrating community traditions and providing testimony of contemporary living conditions, and also includes the context, voice and performance lacking in published transcriptions. González also inscribes orality through the extensive use of direct speech and by the use of Q'anjob'al vocabulary for culturally specific terms in the Spanish text.

The narrative is frequently dramatized by the use of dialogue in the novel. We read prayers and ritual speeches, counsel from the elders, and anecdotes, as well as casual conversations among Mayas and Ladinos. The contrast between Q'anjob'al and Spanish language use and terms of address is itself a theme – for example, Lwin greets his parents

in the traditional respectful way: “Bendígame mam, bendígame chikay” ‘Bless me father, bless me mother,’ to which they reply “Así sea, hijo” ‘So be it, son,’ but when he uses the same form to his new ladina school teacher, she is offended that he does not use the correct Spanish greeting, and expresses her disgust with “Indio bruto.” A brief conversation between a Maya woman and a Ladina woman in the market conveys directly the Ladina’s offensively patronizing attitude:

Estaba una maya vendiendo sus papas vendiendo sus verduras en la plaza; y una ladina le preguntó: “Cuánto valen tus papas, María?” “A veinte la libra, Marcela” contestó la vendedora. Inmediatamente la compradora aclaró “Yo no me llamo Marcela.” “Yo tampoco me llamo María, comadre” aclaró la otra. (González *Sb’eyb’al* 107)

There was a Maya woman selling her potatoes, selling her vegetables in the plaza, and a ladina asked her, “How much are your potatoes, María?” “Twenty a pound, Marcela,” replied the seller. Immediately the customer corrected her “My name is not Marcela.” “And neither is mine María, my dear.”¹⁹

Finally, orality is most clearly present in the use of Q’anjob’al vocabulary in the Spanish text, frequently in ways which emphasize the subaltern status of Q’anjob’al in Spanish-speaking society. Places and people are referred to by their Mayan names, but when Mekel goes to register Lwin’s birth, the Ladino official arbitrarily assigns him a Spanish name for official, legal purposes: Q’anjob’al is not an official language.

Ironically, Mekel himself carries a name borrowed from the Spanish: “Miguel.”

However, when Lwin enters school, he begins a process of “Castellanización”, school-based assimilation into the Spanish-speaking culture. His experiences are based on

¹⁹ “Comadre” in this context is the form of address that friends and acquaintances use to each other in a relationship of equality - which is the point that the Mayan woman wishes to make to the offensive Ladina woman who has patronizingly called her by a generic name.

Gaspar Pedro González' own school experiences, and the assimilationist policy described has been – and in practice, largely remains – that of the educational system in Guatemala.

Lwin is enrolled by the Spanish name on his birth certificate, Pedro Miguel, rather than by his Q'anjob'al name, Lwin Mekel, which has a profound effect on the child, parallel to the experience of Mekel, when he originally goes to register his son's name at birth, another example of the assimilationanist policy. On that occasion, when Mekel first hears the reading of the birth certificate, he is shocked by the sound of Spanish and affected by the sense that the Spanish version of his son's name is, in effect, an identity implant:

El secretario les leyó en la Castilla que cojeaba en los oídos de Mekel, aquel papel en donde quedó sembrado como su ombligo, el nombre de Lwin Mekel, convertido en Pedro Miguel para los blancos, como un eslabón más de los Lwines y Mekeles de Jolomk'u. (González *Sb'eyb'al* 25)

The secretary read to them in the Castilian which sounded distorted to Mekel's ears, that paper where the name of Lwin Mekel was buried like his umbilical cord, changed to Pedro Miguel for the whites, like another link in the chain of Lwines and Mekels of Jolomk'u

Pedro is a common Spanish name, arbitrarily chosen by the secretary. The name "Mekel," handed down from father to son, is a loan derived from Spanish "Miguel," as mentioned above, but adapted phonologically to Q'anjob'al. The secretary's act of reclaiming the original Spanish form of the name is a reminder that it was, after all, only a loan which must be repaid, and a further irony in the process of renaming the child in the parallel legal world in the language of the colonizer. Symbolically, the name "Miguel" can only be used – and written – in its "pure" form. This act of renaming is a

common aspect of colonial linguistic domination, and adds force to the argument that it is through written records that languages and cultures are preserved. It is also significant that in the area of Huehuetenango the system of name-changing was even more stringent than in other areas: in addition to the Spanish system of assigning saints' names, "people's patronymic first names were converted to surnames" so that some people appear to have no last name, because all their names are first names – as in Lwin Mekel/Pedro Miguel (Laura Martin, personal communication).

All municipal and legal processes are conducted in Spanish, so that Mayan peoples are either excluded from or required to adapt to the Spanish system. Moreover, Mekel compares the documentation of his son's Spanish name to the burial of his umbilical cord – a tradition at the birth of a child, to establish a physical and symbolic relationship between the child and the land, and to identify the child's place of origin. The irony for Mekel lies in the fact that instead of the observation of this tradition, his son's identity is metaphorically lost in a foreign place, the official paper. Such confrontations continue to occur in Guatemala and other countries with indigenous populations. In recent, related incidents reported in Mexico in 2007, a parent tried to register a son's indigenous name, and was advised to use "Alfred" instead, and relatives who attempted to register a new baby's name with the Hñahñu name "Doni Zänä" met with a refusal from authorities, because of the non-Spanish spelling – although officials suggested that the parents register the name without the diacritical markings. This, however, according to the father would change the meaning of "Doni Zänä" from 'flower of the world' to 'stone of death' ("A War of Names" 11-12).

For Lwin entering school for the first time, the imposition of his Spanish name represents the beginning of a personality split between two cultures and languages, and the need to learn a new code of behavior:

Este había sido el punto de partida – según recordaría él más adelante – para comenzar una doble personalidad, doble actitud, doble nombre, doble comportamiento: una forma ante su gente y la otra ante los ladinos

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That had been the starting point – as he would remember later – for the beginning of a double personality, double point of view, double name, double behavior: one kind before his people, and the other before the Ladinos.

Several anecdotes emphasize the cultural implications of this language and name change. When the teacher calls his name, Lwin does not respond, not remembering that this is his new name; when the child attempts to greet his teacher in the traditional Q'anjob'al way he has learned, he is ridiculed and punished, as mentioned above. He learns to say "Buenos días" and "Señorita" or "Seño"²⁰, but later he reflects on the dilemma of deciding what is right: his parents' way or his teacher's way? In a deeply conflictual way, he has to resolve the opposing standards of home and school. The Q'anjob'al text writes "wenos días" here, to emphasize the child's pronunciation of "Buenos", and the fact that Q'anjob'al does not have an equivalent phoneme /b/ (like other Maya languages.) Later, he addresses the teacher with the pronoun "vos", and is punished for not using the formal "usted."

²⁰ "Seño" is a commonly-used abbreviation for "Señora" and "Señorita"

¿Qué decís, indio estúpido? – replicó la maestro indignada. –A mí ningún indio me va a decir “vos”, porque no somos iguales, ni nos parecemos ¡Insolente, abusivo, grosero, igualdado! (González *S’beyb’al* 179)

“What did you say, you stupid Indian?” replied the indignant teacher. “No Indian is going to say “vos”²¹ to me, because we are not equal, and we are not alike. Insolent, abusive, disgusting, presumptuous!”

Paradoxically, the teacher, who herself addresses the child using the familiar, indeed, in this context, derogatory, “vos” form of the verb “decís” (“Qué decís” - literally, ‘what are you saying’) is unaware that she herself, in using it, would be considered less educated by some more formal Spanish linguistic communities where this form is no longer used. Language thus becomes the focal point for Lwin’s growing awareness of class, racial and educational differences during his school experience.²² In the Q’anjob’al text describing the school episodes, we see a number of Spanish loan-words written as they are pronounced by the Q’anjob’al speaker: “iskwela” from Spanish “escuela” ‘school’, “moso” from “mozo” ‘boy, man’, “liwro” from “libro” ‘book’, “kwarto” from “cuarto” ‘room’, for concepts borrowed from Spanish/Ladino culture, and which indicate that school and the educational process are an exclusively Spanish domain for which there is therefore no equivalent vocabulary in Q’anjob’al. The way in which the Q’anjob’al speaker’s pronunciation of the words is transcribed shows the phonological differences between the two languages, and which vowels and consonants are pronounced with a Q’anjob’al accent (vowels such as /i/ of escuela, lack of an equivalent

²¹ “vos” is the accepted Guatemalan second-person familiar pronoun. The teacher is offended and tells the child he should have used the formal “Usted.”

²² In a recent study by Susan Barrett, Mayan Sikapense speakers said that it was a common experience to be severely punished for speaking their native language at school.

/b/ in liwro). Socio-linguistic differences between the Q'anjob'al and the mestiza teacher are apparent in the voices of Mekel and the teacher when Mekel wants to know how his son is doing in school:

-Podés decirme, *nanita*, ¿cómo va mi muchacho en las letras?"

- Mirá mijo,..... ustedes los inditos, con poco tienen.....Es por demás mijo, es como perder pólvora en sanates.

"Can you tell me, *nanita*,²³ how is my son doing with his reading and writing?"

"Look son"²⁴,.....you Indians, you don't have much going for youIt's a waste of time, son, like wasting gunpowder on magpies."

The issues of culture clash and corresponding school difficulties are treated thematically – the child loses his appetite and his health suffers. As he adapts, his behavior deteriorates, he becomes less responsible, and in his schoolwork he suffers the consequences of poverty and inadequate educational support at home. The negative consequences of the assimilationist policy of Guatemalan schools is a central theme of González's thesis on language loss among Kaqchikel-speaking students in Guatemala, and the following commentary from a UNICEF article points out how widespread this negative school experience is among Mayan children:

²³ "Nanita" is the diminutive of the noun (woman) and classifier "nan" (in various phonological forms in several Mayan languages) for respected older women. It is used with personal names in reference and address, or alone for address. The diminutive is commonly used in Guatemala, and here it is simply a friendly but respectful form of address the child's father uses to address the female teacher.

²⁴ The Spanish "mijo" is a compression of "mi hijo" 'my son,' and expresses a superior, patronizing attitude towards Mekel.

Se sabe que por la aplicación permanente de la discriminación contra el indígena en la escuela y otros medios de socialización, el estudiante indígena termina su primaria, secundaria y universidad con una personalidad amputada o mutilada. (UNICEF 67)

It is known that through the continuous use of anti-indigenous discrimination in school and other means of socialization, the indigenous student completes his primary, secondary, and university education with an amputated or mutilated personality.

Waqi' Q'anil / Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil also comments that a study of self-esteem among Mayan children, carried out by UNICEF and the University of Texas in 1995, showed that children in primary grades accept without question the negative perception that Ladinos have of them (32).

Even though one of the goals of Lwin's parents in insisting that he attend school was that he avoid the problems that illiteracy had caused his father, Lwin's reading comprehension skills are too limited to help when he needs to read a legal document for his father. It is, however, significant, that after some years of school, his speech changes to a different register. Although we are not aware of the process of change, when he speaks with his friends or family, he now speaks with authority and the capacity to analyze his life and society. Indeed, he delivers a long monologue about the social conditions of the Mayas in Guatemala to his mother, which almost puts her to sleep. He asks himself at one point whether it is necessary to "ladinize" oneself in order to gain access to power and social change – and at this point his language is unlike any of the other voices in the novel, with a broad socio-political vocabulary, complex sentence structure and sustained paragraphs not present in the early part of the narrative. The

reader inevitably questions whether Lwin's skills are a result of, or a reaction against, his schooling and the negative concept of the "indio" which is a part of the "castellanización" program. One of his friends has continued his formal education, but Lwin, who has dropped out in order to remain in his community, depends on him to send him books so that he can continue his education independently.

This development in the life of Lwin is reflected in the language of the narrative. In the first part, code-switching throughout the text reminds the reader of the linguistic and cultural particularities of the Maya people. The reader of the Spanish version of the text enters the Q'anjob'al-speaking world through words such as "Mam Tyoxh"²⁵ 'Lord God', all the day names and numbers of the Mayan calendar "Trece Ajaw" 'One God', "Uno Imox", 'One Imox etc, the "ajtz'ib" 'writer' and "zahori" 'soothsayer' who are repeatedly consulted before any significant action is taken, "nawal" 'spirit', and the repeated use of "Mam" as a term of respect. The code-switching in González's text is selective, and emphasizes the lexicon of Mayan world vision and personal identity. The language is always self-reflective, emphasizing the differences between Q'anjob'al and Spanish, and the contrasting worlds they represent.

However, the language of the novel undergoes a change which reflects that of the consciousness and political maturation of Lwin. If we review briefly this process, we see that early in the novel, when Mekel registers his son's birth, Spanish is described as "la castilla que cojeaba en el oído" 'Spanish which clashed on the ear;' when Lwin reaches school age, after living in a Q'anjob'al-only environment, he goes to school, and undergoes the "castellanización" (systematic assimilation into Spanish) process of his

²⁵ "Tyoxh" is itself a borrowing from Spanish "Dios."

education; when he finishes elementary school, motivated by his rejection of Ladino culture and his determination to maintain his Q'anjob'al culture by staying in his community, Lwin obtains books (in Spanish) and studies independently. As he grows older he begins to speak in long, didactic monologues, which exhaust even his mother! It is unclear whether this tone is an interference of authorial voice, or whether in fact Lwin's voice reflects the oral style of a contemporary Mayan community leader. However, we see a parallel progression in the expressive style of the Meb'ixh in *Retorno de los Mayas* 'Return of the Mayas'.

Lwin continues to read and discuss politics with his friends, and rapidly becomes a community activist and leader. The novel shifts from its emphasis on community life, traditions and testimony to a series of monologues and dialogues on the social conditions of the Mayas, and the last part of the text has a completely different tone, with no more code-switching and no more oral narratives. In effect, literacy has taken over from orality:

La alfabetización de un estado de alienación e instrumento de explotación pasó a ser un instrumento de progreso de los campesinos, quienes caminaron por la vía de las letras hacia su propio encuentro.” (González *Sb'eyb'al* 381)

Literacy has developed from a state of alienation and instrument of exploitation into a means of progress for peasants, who traveled the road of letters towards self-awareness.

It is clear at the end of the novel that education and literacy are key factors in achieving progress and socio-economic parity for the Mayas, although the conclusion is more utopian than realistically convincing. It is not clear whether the oral literature

tradition from which the novel draws its inspiration has disappeared in the new fictional progressive society, and in the shift from testimonial novel to documentary fiction of political change, the preservation of cultural values and world-vision is assumed rather than explicit. The text at this point has shifted from aesthetic to didactic, and certainly we can claim that this too is an influence of oral tradition; the speeches of Lwin to his companions echo the “awases” - traditional oral counsels given by elders to youth, and the narrative here mixes fiction and political commentary.

My conclusion is that for Gaspar Pedro González, as an educator, activist and writer, the preservation of culture must go hand-in-hand with progress and integration into modern society; literacy therefore must be used to ensure that oral traditions are maintained and should build upon the foundation of a well-developed oral culture. His novel sets the precedent for a mixed genre of fiction, testimonial, and documentary, which draws extensively on oral literature and orality, and foregrounds Mayan Q'anjob'al language and culture in plot, character, style and language. At present, it stands alone among written works (poetry, testimonials, short stories, and essays), and oral literature (published in written transcriptions) published by Mayan authors in Mayan languages.

El Retorno de los Mayas

The theme of name and identity loss, seen in Lwin's change of name to a Spanish name when his father goes to register his son's birth, reappears more powerfully in *Retorno de los Mayas*, in which the main character is known only as “Mebixh” ‘the orphan’. Since he is orphaned at an early age, and then grows up as an exile in Mexico,

far from his homeland and native language environment, he retains the ability to speak the Q'anjob'al he learned as a young boy, but does not know his Q'anjob'al language name. He was born on *Lajun Kixkab'*, the Mayan calendar date Ten Earthquake (discussed earlier in this chapter), and should have been named for this day, but was given a different name because the traditional custom was displaced by the colonial imposition of Christian saints' names. Having forgotten this name, he acquires a new, general name *Pablo del pueblo* 'Paul of the town,' and when he eventually returns from exile to his hometown, hopes to find the grave he remembers of his grandfather, whose name he knows he was given. However, the cemetery has since been demolished to make room for urban development, and he remains nameless. He is eventually reunited by chance with his sister, who was a baby at the time of their mother's death, and who was cared for by an older woman among the refugees. Since the *Meb'ixh* lost contact with this woman shortly after arriving at the refugee camp in Mexico, he has no idea what has happened to his sister and the two of them have a moving re-encounter during which they identify themselves and narrate what has happened to them in the intervening years. He now learns that she does not speak Q'anjob'al or have a Q'anjob'al name. After being raised in exile in Mexico, she has married a Mexican and returned to find the village of her parents, even though she knows even less about the identity she has lost than does the brother she now rediscovers.

This incident is foreshadowed in *Sb'eyb'al*, when Lwin and his mother observe a brother and sister who return briefly to the family village. They had originally left with their parents to work on a coastal plantation, at the same time as Mekel, Lwin's father, but after the death of four siblings and their parents, they now live in the city.

Consequently, they have lost the Q'anjob'al language and culture, and have assimilated to Ladino language and culture. Lotaxh and Lwin discuss the implications of this loss, and the risks to their community of the erosion of the ethnolinguistic group. In *Retorno*, this theme – a common theme of exile literature - is developed fully.

Loss of name, language and personal identity are the most poignant themes in this work. They are predominant themes in much contemporary Mayan literature written since the years of violence and exile in the last part of the twentieth century, and a major concern of the language revitalization movement. Melvyn Lewis quotes Joshua Fishman's 1991 work, *Reversing Language Shift*, on the physical, demographic and social factors in language shift: "At the ethnocultural level one of the major physical threats to intergenerational language-in-culture continuity is population transfer and voluntary or involuntary out-migration" (Fishman 57, quoted by Lewis 69). Lewis points out that such population transfer can be brought about through warfare and genocide, as well as "economic pressures brought about by industrialization and modernization" (ibid). He quotes Fishman again: "Cultures are dependent on familiar and traditional places and products, as much as they are on familiar co-participants and on an established consensus among them as to cultural values, norms and processes" (Lewis 69). González's writing shows an acute awareness of these factors and how they have affected his own Q'anjob'al community. Whereas in *S'beyb'al* we see the emergence of the character of Lwin, concluding in the effort to create an ideal society, in *Retorno*, we are confronted with the successive losses suffered by the Meb'ixh, both as an individual and as a member of the exile community, and the novel concludes with his account of the effort to re-construct a

just and equitable society to replace that which has been destroyed, even though nothing remains of the pre-exile community.

The fact that this work is not written in Q'anjob'al, but only in Spanish, itself reflects the cultural loss and urgency for Mayan revival, which is the theme of this work, and also represents González's personal reluctance to write this work in Q'anjob'al, because, as mentioned earlier, such painful experiences would desecrate the language. (Personal Communication). Moreover, at another level, it points to the functional role that Spanish plays in communication among the Mayan exiles in Mexico, who come from different, mutually unintelligible language groups, and for whom Spanish becomes a lingua franca. Nonetheless, the author's Q'anjob'al voice is present in the oral narrative style, in his references to Mayan culture, in his explanation of the Mayan calendar and use of the calendar dates to mark the days of the journey into exile, and in the use of Q'anjob'al vocabulary and occasional conversations. Unlike that of *Sb'eyb'al*, the plot does not include community life-cycle events, nor is there an extensive cast of characters: the community rituals described before and during the journey to exile (visiting the family graves, praying together, counsels from the elders) give way to observations about loss of traditions in exile (traditional clothing, language, foods, modes of behavior.) The novel focuses almost exclusively on the first-person narrator, his experiences of alienation and efforts at recovery. The first sentence is "Yo vengo de allá" 'I come from there' and ends with the signature "Meb'ixh" 'Orphan'.

The first pages of the novel incorporate the repetition typical of Mayan rhetorical style: the narrator seeks the traces of his ancestors "en la cara de la piedra, en la cara del barro, en la cara de los hombres" 'on the face of the rock, on the face of the mud, on the

faces of men' and again in the series of phrases beginning "Quisiera contarles..." 'I would like to tell you...', as he alludes to a series of topics he would like to, but cannot, talk about. This formulaic repetition is a particular characteristic of oral narrative, and González includes a reference to orality here in a line evocative of his poem, analyzed earlier, "Q'anej / La Palabra": "Cómo no quisiera llevarles retazos de leyendas, mitos de mi mundo archivados en la punta de las lenguas de mi oralidad" 'How much I would like to bring you fragments of legends, fables, myths from my worlds, preserved on the tip of the tongues of my orality' (*Retorno 2*).

This consciousness of the reader on the part of the narrator and his direct address to him/her immediately establishes an intimate relationship and the illusion that the narrator is in effect speaking his thoughts directly to his personal audience. The tone throughout is oral, and the narrator invariably accompanies his narration with an explanation of why it is necessary and significant for him to tell his story in this particular style. Dramatic moments are narrated in the present, reliving them for narrator and reader/listener, because "así hablamos en q'anjob'al" 'that's how we talk in Q'anjob'al', and the *Mebixh* reminds his reader that the conversations he refers to were all in Q'anjob'al.

The Mayan calendar is the topic of a long explanation in the first part of the novel, and is also used to mark the days of the journey to exile. Decisions about the journey are made by the elders according to propitious days of the calendar, and the same is true at the end of the book, when the newly-formed community is planning their reconstruction efforts. The *Meb'ixh*, pointing out that the Roman calendar imposed on him in school was devoid of any meaning for him, explains the significance of understanding

and respecting the functions of the *Heb' Komam Ora*, the Year Bearers who control the whole system of human life under the control of the supreme God, *Ajaw*. This system incorporates both the dimension of time, through the calendar, and also represents space in nature, in that each of the *Heb' Komam Ora* is a deification of an element of nature such as birds, the earth, animals, etc. For example, Eight *Lamb'at* 'yellow', color of the East, one of the cardinal points, is the day chosen for leaving the village, because *Lamb'at* helps and protects those in danger. Symbolically, it is on the day dedicated to the supreme deity, Seven *Ajaw*, that the villagers escape from Guatemala across the border to safety in Mexico twelve days later. The use of the calendar glyphs as well as the written transcription of the dates in both Q'anjob'al and Spanish at the beginning of each day's journal are a further visual reminder of the long history of Mayan calendrics.

Q'anjob'al terms relating to the calendar are those which appear most frequently throughout the text. There is extensive use of Q'anjob'al vocabulary in the lengthy passages in which the *Meb'ixh* recalls rituals, prayers, and the Mayan calendar. In this work, rather than borrowings and code-switching, we find explicit references to Q'anjob'al terms written in italics, frequently preceded or followed immediately by a translation or explanation in Spanish for example: "Yo nací en un *Lajun Kixhab'*, Diez Terremoto" (*Retorno* 27) 'I was born on a *Lajun Kixhab'*, Ten Earthquake'. This process, in much the same way as footnotes or a glossary, foregrounds the didactic purpose of the work, and may diminish the aesthetic impact of the reading for some readers. However, it also suggests that the narrator knows his audience, and is giving a helping hand to ensure better comprehension. González leaves the reader in no doubt that the purpose of the text is twofold: on one hand, to give testimony to a reader who would otherwise not know

about the experience of war and exile, and the accompanying cultural loss, and on the other hand, to verbalize the experiences for those who survived them, so as to provide a document which by testifying on their behalf provides a means of coming to terms with reality and reclaiming their psychological and cultural losses.

The Q'anjob'al vocabulary incorporated into this work falls into three broad categories: first, references to the Mayan world view, primarily the calendar and religious beliefs; second, brief conversations; and third, a variety of onomatopoeic exclamations.

The first and largest category includes references to the names of the Year Bearers, terms for specific numbers, dates and periods of time ("q'inal" 'time', "k'u" 'day', "k'atun" 'period of twenty years', etc), and names of spiritual leaders, such as "Ajtxum" 'diviner, soothsayer', and other terms related to religion. The conversations the *Meb'ixh* recalls are simple greetings, and interjections, such as "¡manchaj jach oq', txutx!" 'Don't cry, child'. Perhaps the most impact comes from the onomatopoeic expressions at moments of violence – "Poch, t'eb, tx'en tiq'" (13) are the sounds of the soldiers beating to death the narrator's father, "t'in, y, cha" (87) – the sounds of bombs falling nearby, and "ch'olololll" (45) – the stomach rumbling of the hungry child. These expressions fulfill two purposes: on one hand, they are didactic, and followed by explanations of memories and aspects of culture for which the exiled narrator feels anguish, nostalgia and regret; on the other hand, they convey, in an oral narrative such as this, a powerful sense of the phonological presence and corresponding warmth of the mother tongue.

Whereas in the poems, code-switching may fulfill an aesthetic function, and in *S'beyb'al*, the reader is obliged to imagine him/herself, frequently with a sense of

intentional alienation, in the situation where a Q'anjob'al word is interjected, in the case of *Retorno*, the Q'anjob'al terms, accompanied as they are by translations, are an integral part of an implicit dialogue between narrator and audience. The fictional testimonio of escape, exile and return is an opportunity for an individual to narrate his life, losses and longings, but, even more convincingly, to convey in this intimate conversation how important it is that the audience/reader should receive this message. The narrator directly addresses the reader/audience, as if he were speaking directly to him/her, and frequently explains himself as if answering anticipated questions or clarifying obscure points. This narrative voice and implicitly dialogic style is the aspect of orality which is most powerful in *Retorno*.

In Gonzalez's most recent novel, *13 B'Aktun*, he builds further on the dialogic oral style of *Retorno* by using two different narrative voices: in some chapters, a father speaks to his son, and the reader overhears their dialogue and follows their journey; in other chapters the narrator / father addresses the reader directly and speaks in the first person. In both cases, the plot is developed through either dialogue or monologue and the reader is asked to observe closely and appreciate the significance of events. The theme of the novel is the date in the Mayan Long Count calendar date, "13 B'aktun", which is 12.12.2001, which marks the end of an era, and has been the subject of a number of books and articles, including many New Age predictions. For González, the theme is that of man's destruction of his world, and the search for redemption and recovery, explored through the medium of a father-son dialogue and learning experience. In this sense, González is referring once again to his premise that written literature is based on oral narrative, and employs a kind of double-voicing or mirroring in his use of the

father's voice as counselor to his son and narrator to the reader. This narrative voice also represents the increasingly intimate author-reader relationship whereby González seeks to educate and persuade his reader. We see here, however, a shift from a focus on content from Mayan culture – from the social and spiritual beliefs described in *Sbeyb'al* and *Retorno* to the inclusion of ideas of western writers who have written on topics related to the physical nature of the universe, environment, and its potential destruction. Just as Lwin, by the end of *Sb'eyb'al* has integrated his readings from the Ladino world with the practices of the Mayan community and incorporated them into the development of a new Mayan social organization, so in *13 B'aktun* we find a synthesis of Mayan and western beliefs.

Chapter 6

Victor Montejo: Jakaltek writer, anthropologist and politician

Victor Montejo, a Jakaltek¹ Maya who was forced into exile during the Guatemalan armed conflict of 1954-1996, represents a growing number of Mayas who left their communities, became educated professionals, and now support the Mayan revitalization movement through their writing and political activities. He completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology in the United States, and he has published testimonials, stories based on oral tradition, essays, short stories, poetry, and anthropological research, and has a teaching position at the University of California, Davis. He also taught at the Universidad del Valle in Guatemala in 2003, while holding a Fulbright Research Fellowship. In addition to his academic work, Montejo was elected to the Guatemalan Congress in 2004, where he held the position of Secretary for Peace for a year, and ran unsuccessfully for the Guatemalan Congress in the 2007 elections.

As an anthropologist Montejo is acutely aware that he is both the subject and the object of his critical writing; in his transcriptions of both oral tradition and of testimonies his personal background gives him an unmediated access to and understanding of the

¹ There is inconsistency in the use of names and their spelling for this linguistic community, referred to as the *Jakalteka* (*Poptí*) community by the Academia de Idiomas Mayas de Guatemala. The name *Jakalteka* comes from the name of the main town, Jacaltenango (Nahuatl name), although the area is also known as the *Huista Region*, from the Popb'al Ti' "wuxtaj" (brother). *Jakaltek* is also written *Jacalteco* and *Jakaltec* in English. In Spanish it is written *Jacalteco* or *Jakalteco*. I use the first of each of these spellings. Similarly, for the spelling of the Jakaltek language, I have adopted *Popb'al Ti'*, as used by Montejo, although the ALMG uses *Jakalteka* on its website listing of Maya languages, and *Popti'* in its 2005 official Grammar and Dictionary. It is also common to refer to the language as *Jakalteco*. All these different terms and spellings are commonly used, often within the same text. Similar inconsistencies exist for other Mayan languages.

materials; as a political leader he emphasizes the need for both Ladinos (mestizos) and Mayas to redefine their identities and their relationships with each other in order to reconstruct a pluricultural nation. The goal of his writing is to revitalize Mayan creativity, to denounce the anti-Maya violence of the armed conflict period, to promote Pan-Maya consciousness, and to advocate Mayan self-representation. In this chapter I analyze the progression and shifts in Montejo's self-representation in his literary work, and show how his selection of subject and genre, language(s), voice, and style reflects his unique, hybrid status: a bilingual, indigenous writer and academic, who writes both for and about mestizo and indigenous cultures in Guatemala in the current, post-conflict "Maya Renaissance" period.

A comment by Walter Mignolo aptly prefaces my remarks about the complex identity of Montejo's voice as a writer:

Cultures of scholarship...could make of hybridity an interesting topic of study, but the discourse reporting cannot be a hybrid itself! You cannot, for example, be a sociologist and publish an article in a prestige and refereed sociological journal or any other discipline for that matter) and write like Anzaldúa wrote *Borderlands/La Frontera*. "Indigenous sociology", for instance, would most likely be written in English but not in an "Indigenous" Language. (*Local Histories* 222)

In Montejo's case, there is a clear difference in style in each of the genres he uses, and Mignolo's remark is most pertinent to the author's most recent work. As a politician since his election in 2004, Montejo explains that academic research has enabled him to contribute to the Maya cause: "Desde lo académico creo que se puede dar más aporte porque uno tiene el aspecto comparativo de la cultura" 'With an academic background I believe one can contribute more because one has a comparative understanding of culture

Martínez 2'. With this in mind, his political writings are in English or Spanish, depending on the intended audience for his message. As an anthropologist, he writes about Jakaltek Mayan culture in Guatemala in English for an English-speaking audience or in Spanish for a Spanish-speaking audience.

In 1997, Montejo translated *The Year Bearer's People*, from English into Spanish. This work, published in 1931 in English by Oliver La Farge, from Tulane University, is an ethnography which documents a Jakaltek ceremony honoring the four gods who each protected a part of the year. Montejo's motivation in translating La Farge's book was to keep alive the memory of the ceremony of the Year Bearer after it was banned by the government in 1944 and to repatriate this knowledge and also the lengthy descriptions of the Jakaltek customs and traditions included in the book, to the community. He points out that La Farge and other foreign researchers in Guatemala publish their research in foreign languages in foreign countries. Their research remains in foreign libraries – like this one, at Tulane University- without giving the communities where they have conducted their research the benefit of their results. (Montejo *Voices from exile* 102).

Montejo also criticizes La Farge for using deceitful and unethical methods to extract secret information from villagers, by using his prestige and power as a foreign ethnographer supported by local authorities, even though he acknowledges that La Farge also tried to advocate in support of the human rights struggle of the community ("The Year Bearer's People: a repatriation of ethnographic and sacred knowledge to the Jakaltek Maya of Guatemala" 9). In the same article, Montejo suggests that the short 3-month period during which LaFarge collected data, without learning the Popb'al Ti' language, produced valuable raw material, but also many errors (12). Montejo's

criticisms suggest a high ethical standard for academic research, and it is therefore paradoxical that, in reclaiming this text for the Popb'al Ti' people, he does not translate it into their language, regardless of the Popb'al Ti' literacy rate. Moreover, Montejo's translation does not credit his co-translator, Oscar Velázquez Estrada.

Montejo later wrote a short novel, *Las Aventuras de Mister Puttison* "The Adventures of Mister Puttison", which satirizes the character of Oliver LaFarge as the well-meaning but culturally inept Mister Puttison who, despite his apparent eagerness to learn about the Maya community which accepts him, is finally revealed as yet another opportunistic gringo.

Montejo's testimonial work is written exclusively in Spanish, and is available in English translations, but not, as far as I am aware, in the Jakalteek language, Popb'al Ti'. His stories based on oral tradition and poetry are published in multi-lingual editions, including Popb'al Ti', with extensive explanatory notes, but with conspicuously monolingual non-Popb'al Ti' introductions.

Clearly these language choices are in part driven by political considerations, by the inter-related factors of education, indigenous-language literacy, and the print economy in Guatemala, and by access to publishing and an audience in the United States.² The monolingual language and monoglossic formal style of Montejo's research and political writing are largely a function of his self-identification as a North American anthropologist and academic. Thus, in this work he conforms to the prevailing culture of scholarship by adopting an analytical prose style, which is reflected in a consistently

² There is a lack of indigenous and academic publishing houses through which writers like Montejo can express themselves freely (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 159).

formal register and an absence of code-switching or borrowings. By comparison, Doris Sommer refers to Rigoberta Menchú's choice of Spanish in her work as a conscious choice of the language which will be most effective in getting her point across to a wider audience, but also warns that

One paradox that Rigoberta must negotiate in her politics of cultural preservation is the possibility of becoming the enemy because she needs Spanish as the national lingua franca in a country of twenty-two ethnic groups. It is the only language that can make her an effective leader of the CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina), a heterogeneous coalition of peasants and workers. (*Shared Secrets* 141)

The question of language choice is thus fraught with tension, given the uneasy relationship between ethnic groups and the notion that an indigenous person who uses Spanish has become "ladinized." One obvious risk of this politically-determined language choice is the possibility of identity-confusion - Sommer notes that Rigoberta uses the third-person possessive 'their' instead of "our" when referring to her community – and suggests that when she speaks Spanish Rigoberta identifies linguistically with her audience (Ibid. 142). I will return to this topic in my discussion of Montejo's *Testimonio*.

In another comparison, Mignolo points out that while Gloria Anzaldúa and Edouard Glissant both incorporate two languages (English/Spanish, Creole/French) into their discussions of border cultures, anthropologist Nestor García Canclini discusses the hybridity of Tijuana without using a hybrid discourse (Mignolo 223). Montejo's voice shifts slightly when writing first-person testimony, but in general his language, both Spanish and English, remains stylistically "pure" except when he translates transcriptions of oral tradition. As Mignolo would ironically point out in his comment on academic writing, "disciplinary language should be as pure as the blood of early Christians in

Spain.” (222). Montejo explains his authorial position in a number of his works. In 1998, he states, of his development as a writer, “I myself have tried to write both culturally and politically” (“The stones will speak again” 203) and later, in 2005, he emphasizes his political motivation:

I can see the multiple ways in which I can contribute to the auto-representation of my people. I have been writing testimonial literature to denounce the injustices perpetrated against the Maya. I have also engaged in creative writing, including the writing of children’s books, because the negative stereotypes about the Maya must be destroyed at an early age. (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 62)

Montejo presents himself as a witness of and an advocate for the survival of the cultural identity and literary production of the Jakaltek Maya; he writes for an audience which is less the Jakaltek community itself than the hegemonic society (Spanish- and English-speaking). The ontological status of the writer/speaker in his writing, a status which he reiterates and reconstructs in prefaces and introductions to successive works, is consistently that of a researcher who is a socially committed witness, with both a personal cultural identification and at the same time the detachment of an observer, whether transcribing oral tradition, writing testimonial literature, re-writing texts for children, or critiquing the socio-political situation of contemporary Maya. The notion of literary or personal hybridity is marginal for Montejo: he seeks to educate his audience about Jakaltek culture, and to promote Maya rights, therefore limiting the use of a hybrid style and language to only some of his early literary works, and then always adding explanatory footnotes.

In order to expand on this perspective, and examine Montejo’s identity as a writer, in this chapter I first explain Montejo’s personal and educational background, and

then discuss his literary work: poetry, fables, and works in the testimonio genre. I do not discuss his political and anthropological writing, except insofar as it sheds light on his literary work. I use the most recent editions of Montejo's works, but it is significant to note that many have been published in successive years by a variety of different publishers. *Testimonio* and *Oxlanh B'aqtun* are, to my knowledge, the only works published in Guatemala, and none of his works has been published by Cholsamaj, which was founded and is owned and operated by Mayas, and is the largest Guatemalan publisher of Mayan writing. Yax Te' Foundation has published several of the Spanish / English / Popb'al Ti' editions.³

Personal and educational background

Montejo was born in 1951⁴ in Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango, in the Jakalteq region of the Cuchumatán mountains in northwestern Guatemala. He attended the recently established Maryknoll missionary primary boarding school in Jacaltenango, where, like Gaspar Pedro González, he was immersed in Spanish. He then received a scholarship to study for three years in a seminary in Sololá, even further away from home. He describes the conflictual cultural/linguistic experience of studying in Spanish in school, and then returning to his home, where he would listen to stories narrated in Popb'al Ti' by the people around him.⁵ As he grew, he became conscious of the literary value of these stories, particularly as he began to see analogies to texts he studied in world literature.

³ See the list of Montejo's works in the bibliography.

⁴ The Yax Te' edition of *Q'anil :el hombre rayo* lists Montejo's birthdate as 1951; the Curbstone Press edition of *Sculpted Stones* lists it as 1952.

⁵ Montejo 1998:198

In 1969, Montejo received a scholarship to go to the Instituto Indígena Santiago in Antigua, in order to train as a primary-school teacher. He began to have dreams predicting that he would become a writer, which, as a Maya, he took seriously as a vision of the future. At this time, he wrote his first story, based on a story his mother had told him about his grandfather's spiritual experiences, and tried unsuccessfully to publish it. His teacher praised the quality of the writing, but criticized its "Hindu" aspects. Since Montejo did not know at this time what "Hindu" was, but had simply written the story narrated by his mother, this later exemplified for him the cultural divide between Ladino and Maya cultural understanding. The printing required a payment which he could not afford, and so the story remained unpublished – a problem which continues to plague and limit the publishing of Mayan writers today.⁶ Following this, he began to work on the transcription of a well-known Jakalteek legend, *El Q'anil*, which was first published in 1982, shortly after Montejo left Guatemala.

In 1998, Montejo wrote about his early experience as a writer:

I realized that Mayan culture was very rich, but unfortunately no Mayans were writing for their own people. I began to think about my Mayan heritage and decided to write stories and legends that were fading from the oral tradition.

It was necessary to document the oral histories of the Mayan people in order to secure a place for ourselves in the modern world, which was strongly assimilating younger generations of Mayans. Although I already had the bad experience of not finding a publisher for my work, I insisted on writing for the sake of preserving and promoting the Mayan culture. ("The stones will speak again" 202)

⁶ This is a strong reason for supporting Creative Commons, the international internet publishing organization, which is scheduled to open in Guatemala in 2008.

Montejo's repeatedly-expressed motivation is to promote Jakaltek culture in the wider community by preserving it in writing, as well as by writing about it, rather than to give voice to a personal muse, or to write only for Jakaltek readers.⁷ "It was not my desire to become a popular writer that moved me to write; it was my desire to speak and leave a written legacy for new generations to come" (Ibid.) As mentioned before, the assumption here is that this legacy will be read in Spanish. Montejo does not address issues of Popb'al Ti' (or other Mayan language) literacy, nor does he discuss the discrepancies between Popb'al Ti' and Spanish linguistic expression.

Following his teacher-training program, Montejo taught from 1972-82 in a school in the village of Tzibaj, Jacaltenango, in the Cuchumatán mountains, a period of his life that he described under a pseudonym in his *Testimonio*. Following the outbreak of violence in the 1980s, his brother was assassinated, and in September 1982, when the army entered the village, Montejo experienced the events described in his *Testimonio*. Fearing he would be kidnapped, he left for the United States in November 1982, where he was helped by Wallace Kaufman,⁸ who later translated and wrote the introduction to the 1991 edition of *El Q'anil*. Following some time spent in Mexican camps for Guatemalan refugees, Montejo was able to leave in order to study in the United States. He studied at Bucknell University, received his M.A. at the State University of New York at Albany, and his Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of Connecticut in 1993, and

⁷ The 1994 census lists 26,951 registered inhabitants in Jakaltenango, of whom 26,041 are indigenous, and 9,178 are literate (Montejo 2000:41) This does not take into account members of more remote communities in the Jakaltek region, where the literacy rate is likely lower.

⁸ Kaufman was a chance acquaintance of Montejo's brother, with whom Montejo kept in contact after his brother's assassination.

then became a professor in the Department of Native Studies at the University of California, Davis.

In the Guatemalan elections of 2004 Montejo ran for political office in Guatemala. He was elected to the new government as a deputy representing the center-right Gran Alianza Nacional party, and President Oscar Berger appointed him to be Secretary for Peace, a cabinet office established to carry out the mandates of the 1996 Peace Accords. These included both indigenous community support and promotion of a culture of peace and restitution following the armed conflicts of 1954-2006. However, after taking office, Montejo refused to participate in the restitution payments to ex-community patrols because he judged this should not be the mission of the Secretariat for Peace (Martínez 1). He was widely criticized for this because he himself had been a member of a civil patrol, and it was unclear how he could reconcile his political position with his past actions. However, he explained in an interview that he had had to patrol in order to avoid being killed but had always opposed the formation of the patrols (Martínez 1). In April 2005, Montejo resigned from his position as Secretary for Peace and from his party, on the grounds that the government gave insufficient support to indigenous programs. He joined the party of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), within which he directed the Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas. In May 2007, he threatened to resign after the UNE presidential candidate failed to attend a recent Consejo assembly, claiming that the party was ignoring its indigenous platform (Victor Montejo dejaría la UNE).

In keeping with the focus of my research on diglossia and bilanguaging in the literary works by bilingual authors, my analysis of the literary work of Montejo is based

on two works based on oral tradition, *Q'anil, el hombre rayo* / *Komam Q'anil: ya' k'uh winaj* / *Man of Lightning*, an epic narrative in poem form, and *El pájaro que limpia el mundo y otras fábulas mayas* / *No' ch'ik xtx'ahtx'en sat yib'anh q'inal* “The Bird who Cleans the World”, a book of fables; and two testimonial works, *Testimonio: muerte de una comunidad indígena en Guatemala* “Testimony: Death of an Indigenous Community in Guatemala” and, co-authored by Q'anil Akab', *Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del mayab' (Guatemala)* “A Very Short Testimonial Account of the Continuing Destruction of the Maya Land (Guatemala)”.⁹ I am particularly interested in assessing the interplay in these works of authorial voice, language use and literary form as a function of the content and the intended audience.

Q'anil, el hombre rayo.

Komam Q'anil: ya' k'uh winaj

Montejo states that *Q'anil, el hombre rayo* / *Komam Q'anil: ya' k'uh winaj* is the oldest and best-known legend of the Jakalteek people, and that every child grows up hearing the story of the epic hero Xhuwan Q'anil. “Jakalteks are also called *k'uh winaj* (Men of Lightning), because the legend says that a Man of Lightning exists in each and every Jakalteek” (*Q'anil* 89.) Fundamental to an understanding of the legend is the local belief that the mountains surrounding Jakaltenango are personified by twenty god-like *k'uh*, protectors with the power to create lightning and other natural phenomena.

Montejo's poetic version was first published in English translation as *El Q'anil: The Man of Lightning* by Curbstone Press in 1982 and 1984, shortly after Montejo's

⁹ Montejo's articles and other, non-literary works are used as references, but are not the subject of my analysis.

departure from Guatemala. Later editions are bi- and tri-lingual, and show specific aspects of bilanguaging within the text more frequently than other works by the author. Each edition approaches the bi/tri-lingual text formatting in different ways: in the bilingual Yax Te' edition of 1999, the two languages are on facing pages, with the Popb'al Ti' text first, on the left, and the Spanish second. All page numbers are given in Maya and Arabic numerals, and poem sections are headed by Maya numerals. In the 2001 tri-lingual text published by University of Arizona Press, each language version is separate (English, followed by Spanish, followed by Popb'al Ti'); numerals are all Arabic; and the introduction and notes are all in English only (translated from the 1999 edition). The cover illustration is identical to that in the Yax Te' edition, but the glyph illustrations and maps from the Yax Te' edition are absent in the University of Arizona Press edition.

These differences in presentation may be an editorial, rather than an authorial decision, and reflect differences in approach to foregrounding the Jakalteek culture. What is clear, however, is that the target audience is not the Popb'al Ti'-speaking Jakalteek community itself. The presence of the Popb'al Ti' text, and the linguistic and stylistic bilanguaging are rather presented for the benefit of the outsider. Montejo points out in a 2000 study of Jakaltenango that, according to a 1994 census, the population was 26,951, of whom only 9,178 were literate. Literacy was taught only in Spanish, 1,200 children completed middle school, and only 141 completed high school.¹⁰ We can deduce that the Popb'al Ti' reading population was minimal in 2000, and I am not aware of any more recent assessments. Writing in Popb'al Ti' is a political statement rather than a

¹⁰ See "Relaciones Interétnicas en Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango de 1944-2000."

contribution to a body of written works already in existence or to meet a demand for written texts, and therefore most of Montejo's work is written in Spanish and/or English in order to reach a literate audience and have an impact. Montejo himself states that, at least during his years of exile, he wrote for an American audience:

As a Mayan writer dealing with the cultural and political situation in my country, I feel more secure writing from exile, although my writing may not be widely known among the Mayan people themselves. One of the major burdens I have to bear is not having the opportunity to write in the Mayan language for a Mayan audience. I feel, however, that I am bringing some consciousness to the American population on behalf of the Mayan people. ("The Stones Will Speak Again" 215-6)

Clearly, Montejo's purpose is primarily to raise awareness of conditions in Guatemala, and certainly, during his years of exile, he had no opportunity to ensure that his writing would reach a Mayan audience, literate or not.

In my analysis of *Q'anil* I focus on the integration of Popb'al Ti' vocabulary and style into the Spanish text, and I examine certain cultural/linguistic particularities.¹¹ I hope that in the future a comparative textual study will be undertaken by a bilingual Popb'al Ti'/Spanish speaker, one which will assess and interpret the (a)symmetries between the texts in the two languages. I will mention some differences between the texts in the two languages, but I am acutely aware of my limited knowledge of Popb'al Ti'. At this point, it is worth highlighting a striking asymmetry in the title on the Yax Te' edition cover of *Q'anil, el hombre rayo / Komam Q'anil: ya' k'uh winaj*. In Popb'al Ti' the name "Q'anil" is preceded by the honorific "Komam," a personal classifier for persons to

¹¹ I will discuss the issue of hybridity with reference to Montejo's later work published in Spanish or English only.

whom respect is due,¹² but there is no equivalent in the Spanish title. Interestingly, the title of the later tri-lingual edition has an English title with the article “El” before “Q’anil” : *El Q’anil Man of Lightning* (published 2001) giving the impression that “Q’anil” is itself an honorific, as in the epic poem “El Cid,” rather than a proper name. The preface and introduction in the Yax Te’ edition also use the definite article, and refer to the poem as “El Q’anil,” and these inconsistencies lead to some questions about the meaning of the word “Q’anil.” Montejo points out that the word refers to a “yellow power or emanation” (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 143) and according to the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, Q’anil is the name of the sacred mountain near Jacaltenango, and also is one of the twenty days of the Mayan calendar, meaning seed, the beginning or germination of something. Community elders believe that the mountain Q’anil became a ceremonial site because of the legend El Q’anil, and was an astrological observation site, from which solstices and equinoxes could be predicted. It is a location where people gather to ask for divine protection and to carry out a special ceremony for the Maya New Year (“Comunidad Lingüística Jakalteka (Poptí)”).

In his introduction to this work, Montejo explains that as a child he was familiar with versions of the Q’anil legend. Then, after studying to become a teacher (1970-1972) and returning to teach in his home region, he began seriously listening to stories based on the legend. Concerned about the political turmoil and escalating violence during the 1970s, and fearing that the Jakaltek culture was at increasing risk of being destroyed, he decided to record “the different short and incomplete versions that the elders began to relate” (*El Q’anil* xxviii) in order to preserve the legend in writing, and to show that the

¹² Christopher Day, writing about the semantics of social categories, refers to the use of person classifiers in Jakaltec, including the ultra respectful “komam” used for deities and in addressing priests (Edmunson 90).

Jakaltek culture had its own masterpiece which would otherwise go unknown. Q'anil was again being invoked for protection by community members, and the fact that the legend had contemporary relevance made its preservation in writing critical. The text establishes an analogy between the armed conflict of the 1980s and the Spanish conquest – in both cases it establishes an asymmetric relationship between the Mayan subject and the “white man” who has come to take his land (Arias, *Taking their word* 432).

The poem is an amalgam of several versions narrated by different story-tellers and transcribed by Montejo, but he credits Anton Luk, a story-teller and healer,¹³ with the major part, and dedicates the 1999 Yax Te' edition to him, “el anciano y amigo que me enseñó a valorar y a revitalizar mi herencia cultural Maya (Jakalteka)” ‘the elder and friend who taught me to value and revitalize my (Jakaltek) Mayan Cultural Heritage.’ As an anthropologist himself, Montejo is aware that much of the Mayan literature published during the twentieth century (prayers, myths, legends, fables) was “dictated to anthropologists by elders who were then relegated to appendices in the ethnographic texts” (“The Power of Language” 47) and he wishes here to give appropriate credit to the main source of his own information.

Apart from this acknowledgment of his sources, Montejo does not explain or document his process of selecting from different accounts, or of re-writing/translating the poem into Spanish, nor does he refer to his choice of poetic form or language, including his criteria for keeping certain words in Popb'al Ti'. The text is followed by extensive explanatory notes in Spanish only,¹⁴ many of which give the etymology of the Popb'al

¹³ Anton Luk was a bonesetter who healed Montejo (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 143).

¹⁴ The identical notes appear in English-only translation in the 2001 tri-lingual edition.

Ti' names used, and refer to the identity of characters in Mayan cosmology and Jakaltek history.

Q'anil is an epic which narrates the self-sacrifice and heroism of Xhuwan, a young man who volunteers to go as a porter with a group of magicians sent from Jakaltenango in response to a call for help in a battle against an enemy across the seas. Xhuwan is prepared to give up his home and family in order to acquire special powers from Q'anil, one of the spiritual beings known as "k'uh" 'lightning' and identified with the mountain of that name. He and two other young men use these powers to defeat the enemy. Following this, he can no longer return to his community, because he himself is now a *k'uh*, with superhuman powers. He remains in the Q'anil mountain as a guardian-protector.

In Montejo's poetic version, the poem is preceded by a Pórtico, an introductory preface in which the story-teller displays his respect and admiration for the founding fathers of the Jakaltek people, the natural beauties and traditions of the region, and the skills and wisdom that the ancestors have passed down. The tone is formal, reverent, and ritualistic, and the Pórtico includes a powerful Jacaltek identity-framing device by means of the initial mention of a sacred place and the concluding reference to the Jacaltec founding mother and father. It also sets a standard for naming Jakaltek places and mythological figures in Popb'al Ti'. Most significant of these is "Xajla", the chief town of the Jakaltek region, which was renamed Jakaltenango by the Nahuatl-speaking Tlaxcaltecas who were allies of the Spanish during their conquest of Guatemala. The name is repeated many times throughout the poem, and explained in the endnotes. Some other Popbal Ti' place-names are qualified for the foreigner but not for the native

speaker, such as “Tenb’al May,” followed immediately by an explanation in the Spanish text “en los Cuchumatanes” ‘in the Cuchumatán mountains’ (73), or “Sat B’ak’ul,” followed immediately by “lugar donde nace el Río Azul” ‘the place where the Blue River has its source’ (39). Interestingly, “el Río Azul” (the blue river) is consistently referred to by its commonly-used Spanish name, rather than “ha’Nimam Yax Ha’” ‘the great blue river’, another example of toponym translation asymmetry: the Spanish version omits the noun classifier used for water-related nouns, *ha’* and the adjective *Nimam* ‘great, large’. Other local names are simply followed by their Spanish translation in the text. I mentioned the present-day emphasis, in many Maya communities, on the use of native-language place names and current studies of toponymy by the ALMG in my discussion of Humberto Ak’abal, and it is notable here that Montejo gives an exceptionally wide range of linguistic and ethnographic detail in his endnotes explaining the names used in the poem.

Proper names, particularly those of the “k’uh” (lightning rays, protectors of Xajla’) who are identified with the twenty mountains surrounding the town, are also given in Popb’al Ti’ (Montejo *Q’anil* 39), although in the Pórtico, Montejo translates the word as “dioses” ‘gods’ (26-7).¹⁵ Xhuwan visits several “k’uh” in his efforts to acquire their powers in order to defeat the enemy. They refuse, telling him their powers are too strong for him to use, but he is finally successful when he asks Q’anil. On hearing of Xhuwan’s selfless motivation, and exacting the promise that in exchange for receiving these powers he will sacrifice the right to return to his home and family, Q’anil transmits

¹⁵ The use of the word “god” for entities with divine powers in Maya cosmology leads to confusion when elsewhere Mayan writers emphasize that theirs is a monotheistic system in which such entities are aspects of a single Creator God of Heaven and Earth.

his power. At the end of the saga, after conquering the enemy, Xhuwan returns to stay in the mountain personified by Q'anil.

Balunh Q'ana', the first "k'uh" and Imox, the founding father and mother of the Jakalteks, are also referred to repeatedly by their Popb'al Ti' names, frequently with reminders of their attributes, as are the "ahb'e", the Mayan priests who accompany the small army of volunteers. Montejo refers to the priests by giving their Popb'al Ti' title in italics, followed by the Spanish term in brackets: "*ahb'e* (adivinos)" (79). He uses this procedure for a number of Mayan religious terms in the text, as an alternative to or in addition to providing an endnote¹⁶. It is helpful as an immediate explanation of the meaning, although it detracts, in my view, from the smooth flow of the text, and lessens the impact on the reader of the Jakalteck term. The names of all the lightning ray protectors, in addition to Balunh Q'ana', are listed without translation:

Ochewal, Wiho, Wamu',
Sipoh, Q'anil Tz'otz, Yok'ob' hos, Kaj Icham, Tzulb'al,
Sat Tonhko,
Swi' K'ej B'atz, Mapil Ch'en,
Yab'al Kaq'e, Saj Tanhnaj Oy, Kajeh,
Yinh Ch'en, Tx'ej Tunuk, Kulus Wakax,
Witenam, Nilq'oh, Nhulnhulwi', K'ajb'al Txoh
y Q'anil, nuestro Segundo padre (Q'anil 41)

¹⁶ The *ahb'e* are the Mayan priests who metaphorically prepare the way or path ("be" already discussed in the context of *b'eyb'al* in Gaspar Pedro González's work) for people to follow during the calendar cycle of the year. In this case, they are also literally accompanying the army on the way towards an unknown place, and are responsible for revealing the false claims and deceit of the *brujos* "sorcerers" (Montejo *Q'anil* 122 note)

Finally, the Spanish-language description of the role of the sorcerers in this text is culturally significant, because in the Popb'al Ti' text they are called *nawal*, a Nahuatl term found in other Maya languages, and used as a borrowing in Spanish versions of poems by Ak'abal and González. However, Montejo translates the term by *brujos* “sorcerers” and gives detailed information in his endnotes about the Jakaltek beliefs, which differ from those of some other Mayan communities in that here the *nawal* has specifically negative qualities, whereas in other Mayan communities, it is considered a general “counterpart spirit.” The sorcerers in the poem are a group of arrogant, boastful individuals, who assert at the beginning of the narrative that their ability as “*nawales*” to transform into a variety of dangerous animals gives them incomparable power to fight the enemy, but who finally recognize the superior powers of Xhuwan and his companions.

The poem incorporates several aspects of cultural syncretism which show how this Maya legend has absorbed the influence of Spanish language and history. For example, the hero's name, Xhuwan, is a Mayanization of the Spanish “Juan.” Montejo points out in his introduction that Q'anil is an ancient Mayan name, given to one of the Year Bearers of the Jakaltek calendar, and the name Juan Canil appears in the *Título de Jacaltenango*, an ancient Mayan text written in Nahuatl, the whereabouts of which are now unknown (*Q'anil* 8-10). In this *Título*, Xhuwan Q'anil is one of the founding fathers of the town of Jacaltenango. The doubling of the character – in the poem, Xhuwan is helped by another porter with whom he shares his powers, whose name, Juan Méndez, is kept in Spanish, perhaps to distinguish him from the Jakaltek hero – reflects the double character of the hero twins who defeat the Lords of Xibalbá in the *Popol Vuh*.

Another interesting example of cultural syncretism is the reference to the enemy from across the seas, whom the king describes as “dueños de una gran cultura y finos fabricantes de hermosas sedas” ‘they have a great culture and manufacture beautiful silks’ (*Q’anil* 87). Montejo explains this as the incorporation of the Spanish history of battles against the Moors, which concluded shortly before the conquest of Guatemala, and an identification of the Moors with Turkish silk weavers. The king asks Xhuwan to save some of the enemy so that they can survive to continue this work. In La Farge’s two 1931 versions of the same legend, the characters involved in this part play similar roles, but are identified as the President of the country, and German cloth importers, a characterization which suggests a realistic contemporary setting. Montejo’s version is based in pre- or early colonial times. La Farge gives various suggestions for the origins of the legend, including either antiquity, or the resistance of the Mam people against Gonzalo de Alvarado, and also suggests that perhaps the whole story was invented to account for the stone formation on the big hill dominating the western view from Jacaltenango, which is reputed to be inhabited by Xhuwan and is used by Prayer Makers for ceremonial occasions. (La Farge 121 and “Comunidad Lingüística Jakalteka (Poptí)”)

My own interpretation is that, since the poem belongs to oral tradition, the text may be read as a performance which changes details so as to make the narrative more relevant and meaningful to the audience at hand, always bearing in mind that the underlying message of the legend is the moral values exemplified by the hero, and the belief in the special protected status of the Jakalteka people, who, moreover are held in high esteem by those who ask for their help in time of need.

Plot structure and style

As in traditional Mayan narrative, the narrative plot of the poem, which begins in Part 4, is preceded by extensive references to past history and traditional beliefs, and also by speeches referring to the premonition and certain signs that a significant change is imminent. The most notable feature of the entire poem is that the Pórtico begins with the invocation written in the first-person singular, and thereafter the narrator refers to historical events, events and places using the inclusive first-person plural form, beginning the first part of the main poem with

Heb'ya' icham winaj xhalni bojxin kaw ko sat ch'ilnih (*Q'anil* 30)

Los abuelos dicen y nuestros ojos lo confirman (*Q'anil* 31)

The grandparents say and our eyes confirm

As in oral tradition, the narrator is addressing fellow community members who share a common cultural identity and a sense of belonging to the land, as well as a historical tradition passed down by their “grandparents.” The Spanish version replicates this traditional narrative style and also the formal tone, but, as mentioned earlier, the absence of noun classifiers in Spanish inevitably reduces some of the formal dignity of the Popb'al Ti' text – for example, the initial “heb'ya” in the line just quoted: heb' = plural personal classifier ‘people’ and ya' = personal classifier denoting respect.

Parallelism is evident in several parts of the poem, although it is more evident in the Pórtico and the first three introductory parts, which give the geographical and historical background and are more ritualistic in tone:

Xkonh syenipax heb'ya' tzet chu ko kolnoj kob'a tet howal,
 Yu ko tanhen hantaj tzet ab'ilkanoj jet:
 Sunil hej witz ak'al, ha' nimam, ko tx'otx',
 Jawalb'al; ko tiyoxh, jixal;
 B'ojxin sunil k'ahole, kutz'ineh. (*Q'anil* 30)

enseñándonos además los trucos de la guerra
 para cuidar con celo nuestras pertenencias,
 nuestros cerros, nuestros ríos,
 nuestros campos y milperíos;
 nuestros árboles, nuestros animales,
 nuestras mujeres, nuestros hijos y nuestras hijas. (*Q'anil* 31)

Teaching us also things about war
 to guard jealously our belongings
 our hills, our rivers,
 our fields and corn plantations;
 our trees, our animals,
 our women, our sons and our daughters.

Here, the repetition of the possessive “nuestros” strongly emphasizes the communal identity and ownership by the narrator and audience, notably the rural landscape, cornfields, and family members, including animals, and continues when other aspects of everyday life are mentioned: “nuestros sombreros y kapixhayes” ‘our hats and shirts’

(31), “nuestras tinajas, nuestras ollas, nuestras escudillas y nuestros comales” ‘our pitchers, our pots, our bowls, our griddles’ (32)

The plot development of *Q’anil*, beginning in part 3, is generally linear, but there are several examples of parallelism. Xhuwan’s search for a *k’uh* willing to give him powers to defeat the enemy is an example of repeated encounters, in which he asks a succession of *k’uh* for help, but each one refuses, saying that his powers are too great for Xhuwan to control, until he finally meets the *k’uh* Q’anil, who is willing to help him (*Q’anil* 61-65). A similar example of repetition occurs when Xhuwan passes on his powers to Juan Méndez; his conversation with Juan Méndez duplicates his own earlier conversation with Q’anil, and then the two companions throw a series of lightning bolts to practice their skills. Jill Brody, in discussing repetition as a common Mayan rhetorical and conversational device, states that “the primary emphatic nature of repetition is its highlighting of the repeated material in contrast to material that is delivered only once, underscoring the importance of the duplicated material” (256). In Montejo’s epic poem based on oral tradition, the narrator’s repetition of the significant information places the emphasis on Q’anil’s heroic qualities and skills.

The narration of the action of *Q’anil* is dramatic, with sections of description followed by lengthy dialogue in the form of speeches by the leader, Jich Mam, assertions of the sorcerers, and dialogues between Xhuwan and the *k’uhs*, Juan Mendoza, and later, the king. The heroic qualities of Xhuwan are revealed through these dialogues – for example, Q’anil praises his self-sacrifice and community spirit, while the diviners, who realize that he has special powers, insist that he be respected by the arrogant sorcerers. The king, who expresses amazed appreciation for the help of two humble porters,

acknowledges the contribution of Q'anil and offers him a reward. The poem, like an oral narrative, becomes a dramatic performance, with the inclusion of the reader/audience. While the written text recreates the content and style of an oral performance to a local Jakaltek audience (poetic form, formal ritual introduction, reference to Mayan spiritual beliefs and traditions, use of Popb'al Ti' names of people and places, and use of syntactic and semantic parallelism), the intended audience of the published text is either clearly non-Jakaltek, as indicated by the detailed copious endnotes on cultural and linguistic background, or else a future Jakaltek audience whose memory of traditional stories has been lost.

El pájaro que limpia el mundo y otras fábulas mayas

No' ch'ik xtx'ahtx'en sat yib'anh q'inal

This collection of fables was originally published in English as *The Bird Who Cleans the World and other Maya Fables*, and first appeared in the bilingual Spanish-Popb'al Ti' version in 2000, published by Yax Te'. The Popb'al Ti' and Spanish texts are on facing pages, with the pages numbered in both Arabic and Mayan numerals. The title in Popb'al Ti' does not mention the "other fables." The stories themselves are numbered with Mayan numerals only, with the conventional vertical orientation on each title page, but with an unexpected horizontal orientation in the Index.

Montejo dedicates the book to his parents, who told him many stories when he was a child, and states that he transcribed and recreated the stories from the original Popb'al Ti' (*El pájaro* iii). This suggests that they are not, as in the collections analyzed in my chapter on oral tradition, collected and transcribed for the purpose of preserving

them in a collection, but recorded from memory by the author. He also mentions that the names of animals and places used in the stories are in the Popb'al Ti' language; naming in the mother tongue has, as I have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, particular significance.

The majority of the thirty-two stories are fables involving animals, with a few involving birds and insects, and a few involving humans. The animals include dogs, jaguars, coyotes, foxes, tigers, toads, deer, crocodiles, and monkeys, with frequent appearances of rabbits and rats, while among the birds the most frequent are vultures. The stories promote moral values such as hard work, gratitude, loyalty, communal support, friendship, and acceptance of the conditions of life. By contrast, punishment is given for disobedience, envy, greed, ingratitude, laziness, and for those who fail to appreciate the advantages they have. In content, they resemble the *Tz'utujil Nawalin taq tzij / Cuentos tradicionales tz'utujiles* "Traditional Tz'utujil Stories", the moral tales of advice for children that I discussed in the chapter on Oral Tradition, but they lack the strong didactic tone of the conclusions of that work.

There is some overlap in content with stories from other regions, as is to be expected – for example, the title story, about the vulture who is sent by the Creator to find dry land after the flood, and who is punished because instead of returning with information he satisfies his hunger with the carrion he finds: he becomes the bird who cleans the world (#1); or the lazy man who envies the vulture's easy life and changes places with him, but learns too late that despite the joy of flying on the air currents, he must accept the responsibility of eating dead animals (#25). The story of the two boys

who are transformed into monkeys by their grandmother is clearly based on the *Popol Vuh* legend (#5).

There are two exceptions to the animal tales. One begins “When I was a boy, my father used to tell me..” and continues with advice against unnecessary tree-cutting (#14), an interesting topic given the current awareness in Guatemala of the risks of deforestation.¹⁷ The other is a disconcerting story of the child whose mother explains that his dog howls at night because he has visions. The child puts the green discharge from the dog’s eyes on his own, starts seeing visions, and, unable to tolerate them, soon dies (#17). This story would fall into the category Fernando Peñalosa describes as “caso,” a narrative about something strange or interesting which occurs to someone (*El cuento popular* 11).

Unlike the collections of oral tradition I have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, there is little influence of Mayan language or style in the Spanish version of these stories. The narratives are linear, with little repetition or parallelism, and with minimal use of forms found elsewhere, such as “our grandparents tell us that...” or “they say that...” There is extensive use of dialogue, typical for such stories. Peñalosa notes Dennis Tedlock’s comment that “estos cuentos se parecen más al drama que a la novela o al cuento del mundo occidental” ‘these stories are more like plays than novels or stories of the western world’ (*El cuento popular* 21). There is little use of local color, or other identification of person, time and place – the fables are not intended to be taken as local histories, but rather as narratives of survival and relationship among species, and between

¹⁷ In my 2006 discussions with the author Domitila Canek, the pen name of Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, who now works for the Guatemalan Department of the Environment, she pointed out to me that the government was developing policies regarding deforestation without being aware that in the Maya community such policies were always part of traditional practices.

individuals and the Creator. In keeping with Montejo's goal of preserving Jakalteq culture and telling the outside world about it, the selection of tales here highlights strong social and moral values (responsibility, hard work, and the consequences of selfishness and laziness) and gives an implicit sense of a cohesive world structure in which all elements of the natural, animal and human world have interconnected and mutually beneficial roles.

Testimonial works

Montejo's personal *Testimonio: muerte de una comunidad indígena en Guatemala* "Testimony: Death of an Indigenous Community in Guatemala" was first published in 1987. I will discuss this work in terms of its claim to authenticity and historical truth, bearing in mind the widespread controversy arising from David's Stoll's 1999 critique (*Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*) of Rigoberta Menchú's 1983 testimony, and also to draw attention to the language use and literary devices of the testimonio genre. In 1992 Montejo published a hybrid work, *Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del Mayab' (Guatemala)* "Very Brief Testimonial Account of the Ongoing Destruction of the Maya Lands (Guatemala)", which includes writing by Montejo and a collaborator, and several testimonial "laments" by refugees from the Guatemalan armed conflict, which I discuss in terms of authenticity and polyphony. Some of the materials from *Brevísima relación testimonial* are included as field work in his 1993 dissertation, *The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance and Transformations: The Case of Guatemalan-Mayan Refugees in Mexico* and in the 1999

published book version of his dissertation, *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*. The testimonial works I discuss here show the beginning of the themes and political motivation which Montejo develops in the socio-political analysis of his later anthropological works.

Montejo's personal testimonial work, *Testimonio: muerte de una comunidad indígena en Guatemala* was first published in English by Curbstone Press in 1987. It was only published in Spanish in 1993, by the editorial house of San Carlos University in Guatemala, and does not exist in Popb'al Ti'. Given the outspoken political opinions of this *testimonio*, it is surprising that it was published in Guatemala before the end of the armed conflict in 1996, but it is worth noting that at this time Montejo and his family were living in the United States and out of reach of reprisals.

The goal of the *testimonio* is "to denounce the injustices perpetrated against the Maya" (Montejo *Sculpted Stones* 62) from the perspective of a witness (Montejo) who was "collateral damage." The text describes the personal experience of Montejo on September 9, 1982, when the military entered the village of Tzibaj,¹⁸ near Huehuetenango where he was a schoolteacher; the torture and killing of villagers; and Montejo's subsequent incarceration, interrogations, and surveillance. At this time the village, like many Maya communities complying with government orders, had a civil patrol of local men, responsible for anti-guerrilla surveillance.

¹⁸ The village is given a pseudonym, Tz'alalá, in the text.

On September 9, 1982 the local civil patrol¹⁹ catches sight of a group of armed men whom they mistake for guerrillas, and attack them. In fact, the men are army soldiers, who retaliate with overwhelming force, killing many of the villagers, and then take vengeance with appalling brutality on the whole village, despite the villagers' assurances that they had not intended to attack the military but that the color of the soldiers' fatigues had led to a misunderstanding. Montejo is accused by one of the villagers of subversive activity, in testimony extracted under torture; Montejo is arrested, bound, beaten, and taken to the military base in Huehuetenango, where he is held for questioning, threatened, and treated viciously by soldiers. While there he witnesses the torture of other prisoners, before being finally released on condition that he report regularly to the military base, and that he provide names of suspected guerrilla supporters.

Unlike other popular testimonies, this work is written by an educated author, without the necessity of an intermediary to help in the transcription of the text, or the aid of an editor to add explanatory material, or the presence of a witness for authentication. The narrative is autobiographical, in the style of a journal, but written with a clear sense of the reader's need for explanation of certain events and places – indeed, Montejo includes a brief glossary at the end for the reader unfamiliar with Guatemalan colloquial expressions and slang. It includes a chapter devoted to the account a mother narrates to Montejo of her son's death (*testimonio* within *testimonio*) and lengthy passages of

¹⁹ The formation of civil patrols was imposed in the Cuchumatán region in 1982, after Ríos Montt took over the government. They were imposed in the Ixil region in 1981. Communities which objected to forming civil patrols were threatened with military reprisals on the grounds that their resistance implied subversive, anti-government tendencies.

dialogue which reproduce the speech of the local community members, soldiers and military commanders – giving the effect of heterophony within the text.

The intended audience is the international community, and the intended goal of the narrative is to raise awareness of the atrocities of the armed conflict in Guatemala, in particular of the early 1980s. In this sense, Montejo's work is typical of other testimonies of violence, with a message of urgency to the outside community. On the other hand, unlike, for example, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* (published in English as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*), there is little space allotted to cultural and social description. It is not the author's goal to give an ethnographic description of the community. Montejo focuses exclusively on the events of the original attack and the period following it, and includes descriptive references only when they reflect his own feelings under stress, or his sense of loss, or in order to give the reader an understanding of the local setting at the beginning of his account:

Los techos pajizos de las casas del poblado comienzan a humear a las cuatro de la mañana, cuando las mujeres se levantan a moler el nixtamal y a preparar las tortillas del marido, quien a muy temprana hora del día se dirige a sus campos, lugar donde siempre se ha identificado con la tierra virgen de sus ancestros. (*Testimonio*1)

The thatched roofs of the houses of the community begin to smoke at four in the morning, when the women get up to grind the nixtamal and to prepare the tortillas for their husbands, who early in the day make their way to their fields, the place where they have always identified with the virgin land of their ancestors.

In keeping with this focus and the journalistic style, it is notable that Montejo writes extensively about his own reactions to and reflections on events, and also includes his comments on the political situation which promotes the kind of violence he witnesses:

El ejército de Ríos Montt era implacable e iba matando por parejo con su plan de “tierra arrasada”. Y como cosa absurda, Ríos Montt y su iglesia predicaban por radio y televisión, que Dios lo había escogido para el poder. (*Testimonio* 4)

The army of Ríos Montt was implacable and went about killing indiscriminately in line with his “scorched earth” policy. And the absurd thing was, that Ríos Montt and his church preached on the radio and on television that God had put him in power.

The uncompromising criticism of Ríos Montt,²⁰ of his personal hypocrisy and manipulation of the public, of his governmental and military corruption and the institutionalized hatred and violence which destroyed, both morally and physically, the Mayan communities during this period permeates all the situations described in the testimonio:

Desde la llegada de Ríos Montt al poder los derechos humanos desaparecieron y era el ejército el único dueño de las vidas de los sufridos guatemaltecos, pobres e indígenas de estas regiones. (*Testimonio* 105)

From the time that Ríos Montt came to power, human rights disappeared and the army alone ruled the lives of the long-suffering poor and indigenous Guatemalans of these regions.

At each threatening encounter that Montejo has with the soldiers during his day's ordeal and during the following weeks when he is under supervision, he describes his fear and his efforts to control his emotions, look his aggressors in the eyes, and project an impression of innocence and dignity. Some of the most moving passages describe his thoughts about his wife and children: he resists an opportunity to escape after his capture,

²⁰ Ríos Montt overthrew the government of Lucas García in a coup on March 23, 1982.

because of potential reprisals against his family (65); while waiting to be transported by helicopter, he thinks of his children and wonders whether he will be killed and they will be orphaned (45); as he recovers from a beating by the soldiers, he thinks of his wife and children at home worrying about his absence (69); he cannot help breaking down in tears when a soldier brings him a thermos of hot coffee which his wife has delivered to the prison, and he learns that she and his three children are close by, outside the walls: “Sentí como un halo benéfico la presencia de mi esposa y de mis hijos cerca de mí” ‘The presence of my wife and children near me felt like a beneficent halo’ (83). Their presence also makes him realize that his wife is advocating on his behalf, and that he has a chance to be freed.

Another characteristic of the journalistic style is Montejo’s insistent repetition of the exact time, day, and date of successive events. The testimonio begins “el día viernes 9 de septiembre de 1982” ‘on September 9, 1982’ (*Testimonio* 7) and continues to document later events. In particular, in a flashback to an event a month earlier, when the members of the civil patrol were forced by the military to beat to death two of their fellow community members, Montejo repeats several times “ese 30 de agosto como a las once de la mañana” ‘that 30th of August at about 11 in the morning’ (*Testimonio* 95-97). This gives historical perspective, and contributes to the documentary evidence of the events, echoing traditional Mayan documents which always include dates, in both glyph and early alphabetic texts, but also, as a literary parallelism, has the impact on the reader of a painful hammering-in of the truth – indeed, it is strongly reminiscent of the refrain “A las cinco de la tarde” ‘at five in the afternoon’ which echoes the tolling of the funeral

bell for the famous toreador in Gabriel García Lorca's poem "Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías."

Among other literary devices used in this narrative, there is a tight chronological structure, highlighted by the repetition of the date and time of occurrences; flashbacks; digressions which focus attention on political criticism; carefully constructed but strictly limited personal family details; third-person testimony (Sebastiano's mother); dialogue, including the phonetic transcription of non-standard Spanish grammar and pronunciation; and abundant first-person autobiographical explanations and commentaries on events taking place around him – for example, the author's awareness of the distinctive sounds made by the make of guns used by the military, which the villagers do not distinguish from the sound of guns used by the guerillas whom the civil patrols are supposed to kill or capture. From the sound of the guns, the author realizes before the villagers do that the attackers they are fighting are not guerrillas but the military dressed in guerrilla-like camouflage.

While Montejo is advocating strongly on behalf of the suffering Maya community at the same time as he describes his own experiences, he does not, unlike other *testimonio* writers, present himself as a spokesperson for the community. Indeed, he makes clear that he is NOT a member of the community, but someone who happens to work there. As he insists to his interrogators, he is a resident of the nearest large town, Huehuetenango, and returns there to spend weekends with his wife and family after teaching from Monday to Friday in the village school. He is humiliated by his public arrest, because it offends his sense of dignity as the schoolteacher: "mi dignidad de maestro me hacía pensar. Estos desgraciados me tienen aquí en ridículo, exhibiéndome al público como si fuera asesino,

ladrón o criminal.” ‘my dignity as a teacher made me think. Those bastards are holding me up to ridicule here, making a public spectacle of me as if I were a murderer, a thief or a criminal’ (47) His conversations with the military commanders emphasize his professional standing and his lack of involvement in community activities. Indeed, in the conversations he records, he speaks in an intentionally formal language and expresses politically correct sentiments, so as to demonstrate his innocence and patriotism, and to emphasize that he has been falsely accused of guerrilla collaboration:

Señores, ya les he dicho la verdad. Yo soy maestro de escuela y estoy dedicado a mi trabajo. Mi deseo es engrandecer a mi patria con mi trabajo. Y como ciudadano honrado, que soy, amo la paz, y la tranquilidad de Guatemala. (*Testimonio* 69)

Gentlemen, I have already told you the truth. I am a schoolteacher, and I am dedicated to my work. My wish is to make my country greater through my work. And as an honorable citizen, which I am, I love the peace and tranquility of Guatemala.

We might re-phrase the words of Gayatri Spivak, who states that “the subaltern as female cannot speak”, and demonstrate that as long as the Maya is a subaltern, he cannot speak:

The subaltern cannot speak. There is little virtue in global laundry lists with “woman” (*read here, indigenous*) as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female (*indigenous*) intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disavow with a flourish. (308 my italics)

Montejo, as prisoner, and as a writer in exile, rejects the status of subaltern, and emphasizes his status as a middle-class teacher who has nothing to do with the suspected activities of the villagers.

On the other hand, Montejo expresses strong sympathy and pity for the villagers, and a willingness to intercede on their behalf:

Confieso que mi debilidad más grande es la compasión. Cuando vi a la señora gimiendo y llorando, me dieron también ganas de llorar, pero no dejé que mis lágrimas se escaparon. Me armé de valor y lentamente me fui acercando a los hombres armados que tenían cautivos a los patrulleros. Cuando me acerqué a ellos, los saludé inmediatamente y me identifiqué como uno de los maestros de la escuela.

(Testimonio 13)

I confess that my greatest weakness is compassion. When I saw the woman whimpering and crying, it made me want to cry too, but I didn't let my tears escape. I armed myself with valor and slowly approached the armed men who were holding the patrollers captive. When I reached them, I greeted them immediately and introduced myself as one of the schoolteachers.

As the village teacher Montejo feels that his position gives him a certain responsibility and authority – but also, hopefully, immunity from the indiscriminate aggression of the attackers. Montejo's awareness of the social class and educational hierarchy which separates him from the villagers is also clear in his repeated criticism of the offensive language used by the soldiers: “el idioma de los hijueputazos” ‘the language of the sonsofbitches’ (72). Clearly this is one mechanism which enables him to detach himself from their insults. Not only does he quote their slang and obscenities quite extensively, but he includes a glossary for the reader unfamiliar with Guatemalan slang. To add insult to injury, the soldiers address him as “cerote” ‘piece of shit’, and use the derogatory diminutive “maestrito” ‘little teacher’ and the second-person familiar form “vos” rather than the formal, respectful “usted.”

The comments on language are made more complex by Montejo's observation that some of the soldiers cannot speak Spanish well:

El soldado...respondió en mal castellano. Por su forma de hablar el castellano se podía deducir que era un indígena, de esos que han sido forzados a servir en el ejército.
(*Testimonio*13)

The soldier...replied in bad Spanish. From his way of speaking Spanish you could deduce that he was indigenous, one of those who have been forced to serve in the army.

This observation is in part a reference to the uneven levels of Mayan language/Spanish bilingualism among the indigenous population in Guatemala, and the low level of education of the indigenous soldiers, who have not had the opportunity to go to school – where they would have been immediately immersed in Spanish. However, more particularly, it is a means of bringing to the attention of the international community represented by the reader the fact that most of the soldiers in the army are poor indigenous peasants who have been forcibly enlisted and trained to fight and kill other indigenous peasants. For the government, one advantage of this devious policy is that politicians can claim that it is not the Ladinos, but the indigenous who are killing each other, both in the civil patrols and in the army, thereby justifying the claim that the armed conflict is a civil war, and expediting the massive extermination of the Maya population.

Observing some soldiers kicking the face of a prisoner who has been tied down in the cesspool in the military prison, Montejo wonders how it is that the soldiers can carry out criminal orders from their superiors, and mistreat fellow Mayans, who come from the

same background as they do, suffer the same hardships and humiliations, and have done nothing to harm them. He quotes the explanation of a friend who had been in the army:

Un amigo ex-militar me contaba cierta tarde que “Le lavan el coco a uno y nos predisponen de tal manera que hasta a nuestros mismos padres les podemos “dar agua” si así nos lo ordenan los jefes. Yo estuve tres años en el cuartel ¿y qué putas aprendí? Nada; lo único que le enseñan a uno es matar, matar y matar. Y lo pisado es que uno no sabe por qué está matando. ... (*Testimonio* 78)

An ex-army friend of mine was telling me one day that “They brainwash you and fix us up so that we can even wipe out our own parents, if that’s what the bosses order us. I was in the barracks for three years and what the fuck did I learn? Nothing; the only thing they teach you is to kill, kill and kill. And what’s screwed is that you don’t know what you’re killing for.

Understanding the background of the soldiers who are brutalizing him, who are themselves abused by their superiors, and who are trained to obey all commands, creates a painful tension in the narrative: the author expresses pity for the indigenous villagers who are victims, and horror at the indigenous soldiers who are forced to fight against their own people – as well as personal fear for his own safety as their victim. His negative attitude towards the poor Spanish skills of these soldiers, which overlaps with his disapproval of the obscene language of all the military, moreover, gives the reader some insight into Montejo’s dilemma in defining his own place as narrator of this *testimonio*. The publication of the work before the end of the armed conflict also carries with it some risks, which the author must have taken into account in writing and editing the text, and is a factor which the reader must, I believe, bear in mind when considering the author’s voice.

As mentioned above, Montejo agrees to intercede on behalf of community members. However, at no point in the *testimonio* does he mention that he himself was a member of a civil patrol from July 1981 – November 1982, at the time of these events.²¹ Nor does he explicitly state that he himself is indigenous, a native of this region, and that he speaks Popb'al Ti', the local Mayan language. Whether this is intentional or not, or possibly an effort to downplay or keep hidden aspects of his personal identity (for safety or other reasons) is not clear. Moreover, the international reader to whom this work is addressed may have different expectations of authenticity and truth from those of the author. Elzbieta Sklodowska, in her comparison of definitions of Latin American *testimonio*, further points out that

seeing testimonio as a seamless monument of authenticity and truth deprives it, in my opinion, of the ongoing tension between stories told and stories remaining to be told. More to the point, perhaps, it also diminishes its potential as a forward-looking discourse participating in an open-ended and endless task of rewriting human experience. (98)

In analyzing Montejo's voice as *testimonio*-writer, I have discussed his awareness of his socio-educational status, but in addition to this, it is apparent that by writing this *testimonio* in Spanish, without explicitly identifying himself as a Maya, and by his inconsistent use of possessive pronouns when writing about Popb'al Ti', to some extent he is implicitly identifying with his reader in much the same way as Rigoberta Menchú was, according to Doris Sommer, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. On only one occasion, after Sebastiano's mother has described her son's death to the author, does he mention that she speaks in "nuestro idioma Maya" 'our Maya language' (26), (my

²¹ In the Prensa Libre interview of 2005, Montejo claims that everyone, even the parish priest, was forced to be in a patrol, to avoid being accused of guerrilla sympathies.

underline), without explaining what “our Maya language” is; later the reader must assume that when another villager asks him to intercede with the military on her behalf because she cannot speak Spanish, she is actually speaking – and the author is responding – in Popb’al Ti’. Later in the text, he uses the third-person “their language” to describe Popb’al Ti’: “las mujeres clamaban a Diós su protección y lloraban gritando en su propio idioma sus penas, sus dolores y sus más grandes sufrimientos” ‘The women were calling on God for his protection and crying out in their own language their pain, their anguish and their greatest suffering’ (52).

These discrepancies suggest a shifting distance and ambivalent attitude between the writer and the Maya community members. As mentioned earlier, the *Testimonio* is not published in Popb’al Ti’. It is remarkable that the Spanish text includes only two Mayan place names, no personal names, and only one brief exchange in Popb’al Ti’, which occurs when the village civil patrol members call out to each other as they rush to defend the village from the attack of the supposed guerrillas (10). These examples suggest that, for either political or personal reasons at the time of publication, as I have mentioned, Montejo chose to de-emphasize his own Mayan identity, to create a specific persona for himself as *testimonio* narrator, and to align himself more with the educated Spanish-speaking reader and with the sympathetic international community to whom he directs the *testimonio*.

In the context of the body of Montejo’s writing, this is an indeterminate position between the author of bilingual poetry and fables and the author of political and anthropological texts. Who is Montejo the *testimonio* writer? To what extent can we take this account as authentic (ethnography) and to what extent should we assume that it is a

literary work not bound by such conventions? In other words, can we allow for dissonance and selective silences in such a text, and between successive texts by the author, and consider the possibility that they are symptomatic of the personal and family risks to which the writer of such a text is exposed? Elzbieta Sklodowska suggests that Doris Sommer's critique of Rigoberta Menchú's silences as contrived literary secrets is in fact a belletrization of a text and that "(w)e are dealing here with very real secrets essential to the survival of the entire culture, and not with a belletrization of narrative gaps" (94). I suggest that, by the same token, the dissonances in Montejo's text tell us that this is one part of and one perspective on the story, and that there is, in fact, much more to be told, both about the author, and about the Jakaltek community during and since the armed conflict.

If we examine Montejo's later writing, we learn that at the time that he was arrested he had in fact been quite open about his anti-government opinions. In a 2005 interview he states:

Como yo era una persona que me gustaba expresarme libremente en poesía de resistencia me acusaron de ser uno de los entrenadores intelectuales de la guerrilla.

(Martínez 2)

Since I was someone who liked to express myself freely in resistance poetry, they accused me of being one of the intellectual leaders of the guerrillas.

The picture becomes even clearer when we read *Sculpted Stones / Piedras labradas* published in 1995. This work is a collection of personal, lyrical poems on themes relating to the Guatemalan armed conflict, the violence against the Maya, and Montejo's own

reaction to his exile, and in many ways reflects the sentiments expressed in the *Testimonio*. It was published in 1995 by Curbstone Press, which is dedicated to “literature that reflects a commitment to social change” and to publishing the work of “writers who give voice to the unheard.” The text is bilingual, Spanish and English on facing pages, with footnotes explaining some of the unfamiliar terms used, and is in two parts. Part 1 consists of poems from 1982-1986 about the author’s reaction to the oppression of the Maya. They include narratives about specific acts of aggression and torture during the armed conflict, and express the author’s bitterness, anger and frustration that the Mayas seem unable to defend themselves and their culture against the government’s efforts to eradicate them. The voice and content show the reader a rather different, more assertive and unrestrained perspective of the schoolteacher of Tzibaj from that projected by the *testimonio*.

In 1992, five years after the publication of the *Testimonio* I have discussed, and 500 years after the “discovery” of America by Christopher Columbus, Montejo published *Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del Mayab’ (Guatemala)* “Very brief testimonial account of the continued destruction of the Mayan lands”. The work is a literary hybrid, which uses quotations from historical texts, recreations of historical texts, commentary, and *testimonio*, to draw an analogy between the Spanish conquest of Guatemala and the ongoing armed conflict which did not end until 1996. The title imitates that of Bartolomé de las Casas’ 1550 *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* “Very brief account of the destruction of the Indies”, and the work begins with an introductory Prologue to the King of Spain, intended to duplicate the famous letter of 1572, “Nuestro pesar, nuestra affliction,” ‘Our sorrow, our affliction’ sent by

Maya representatives to King Philip I of Spain, appealing for compassion and alleviation of the Maya sufferings under the Spanish conquerors. This section is followed by a two-page section of “Prophecies of the Maya Priests,” an extract from the book of *Books of the Chilam Balam*, and another entitled “Prophecies according to the informers of Sahagún.”

Montejo’s work appeared in Spanish only, published by the Guatemalan Scholars Network in an edition of 3,000, and was clearly intended as a political statement for an audience of Spanish-reading academics and activists. There is a brief preface which explains the historical context and mentions Montejo’s co-author, known by the pseudonym of Q’anil Akab,²² followed by a series of six chapters, listed as Laments, to reflect the theme of the Prologue. The first of these is a historical account of the beginning of the period of intense violence in the Kuchumatán mountains, written by Montejo and Kaxh Pasil, a teacher in exile, followed by four personal testimonies of individuals whom Montejo interviewed in Mexican refugee camps. Lament 6 focuses on Guatemalan children in exile, and consists of poems and drawings by children taught by Kaxh Pasil in the school in the refugee camp of Guadalupe Victoria. Montejo introduces each chapter with a thematically related quotation from Bartolomé de las Casas, and a related drawing by one of the children whose work appears in Lament 6. The book ends with an epilogue explaining the motivation of the participating writers: to document the human rights abuses of the armed conflict and to give a human face and personal voice to the statistics. The final page is a long, sobering list of inhabitants of San Francisco Nentón who were all massacred on July 17, 1982.

²² The name Q’anil Akab also appears in parentheses after Montejo’s name in articles Montejo published in La Prensa Libre in 2005 (see bibliography).

The materials for the *Brevísima relación testimonial* were collected in Mexico in 1982, 1983, and 1988, 1989 and, as mentioned earlier, include the field work for Montejo's 1993 dissertation, *The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance and Transformations: The Case of Guatemalan-Mayan Refugees in Mexico*. According to Montejo, the testimonies were recorded and transcribed without any mediation or commentary, but he does not go into any details about the process of recording and transcription, nor does he include detailed information about the speakers.

In 1999, Montejo published *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*, an English adaptation of his 1993 dissertation. With some minor changes, most of the chapters are the same as his dissertation. These three works contain a substantial amount of overlapping material; the most notable differences between the *Brevísima Relación*, on the one hand, and the dissertation and *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*, on the other, are the greater number of testimonies in the former; the absence of the texts co-authored by Montejo and Q'anil Akab in the latter; and the absence of the children's writings and drawings in *Voices from Exile*. It is unclear why Montejo did not include all the testimonies of *Brevísima Relación* in his dissertation and *Voices from Exile*, and he does not account for the selection process. However, the texts together form a substantial body of personal accounts and analysis of the most violent years of the Guatemalan armed conflict and the resulting escape to exile in Mexico of thousands of Guatemalan peasants.

As a polyphonic literary document the *Brevísima Relación Testimonial* is of greatest interest. In addition to the preface, historical quotations and recreations mentioned, it brings together the testimonial voices of a variety of exiles, and narrates

both historic events and personal experiences of the Maya struggle for survival within the Guatemalan military, in peasant communities, and in the refugee camps. The small collection of children's accounts and drawings are, in my opinion, a valuable addition. The copies of drawings and the reproductions of handwritten narratives by children add a powerful visual dimension to the printed texts. It is rare to find the voices of children in such documentary works, and they testify to the physical and psychological suffering of a whole generation of children who were uprooted from their homes, saw their homes burned down and their parents executed or disappeared, and were forced into an exile beyond their comprehension. They are reminiscent of the children's works from Terezin²³ in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, and I am surprised that Montejo, as an anthropologist who formerly trained and worked for ten years as an elementary school teacher, has not made further use of this part of his collection.²⁴

As a literary work, the testimonio *Brevísima Relación* exemplifies Montejo's multi-faceted identity as a bilingual, now tri-lingual author who is both indigenous subject and anthropological researcher, both victim and reporter of the armed conflict. In his 1993 dissertation he expresses his position and voices his skepticism about grand theories in the academic field:

I tried to be cautious and not to buy the post modern approach wholesale since it is obvious that the celebrated dialogical and multivocality of postmodern ethnographic

²³ Terezin is a town in northern Czechoslovakia which was converted into an internment camp for Czech Jews during the Nazi occupation of World War II. The majority of the inmates – adults and children – were subsequently sent to their deaths, but many testimonies were preserved, including the drawings and poems by children later published as *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*.

²⁴ Gaspar Pedro González writes with great sensitivity of the experiences of childhood. In *Retorno de los Mayas*, the protagonist narrates his childhood experience of witnessing his father's torture, his mother's death, the loss of his sister, and the experience of escaping into exile in Mexico. González bases his work on his own experiences when he visited in Mexican refugee camps and on published testimonial accounts. The experiences closely resemble those described by Montejo.

writing...is still a white man's project since the anthropologist is, at the end, the one who has the power to decide and define the terms of the encounter. (*The Dynamics of Cultural Change and Resistance. The Case of Guatemalan Mayan Refugees in Mexico* 20)

Despite his doubts about the multivocality which is the privilege of the anthropologist, Montejo makes ample use of it in *Brevísima Relación Testimonial*. Arturo Arias suggests that the inclusion of prophecies, visions and dreams is an authorial device to break the supposed logic of the westernized *testimonio* for a reader who had been lulled into believing s/he was reading a traditional testimonio (Arias *Taking their Word* 436). There is no doubt that this authorial device, by using multiple levels of intertextuality, highlights each of the voices and visual images, and presents a historical perspective beyond that of contemporary reporting on the Maya struggle for social justice. Given the amount of attention given to the *testimonio* genre in recent years, particularly after the Rigoberta Menchú controversy, and the fact that Montejo makes his intentions in *Brevísima Relación Testimonial* and the sources/authors of the various texts quite clear, I disagree with Arias' characterization of the reader, but concede that, as Montejo is well aware, the *testimonio* is a genre produced for the western reader, and, as such, has created a commodified niche with its own set of assumptions.

I would like to conclude my remarks about the writing of Victor Montejo with a brief summary of the political views which underlie the development of his writing as a form of social and political resistance and a means to promote development in Maya communities. In the same 2005 interview mentioned above, Montejo clarifies a position about the armed conflict in Guatemala which he has made clear in other works – that the

guerrillas appealed for support from the Maya peasants under false pretences, and that real change for the Maya would only be achieved by means of support for development and education:

Yo critico a la guerrilla, porque ésta quería imponer su ideología marxista leninista y, con esto, involucrar a un pueblo que desconocía este tipo de doctrina, pero que la condujo a un conflicto armado. Era meter a la gente a morir. El camino era el desarrollo y la educación. (Ibid. 2)

I criticize the guerrilla movement, because it wanted to impose its Marxist-Leninist ideology and thereby involve a people who didn't know anything about this type of doctrine, but which led them into an armed conflict. It was taking people to their death. The road was through development and education.

Montejo is acutely aware of the educational disparities between Mayas and Ladinos,²⁵ and that he himself is open to criticism for “selling out” to the other side – both as an educated Maya who has become ladinized and part of the “modern intellectual colonialism” (“Maya Itz’at: Crisis del liderazgo maya (I)”), and as an exile who was able to live safely and successfully in exile. He also recognizes that Maya intellectuals have studied under a western system, and inevitably become alienated from the Mayan world view, which categorizes knowledge in a way fundamentally different from the western system, and does not separate the different arts and sciences from each other or from spirituality. In order to overcome this discrepancy, he strongly advocates for the development of the Maya University, which has been founded and is being developed but is not yet well known. At the same time, he also advocates for multiculturalism, in order to give equal opportunities to all ethnicities and races, and to promote an equal

²⁵ Montejo specifically refers to technological disparities, and advocates for the promotion of computer access to the world wide web in Maya communities (“Maya Itz’at (I)”).

interchange of cultures, rather than an over-emphasis on the Ladino or certain predominant Maya groups. Clearly, this was in part his motivation in accepting the position of Secretary for Peace in the last government, and it is unfortunate that these policies have not progressed. Montejo was not re-elected in September 2007, and it remains to be seen what effect this will have on his work. It is clear from his recent published works that he is concentrating on socio-political advocacy, and while this includes concerns about the survival of Mayan traditions, languages and culture, as a writer he is not actively preserving Jakalteco language or traditions by creating literary work in his native language, nor does his writing address itself to the Popti'-speaking community. He remains in the challenging position of trying to maintain a balance between conflicting identities and overlapping interests as tri-lingual, bicultural writer, academician and politician.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to analyze bilanguaging in the writing of a select group of bilingual Mayan authors whose common theme has been the promotion and preservation of Mayan language and culture in response to the armed conflict of 1954-1996. Their work illustrates the profound importance of linguistic rights and the validation of cultural literary expression in Mayan languages in an era when indigenous and minority groups worldwide are struggling to retain their identity in the face of globalization. At the same time, these authors are a literary elite which may not represent the majority of the Mayan community, especially at a time when it is clear that in Guatemala the drive to preserve Mayan culture is at odds with the need for the economic progress which assimilation into the hegemonic society appears to offer. Furthermore, the authors confront the paradox of writing for a linguistic community which has hitherto been marginalized from the written word and in which it is not at all clear whether literacy in Mayan languages will increase. These aspects of the cultural context are, however, rapidly and constantly changing, as is the definition of Mayan linguistic and cultural identity.

The successive literary works of the authors also reflect changes in focus. My analyses have shown how traditional Mayan rhetorical devices, parallelism, spiraling and cyclical narrative structures, and narrative framing devices are incorporated into their written texts in Spanish and Mayan languages; narratives and poetic themes are embedded in Mayan culture; and code-switching is used extensively in the Spanish-

language texts in order to foreground traditional Mayan cultural concepts associated with the calendar, spiritual beliefs and the natural world. Dual-language editions show clear differences between texts on facing pages; González's first novel contains more material in Q'anjob'al than it was politically safe to publish in Spanish at the time of publication, while Ak'abal changes, substitutes and omits words so as to create subtle differences of meaning for the reader of each language text. Shades of meaning particular to Mayan language syntax, phonology and lexicon are lost in the Spanish text, as are many of the structural patterns which depend on them. These bilanguaging characteristics of the Mayanized Spanish writing express implicitly the message which the writers also express explicitly. In summary, these analyses suggest multiple critical approaches to the study of literary texts written and self-translated/re-created by bilingual authors in postcolonial and minority contexts.

However, all three writers have published more in Spanish in recent years.

Ak'abal has published several new collections in Spanish only, which include some of his earlier poems with the addition of poems written during his travels in Europe, and he has also published, in Spanish only, an expanded edition of his moving and often tragic short stories. Unlike the other two writers discussed here, his writing is self-reflective and he is not publicly involved in political/cultural activism.

González's fictional writing shows a progression from third-person narrative to fictional *testimonio* to a fictional dialogue. In each case, the reader grows closer to the authorial voice. The fictional representation of the traditional elder counseling the younger child which appears in each text is increasingly a reflection of the author-reader relationship that González creates. Moreover, the Mayan calendar, which frames the

beginning and end of the plot of each of the prior narratives, is used to date successive episodes, and is a recurrent theme during the action, is now the central theme of his most recent work. González's recent work is in Spanish only, and shows a movement away from poetic or fictional style, towards a Mayan form of giving counsel and information.

Montejo's writing is increasingly motivated by socio-political rather than literary concerns, and is published in Spanish and English, but not in his native language. As I have mentioned, Montejo has to balance his identities as Jakalteq Maya and anthropologist, as well as the overlapping responsibilities of a Guatemalan Mayan activist and American university academic, and in 2008 his primary concern is Mayan rights.

The current status of Mayan literature in Guatemala is complex, twelve years after the 1996 Peace Accords and the initial impetus to revitalize the cultures and languages threatened by the 1954-1996 armed conflict. Bilingual-Intercultural Education has not been effective, and the national budget was cut by 50% at the end of 2007. However, there is growth in Mayan access to education at all levels, and increasing demand for culturally inclusive materials and programs. The availability of books is limited by production and distribution: even though recent years have seen the establishment of more Mayan publishers, Mayan writers face financial obstacles in publishing their work, and books are too expensive for the average person to purchase. Additionally, books from outside Guatemala are difficult to obtain, because of custom duties, high cost and theft. Outside the capital and the major cities there are very few school or public-access libraries. Computer use is expanding, with the creation of computer learning centers in some progressive schools, but maintenance and internet access are still very limited and extremely costly. Nonetheless, internet publishing may be a viable way of overcoming

some of the logistical difficulties facing the development and distribution of Mayan literature.

The growth of Mayan activism and awareness is reflected in an increase in Mayan writers, many unpublished and known only within small local groups, and many who write in Spanish only, raising questions of linguistic-cultural identity. Genre and style definitions are also in flux, influenced by the Spanish educational background and the Mayan cultural background of writers. My analysis of Montejo's and González's testimonial work suggests that the repercussions of the Stoll - Rigoberta Menchú controversy have resulted in greater caution and reserve on the part of potential *testimonio* writers. It is also clear that the *testimonio*, like other genres whose definitions have been controlled by the western academy, is a genre in process of change, whose function, as a form of identity creation and resistance, must be based on intrinsic rather than extrinsic categories. Although González's fictional works have been classified as novels by western critics, and certainly they share some of their characteristics, in fact they correspond to Mayan literary categories which more closely reflect their literary and social function. Beyond this, however, all the literary works by these, and other Mayan writers, indicate the need for the development and acceptance of a Mayan poetics based on intrinsic generic and rhetorical concepts, rather than on western conventions.

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Princeton Adult School, Princeton, N.J. Spanish teacher	1993-1998
YWCA Princeton, N.J. Spanish teacher	1996
Highland Park, N.J. Spanish and French teacher	1982-1987
Matawan Avenue Middle School, Matawan, N.J. Teacher: resource room for grades 6-8 Resource Room: perceptually/neurologically impaired	1974-1976
Princeton Child Development Institute, Princeton Teacher: autistic children aged 6-13	1973-1974
University of Trujillo, Trujillo, Peru Lecturer: English, French	1970-1972

Mellow Lane Comprehensive School, Hayes, UK 1969-1970
 French and Spanish teacher grades 6-12

Lycée Francois Magendie, Bordeaux, France 1966-1967
 English teaching assistant, grades 9-12

PUBLICATIONS

“Maya Identity in the Bilingual K’iche’-Spanish Poetry of Humberto Ak’abal.” Crossing Over: Redefining the Scope of Border Studies. Eds. Antonio Medina-Rivera and Diana Orendi. Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2007)

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