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Linguist's multi-layered data and the linguistic community's polyphony

Maurizo Gnerre

1. Some basic issues.

While graduate students in anthropology are often recommended to keep a field diary, the same usually does not happen to their fellow students in linguistics. As a consequence, while many anthropologists write on their fieldwork experience, and on the internal history of their 'data', this is not so frequent among linguists. It is likely that their field notes are much more focused on linguistic 'data' than on dimensions such as their more or less successful contacts and relations with local people (often referred to by linguists as 'native speakers'¹). Conditions under which linguistic fieldwork is undertaken and conducted vary very much on a large set of parameters. Each linguist who has done field research perceives the relevance of all these 'non-linguistic' dimensions for the quality of the 'linguistic' data collected. Beyond the relations established with local people, any possible research track is built, at least in part, on several factors, including the presence or absence of other people (either government agents, missionaries, or researchers, say, linguists, anthropologists, or biologists), or the existence, quantity and quality of texts written in, or on, the language being studied, and several others. All these factors represent, for the fieldwork and data collection, an interwoven set of *imponderabilia*, a term used by Malinowski to refer to some dimensions of culture².

Duranti (1994: 15-18) pointed out two ways of conceiving of linguistic work and data collection (and use). According to him one way is that of 'ethnographic linguistics', which requires going to the field; the other is 'field linguistics' which can, in principle be done even without going to the field.

Re-thinking my own long-term research experiences I am not so sure that the split pointed out by Duranti is always a recognizable one: most of the time 'ethnographic linguistics' encompasses 'field linguistics' even under the most planned circumstances and the most positivistic beliefs about 'data'. It is rather, I would say, an issue of the perspective one assumes on other people's speaking, and even on his/her own linguistic introspection. So, perhaps, it is

¹ A useful overview of the terms more frequently used in English to refer to 'informants' (or similar), is provided by Newman and Ratliff (2001: 2-4).

² R.M.W. Dixon is one of the very few linguists who has written a whole book (and not just scattered footnotes) on his fieldwork (Dixon 1975).

safer to talk of a process of ‘data collection’ rather than of ‘fieldwork’. Such a perspective on ‘data collection’ is part, obviously, of the ‘natural history’ of the data themselves, and is particularly relevant for the genesis of the artefacts that are typical products of linguists’ work: grammars, dictionaries, articles focussing (from many possible theoretical angles) on a specific aspect of a particular language³. I perceive my research in South and Central America as ways of doing ‘ethnographic linguistics’, and this was the case even when I was focussing on strictly linguistic dimensions, say phonological or morphological ones. Even if during most of my field research I used to keep field diaries, written apart from language notes, these carry many notes on, eg. native speakers’ ways of answering my questions (in more or less hesitant, amused or annoyed ways) or their more or less reticent or spontaneous attitudes. But, beyond all these, even more important than extended field diaries, or rich linguistic notes, is self-reflection on one’s individual research story, track, or experience, if we prefer, and on the *imponderabilia* that in each single moment provide support, or build obstacles to the research plans. The distance between such a reflection and the day-to-day field notes is one of perspective, similar to that found between an autobiography and a diary. Linguistic ‘data’ (perhaps excluding those grounded on linguist’s introspection) are necessarily ‘fragments’ from a communicative flow. The perspective, increasingly acquired year after year, encompasses the ‘natural history’ of data, i.e. the history of those chunks of spoken interactions (either spontaneous, or provoked through elicitation), or written texts, dried up of their vital juice, or their alive authoriality, and put in the linguist’s herbarium.

Any reflection on their history, starting from the specific circumstances that made possible their collection all the way to their textual implementation is a sort of deconstruction of the steps of knowledge, and layers of data, more or less hidden inside any single paper, article, essay or book one writes. In an open and transparent self-analysis of this kind, no hidden, or unsaid, layers should be left. Any field research track is also an experience of mental re-education of re-shaping certainties and, hopefully, an attempt of escaping from the euro-centrism (Gil 2001) of the linguist’s ‘radically inhabited’ language(s).

During the field research, local ‘informants’, ‘consultants’ (without any exclusion of other terms referring to native speakers assumed by a linguist as her/his source of knowledge), each one with her/his own individuality and ever-changing position, can either smooth or hinder the researcher’s work. As any linguist, at least anyone who has done field research, should know, ‘communities and speakers can differ considerably in their awareness of and

³ Comparative essays in which data from many languages are used can result also from direct data collection, although in many cases can be considered as a ‘secondary’ elaboration on already published first-hand data.

attitudes to their language' (Mithun 2001: 48), and, I would add, in their attitude to the 'translatability' of their own language and, ultimately, of their discourse. Linguistic data, even single words, but for sure sentences or discourses, often convey in themselves different local perspectives if they are 'volunteered', 'taken', if not 'extorted' through elicitation. David Gil (2001: 115) points out a 'good informant paradox': 'the better s/he is, the worse s/he is'. Basically, 'the more skilled informant will provide a translational equivalent that is as close as possible to the [...] source sentence, not just in meaning but also in structure.' As a consequence, the linguist is likely 'to end up with a corpus of sentences which, although grammatical, are actually too much like their [...] source sentences, hereby providing a distorted picture of the language under investigation.' However, the track from 'marginal' observation through approximate perception and understanding can develop into a researcher's full involvement in the linguistic community. This further step implies, in most cases, a control of the local language, and the 'data' can be not only 'collected' or 'given' anymore, but emerge even from the researcher's introspection.

'Data' collected in the field converge into textualities, or textual models, which can be very different as for the implicit or explicit reference to a more or less descriptively or theoretically oriented perspective on language. Each single piece of 'data' has its own origin in a discursive setting, more or less a monological or a dialogical one, and the linguist has been part of that setting, even if in different, more or less prominent, ways. The history of any single piece of 'data' (referring mostly to sentences) is very instructive if one wishes to understand the routes through which those pieces travelled, and, at the same time, were re-shaped, while converging from the field setting into a published article, an essay, or a book (Silverstein and Urban 1996; Gnerre 1997). Part of the 'natural history' of data is provided also by the way in which they are used, transformed, and filtered to converge, somehow homogenised, into a single essay or article. To dig out, as much as possible, also this part of their 'natural history' is a challenge leading to a deeper (and critical) understanding of a final textual product, the points it makes, or the issues it raises.

If we try to classify as different genres many (or most) of those intellectual products converging into the huge hotchpotch of linguistic 'literature', we realize that most of them (at least those whose data are not based exclusively on the author's introspection) are varying specimens of quite unique literary-scientific genres. The most frequently occurring one is a specific form of 'essay', where argumentation is supported through a set of language examples, most of them sentences. Linguists are acquainted with that genre and usually dismiss, or consider as irrelevant, the intricate stories behind many (or most) of the data used, and often concocted, in each single final intellectual product. Many sentences, or short texts, presented in them to support a linguistic argument, or topic, come from a variable number of

'consultants'. In a sense, each single sentence has its own history to the point in which it was 'taken' or 'provoked', and transcribed by one or more linguists. In fact, in everyday linguistic production, and this is particularly true in small communities, a linguist soon finds out the most recurrent, or frequent syntactic constructions, morphemes or lexical items. In most cases they can listen the 'same' sentence repeated quite often by different speakers. These recurring constructions and items are 'offered' to the linguist, who assumes, or 'takes' them, to constitute at least part of their early 'corpus'. The subsequent research history is one of search and selection, conducted through active elicitation and passive/active participation in discourse. In other words, a basic distinction that should be made is between what is 'given' (offered, volunteered) to the linguist and what is 'taken' by her/him. This second phase is one in which the linguist searches for data even, in some cases, challenging local speakers' mental laziness. All these different layers of data eventually converge into some form of textuality and, ultimately, under the category of 'examples', into a published product.

Up to now I have used in quotation marks the word 'data'. As linguists, we should start from a brief reflection on the word itself, as 'data' (and its singular form, 'datum'), means 'given'. So, this word provides an optimistic perspective, of something that has been 'given' as a 'gift' (obviously, a word etymologically related to the same verbal root). These meanings are close to the concept conveyed by the verb 'volunteer' sometimes used to differentiate some linguistic data from the majority of them, resulting from regular 'elicitation', usually understood as collected through systematic linguistic work. It is easy to perceive that these words already outline a conceptual continuum: on one of its sides we find data labelled as 'volunteered'. 'Elicited' data follow, and other data 'derive', or are 'extracted', from 'observation' or from some written text. As Larry Hyman notes: 'the essential difference between the [two different ways of working, elicitation and observation] derives from the role of the investigator: in elicitation, the researcher necessarily plays an active role in generating the data [...] the methodology is essentially experimental' (Hyman 2001:18).

To refer to the 'observed' or 'extracted' data we could use a general cover term: 'taken' data. So, the conceptual continuum extends from 'given' to 'taken' data, and, obviously, each one of these and of the intermediate labels raises different issues of research ethics, that I will not discuss here. Such a continuum raises issues of perspective and value: which are the 'best', or the most relevant data from the linguist's point of view? Those placed towards the 'given' end of the continuum, or those closer to the opposite end? Anyone who has heard of Labov's 'observer's paradox', and has received some ideas about 'authenticity' or 'naturalness', or similar, often suspects that 'elicited' single sentences or full texts, performed by a native speaker for the researcher, are not so 'authentic' as one would wish them to be. Marianne Mithun states

(2001:51), quite correctly from a linguist's point of view, but not necessarily from an anthropological-linguistic perspective: 'the more we can document speech in its natural function, in spontaneous interaction among speakers, with the give and take of true communication, the more we can learn about the language in its own terms. Speakers often shape the record most effectively when they are given the opportunity to choose what to say and how to say it.'

Data labelled as 'natural' or 'artificial' are often labelled, at the same time respectively, as 'taken' and 'given' ('volunteered', 'elicited'?). In any case, far from any easily built scale, local representations of what is, say, 'volunteered', or 'stolen', just to use two terms that at a first glance seem to convey two reciprocally very removed judgements, must be taken into account. Such an awareness raises not only multi-faced ethical issues, but also an issue of the intrinsic nature and quality of the data. In fact, research ethics is not necessarily an absolute, or a generic one, but rather it is calibrated on the ethos of 'ownership' and sharing attitudes of any single society.

Going back to the first of the two sentences by Mithun quoted above, an interwoven issue is that of describing a 'language in its own terms'. Such an expression can suggest either that there is an internal logic in a language, even if its speakers are not aware of it, but it could also suggest, more concretely, the existence of a meta-linguistic lexicon used to refer to different uses of a language, or to different parts of it. Sometimes, local terminologies referring, say, to language uses or ideologies, can actually guide the researcher. The existence of a meta-linguistic lexicon, raises very complex issues: in fact, when we think of Western traditional meta-linguistic terminology, including the highly elaborate rhetorical terminology, we realize how unsatisfactory, and even misleading it can be. As a consequence I am very skeptical of any possible description of any language 'in its own terms'. So, the route from data field collection to an intellectual product contributing, with different levels of acceptance or recognition, to the linguistic hotchpotch is often one from the 'unsaid', not stated at all by local speakers, towards the 'said', the linguist's explicit statements. It emerges through an external insight on a language, made possible by an (ever-changing and growing) meta-linguistic conceptual elaboration and terminology. An example of such a growing analytical awareness and correspondingly growing meta-linguistic lexicon will be provided by the use of the concept (and term) of 'concomitance' that guided the construction of the second of the two articles discussed below.

In the remaining part of this paper I will outline, even if in a cursory way, the 'secret history' of two articles of mine, quite different one from the other, putting them under scrutiny. Each one reflects a specific history of *imponderabilia* and data 'given', 'taken', and re-interpreted.

The first article outlines the Upper Amazon Shuar and Achuar ways of speaking, and their recent changes. It is an anthropological-linguistic article

and as such it is already 'open' to a sort of natural history of its genesis. The second article (written with Flavia Cuturi), on the Southern Mexican Huave language, seems to me to be representative, as for the quality of the data used in it, of many linguistic papers.

The first of the two articles reflects more an 'ethnographic linguistic' attitude than the second, in terms of the above mentioned distinction made by Duranti.

Using the expression 'secret history' I was referring to a literary exercise done in the past by Mario Vargas Llosa, who has reflected on the history and the genesis of one of his novels, *La casa verde* (1965). A few years later, rethinking on the circumstances that inspired him to write the novel, he wrote the essay *Historia Secreta de una Novela* (1971).

2. 'Taken' and 'given': a paper on the Shuar and Achuar (Upper Amazon) communicative changes.

When, in 1968, I first travelled to the Upper Amazon, to reach the Jívaros (Shuar), where I would do my first extended field research, I was very young, and I barely knew what linguistics was about. At that time I was planning to get acquainted with the Shuar language and culture, as a first step to preparing a future research (and action) project. The following year, when I went back to my home place, Rome, to receive some formal training in linguistics I found that no course on linguistic field methods was taught⁴.

In 1970 I went back to the Shuar, planning to conduct linguistic fieldwork (initially, for 12 months), in some small villages where at least a few of the residents already knew me and, as I flatter myself to believe, enjoyed my presence there as an exotic entertainment. That was an ideal condition for the very initial step in any field research: good relations with local people, and their acceptance. I had particularly good relations with several young Shuar men (approximately my peers, between 20 and 22). Some of them were already quite fluent in regional Spanish and a few of them were starting to write in their language.

In 1971 I convinced two of my peers to travel to the neighbouring Achuar. There I found a cultural setting that recalled to me the way of life (and of

⁴ Professor Giorgio Cardona, an Africanist, introduced me to Professor William Samarin, another Africanist, whose *Field Linguistics* had been published two years before (Samarin 1967). Still nothing had been published by anthropological-linguists on the way of putting questions to consultants (such as Charles Briggs, 1986). Probably, the relevant reflections on these issues contributed to oral interactions in field methods seminars, held in several universities and in missionary institutions (such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics).

language use) I had heard described by the grown up Shuar as their own way of life till some two or three decades earlier. That visit, and others in the years to follow, provided me with a new perspective on the Shuar data I had collected or those I knew of. In those same years I did some fieldwork among the Achuar together with an anthropologist, Antonino Colajanni, from whom I heard about many aspects of anthropological theory, issues and current research.

A decade later, part of the data collected among the Achuar, but, much more important, the perspective acquired on the changes taking place among the Shuar, converged into a paper, discussed below, *The Decline of Dialogue*. That paper was made possible not only by specific data, but, as should be obvious, by an overall feeling of the linguistic and cultural conditions of the peoples I was writing about. The main focus was put on cultural and linguistic changes affecting the Shuar and Achuar ways of speaking and discourse genres, carrying with them a reduced (at least up to the present) impact on the linguistic code as such.

Through those same years, my intellectual horizons widened from the strict linguistic 'phonology-morphology-syntax' paradigm to one encompassing some of the contextual dimensions framing local language uses and fast changes. I became interested in the very early attempts creating a written language and some writing styles.

The local indigenous organisation, the *Federación Shuar*, established a few years earlier, started to operate a radio where speakers had to do their best to adapt their language, spoken till then exclusively in face-to-face modalities, to a language produced in a 'displaced' modality, to be heard, and hopefully understood, by thousands of people scattered far away in the tropical forest. The *Radio Federación* represented, as should be obvious, another linguistically (and culturally) far-reaching innovation. Shuar language acquired some spoken-by-radio modalities, as it was broadcast several hours a day. The radio enhanced the use of some genres, such as new forms of political, highly rhetorical, speeches produced by the *Federación* political leaders, as well as elementary school lessons, usually produced by teachers in a newly-shaped, slowly spoken, speech style. While both these forms of discourse were often tape recorded and broadcast, every day dozens of messages were directly spoken into the microphones by people coming from remote areas of the Shuar country willing to have their voice heard in their own villages. Both written and spoken-by-radio language enhanced my awareness on the range of speaking and writing styles and modalities.

It was in the frame of those reflections, and on the background of my 'extended' linguistic awareness, encompassing dimensions much wider than the exclusive focus on language structure, that, month after month, the nature and quality of my data became increasingly evident to me. Several episodes,

quite similar to those that every linguist can remember from their fieldwork, were contributing to my awareness. Once, it was still 1970, I addressed in Spanish one of my almost-bilingual peers, asking him a question ‘How old are you?’ (*¿Cuántos años tienes?*), that was totally foolish in that context. The young man was already equipped with some level of linguistic and intercultural awareness and he understood, perhaps, that my interest was not only to ‘learn’ his language, to be able to speak it, but to work on it with the aim of producing a linguistic description and, ultimately, a ‘grammar’. So, after a short reflection, in place of answering with the numeral (necessarily in Spanish, as Shuar numerals reach only ‘five’) corresponding to his age (some unit above 20), he rather translated my question in the following way: *Urutma uwí takákam*. I took note of that meta-linguistic answer with a sort of naïve acceptance of the native speaker’s utterance. Only some time later, fortunately not too late, I realised that the way in which he had put together the three-words sentence, with a one-to-one correspondence to the Spanish wording of my question, reflected a variety of simplified Shuar.

Although each one of the three words used by the young man was perfectly acceptable Shuar, as for the meaning only the first, *urutma* ‘how much, many’, was a word regularly used in everyday language. The other two, *uwí* and *takákam*, derived their meaning from cultural contact with *mestizo* Spanish-speaking people. In fact, reading some old texts published between the late XIX century and 1940, approximately, I found out that in the Shuar area two contact linguistic varieties had been in use: one based on a simplified Shuar and another on a simplified (pidginized) Spanish. The first of the two words was the name of the *Bactris Sp.*, a palm-tree highly symbolic in Shuar culture, bearing its fruits once a year, an event celebrated by the Shuar. As a consequence of cultural contacts, most Shuar were using that name to refer to the concept of ‘year’. The second word was a verb form (2nd person, present tense) of a verb root *taka-* with a basic meaning such as ‘to touch, to hold’. In the speech of the Shuar in contact with the colonising frontier, that verb, in a semantic transition favoured by Sp. *tener* ‘to hold, to have’ had acquired the meaning of ‘to have’ (as well as ‘to work’).

In some places of the very extended Shuar country, either catholic or protestant missionaries had been present for many years. I got in touch with three of them, who were quite knowledgeable of Shuar language. Each one helped me in different ways, providing me with advice and answering several of the questions I had on Shuar grammar. In particular, I was able to discuss with Dr. Glen Turner, an American missionary-linguist of the Summer Institute of Linguistics my phonological data, and several others on switch-reference. With Aijiu Juank, an extremely insightful Salesian missionary, I discussed lexical and syntactic data. Later, as my knowledge of the language grew, I started reading the mythological texts that another Salesian missionary, Siro Pellizzaro, was tape-recording and transcribing. In my field

notebooks there are several pages of hand-written copies of transcripts of narratives he had tape-recorded, that he kindly allowed me to copy, while I was spending two or three days in the mission place where he was living.

I started taking advantage of such an internal sedimentation of data to detect and uncover the emergence of the use of evidential forms, implemented mostly in mythological narratives. Far from the early naiveté of the time when I had taken as good a sentence like the 'How old are you?' one, around 1995 I started publishing papers on data (mostly texts) collected twenty years earlier by me and by Father Pellizzaro. The textual analyses I was working out were aiming at an understanding of the textual building up, under interactive conditions (the narrator and the researcher), of texts often assumed by anthropologists just as reified 'myths', to be translated and quoted as such. In those papers several of the above mentioned layers played their role. Each one was filtered through the understanding tool, or lens, that other layers were providing.

My own history, and that of my relations with the Shuar and other researchers (as the four mentioned above) built the background to the pages I wrote focussing on two forms of discourse: ceremonial visiting dialogues and narrative discourse dialogues with mythological content. Both were highly salient for native speakers, who recognized them as distinctive types of language use with different functions, and had several names to refer to them. Ceremonial dialogues reach the level of consciousness of speakers because of their special formal features, mainly prosodic and rhythmic. Narratives with mythological content reach speakers' consciousness because of their content, perceived as a set of stories characteristic of traditional Shuar and Achuar beliefs and way of life.

Dimensions of introspection, or of elaboration on the knowledge one has acquired along fieldwork are exemplified in the paper on the Shuar forms of discourse. None of the data presented there comes from standard linguistic elicitation, neither mine nor any other linguist's. All the data are from full discourses, such as ceremonial visiting conversations, or mythological narrations. The example of the first type of discourse was collected by me, while the samples of mythological narratives come from my acquaintance with available sources. So, I aligned scattered data to show a specific dimension of change in Shuar ceremonial and narrative discourse.

Ceremonial conversations, both the visiting dialogues and war party dialogues, were (and still are) perceived as special speech forms. Once they were used by Shuar men but probably since one or two decades before my first visit they had been dismissed. Sometimes, these are still used by Achuar men, who volunteer to 'reproduce' them as a significant performance of their speaking abilities. Some simplified forms of dialogue are occasionally taught

in Shuar bilingual and bicultural schools as a facet of the traditional way of life that boys are supposed to master to be acknowledged as young men.

Ceremonial conversations traditionally represented perhaps the most important abilities of male speakers and were central activities in social life. Although some minor varieties of ceremonial conversations are still in use on some occasions among the Shuar, and in some cases war party and visiting dialogues are currently represented as ‘folklore’ or taught in a classroom setting, it is clear that a basic displacement has taken place with regard to the social relevance of these conversations. Among the Shuar and the Achuar the use of several names makes them easily identifiable genres. So, for example, the visiting conversation provided in the paper was usually called *ájumatin* ‘to narrate, to converse’ by the Achuar and *ausha ausha* by the Shuar, who extrapolated one of the words frequently used in its performance, understood by them with the meaning of ‘to be different, otherwise’. Among the Achuar, at the time when I collected several of those conversations, those performances were protected by a sort of jealousy, and no one was ready to spell out word-by-word the sentences pronounced very rapidly, and following a specific prosodic pattern in such a way to produce some significant phonological changes, such as stress shifts, apocopies, and vowel reductions. Achuar, and even present-day Shuar, still perceive these conversations as something worth being heard and seen by non-Jivaroan visitors, who are very likely to appreciate them as an outstanding example of speech ability. Apparently, however, a non-Achuar person should not learn and perform those discourse. A missionary, Father Luis Bolla (Yankuam’), who has lived in the Achuar country for many years and who speaks the Achuar language very fluently, prepared himself to perform a ceremonial dialogue on special occasions. Some Achuar men appreciated his ability, although others had the feeling that he was learning too much of their traditions and linguistic knowledge.

Mythological narrative, at least in some social settings, has undergone a general switch from direct discourse to a widely used quotative form. In the paper analyzed here, these changes are viewed as factors in the development of native speaker consciousness of ceremonial dialogue.

Through the observation of many cases of ceremonial visiting and from a set of interviews with Achuar men, I found that many non-linguistic aspects of the visit are significant and that they form a continuum with the central verbal act, the visiting ceremonial dialogue. The fundamental components of this continuum are: (1) the distribution of silence and speech; (2) body position and the direction of gaze; (3) the rhythm and prosody of the dialogue; and (4) the quantity and quality of information communicated. In the paper I transcribed a ceremonial visiting conversation volunteered to me and Antonino Colajanni by two Achuar men, Nayàsh and Chiriàp, in the house of

the first, on the upper Setuchi River (Eastern Ecuador), on 22nd September, 1974. As a short sample, only ten turns are reproduced here:

Nayàsh	Chiriàp
1 <i>Yatsùru winyàmek</i> my brother did you come?	
la	<i>jm</i>
2 <i>tse wari àntsarik</i> even what without doing anything	
<i>pujàkrisha</i> we stay too	
2a	<i>jai!</i>
3 <i>tse wari jìimkyachu</i> even what without visiting	<i>àntsarik</i> without doing anything
	<i>pujàkrisha a</i> we stay too
<i>kétkursha</i> stays at home	
4 <i>wari jìimtsuk keémtaka</i> what without visiting staying	<i>jìimkyachu kétkursha</i> without visiting stays at home
<i>keémtainkya</i> at home staying	
5 <i>ya wari àush tímyajuyà</i> who what like this	<i>kémtaka kémtainkya</i> <i>aushà!</i> staying at home
6 <i>yà tímya jùsh tímyajauyà</i> who like this like this	<i>wari jìimtsuka</i> what without visiting
	<i>ekémtainkyaitya</i> staying at home
7 <i>wari ekétsuk àusha yà</i> what without staying at home who	<i>tu tukin wekàjai</i> so saying I go
7a	<i>jai!</i>
8 <i>wari àush jìimkyachu</i> what without visiting	
8a	<i>chua!</i>
9 <i>wari jìimkyachu keemta</i> what without visiting staying	wow!
9a	<i>jm!</i>
10 <i>wari tu tukimtsukuk àusha ya</i> what so saying this who	
10a	<i>nekàsa!</i> true!

The most outstanding features of Shuar and Achuar ceremonial conversations are prosody and rhythm. The typical intonation contour of the main speaker's utterance consists in a rapid rise to and fall from a single intonation peak.

Immediately after the initial phrase pronounced by the main resident of a long-house, the visitor, in this case Chiriáp, begins his rapid and rhythmic speech. From this point (line 3) on, the two men speak together without paying too much attention to listening to the interlocutor. The interval between the rise and fall corresponds to a minor third. After this initial phase, the visitor starts listening to the speech of the long-house resident, in this case Nayásh, replying with expressions such *ajai* ('yes'), *nekàsa* ('true'), *chúa* ('wow!'), *tsa* ('no'), *màkete* ('its enough') and a few others, drawn from a closed set. Each utterance is pronounced with great rapidity and while the number of words and the semantic content may vary the rhythm and the prosody become more uniform. Each utterance of the main speaker lasts two seconds or less.

With regard to the lexical and grammatical selection of forms, some are used only to complete the rhythmic and prosodic pattern, but with scarce or non-existent semantic function, such as *àusha*, *kame*. In addition, many words are used which in themselves carry a clear meaning, but in this ritualized context are little more than generic forms used to fulfil the rhythmic and prosodic pattern. Examples, among others, are *wari* ('what'), *ya* ('who'), *junikya* ('like this'), *jùsha* ('this also'), *ju* ('this'), *timyajuya* ('that far away'). The variation in the forms used is quite remarkable and the degree of variation is not directly related to semantic differences, but much more to adjusting phonology to rhythm, prosody, and formulaic patterns. Many utterances completely lack semantic content beyond the possible translation of individual words. An example is: *wari aush ausha yá*. No Achuar man was able to suggest an interpretation for this kind of utterance. Other utterances, even though translatable, are highly redundant, such as: *wekátash wekámтай wekámтай wekámтай*. Both redundancy and formulaic pattern reflect an implicit folk theory of language efficacy. By repeating the same forms and even the same utterances many times, the speaker not only fills out the pattern of the ceremonial dialogue; he also states beyond any doubt some basic and constitutive concepts, or 'key-words' of the whole cultural complex.

Among the Shuar, basic socio-cultural transformation took place, affecting the relevance, or the efficacy attributed to several cultural dimensions, among these ceremonial visiting conversations. Until the decade of 1950-60, these conversations represented one of the most important uses of language. In 1970-80, even if some kind of reduced or simplified form of the visiting dialogue was still practised, it was clear that other uses of language in school and in bureaucratic settings had assumed a central role. The main feature of such a set of changes was the decline of the exclusive dialogic pattern of verbal interaction. Not only the new living patterns (from scattered long-houses to villages) and consequent new forms of visiting, but also self-consciousness with respect to language and its uses contributed to the decline of this verbal form.

A somewhat similar process is taking place among the Achuar, as they are changing their living pattern, their visiting activity, and their awareness of language and language use. Furthermore, a very relevant dimension to be taken into account is that for the Achuar of Ecuador, the Shuar, their neighbours, constituted an example of social change, and the radio broadcasting station in Shuar was widely heard by the Achuar. Not only the Shuar language, but also its uses became a model for the young Achuar.

Among both Shuar and Achuar, the decline of the visiting ceremonial dialogues was (and still is) interconnected, at should be expected, to the restructuring of other forms of discourse. Narration was a verbal activity which often occupied a special status, in that while it established a dialogic relationship between narrator and his/her audience, it also established a more or less defined indirect relation of all of them with the main characters of the narrative. These were not necessarily human beings, but also other animates (animals and plants), and inanimate objects (mostly natural or man-made ones).

If we listen to a narrative produced by a Shuar or an Achuar for another individual (not for a researcher) we observe that a dialogic verbal interaction takes place. The listener participates at all times in the narrative discourse, either repeating the last word of a paragraph (a set of sentences) of the narrative, asking rhetorically: *nekàsa* ? ('is that true?'), or using expressions which manifest his or her agreement with or involvement in the narrator's performance. However, in the narratives of myths or traditional stories as recorded by researchers we find repeated uses of the verb *t-i/a/u-*, 'to say.' Each paragraph, or sometimes even each sentence of the narrative is closed by a form of that verb. We should interpret such a form of myth telling as a kind of reported speech. In the paper discussed here, as an example of this style, I provide a segment of a very important Shuar myth, that of Tsunki, as it had been narrated by Pitiur, a Shuar big man, in 1978, and recorded and transcribed by S. Pellizzaro.

The process of 'extexualization' linking somehow Pitiur's spoken performance to Pellizzaro written (and even published) mythological texts is a dimension that was not discussed in the paper analyzed here, but in a later one (Gnerre 1997).

...

5. *Aínsank Tsunkísha winiákui, ūmia pujúmia tūmiayi.*

In this way also, Tsunki was seated, watching him while he approached, it was said.

6. *-Winiájai - tīnia, waniá, pujús, nuí waniámujai métek pànkikia:*

juka nu Tsunki kuchirí tīniu ármiai pankínkia.

Saying, 'I am coming,' he entered and sat down. At the entrance there were anacondas, which Tsunki used to call his pigs.

7. *Tsunkí kuchirínkia áawini taníshmarma ániunam tepétar ajármia tūmiayi.*

Tsunki's pigs were lying down just outside the door, surrounded by a fence, it was said.

From: Pellizzaro (1979: 27-28)

In lines 5, and 7 we find the form *timiayi*, 'it was said,' which closes two of the paragraphs of the narrative. When we read the texts of myths as transcribed by researchers in the past, however, we find that such forms of the *t-i/a/u-* verb do not occur with the same paragraph-closing function.

Rafael Karsten, a Finnish ethnologist, travelled among the Shuar and other Jivaroan peoples between 1916 and 1919 and in 1928-29. He knew the Shuar language, and transcribed many myths under dictation (Karsten 1919). In those texts we find samples of reported speech which are part of the narrative, followed by *timya* ('(she) said'), but not a single occurrence of the verb in paragraph-final position. To explain this absence, which is puzzling when compared to the contemporary frequent occurrence of the *t-i/a/u-* forms in paragraph-final position, I offer three possible hypotheses:

1. Karsten's Shuar informants performed a simplification or a restructuring of the way they would have otherwise told the myth to a non-Shuar listener, because they were using a variety of contact Shuar, or because they were dictating the text, and the extremely artificial situation led them to drop the *t-i/a/u-* verb forms;
2. Karsten edited the texts to make them 'cleaner' as he was focusing primarily on their content as myths and not on their linguistic and stylistic form
3. in those years the *t-i/a/u-* forms were not found in paragraph-final position and their use in narratives was introduced in more recent years.

One of the purposes of the paper discussed here was to show that the last of the three hypotheses received strong support from more recent evidence. The same researcher who collected most of the Shuar myths, S. Pellizzaro, had recorded some texts already in 1955. One of the few texts transcribed from those early recordings was told by a young man, Shakai, who at that time was about 20 years old. His short mythological narrative was quite traditional in its structure: it was an exemplary story where an hero, Etsa, is depicted as a pitiful man, who weeps for the death of a woman who was not even his wife, as opposed to her husband's (Sau's) pitilessness. In the whole text, not a single *t-i/a/u-* form is used. This evidence supports the hypothesis that the *t-i/a/u-* forms used as quotatives in paragraph-final position are an innovation in the way of narrating. Their function in the narration is either one of legitimizing the knowledge the informant is transmitting or one of expressing some distance that he or she is taking from the narrative content. The two meanings could converge with a sense something like: 'it is not me the one who is saying this, somebody else (more reliable, more knowledgeable than me) told this.' With the use of the *t-i/a/u-* forms, mythological narrative becomes embedded into a temporal/ aspectual frame of reference: 'it was said, they used to say.' This embedding into an indefinite past increases the distance between the narrator (in his function as 'informant') and the narrative content, and actually states that somebody (or everybody) once said or used to say that. It is possible that consciousness of the fact that a traditional story is being told out of its normal context (i. e., for a researcher) plays an important role in triggering the use of the *t-i/a/u-* forms.

An alternative interpretation, which we might call 'formal,' as opposed to the 'semantic' one, is that these forms show up only in the special interaction which is established with an outsider (the researcher) who is silent most of the time and who does not interact in a dialogic way with the narrator, in the usual Shuar manner. These forms would be, according to this interpretation, a substitution for the dialogic interchange.

There is, however, counter-evidence to this exclusively formal interpretation. When in 1975, for the first time, a Shuar researcher, Ricardo Tankámash', tape-recorded traditional narratives, most of his informants produced texts with an outstanding amount of *t-i/a/u-* forms (Gnerre 1985). He was obviously able to interact with his 'informants' and in most cases he did interact in the narration of the myths. In fact, we find many occurrences of the form *timiaja* ('it was said'). The frequency of the *t-i/a/u-* forms even in narratives recorded by a Shuar researcher leads me to prefer the semantic interpretation rather than the formal one. In fact he was interacting with his informants, but in the artificial recording setting the dialogue had to shift into a monologue incorporating the dialogue. In the monologue the informant establishes a relation with previous times when old time Shuar really knew about things. In this way, the narrative incorporates within itself, when

produced in an artificial setting, a meta-narrative, and any myth or traditional story becomes an opportunity to repeat the general story concerning changes in knowledge and beliefs in the community. The narration of each myth becomes a discourse about cultural changes. Dialogue becomes a monologue about the process of decline of dialogue.

When, in the 1970s, literacy in Shuar had a still moderate spread, in the myths written in Shuar by young people the *t-i/a/u-* verb forms were not used as quotatives. This fact should not be interpreted as a return to the traditional way of narrating. The few Shuar who have written mythological narratives constitute a group that is quite advanced in the process of critical consciousness and distance from an ‘internal’ perspective on the content of myth. They had all spent many years in school, some of them outside of Shuar country. For them, the proper way to narrate orally a myth was by using the *t-i/a/u-* forms, but for written narrative they were strongly influenced by the western (Spanish) model (Gnerre 2000a and b).

Parallel to the decline of formalised dialogue was the increasing distance between traditional knowledge and current Shuar beliefs, values, and ways of life. Literacy, schooling, and even the presence of researchers among the Shuar played an important role in the process of establishing a consciousness of that increasing distance. The new way of performing traditional narratives, especially in the presence of researchers, reflects that consciousness through the use of quotative forms. Of course, it is not at all by chance that the presence of a researcher, either a white man, like Pellizzaro or me, or a Shuar, like Ricardo Tankámash’, triggers the use of the quotative forms. These manifest the consciousness the narrator has of the different world views and beliefs of his listener. But even further, in most cases they represent the different world view and beliefs of the narrator himself or herself in relation to those expressed in the narratives. In this way, the narratives with *t-i/a/u-* forms become, ultimately, a monologue in which ‘traditional’, or even contemporary, dialogue is represented.

To clarify the internal layers of the paper outlined here it is helpful to recall its genesis. Already in my early years in the field (up to 1974, I would say) the Shuar data I had were layered in several levels, even if at that time I was not fully aware of that internal layering. I would roughly recognise, in an approximate order of their sedimentation:

1. transcripts of sentences occurring in natural conversations (I had always with me a small pocket-size note-book, and, later, a small cassette tape-recorder with external microphone);

2. sentences elicited one by one, in regular field linguistic elicitation work done with some good close-to-bilingual informants, who were spending a few hours a week with me, trying to do their best in their 'translation' job, while I was tape recording them;
3. verbal interactions among the informant and other people always sitting around during the elicitation sessions and providing comments or informing each other on something happening or whatever, these also tape-recorded;
4. mythological narratives tape recorded under different circumstances and produced, in most cases, by fully monolingual speakers, still well 'inside' their world of representations and behaviours;
5. both naturally-occurring and volunteered samples of ceremonial speeches, a genre once highly present in the Shuar culture and still present among the Achuar;
6. tape-recorded comments on my own recordings, systematically requested of some informants with a good level of language awareness and linguistic sensibility;
7. mythological texts published by the Finnish anthropologist Rafael Karsten between 1919 and 1935, written by him under dictation in the 'simplified variety of Shuar';
8. narrative texts tape-recorded by Ricardo Tankamash, the first Shuar researcher, around 1970 (Rueda 1983 and Gnerre 1985);
9. speeches and short messages broadcast by radio;
10. sentences produced by elders or even young people in the simplified variety of Shuar that had been in use (and referred to in written sources) decades before but that was still practiced sometimes by local indigenous monolingual people as a way to make 'easier' their language to non-indigenous people (Spanish or Quechua speaking); to these I had to add a set of sentences transcribed between 1890 and 1940 in Missionary accounts, as well as most of an early translation of St Luke's Gospel produced by a couple of American Missionaries (in 1930 approximately) (Gnerre 1984);

11. short written texts produced by some young men and women who, together with writing, had acquired some level of linguist awareness, and who were willing to ‘help’ me in one way or another (Gnerre 2000a and b);
12. the transcripts of Father Pellizzaro, mostly mythological narratives tape recorded by him and ‘textualized’ under very complex conditions (that I analysed, several years later in a paper on personal relations, linguistic data ‘entextualization’ and textual analysis (Gnerre 1997);
13. some extended ‘translations’ of the Gospels produced by protestant missionaries and/or a set of originally written religious hymns and songs; their linguistic quality was good and an external observer, as I was, had to appreciate the fight undertaken to fit Western and Christian contents and messages into the lexical resources of an indigenous Amazonian tongue;
14. part of the linguistic work undertaken by several missionaries in their attempts at putting Shuar language into a grammatical frame; the ‘modern’ phase of such work started in the mid-1950s (approximately ten years before I had first reached the Shuar) (Turner 1957, and Pellizzaro 1968).

Finally, but very important in ethnographic linguistic research:

15. a cultural-pragmatic view of language use and, at least roughly, of its cultural background;

Later, from 1980 on, two further layers were added. Around that date I started acting, under request of the Shuar teachers, as a lecturer on their language for Shuar high-school students. At the same time, I was an early organiser of the work for a Spanish-Shuar (not the reverse!) dictionary, they claimed to be needed for their bilingual schools. The first edition of the Dictionary was printed in 1988 (Instituto Normal 1988). The work done with Shuar people showed, through their comments and questions, different levels of awareness of their language, and represented another layer in my own ‘data’.

The further, and, to this point, final layer grew out of my increasing interest in ethnomusicology, after I had met, at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, Anthony Seeger, an American ethnomusicologist who was conducting his research among the Suyá of Central Brazil. His lectures

convinced me that any ethno-linguistic perspective on language and culture had to be complemented by an ethno-musicological perspective. So, when I went back, once more, to the Shuar and the Achuar, I tried to tape-record their magical songs, the *ánent*. I discovered, however, a dimension of jealousy that I had come across only occasionally, but that had not been so relevant as an obstacle to my research purposes: the Shuar and the Achuar were highly protective of their *ánent*, more or less secretly sung by both males and females, and were not ready to have them recorded. What they usually 'volunteered' to me were their public songs, the *námpet* usually sung during their parties. As my musicological expertise was quite poor, I rather focussed on transcribing the highly intricate texts (of the few *ánent* and of the several *námpet*), discovering a poetical language totally new to me, and previously unsuspected (Gnerre 2003).

In terms of the layers mentioned above, at least half of them are explicitly quoted in the paper: (a) linguistic background knowledge, relevant for the basic transcription and analysis of all the texts included in the paper (layers 1 and 2); (b) cultural acquaintance with Shuar culture, was part of my research to a certain degree, mostly that directly relevant to the anthropological-linguistic understanding (layer 15); such knowledge is present in any part of the paper in presenting several dimensions of the speech styles and their changes; (c) ethno-historical knowledge, relevant in the paper to point out some linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions of the Shuar contact variety once in use (layer 10); (d) the Achuar ritual conversations that I had first tape-recorded in 1971 (layer 5); (e) myth transcriptions from Pellizzaro, Karsten and Tankamash (layers 4, 7, 8 and 12), relevant to show how some quotative forms had emerged through the decades. All these different layers are fully functional, to show how changes in speech styles were taking place.

In the face of such complexity it is really hard for me to talk in terms of 'primary' vs. 'secondary', or 'first hand' vs. 'second hand' data. Issues such as level of speakers' awareness, their full understanding of my purposes beyond my desire of 'learning' their language, the presence of different rhetorical levels, let alone ceremonial speeches and singing, all converge to raise the question of the continuum between data and metadata. Ultimately, the issue of a distinction between 'data', understood in the etymological sense, i.e. 'given', as opposed to 'taken' chunks of language, and their homogenising entextualization into the highly specific frame of a linguistic discourse should be raised.

3. 'Given' and 'taken': a paper on Huave (Mesoamerica) concomitance relations.

The second of the two papers discussed here emerges out of, and exemplifies, a research situation radically different, as for both fieldwork conditions and main purposes, from the one among the Shuar-Achuar. I went to the Huave research setting about the mid-1990s. My acquaintance with Flavia Cuturi, the anthropologist who took me in 1994 to the Huave area for the first time, opened to me a whole set of relations with the villagers of San Mateo del Mar, as she had been conducting her research there since 1979. At the same time, Flavia acted as a filter in most of my early contacts. I had to accept to be perceived and 'classified' from the local point of view, as a 'continuity' of Flavia's long-term acquaintance with the Huave. Flavia's role was, however, a very positive and productive one. The paper discussed here, about 'concomitance' relations in Huave, is one of the outputs of our joint anthropological and linguistic research. In it we use data produced by at least eight 'consultants', at different times.

Most of the data were produced, 'given' orally, but a few were also 'taken' from written texts. Flavia had been working, since her first years in San Mateo, with an aged fisherman, Juan Olivares, who was one of the most outstanding personalities in the cultural-linguistic scene of the village. In the context of this paper, focussing on the nature and the background of linguistic data, some aspects of Juan Olivares' experience and linguistic awareness should be pointed out. He had been a main collaborator of an SIL linguistic missionary, Rev. Milton Warkentin, who taught him how to write and read in his own language. With him he co-authored an early paper where some Huave oral narratives were transcribed and translated (Warkentin and Olivares 1947). Since the late 1950's Juan started collaborating with a couple of SIL linguists, Emily and Albert Stairs (Stairs and Stairs 1981), and, for two years, with an anthropological linguist, Richard Diebold. (Diebold 1961, a and b). Later, in the early 1970's Juan worked for a short period with the Argentinian-Mexican linguist Jorge Suarez (Suárez 1975). Around the same time he was the main consultant of Italo Signorini, the author of the first ethnographic monograph on the Huave (Signorini 1979), and Flavia Cuturi's Professor. After that Juan became the main consultant and a 'counsellor' of several other, much younger anthropologists, while he kept working on improving the already existing translation of the Gospels into Huave. Flavia Cuturi wrote quite an impressive book about Mr. Olivares as a man, a local intellectual, and a writer, as well as about his own sources of knowledge and, overall, about his linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness (Cuturi 2003).

After this brief introduction to the research background and to one of the most outstanding personalities in San Mateo, we can proceed to a sort of deconstruction of the paper taken into account here (Cuturi and Gnerre 2005).

It focuses on the complex strategies implemented by the Huave to express ‘concomitance’ relations, a cover-term encompassing, according to Lehmann and Shin (2005) seven participant relations, viz. Partner (PR), Companion (CM), Tool (TL), Material (ML), Vehicle (VL), Manner (MR), and Circumstance (CE). The same authors identify seven types of syntactic strategies employed in codifying concomitant relations, viz. Concomitant predication (Cp), Adpositional marking (Am), Case marking (Cm), Verb derivation (Vd), Incorporation (In), Conversion (Cv), and Lexical fusion (Lf). Each one of the fourteen languages taken into account in Lehmann and Shin’s study implement two or more of the above strategies. Furthermore, out of the 49 theoretically possible combinations of the participant relations with the coding strategies, ten have not been found in any one of the languages studied. We realized that in San Mateo Huave combinations were quite rich and deserved a special focus. Some speakers’ linguistic awareness played a decisive role in selecting this topic as part of Huave Grammar. However, as it will be shown, linguistic communities’ intrinsic polyphony can play either a role of confusing the researcher, or one of stimulating them to focus on a specific linguistic issue. Over several years Juan Olivares was our main linguistic consultant. At that point of his life he had fifty-years experience of work, and he contributed to point out to both of us the intricacies of the ways in which several of the ‘concomitance’ relations are codified in San Mateo Huave. This was even more apparent to him when compared with the Spanish preposition *con* ‘with’, codifying, as it is the case for the corresponding prepositions in most European languages, several of the ‘concomitance’ relations. Spanish *con* is frequently used also in ‘inaccurately’ (according to Juan) spoken Huave.

As a story-teller, and writer, Juan contributed to several of the more than seventy sentences quoted in our paper to illustrate the complexity of the codification of ‘concomitance’ relations in Huave. Some selected examples are⁵:

⁵ The number in square brackets is that of the example in the paper discussed; differently from the ‘free translation’ glosses provided in the paper on Shuar discourse, in this case, as this paper focuses on a specific linguistic issue, linguistic glosses are provided. Abbreviations are: ANM = Animate; ANPAS= Antipassive; CAUS= Causative; CLS= Close; CMP- Completive; COM= Comitative; CTF= Centrifugal; CTP= Centripetal; DEM = Demonstrative; DET= Determiner; DIR= Directional; DIST= Distant; EXC= Exclusive; FUT = Future; GNR=Generalizer; IMP = Imperative; INCL= Inclusive; IND= Indexical; INT = Interrogative; NEG= Nrgative; NMR= Nominalizer; OBJ= Object; OBL=Oblique; PL=Plural; PN= Proun; POS=Possessive; PRG= Progressive; PST=Past; PSV= Passivizing mark (infix); QST=Question; RCP= Reciprocal; REL=Relational (*wix* only); RFL= Reflexive; RND = Round; SBJ= Subject; STAT= Stative; SUB=Subordinate.

- (1) [18] *ta-piüng aaga najtaj para ma-rang-iüw no-ik*
 3/PST-say DET woman for 3/SUB-do-3PL one-JOINT

gusto ma-jlüy a-we-aag
 pleasure 3/SUB-stay AG-CTF-DEM

‘The woman told (the man) to do something pleasant together’
 (Cuturi 2003: 114)

and:

- (2) [30] *xik-e sa-na-jlüy a-n-aag ik pero ik-e*
 1-SBJ 1/FUT-SUB-stay AG-NMR-DEM 2/OBL but 2-SBJ

la-ngo-me-amb wüx ombas mi-ntaj
 CMP-NEG-2/SUB-go LOC body 2/POS-wife

ap-me-jlüy a-n-aag xik
 FUT-2/SUB-stay AG-NMR-DEM 1/OBL

‘I will stay with you, but you will not go to have relations with
 your wife; you will stay with me’ (Olivares, w.d.)

Both (1) and (2) are ‘taken’ from the tale ‘*Saap Cheeb*’, to exemplify the use of *aweag* and *anaag* (in (1) and (2), respectively) to codify comitative or ‘companion’ relations when two third persons are involved (as in (1)) and when the speaker and the hearer are involved (as in (2)). Such a fine distinction can be dismissed in language spoken, mostly by young people.

Other significant contributions by Juan are chunks from speeches delivered by parents, or elders, to young people in some special circumstances (such as engagement and marriage) and usually called ‘*consejos*’, ‘counsels’:

- (3) [45] *la-me-ngocho i-wix me-kiiüb*
 CMP-2/SUB-cross 2/POS-hand 2/SUB-move with

mi-noj nganüy la-ma-sap i-mbas
 2/POS-husband now CMP-3/SUB-take 2/POS-body

me-kiiüb
 2/SUB-move with

‘You are already married to your husband;
 now get acquainted with him’

This sentence (and others in the paper) shows the use of verbal forms from the root *-kiiüb* ‘to move with’, codifying a comitative (or ‘companion’) relation in which emphasis is put on movement, through space or time.

Other sentences provided in the paper are not taken from written texts or oral discourses, but were elicited by us as ‘translations’ of Spanish sentences.

These were regarded by us rather as ‘inputs’, because, when interacting with a personality like Juan’s, we never produced a Spanish sentence to be flatly ‘translated’ into Huave by him. As linguists with field experience know very well, ‘good speakers have a sense of the difference between not only what is grammatical and what is ungrammatical [a main distinction mostly for linguists not so much interested in the social use of language - MG] but also of what is said and what could be said but is not’ (Mithun 2001: 59-60). David Gil (2001: 115) in the same book wrote about the *good informant paradox*: ‘the better s/he is the worse s/he is’, quoted above, and added: ‘it is worth asking why speakers tend to offer certain sentences rather than other, equally grammatical ones’. Thinking of our experience with Juan, it is clear to me that he was an excellent speaker in terms of Mithun, and a ‘good informant’ who did not fit in Gil’s paradox. He was highly ‘opinionated’ and was always ready not only to ‘offer’ a certain sentence to us, but also to ‘argue’ for its correctness when compared with other ‘equally grammatical’ sentences. To satisfactorily depict Juan personality, as a speaker of his language, and as an ‘informant’, I would take advantage of the concept of ‘polyphony’. This is found, as we know, in each single speaker’s words and, from the linguist’s point of view, quite often in the sentences that a single ‘good informant’ is able to offer, even as alternative ‘translations’ to one single sentence. Juan was a fully ‘polyphonic’ speaker and, in relation to us, a polyphonic ‘informant’, with a consciousness of other speakers’ voices and words. He was able to speak his language in several registers, often in joking registers, emblemizing different characters and gender/age types of Huave society. Such a skill was projected, obviously, in his narrative writings. As we have already seen, out of the more than seventy ‘examples’ provided in the paper discussed here, some are taken from his written tales and accounts.

Along with our linguistic ‘elicitation’ work, we usually described to Juan a situation, or an event, that could suggest a frame where a dialogue among participants, or a description from an external point of view could properly fit. Only at that point were we able to suggest some changes of perspective, or of internal relations, inside those either dialogical or descriptive sentences Juan had provided. This ‘half-elicited’ category of sentences is sampled in our paper by several examples, such as the following one, where Juan refers, to provide a more realistic contextualization, to the most famous weaver in San Mateo, Justina Oviedo:

- (4) [9] *Mim Tine* *ta-jüy* *mi-meed* *nej*
 Lady Justina 3/PST-weave 3/POS-huipil 3
- n-aag* *ni-ndil-aran* *jariñch*
 NMR-DEM NMR-spin-GNR thread

‘Lady Justina wove her huipil with hand-spun thread’

In (4) the use of the instrumental form *naag* is exemplified. In this sentence, we can further observe, the alignment is SVO (in place of the most frequent Verb-initial Huave order), revealing the influence of Spanish alignment. Juan was, perhaps, one of the very few people in San Mateo able to provide some meta-linguistic comments or devise examples useful to illustrate meaningful differences. Under the influence of bilingualism with Spanish (that, as most European languages, has *con* as a multi-purpose preposition), *n-aag* can be used to codify relations that can be interpreted as half way between a Tool (TL) and a Companion (CM) relation. An animate being such as a dog can be referred to in such an intermediate role, even if its participation in human activities is not frequent among the Huave:

- (5) [6] *sa-na-sap* *pixix* *n-aag* *xa-pet*
 1/FUT-SUB-hunt duck NMR-DEM 1/POS-dog

‘I will go to hunt ducks with my dog’

The same meaning, however, can be conveyed also through the verb root *-kiiiüb*, providing in this way the meaning of a fully CM (and not an instrumental (TL)) relation with an animal:

- (6) [50] *sa-na-sap* *pixix* *na-kiiiüb* *xa-pet*
 1/FUT-SUB-catch duck 1/SUB-go with 1/POS-dog

‘I will go to hunt ducks with my dog’

Also the following sentences (7) and (8) were provided by Juan with a contrastive purpose, aiming at exemplifying how not only the number of participants (two in (7), and more than two in (8)), but also the degree of ‘togetherness’ among them could be codified:

- (7) [29] *a-nganeow* *a-we-aag*
 3-drink AG-CTF-DEM

‘He drinks with another one (2 people)’

With (7) the speaker means that two people drink together, but each one by himself (say, in his own cup, or glass). To convey the meaning that more than two people are drinking from the same cup (or glass) a verb form such as

- (8) [31] *a-nganeow-iüw*
 3-drink-PL

‘They (more than two people) drink together’

should be used. Another example of Juan’s meta-linguistic ability is provided by his comments on:

- (9) [32] *a-ndeak* *a-we-ajk-iüw*
 3-speak AG-CTF-DEM-3PL

‘He speaks with them’

This sentence is understood, he explained to us, as if one person is speaking with a group, seen as another entity. A construction such as **andeakiüw aweajkiüw* 'they speak together (with them)' that we proposed, was rejected by Juan: this relation (3P+3P) must be codified through the verb root *-kiiüb* 'to move together' (see example (3)).

Obviously, Juan was also talking naturally with us and with his wife, and the following sentence is a chunk of his everyday speech:

- (10) [75] *sa-na-nganeow café ngo na-yak ingan*
 1/FUT-SUB-drink coffee NEG 1/SUB-put sugar

'I will drink coffee without sugar'

Sentence (10) provides an example of the several ways in which San Mateo speakers convey the idea of 'without' that we commonly understand as one of the semantic opposites to 'with'. Usually, the ways in which Huave speakers try to 'translate' Spanish *sin* 'without', when requested, seem to be very unnatural.

As Juan was getting very old, we started searching for other collaborators, and we became acquainted with another fisherman, Mr. Tereso Ponce, who had also been a linguistic consultant of the SIL missionaries. He was able to 'translate' very carefully, and in a highly elaborate, sometimes even unnatural language, the Spanish sentences we presented to him. In a sense, Tereso fit Gil's *good informant paradox*. Sentence (11) was his dialogical construction devised to 'translate' our sentence: 'He went to Tehuantepec without money':

- (11) [13] *ta-mb Latiük; ngineay ta-mb?*
 3/PST-go Tehuantepec; how 3/PST-go?

ngo ma-jiür tomiin
 NEG 3/SUB-have money

'He went to Tehuantepec; how did he go?
 He does not have any money'

Our work with Mr. Tereso was helpful as well, and we were able to explore with him some further dimensions of 'concomitance' as simultaneity of action. In sentence (12), the reciprocal ending *-yej* follows the numeral pronoun *ijpüe-*, to convey the meaning of two agents acting simultaneously:

- (12) [66] *ta-xom-iüw ijpüe-yej wüx*
 PST-see-PL DUAL/PN-RCP/3PL LOC/REL

'They both saw (it) at the same time'

The same meaning of a simultaneous action is conveyed, as Tereso observed, in the following sentence, where the same reciprocal ending is used:

(13) [67] *wiix t-aɣʎos a pet al-e-amb-iww*
 LOC/REL PST-thrown DET dog DUR-DIR/CTF-PL

kyaj a-jaw-ajej alos
 IND 3-see-RCP/3PL thrown

‘When somebody threw (a stone) at a dog they were walking
 and saw at the same time that it had been hit’

In the meantime, over the years, some other personalities of collaborators and consultants emerged. Among these, I can mention, in relation to the paper discussed here, two young men, Bernardo Hidalgo and Tino (Constantino) Canales. The latter, an almost perfect bilingual with Spanish, came twice to Rome to spend one month with us each time. We did with him intense linguistic work of a kind that an anthropological linguist would, correctly, judge to be highly de-contextualized. The work done with Tino at Rome, either at home or in an academic setting would provide a perfect example of a ‘fieldwork’ done, as Duranti (1994: 15-17) points out, even ‘without going to the field’. Several sentences in our paper come from the large amount of linguistic material worked out with Tino, very much ready to develop a meta-linguistic awareness of his own native language.

In San Mateo, Tino and other more or less young men and women, had formed a group aiming at producing written texts in their own language. Also Mr. Tereso was involved in some of the group’s activities. In our paper we quoted some elaborate sentences from one of the booklets the group (self-called *Mikwal iüt* ‘The sons of the earth’) had produced. (14) is one of these:

(14) [54] *nej-iw teat Alcalde kyaj a-kiiüb-kiiüjp-iww*
 3-PL mister judge IND 3-go with-go with-3PL

ma-mb ingow-iw nej-iw a-jo-iw
 SUB-DIR/CTF in place of-3PL 3-PL 3-carry-PL

ma-mb nangaj kandeal
 SUB-DIR/CTF holy candle

‘Then each one of the *Alcalde* judges goes with his substitute
 bringing with them the holy candles’ (Mikwal iüt, 2002: 11)

In (14) we find a reduplicated use of *-kiiüb*, where two forms of the same root, *kiiüb* and *kiiüjp*, occur together (the second one showing a phonological change due to the insertion of the morpheme *-j-*), providing a distributive meaning: ‘each one going with (his own)’.

At the same time, we started regarding local friends, who until that moment were not thought of as potential linguistic consultants, as sources of

linguistic data. This was the case, say, of Chabela (Isabela Ampudia), a long-term friend, and Flavia's *comadre* (spiritual kinswoman). Since the 1980s Flavia had started to pay almost daily visits to Chabela. In the hours spent on her patio, Flavia was able to record and collect many chunks of natural speech, produced by both adults and children. One example of children's speech is provided by sentence (15), a chunk of natural speech by a child observing with enthusiasm the cake his mother was preparing:

- (15) [72] *pan mol a-we-ajk-iüw pasas !*
 bread outsider AG-CTF-DET-3P raisins

'Bread with raisins !'

In this case we find the same *aweaaag* already found, as a comitative form, in (1). The meaning the same form conveys in (15) seems to be only remotely understandable as a comitative, but its use is representative of several readjustments currently taking place in the codification of 'concomitance' relations in San Mateo Huave. With sentence (15) the child refers to the fully visible presence of raisins in the bread. In other cases, however, it is not so, and the presence of an ingredient can be perceived only through tasting the food or knowing about it from somebody else. In these cases we find another use of the verb *-jiiür*, already found in sentence (11), produced by Mr. Tereso:

- (16) [73] *sa-na-nganeow chokolüet a-jiiür canela*
 1/FUT-SUB-drink chocolate 3-have cinnamon

'I will drink chocolate with cinnamon'

As Chabela is an outstanding cook of local 'traditional' food, her personality emerged also as a very accurate descriptor of the ways in which she was preparing food, and of the detailed processes required. Sentences (17) and (18), both statements in the first person, are samples of these verbal descriptive abilities. When two different ingredients are mentioned, stressing their co-presence, without assuming any reciprocal interdependency, the verb root *-kiiüb*, 'to move, to go with', can be used, as in (17), where Chabela describes how she prepares a local dish (*meink*), requiring a mixture of corn and chilli:

- (17) [69] *sa-ol ti-ül aaga ajtsaj*
 1-mix LOC-DET DET corn mass
- piid na-kiiüb a kants*
 epazote 1/SUB-be with DET chilli

'I mix in the corn mass epazote (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*) with chilli'

The verb root *-yak* ‘to put’ or ‘to add’, already found in sentence (10), is used by her in sentence (18) to refer to two ingredients that in the final product are fully visible:

- (18) [70] *kawiil sa-na-rang najngow*
 later 1/FUT-SUB-do fish soup
- na-loy küet sa-na-yak ten*
 ADJ-dry fish 1/FUT-SUB-put plum

‘Later I will prepare a soup of dry fish and plums’

In this overview of the internal layering of our paper I mentioned only some of the ‘informants’ or consultants’ who have contributed to show to us the internal polyphony in San Mateo Huave. Individuality in speech is highly valued and each one of the people mentioned above is the ‘author’ of her/his own, spoken or written, sentences. As such, s/he would not necessarily subscribe to and adopt some other speaker’s wording, syntactic construction, or lexical preferences, to convey the ‘same’ meanings.

4. Conclusions

The two papers put under scrutiny here had two different intellectual and circumstantial origins. The ethnographic-linguistic topic of the first was triggered by the decay of Shuar ceremonial dialogues and grew in a diachronic perspective through a reflection on other data, already collected, by me or other researchers, or simply available to me. The second paper emerged as linguistic research defined in a functional-typological frame. A specific problem, raised by another paper, became the topic of our research on an unexplored area of Huave syntax and morphology. However, when one ransacks the linguist’s cabinet in most cases not only a ‘natural history’ of their research emerges, but also some, or several, socio- or ethno-linguistic dimensions, often kept hidden in the final product. Any fieldwork is intrinsically ethnographic, socio-linguistic and historical research, leading anyone to detect the absence of internal uniformity in the linguistic community, even when it is a very small one, and, in parallel, the set of its, necessarily present, internal levels, stratifications and diachronies.

Each researcher knows very well the conditions under which the specific data they use were collected, but usually they do not provide this information in the linguistic papers or books they write. So, it happens that, unless specific anthropological-linguistic or socio-linguistic issues are focussed upon, all the data are quoted indiscriminately as specimens of a language or linguistic community.

In most cases, in papers or books where descriptive or theoretical issues relevant for a specific language, or a set of languages, are discussed, linguists often use sets of data (usually sentences) laconically identified as numbered specimens, labelled with the language or linguistic community name. Such a state of affairs is, obviously, a reflex of the ghost of the 'ideal speaker-hearer'. When inspected from close, however, data labelled as specimens from the 'same' language often show a multi-layered internal structure. Each layer carries in it some specific feature that identifies, in one way or another, its origin in terms of different conditions of linguistic production and recording. Not only different speakers, but also different discourse circumstances, the use of both spoken and, at least in some cases, written records, as well the relationship of the researcher with their collaborators, and several other dimensions (for instance, the level of speakers' meta-linguistic awareness), are all very relevant to providing a specific value and 'flavour' to each set of data. Such a multi-layered structure of the data could reflect either a linguistic community's alive social polyphony, or, more rarely, a fading away use of an obsolescent language code.

Linguists' entextualization processes are highly complex ones, and many voices from the field are led to converge into one single piece of scholarship. Any linguistic output of field research should include at least an extended note, if not a whole chapter (in a book), making clear that it is not the patchwork somebody could assume it is, but rather a piece of scholarship reflecting some of (not all!) the dimensions of linguistic variation and polyphony found in a speech community. The secret history (or several histories) of data constructions, where both local consultants, often 'authors' of their sentences or texts, and the linguist are converging, should be made transparent to make explicit the often hidden back-grounding polyphony. Such transparency, beyond any possible ethical concern, provides each linguistic output (paper, article, essay, or book) with a liveliness that is a further way of stating that the 'ideal speaker-hearer' is a spiteful ghost that we should regard as extinct, if we want to point out, and support, the vital, polyphonic existence of languages.

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