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LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION: AN AMAZON PEOPLE'S STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL MAINTENANCE

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Abstract — This paper is concerned with the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their own languages which are seen as fundamental to the maintenance of their own cultures and for the transmission of culture from one generation to another. Taking the examples of two small neighbouring groups belonging to the Harakmbut Amazon people, it shows that even though their objectives are the same — the maintenance and strengthening of their language and culture — they have very different views about how this should be done. The paper argues that it is necessary to understand the communities' reactions to new proposals for language maintenance introduced from outside and of the importance of them developing and following their own strategies for maintaining their cultural identity in a rapidly changing world.

Over the last decade, indigenous peoples and governments have debated and discussed rights at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations and have produced a draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which is now being submitted to the Sub-commission on Human Rights. This Declaration includes the right of indigenous peoples to language: '... to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures ...' (E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1993/29 Part III, Article 14). For the indigenous representatives present at the drafting of this Declaration, the maintenance of language in all its different forms is considered fundamental to their identities as peoples.

The draft Declaration is the product of the indigenous peoples' struggle over many decades for recognition of and respect for their distinct social, political, economic and cultural characteristics as well as their rights to participate fully (if they so choose) in the life of the state. Indigenous peoples throughout the world have condemned those forms of formal education which undermine the use of their culture and promote only the languages of the national society (see Barman *et al.*, 1986). However, indigenous peoples also consider that education can play a part in promoting a positive and respectful attitude towards their languages through education policies which actively promote indigenous language main-

tenance. The draft Declaration recognises indigenous peoples' 'right to all levels and forms of education of the state and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions which provide education in their own language and in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning' (op. cit. Part IV, Article 15).

Today indigenous peoples are calling for all levels and forms of education to be bilingual and intercultural (or bicultural) in order to promote not only the national prestige language but also indigenous languages, and to ensure respect be given not only to the cultural practices, values and beliefs of the national society but also to those of indigenous societies (Kari Oka Declaration 1992, in IWGIA 1992). Intercultural bilingual education is considered a means of (a) providing useful knowledge with which indigenous peoples can defend their interests vis-à-vis the wider encroaching society (including nationally-based language(s) and communicative practices), and (b) revitalising and strengthening indigenous cultural practices (including indigenous communicative practices) (Sampaio and da Silva, 1981). Education which is bilingual and intercultural, therefore, is considered a means of achieving indigenous peoples' rights to maintain and use their language in a meaningful context.

This paper examines the relationship between literacy and language maintenance in

intercultural bilingual education. Taking the example of two indigenous communities in Southeastern Peruvian Amazon, the paper questions the 'appropriateness' of the introduction of a form of intercultural bilingual education which is both biliterate and school-based and which ignores the cultural practices and context within which the language has hitherto been embedded.

INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS THE PROMOTION OF BILITERACY

In many Latin American countries with large indigenous populations, government policies have shifted during the 1980s from policies aimed at the cultural assimilation of the indigenous peoples within their borders and the formation of a homogenous nation state, to policies aimed at recognising the cultural and linguistic plurality of their countries. The government of Peru, for example, is now talking in terms of 'national unity in diversity' and education for the maintenance of cultural and linguistic diversity (Ley General de Educación No. 23384, 1982). In keeping with this new political orientation, cultural plurality has been recognised in educational policy in terms of promoting bilingual and intercultural education where formerly the focus was on the quantitative spread of monolingual education in Spanish.

In 1990, the Peruvian Ministry of Education produced a National Policy on Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) which recognised the rights of peoples with languages other than Spanish to receive a bilingual education, that is, an education in two languages and in two cultures (DIGEBIL, 1990:3). In terms of adult education, the policy states that IBE will be developed within adult basic education and adult literacy so that literacy is promoted in the mother tongue as well as Spanish, as part of the process of development and community promotion with the active participation of the population. Literacy programmes are expected to generate an 'environment of permanent literacy with the aim of guaranteeing the use of the skills acquired'. Furthermore, mother-tongue literacy is the hub of the State's IBE policy: 'the production of written materials in the vernacular language will be promoted as an integral part of the formal education process'.

Formal primary education in Peru, as in most countries, is based fundamentally on the acquisition of literacy, wherein learning and using literacy are the foundation for further learning and subsequent education (Graff, 1994) and the written language is valued above the oral. Therefore, a formal primary IBE system will be biliterate, where literacy in two languages is the foundation for further learning as well as for participation in the pluricultural and multilingual national society.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES AND AMAZON

In the Andean region of South America, the Quechua and Aymara speaking peoples stretch across present day borders and number in their millions. They are numerically the largest indigenous peoples in Peru and have been the focus of bilingual education projects for more than two decades. Today there are Quechua and Aymara texts for all six grades of primary school as both a language of instruction and a subject (though this is not available in all schools). This has been hailed as a breakthrough in terms of the recognition of the worth of these languages as languages of study in themselves and the recognition of their potential for fulfilling all the required functions for school life and life beyond it (Pozzi-Escot, 1990).

Nevertheless, not all Quechua and Aymara peoples have been enthusiastic about mother-tongue education, especially where projects have lacked any mechanisms for the incorporation and participation of the indigenous peoples themselves in the decision making (cf. Lopez *et al.*, 1987; Villavicencio, 1987). Furthermore, in-depth studies of the relationship between bilingual education, mother-tongue literacy and language maintenance have in some cases led to a questioning of the extent to which schools themselves can contribute to language maintenance and the importance of a positive approach to language maintenance in the community as a whole (Hornberger, 1988).

There is increasing evidence for the spontaneous use of Quechua literacy beyond the classroom and of an increasing acceptance of Quechua for formal functions where Spanish formerly held sway such as employment domains and written channels and as a means for

promoting the Quechua language, for spreading Christianity and as a vehicle for exact expression of Quechua knowledge (Hornberger, 1994a). Written Quechua, as a new instrument of expression of the culture of origin, may be an important channel for the strengthening of ethnic identity (Zuñiga, 1989) and for fuller social participation of hitherto marginalised sectors of the national society (Hornberger, 1994b).

The Peruvian Amazon provides a contrast to the Andes in terms of the number of different languages spoken and the number of different ethnic groups that live there. The Peruvian Amazon has an indigenous population of approximately 300,000 persons belonging to some 63 ethno-linguistic groups from 12 different language families. Of these peoples, only five comprise more than 10,000 persons (Chirif, 1991). Nevertheless, the population of the Peruvian Amazon is estimated to be around 2 million inhabitants, some of whom are *ribereños* (persons who have lost their identifying characteristics as indigenous, or deny them, and early settlers from other regions of Peru) and colonists who have migrated to the rainforest from the Andean region in search of agricultural land.

The Amazon region presents a wide variety of developments in bilingual and intercultural bilingual education. The experience from this region demonstrates that responses and approaches to language maintenance can vary enormously not only from people to people but from community to community, although all are concerned with the maintenance of their mother tongue. The Amazon region, consequently, provides interesting and illuminating insights into language maintenance and mother-tongue literacy.

The following case study of the Amazon is based on ethnographic field work carried out among the Harakmbut peoples over nine months between 1991–1992 and two months in 1993–1994. The field work was oriented to developing an understanding of Harakmbut peoples' different responses to a proposal to introduce Intercultural Bilingual Education.

AMAZON PEOPLES' OWN DEVELOPMENTS IN BILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

In the central and northern Amazon regions of Peru, indigenous peoples have been at the

forefront of demands for and experimental projects in IBE. Bilingual education is not new to the Amazon in general. Many of the people involved in innovative intercultural bilingual programmes were themselves pupils at the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) mission-run bilingual schools of the 1950s and 1960s. Some were also among the first indigenous bilingual teachers in the Amazon and, more recently, officials in local administration of bilingual education and bilingual teacher training.

Over the last two decades, the SIL bilingual schools have come increasingly under the control of indigenous peoples. Indigenous bilingual teachers have strongly supported the need for Spanish literacy as important for the defence of indigenous society and territory, and for indigenous mother-tongue literacy for promoting respect for the cultural characteristics of the ethnic group (Wipio, 1981). However, some peoples began to question the underlying objectives of the bilingual curriculum which they felt was not based in respect for their cultural practices (Pueblo Indio, 1986). They became increasingly critical of officially approved educational materials which were direct translations of a national curriculum oriented to the urban coastal population (Aikman, 1989). Many indigenous peoples felt that the practices associated with the school had no relevance or regard for the indigenous society beyond the school. The written indigenous language was exclusively focused on the school and only one restricted use of the language. By concentrating on strengthening the indigenous mother tongue through schooled literacy, many different mother-tongue oral practices, such as mythology, communal rituals and orally transmitted and practically acquired knowledge within the community, were being devalued by the young. Shipibo elders have criticised the educational focus on mother-tongue schooling among their people as being responsible for a neglect of traditional Shipibo educational practices which were fundamentally oral and contributing to the loss of cultural knowledge.

Through the 1980s there was growing dissatisfaction with the national orientation of the bilingual curriculum in bilingual schools, as well as outcries at the ethnocidal nature of the monolingual Spanish education promoted in schools for indigenous peoples where there is no bilingual education (Chirif, 1991).

In response, the national Amazon indigenous organisation, the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSEP), designed a new training course for indigenous bilingual teachers (Programa de Formación de Maestros Bilingües — PFMB) in 1988 in association with the Loreto Teacher Training College (ISP-Loreto) in the northern Peruvian Amazon. This programme was an attempt to break away from folkloric representations of indigenous cultural traditions and way of life in mass-produced primers which are primarily founded in non-indigenous value systems and a unified national curriculum. The PFMB encourages new teachers to analyse the processes and influences which are affecting and changing indigenous societies and to develop new integrated curricula around significant problems for the teacher and community (Trapnell, 1986).

The developments in intercultural bilingual education taking place in the 1990s are still, however, focused primarily on formal education in attempts to improve the quality and relevance of a system which is already in existence. Many of the new programmes are still experimental and not all indigenous peoples have access to them. At present IBE is concentrated on formal schooling to the neglect of adult education, a situation which indigenous organisations themselves are trying to address through non-formal education (Aikman, 1990).

INTRODUCING INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PERUVIAN AMAZON

In the Department of Madre de Dios in the Southeastern Peruvian Amazon, the indigenous representative organisation for the Southeastern Amazon, the Federation of Natives of the River Madre de Dios and its Tributaries (FENAMAD) is taking note of the developments in IBE in the Central and Northern Amazon. Madre de Dios is a marginalised area in terms of the national society and its institutions, including education. It has no SIL bilingual schools, although there were two running for short periods in the 1970s (Moore, 1981; D'Ans, 1975), and schooling in the indigenous communities is monolingual and monoliterate in Spanish with an exclusively monocultural (national society) emphasis.

These schools are run either by the Dominican

School Network (Red Educativa de la Selva Sur Oriente Peruana — RESSOP) or directly by the Ministry of Education with non-indigenous teachers. There is no adult education, although one community found out in retrospect that the school teacher had been paid for running a Spanish adult literacy course which never materialised. All but the oldest generations in this area have had some schooling since it was first introduced sporadically in the 1950s.

A study of the largest ethno-linguistic group in Madre de Dios, the Harakmbut-speaking peoples, based on long term research in the area (see Aikman, 1994), provides interesting perspectives on the importance of literacy in cultural maintenance. Among the Harakmbut communities there are very different responses to the proposal for the introduction of a maintenance-oriented intercultural bilingual education which implies biliteracy: one subgroup, the Arakmbut, rejected it as totally inappropriate while another subgroup, the Arasaeri, embraced it as a last hope for language recovery.

THE HARAKMBUT OF MADRE DE DIOS

The Harakmbut-speaking peoples live in the Amazon Department of Madre de Dios in the Southeast of Peru, a region of 78,402,71 km² of lowland tropical rainforest. They belong to one of four major language families and 17 ethnolinguistic groups who together number approximately 10,000 people, and comprise about one sixth of the total population in the Department today. The population rises to between 80,000 and 90,000 from November to March due to an influx of predominantly Quechua migrants who come to pan for gold.

The Harakmbut number approximately 1500 persons and comprise seven distinct ethno-linguistic subgroups: the Arakmbut, Arasaeri, Wachipaeri, Toyeri, Pukirieri, Sapiteri and Kisambaeri. There is some debate about the status of the languages spoken by each group as to whether they are one language with different dialects or several languages within the Harakmbut language family (Lyon, 1976; Ribeiro and Wise, 1978). Helberg (1989) notes the lack of research into the linguistic situation of the Harakmbut language and considers it an, as yet, unclassified language. The

Arakmbut are today the largest Harakmbut-speaking people with a population of approximately 1000 living in five discrete communities. The Wachipaeri are the second largest group, and the Arasaeri the third largest numbering some 56 persons living together in one community.

The physical characteristics of Madre de Dios with its precipitous Andean slopes to the west and dense forest ensured that the indigenous inhabitants lived a relatively undisturbed existence until the end of the 19th century when the full force of natural resource extraction hit the area in the form of a rubber boom. Until the collapse of the international rubber economy in the 1920s, Madre de Dios was a focus for rubber tappers from Bolivia and Brazil who came in search of slaves and brought diseases such as yellow fever and measles. The Arasaeri were reduced to a few tens of individuals as many were sold in slave markets in Bolivia where they fetched a higher price than in Peru (Rummenholler, 1984).

At this time the Arakmbut lived in relative isolation in the headwaters of the river Karene and Isirwe where they continued hunting, gathering and gardening undisturbed. But the turbulence and violence along the Madre de Dios river eventually forced other Harakmbut peoples into the headwaters bringing them into close contact with the Arakmbut which fostered the spread of disease and fighting. As a result, the Arakmbut were drastically reduced in number and in the 1950s many were forced to make their way to recently established Catholic missions for respite from disease.

DEVELOPING PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND EDUCATION

During and after the rubber boom period, missionaries of the Dominican order became very active in the region, particularly focusing their energies on the Harakmbut in an attempt to 'pacify' them and, through education, 'civilise' them (Junquera, 1978). Great emphasis was placed on teaching the Spanish language to the Harakmbut 'because the savage language closes the soul to the light and prevents him from entering fully into civilisation, religion and the life of the nation' (Sarasola, 1931). Harakmbut children were obliged to attend the mission school away from the influence of their 'savage' parents, who were being co-

erced into discarding their 'sinful and immoral ways' such as their male age-grade ceremonies which were important milestones in the growth and maturity of Harakmbut boys. Promising young orphans were selected to be sent to a Dominican agricultural boarding school in the high rainforest, far from their extended families. By the 1970s, the majority of Harakmbut had re-established villages independent of the missionaries (cf. Aikman, 1994). Today the Arakmbut live in five communities, each with an area of territory which is legally titled according to the Law of Native Communities.

The 1970s witnessed the beginning of a second wave of natural resource exploitation in Madre de Dios, this time in the form of a gold rush which centred on the traditional lands of the Harakmbut peoples. As colonisation of their territory has increased and as their traditional subsistence base has been eroded and encroached over the last two decades, the Harakmbut peoples have begun to participate to different degrees in the gold panning economy to supplement their diminishing possibilities for hunting and fishing (Gray, 1986).

By the 1980s most Harakmbut communities had Spanish language primary schools in their villages run either by RESSOP with lay-missionary teachers or directly controlled by the Ministry of Education which allocated *mestizo* teachers. At the beginning of the 1990s, the multi-ethnic federation FENAMAD contributed to a document calling for qualitative educational change. It noted the absence of bilingual education and adult education in indigenous communities as well as the extreme irrelevance of school curricula (CAAP, 1992).

FENAMAD produced a proposal for IBE among the Harakmbut communities designed to redress this educational situation and encourage 'cultural self-affirmation' and 'intercultural dialogue'. FENAMAD supported the national Amazon organisation (AIDSESEP) and the international Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon (COICA) in their promotion of indigenous people's right to an education which is oriented towards maintaining and strengthening indigenous language and cultural traditions (AIDSESEP, 1993; COICA, 1993). Under the guidance of a linguist, the proposal advocated working with elected members of the Harakmbut communities to agree on an orthography for this language.

while raising awareness among the members of the Harakmbut communities for the need for IBE.

At the 1991 FENAMAD congress, Harakmbut representatives expressed their concern with the schooling which their children were receiving. However, this concern was confined to lobbying for teachers and urging the Ministry of Education for funds to improve the poor quality of the school buildings. The initiative for curriculum and language policy change has come primarily from Federation office bearers and advisors.

The response of the Arakmbut Harakmbut to the proposal for IBE was not favourable, while the Arasaeri Harakmbut were very much in favour of it as the only means of reintroducing their language. The Federation reacted to these disparate responses by assuming that the Arakmbut could be talked around to a biliterate education project and were merely being obstinate and difficult, while the Arasaeri were being much more amenable. From the research I carried out with the Arakmbut, it became clear that the Arakmbut reaction was not based in obstinacy or a desire to make life difficult for the Federation but in their well-grounded perceptions of the school and what it had to offer them at this particular point in their history of contact with the national society. The Arasaeri, on the other hand, had a very different history of inter-ethnic relations and history of formal education. A study of the historical relations of the Arakmbut and Arasaeri with the national society and formal education is needed in order to understand the two very different reactions.

BILITERATE EDUCATION AS A THREAT TO CULTURAL INTEGRITY

The Arakmbut Harakmbut

The members of the Arakmbut community of San José, one of the five Arakmbut communities, reacted to the proposal for biliterate bilingual schooling by a series of bewildered questions: why should their children be taught to speak Harakmbut in school when they learned it quite satisfactorily without schooling? how could the *mestizo* lay-missionary teachers teach the language when they did not speak it themselves? and why would the Arakmbut want to learn to write in Harakmbut when their need is to be able to write in Spanish? The only reason

for teaching Harakmbut in school, as far as this community was concerned, would be so that the Quechua- and Spanish-speaking colonists who lived around them could learn it — but that did not make sense either because the Arakmbut believed that the colonists derided the Harakmbut language and would never want to learn it.

The greatest bewilderment among the Arakmbut with IBE was the proposal to teach Harakmbut in a written form. The community had had some experience of Harakmbut literacy materials and had rejected them. The neighbouring Arakmbut community, Puerto Luz, had had a short-lived SIL bilingual school in the mid-1970s and had rejected it in favour of a Dominican lay-missionary Spanish language school. For this community therefore, a written form of Harakmbut was not a novelty but instead an old idea that they had already rejected.

The Arakmbut have had approximately thirty-five years experience of the institution of the school. Data gathered from the earliest available registers in 1982 for the San José school, when the lay-missionaries took charge, indicate that San José had lower dropout rates and repetition rates than in monolingual Spanish schools for indigenous students in the Northern Rainforest (Aikman, 1994). The schooling throughout this period was run by the Dominican missionaries and followed Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. Many parents encouraged their children to attend school and supported the work of the teachers in principle, though not actively.

The education to which the Arakmbut were subject over this period had all the attributes identified in the critique of education in *Madre de Dios* made by FENAMAD (CAAAP, 1992). It was authoritarian and hierarchical, characterised by teacher control of all the educational processes; students were passive recipients of teacher-controlled access to information; and labour-intensive copying from blackboards and books (where they existed) without regard for student comprehension was the norm. This authoritarianism extended to all members of the community in the teacher's attempt to change the Arakmbut and their values. Education has always been presented to the Arakmbut by the Dominican missionaries as the pathway to 'civilisation' through the acquisition of the Spanish language; the school

has always been a place where the Arakmbut language and all aspects of the way of life have been devalued (Sarasola, 1931; Wahl, 1985).

Their reaction to this schooling has not been to reject it but to value it highly as a means of becoming 'civilised'. But the Arakmbut consider short attendance at school as adequate for achieving this state, and a smattering of Spanish as the tangible evidence of its acquisition. The physical presence of the school and the state recognition of the community as a whole which this implies have become the symbols of a 'civilised' community not only in the eyes of the Harakmbut but also of the colonists illegally settled around them. In the 1960s, a few Arakmbut youths were selected and sent to mission boarding schools from which they emerged in the 1970s with a greater proficiency in speaking and reading Spanish than other Arakmbut. On their completion of primary schooling, their literate abilities were considered a collective resource for the whole community and not an achievement which every individual needed (Aikman, 1994). They were looked to for leadership in situations concerning the 'outside', for example in conflicts with colonists over invasions of their territory.

The Arakmbut have developed only a very restricted need for formal education, linked with the restricted form of 'education' which the school has to offer them. The persistent negation shown in text books and by lay-missionaries and colonists to indigenous society, its language and cultural practices, has ensured that the school has always remained an 'outside' institution which the Arakmbut value but they do not concern themselves with how it is run or the details of the curriculum. In the mission in the 1960s, the Harakmbut were ashamed into abandoning the overt manifestations of their culture such as communal rituals, body painting and living in communal long houses (*malocas*) by missionaries trying to fit them for citizenship. Today the lay-missionary teachers try to bring 'modernity' to the community and impose Christian beliefs and western standards of morality on a people whom they consider have neither.

From their first sustained contact with the national society in the 1950s, the Arakmbut quickly learned that the less tangible aspects of their beliefs and practices, such as their spirituality and social organisation, could be

maintained if kept away from the disapproving gaze of missionaries and colonists. In a quiet undemonstrative way, this community has maintained the integrity and strength of its distinctive world view while accommodating new experiences and understandings from the society around it. For example, through their controlled hunting and cooking of wild meat and fish, Harakmbut men and women carefully try to maintain a balance between the spirits of the invisible world and health and prosperity in the visible world. The elders use their intimate knowledge of the forest and river together with the species that inhabit them and their spirits to cure illnesses and contact the spirits for guidance; yet they also recognise that disease brought by colonists and contact with the wider society can be cured through medicines provided by that same society. They belong to one of seven exogamous clans which order political alliances and work and residence groups, not only for fishing and gardening activities but also for their participation in the gold panning economy (Gray, 1983; Aikman, 1994).

For the Arakmbut, learning is lifelong and knowledge is built up through expanding on prior understanding in meaningful dialogue and socially significant interaction (see McCarty, 1991). Growth from birth to death is punctuated by stages, each stage heralding a new phase of learning and a new ability to use knowledge for the benefit of the individual, the household and the community. Within this context the Harakmbut language develops and has meaning. Language is not something taught in isolation from daily life through grammar or abstract analysis, just as children are not separated from adults and exposed to an institutionalised learning. Learning for the Arakmbut is neither formalised nor divided into discrete components for children and adults but rather children learn as if they were incomplete but developing adults (Middleton, 1970). Moreover, learners are not labelled failures and ejected from the system in a process of increasing selection. On the contrary, an individual's use and knowledge of the Harakmbut language is expected to expand as they mature and learn new and specialised vocabularies, such as the vocabularies of birds and animals.

This brief consideration of Arakmbut indigenous learning practices and processes reinforces the differences between these and the

formal education system. It is because of the formal system's rejection of the validity of the indigenous language and cultural practices, and at the same time its ignorance of them, that these practices have thrived unmolested and beyond the authoritative control of the school. The Arakmbut continue to control and maintain a distinctive philosophy and relations with the environment which nurtures their unique identity. The school, on the other hand, is an outside institution over which they have never had, or expected to have, control.

Taking these diverse factors into consideration, it is not at all inconsistent for the Arakmbut to find a proposal for indigenous cultural maintenance through formal education completely unacceptable. Harakmbut schooled literacy is a threat to Arakmbut identity because defining cultural practices, including communicative practices, are profoundly oral rather than literate. Arakmbut knowledge belongs to the individual and is not publicly accessible through texts; knowledge gained is used for the benefit of the collectivity and its relations with the Arakmbut spiritual world; it is not to serve the individualistic goals, competition and a striving for betterment of the formal education system.

BILITERATE EDUCATION FOR LANGUAGE RECUPERATION

The Arasaeri Harakmbut

The Arasaeri live in the community of Villa Santiago situated a day's journey by boat from San José on the River Inambari, a tributary of the river Madre de Dios. There, the reaction of the people to the proposal for intercultural bilingual education was quite different. The members of this community saw formal biliterate intercultural education as the only means of rescuing their language, the active use of which was confined to two elders, although a few younger people still have a passive knowledge. The elders supported the idea of formally teaching the Arasaeri language to the youngest generation whose parents now only speak Spanish. Bilingual education was seen as a means of avoiding the death of the Arasaeri language when the two elders pass away. The school, with its emphasis on the written language, was considered the obvious and only site for such teaching but, in contrast

to Arakmbut situation, Arasaeri would have to be introduced as a second language.

Villa Santiago comprises approximately 56 persons, of whom the majority are Arasaeri but there are also some other Harakmbut peoples, some Ese'eja (neighbouring but different ethno-linguistic people) and *mestizos* who have intermarried with members of the community. The Arasaeri are the survivors of the rubber boom and a first wave of gold exploitation in the 1930s when they learned the techniques of placer gold panning (Rummenholler, 1984). For a few years in the 1940s, the dozen or so remaining Arasaeri families lived in the Dominican mission of San Miguel de Caichiwe and, after its closure in 1949, moved from place to place within their traditional territory which was by then occupied by 4–5000 gold panners (Rummenholler *et al.*, 1991). In 1955, two brothers were sent by the Dominicans to boarding school for primary education. They subsequently rejoined their people who were suffering from pressure on land and resources from the gold panners. They panned gold and tried to supplement this with other economic activities, but the building of the Cusco–Puerto Maldonado road through Arasaeri territory resulted in the area being flooded with colonists and their hunting circumscribed.

In 1975 a very small part of their traditional territory was legally titled to the community but this area is insufficient for them to carry out their traditional subsistence activities. Today there is little game left; they rely on fishing for protein but no longer fish communally or distribute their catch through their kin network. They cultivate small gardens with different varieties of plantains but these contrast sharply with the Arakmbut gardens which support a wide diversity of crops and types. Arakmbut gardeners recognise and use up to 17 different types of pineapple and cultivate semi-wild crops such as *barbasco* for communal fishing. The Arasaeri dedicate a large part of their time to gold work in order to eke out a living and are frequently harassed by illegal lumber workers.

The primary school was built in 1965 when a large number of colonists entered the region. Today it is staffed by a *mestizo* with no professional qualifications and is used also by the local *mestizos* living by this part of the Puerto Maldonado road who are engaged in lumber work. The Arasaeri brothers, who

attended the Dominican boarding school in the 1950s and are now the elders of the community, believe that education is important and have sent their children to secondary school in the nearest town, Mazuko. This community has the highest percentage of students in higher education of all Harakmbut communities.

The community president, one of the two elders, says that the community needs a native bilingual teacher as well as teaching materials in Arasaeri Harakmbut in order to recuperate the language and the indigenous traditions. Four young highly educated men and women, who themselves have only very limited abilities to speak Arasaeri, strongly support the elders. For the Arasaeri, the school is an obvious focus for the formal teaching of a language that is rarely heard in the community today. But the school lacks all the resources for such a task: there is no mother tongue-speaking teacher, no agreed orthography, no written materials, etc. Unlike the Arakmbut situation above, moreover, the Arasaeri have fewer oral resources within the community to bring to the task of school-based language maintenance. The cultural context wherein Arasaeri was a living and thriving spoken language in the past has been severely undermined. Today the young know only a few words of Harakmbut and do not know the myths, songs and curing chants that made up the Arasaeri canon and are the oral repositories of their knowledge. Some of these can be gleaned from the elders before they are lost, but it is the relationship with the invisible spirit world which transforms a chant or a song into an effective instrument for curing (Gray, 1983). Moreover, individuals have to develop their relations with the spirits over time. The knowledge of the vast biodiversity that they used to cultivate in the gardens has been eroded to a far greater degree than the Arakmbut community, and many of the young are only now becoming aware of their history and the genocide of their people at the turn of the century.

Thus the cultural basis of the language, the context within which the language had meaning in the past when it was the language of the home and the community, has changed. This raises the question of what materials will be produced in the new written language and how the cultural traditions can be regenerated and redefined so that they become dynamic practices which are meaningful and not simply static folkloric

reconstructions used in the school. What they have at present is the ability of only a few to speak the language, though most often they too speak Spanish.

THE ARAKMBUT AND THE ARASAERI: LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE BEYOND THE SCHOOL

While the Arakmbut use their language within the context of a rich cultural heritage, the Arasaeri are looking to the recovery of their language as the first step towards cultural recuperation. For the Arakmbut their language and their cultural practices are inextricably linked and meaningful. They do not consider them part of the school over which they have no control at present. Conversely, the Arasaeri are looking to the school to help them construct a literacy on the basis of an oral language that is scarcely heard today.

For both the Arakmbut and the Arasaeri, formal education and the institution of the school is a place where indigenous cultural practices and traditions are negated. This suggests that it may not be a fruitful place for language regeneration and maintenance at present. The Shipibo found that mother-tongue literacy constructed and used purely within the school context has led to the neglect of their oral language within the community (pers. comm. A. Soria). Unlike the Shipibo, the Arasaeri do not have mother-tongue literacy at present but, like the Shipibo, they still have a basis for recovering the oral language although restricted to the two elders who are the last repositories of Arasaeri knowledge. Arasaeri language recovery may profit most from starting from what the people still have and building upon that in a way that Harakmbut learning always has done. By expanding on the understanding and knowledge that already exists, the Arasaeri may find that their language can be recovered through meaningful dialogue and socially significant interaction in both the school *and* the community.

Other indigenous peoples have been faced with the dilemma of the loss of a language, and many have looked to the school to help maintain and invigorate it such as the Mohawk of Canada (*Intercultural Horizons*, 1989). Others, such as the Maori, have taken a different

approach, looking instead to traditional structures within the indigenous society to nurture the language. Through their '*Kohango Reo*' or 'language nests', pre-school children are taught the Maori language, values and cultural traditions by elders and other Maori-speaking adults from the local community in an active and participatory context (cf. Spolsky, 1989). The 'language nest' model could bring together the oldest generation of Arasaeri and the youngest generation in a communicative and meaningful learning situation which could later be reinforced by the work of the school. The elders, no longer panning gold, would participate in looking after the young children. In this way a new avenue outside of the school would be opened up for a cultural and linguistic recycling of Arasaeri culture.

BUILDING ON EXISTING MEANINGFUL CONTEXTS AND PRACTICES

The two Harakmbut communities, San José (Arakmbut) and Villa Santiago (Arasaeri) respectively, present very different contexts for the development of an intercultural bilingual education designed to maintain and strengthen their language and cultural practices. The Arakmbut community has solid and thriving cultural practices and would appear to have abundant resources for an intercultural bilingual curriculum, yet it rejects the use of these resources in the school. Conversely, the Arasaeri community welcomes the proposal for IBE, yet has few cultural resources on which to develop it. Nevertheless, the members of both communities value their language highly and do not want it to disappear in the future. Their indigenous Federation is also very concerned with indigenous language maintenance and has proposed an IBE project to serve precisely this end.

However, as we have seen, IBE has followed a primarily biliterate schooled model which has been developed in different forms in other parts of the Amazon, Peru and Latin America. IBE for many indigenous peoples elsewhere has signified increased self-determination over formal education, higher prestige for indigenous languages and a more culturally sensitive approach to mother-tongue teaching. However, for the Harakmbut in Madre de Dios, with

their particular history of relations with formal education, the national society and their experiences of genocidal and ethnocidal policies, rights to language maintenance are less easily equated with biliterate schooling.

The school may have an important part to play in the future in the maintenance of the Arakmbut and Arasaeri languages but the school alone, as the non-Harakmbut institution which it is at present, cannot single-handedly support this process. Harakmbut literacy and oracy within the context of the school must be only one part of a wider use of the language that derives its meaning from Harakmbut cultural practices. For the Arakmbut of San José, the meaningfulness of their language is derided in the school and through the formal curriculum; the community's outright rejection of school-based mother-tongue literacy reflects their cultural and linguistic oppression by the school over the past forty years. We must, therefore, question the extent to which the school alone can provide the Arasaeri Harakmbut language with an intrinsically Arasaeri meaningfulness when that is denied by and alien to the institution of the school. The Shipibo people are now warning of the dangers of concentrating on a schooled mother-tongue literacy at the expense of oral practices outside of the school (Aikman, forthcoming). Literacy primers and texts based on myths and stories that are no longer told or heard in the community consign indigenous epistemologies to the status of folklore.

The two examples, Arasaeri and Arakmbut, demonstrate different responses to maintaining and strengthening indigenous languages, but in both cases the greatest strength of these languages lies in those cultural practices they still maintain and practise. In both cases, these are based on oral traditions. If mother-tongue literacy is to contribute in any way to the maintenance and regeneration of indigenous culture, then it must be used as a part of existing cultural practices rather than introduced from outside according to very different cultural traditions and as mirror images of successful projects with other indigenous peoples.

The Quechua situation, described by Hornberger (1994a), is quite distinct from that of the Harakmbut. Quechua literacy is already providing important functions and useful purposes which complement its long and persistent oral tradition. Conversely, neither the Arakmbut nor the Arasaeri at present see a use for

a Harakmbut literacy outside of the school (although among both Arakmbut and Arasaeri students there are signs that this is changing) but there are no indications that Harakmbut could challenge the supremacy of Spanish in Spanish language domains. Moreover, in the case of the Arasaeri, the future of the oral language is itself in serious doubt. This is not to say that Harakmbut cannot or should not become a written language, but rather that language maintenance must also be oriented towards strengthening the oral language. Developments in indigenous literacies among the Quechua and Aymara peoples through the spontaneous uses they are finding for mother-tongue literacy beyond the school, offer encouragement for the Arakmbut of San José. They demonstrate that schooled literacy is only one of many literacies and that rejecting a school-based literacy does not necessarily imply an outright rejection of mother-tongue literacy *per se*.

Nevertheless, the Amazon examples discussed here alert us to the importance of looking closely at the reasons why mother-tongue literacy is opposed and of understanding the often complex contextual factors which lie behind such positions before embarking on radical educational change. They do not necessarily imply a rejection of the mother tongue but are bound up in indigenous peoples' own strategies for maintaining their cultural identity in a rapidly changing world.

As Hornberger (1988) concludes from her study of bilingual education and language maintenance in a Quechua community, the autonomy of the speech community to decide about the use of languages in their schools and societal contexts is paramount. The example of the Harakmbut peoples of Madre de Dios supports the argument that the translation of indigenous peoples' rights to language use and maintenance into a demand for an intercultural bilingual education that is both schooled and biliterate may not promote either their use or their maintenance in the long term. Each people's distinctive language uses and practices outside of the formal education system must be respected, and any changes aimed at strengthening and maintaining them must be on their terms, under their control and supported by the widest access to the vast resources of experience held by other indigenous peoples throughout Latin America and beyond.

NOTE

1. Hornberger uses the term 'biliteracy' to mean any instance in which communication occurs in two or more languages in or around writing (Hornberger, 1994a).

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