

# Indigenous Language Literacies of the Northwest Amazon

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Since the demarcation of the Indigenous Territory of the Upper Rio Negro in the Brazilian Amazon in 1996, indigenous language literacy and specialized indigenous schooling has been prioritized by the indigenous governing authority. This paper illustrates how the centrality of indigenous language literacy to indigenous self-governance, and the particular form which it takes, grow out of three kinds of engagements with literacy in the region; (a) instruction in Portuguese reading and writing (and the marginalization of indigenous languages) in Catholic boarding schools set up by Salesian Missionaries in the first half of the 20th century; (b) the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages by Protestant missionaries and its close relationship to conversion experiences; (c) the phonetic transcription of indigenous languages, especially of myths, by anthropologists and linguists. The paper illustrates how the values of literacy naturalized through these various encounters, as they interact with indigenous language ideologies, constrain and condition the manner in which reading and writing in indigenous languages takes place in the Northwest Amazon today.

## Introduction

Indigenous language literacy has increasingly been hailed as a strong counter-balance to processes of language obsolescence (see Ostler & Rudes, 2000 for a survey of such perspectives). In the recently demarcated indigenous territories of the upper and middle Rio Negro, in the Northwest Amazon in Brazil, the indigenous authority and the pro-indigenous non-governmental organization which advises it, have come to the same conclusion. In this paper I present a history of indigenous language literacies and of the social life of literacy as a linguistic medium in the region. This history, which begins with the Catholic boarding schools (or *internatos*) set up in the first half of the 20th century to “civilize” indigenous children through, among other things, instruction in Portuguese reading and writing, has profound implications for how indigenous language literacy as a project of an indigenous governing authority is un-

derstood and implemented in the contemporary post-colonial moment. I present three stages in this history: (a) the Portuguese medium literacy of the Catholic boarding schools; (b) the efflorescence of indigenous language literacy on the Rio Içana associated with the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages and large-scale Protestant conversion; and (c) the indigenous language literacy of the specialized indigenous schools of the newly demarcated indigenous territory, set up by the indigenous authority (the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Upper Rio Negro, or FOIRN).

Each of these various encounters with reading and writing comes to both characterize the space of literacy and enregister practices of literacy in different but related ways. To say that practices of literacy have been multiply enregistered is to say that they have been reanalyzed as different “cultural models of action” capable of indexing, or pointing to, different kinds of social characters, at different times and places (Agha, 2007, p. 55). For instance, Catholic instruction in Portuguese literacy was a privileged site for socializing indigenous children to colonial discourses which understood *índios* “Indians” as inherently primitive and uncivilized. This essentialization of the asymmetrical power relation between colonizer and colonized into civilized and primitive was naturalized by a focus on the absence of indigenous traditions of literacy. Within the framework of Catholic schooling, becoming literate was understood by missionaries and indigenous students alike as transformational, capable of turning people the missionaries thought of as primitive *índios* into civilized Brazilians. The translation of the Bible into indigenous languages by Protestant missionaries and their indigenous disciples offered a quite distinct understanding of literacy. Here literacy was opened up as an onto-theological space, where the achievement of literacy in the indigenous language could be seen as the central index of authentic conversion to Christianity.

In this paper I will demonstrate how contemporary projects of indigenous language literacy, which are understood as promoting linguistic and cultural revitalization, are ambivalent in their ideological bent.<sup>1</sup> I will argue that they incorporate both the understanding of Portuguese literacy as a sign of civilization and learning and the association of indigenous language literacy with a sacred experience, though now of “indigenous culture” and not of the Christian Bible message. At the same time, I hope to make clear how contemporary indigenous language literacies as they are transmitted in indigenous schools articulate with the particular ideologies of *spoken* language varieties which have undergirded the system of linguistic exogamy, the obligation to marry someone who is a native speaker of a language other than one’s own, characteristic of the Northwest Amazon. It is through the mediation of orthographies created by anthropologists and linguists that ideologies of linguistic difference in speech can be mapped onto differences in writing. These orthographies can become the analogs of speech varieties because they grow out of the common field-

work practice of phonetic transcription, which has as its goal the preservation of sonic form in a written text.

This paper draws its conclusions from multiple sources. Historical data on Catholic and Protestant literacy campaigns are drawn from the writings of missionaries, histories of the period, and interviews I conducted with individuals who attended the *internatos* along the Uaupés and its headwaters or who were present for the religious revivals on the Içana and its headwaters. Data on contemporary attitudes towards indigenous language literacy and indigenous and Portuguese medium schooling were gathered during my field research in and around São Gabriel da Cachoeira, on the upper Rio Negro, between 2003 and 2007.

### Catholic Mission Schooling and “Standard Language” Literacy

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, using the last Brazilian town up the Rio Negro, São Gabriel da Cachoeira, as a base of operations, Catholic missionaries made incursions into the headwaters of the upper Rio Negro, including the Uaupés, Tiquié and Içana Rivers.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1915 the Salesian order set up a number of mission centers throughout the region. Chernela (1993) offers a concise overview of the history of Catholic activities in the area (pp. 34-36, pp. 40-41). The boarding schools, which the Salesians set up at Pari-Cachoeira (on the Tiquié River), Yawaretê (on the Papuri and Uaupés), and Taracua (on the Uaupés), represent the first large-scale institutionalized literacy campaign (or campaign of *alfabetização* “literacy”) in the Northwest Amazon (Weigel & Ramos, 1991). This was not, however, a program of indigenous language literacy. Rather, as interviews with individuals who attended the schools make clear, in the boarding schools at the mission centers, Portuguese monolingualism was the rule. This reflected the sympathetic and even institutionally-recognized relationship between the Brazilian government and the Catholic Church and the latter’s antagonistic relationship to indigenous language and culture. Brazilian control over the region, which borders Colombia and Venezuela, was most often in name only (Weigel & Ramos, 1991). In the 18th century the Marquis de Pombal, in the name of the Portuguese crown, had put restrictions on Jesuit missionaries who were seen as having too much control in the region. Their use of Nheengatú (*Língua Geral Amazônica*), the Tupi-derived language used by the Jesuits in their missionizing in Northern Brazil, had long thwarted the spread of Portuguese in the region. On the upper Rio Negro, Nheengatú still flourished well into the 20th century, in part because of the close contacts which Nheengatú speaking merchants had in Venezuela and Colombia. The absence of familiarity with Portuguese in the region, even among Brazilians who had migrated there from other areas of Brazil, was lamented by government bureaucrats and church elders:

Portuguese appears to be a completely foreign language [in the region]. Some of the people from Ceara [a state in Northeastern Brazil] that we met, and other people from different states, spoke Spanish with more facility than their own language [of Portuguese] (Bishop Costa of the Brazilian state of Amazonas, cited in Weigel & Ramos, 1991, pp. 143-144, my translation).

Portuguese instruction in the *internatos* would effectively counteract not only Spanish but also Nheengatú, not just on the headwaters of the Uaupés but also at São Gabriel and the other Brazilian outposts on the Rio Negro.

The importance of the Salesian mission centers was not simply as a set of religious and educational institutions but also as sites for the promulgation of a discourse through which the indigenous population could understand itself as properly Brazilian, through practices like instruction in Portuguese, the standard language of the nation-state, and pledging allegiance to the Brazilian flag (Weigel & Ramos, 1991). These outposts in the indigenous territory are still nodal sites for the dissemination of discourses which more or less forcefully solicit indigenous people to understand themselves as Brazilian. Though the system of *internatos* ended in the 1980s, the mission centers at Yawaretê and Pari-Cachoeira, in addition to outposts at Cucui, on the Rio Negro, São Joaquim, and on the Rio Içana, have been converted into Brazilian border posts manned by indigenous-only Brazilian battalions.

The Portuguese monolingualism of the mission schools framed, stabilized, and circulated—that is, enregistered—the idea that Portuguese was the language of learning and of literacy. The relations between students and teachers in the classroom consisted in a further institutionalization of the asymmetric power relations which have characterized relations between the indigenous groups of the region and the various settler populations that have come there, either to extract labor or raw materials from the forest over the last few centuries. Strict discipline was the rule in the *internatos*, and this was quite clearly linked to the ranking of linguistic varieties, as children were physically punished by the priests and nuns if they were caught speaking any other language than Portuguese (Weigel & Ramos, 1991).

While training indigenous children in Portuguese literacy, Catholic missionaries were also making scripts for Tukano, the indigenous language which they used as a *lingua franca* on the Uaupés and its headwaters. They did this not for pedagogical instruction but as an aid in their own learning of the language. They were anxious to showcase the scientificity of their linguistic efforts. Father Alcionílio Brüzzi Alves da Silva, who worked for many years at Yawaretê, in the preface to his *Observações Gramaticais da Língua Daxseyé ou Tukano* ("Grammatical Observations on the Language Daseye or Tukano") proudly quotes Joseph Greenberg's evaluation that

"You have mastered the Tukano Language" (Brüzzi, 1968, p. iii) in the English original. This self-promotion perhaps indexes a slight anxiety on the part of the Catholic missionary about his skills as a linguist, and the status of his text as a "scientific" grammar. Indeed, Brüzzi sets aside a section in his preface dedicated to problems with the grammar. He admits that there are errors, but says that these are the fault of his indigenous informants and in particular a function of their being illiterate. That language learning in the native setting occurs without writing, Brüzzi further contests, has led to the degeneration of the Eastern Tukanoan languages themselves, leaving us with the impression that a "correct" grammar would be impossible simply because the languages, not being written, are themselves inherently flawed.

All knowledge that the Indian possesses of his language is acquired exclusively through hearing, from someone who, in turn, learned by the same method, and perhaps deficiently, or whose vocal organs are not able to reproduce well a given phoneme. Neither do they have the assiduity, which those who are civilized do, to correct a child whose pronunciation is bad, and to give them the meaning of a term of which they are ignorant (Brüzzi, 1968, p. vi, my translation).

Illiteracy is, for the Catholic missionary, a sign of an inherently defective language. It is only with writing, the stable and artifactualized form of language, that its rapid deformation can be militated against.<sup>3</sup>

This folk-theory of language acquisition based in writing is perhaps a reanalysis and projection of the sociolinguistic situation with which Father Brüzzi was himself familiar, that of the Catholic church whose prestige register, Latin, was one which was principally written. But the higher sociolinguistic value associated with the written register is also at work in Brazilian Portuguese, where spoken prestige registers are measured by the degree to which they approximate written Portuguese. Ironically, in both of these cases, the written is the prestige language in part because spoken forms of the language have continued to change (or died out altogether) as the written form has become increasingly standardized, rather in contradiction to Brüzzi's implicit claim that explicit correction and literacy would stop language change in Tukano. Within such a sociolinguistic milieu as this, prestigious speech approximates itself to registers of the written language and not vice-versa.

The value of writing for the linguist is precisely opposite this standard language literacy. A linguist's transcription is only as good as its approximation of the phonological and morphosyntactic categories represented in the spoken language. Thus while Brüzzi was concerned to come up with a Tukano orthography and grammar, it was as a scientific endeavor and not as a precursor to the teaching of indigenous languages in the mission schools. On the contrary, if the prestige language was Por-

tuguese, then the form of writing would have to be in that language—writing being perceived as more civilized than speech, just as Portuguese was held to be superior to Tukano. Linguistic transcription, for Brüzzi and the other Catholic linguists of the mid-twentieth century, was wholly separate from writing, which would, by definition, be impossible in the indigenous language.

In this manner, the existence of literacy naturalized the superiority of Portuguese and its speakers over indigenous languages and their speakers within the Catholic boarding schools. Literacy was associated with the colonial language, Portuguese, and served simultaneously to emblemize both its superiority over Tukano and the ontological difference between the colonizers and colonized voiced in the idiom of a lack: *analfabeto* “illiterate.” The legacy of this symbolic accretion to the concept of literacy is what is reflected in the quotidian anxieties concerning literacy and the performance of literacy in parent-child interactions, in the domain of commerce, and in interactions with governmental and non-governmental bureaucracies still evidenced in the present day and which I repeatedly encountered throughout my field research. It is to these modern day concerns over literacy that we now turn.

### Anxieties of (Il)literacy

During my fieldwork in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the nearest Brazilian town to the indigenous territory, I was struck, again and again, by the anxieties which surround events of reading and writing in daily interactions with indigenous people. These anxieties appear as the legacy of the role that literacy played in the paternalistic colonialism of the Salesian missions. The town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira has doubled in size, from ten to twenty thousand people, in the last fifteen years. The vast majority of these immigrants comes from the indigenous territory. The major cause for their migration is the pursuit of continuing education. Parents often relocate with their children and end up staying—much as they did within the indigenous territory at the mission centers. The high value which is placed on education is reflected in literacy rates in Portuguese which are much higher in the town and the region generally than in other parts of Brazil. Consciousness of this fact does not, however, appear to be widespread, and lamentations about the quality of schooling are commonly voiced among the indigenous population of the town. There are legitimate complaints to be made about the school system which is chronically under-funded, often because of rampant corruption stemming from a lack of checks on the municipal government and the judicial authority in the isolated town. Already impoverished parents are forced to take on ever greater financial responsibilities for buying school supplies and uniforms through raffles, bingo, and other events designed to raise money for the

schools and the school teachers who are sometimes not paid for months at a time. The parents, nearly all of whom are indigenous, often participate actively in these events and in their children's education, both inside and outside of school. It is not uncommon to see parents or grandparents teaching young children how to read and write at home. Literacy is the central concern of these parent-child interactions. To be sure, much of the school curriculum presupposes literacy and so learning to read and write is, in this sense, functionally vital to continuing education. At the same time, however, literacy is seen as an end in itself, and talk about literacy is the manner in which education comes to be understood as having a self-evident value.

The centrality of literacy in talk about education, and particularly in talk about education as a social right and a social good is not unique to São Gabriel or the indigenous territory, rather it is ubiquitous in Brazilian political discourse. The two-term president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, effectively used his biography in order to argue that he would most strenuously fight for more educational opportunities for the people. Lula, who never graduated from high-school and who only learned to read at the age of 10, said that he, of all the candidates, would fight hardest for education because only he knew how important it was, having had to fight so hard to get it in his own life. In the 2006 presidential debates, the candidates tripped over one another trying to speak in the strongest and most unequivocal terms about the need to fight illiteracy (Cristovam Buarque of the Democratic Labor Party, who ran on a platform of federalizing primary education said that *Têmos que eradicar analfabetismo* "We must eradicate illiteracy").

Within neo-liberal democracies education is often advertised as a promissory note on an always-deferred utopia. If the present generation has not been successful then success is promised to their children's generation through the mediation of education. While this dynamic of generational transformation is central to projects of modernity it also clearly speaks, and for many of the same underlying structural reasons, to projects of colonialism in settler colonies. Just as cargo cults, millenarian movements, and other Messianic prophetic traditions have commonly emerged among colonized and subjugated populations, so too does this dream of a deferred age of success through the mediation of education—a kind of genealogical imagining of deferred success in one's children's generation—appeal to underprivileged populations which see no hope for the transformation of their social status and the rights and privileges associated with it in the present age. But if transformation of social class is the principal imagining of what education may accomplish for non-indigenous Brazilians, the stakes are much higher for indigenous ones. In the case of indigenous people, the difference between them and outsiders has been framed as an ontological one, that is, as a difference in essential being or nature. Education is seen as essential to bridging this

divide, transforming the student's status from that of an *índio* to one of membership in Brazilian mass society.

Colonial discourses of indigeneity in Brazil, as elsewhere, have used the figure of the child as a central trope for making intelligible this projected ontological difference between European settlers and indigenous Amerindian peoples (Ramos, 1998, pp. 15-24). Thus colonial authorities have often spoken, and still do speak, albeit more privately, of indigenous people as though they were children. This discourse naturalizes the forms of paternalistic colonial governmentality that allowed the Salesian missionaries to invade indigenous areas and which gave the Service for the Protection of Indians, the precursor to FUNAI (the Brazilian Bureau for Indian Affairs), total control over indigenous lands. Missionary education within such a framework literalized this discourse, concentrating its efforts on indigenous children, and created a narrative of ontological transformation to be achieved through the mediation of education. As in other places, such explicit training was never enough. Since the social circumstances and the prejudices which they produce and which are produced by them do not change through education, the ontological difference has always been interpreted as remaining though perhaps in more hidden form. Indigenous people themselves note this irony whenever one of the indigenous school teachers—a position of considerable prestige—is drunk in public. A common refrain is, "All of that education and he still is an *índio*." Nevertheless, education has become the central emblem for imagining the possibility of transformation. I would argue that within the field of education, literacy (in Portuguese) and the clear qualitative difference in perception and understanding it implies—the revelation of the written word—has become the truly transformational site in which ontological change from colonized to the status of colonizer can be imagined.

In my own field research, I saw evidence for this associational complex not only in the centrality of indigenous language literacy within projects of indigenous governmentality (about which more will be discussed later on) but also in talk about literacy within the household between parents or grandparents and children. In one home where I spent a significant amount of time during my field research, a Tukano grandmother spent much of her time lecturing her grandson about the importance of learning to read and write, trying, through physically grasping his hand and forcing the movements of the pencil, to make him write. There were two common themes in her intermittent speeches. On the one hand, she would call him a *cheira cola* or "glue sniffer," a slang term in colloquial Brazilian Portuguese which literally refers to the often homeless youths who engage in criminal activities to support their addiction to sniffing glue. For this woman the term did not have this specificity of sense but rather was used to refer to any of the children who spent too much time wandering the streets playing with other children. The modern figure of the "glue sniffer" alternated with an ethnic epithet of the region; she would call him



*Maku*. *Maku* is the Arawak name for the forest dwelling Hupda, Yhupde, Nadöb and Dow (Epps, 2005; FOIRN-ISA, 2000). These formerly nomadic groups have the lowest status of all the indigenous groups in the Northwest Amazon, and were traditionally considered servants by members of Eastern Tukanoan speaking groups. The use of the term in this context shows how being *analfabeto* “illiterate” is associated with being low-status and indigenous.

The grandmother, who was herself educated at the Salesian *internato* at Pari-Cachoeira, had embodied this ethnically-inflected understanding of literacy and illiteracy. Others of her generation also show this in their engagement with bureaucratic institutions. Here signatures, which are essential for entering into agreements mediated by colonial and state institutions, are a major source of anxiety. I noted this when an older ethnically Arawakan, Nheengatú speaking friend of mine had to sign an official government document. He sat down and dedicated himself to the task for over five minutes in order to make sure that his name was completely legible. It consisted of a strange inversion of the European conception of the contractual signature whose singularity is ensured precisely in its being unmediated, habitual, speedy, and hence not reproducible. Here it was clear that the act of signing the document was understood as an evaluation to be judged in terms of its legibility and not its distinctiveness. This anxiety is well founded, for it is not certain that illegible distinctiveness would not itself be “read” by representatives of the state institution as a sign of illiteracy. A fingerprint is used on identity cards and bank contracts if a signature cannot be provided. While the fingerprint is an index of the unique signatory to the contract it is also, at a higher level of abstraction, a sign of his or her illiteracy, and thus a source of embarrassment and shame.

### Protestant Missionization and Indigenous Language Literacy

If Portuguese literacy was, from the beginning, tied to a civilizing and nationalizing project sponsored by the Brazilian government and put into action by Catholic priests and nuns, then the first occurrence of indigenous language literacy in the region had a very different set of associations. If we were to date the first large scale efflorescence of indigenous language literacy in the Northwest Amazon it would be to the 1940s and the efforts of Sophie Muller, an independent American missionary (later affiliated with the New Tribes Mission) who worked in Colombia and Brazil (Stoll, 1982, p. 170). The remarkable events surrounding the emergence of indigenous language literacy on the Içana River and its headwaters at that time are documented by Robin Wright (1998). Muller wrote in her account of these events: “Knowing that God had sent me to South America to reach a tribe whose language was unknown and *unwritten*, I set off by myself—for

want of better ‘visible’ company—to find such a tribe” (Muller, 1952, quoted in Wright, 1998, p. 236, emphasis added). In order to understand the importance to Muller of finding speech communities without traditions of indigenous language literacy, it is well to remember the manner in which the literalist evangelical interpretation of the Bible as the word of God makes the translation of the Bible into local languages (“heart languages” as the Summer Institute of Linguistics literature has called them), a necessary condition on the possibility of authentic conversion (Handman, 2007). Indeed a key component of Martin Luther’s revolutionary project consisted in the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, allowing individuals a personal and more direct relationship with God through the reading of a Bible written in the reader’s native tongue (Daniell, 2003, p. 128). We must consider the particular added effect of cases, like Muller’s Arawakan Bible translations, where the first writing and reading in the indigenous language—indeed, the first experience of literacy itself—co-occurs with the revelation of the Biblical message.

In this context, the acquisition of literacy is laminated onto the receiving of the scriptures in a ritually powerful manner. It diagrammatically figurates—that is, models—the revelation (and resurrection) of linguistic meaning from the inert, material orthographic signs of the Biblical text as the self-evidence of the revelation, or true hearing, of the word made flesh in the figure of Jesus. The epistemological and phenomenological domain of literacy is immediately filled in as an onto-theological<sup>4</sup> domain of revelation. The Arawakan languages of the Içana and its headwaters were just such “unwritten” languages wherein, through Bible translation, the acquisition of literacy in the indigenous language could act as the ritual site of Christian conversion. It was not so much the understanding of what was read as the very experience of being able to read itself which characterized the conversion experience as a transformative and revelatory one.

The Protestant model of indigenous language literacy is all the more powerful in that the process of Bible translation, as the missionary works with native speakers to translate the New Testament into the indigenous language, itself diagrammatically figurates the gospel story, the missionary, like Jesus, teaching her disciples. The translation of “disciples” in the Nheengatú Bible, as *omboeuaita*, “those that learn,” returning to the Latin etymology, is illustrative in this regard. The translation process effects an iconism between the missionary and Jesus, on the one hand, and the missionary’s translation assistants and the disciples, on the other. The act of teaching her students (“those that learn”) to read and write, is the ritual site which indexically links the missionary and her assistants, in the process of Bible translation, to the figures of Jesus and his disciples, from the New Testament. As the missionary teaches her core group of assistants to read the Biblical story, that story—now revealed through literacy—cues this alignment between the text and the process of its translation.<sup>5</sup> Indeed,

the highly-revered status of both Sophie Muller and Pastor James, another North American missionary who worked on the Içana River in the 1950s, shows the possibility for this iconism between Jesus and the missionary to be taken a little too literally. Muller was frustrated by the fact that converts in many villages thought she held magical powers, akin to Jesus, and that she was “from heaven” (Stoll, 1982, p. 170).

If the Catholic missionaries saw indigenous writing (in the colonial language) as evidence of success in their civilizing mission, the Protestant missionary Sophie Muller saw learning to read and write as a sign of the fervency with which her new converts embraced the Word of God. Time and again in the travelogue of her missionary encounters she equates the dedication with which a convert applies him or herself to learning how to read and write with the intensity of his or her belief. Upon her return to the Baniwa speaking village of Tunuí on the Rio Içana she was greeted warmly:

[C]rowds came in canoes from the river above and below. Two brothers, who had learned to read last time, had taught dozens of others in the villages below where I hadn't been yet. There were about 60 students here and about 125 listening to the Gospel every evening (Muller, 1952, p. 101).

Those that help in the translation of the scriptural verses form the core group of disciples. Those that have learned to read and write are a larger group of proselytizers, and those that “listen to the Gospel” are merely potential converts. Places like Tunuí contrast with villages like Manchiali, on the River Cuyarí, where Muller found the villagers still engaged in their traditional religious rites, playing pan-pipes late into the night while dancing and drinking manioc beer. She ends her description of her return to Manchiali by noting: “This was the only village that had not advanced with the reading lessons, nor had they taught anyone” (Muller, 1952, p. 100). In these conversion encounters teaching others to read is seen as a kind of proselytizing, while learning to read and write is apprehended as the conversion experience itself. This equivalence of literacy and conversion is scaffolded by the real properties of writing as a medium—here learned in adulthood—where arbitrary marks are revealed as encasing a meaning hitherto encountered only in speech. When conceptualized in this manner, literacy and conversion are mutually reinforcing.

If indigenous language literacy was indeed a potentially powerful ontological space in the Protestant conversion experience—the space of literacy made into an onto-theological space—it was nevertheless one which held as its imperative the abandonment of indigenous culture. It is this legacy that most clearly underlies the present day animosities between the indigenous activists of the Uaupés and its headwaters, who lament the

loss of indigenous practices and traditions brought about by the Salesian missions, and the Protestants on the Xié, Içana and upper Rio Negro who actively eschew emblems of indigeneity, while embracing Portuguese, Nheengatú, and Baniwa Bibles.

### Indigenous Governmentality and Indigenous Language Literacy

Since the demarcation of the indigenous territory of the upper Rio Negro in 1996 the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Upper Rio Negro (FOIRN) has taken control of many of the political and bureaucratic functions with respect to the territory. Their mission, as described in their own materials is as follows:

FOIRN...dedicat[es] itself to the great challenge of building a program of ethno-development over the long term, for the regions of the upper and middle Rio Negro, with activities of protection, checks and balances, technical training, cultural expression and self-sustainability of the indigenous communities (including projects of forest agriculture, fisheries, the marketing of arts and crafts and other products, the installation of indigenous schools, the training of indigenous medics, and the publication of works by indigenous authors) (FOIRN-ISA, 2000, p. 114, my translation).

Within this new context of autonomous indigenous control over the territory, indigenous schools—called *escolas indígenas diferenciadas*, “specialized indigenous schools” —have taken on a special status, and with them, indigenous language literacy. Tukano, Tuyuka, Tariano, and Baniwa medium schools have been created within the territory. The flagship of this system of indigenous schools is the Escola Indígena Útapinopona-Tuyuka founded in 1999 by FOIRN in consultation with anthropologists working for the Institute for the Social Environment (ISA), an NGO which works with indigenous populations throughout Brazil. The project was financially supported by grants from Norwegian NGOs (FOIRN-ISA, 2001, p. 3). The Escola Indígena Útapinopona-Tuyuka located at São Pedro on the River Tiquié at the Columbian border is Tuyuka medium, and literacy in a special Tuyuka script is a privileged part of the curriculum.

The centrality of indigenous language literacy to the development of the indigenous governmentality of FOIRN in the post-demarcation era arises out of the double-bind in which indigenous populations are placed in their attempts to secure political and territorial autonomy from the nation-states in which they find themselves (see Povinelli (2002) for a discussion of similar paradoxes of indigenous “recognition” in Australia). Demarcation of the indigenous territory, inasmuch as it ceded control to

FOIRN from the Brazilian Government and FUNAI, involves an inherent tension. If there is an indigenous authority capable of administering the territory then the authenticity of the indigeneity of its governing members is put into question, since governance presupposes a modern, rational, and literate subject which has been constructed, through colonial discourses like those disseminated by the Salesian boarding schools, as mutually exclusive with authentic indigeneity. Indigenous language medium schools must mediate the need both to be rational and educated, on the one hand, and authentically indigenous, on the other. FOIRN must be led by what will be viewed as an educated indigenous elite, since just such an educated elite is seen as a precondition of indigenous self-governance and of the recognition of FOIRN as an institutional coeval with FUNAI, SEDUC (the Department of Education), and the other state institutions which ceded control to it at the time of demarcation. Without schooling, the indigenous territory would be vulnerable to the kind of paternalism of the Salesian missions, whose presence was seen as justified because the indigenous population was said to be childlike, lacking education (and civilization) and thus the ability to manage its relations with various encroaching settler populations. At the same time, the indigenous authority and its representatives must effectively display emblems of indigeneity in order to figurate the continuity of indigenous practice and knowledge over time, since this is the legal, political, and discursively agreed upon basis for the special rights of indigenous people over the land in the territory vis-à-vis other Brazilians.

Since the major threat to indigenous culture as discussed in widely circulating discourses about language death and cultural revitalization is the problem of social reproduction (e.g., Fishman, 2001), *escolas indígenas diferenciadas* nicely mediate between the need to educate the indigenous population (speaking to discourses of civility and Brazilian *cidadania* "citizenship") and the need to be seen as actively promoting a *valorização da cultura indígena* ("the valuing of indigenous culture") by transmitting indigenous traditions and practices to the younger generations (the imperative of an indigenous state). Schools can both be the central institutions in processes of indigenous (and NGO) governmentality while also fulfilling the demands of a globalized and anthropologically authorized discourse of cultural preservation and revitalization. Within the framework of an indigenous—as opposed to a Catholic or state—authority, schools serve as an institutional reification of the anthropological concept of "social reproduction." At the same time, the existence of universal schooling in the territory figurates FOIRN (as opposed to e.g., kin-based groups) as in control of the means of social reproduction.

## Myth Writing and the Writing of Linguists

The scripts used in the “specialized indigenous schools” have been created in close consultation with linguists and anthropologists. In this they are influenced by the kind of writing which linguists and anthropologists practice in their engagements with the languages they study, that of phonetic transcription. Transcription is the writing of linguists. Of all imaginings of speech reducible to writing there is none more fully elaborated than that of the phonetic alphabet (Derrida, 1967/1997). In phonetic transcription writing is precisely conceptualized as the means of preserving evanescent sound in another, more permanent, medium. This concern which linguists and anthropologists have for preserving sound in written form is reflected in how they go about coming up with orthographies for indigenous languages, and the scorn which they often reserve for the orthographies of missionaries. Indeed, indigenous language orthographies have often been the site of skirmishes in the turf wars between anthropologists and missionaries in indigenous communities.

When linguists devise an orthography their principal concern is to create a system of graphic representation which represents all of the phonemic distinctions made in the spoken language. These orthographies are seen as more phonemically natural, ideally only representing the sounds which have a psychological reality for the native speaker.<sup>6</sup> Though such a one-to-one mapping between phonemes and graphemes may be thought to democratize and speed up the acquisition of literacy (cf. Pike, 1968), too much concern with the fidelity of the formalism—as has been the case in conflicts about how best to represent nasality, tone, and the high-mid-vowel in the Eastern Tukanoan languages—can re-inscribe the prescriptivism that occurs in learning the “correct” alphabetic inventory and word spellings in the acquisition of standardized languages, and reproduce scholastically based hierarchies in indigenous education.

In the case of Tukano, the desire to create a precise script has led to more than three different orthographies having been used in the past two decades. In one case I asked an 18-year-old girl who had been educated in Yawaretê to write Tukano in the script she had been taught only to find that her 30-year-old brother-in-law who had been educated at Taracua used an alternate orthography and found it difficult to read her version. As this story indicates, the concern with correct spelling (whether it has a phonemically scientific or merely prescriptivist basis) is orthogonal to writing as a habitual practice that appears, from what much research indicates (Smith, 2003), to be more morphemic and logographic in its production, comprehension and historical trajectory, rather than phonemic and alphabetic, all things being equal (see especially Roger Wright, 1994, pp. 165-180).

The linguist’s concern that the orthographic system be nothing more and nothing less than the expression of the phonemic inventory of a lan-

guage is one fully consonant with the idea that writing is merely an extension of speech. It is not surprising, then, that the kinds of texts which come to be produced in these orthographies are themselves transcripts of speech. While there is no reason to believe that new texts could not be written and genres emerge<sup>7</sup> in indigenous language writing, the writing sponsored by ISA and FOIRN follows the model of anthropological transcription and not of novel creation. Quite literally replicating the methods of anthropological knowledge production, young indigenous students tape record older speakers' retellings of myths, which they then transcribe and often translate into Portuguese for eventual publication. In FOIRN's *Narradores Indígenas do Rio Negro* ("Indigenous Narrators of the Rio Negro") series, Tariano, Desano, Tukano, and Baniwa myths have been published thus far.

That it is myths which serve as the speech-genre which is sourced for a new indigenous literature seems over-determined. Myth, especially in Amazonia, is the form of oral discourse which most closely approaches the form of a replicable and decontextualizable object (Urban, 1991). The explicit manner in which it is transmitted and the remarkable fidelity of that transmission, the focus on the materiality of the speech, all would seem to predispose it to being a natural candidate for transcription and text artifactualization in the form of a book. This, the emic organization of the discourse genre, has played a role in giving myth a privileged place in anthropological theory. But myth is also over-determined as the source genre for an emerging indigenous (and indigenist) literature from another perspective, not of which speech-genre is most easily transduced into the written medium, but of what other kinds of indigenous writing this indigenous language literature will contrast with.

The choice of myth as the source genre of this new indigenous language literacy is meant to occupy the space that the translated Bible did in the Protestant missionary encounter. Myth, in this manner, enters into paradigmatic contrast with the Bible. The privileged occurrence of the origin myth, in the books published thus far by FOIRN, seems, in particular, to signal that this set of texts will constitute a cosmological and theological canon. Take for example the Tukano author, Gabriel dos Santos *Gentil's Mito Tukano: Quatro Tempos de Antiguidades* (2000), where the myths are presented in chronological order beginning with the Tukanoan origin myth. This book is cast by the author as the means of sacred transmission of these, the Tukano, scriptures. The writing down of the myths, breaking the authorized chain of transmission, is forced upon him by the "threat" to indigenous culture: "It is only now that we write the myths, so that we will not forget the rationales of our culture which is so threatened today" (p. 15, my translation). This discourse of *nossa cultura* "our culture" forms the bridge between the text as an extension of emic forms of knowledge transmission and the book as an etic account of Tukanoan mythic universe—that is, as a form of anthropological writing.

Though the book consists in line-by-line translations from Tukano into Portuguese, the introductory comments appear only in Portuguese. This makes Portuguese the privileged, framing linguistic code, literally book-ending the text. That Portuguese is the narrating code conforms to the ideology that it is the privileged code of knowledge production. Portuguese is the code in which FOIRN officials voice the anthropological discourse *about* indigenous culture which serves as the discursive backing to their authority. That writing—the privileged linguistic medium—and Portuguese—the privileged linguistic code—should harmonize is not surprising. Still, it is ironic that in a project designed to *valorizar* (“value”) indigenous language we see a similar situation of contrasting varieties of writing (or digraphia), with Portuguese as the narrating linguistic code and the indigenous language as the object of scientific study, to the one represented in Father Brüzzi’s grammar and in the privileging of Portuguese in the Salesian boarding schools. In this manner the writing down of Tukano myths is ambiguous in its status. One is left to wonder whether it is not so much the reproduction of indigenous culture as the reproduction of a civilized discourse of knowledge production—an anthropological discourse—which is what is going on here.

Indigenous language writing is not only devalued from “the outside,” but also from within. From the indigenous perspective, writing is less, not more, authoritative than speech. In Tukano the same word, *oha-*, glosses both as “to draw” and “to write” (the same has been noted for other Amazonian languages, Kashinawa and Kali’na (Menezes de Souza, 2007, p. 158)). This semantic equivalence is further reflected by the use of the inferred evidential and not of the hearsay evidential in relaying information gained through reading (Ramirez, 1997, p. 138, p. 140). This is similar to the use of the inferred evidential in telling parts of myths corroborated by physical evidences like rock art or geological formations said to be brought about through the recounted events, where the hearsay evidential might otherwise be employed. Though there does seem to be some change in this usage as writing becomes reconceptualized on analogy to speech, the use of the inferred evidential in this context reflects a conceptualization of writing as the contingent result of processes which the reader was not present for. The most prototypical cases where the inferred evidential is used are those where the speaker was privy only to the end-state of a process. That resultative meanings are prototypical for inferred evidentials is also reflected in the cross-linguistically attested historical relations between these grammatical constructions (Nedjalkov, 1988). Marks, such as the tracks left by an animal in the sand or the broken branches where people have made a path through the forest, are the perceptible ground for such inferences. In terms of evidentiary coding, the Tukano language treats writing, not as just another system of symbolic representation equivalent in status to enunciated speech—in which case the hearsay evidential would be used—but rather as the result of a process which



we can only make possible or probable inferences about at this time.<sup>8</sup> If authorial absence and erasure is part of the reason for the imputation of greater objectivity to writing over speech within the Western tradition then it is precisely the reason that writing, at least as evidentially coded, is a more dubious source of information within Tukanoan epistemology, which places a high evidentiary value on the speaker's being present at, or proximal to, the events reported in discourse. While phonologically reductive scripts attempt, from a Western perspective, to preserve the "presence" of the spoken voice (Derrida, 1967/1997), and thus proximity to the event of speaking, it is clear that this is not the indigenous interpretation of even phonologically informed writing.

### **Orthographic Babel and the Politics of Ethnic Recognition**

There is, however, one way in which the linguist's concern to make phonologically precise orthographies harmonize with especially Tukanoan<sup>9</sup> sensitivities to linguistic difference. Linguistic difference has always been of central importance in mediating the inter-ethnic relationships of the indigenous communities of the upper Rio Negro, where linguistic exogamy was the rule. The pervasive multilingualism of the Northwest Amazon (over 20 different languages are spoken in the region) is a function of this language group exogamy. In the traditional society of the Uaupés River basin women spoke different languages from their husbands (Jackson, 1983; Hugh-Jones, 1979; Gómez-Imbert, 2000). One could imagine few linguistic means to more markedly index the difference between exogamously marrying groups than wholly different linguistic codes. However, since cross-cousin marriage is the ideal, an individual's spouse often speaks the same language as that individual's mother speaks, meaning that spouses can understand one another even though they speak different languages. Under such conditions, where already genetically-related languages are brought into constant contact through marriage there is a marked separation of linguistic competence from linguistic performance (Chomsky, 1965).

Most individuals would be competent in understanding both their father's and mother's tongues but, after puberty, were normatively expected to only produce their father's language. Children were frequently corrected in their pronunciation and lexical choices during (primary and secondary) language acquisition (Jackson, 1983). Older informants, who were socialized into this linguistic milieu, will report true fluency only in their father's language, though they will invariably boast competence in a number of other Eastern Tukanoan languages. To this day, the concept of linguistic purity is foregrounded among speakers of Tukanoan languages and those with only partial mastery over their language may feel embarrassment or shame when this fact is discovered. The prevalence of word-borrowing from Portuguese in

Nheengatú speech is one of the most oft cited examples, by Tukanoans, that speakers of Nheengatú (and in particular members of *tribo baré*<sup>10</sup>) have “lost” their *etnia* (“ethnicity”). Since language served as the central marker of group identity, individuals were expected to speak their father’s language in nearly all circumstances.

The iterative effects of this kind of linguistic situation is the convergence of the grammatical categories of these languages. Common to many of the Eastern Tukanoan languages are complex systems of evidential marking, nominalization, and noun-classifiers. While there are differences in the degree to which these different linguistic subsystems are reticulated within the different languages, there is a high degree of standardization among the varieties when compared to, for instance, Cubeo, another Eastern Tukanoan language spoken in the region but by a group which marries endogamously (Goldman, 1963). This is all to say that generationally-iterated linguistic competence in different but genetically related languages has led to their convergence in terms of sense categories (cf. Aikhenvald, 2002). This similarity of sense, however, ironically threatens the very ideological preconditions of the system of linguistic exogamy, the idea that individuals who speak the same language share the same blood (i.e., the idea that marrying someone who speaks the same language is tantamount to incest). It is within such an ideological field that we see the phonological differentiation of these speech varieties and inter-lingual lexical suppletion in the region (i.e., differentiation in terms of the salient substance of linguistic form itself). Differences in lexical forms and complex tonal patterns bear a great functional load in the marking of linguistic difference among the Eastern Tukanoan languages, being particularly salient sites of ideological regimentation (Gómez-Imbert, 2000):

The use of these languages as emblems of social differentiation is not contradicted by that which they share phonological, morphosyntactic and semantic structures, and to such a point that the label ‘language’ itself appears inappropriate to designate them (p. 322, my translation).<sup>11</sup>

Hyper-sensitivity to differences in pronunciation is necessary in order for language to serve as an index which successfully marks off ethnic groups from one another. The tendency of linguists to create phonologically reductive orthographies means that such orthographies can be used as a further, outward manifestation of the differences between the Eastern Tukanoan languages, and thus of the different ethnicities that these languages traditionally indexed. The resulting orthographic Babel—with different orthographies for Tuyuka, Tukano, Wanano, Desano and other Eastern Tukanoan languages—represents the ideologically motivated sensitivity to surface differences between the Eastern Tukanoan languages characteristic of the region more than it does real underlying problems

in representing these speech varieties with a uniform system of graphic representation. This is all the more poignant given that the number of speakers of languages other than Tukano has drastically fallen in the last two generations, as Tukano became a *lingua franca* at the Salesian mission centers and now in the town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira. In this context, the creation of unique and specific orthographies for each speech variety serves to replace, in part, spoken language as a means of indexing ethnic differences, since ethnic differences are no longer immediately manifested by differences in linguistic production as they were traditionally.

Material objects, in addition to linguistic differences, have traditionally been a means of marking off ethnic groups from one another. A system of ritualized ceremonial exchange of goods (Wanano, *po'oa*) relates the different groups to one another not only through marriage exchange, but through the exchange of specialized crafts (Chernela, 1993, p. 110-122). Different ethnic groups are associated with different traditions of craft production. The Tukano, for instance, are known for their production of shamans' benches, the Hohodene Baniwa for their production of grater boards used in manioc processing, and the Desana for their *balaio* baskets (p. 111). The books of myths authored by members of different ethnicities and using orthographies specialized to those ethnicities' specific languages, sold at FOIRN headquarters and used in the indigenous schools in the indigenous territory, can be understood as another kind of specialized craft production of the sort which, along with linguistic differentiation, traditionally highlighted differences between ethnic groups. Just as the inferred evidential, which is used to encode information gained not through linguistic communication but from material traces, is used in the Tukanoan languages to recount information gleaned from written texts, so too are the written texts of a new indigenous language literacy themselves understood as the material emblems of different ethnic groups.

### Conclusion

The development of indigenous language orthographies and of specialized indigenous schools helps legitimate the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Upper Rio Negro (FOIRN), the indigenous and governing authority in the region. The Brazilian government had long dragged its feet on the demarcation of indigenous lands in the area, not wanting to grant indigenous groups the right of self-governance over the huge swath of rainforest which borders both Venezuela and Colombia. In such land disputes the government or other interested outside parties often argue that either indigenous groups are not civilized enough to protect themselves from outside interests or that they are too civilized, and not authentically indigenous enough to merit special privileges over their

lands. FOIRN's project of indigenous language literacy represents a hybrid position which tries to maneuver around this double-bind. It involves education and *alfabetização* ("literacy")—that which a modern nation-state must provide its citizens—while simultaneously locating these techniques of reason in the indigenous language and in harmony with culturally indigenous texts and practices, like myths and craft production—ensuring the social reproduction of indigenous society, and thus its continuing authenticity. Indigenous language literacy in this manner helps to emblemize FOIRN as a rational yet simultaneously authentic indigenous governing authority.

The indigenous language orthographies developed by linguists and anthropologists in consultation with FOIRN, the genres of their textual expression (transcribed myths), and their mode of transmission (indigenous schools), are all determined at the intersection of the enregistered values of kinds of writing, both in indigenous languages and in Portuguese, that have come before. FOIRN's project of indigenous language literacy—from indigenous schooling, to orthographic development, to the publication of indigenous myths—is constrained by this history of literacy and the registers of literacy which have formed within it. In many ways this history has been too constraining, pre-determining both the form and expression of an official indigenous language literacy.

In form, indigenous scripts borrow from the linguist and anthropologist and from their practices of phonetic transcription. Phonetic transcription is given value because of its association with scientific rationality and with knowledge production. Transcription enregisters the value of writing as adhering in the degree to which it preserves features of the spoken; that is, as a recording device. At the same time, associated as it is with the figures of the linguist and the anthropologist, transcription—which does not imply understanding of "inner" meaning as much as fidelity to "outward" form—can figurate the *animator* of the text (the transcriber is by definition not the *author*) as an outsider (Goffman, 1979). This is reflected in the choice of myth narration, a traditionally oral practice, as the genre in which these indigenous orthographies are to be employed. That these texts, the same ones which anthropologists often collect and transcribe, are those which are chosen to be published by FOIRN, further determines indigenous language writing as necessarily having a cultural subject matter, and further, as being an act of cultural "preservation." This instant archaeology of transcribed myths and craft production (which is also taught at some of the specialized indigenous schools), proudly showcased at FOIRN's headquarters in São Gabriel, articulates with phonetic transcription as a technique for the preservation of sound. We are left to wonder if writing, in this case, is not an enunciation of the historical closure of indige-

nous culture, whose emblems this writing archives. This closure, which is figured by indigenous language literacy as an anthropological discourse about but not of indigenous culture, allows FOIRN to occupy the space of rationality necessary to its claim of indigenous self-governance.

The highly limited set of contexts in which indigenous language literacy is employed has the paradoxical effect of closing off indigenous languages from literacy rather than opening them up to it. In the case of the Nheengatú and Baniwa-speaking Protestants of the Içana and Xié Rivers, often fluent in standard Portuguese, this can create a *de facto* sacralization of the indigenous code, with Bibles, hymnals, and prayers being the only written indigenous-language-texts. This is reminiscent, at least in the domain of literacy, to the written and specifically sacralized Hebrew of the Jewish diaspora which contrasted with the local vernaculars of everyday life (Mendes-Flohr, 1993). In the case of the indigenous schools we see indigenous language literacy following the kind of prescriptivism common both to standard language instruction in Brazilian schools and to the hyper-correction of, and hyper-sensitivity to, differences in speech characteristic of the Northwest Amazon. In some ways differences in the writing of the Eastern Tukanoan languages are becoming substitutes for the differences in speech which were vitally important in the system of linguistic exogamy traditionally practiced in the region. Individuals no longer index their group membership through speech, as speakers of minority languages like Desano, Tuyuka and Wanano are increasingly shifting to Tukano, and in the case of the younger urban indigenous population, to Portuguese. From this perspective, writing is understood as analogous to crafts, ritually exchanged between the groups of the Uaupés basin, as a set of lasting material signs which uniquely index different ethnic groups.

Though indigenous language literacy is now widespread in the Northwest Amazon, it is a largely passive knowledge, for there is almost no autochthonous production of literary texts in the indigenous languages. On the contrary, writing, when it does occur, is in Portuguese. We see this especially with the writing of diaries, love letters, poems, and other emblems of the interiorized world of modern subjectivity, where Portuguese is used. Since indigenous language writing has been modeled in terms of anthropological transcription, and as recording a necessarily "indigenous" object, writing in Portuguese is understood as the default mode of literary production and reception. The important emblematic and ideological significance of indigenous language literacies, whether in licensing the indigenous governmentality of FOIRN or, through its acquisition, in figuring the experience of Christian conversion, has had the ironic effect of frustrating the growth of literacy as a medium for the creation of novel genres of linguistic expression and communication in indigenous languages.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Ideologies of linguistic code or—in the case of discourses about literacy—medium, are explicitly voiced cultural beliefs which rationalize linguistic structures and patterns of use. Such beliefs, as they reflexively orient linguistic practice, may come to circularly naturalize those linguistic structures and patterns of use which are the object of ideological rationalization as being really imbued with the cultural values said to adhere in them (Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> There are two major river systems which branch off from the Rio Negro within the indigenous territory. The Uaupés River and its headwaters, including the Papuri and Tiquié Rivers, is mainly populated by speakers of Eastern Tukanoan languages. This was the region most aggressively missionized by Catholics. The Xié and Içana Rivers, and the headwaters of the latter, including the Cuyari and Cubaté Rivers, are mainly populated by speakers of Arawakan languages (though people on the lower Içana and Cubaté now speak Nheengatú). This was the region most aggressively missionized by Protestants.

<sup>3</sup> Variation between and within the Eastern Tukanoan languages is accelerated. The causes of this are not, however, ineffectual language transmission either as a function of illiteracy or of multilingualism in the home (another cause cited by Brüzzi) but rather local differentiation of phonological and lexical forms towards the ends of pragmatically marking off these languages as different from one another (see the discussion in the section “Orthographic Babel and the Politics of Ethnic Recognition”).

<sup>4</sup> I am using the term “onto-theological” to describe the mode of being which is attributed, through textual and pedagogical practices and missionary discourses, to the phenomenological experience of literacy in the Protestant conversion experience. Since all reading and writing in this missionary context is religious in nature—the Bible being the only written text—I argue that the experience of reading comes to be understood as an inherently theological mode of being, one only made possible by, and in, God.

<sup>5</sup> That the process of translating the Bible is understood as a religiously powerful one was reflected in an interview I did with the ethnically Baré, Nheengatú speaking son of one of the original translators of the Nheengatú Bible, who expressed his desire to translate the Old Testament into Nheengatú and explicitly

linked up such a translation project to the possibility of a religious revival on the lower Içana.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Edward Sapir's concept of the "Psychological Reality of the Phoneme" ([1933] 1985) comes to him when speakers of American Indian languages whom he has trained to write phonetically, write the "theoretically real but actually nonexistent form[s]" of their language (p. 49). Sapir's theory of the phoneme—especially through Kenneth Pike and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (M.C.D.M. Barros, 1994)—has been greatly influential in the devising of indigenous language orthographies. In this we see transcription, as the practice of the linguist and his assistant, being quite literally converted into traditions of indigenous language literacy. My thanks to Courtney Handman for this point.

<sup>7</sup> I heard of a couple of cases of letters written in Tuyuka, sent between relatives on the Tiquié and those in São Gabriel who had been educated in the schools there. It would seem that if indigenous language literacy is going to thrive it will have to thrive in just such emergent and quotidian genres of textual production or not at all. I should also note that ISA and FOIRN have also published, as protestant missionaries also did, alphabet books for children.

<sup>8</sup> The Tukano evidentials which are labeled in terms of the prototypic kind of perceptual access the speaker has to the information (i.e., visual, sensed, hearsay, and inferred) are also epistemically gradient, the visual evidential implying the greatest epistemic certainty and the inferred evidential implying the least.

<sup>9</sup> "Tukanoan" refers to members of all the Eastern Tukanoan language groups, not just the Tukano language group.

<sup>10</sup> This ethnonym is taken from the name of a now-extinct Arawakan language that is held to have been the language of this group originally. This designation appears, however, to have a rather recent history and to have really gained traction only with the demarcation of the indigenous territory. The "invention" of *tribo baré* illustrates how demands for indigenous authenticity go hand in hand with projects of territorial self-determination.

<sup>11</sup> Not making a distinction between the ideology of linguistic difference and its reality has led linguists and missionaries to often over-emphasize the differences between the Eastern Tukanoan languages. In the 1960s the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an arm of Wycliffe Bible Translators, did a survey of the Colombian Vaupes which turned up 15 languages (Stoll, 1982, p. 173). With so many "languages" the region became a focal site of missionary work. SIL linguists spent considerable amounts of time working up grammatical sketches of the different languages (e.g., Barnes, 1984; Jones & Jones, 1991'; Miller, 1999 for the languages of Tuyuka, Barasano, and Desano respectively), towards the ends of creating distinct translations of the Bible for each tongue.

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