The Convergence of Literacy and Oral Tradition in the Bilingual Runasimi
Reading and Writing Workshops in South Central Peru

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Resumen

Para resumir en castellano, examiné los objetivos del taller bilingüe runasimi/castellano de lectura y escritura, que son escribir bien, hablar con familiares mayores sobre cuentos del área de Laramarka y luego grabarlos en escritos, fundar una biblioteca, que ahora tiene más de 500 libros clásicos y en runasimi, alimentar a los participantes y mostrar la creatividad de la gente indígena/mestiza. Mencioné el taller de dos semanas en términos de sus 56 participantes en 2010, de su edad promedio de 12 años, y los 35 cuentos coleccionados, los 17 transcritos en tres lenguas en la recopilación de Numa. Señalé el contenido de los talleres, los estándares para evaluarlos típicamente, y cómo hicieron más de lo suficiente en Laramarka. Destaqué también que la lecto-escritura puede tener un efecto político en el sentido que una persona que fácilmente lee y escribe puede indagar sobre las minas del área e incluso entender y escribir documentos relacionados y tomar decisiones. Ojalá que funcione en Laramarka, si no, la ley de consulta previa.
Introduction

Madison, WI is the home of the José Teófilo Armacanqui Association for the Learning and Promoting of the Runasimi or Quechua Language (from here now on Runasimi), and this Nicolás Armacanqui Flores Runasimi/Castilian Bilingual Reading and Writing Workshop is the brainchild of Numa Armacanqui, and the whole Armacanqui clan of Madison, WI, originally of South Central Peru. The idea of the workshop, the tradition having started in the summer of 2010 and then continued with another workshop this past summer, has been to lend a hand to the peasants in Laramarca, near where the Armacanquis grew up so that the community can better read, interpret and write documents in Spanish (Castilian). Moreover, we want to help revitalize the native language Runasimi; it was spoken in the workshop some of the time, it was spoken about more of the time, and also important, a growing piece of Andean oral tradition has been documented. The workshops have been sponsored by the Laramarka Community Peasant Council and the Rio Grande Basin Defense and Development Front.

1. To overview the 2010 workshop, the awesome participants, who worked hard for two weeks, were on average 12 years old; there were 56 attendees in total. Thirty-five stories were transcribed, and 17 presented in the “Transcribed Collection”—a trilingual book of collected works in a three-column, three-language layout perfected by Numa. For each story, on each page we can read it in Runasimi, in Castilian and in English, so the presentation itself is highly educational. The stories include creation myths, local events and myths, family memories, personal experiences, and fictional stories, including the Qarqacha or “penitent soul” stories. These narratives have been passed down orally for millennia at the fireplace of the farm, and now they have been recorded and transcribed for everyone in the world to share and study.

2. Workshop goals. What these summer writing workshops have accomplished has been nothing less than a benchmark for how learners can jump from thinking about written communication, learning to read (seeing the relationship of sound to meaning), and taking it to documenting what had previously been oral tradition. The workshops have been bilingual in the sense that they have emphasized Runasimi as an ancestral language that should be learned, not ignored (even though the politics of Peru the last 30 years sort of indicates otherwise), and details of both the Runasimi and Castilian alphabet, spelling and words were discussed continually. The
interpretation of the often-haunting tales was also a frequent topic. These elements have led to lively and insightful workshops for the over one hundred participants to date.

Other important specific workshop goals at the outset were all accomplished objectives. To wit, an important one was a goal that the children would write well without much difficulty and this was borne out; the participants were surprised to see their projects did involve a lot of effort but turned out phenomenal. Another goal was that the participants were to talk to their elder family members about the oral stories of the area and myths that they had heard in their lives, and they were to record them in written form, which is the fruit of this rich collection. A third goal was to collect a number of valuable books for a library in Laramarka, along with some of the transcribed stories, and dozens of other seminal works such as the writing of J. M. Arguedas, Carrillo, C. Vallejo, Garcilaso de la Vega, and some books in Runasimi, 535 books in all. It was hoped that they would be donated, most of which were, with much sponsorship of the Armacanquis and other friends. Another goal was to illustrate the creativity of indigenous and mestizo people, to show how culture comes from people, and it also infuses into people, to quote César Vallejo. Workshop participants were also fed a nutritious meal every day on site. The overarching goal was to show that however deplorable and inhospitable the economic conditions have been for Runasimi speakers for the last 500 years, at least there is a ray of hope for this group, and hopefully this generation will not forget their Kichwa heritage, even though sometimes it seems that forces conspire to make and keep people powerless and oppressed in the Andes.

3. In terms of workshop content, on a day-to-day basis, students were to record and revise the narratives that they had solicited of their elders, and brainstorm various aspects of writing. Of course there were daily lessons, and students followed along in a manual written by Numa. Some important lessons revolved around spelling systems, which is part of the process of associating sound and meaning, or literacy in at least one of its foundations, because a spelling system that is easy to use promotes literacy. In the workshop(s), aspects of the Spanish or Castilian spelling system were compared to aspects of the Runasimi spelling system approved in 1985 adopted at these workshops.

At the time of conquest, Runasimi began to be spelled with the Castilian system of alphabetizing, in part because Runasimi did not have its own system. But it is clearly a separate
language with a necessarily distinct sound system and history, so to maintain a colonial literary system does not make sense anymore. It is confusing to readers and does not allow for an organic understanding of one’s world. Let me give a couple of examples used in the workshops.

Consider the etymology of the city and toponym Huancavelica. The etymology of the word is a combination of \textit{wanka} + \textit{willka} and means “the place where the grandsons of the Wankas live”, \textit{willka}, being ‘grandsons’ and \textit{Wanka} referring to the ancient Wanka people and the Junin area. There are several problems with the common spelling of this word that Numa discussed with workshop participants. First of all, as I alluded there is a rather long and interesting debate about Runasimi spelling, but to quickly summarize a few of these issues with this example, “huancavelica” is commonly spelled this way on maps and other official references with <hu> and <v>. But the word is potentially unrecognizable with the Castilian spelling, so that the linguistic reference points to a rich history are lost. One ubiquitous problem is that Spanish cannot spell the sound \textit{[w]} without the graphic sequence <hu> for whatever arbitrary reason, so even though the <w> is obviously shorter, for some reason it is not preferred, except at Numa’s workshop in particular (and several respected spelling systems in general also adopt the <w>).

What about the sequence <ve>? Notice this second \textit{[w]} sound is now suddenly represented by <v>. Since there is no \textit{v} sound (labiodental fricative) in Peruvian Runasimi, it is not a good candidate for a letter to represent Runasimi words at all. Now, let us discuss the <e> sound. There are some who insist that <e> and <o> (the dorsal counterpart to [e]), are necessary graphemes in Runasimi, but are they really? Because if they are not, then according to specialists, extraneous letters of the alphabet could make it all the more difficult to learn to read. Ideally, letters of the alphabet representing sounds that make meaningful differences in a language are necessary, but beyond that it is controversial.

To show that sounds are meaningful, minimal pairs are typically proposed. E.g., Runasimi \textit{maki} means ‘hand’ and there is no word in any pronunciation or dialect such as \textit{make} that means anything different. Likewise, \textit{maku} means ‘male wanaku (animal)’, and there is no word with a sound variant such as \textit{mako} that means anything clearly different, for which it can be argued that we need the back vowel. Although some have to tried to come up with minimal pairings to prove the existence of /e/ and /o/ phonologically (Weber, who does not think of a single true minimal pair), there is no solid evidence of it, so it remains sort of a mystery why
some have even spent time arguing for this pentavocalist view or phonetic alphabetization. One conclusion to be drawn is that these vowels are symbolically representative of a mistaken holdover from the past that can essentially obfuscate reality for present day people trying to revitalize their own nationality and identity. For these reasons, the workshop has encouraged the spelling (and pronunciation) of “Huancavelica” as <Wankawillka>, and likewise for other place names, common nouns, verbs, suffixes, etc.

Let us also consider the Qarqarcha tales in this collection for a moment. They depict a penitent soul that frightens villagers who commit sins. A few workshop participants wrote about this theme. Qarqacha tales are thought to have been used to scare people into compliance, but their exact origin is unknown, and we look forward to investigating it. But what about the spelling? In the collection, the <q> is used to render the uvular sound spelled in Spanish with a <j>. In Peruvian Runasimi there are a variety of dorsal consonants and fricatives, among them the sound represented with <q>, though in other dialects similar words may be spelled with a <k>. In any event, workshop participants were invited to inventory their own set of names and toponyms in their families and worlds, and decide for themselves which writing system made more sense. Incidentally any of the Qarqacha stories, in fact, most of the collected works would make excellent short stories for students of Runasimi to read, discuss and debate at any level the language is taught in, whether in Peru or in an American or European classroom. Any of them would be ideal for language and literary analysis.

Numa’s ideas for bilingual education and other kinds of supplemental learning should serve as a model; they show that currently in the community, more students should be rewarded for their writing accomplishment; there should be more linkages between the community and the schools. Community representatives could visit classrooms and share their experiences. The community board or elected municipality officers could lecture at the high school in Laramarka about problematic issues such as borders, and the mine at Antapite. High school teachers and students alike could attend Laramarka Community Peasant Council assemblies and municipality sessions. All of these are brilliant ideas to further literacy and revitalization efforts anywhere in the Sierra.
4. Let us talk about Bilingual education standards, because the workshops were bilingual. They went beyond the typical benchmarks for success that have been used in K-12 ELD (English Language Development). For example, since as we saw, students learned about Runasimi and Castilian alphabet issues vis-a-vis their geographical and personal names, among many other things, which strengthened their understanding of spelling conventions and built vocabulary, and must have piqued their curiosity about dorsal sounds in Runasimi. The discussions of the Qarqacha, among other tales, made students think about the origin of spooky narratives.

Let us consider for example Washington state’s K-12 bilingual education benchmarks, just for comparison. For writing standards, according to these benchmarks the student:

- prewrites to generate ideas and plan writing
- produces drafts
- revises to improve text
- edits text
- publishes text to share with audience
- adjusts writing process as necessary
- adapts writing for a variety of audiences
- writes for different purposes
- writes in a variety of forms/genres
- develops ideas and organizes writing
- uses appropriate style
- knows and applies grade-level-appropriate writing conventions
- analyzes and evaluates others’ and own writing
- sets goals for improvement
- writes in a second or foreign language or cultural context

Some participants wrote in Runasimi, and others did not, but that cultural context was there, of course. Regarding the writing conventions, some of the more challenging aspects were intended for some older participants, but in general the Runasimi spelling system adopted by Numa was easier to learn than Castilian spelling, as I argued above.
For reading standards, according to the Washington state benchmarks, the student,

- uses word recognition skills and strategies to comprehend text
- uses vocabulary, word meaning, strategies to comprehend text
- builds vocabulary through wide reading
- applies word recognition skills and strategies to read fluently
- student understands meaning of what was read
- demonstrates evidence of reading comprehension
- understands and applies knowledge of text components to comprehend text
- expands comprehension by analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational texts
- thinks critically and analyzes authors’ use of language, style, purpose and perspective in informational and literary texts
- student reads material for a multiple purposes, to learn new information, to perform a task
- reads for literary and narrative experience in different genres
- student sets goals and evaluates progress to improve in reading
- assesses reading strength and need for improvement
- develops interest and shares reading experiences
- reads in a second or foreign language or cultural context

The reading/writing workshops clearly met any benchmarks for an awesome bilingual writing and reading class in the sense that Numa carefully guided the participants through the process of revising their drafts for dozens of details, not to mention including peer reviews and self accountability. Also, the workshops were based in the community and composed of a variety of ages and abilities who shared their oral traditions by recording these narratives in the collection, while other writing genres and purposes were also discussed.

5. There are some geopolitical considerations. Mining has been a problem in Laramarka, and you may have heard about the heavy metal mining restrictions in Peru that went into effect in 2011, or the law of previous consultation. The groundwork had been laid for this by other activities and events in the region but this victory also shows that information and education efforts make a huge difference; indigenous groups have won the right to be consulted and, in fact, must give
their permission for any mining to be done. This achievement is due, in (at least some) part, to literacy efforts and bilingualism. Hopefully, the children of Laramarka can grow up to be bilingual and literate and they can better fend off the effects of mining through insisting on previous consultation, which naturally includes investigation and drafting of documents.
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The 2011 Symposium for Teaching and Learning Indigenous Languages of Latin America (STLILLA) was the second in a biennial series of symposia organized by the Association for Teaching and Learning Indigenous Languages of Latin America (ATLILLA). The Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame hosted STLILLA-2011 in collaboration with partner institutions.

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