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**The political language of love in Guaraní
in the missions of Paraguay (1750–1810)**

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Abstract

Our hypothesis is that in Paraguay's Jesuit missions the Indian authorities, whose language was Guaraní, identified the medieval political concept of love with their own conceptions of ownership and possession of others, while the Jesuits thought they had found the exact equivalent of their conceptions of love in the Guaraní verb *ayhu*. We show that this was a case of 'double mistaken identity', but that it was nonetheless productive in that it entrenched, for a very long time, a certain conception of asymmetrical mutual love in Guaraní-speaking societies. To conduct our demonstration we reread recent works in Tupí-Guaraní prehistory and anthropology and analysed documents written in Guaraní by mission Indian authorities between 1750 and 1810, which as a team we did the palaeography, transliteration, and translation for an open-access database, available at www.langas.cnrs.fr.

Key words: conceptual history, love, Guaraní, missions, Jesuits, Paraguay

Introduction

At first, the Jesuit missions in Paraguay, established in 1604, gathered natives of different languages and from many regions (Wilde 2011). The thirty eventually stable missions between the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers at the intersection of what are now Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay used only one Amerindian language for evangelisation and government purposes, namely Guaraní (Melià 2003).¹ Although the Jesuits wrote their yearly reports to Rome in Spanish, they administered native souls and bodies in the region's 'general language' (Estenssoro and Itier 2015). With the assistance of Indian Ladinos (who had skills in Spanish) and non-religious interpreters, Jesuit *lenguas* (experts in the Guaraní language) gradually established translation equivalents in Guaraní for words, ritual phrases, and Catholic prayers, but also for Iberian institutions, figures and political concepts. In this 'middle ground' (White 2010) made up by the missions, European priests and Indian authorities built up a register of Catholic and monarchist language in Guaraní that would be theologically coherent and pleasant to Amerindian ears.²

For part of the historiography, this register in Guaraní, both monarchist and Catholic, may have seemed artificial. But as a fact, the newly converted Indians repeated prayers and rituals daily, the scripts of which were standardised and disseminated thanks to their having

¹ During the period under consideration (1750–1810), the thirty missions, whose population grew from about 100,000 in 1750 to 450,000 in 1800, were first part of the *Gobernación del Paraguay*, which was answerable to the Viceroyalty of Peru and governed from Lima. The Jesuits were evicted in 1767, and starting in 1770 the thirty missions fell under the stewardship of Buenos Aires, which in 1776 became part of the newly created Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, whose seat was Buenos Aires. Between 1770 and 1810, there was an intermittent *Gobernación de los treinta pueblos de las misiones guaraníes* that was independent of both the Buenos Aires stewardship and the *Gobernación del Paraguay* commanded from Asunción.

² My thanks to Rafael Fernandes Mendes, who was at CREDA UMR 7227 (*Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Amériques*) from January to April 2021 under a Legs Lelong postdoctoral scholarship, Joaquín Ruiz Zubizaretta, PhD student at LAS under the supervision of Alexandre Surrallés, as well as to Thomas Brignon, Mickaël Orantin and Consuelo Hernandez, PhD students at CREDA UMR 7227 under my supervision, for our discussions and collective reviews of this article.

been written, both by hand and in print – the first printing press in South America was up and running in Paraguay’s Jesuit missions between 1700 and 1727. Set once and for all and disseminated in written form, indexed to objects, architectures and daily practices, this both religious and political register is coextensive with the missions’ social space, like in the Mayan Franciscan missions of Yucatán (Hanks 2010). In the territorialisation process, the inhabitants strongly identified with the Christian patron saint whose name was given to their town and lands (Oliveira 1998). At church, out in the fields or at municipal assemblies, the sermons, technical instructions, and political decisions were spoken, executed and written in Guaraní. Scripted, grammaticized, taught, literalised and Christianised – the Guaraní language thus became a ‘Westernized’ language and a language of Westernization (Boidin 2017).

Alphabetised in Guaraní and in Latin, the caciques, those Indians politically and economically in charge of their respective communities, wrote memorandums, missives, and letters, both to each other, and to the imperial authorities in Buenos Aires and Madrid. There was a genuine Guaraní ‘educated élite’, to use Eduardo Neumann’s (2015) expression, administering the missions alongside the Jesuits. The latter, who in the mid-eighteenth century amounted to two representatives on average in missionary towns having a population of several thousand Indians, could not manage on their own. Our research so far has found political documents written in Guaraní by Indian hands in the archives running from 1752 – or fifteen years before the Jesuits were evicted from America by decree in 1767 – to 1832. Our analysis of this corpus of 187 documents, however, has led us to believe that the Indian élites’ epistolary and scriptural activity must have begun well before 1752 and been far more abundant.³ In fact,

³ During the LANGAS (*Langues Générales d’Amérique du Sud XVI-XIX*) project, funded by the French national research agency *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* between 2011 and 2016, coordinated by Capucine Boidin, with Cecilia Adoue, Graciela Chamorro, Angélica Otazu Melgarejo and colleagues who sent us their contributions, we listed 254 references to documents in Guaraní, and identified and digitised 184 of them, only 70 of which were found with a translation into the Spanish of the time. We worked as a priority on the documents that had been translated, and we paleographed 87 texts in Guaraní and 49 texts in Spanish. We uploaded 79 to the LANGAS database. Some of the documents are correspondence between missions, but most were sent by permanent political representatives (caciques) and temporarily elected officials (mayors and municipal officials) to priests, to the king

the corpus grew continuously as we worked with the archives and provided translations or re-translations of monolingual and bilingual documents to make them available on line in the multilingual database www.langas.cnrs.fr (Boidin 2017).

The documents are only just beginning to be the object of systematic works. It so happens that historians are very rarely skilled in Amerindian languages, while most anthropologists who are trained in these languages neglect sources from the late colonial era because they deem them to be a pure product of colonisation and to have nothing to say that would be *really* Indian, that is, non-Western. Yet analysing these documents by placing them in both their colonial historical context and in the long history of Euro-Amerindian languages and societies enriches both colonial history and Guaraní anthropology. Re-establishing the experiences and the words in Guaraní of a fraction of the Indian societies– the élite – sheds light from a new angle on colonial history, and historicising certain core concepts of the Guaraní language enriches the philosophical anthropology of the lowlands (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Descola 2005). We consider that languages are neither windows framing worlds that are radically foreign to one another – hence literally untranslatable –, nor superfluous garments clothing the same world in different ways. Languages make a world while also being translatable. Languages are neither transparent to one another, nor completely opaque; each language depicts a singular world, and equivalences are possible amongst each of these worlds. Translations are always to be done anew (Cassin 2016). Words make a world while being changed by the concrete social experiences of those who speak them, and use them to act upon the world. And those who speak them never stop shaping them. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, when time was accelerating and the relationships between the past, the present and the

and most of all, to the Governor of Buenos Aires. A very few documents were sent by Spaniards to Indians before 1810.

future were changing, certain words began to concentrate the speakers' 'social experiences' and 'horizons of expectation' in new ways, thus becoming political concepts (Koselleck 2016).

To truly grasp of the contours of the historical experiences to which Guaraní concepts refer, we need to adapt Reinhart Koselleck's (2016) conceptual-history methods to middle-ground and language-contact (Latin-Spanish/Guaraní) situations specific to Paraguay's modern/colonial missionary spaces. Focusing exclusively on texts in Guaraní would be tantamount to succumbing to the sirens of an equally shared history and turning a blind eye to past asymmetries. But to settle for only the versions in Spanish, and to ignore the language used by the actors of the time, whether Jesuits or Indians, would be as good as winding up in the swamps of a triumphant Spanish colonial history, flouting anything that deviates from it, is inconsistent with it or is resistant to it. We propose to read these documents as what they were at their time, namely as active material practices. With these letters, these words, certain Indians – members of the educated élite – stated and conceptualised in their languages the situations they experienced. Relying on them, they made explicit their singular experience and their thoughts on the modern and colonial system in which they lived, by which they were shaped, and which they were also shaping (Boidin 2016). Very specifically, we have worked on our corpus in two ways: by identifying the meaning effects of the words in their monolingual context, and by detecting the translation equivalents with which they were associated in the Spanish of that time. This allowed us to reconstruct co-translation semantic trajectories. We were thus reconstructing the *history of Spanish-Guaraní equivalences and translation failings* as indices of convergences, divergences and misunderstandings in the way asymmetrical relations were expressed, regarded and practiced.⁴ Our hypothesis is that the Indian authorities of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay often used and interpreted the medieval political concept of

⁴ Our intention was less to bring to light ambivalences and misunderstandings in and for themselves than to understand what they produced, historically speaking. For an example of the first approach see Viveiros de Castro (2004).

love, which expressed the asymmetrical reciprocity of hierarchical relations in terms of their own conceptions of ownership and possession of others. Conversely, the Jesuits thought they had recognised in a verb, *ayhu*, an equivalent of their verb ‘to love’. This dual identification – mistaken from the start (Lockhart 1999) – entrenched for a very long time a certain conception of asymmetrical mutual love in Guaraní-speaking societies, resisting against the republican language of horizontal friendship.

The language of ownership (1630s)

Thanks to the past twenty years’ progress in archaeology, and in historical and contemporary ethnology, thanks particularly to the works of Carlos Fausto (2008, 1992, 2005), we can now advance a number of hypotheses regarding the social organisation of precolonial Amazonian societies; far from being egalitarian and anti-state, they were rather instead marked by a twofold characteristic. Great men and commoners belonged to two differentiated groupings, but this asymmetry was based less on an unequal distribution of material wealth than on prestige ensuing from war, hunting, polygamy, ritual expertise and public speaking. Borrowing the expression from Alain Testart (2012), these societies were most likely ‘achrematic’, meaning that they did not need to stock food – which was available all year long –, did not accumulate wealth or ground asymmetries on the possession of material goods. Their semi-nomadic way of life, based on hunting and gathering, but on polyculture as well (cassava, squash, red beans and corn), allowed them to live in abundance with very little work (Sahlins 1972).⁵ However, it does not follow that they had no form of ownership; they had rather developed relations of appropriation, of ownership/dependency through predation (capture/be captured) and care (feed, be fed) of others’ lives, of humans and non-humans (what we call things, animals, plants and spirits), a ‘familiarising predation’ (Fausto and Rodgers 1999).

⁵ In the Americas, the domestication of plants and animals has singular contours, for the distinctions between hunting/breeding and gathering/farming are not clear, as they are in Africa or in Eurasia (Digard 1992).

All Amazonian languages possess a term to designate these ‘wild pets’, whose reciprocal term is normally a word meaning ‘owner’ or ‘master’. These reciprocal pairs designate a great number of relationships, besides actual pet-keeping: those between adoptive parents and adopted children, captors and captives, warriors and their victims, shamans and their auxiliary spirits, chiefs and followers, and cultivators and their plants. (Fausto and Neves 2018),

These ‘familiarising predation’ relations (of captive enemies, adopted children, ‘wild pets’, plants and auxiliary spirits), were not exclusively based on predation, but on seduction/mutual will as well, which were to be maintained permanently and consubstantial with individual and collective identities, never single, set or final, but plural and cumulative (Brightman, Fausto, and Grotti 2016). ‘Preys’ and ‘predators’ alike seduce one another (inspiring desire in the predator to include the prey in him/herself / make the prey want to be included in the predator). ‘Familiarising predation’ manufactures kinship bonds (by incorporating affinities) between master/mistress and small ones, children, animals, or plants, but they are not direct ownership bonds like in farming or breeding activities, where domestication involves selection and active control over reproduction (Haudricourt 1962). It is more about indirectly favouring the growth of plants and of captured animals through care and protection, while avoiding that a ‘small one’ should be seduced or should seduce another master/mistress. Let us suppose, then, that in the region and at the time when the Jesuit missions settled in Paraguay, asymmetrical intra-human and inter-species relations were conceptualised and practiced according to the ‘familiarising predation’ pattern described above.

When we examined our corpus, the first term to designate an asymmetrical relation, here between the Indians and the Spanish king, appeared in an oral speech given at an assembly in a Jesuit mission on 14 August 1630 and transcribed by the Jesuits.⁶ In the middle of winter, ‘the entire municipality and a large part of the population’ of ‘the reduction of San Ignacio de

⁶ The manuscript was part of Pedro de Angelis’s collection, dating from the late nineteenth century and now curated at the National Library of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, identified by Jaime Cortasão in 1951 then presented by Melià (1982). For a stylistic and semantic analysis see Boidin (2017, 324–358).

l'ÿpaũmbucu of the Paranapanema River, dependent on Ciudad Real del Guayrá' met to express their dissatisfaction regarding two royal provisions published by the visitor Francisco de Alfaro (1612).⁷ The Jesuits explained that 'for the force of their words to be seen, they will be put in their own language, just as they said them, and they will be faithfully translated into our vulgar language'.

The term to express the relationship the Indians wanted with the king is *porerekua*, 'to contain others in oneself' or 'to hold things or persons with happiness or easily', translated in a Guaraní-Spanish dictionary in 1639 as 'he who, with care, knows how to have/hold things and offers presents, caresses, accommodates with love'.⁸ In other words, to be translated *porerekua* requires a long commentary: 'to have/to contain/to treat something/someone with gentleness and generosity', which is the approximate equivalent of 'to care' in English. It is sometimes also translated in this dictionary as 'to be affable, to know how to treat others well', and 'to be merciful' (Ruiz de Montoya [1639] 2011, 496). But in the active form it is more prosaically used to order to a group or people, 'watch the fire, so it does not go out!': *peporerekua katu tata, togue vymei* (Ruiz de Montoya [1639] 2011, 496).

⁷ All phrases between inverted commas are translated from the text in Spanish, in which the Guaraní version is inserted along with the Spanish translation.

Better known as San Ignacio Mini, the San Ignacio de l'ÿpaũmbucu mission was founded in 1610 and would be relocated to near the Paraná River after the exodus led by Father Antonio Ruiz de Montoya.

The two provisions were published on 11 October 1611 by Don Francisco de Alfaro, who represented the Real Audiencia de Charcas (royal appellate court). They prohibited private *encomiendas* and selling Indians as slaves. Indians 'cannot be convened in greater numbers than what is requested by the mita, and the rest must remain free to work in their villages, at what they wish to, or rent themselves out according to their will'. They also prohibited Spaniards from entering the missions for a period longer than three days and established the obligation to set up an Indian *cabildo* (municipal council) with the responsibilities of a *corregidor* and an *alcalde*. In 1630, de Alfaro's rulings were already 'old' (Vaquero 1994, 495 ff).

⁸ In *porerekua*, there is a possible breakdown into *por(o)-rekua*: *poro/mboro*, a direct object incorporated into the verb, which then designates a plurality on which the action of the verb is exercised; '*t-erekua*: the part of something you can use to hold it easily (handle for example), to be happy with someone' (Ruiz de Montoya [1639] 2011, 565). Hence, *poro-erekua*: to hold things or people. Joaquín Ruiz Zubizaretta offers another breakdown, *poro-guero-kua*: *guero*, a reflexive verb frequently changed to *-rero-* or *rere*; *rekua*, variation of *-reko*, to have. Hence *poro-guero-rekua*, turned into the acocope *por(o)-rere-(re)ko*: he who contains/keeps/holds a plurality in himself. For the citation 'he who, with care, knows how to have/hold things and offers presents, caresses, accommodates with love', see Ruiz de Montoya ([1639] 2011, 335), '*porerekua*: el que con cuidado sabe tener las cosas, y agasaja', and Covarruvias (1674, fol 14r): 'agasajar: regalar, acariciar, hospedar con amor', facsimile consulted on line at www.cervantesvirtual.com.

We should note that the suffix *erekua*, prolonged with the suffix *h-ára* in *erekuá-ra*, ‘he who has’, is used in the same dictionary to translate the action of ‘guardians’, whether doormen, *okê rerekuára* (guardians of the door), herdsmen, *Mbaka rerekuára* (guardians of cows), shepherds, *ovecha rerekuára* (guardians of sheep), mule drivers, *kavaju risy rerekuára*, boat pilots, *ygarata rerekuára*, standard bearers, *aoeveve rerekuára*, men wearing masks, *tova ra’ānga rerekuára*, but also tramps, *kyva rerekuára*, lepers, *pirai rerekuára*, or anyone always leading a similar lifestyle: the idler, *Teko teĩ rerekuára* (he who is a master in a lifestyle that is useless, and has no profit or goal), the coaxer, *ñe’ẽ marāngatu rerekuára* (he who asks, and literally he who is an expert in smooth talking), and the blessed, *tory vete apyre’ỹ rerekuára*.⁹

Let us now put the dictionary aside and look at the word as used in its own linguistic framework, and above all historical context. In the transcribed political speech of 1630, the Indians asked the king, whom they apostrophise with an expression that we can translate as ‘our superior’, *ñande-ruvicha-vete*, to look at/consider them, *ma’e*, know them, *kuaa*, and to be *porerekua* in their regard, which needs to be translated as ‘to care for’ in the first phrastic context and by ‘to protect’ in the second:

*ti porerekua ore ri ñanderuvichavete*¹⁰

Take care of us, our superior (king)

*ndipori amboe ore ri porerekua va’erāma*¹¹

There is no one else who can protect us

A good *r-uvicha* (superior) looks, knows, cares for and protects his servants. The action of the verb *porerekua* and the ways in which it is used in this document are basically the exact reflection, we believe, of the ‘familiarising predation’ relationship described above. This would

⁹ Lexicographic research in the Ruiz de Montoya ([1639] 2011) pdf preprint.

¹⁰ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54137 The original Spanish translation is not literal and does not translate *porerekua*.

¹¹ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54160 The original Spanish translation is ‘porque no tenemos otro amparo sino es en vosotros’.

mean that they then place themselves with regard to the king as a ‘wild pet’ does with regard to its master, a plant with regard to its mistress/gardener and an adopted child with regard to its adoptive parents, and this is a relationship based on mutual seduction/will and on repeated care. In this relationship, speaking and listening to one another seems central; the word equivalent to speaking, *ñe’ê*, shows up fourteen times, the verb ‘to say’, *-’e*, six times and the verb ‘to listen’, *hendu*, ten times, and one speaks with one’s heart, *py’a*. But the verb ‘to love’, *ayhu*, is not used as such to describe the relationship that is wished for with the king.

In the same time period, the verb *ayhu* shows up to express a man’s attraction to a woman, friendship, the love of parents, and the love of earthly things, which in the Christian language diverts from heavenly things.¹² It also becomes, very early on, part of the word for slave, ‘he who is captured and loved’ (*tembia-ayhu* or *mbi-ayhu*).¹³ But this equivalence is unstable; slave is also translated in the dictionaries and texts of the time using two other words: *Tapy’yi*, the etymology of which remains obscure, or *T-emi-nguai /t-emi-kuai*, literally ‘he who is owned’, which also translates the status of a page or domestic servant (*criado*) in seventeenth-century Spanish society.¹⁴ Unstable equivalences, in our view, are the expression of differences in ways of conceiving and practising both asymmetrical and ownership relations amongst the various societies there. For the moment, let us retain that in the seventeenth century, the missions’ Indian authorities think about their asymmetrical relationship with the faraway Spanish king with a verb, *porerekua*, that is the equivalent of protect/care for/contain. They do not use the verb ‘to love’, *ayhu*, which is part of the composition of a word that expresses the status of slave and seems to reflect the regular usage of the term in the Spanish language of the time.

¹² https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/35143; https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/35237; https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/36212 T, 318; https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/35455.

¹³ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/35103

¹⁴ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/35001 T, 355

The language of love in times of war (1750s)

Let us now leap to a century later, circa 1750. The verb ‘to love’, *ayhu*, together with *porerekua* amongst others, is now at the core of the relationship of the Indian authorities (caciques and *alcaldes*) with the king. The calligraphy is by the very hands of the Indian authorities of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay. Eight letters are sent from seven missions to the king and to the governors during the Guaranitic war, a war setting the Indians and a few Jesuits of Paraguay’s missions against the Spanish and Portuguese armies in a border conflict between the two Iberian empires.

In January 1750, the Iberian crowns signed the Treaty of Madrid in which Portugal gave up the Port of Colonia de Sacramento (facing Buenos Aires, on the other side of the Paraná River). In exchange, Spain yielded a territory in which seven of the thirty missions under Jesuit guardianship were located. The Guaraní had on several occasions taken part in the war against the Portuguese to win Colonia de Sacramento for the Spanish crown. Hostilities between the missions’ Guaraní and the Portuguese had been longstanding. And now the Spanish king himself ordered 29,000 Guaraní to migrate to the other side of the Uruguay River, abandoning their towns, churches, numerous *yerbales* and *estancias*, and leaving them in the hands of the Portuguese. At first, the Indians tried to comply with the decree, but given the practical impossibility to do so and the lack of time, means, and available land, they opposed it more and more openly (Quarleri 2009).

The governor then had some of the letters read and commented on in the mission’s churches, accusing the Indians of lese-majesty and ordering them to obey (Neumann and Wilde 2014, 361). The Indian political authorities of the missions involved – except for one – were quick to respond. In a series of letters, some longer than others, they defended their right to not obey the royal order and to defend themselves against the governor’s armies.

Jesuits such as Father NUSDORFFER, a mission superior, were of course amongst the first to take up their quill to denounce the iniquity of the exchange, and to warn of the difficulty involved in enforcing the royal decree. But ‘papers were flying’ amongst the Indians as well as they sought to keep up to date on the latest events and decisions made about them (Neumann 2004). Part of these papers were preserved precisely because they allowed proving that the Jesuits or other military officers were not responsible for the course of events (Neumann and Boidin 2017). Standard thinking in the upper levels was indeed that the Indians had no such capacities. According to Father Luis Altamirano, who was in charge of having the royal decree applied, Indians had ‘no head, no economy, no government’ (Quarleri 2009, 180) and only the Jesuits had the power to act. Yet when he would visit the missions, he would get death threats and would have to flee.

Researchers have argued that the letters in Guaraní sent to the commissioner Father Luis Altamirano, and to Governor Andonaegui, were indeed devised, and drafted by the Indian authorities themselves (Ganson 2003, 87–116 [Chapter 4, From resistance to rebellion]; Wilde 2009, 157–181 [Chapter 4, Frontera, guerra y agencia]; Quarleri 2009, 161–204 [Chapter 4, Consolidación de la resistencia]); they had been taught writing, the precepts of the Christian religion, but also some schools of European philosophy and law. According to Lía Quarleri (2009), the main political theories on which they drew came from neo-Thomism, more specifically natural law and contractual conceptions of relations between the king and his subjects. Use of these theories in Nahuatl and in Mayan by municipal councils in New Spain (Mexico) has in fact also been confirmed by Mark Morris (2007) and Caroline Cunill (2012), respectively. Several of us think that these letters were previously discussed and thought out in assemblies (Neumann and Wilde 2014; Boidin 2017).

In these letters, translated into Spanish by Jesuits and held in the National Archives of Spain, the root *ayhu* turns up forty-seven times to qualify relations between God and the

Indians, God and the king, the king and the Indians, the king and the governor, the governor and the Indians, and any relationship between a victor and a loser. They remind the king that they had become his vassals, *voja*, of their own volition, and that they had always executed, respected, *oromboaje* and trusted, *mbojerovia*, his words and his orders, had never failed, *ndorojavyi*, to do so and had never ‘made themselves superiors’, *ñemboete*, that is never risen against their sovereign – even in their times of infidelity. They had always acted out of love, *ayhu*, for the king and given their goods, their animals and even their lives for him. In fact, they had never received until then anything but love, *ayhu*, and consolation *angapyhy*, munificence, *porerekua*, and preservation, *ñangareko*, assistance, *pytyvõ*, and salvation, *pyhyrõ*, from the predecessors of the king to whom their letters were addressed.¹⁵

We find here a political concept inherited from the Iberian Middle Ages (Heusch 2015). Every vertical relationship between two entities of a different nature – God/men, God/the king, the king/his subjects, the king/his lords, a lord/his vassals, father/children, or husband/wife – is expressed in the language of love. This basic conceptual framework is the legal language of every hierarchical relationship (Owensby 2011), and also permeates the economy (Clavero 1996). The Indians, however, were the king’s subjects but also minors, ‘vulnerable’ and ‘wretches’ (Cunill 2017; Owensby 2011). This was why under the Iberian law of the time they were doubly the object of the king’s love.

Does this mean that the Indian authorities were using the imperial legal language of their time for strategic purposes, to defend their points of view more advantageously, and that fundamentally the king was nothing more than a fiction to be manipulated in order to serve their interests more effectively? This is something we might think, since thereafter *ayhu*, which is in a transparent translation relationship with the Iberian political concept of love, supplanted

¹⁵ The 8 letters contain 30 instances of *mboaje*, 27 of *mbojerovia*, 20 of *ñangareko* and only 4 of *porerekua*.

porerekuā to express the relationship with the king. In reality, the king and his subjects' mutual love was represented during the many ceremonies organised by towns in the entire kingdom to celebrate all main life events (birth, marriage, enthronement, military victories, death, etc.). The king was celebrated as a 'kind' person with many qualities: he protected his possessions against outside aggressions, administered resources for the common good, was a fair magistrate, protected the weak, and stimulated science and the arts (Vásquez Meléndez 2013). The religious rites and the popular festivities organised by the viceroy were supposed to 'express the sincere love' that the subjects felt for their sovereign. The Jesuit missions, like all other urban centres of the time, also staged this feeling on many an occasion, and the Indians, it was told, even flagellated themselves without being asked to do so during funeral rites in honour of the king.¹⁶ The reiterated splendour of the ceremonies maintained the strength of the ties binding the 'faraway' monarch and his subjects. In the letters, the pact with the king was both personal (we name him, we speak to him, we wish to kiss his feet and bend to the ground before him) and impersonal (he is the representative of God on Earth, he protects us and we serve him) (Exbalin and Ragon 2020).

Rather than a strategic use of the Iberian legal language, we think we are dealing here instead with a somewhat deep 'double mistaken identity' (Lockhart 1999); the Indian authorities thought they had recognised in this Iberian language their own conceptions of ownership/possession, 'familiarising predation' relationships, while the Spaniards thought they had recognised in the word *ayhu* an exact equivalent of their verb 'to love'. These discrepancies would taper off but we still perceive them in some letter excerpts like this one:

Rey marangatu ñangareko háramo,

orereko katu ore ma'ẽ háramo oikóne,

¹⁶ Annotation added by the translator of the letter of San Juan (1752, section 20) in order to justify, it appears, the knowledge that the Indian authorities manifested about royal debts and the king's engagements in their regard.

ore rembiayhuete ramo oiko,

*ore rayhupa rete ramo heko hápe*¹⁷

The holy king, he who preserves/protects

he who holds and watches us will live

as our beloved he lives

loving us he lives¹⁸

According to the translation of the time, at some variance with the syntax and lexicon of the original but close in its spirit, the Indians are children of the Holy Mother Church, and are ‘under the responsibility’ of the king, their ‘defender’, so that he should ‘take care’ of them. We find here, as much in the version in Guaraní as in the translation, signs that were already there in 1630: the king must be he who ‘holds’ them, ‘watches’ them, ‘protects/defends’ them and ‘takes care’ of them. And in return he is held as a beloved being. This does not prevent them, however, from being aware of the subjection that comes with the love relationship in the Spanish sense of the term.

Thus, they reminded the king of the many ways in which they had served him as part of the armed militia to subject Spaniards who had rebelled, or infidel Indians.¹⁹ They then expressed that to defeat the Paraguayans of Asunción was to bring to them God’s will and love in the absolute, *mborayhu*, and make them humble/small, *mo-ñe-mo-mirĩ*:

¹⁷ ‘nro Santo Rey que nos ama mucho por el amor q le tenemos, y porque somos hijos de la S.ta Madre Yglesia esta puesto por nuestro Defensor, y nosotros estamos a su cargo, paraq cuyde de nosotros’ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/36838

¹⁸ We would like to underscore that in ‘beloved’ (*rembiayhuete*) the form is relational (mark of a person *r-embaiyhu*) whereas in the seventeenth century the form translated by ‘slave’, *t-embaiyhu*, is always used in absolute form, as referring to a status, like in *tembiayhuvamo aiko*, I live as a slave; *Tembiayhúvamo herekopy nde* (T, 377) you are held as a slave.

¹⁹ The Indian militia of the Jesuit missions of Paraguay were amongst the only ones to have the right to carry firearms. This permission was negotiated by the Jesuit Antonio Ruiz de Montoya in 1639 when he published in Madrid two dictionaries, one grammar and a catechism in Guaraní as well as a chronicle on the spiritual conquest of the Paraguayan region.

*Paraguái ygua moñemomirĩvo mborayhu Tupã remimbota chupe ime'ẽvo*²⁰

[We, Indians vassals loyal to the king]

humiliated the Paraguayans [rebelled against the king]

and we gave them God's will and love.

They were not mistaken about the subjection dimension of love in the Spanish sense. They never ceased to present themselves as humble, *miri*, and wretched, poor, *poriahu*, vassals with respect to the king. It seems to us, however, that they did so to be in a better position to solicit his prodigality, and justify their stand, namely to not obey – for once – an unfair order from the king, who must have been deceived by the Portuguese; considering the pact with the monarchy – the love, *ayhu*, that binds us poor subjects, *voja poriahu*, to the king – it is neither possible nor fair, *ndikatúi*, that we should abandon these lands to the Portuguese. The promise of abundance and of joy, *jekohu*, made to us by God and for which our ancestors, the Jesuits and ourselves have laboured, cannot be let down. As they twice repeated: ‘we will not leave this land that God has given us’.

But why did they write letters to the king and to the governor in Guaraní? The reality was that these positions were developed in assemblies not only to convince the king of the legitimacy of their actions but also to give meaning, direction to the events, and unity to the members of the missions. They were genuine political discourses giving meaning to the events that they were experiencing together. ‘What characterises this event, is both the evidence of a breach and the uncertainty as to what it means’ (Bensa and Fassin 2002). The Treaty of Madrid and the order to yield seven Spanish Jesuit missions to the crown of Portugal established an obvious breach in the missions’ political economy; until then the Guaraní militia’s main role had been to protect the Spanish colonies against the Portuguese advance. This service was one

²⁰ 1752 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/36843

of the ways in which the Guaraní had paid their tribute to the king. So, what was the significance of the king's change of direction? There was deep uncertainty at the time amongst many, who were expressing themselves in Spanish or in Guaraní. The Indian authorities then worked out, amongst themselves, with the common Indians and with the Jesuits, what they considered to be the significance of this 'event'.

Like in any political discourse, they produced continuity and unity out of disparities and discontinuity (Latour 2012, 141-142), which could only happen by speaking the language of those to whom they were addressing. Galvanised by the local public speaking that they were thus cultivating, they could only elaborate their discourses and statements in Guaraní. These could only be written in Guaraní. Then translated. The statements were of course addressed to the stated recipients, but they were also intended for the ears of the collective, the opinions of which were supposed to be included in the statements. This is why these statements tell us not only what the Indian authorities considered to be hearable and receivable by a Spanish governor, but also what their own 'people' were able to conceive and validate as being 'fair'. The speaker had a dual goal, which was to be heard by both his addressee and his public, to convince both his adversary and the members of his town, whose language he must use in order to seduce and unite them.

Were these statements ever read or heard? They are in the archives kept in Madrid. There are even several copies of the Guaraní and Spanish versions there. But they did not succeed in convincing the Spanish authorities. Could they have even done so? In a political context where the royal power was seeking to consolidate its position versus the papal power, such statements could not be expected to receive favour. In a political context where the Jesuits were beginning to have their prestige and autonomy contested, these letters could only constitute evidence making things worse for them. The Jesuits would be evicted from the kingdoms of Portugal in 1759. The Marquis of Pombal, who was the principal leader of this

eviction, used the translation into French and Portuguese of letters that had been written in Guaraní by the Indians as evidence against the Jesuits. These letters, he argued, could only have been written by the Jesuits (Carvalho e Mello 1758). This pamphlet is believed to have inspired Voltaire (Domingues 2006). And yet, despite the learned opinion of the time, the missions' Guaraní élites were definitely their authors.

The language of charity, between ownership and love (1750–1800)

The British Library and the General Archive of the Nation in Buenos Aires hold letters from municipal assemblies, with their caciques and their municipal officers, addressed to the Governor of Buenos Aires, which were sent from the 1760s onwards. These letters became more frequent after the eviction of the Jesuits from the kingdoms of Spain in 1767.²¹ Our research so far has not been able to ascertain whether this increase is due to better archival conditions, to a better identification of more recent funds, or to greater letter-writing activity by those involved. It is not improbable, however, that the Jesuits' absence might have enabled such writing to free up, and brought about the necessity to write more often to defend the interests of the village people and inform superior authorities of their needs. They were seeking to maintain a good relationship with the governor. A letter of 1769 thus asks the governor three times to see them with love, and to be like a father to them, going as far as to sign, 'your children who love you'.²²

The letters sent to the governor in this period are for the most part intended to inform of the good or bad behaviour of the Spanish administrators and the priests put in place by the Governor of Buenos Aires to replace the Jesuits after 1767. The letters were intended to call for them to be allowed to stay or to be made to leave. The categories they use to judge their behaviour are first those of *porrekua* and *ayhu*, alone or put together:

²¹ Of the 254 references to documents in Guaraní between 1752 and 1832, 66% were written after 1767.

²² 1769 monolingual https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54642

ore karai Administrador ko nde táva poriahupe anga reheve

*iporerekua iporayhu katu ñemomburu katu pype ore pavẽ poriahu rehe*²³

Our Spanish administrator vis-à-vis your town,

is generous and loving, is diligent with respect to all of us who are poor.

Concretely, this means that he puts himself out to care for their material living conditions and their wellbeing (*aguyjei*), that he is bringing abundance back to the mission, namely that the cows in the estancias are reproducing in greater numbers and that cotton, as well as its weaving, is increasing.

*Corregidor ha'e Cabildos opakatu Santa Maria de Fe tava rehegua orohecha pype nde poroayhu guasu ha'e ne nde pokopy opakatu ore reko aguyjeirã rehe*²⁴

The *corregidor* and all the officers of the municipality of Santa Maria de Fe, seeing your great **love** and your continuous effort to improve our living conditions [own translation]

*ore koty koty gua ñavẽ nde ave ereñemokane'õ ngatu anga ko ára ore reka vo mborayhu porã reru vo anga oréve ore moangapyhyse katu vo anga*²⁵

Vos tambien en estos dias movido de nro **amor** os aveis **molestado** buscandonos para nuestro consuelo [translation of the time]

You also in these days, moved by our love, you have bothered to look for us for our consolation.

*opakatu ore mboriahu reta rehe, iporerekua porã été*²⁶

Vaka omoĩ jevy: . . . omoñemoña jevy Mandyju ha'e Lienzo

²³ 1769 monolingual https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54648

²⁴ 1769 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54639

²⁵ 1769 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54174

²⁶ 1782 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/831

He is truly generous with all of us poor

He gives cows . . . and makes cotton and weaving increase

This last excerpt might lead us to believe that *porerekua* continues to express a way of caring indirectly – the good administrator fosters growth, he himself does not farm. Nonetheless, *porerekua* often appears with *poriahu vereko*, which expresses Christian compassion.²⁷ A boat driver, for instance, asks the governor to be generous, *porerekua*, and full of compassion, *poriahu vereko*, with regard to his men ‘in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ’.²⁸ It therefore seems to us rather that the meaning of *porerekua* has increasingly Christianised effects close to those of the verb *ayhu/amar* with Iberian medieval aspects, which we also find in the following context of use.

The authors liked to stress that they themselves were *porerekua* with regard to infidel Indians, that is, that they ‘gave them help’ and brought them their ‘munificence’, which they compared with ‘giving them alms’, a term they had then taken from Spanish. And they complained of their ingratitude and scorn:

Ah Señor ore poriahu ramo jepe anga,

ko Guaikuru, ko terã Mbocobi Táva pyahu San Fernando jevygua rehe

*ore **po rerekua** jevy jevy rako,*

vaka, kumanda, ha’e lienzo oromondóvo ichupe, ko limosna jáva²⁹

Ah Señor! Aunque pobres, y necesitados

²⁷ 1758 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/622

²⁸ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/1025

²⁹ 1758 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/625

hemos **socorrido** repetidas veces

â los Guaycurus, ô Mocobis del nuevo Pueblo de S. Fernando,

remitiendoles Vacas, grano, y lienzo por via de limosna [translation of the time]

Ah Lord! Though poor and needy

we have repeatedly helped

the Guaycurus, or Mocobis of the new town of S. Fernando,

sending them cows, grains and canvas by way of alms.

*aipo ramo jepe anga, ha'e ko ore **porerekua** háva rero 'yrõ pýpe,*

ikarai e'ỹ va'e reko rupi, ko gueko pochy ete rehe ojeporara pýpe

ore nde voja poriahu omoangeko ete jepi ko rupi, oporojukávo ase³⁰

no obstante esso, despreciando nra **liberalidad**

Como Infieles persisten en sus maldades,

persiguiendo pr aqui â estos tus humildes subditos, matandolos, [translation of the time]

In spite of this, they despise our liberality,

like infidels, persist in their wickedness,

they persecute your humble subjects here and there, killing them.

We see here that *porerekua* was translated at the time into the words of Christian charity for a better statement of the aspiration to dominate others. The Indians of the Jesuit missions took over the language of charitable love to describe their asymmetrical relations with the other

³⁰ 1758 https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/627

‘infidel’ Indians, namely those who had not submitted to the king. But the ‘non-baptised Indians’, *ikarai e ’y*’s scorn of Guaraní alms had tangible effects – the infidel pursued and killed Guaraní, who had become prey. And the Christian Indian subjects (*voja*) needed royal protection through the figure of their governor. Are we that far from the language of ownership described at the beginning of this article? The ‘double mistaken identity’ scenario is possible because the underpinning logics of ownership through seduction and care, on the one hand, and subjection through love and generosity, on the other, are not that distant. The two languages have in common that they produce asymmetry and mutual obligation through generosity and consent. They are based on the mainsprings of the form and functions of a gift (Mauss 1923). The differences at the outset were important. We should recall that ownership relations, of ‘familiarising predation’, generate cumulative identities in the making, while subjection relations are established once and for all between given identities. Ownership relations are based on a continuous, never total or irrevocable appropriation of the life/death of others, while subjection relations describe an irrevocable ownership of another’s life.

In our corpus, however, phrases are set and ritualised – many caciques and municipality officials sign ‘your vassal, *voja*’ or ‘your servant, *rembiguái*’, ‘who loves you, *nde rayhupára*, and [is] your very beloved, *nde rembiayhuvete*’.³¹ They place themselves – at least at the formal, epistolary level – in an increasingly set position of loving subordinate. The double mistaken identity here furthers a deep anchoring of the language of love in the regional political culture. So deep, perhaps, that it will struggle to give way to the language of fraternal, horizontal friendship and that of liberty particular to the age of social revolutions of the early nineteenth century.

³¹ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54351

When the language of love persists beyond the time of equality

Set up on 25 May 1810, the Buenos Aires junta sent its representative, General Belgrano, to deliver its message to the ‘mission naturals’, as well as to the ‘Paraguayans’. Seeking to convince rather than to conquest, the general dictated three proclamations and six charges.³² The proclamations were addressed to the mission naturals, the Paraguayans, and its own army. The charges were sent to the highest authorities of Paraguay (governor, the *cabildo* of the city of Asunción, and its bishop). These texts were most probably translated by the Guaraní missions’ literate, educated Indians (Boidin 2017).

Manuel Belgrano (1770–1820), a lawyer graduated from the University of Valladolid and one of the first translators of Italian and French political-economy authors, promised the mission Indians the protection of a trilogy highly characteristic of this new language: the rights of liberty, property, and security. He considered these to be the Indigenous peoples’ original rights, of which they had been deprived by Spain. Belgrano promised the mission Indians that they would be treated with equality and brotherhood, that they should be reputed to be ‘our brothers’, and that they belonged to the same military corps. The brother figure in Spanish changed in Guaraní into that of a ‘kin’, of a ‘generic parent’, *yí*. But, above all, he did not use the concept of love, even though it was present in the versions in Guaraní.

While the text in Spanish uses ‘peace, union, and friendship’, the version in Guaraní brings unity and love, *mborayhu*.³³ Where Belgrano promises to bring proof of the Junta’s wise providence, the Guaraní version offers eternal love and shows the Junta’s intentions.³⁴ When Belgrano speaks of ‘comrades’, the Guaraní version evokes ‘our beloveds’, *ñande rembiayhu*.³⁵

³² The bilingual copies set in two columns of Belgrano’s letters are kept at the Museo Mitre in Buenos Aires. Belgrano, Manuel, *Documentos en guaraní y español*. Nro. de Registro: 4490. 19 f. ms. 33 cm, 1810. Our thanks to Guillermo Wilde, who brought us a first copy, and to Cecilia Adoue, who photographed and transcribed them under the LANGAS project.

³³ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/74

³⁴ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/32

³⁵ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/124

The king is characterised several times as ‘our beloved’, *Fernando 7º ñande rembiayhu*.³⁶ When Belgrano assures that Buenos Aires has no interest in uniting with Paraguay, but that including it is a favour, the version in Guaraní encourages believing in the love, *mborayhu*, expressed to it.³⁷ When he assures that he will be found prepared to do nothing else but good, the Guaraní version reassures by saying, ‘you will find me full of loyalty and love towards you.’³⁸ Given the date of the text (1810), it is very unlikely that the effects of the meaning of the word *ayhu* had already lost their ability to state and produce asymmetrical relations. In other words, the translation is largely unfaithful to the Spanish version, changing a message of friendship and of a symmetric relationship into a proposal of asymmetrical love. Unless the translators consciously choose to translate the announced horizontal relationship in a much more probable hierarchical dependence.

While the writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sent from the missions to the imperial authorities and translated into Spanish, reflect the *pactist* logic of the old order, those of the nineteenth century take the opposite path – from Spanish to Guaraní, from the revolutionary to the Indians – in order to mobilise and politicise social sectors around a new conception of political bonds.³⁹ Reading the analysis focused here on *porerekua* and *ayhu* might give the impression that the hierarchical language of medieval love achieved a better ‘grasp’ in Guaraní than the egalitarian language of republican fraternity. We must not, however, reach hasty conclusions. When tracking the use of other terms we were able to show that the ideal of equality had been translated in another text by the idea of similarity between Indians and

³⁶ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/40

³⁷ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/169

³⁸ https://langas.cnrs.fr/#/consulter_extrait/extrait/54006

³⁹ My thanks to Javier Ochoa de Eribe for our discussion on this contrast as worded here.

Spaniards, and could very well reflect a deep aspiration to resemblance with others (Boidin et al., forthcoming).⁴⁰

What can be said about later periods, about the political language of love between 1810 and today? The corpus, hence, the studies, are not yet available. But we find even today that this language of love, *ayhu*, permeated all political relations, whether interpersonal within the hamlets or mediated in the political discourse at the national level in Paraguay. This language characterises the interpersonal asymmetrical relationships between people who are in someone's debt – those qualified in political science as clientelist –, but also the imaginary bonds that a number of political figures manage to bring into existence through their discourse and/or their acts (Boidin 2006). A love that can never be taken for granted, that must always provide new proof of generosity and protection to maintain the ardour of partisans and electoral participation. We must add that in the current Indian Mbyá Guaraní communities, *ayhu* love, namely that which takes care of others and shares one's goods, is one of the elements, with fasting, singing, and dancing, allowing a state of divine perfection, *aguyje*, to be reached.⁴¹ Mixed-race Paraguayans may use *ayhu* in political contexts and Indian communities may do so in religious contexts, but in both cases, the colonial, monarchic/Catholic stratum is perceptible.

As we reach the end of our journey into semantic history in a linguistic contact area, what conclusions might we draw? This history of translation equivalences, with its divergences from the start, its double mistaken identities and the resulting convergences, can be summarised as follows. In 1630, the missions' Indian authorities stated the relationship that they wished to have with the king with *porerekua*, and our hypothesis is that they then placed themselves vis-

⁴⁰ 'Decreto n°436, 12 de marzo de 1813, Ratificación del decreto que libertó a los Indígenas del tributo, abolición de la mita, encomiendas, etc, por la Asamblea general constituyente'. A copy printed by the Imprenta de Niños Expósitos has been preserved, digitised and put on line by the JCB (bBB/P969/ 1813/ 7) <https://archive.org/stream/decretolaasamble00prov#page/n1/mode/2up>.

⁴¹ See for instance, Pierre Clastres's (1974, 27–29) sustained efforts to not translate *mborayu* as 'love' the way León Cadogan does, but as 'gathering'. Hélène Clastres (1975) proposes 'justice' and 'equitable sharing'.

à-vis the king like a ‘wild pet’ vis-à-vis its master, a plant vis-à-vis its gardener-mistress, and an adopted child vis-à-vis its parents, and that this seduction-based relationship was not conceived as granted once and for all but rather as a bond, admittedly asymmetrical, but maintained by both parties through their gaze, words and acts. Then the verb *ayhu* became the rule to designate this relationship, with meaning effects close to those of the verb ‘to love’ that came from the protracted European Middle Ages. Finally, we observe that the two verbs, *porerekua* and *ayhu*, were alternatively used to describe hierarchical relations with meaning effects that were increasingly convergent with Christian charity. We are aware that our linguistic demonstration is lacking an analysis of the social, economic, and political changes of the Jesuit missions between 1750 and 1810. If the meaning effects of the verbs *porerekua* and *ayhu* in Guaraní became increasingly closer to the effects that the verb *amar* produced in Spanish, it was not by the intrinsic force of linguistic equivalences. It was rather because in the missions’ daily life, the relations between humans, animals, and other entities underwent deep changes.⁴²

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⁴² See the PhD dissertations in progress of Mickaël Orantin on labour relations (supervised by Capucine Boidin and Denis Merklen) and Thomas Brignon on relations between humans and animals in the missions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (supervised by Capucine Boidin and Sonia Rose).

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