

*Part of my humanism says that, in order for science to be of value, it must have value to the people from whom our scientific information comes. To use other human beings as objects of study and then hide the results from them--using such results only for the benefit of ourselves and our group--is, in my judgment, both anti humanistic and scientifically unethical. It also leads to bad science, as some work in my own field of linguistics clearly shows.*

I first went to Bolivia in the early 1960s to work with the Jaqi (pronounced "hah-kay") people who inhabit the high lands of the Andes mountains. Though Aymara ("eye-mah-dah") is the language spoken by the largest number of the Jaqi, I found that the people of the Andes--both Aymara- and Spanish-speaking--were not united at that time as to whether Aymara was truly a language.

To have a voice in the modern world, one must read and write. But I found that all linguistics in Bolivia were in the hands of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, otherwise known as the Wycliffe Bible Translators. It closed off the world of linguistics, disallowing Bolivians membership in the institute. Given the right to run all bilingual programs within the country, it enforced the unwritten rule that, in order for one to learn to read and write, one must become a Protestant.

Since I considered it inappropriate that religion be a precondition for such knowledge--even though, historically, universal literacy among ourselves has been so tied--I founded the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Linguisticos (the National Institute for Linguistic Studies) in Bolivia and began providing for the linguistic training of Bolivians in a manner equal to that of the SIL linguists. Out of that came a development that changed the nature of the debate from whether Aymara was a language to who writes the Aymara language better.

It began in 1965 when one Aymara speaking student, Juan de Dios Yapita, wrote a phonology of Aymara for his term paper. Shortly thereafter, he brought me an alphabet he had devised for the Aymara language and asked my opinion. I found it to be an excellent alphabet, firmly based in linguistic science, and it later became known as the Aymara Alphabet. Using it, Yapita immediately began producing materials in the language and, in 1969, he started a newspaper. In 1972, he founded the Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara (the Institute of Aymara Language and Culture) and, through it, the first program for the linguistic training of Aymara teachers.

His creation of the Aymara Alphabet, however, generated a surprising amount of hostility. Though the Aymara Alphabet accurately reflects the structure of the Aymara language and was intended to be used by Aymara speakers, it initially had to compete with three other alphabets already in existence. These three alphabets had been invented by foreigners and were used by foreigners for their own purposes--never by the Aymara people themselves. None of these alphabets reflected the Aymara language accurately; foreigners distorted the language so it looked more like Spanish or English and ignored some essential features. These alphabets were known as the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Governmental; the first two were used for purposes of religious and cultural conversion, and the third primarily for official proclamations and pronouncements.

So a period I call the "Alphabet Wars" ensued. Leading advocates of all three of these alphabets argued that Yapita could not have developed the Aymara Alphabet himself; it had to have been me. It was the same kind of denial of agency that the men of my culture have visited upon me as a woman, that they, in this case, also visited upon the Aymara who were working within their own language. But if the choice had to be between a white woman or an Aymara, the advocates of the three foreign created alphabets preferred to give the credit to one who, at least, "spoke their own language."

When I refused to take the credit, however, I received in one brief period letters from a Catholic priest, a Protestant missionary, and a government official, all asking me to order Yapita to change his alphabet to more closely resemble theirs! I wouldn't do that. Instead, at the request of the Aymara people, I adopted the Aymara Alphabet just as it was for all my own scientific publications, as well as the work of my students. When an Aymara student of one of the Aymara linguists whom I had taught wrote a history of alphabets in Aymara--pointing out the political and religious motivations behind the debates in a superb study and striking example of Aymara scholarship--I reviewed it favorably in various linguistic journals.

Over time, it was the foreign created alphabets that began to change--and all in the direction of the Aymara Alphabet. Finally, about ten years ago, the Catholics, the Protestants, and the government held a series of conferences in which they decided to unify their alphabets. They adopted, with only one exception, all the ways of writing that had been developed by Yapita (with no credit to him, of course). That one exception is that aspiration be written with an h--like in English--rather than with a double quote mark--parallel to the use of the single quote mark for glottalization. Thus, the Catholics, the Protestants, and the government have continued their conceit that outsiders, not an Aymara, developed the alphabet for Aymara.

As a result of this, there are to this day the two competing alphabets--the Aymara Alphabet and the Official Alphabet--identical but for the one item. When one Aymara speaker was asked to write a preface for a book being published by a priest involved in all this, he wrote his text carefully so that no aspirations would occur, thus avoiding any actual use of the Official Alphabet. Naturally, the priest never caught on.

Today, there are three Aymara newspapers--established, written, and owned by Aymara speakers. The Aymara people themselves have produced their own literacy materials based in linguistic science and have trained their own teachers.

Among the Jaqi people, language is the definition of what it means to be human. The linguistic recognition of mutual humanity is the basis of both the grammatical system and the system of courtesy. So the sanction for someone who behaves less than human is the withdrawal of that which is most human: language. That is, if you behave like an animal, people don't talk to you.

It is interesting that, when I first started my work, people in Lima, Peru, told me that I wouldn't be able to study the language because the Indians were so taciturn; they never talked, and I wouldn't be able to engage in conversation. But that turned out to be a problem I simply never encountered.

Only later did I learn that my insistent practice of greeting everyone I met--practicing the language as much as possible--was interpreted by the Jaqi as human behavior, and therefore I was accorded human respect: constant and consistent language. After I finally understood the system, I looked back on earlier researchers' characterizations of the Aymara--those who had said that these people were so taciturn. The studies told me a lot about the way in which the researchers had treated the Aymara. The gift of language had been withdrawn from the researchers quite clearly because they had treated the Aymara like animals--as nonhumans.

In Aymara, there is an interesting borrowing that shows the impact of oppression on a people's self respect and, at the same time, their rejection of that oppression. This borrowing is *parlana*--"to speak." It is borrowed from the old Spanish word *parlar*, related to our word *parliament*. The old Aymara word for speaking, *aruna*, was relegated to cocks' crows and for speaking of speaking in a deprecatory way. It would appear that the Aymara perceived the Spanish as classifying them with animals, as Europeans did with native peoples the world over. Since language is quintessentially human, the Aymara replied back, "No, we are not animals. Our language is as good as yours, but at the same time, if you say we are not human, then our language is not human." Thus, by giving up *aruna*, the Aymara internalized the judgment of the Spanish. By labeling their own speaking *parlana*, they also said, "Our language and therefore our humanity is as good as yours," thereby rejecting the classification the Spanish had imposed upon them.

When I had reconstructed the borrowing process just described, I made a point to share the information with my Aymara students. They then proceeded to share it rapidly with many other Aymara speakers. The information spread to such an extent that, later, I was caught by surprise when the motto for an Aymara literature series, published by the Aymara-founded Institute of Aymara Language and Culture, turned out to be *aruskipasipxananakaskirakipunispa*. Based on the root *aru*, it means approximately, "It is my personal knowledge that it is desirable that all of us, you included, make the effort to communicate." Since then, I have observed a number of efforts to rehabilitate *aruna*, to take it out of the animal class and put it back into the human class. These are, of course, scholarly efforts, but the whole process underlines the imperative of human dignity, which was one of the first gifts I received from the Jaqi.

As a young academic woman in the 1950s, I was not accustomed to being accorded human dignity. I did not know what being accorded human dignity would even feel like until I was given it. Believe me, it is quite a heady experience!

A sense of humanity in a mutual, reciprocal, language-giving environment was not the only gift the Jaqi gave me. It was through their example that I came to understand the possibilities of human social creation and that the human universe in which I had been raised was not the only one available. By being among people who conceived and perceived the human condition in ways that I had not believed possible, I, myself, became more human. My philosophy changed from one not unlike the currently popular religious right to that of humanism. So my debt to the Jaqi and the other peoples I lived with in Peru--the Hispanic and the Shipibo--is great indeed. Part of the way in which I paid back the debt was the founding of the INEL in Bolivia.

After their preparation in Bolivia, some of my students were clearly ready for further linguistic training. At the time, however, none was available in Latin America. (That is no longer true and, building upon the institutional framework I left, students can now major in linguistics and in native languages at the major universities in Bolivia.) So I sought a way to bring a few people to the United States for further study. This effort failed. None of the scholarship programs or international programs then existing contemplated in any way the idea of native peoples coming for genuine advanced work.

Within months of my arrival at the University of Florida in 1969, I therefore founded the Aymara Language Materials Program. Building on the State Department's desire for Americans to know foreign languages for strategic purposes, I set up a reciprocal plan whereby those who came to teach us would also learn and participate in classes together with those who were their students. This allowed me to make it possible for people to come whether or not they had official credentials--people who could benefit from the study of linguistics and then return to build institutions back in the Andes.

The program was, in many ways, very successful, running for twenty one years. My purposes behind it were not only partial payment of my personal debt but also a leveling of the international playing field. In conditions of ignorance, exploitation occurs, and we have badly exploited countries like Bolivia, with the worst of the exploitation falling upon people like the Aymara, who have, with great effort and ingenuity, managed to maintain their own values against tremendous odds.

One master's thesis that emerged from the program discussed the role of the *yatiri* ("one who knows")--women and men among the Aymara whose role is that of an intellectual--one who diagnoses, who integrates new knowledge with the old and thus keeps the culture intact but not stagnant. The author of the thesis, Tomols Huanca, showed how, among the Aymara, this most prestigious of all roles carries with it no increased status--that is, no perks. While there is more responsibility, the *yatiri* still, for example, do all their own farming. Previously, as described by outsiders, the role of the *yatiri* had been treated dismissively as that of a witch doctor or shaman. But since writing his thesis, Huanca has gone on to publish two books featuring the words of a number of *yatiri*, recording for all time the wisdom of these elders.

Another thesis by an Aymara speaker, Francisco Mamani Canazaca, details the endless failures of a whole series of development projects due to the fact that the developers didn't listen to the people, didn't accord them human dignity, and didn't reciprocate the gifts given them. The Aymara complained that, when the developers came into the village, the Aymara would feed them, house them, and show them hospitality. But when the Aymara went to visit the developers in town, the developers would make them wait--on hard chairs in the office--and never even offer them a cup of tea. That is not reciprocal human dignity.

The thesis also details the many ways in which the knowledge of the Aymara was dismissed by "smart" outsiders--for example, how to breed lots of guinea pigs instead of just a few, and thereby produce more meat. The developers built all these big fancy cement pens--so much better than keeping the guinea pigs in the kitchen, they thought. The Aymara tried to warn them; but no, they wouldn't listen. So all the guinea pigs died; the cement was too cold and there was no way to keep them warm. On the dirt floor of a kitchen, however, the guinea pigs do just fine.

From the beginning, the structure of language has been important to the Aymara. I used to explain to the Aymara students working with me--on any little old scrap of paper handy, backs of envelopes, anything--some of the grammar as I was discovering it. One of the students

would slide these little bits into her pocket. I later learned that she was going about the countryside giving lectures in Aymara communities using those scraps of paper, showing the people that Aymara was truly a language, not like what the Spanish said, and that she could prove it because here was the grammar.

Today, the Aymara have integrated scientific linguistic knowledge into the materials and methods they have developed for teaching reading and writing. For example, in teaching literacy, the Aymara also teach phonology--the actual phonemic structure of Aymara.

One year when I returned to Bolivia, I was most pleased to learn that even my taxi driver knew about linguistics and could tell me some of the activities of the Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara. ILCA publications have included poetry, collections of tales, political comments, primers, educational materials, and information concerning cultural continuity.

The door has been opened. It can't be closed again. And there is one more voice we can hear that enriches the human community.

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