A Study of Indigenous English Speakers in the Standard English Classroom

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of dialect speakers of Indigenous English in the Standard English School. Indigenous English is a dialect of English spoken by many Aboriginal people in Canada; it is especially discernable in the Prairie Provinces, yet it is not widely recognized by the majority of the population.

This classroom study was conducted in a semi-urban community in East Central Saskatchewan. The focus of the research was six children in a Grade 3 classroom, four of whom are First Nations and Indigenous English Speakers. The remaining two children are White and speakers of Standard English.

The results of this study indicate that the First Nations children of this study speak a dialect of English that differs phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, and lexically from the Standard English spoken in Saskatchewan. These children are all below grade level in Language Arts and follow modified programs. They experience difficulty in phonics and spelling and are receiving additional support from classroom assistants, resource room teachers and speech pathologists. It would also appear that these children are experiencing institutional racism in a number of forms.

Possible resolutions to the problems faced by these students may include teacher training and dialect awareness classes. This field has not been adequately explored and further research is needed to discover viable solutions to the issues experienced by dialect speakers of Indigenous English in the Standard English classroom.

Résumé

Ce mémoire traite de l'éxpérience vécue par les enfants qui parlent l'anglais indigène dans une école d'anglais standard. L'anglais indigène est un dialecte de l'anglais parlé par plusieurs autochtones au Canada. Il est particulièrement présent dans la région des prairies malgré qu'il ne soit pas généralement reconnu par la population majoritaire.

Cette étude a été réalisée dans une communauté semi-urbaine de la région centrale-est de la Saskatchewan. La collecte de données a pris place auprès de six enfants d'une classe de troisième année du primaire. Quatre parmi ces six enfants étaient Premières Nations et l'anglais indigène était leur langue d'usage. Les deux autres enfants étaient caucasiens et parlaient l'anglais standard.

Les résultats de cette étude indiquent que les enfants Premières Nations de cette étude parlent un dialecte d'anglais qui diffère phonologiquement, morphologiquement, syntaxiquement, et lexicalement de l'anglais standard de la Saskatchewan. Ces enfants performent en deçà de la moyenne dans les cours d'anglais langue d'enseignemnt et suivent des programmes adaptés. Ils éprouvent de la difficulté en grapho-phonétique et en orthographe. De plus, ils sont suivis par des éducateurs, orthopédagogues, et orthophonistes. Ces enfants témoignent du racisme institutionnel dans leur vie quotidienne à l'école.

Des solutions potentielles aux problèmes vécus par ces élèves pourraient résider dans la formation des enseignants ainsi que dans une sensibilisation aux particularités du dialecte indigène dans le milieu scolaire. Cette problématique, encore relativement inexplorée, requiert une attention particulière du monde de la

recherche en éducation afin que des solutions viables soient implantées auprès de

ceux qui parlent l'anglais indigène.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Purpose of Study

Canada's constitution recognizes three Aboriginal groups: First Nations,

Metis, and Inuit. The combined population of these people is roughly 976,305. The

results from the 2001 Canadian Census indicate that the native birthrate is almost

twice that of the rest of the country. In 2001, in the province of Saskatchewan,

Aboriginal people accounted for 14% of the total population. In 2001, 23% of all

Aboriginal people held a high school diploma (www.statcan.ca/english/census01).

The First Nations people occupy a significant, growing portion of the population.

This success rate is not acceptable and current attempts to improve it are clearly

inadequate.

The relationship between language and aboriginal people has been a

controversial subject in Canada since first contact. The legacy of the native

residential school and its effects on the Canadian aboriginal people continue to echo

through the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities of Canada (Frideres &

Reeves, 1993). Indigenous languages were undeniably affected by this period of

Canadian history. Today, Cree, Dakota, Ojibway, and Inuktitut are considered the

aboriginal languages with the best chance at long-term survival (Kirkness, 1998).

In 2001, 198,595 Aboriginal people, of a possible 976,305, reported having an

Aboriginal mother tongue (www.statcan.ca/english/census01). This indicates that

approximately 20% of the indigenous population speak an Aboriginal mother tongue.

The remaining 80% of the population are, in large part, unilingual speakers of

English, with the exception of roughly 5%, who claim French as a mother tongue.

There is, however, another reality of language use amongst aboriginal people that is not receiving enough attention, that of Indigenous English.

The non-acknowledgement of the existence of this dialect is highly apparent in the education system. First Nations and Metis learners who "speak like that" are considered by many to be using a deviant, substandard form of English. The question remains as to how speakers of this dialect function in a system ignorant of its existence. In an attempt to answer this question, this study will describe the experience of four Indigenous English speaking children in the Standard English Classroom. It is hoped that the findings of this initial study can be used to further address the educational structure and context provided for these children. At this point, it would be helpful to define the terms which will be used:

1.2   Definition of Terms

1.2.1   First Nations

First Nations refers to status or treaty Indians (those legally entitled to the benefit of programs under the Indian Act) and non-status Indians (those people who claim to be of native ancestry but who have either lost or never had status; this category includes the Metis).

1.2.2   Aboriginal and Indigenous

The words "aboriginal" and "indigenous", used interchangeably in this study, refer to all three groups of Canada's native people. These umbrella terms can be used to describe status and non-status Indians, as well as the Inuit.

1.2.3   Indigenous English

Just as the African-American Vernacular English is now being considered as a dialect, there is a growing trend towards that same consideration for the English of Canadian First Nations people. As a result of geographical and historical differences, there are many such dialects among First Nations people. For the purposes of this discussion, Indigenous English will refer to all varieties of English spoken by First Nations and Inuit people.

1.2.4   Submersion

Submersion is the act of educating a minority group using the language of the majority group as the language of instruction in the classroom. In the case of this study, the language of the majority is Standard English and the first language of the minority group is Indigenous English.

1.2.5   Community School

The Community School Program was introduced in Saskatchewan in the late seventies in an effort to address the problems of urban Native poverty. Victims of unemployment, poverty, and discrimination are often alienated from social and community institutions. In response to this problem, the provincial department of education, Saskatchewan Learning, implemented the Community School model. This model requires each school to have, in addition to regular staff, a community school coordinator, First Nations teaching associates, a nutrition advisor, and administrative support. Saskatchewan Learning describes the benefits of this program as follows:

> The Saskatchewan Community School Program provides additional resources and supports to school divisions to support high needs students and their families which are impacted by complex socio-economic factors. Community Schools provide a high quality, comprehensive, responsive learning program,

as well as learning opportunities for preschoolers, adults, and seniors in an environment that is culturally affirming, safe, and caring. Family and community participation in education is fundamental to a Community School that fosters shared decision-making, leadership, and empowerment. Community Schools are a hub for community activities and organizations. (www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/k/pecs/ce/commschools.html).

In brief, the Community School program consists of four parts: the learning program, parent and community involvement, integrated services, and community development. Today in Saskatchewan, 88 schools are officially designated as Community Schools with approximately ten additional schools operating as such.

1.3   Summary

This first chapter has sought to introduce the purpose and motivation of this study. The research question of this study is:

(1)   What is the experience of Indigenous English speakers in the Standard English Classroom?

This thesis is organized into six main chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Research Design and Methodology, (4) Home and School, (5) Language, and (6) Discussion. Through a review of the pertinent literature, this second chapter will seek to provide a description of Indigenous English, its origins, and its place in the Standard English classroom. The third chapter provides a detailed description of the context of the study, the materials and procedure, and the data analysis. The results of this study are divided into the chapters of "Home and School" and "Language", the categories which best reflect the findings of the study. Finally, this thesis will conclude with a thorough synthesis and discussion of this study's findings.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1   Introduction

Indigenous English is a nameless dialect for most Canadian people. In the province of Saskatchewan, First Nations people are acknowledged as speaking differently from the Standard English speaker but the dialect is normally referred to as "the Indian accent". A clear picture of Indigenous English does not exist in mainstream society, most likely due to its non-acknowledgement as a dialect. In an effort to build an accurate framework for this study, it is important to synthesize its history and differences from Standard English, through the examination of pertinent studies.

This literature review will begin with a succinct explanation of the origins of Indigenous English in North America. Residential schools are generally acknowledged as the source of this dialect; the policies and objectives of these institutions will be addressed. The future of Indigenous English in Canada will be examined, as will be the reasons for its continuing existence.

The study of Indigenous English and its relationship with academic success is newly emerging in Canada. Some studies of a linguistic nature have been done in the United States in the area of American Indian English (Indigenous English). Heit and Blair (1993) acknowledge that there are many varieties of English spoken by First Nations and Metis people due to "the range of geographic, social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p.115). However, Olson Flanigan (1987) indicates that "similar patterns exist throughout native American language groups" (p.181). Although the current study was conducted in a Canadian context, these "similar

patterns" support the relevancy of examining the research literature regarding American Indian English. In addition, in reviewing previous research, consideration must be given to the impact of non-verbal language and pragmatic differences.

While the linguistic studies of Indigenous English help us to build a clearer description of this dialect, to better understand the experience of dialect-speaking students being schooled in a submersion setting, we will have to look to the extensive research done on African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Finally, the framework of this study will be completed with an examination of the notion of language deficiency. The many different segments of this body of research, discussed in detail in the following sections, combine to create a comprehensive overview of the Indigenous English dialect and its role in the Standard English classroom.

2.1.1   Origins of Indigenous English

When considering the sources of Indigenous English, we must acknowledge that the Indigenous people are a minority group surrounded by an English-speaking majority; this fact in itself has affected their linguistic history. However, there is an aspect of calculation involved in the story of this dialect: the objectives of the Residential School. Taylor and Wright (1995) explain, through reference to the work of Freeman (1978), Jordan (1988), Pelletier (1970) and Platero (1975), that in "Residential Schools, in both Canada and the United States, children were verbally berated, publicly humiliated, and even physically punished for using their heritage language" (p. 21). The goal of eradicating the use of the student's indigenous languages and the assimilationist "English-only" position led to that generation's partial and in many cases, complete, loss of their first language. As Indigenous

people were forced to speak English among themselves, a non-standard form of English surfaced. Due to the length of time spent in Residential Schools, it became for many the preferred means of communication, perhaps due to the feelings of guilt associated with use of their Indigenous languages. As a result, most of today's First Nations and Metis people—children and grandchildren of the individuals reared in Residential Schools—are able to speak only English.

Today, Indigenous English is no longer a stage of second language learning, or evidence of transfer from a first language, but rather, a complete system of its own, specific to a speech community. Schilling-Estes (2000) raises the question of dialect contact and remarks that increased contact between the standard and non-standard speech communities can lead to "the levelling of linguistic distinctiveness" (p.165). However, Schilling-Estes (2000) goes on to examine the fact that this increased contact does not always create "increased linguistic assimilation" among groups. There are cases where dialect groups have maintained their differences. She explains that "identification or attitudinal factors are paramount; speakers in dialect communities have a strong sense of in-group identity and are sharply focused on local, social and cultural norms (and often actively opposed to the encroachment of outside norms). Thus, they are able to resist the linguistic pressure to level the dialectal distinctions that help mark them as distinctive cultural groups (Schilling-Estes, 2000, p.165).

If we examine this possibility within the context of Canadian First Nations and Metis people, it is apparent that the norms of the in-group, the Indigenous English speakers, and those of the out-group, Standard English speakers, differ greatly, as do

their places in society. Over the past fifteen years, this culture, long oppressed, has

begun to experience a renaissance of its ways, means of expression, and art. The re-

emergence of pride in the Pow Wow Trail and round dances, the creation of First

Nations Healing Centres, the construction of the first First Nations banking

institution, the existence of the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), as

well as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), all demonstrate a self-

awareness of cultural differences and strong identification with that culture. Based on

these developments in the First Nations community, it would be reasonable to argue

that there exists "a strong sense of in-group identity" and that the dialectal differences

of Indigenous English will not soon be levelled. Indigenous English exists as a mark

of distinction from Standard English speakers, as a reaction against assimilation into

mainstream language, culture, and society.

2.1.2   Linguistic Aspects of Indigenous English

Leap (1993) argues that American Indian English differs systematically from

Standard English on phonological, morphological, and lexical levels, and in terms of

pragmatics, syntax, and non-verbal language as well, thus classifying it as a dialect.

Other American Indian English researchers frequently cite his extensive work in the

area of this dialect. His study of grammaticality in the American Indian English of

First Nations people living in Isleta, New Mexico, examines how this dialect differs

from Standard English at a sentence construction level (Leap, 1974). Wolfram (1984)

conducted a study, which sought to better understand unmarked tense in American

Indian English. Schilling-Estes (2000) explores the variable patterning of /ay/ in the

American Indian English spoken by the Lumbee First Nations in North Carolina.

Flanagan (1987) examines language variation in general in the Indigenous English used among the Sioux of South Dakota. Finally, Dubois (1978) presents a case study of an American Indian English speaking child in New Mexico and analyses the phonological, morphological, and syntactic differences in relation to Standard English. All of these studies, discussed in greater detail in this chapter, establish significant differences between Standard English and Indigenous English.

Dubois' (1978) examination of the speech of a four-year old "Native American" shows an absence of marking of the past tense. Wolfram (1984) explains that in American Indian English, mechanisms such as temporal adverbs and linguistic clauses, are used more often to "set the temporal/aspect framework" (p. 43). Olson Flanigan (1987) also mentions the evidence of tense shifting within a sentence. When the first clause in a sentence establishes the past tense, the second reverts to the present, as seen in the example, "So I came back and I stick with the elementary" (p.184).

Both Leap (1974) and Olson Flanigan (1987) describe a lack of subject-verb agreement in Indigenous English. The example that is provided from the work of Olson Flanigan is "My brother, he do that everyday, painting" (p.183). Leap presents the following utterance, "This old ladies down there is awfully poor" (p.83). Dubois (1978) observed non-standard indefinite article usage, as did Olson Flanigan (1987). This phenomenon is demonstrated in an example from Olson Flanigan's work with the South Dakota Sioux, "We have bacon in morning" (p.184).

An additional aspect of Indigenous English that has been observed on the morphological and syntactic levels is the use of the double negative, also frequently

seen in other non-standard forms of English. This characteristic is described by Leap (1993) and is shown in his example, "He was never hurt by no ants" (p.83). This trait is also depicted by Heit and Blair (1993) as being apparent in the speech of First Nations and Metis people in Saskatchewan.

Turning now to evidence of phonological differences between Indigenous and Standard English, it would appear that this area has not experienced as much research. Dubois (1978) states that the phonology of the English dialect spoken by "New Mexico Indians" varies from Standard English in three ways: "syllable, as opposed to stress, timing; extensive use of glottal stops; and two, as opposed to three, pitch levels" (p. 3). Olson Flanigan examined the differences in the Indigenous English pronunciation in the Sioux of South Dakota, a group of people whose heritage language is Lakota. She comments on three noticeable differences. The first is in the stress patterns, which Olson Flanigan links to the frequent deletion of function words such as *in* and *the*. Secondly, the researcher explains that "intonation contours are often flattened out, probably in hyper corrective reaction to switching from Lakota, which is a tone language" (p. 188). Finally, Olson Flanigan remarks that "syllable length appears to be shorter but this is caused by vowel glide reduction so that the normal pattern of alternating monophthongs and diphthongised vowels is lost" (p. 188).

Another phonological difference observed in a number of varieties of Indigenous English is that of "consonant cluster reduction" (Olson Flanigan, 1987, p.183). This is discernible in the Sioux First Nations of South Dakota and the Cree First Nations of Saskatchewan (Olson Flanigan, 1987; Heit & Blair, 1993). An

example of this characteristic is found in the following example, "When I firs' start'
workin' here" (Olson Flanigan, 1987, p. 183).

2.1.3 Discourse Behaviour

Another consideration in understanding how Indigenous English differs from
Standard English is that of nonverbal and sociolinguistic differences. Greenbaum
(1985) found that the Choctaw First Nations that he observed "spoke individually less
often, used shorter utterances, interrupted the teacher more often and while the
teacher was talking, gazed more at peers than their Anglo counterpart" (p. 101).
Piquemal (2001) draws on ethnographic research to examine the sociolinguistic
difficulties that many indigenous people encounter in their relationships with
teachers. She identifies differences on a number of levels: behavioural norms of non-
interference in their interactions with others, discourse accent, strategies of
indirection, perception of silence and eye contact.

Crago (1992) describes the complications caused by differing perceptions of
appropriate classroom discourse between Inuit families and non-Inuit educators. The
Inuit people value learning through "looking and listening" whereas the non-Inuit
teachers place more importance on "question asking and answering". The following
excerpt (Crago, 1992), is taken from a report card interview between an Inuk parent
and a non-Inuit teacher:

Non-Inuit Teacher	*Your son is talking well in class. He is speaking up a lot*
Inuk Parent	*I am sorry* (p. 498)

This exchange displays some of the misunderstanding that can arise between
these two culturally derived perceptions of appropriate language behaviour.

Fiordo (1985) presents a study on English speech communication in First

Nations, addressing specifically the "soft spoken way" of the First Nations people.

He describes this speech as "a gentle and patient style of delivery" (Fiordo, 1985, p.

40). Finally, Darnell (1981) discusses the importance of silence and sharing

understanding between interlocutors. Her research on the discourse behaviour of the

Cree First Nations of Northern Alberta also addresses the role of asymmetry of

knowledge in establishing a need for discussion between interlocutors.

2.1.4   Non-standard Varieties of English in the Classroom

Research into the relationship between Indigenous English and the classroom

is limited and, again, restricted to the United States (Bartelt, 2001; Leap, 1993). The

study of AAVE and the experiences of its speakers in Standard English classrooms is

years ahead of any similar work done in Indigenous English. Though there are

obvious differences between these dialects and their discourse communities,

similarities are apparent and the AAVE literature is a helpful reference in the present

study. Cecil's (1988) examination of black dialect and academic success considers

the role of teacher expectations of dialect speakers. Her study found that the teachers

surveyed expected significantly greater overall academic achievement, reading

success and intelligence from those children who spoke Standard English than from

those who spoke AAVE. Goodman and Buck (1973) explored the influence of

dialect differences on learning to read. Their study found that it was the rejection of

the learner's dialect by educators, and not dialect differences, that created a special

disadvantage for dialect speaking learners.

In her discussion article, Eller (1989) examines the perpetuation of the deficit theory amongst educators. The author claims that the view of a dialect speaker's language as being substandard is based on "questionable assumptions about language and how it is used" (Eller, 1989, p. 670). Eller argues for a re-evaluation of educators' biases and suggests that the tendency to label children as being verbally inept is a result of the majority's need for these children to conform to their own linguistic models.

Wolfram, Temple Adger and Christian (1999) explain that proponents of the deficit theory "believe that speakers of dialects with non-standard forms have a handicap—socially and cognitively—because the dialects are illogical, or sloppy, or just bad grammar" (p. 20). The authors argue that if educators believe that only one particular dialect is acceptable and they test only through the medium of that variety, then it is obvious that students entering school already speaking the valued dialect will achieve higher levels of academic performance than their peers who speak an undervalued dialect.

1.4   Summary

The combination of this literature from many fields of research creates a clear framework for the present study. The detrimental effects of the non-acceptance of dialectic differences by educators are clear. The possible differences—both verbal and non-verbal—that may exist between Indigenous English and Standard English are also apparent. This literature demonstrates the need for Indigenous English research in the context of the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

The current study was conducted in a Grade 3 classroom in the province of Saskatchewan. Over a period of three weeks, I observed the daily routine of this class and focused, specifically, on the experience of six students. Oral interviews were conducted with this group of students, four of whom were Indigenous English speakers while the remaining two were speakers of Standard English. I was given access to all cumulative files and conducted informal interviews with the Resource Room teachers and speech pathologist. This chapter will seek to fully explain the design and methodology of this study.

3.2   Context

The school in which this research was conducted is situated in a semi-urban community in East Central Saskatchewan. Statistics Canada sets the community's population at 17,280 and of that, 1,825 are Aboriginal (www.statcan.ca). This number includes both Treaty and Non-status Indians, the categories used on the census form. This community is the business hub for a large radius, which includes many small towns and reserves. The school concerned is a Community School located in the lowest socio-economic area of town. Generally, this school is viewed negatively by the community and referred to as an inner-city school. Many families move in and out of neighbourhood and the school's population is generally in flux. Enrolment in September 2002 for this K-8 school was slightly under two hundred students and roughly, 35-40% of the student population is aboriginal.

Contact was first made with the school's principal in June 2002. Having myself lived and taught in the community, communication was easily established. The principal was open to having me conduct research in the school and asked me to contact the school again in the new school year. In September 2002, I began communication with the Grade 3 classroom teacher. At this point, I received approval to conduct this study from McGill's Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee (see Appendix A). In December 2002, subsequently, the parental permission letter (see Appendix B) was sent home with all students in the class.

The school itself is the former public high school building. It was recently retrofitted to make it more appropriate for elementary school students. It was designated a Community school by Saskatchewan Learning one and a half years ago. As a recent Community school, many of this school's programs are still developing. This being said, it would seem that there is resistance by some members of the school community to fully embrace some aspects of the program. Specifically, only one of the teaching associates is First Nations and the community school coordinator, who would normally be in charge of planning Aboriginal cultural activities, is a White woman from Michigan with no previous First Nations experience. According to the school's principal, although the funding was in place, it was difficult to find elders and community members willing or able to fulfill these roles. The classroom teacher stated that community members felt that the school community included many cultures and that the First Nations culture should not receive extra emphasis.

The classroom teacher for Grade 3 has approximately ten years of teaching experience. He grew up in a town not far from the community concerned. It is his

first year teaching at this Community School. He is White and a Standard English speaker. Since December, there has been one classroom assistant working fulltime in the class. She is also White, a Standard English speaker, and grew up in a nearby community. She generally helps students with their deskwork, works with small groups, and completes correcting for the teacher. In January, a student classroom assistant arrived to complete her practicum for her studies. She is originally from Alberta, is White and a speaker of Standard English.

Over the Christmas holidays, three children in the class moved away from the community and two were moved from the classroom to the assisted learning centre within the school. Upon my arrival in the class, only seven First Nations students remained in the Grade 3 classroom, including one student who was now spending most of his class time in the assisted learning centre. This had decreased from the original nine who were enrolled in September. In addition, during the first week of my research another First Nations child abruptly moved with her mother to Manitoba leaving only six Aboriginal children in the class. Of these six students, two children's parents had refused to give permission to have oral interviews conducted with their children. The classroom enrolment for the majority of this study was 22, including the two students who spend most of their time in the assisted learning centre and not including the Indigenous English speaking child who moved away at the end of the first week.

In total, I selected six children for the case studies. Four male Aboriginal children were selected because I had complete data for all of them. The two White children, one male and one female, were selected to provide a comparison for the

First Nations children. One of the male Aboriginal children spends most of his class time in the assisted learning centre, joining the other students for Health, Phys-ed, and Science.

3.3   Materials and Procedure

This descriptive study was conducted over three weeks. Throughout my time spent in the classroom, data were collected from a number of sources. During my periods of observation, the desk at which I was seated was located in the back left-hand corner of the classroom. This placement allowed me to observe unobtrusively. In addition, I also circulated and assisted students during seatwork. I was present and taking notes throughout all subjects and only absent from the class during recesses and lunch hours. I took field notes, which tended to focus on the First Nations and Metis students of the class.

3.3.1   Questionnaire

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to discern students' perceptions and attitudes towards language, both written and spoken. I was particularly interested in whether or not they were aware of differences between the spoken English of First Nations and White people. Therefore, I asked the question, "Do you speak the same way as everyone else in class?" I was also curious as to whether any of the Indigenous English speaking children might have developed the ability to code-switch between Indigenous and Standard English. I attempted to discern this information by asking, "Do you speak the same way at school as you do at home?" Furthermore, I wanted to understand the children's feelings towards their

in-groups and out-groups. In an effort to garner this information, I asked the following two questions: "Who do you like to play with at recess?" and "Who do you like to work with in class?" Finally, I was interested in the children's feelings towards their language abilities, both written and spoken. I attempted to gather this information through questions such as: "Do you like to write stories?" and "Do you like to read your stories aloud to the class?" All students of the class completed questionnaires with the exception of one First Nations boy and one White boy. In their cases, parental permission was refused. I supervised the completion of the questionnaires and this was done outside the classroom in groups of four. The children were allowed to ask questions of clarification and all questions were answered. They were encouraged to not share answers and it was made clear to them that there were no right or wrong answers.

3.3.2 Student Work and Cumulative Files

I was given complete access to student work and allowed to make photocopies of anything of particular interest. Generally, I focused on their writing in their journals, and stories, spelling work, dictations, written math problems, and any recent quizzes or tests. Samples were taken of all of these items for the six case studies. I was also permitted to study student cumulative files and make copies of any enclosed documents. Normally, cumulative files for children of this age are not very detailed. In the cases of the two White children, the files contained only a summary of their marks from kindergarten to Grade 2. The cumulative file of one of the First Nations boys, Keith, has not been requested from his previous school. The cumulative files of the other three First Nations boys contained copies of their report cards, reports of

school suspension, referrals for testing made by classroom teachers, diagnostic test

results, and reports written by speech pathologists. Photocopies were made of all

these items.

During my time in the school, a standardized test called the Canadian

Achievement Test (CAT) was administered to all classes of this school. The CAT is

a commercial test designed to discern student achievement levels in a number of core

subject areas. The creators of the test (www.canadian.testcentre.com) claim that their

instrument is "virtually free of bias with respect to ethnicity, age and gender. The

themes and content reflect the cultural, ethnic, geographical and occupational

diversity of modern Canadian society."

Guided by the test manual, the classroom teacher conducted the testing over a

period of a week. The test contained eight modules, which sought to evaluate the

children in: Reading, Language, Mathematics, Word Analysis, Vocabulary, Dictation,

Language/Writing Conventions, and Computation. Once testing was completed, the

tests were sent to the Canadian Test Centre and the results were calculated.

Subsequently, the results were returned to the school and made known to the

administrators and teachers. The scores of each child are presented in five ways:

national percentile, national stanine, grade equivalency, number correct, and scale

score. The creators of the test (www.canadiantestcentre.com) state that, "CAT results

provide teachers with external scores to be compared with their own assessments."

The CAT results of this Grade 3 class were returned to the school a month subsequent

to the completion of this study, a copy of which was sent to me by the classroom

teacher. While standardized testing in relation to minority students is controversial

(Adler & Birdsong, 1983; Gopaul-McNicol, Reid & Wisdom, 1998), these results originate from an external source and enhance the description of these students' performance.

3.3.3   Interviews

Oral interviews were conducted individually with all six of the children selected for the case studies. These interviews were audio recorded and took place in a room separate from the classroom. Children were aware that our conversation was being recorded and encouraged to become familiar with the equipment. The interview questions were expansions of the questions asked on the questionnaire (see section 2.3.1 and Appendix A). I re-read the questionnaire questions to the students and reminded them of their answers. Then, I continued by asking them why they had answered the way they had. Conversation would continue if their answers were particularly revealing. The interviews lasted anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the child.

I met with the two Resource Room teachers to discuss the files of each Grade 3 student with whom they work. Both women have worked at this school as Resource Room teachers for over ten years. They explained the individual programs of each student and responded to my questions. The Resource Room teachers currently work with seven students from the Grade 3 class. Of the six case-study children, four currently follow programs in the Resource Room. I took notes throughout the interview regarding each student's program and how often they visited the resource room. I also met with the school speech pathologist in the room she used for her sessions. She was new to this school, having arrived three months prior to my

study. Of the six case study children, only one currently works with the speech pathologist. His program and areas of concern were explained to me. The interview was not tape-recorded and detailed notes were taken throughout the discussion.

Finally, I met with school principal in her office and conducted an unstructured interview. She has been principal of this school for one and a half years, since it was designated Community School status. The discussion was tape-recorded and lasted approximately one hour. The school population was discussed, with a greater focus on the Grade 3 families. The school's history and its growth as a Community School were also examined. Also reviewed was the problem of gangs and the school's solutions regarding this matter. Finally, time was spent discussing the principal's perceptions regarding dialects and her students.

3.3.4   Data Analysis

From the data collected, categories were created for the case studies. These areas of discussion include: (1) family, (2) school, (3) speech, and (4) perceptions and attitudes towards language. Information for these categories was gathered from all of the above described data sources. The transcribed student interviews are an extremely rich source. In addition to providing information about student perceptions towards language, they were also analysed for discourse patterns by counting the number of words uttered by each child and then dividing this number by the number of turns taken by the child. In addition, I completed the same calculation for myself for each of the six interviews. The classroom field notes also contain significant information regarding the classroom behaviour of the children and their speech in a natural setting. Their cumulative files, school work, results of the CAT testing as

well as the interviews with support staff provide information about each student's

academic progress. Each of these areas will be discussed in relation to the six

children selected: Gary, Corey, Keith, John, Jason, and Caitlin.

CHAPTER 4: HOME AND SCHOOL

4.1 Introduction

The home environment and school experience are important components of the emerging description of each child. Consequently, this chapter will attempt to outline the children's family background and relationships that have surrounded them in their early development. As is the case of any student, this foundation affects their performance in school and, as such, these two areas of discussion are intrinsically linked. Of equal importance in these portraits, are the children's behaviour in school, interaction with teachers and peers, and any specialized evaluations or programs in which they may be involved. The categories of home and school are essential to this discussion and will provide a framework for the ensuing exploration of language.

3.2 Home

A detailed description of each child's family will be presented. This account will include details about the child's ethnic background, living arrangements, length of time in the community, number of siblings in the home, and the marital and socio-economic status of the parents. Also discussed will be the child's relationships with the parents and the siblings. In addition, the parental involvement in the school and their relationship with school staff will be explored. In the cases of the First Nations children, ties to specific reservations will be outlined.

4.2.1 Keith

Keith is a 9-year-old boy living with his 25-year-old mother and his five brothers and sisters. Also living in the house is a 27-year-old man whom Keith claims to be his biological father. His classroom teacher, however, believes this man

to be a stepfather. Neither adult is currently employed outside the home. Keith is the eldest child in the family and his five siblings range from infancy to 7-years-old. The family lives together in a house close to the school. Neither parent attends parent-teacher conferences and the classroom teacher has not met either one. It is Keith's first year attending this school and his family's first year living in this town.

Stated frankly, Keith appears to be a white child. His speech does display Indigenous English influences but given his completely Caucasian appearance, I did not expect him to be First Nations or Metis. I assumed only that his First Nations playmates influenced his speech. The classroom teacher is, also, completely unaware of Keith's First Nations' background. It was not until the third week of research, when I was helping him with an assignment, that he began describing visits to a nearby reserve. When I asked him why he went there, he explained to me that his "mooshum" (Cree word for grandfather) lived there. In our discussions about visiting his grandfather at the reserve, he told me that, "a lot of drunk Indians is there. I mean, a lot of drunk Indians are there." His code-switch between the two dialects reveals a great deal about the identity struggle, and possibly related self-esteem issues, which were to become so apparent during his oral interview.

Keith has spent most of his life living in a large prairie city. It is only in the past 2 years that his family has returned to rural Saskatchewan. Keith states that his mother grew up on one of the adjacent reserves; it is a Cree reservation, as is the reservation on which his grandfather presently resides. According to the website of the Aboriginal Canada Portal (http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/), 88% of this reserve's approximately 3000 band members do not have a high school diploma. It is

highly likely that his mother is Treaty Indian, specifically Cree, and, based on Keith's

appearance, it would seem likely to assume that his biological father was Caucasian.

His current school has not requested Keith's cumulative files and, as such, much of

his family information and background has been discerned from my interview

transcripts and discussions with Keith in class.

Upon returning to Saskatchewan, Keith and his family spent a year living on

his grandfather's reserve. After one year's time, the family relocated to the town of

this study. The following conversation took place in our oral interview:

Andrea:	*So, how come you guys moved into town?*
Keith:	*'Cause it startin' to get, like, erybody like startin' to walk, think that, erybody, we moved here because, erybody was tellin' my mom like to "drink with us" like that? An' she didn't wanna drink.*
Andrea:	*So you needed a better environment?*
Keith:	*Yeah, so no one can't come around us, jus some people come aroun' us*

Keith enjoyed the time spent living on the reserve but, at the same time, seems

uncomfortable with some aspects of this life. Based on his statements, it would

appear that he feels relief over his family's improved home environment.

4.2.2   Corey

Corey's family moved to this community in the summer of 2002. Before their

relocation, they resided at the family's reservation approximately one hour east of

town. The people of this reserve are Ojibway First Nations as are both of Corey's

parents. His mother is an administrator for the band office and his father is a stay-at-

home dad. His mother is also pursuing post-secondary studies on a part-time basis in

the city of Saskatoon.

The website of the Aboriginal Canada Portal (www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/)

indicates that 92% of this reserve's roughly 1400 band members do not have a high

school diploma. Corey has four brothers and two sisters. Corey, along with his

siblings, used to attend school in the town closest to the reserve. According to Corey,

a teacher called one of his brothers a "dumb Indian" and this incident, combined with

pressure by the band office for the children to attend the reserve school, caused the

parents to remove all their children from this school.

Subsequently, the children attended the reserve school for one year. At this

point, the parents decided that they were not pleased with the quality of schooling that

the children were receiving at the reservation school. The family decided that all the

children and their father would relocate to the present community in order to ensure

them a better quality of education. The mother remains on the reserve to work and

commutes regularly to be with the rest of the family. At some point in the past year,

one of Corey's sisters began to be involved in gangs. In an effort to remove her from

this influence, she was sent back to the reserve to live with her mother.

Corey's parents are very involved in his current school community. This past

fall, the family participated in a program called FAST, Families and Schools

Together. This program follows an 8-week cycle; approximately ten families can

participate at a time. Each week, parents, and children meet at the school to share a

meal that one family prepares. After supper, the families play games together and

then children and parents separate into two groups. At this point, the children are

supervised in the gym and the parents have an hour-long workshop on a different

parenting subject each week.

Corey's father drops off and picks up the children from school each day. He enters the school and uses the opportunity to greet teachers and staff cheerfully. Administrators, teachers, and support staff hold him in high regard. During my three weeks in the school, I twice saw Corey's mother accompany her husband to pick up the children after school. Corey stated on a number of occasions that his mother and father believe this to be a very good school. Corey's father is also involved with Corey's homework. During the interview, Corey stated that he likes reading best with his father and that they read books out loud with his siblings.

Corey also spoke about his older brothers a number of times during the oral interview. On a number of instances, he described hunting trips in the company of his brothers as is seen in the following example:

Andrea:	*Is there good hunting around Bear Lake?*
Corey:	*Yeah, we go, me an' my brother, we went hun, we went huntin', he shot a deer, we came back an' then Ritchie got attacked from one because that deer was injured an' den that deer was tryin' to attack him*
Andrea:	*Oh yeah?*
Corey:	*Yeah, an' my, an' Ritchie was holdin' dat deer down so my brother* [a third brother] *had to shoot him in the head because that deer was sufferin', he had a shot in his leg*
Andrea:	*Oh wow, but was he, was he really strong still?*
Corey:	*Yeah, he was tryin' to, um, kick Ritchie*
Andrea:	*So Ritchie had to hold him hard, eh?*
Corey:	*Yeah, an' then Lennie* [the third brother] *come with the rifle*
Andrea:	*And shot him in the head? Yeah?*
Cory:	*Because that deer was sufferin'*

This passage conveys the pride that Corey feels regarding his brothers, their hunting skills, and their ability to end the deer's suffering. While Corey is close to all his family members, he seems most connected to his older brothers.

4.2.3   Gary

Gary's family's living arrangements are somewhat unclear. It appears that two households are maintained with the mother living in one and the father in the other. What is ambiguous about the situation is that it would seem that the parents still function as a couple. There is speculation by teachers, teacher assistants, and the school principal that the family has two addresses in order to maximize payments from social assistance. Neither parent is employed outside the home. Gary states that he lives with his father and that he sees his mother regularly. School records show that he has lived in the community for the past 4 years and that he has attended two schools, including his current, in the public school system. Gary's journal entries indicate frequent visits to a nearby reservation; it is the home of both Cree and Ojibway First Nations. He describes it as "my reserve" which would seem to point to close family ties. According to the web site of the Aboriginal Canada Portal (http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/), 82% of this reserve's roughly 2600 band members have not completed high school.

During the oral interview, I asked Gary about his brothers and sisters. He named ten siblings—five brothers and five sisters—ranging from infancy to late teens. One of Gary's younger sisters is autistic. She attends the same school as he does but she is not integrated into the classroom. She spends her days with a teacher assistant in the library. Gary stated that two of the brothers do not live in town with his family but reside, instead, on a reservation. Gary speaks often of another one of his older brothers, Leon. Until last year, this brother attended the same school as Gary; Leon now attends the public high school. Gary often comes to school wearing

this older brother's clothing and makes a point of telling this to his peers or the adults in the room. Gary describes spending a lot of time with Leon and frequently talks about him to other classmates. Both the classroom teacher and the teacher assistant indicated to me that Leon is an active gang member.

On one occasion, I observed Gary describing his activities of the previous evening to some of his classmates. He was showing them some scratches on his arm and recounting that he had been with Leon when a fight broke out with some other boys. Gary became involved when Leon was "jumped" and the resulting injuries were the cuts on his arm. During my interview with the school principal, she indicated to me that, according to the school RCMP liaison officer, Gary's father is also an active gang member.

I do not know exactly which siblings live in the same house as Gary. It would seem that all the children move freely between the two residences. Gary seems to spend the majority of his time in his father's care. He describes hunting trips, time spent on the reserve, and hockey games, all under the supervision of his father. Gary's father is the contact parent for both Gary and the younger sister in Grade 1. Both parents attend the parent-teacher interviews together and came together to the most recent Christmas concert at the school.

In terms of parental involvement regarding Gary's progress, the classroom teacher describes open communication and depicts the father as being concerned about Gary's behaviour in class. During the oral interview, Gary referred to an incident that took place a couple of years ago. The following excerpt from our interview describes his mother's involvement in Gary's schoolwork:

Andrea:	What kind of stories do you like to write? Is there a certain topic that you like writing about?
Gary:	Yeah, but I don't write those kind of stories anymore
Andrea:	No? How come?
Gary:	Cause there had too much violence in them
Andrea:	And you got in trouble for that or what?
Gary:	No, I got in trouble for that, for my, for my mom
Andrea:	For writing violent stories?
Gary:	Yeah, my Dad doesn't care
Andrea:	Your Dad doesn't care? How were they violent?
Gary:	They had swear words in them
Andrea:	Your mom didn't like that?
Gary:	No, so I stopped that

This exchange demonstrates parental involvement on the part of Gary's mother. It is evident that she was not comfortable with her son's choice to write violent stories containing swear words and, accordingly, intervened in the situation.

4.2.4   John

John has lived in the community all of his life. Like his siblings, he has only attended his current school. He is First Nations but I have no records indicating to which specific First Nations group he belongs. John did not discuss any affiliation with a reservation nor was his classroom teacher aware of any relationship with a specific reserve. He lives with both his parents and his siblings in a house close to school.

Neither the classroom teacher nor the school principal could tell me where John's father was employed but both had the impression that he worked outside the home. The school principal indicated that John's mother worked at the local legion as a waitress. The classroom teacher and the school principal seemed to both have limited contact with John's parents. As a result, John's family description is not as detailed as I would have liked. The classroom assistant indicated that they were a

large family and that John's parents were older. John told me that he has six brothers and two sisters, ranging in age from 4 to 23. His three eldest brothers live away from the family home: two in apartments in town and the other in another Saskatchewan city.

Like Corey and Gary, John seems to think very highly of his older brothers. Of all his family members, it was only of his older brothers that he spoke to me. At one point, during an informal discussion with John, I used a diminutive of his name, roughly the equivalent of "John John". John reacted with great pleasure and told me that that was the name his oldest brother used for him. He then volunteered that he called this brother "Piss Piss"; it was evident that he enjoyed this teasing aspect of their relationship. During the oral interview, he told me that he enjoyed visiting this brother in the city where he lives. I asked John what this brother did in terms of employment in the city where he lives. John's answer was that he did nothing.

Another older brother was discussed during our oral interview. John volunteered that he had recently watched a film with his family and that this particular video belonged to one of his brothers. He explained that they used this brother's Playstation 2 to watch the DVD. John seemed to be very proud to tell me that his brother owned the film and the equipment that allowed them to watch it. Discussion of these brothers was one of the only instances where John initiated conversation with me.

4.2.5 Jason

Jason lives with his mother, father, and brother in a house close to the school. He is White and a speaker of Standard English. His mother works for a major

telecommunications company and his father is a salesperson. Jason's brother is in Grade 6 at the same school. Both boys play hockey and a lot of family time is dedicated to travelling with the boys to their various hockey games and tournaments. Any informal discussion that Jason and I shared regarding his family usually focused on hockey activities. Both parents have attended parent-teacher interviews and the classroom teacher speaks of Jason's parents on a first name basis.

During the interview, Jason told me that his parents think he is a good writer and that he receives praise from them for stories that he brings home. Presently, Jason is very excited about an upcoming trip his family is planning for the summer. The family will travel to British Columbia and spend a week visiting the province.

4.2.6   Caitlin

Caitlin is White and a Standard English speaker. Caitlin has a brother and sister, both older. She and her brother live with their father, and her brother, aged 10, attends the same school as Caitlin. Caitlin's sister is 14-years-old but does not attend school; no explanation was given as to why not. Their father is somewhat of a local celebrity; he is a radio deejay on the town's only FM radio station. Caitlin's parents are divorced and it has not been an easy split for the family. According to the school principal, Caitlin's mother suffers from mental illness and is not able to work. Caitlin visits with her mother but has not lived with her since the parents' divorce. Caitlin's description of her father indicates a light-hearted, teasing relationship. She speaks of making up names to call each other. Caitlin's older sister does not live with their mother or father. Caitlin seemed hesitant to say where her sister is currently living, only that she does not live with her parents.

During the interview, Caitlin described that she enjoys reading books aloud with all members of her family. I had the impression that perhaps these are not activities that actually occur but rather how Caitlin might wish her family life to be. During the weeks I was in Caitlin's classroom, she repeatedly brought items to school for show and tell. This is not an uncommon practice, and many of the children in the class brought belongings to show to the other students. What I did find interesting is that Caitlin would inevitably begin her presentation by explaining that her item was a present from her mother.

4.3   School

The children's behaviour in the school environment will be discussed. This description will include details about their work habits, interaction with teacher and peers, performance on reports cards, Canadian Achievement Test, and cumulative records. Also examined will be any records of diagnostic testing, speech pathologist reports, resource room evaluations, suspension reports, and records of retention.

4.3.1   Keith

Keith's scores on the CAT tests indicate below grade level standings in all subject areas. In Reading and Language, he is evaluated at a Grade 2.4 level and in Mathematics at a Grade 2 level. Interestingly, he scored B's and C's in all subjects on his first term report card indicating average and acceptable performance. His cumulative file has not been requested from his former school so his previous performance is unknown. This speaker of Indigenous English is following a modified

reading program and is seated in the section of the classroom designated for students following this program.

Keith sees the Resource Room teacher six times in a six-day cycle. Three of these days are for listening comprehension and silent reading exercises. The other three sessions are devoted to "Sound City", a program based on the "Blended Sound Sight Program of Learning" by Anna Ingham; this program was developed as a phonics based reading approach for use by early elementary teachers (Ingham, 1994). According to the Resource teacher, Keith is making progress in all aspects of his individualized program.

Keith sits at the front of a row in the modified reading section of the classroom. He does not like individual work and struggles to stay on task. Furthermore, he enjoys having adult assistance and generally asks for it in every activity. He does not like note taking and seems motivated by immediate feedback in his assignments. He often asks for his math to be corrected before moving on from one question to the next. Interestingly, he seems to enjoy receiving praise but he immediately rejects it. One example of this is when Keith showed me his handwriting assignment and I praised him for his penmanship. He immediately disagreed with my feedback and told me that his work was "no good".

Keith's writing in his journal is very detailed and colourful. It does, however, contain frequent spelling mistakes and evidence of Indigenous English influence. Many of his words are spelled phonetically and often difficult to understand. He tells me that he enjoys writing and often asks for help in spelling new words. He seems to enjoy brainstorming his story ideas before writing them down. He is productive in

his writing and is never told by his classroom teacher to write more, a frequent comment in other students' journal. He illustrates most stories and journal entries with sketches.

Keith enjoys socializing with his classmates, both White and First Nations. He generally plays outdoor soccer at recess with a mixed group. Throughout the time of my research, I neither saw nor heard of any evidence of conflict with teachers or peers. He does, however, seem to display a strong need for acceptance by his peers. One example of this is when I observed him working with Gary on a make-up spelling test. Gary had missed the quiz due to tardiness and Keith was asked to dictate the words to him. I was curious to see Gary's dictation abilities so I was paying close attention to his spelling. The first five words on his test were spelt incorrectly. When I returned minutes later to check on his progress I noticed that all of these misspelled words had been erased and corrected. The boys both looked at me with guilty eyes and I stood beside them for the rest of the quiz. Keith's desire to be accepted by Gary, a strong social leader among the boys, and his loyalty to him as a First Nations peer, led him to supply Gary with the answers to the test.

Keith is a likeable child. He is good-natured and helpful. He cares about his classmates and often discusses his younger siblings with me. He enjoys sports and frequently attends local hockey games with a family friend. He does appear to have self-esteem issues and has referred to himself as stupid in conversation with me. In addition, it would appear that he is going through a transition in terms of social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995) and, as a result, may be experiencing some confusion.

4.3.2   Corey

Corey, a speaker of Indigenous English, attended Kindergarten, Grade 1, and part of Grade 2 at a school in the closest town to his reserve. His Kindergarten report card shows average performance on most of the required tasks. His Grade 1 report card begins to show evidence of difficulty in most subject areas. In Grade 2, he began modified classes and started to meet with the resource room teacher. Near the end of Grade 2, Corey and his siblings were removed from this school and spent one term, roughly 2 months, at the reservation school. Corey's marks while at this school are very high. As previously mentioned, Corey's parents were not satisfied with the reserve school and chose to move to the town in which this study was conducted. Corey began Grade 3 in his new town. By October of his Grade 3 year, his classroom teacher referred Corey for evaluation by an educational psychologist. The testing indicated that Corey is scoring in the below average range on measures of core academic subjects.

Since January 2003, Corey spends most of his school day in the Assisted Learning Centre (ALC) which occupies the classroom next door to the Grade 3 room. An experienced teacher is responsible for this program and one classroom assistant works fulltime with these students. All students who go to the ALC continue to attend some classes with their original class. Depending on the day, there are approximately 10-15 students present in the room. The children's problems appear to range from mild learning difficulties to mental disabilities. Corey is a good-natured child and is very cooperative about this move. He likes working with the new teacher, "because whoever works nice she gives them goldfish [the snack cracker]."

At the time of this research, he continued to ask about the three classes that he does attend with the other Grade 3 students: Science, Health, and Phys-Ed. He seemed to require reassurance that he would see these former classmates throughout the school day and that he remained a Grade 3 student regardless of his ALC placement.

Due to his relocation to the ALC, Corey did not participate in the CAT testing. His marks from the fall term report card place his achievement as "acceptable" or "experiencing difficulty" in all subjects except French, Phys-ed, and Music. In terms of his work behaviour, he is rated as not meeting any of the following expected classroom behaviour: listening attentively, understanding and following directions, working independently, using class time effectively, finishing assignments on time, demonstrating organizational skills, showing courtesy and respect for others, displaying a positive attitude and demonstrating appropriate behaviour and self-control.

Corey's ALC teacher is happy with his classroom behaviour and his work. She had been told by the Grade 3 classroom teacher that Corey was unable to copy notes from the board. She was very pleased to show me Corey's ALC notebooks in which he had been able to copy all the required notes. She also indicated to me that she does not believe that Corey will need to attend the ALC long-term. She stated that he is a good candidate to return to regular classes. Her optimistic comments about Corey are in almost complete opposition to the description of Corey given by the Grade 3 classroom teacher.

I met with the resource room teacher who also works with Corey. She sees him three times in a six-day cycle. She believes that his reading must have been

taught to him using whole language teaching. She indicated that Corey lacks reading attack skills: the abilities one uses to process a text. For a child in Grade 3, some of these skills might be sounding out words, reading an entire sentence and then attempting to discern the meaning of a new word, recognizing root words within a new word, and making use of phonics rules. The resource room teacher indicates that, since phonics rules were made salient to him, he has been able to apply them and to improve his reading. She indicates that he has high verbal skills. Students who attend resource room have their reading abilities tested regularly to assess progress. In a one-month period, Corey moved from a .5 grade level to one of 1.7. Corey has been working on several areas during his resource room sessions. He struggles with rhyming. According to his resource room teacher, he does not seem to hear word endings and, as such, is unable to hear likenesses between words. She also indicates that he has difficulty with letter formation but that this has improved greatly over the last five months. This teacher also states that Corey deletes the plural "s" when reading aloud, that he "doesn't take words to the end". Corey also seems to have difficulty with consonant blends; he confuses "ch" and "sh".

Corey's resource room teacher and his ALC teacher describe Corey's father as being heavily involved in Corey's progress. He reads with Corey at home and has purchased printing workbooks for Corey to use at home. Corey talked about these workbooks during his interview; he enjoys using them. Both teachers said that it is because Corey's parents support his program that he is making such rapid improvement. The ALC teacher and the resource room teacher both believe that, at a future point, Corey will resume regular classes.

4.3.3   Gary

Gary, a First Nations child, has attended two schools in the community's

public school system since Kindergarten. He has spent Grades 1, 2, and 3 in the

current school. In Grades 1 and 2, he followed the regular program; his Grade 3

school program is modified in Language Arts. As a result, he sits in the section of the

classroom where the students who are in modified programs are located.

Gary is aware that he follows a program that differs from that of the other

Grade 3 students. It would seem that he is not pleased with being singled out in this

manner. Students who are on modified programs study only the first fifteen words

for the weekly spelling tests. Those students who are following regular Language

Arts programs have an additional five spelling words, bringing their total to twenty.

During the spelling quiz, the classroom teacher tells the modified program students to

stop at fifteen and the regular program students to continue. Gary, however, ignores

these directions each week and continues with the final five words. Another indicator

of his displeasure at being on a modified program is a statement he made to me

during our oral interview:

Andrea:	*...Do you think you'd make a good English teacher, like how Mr. X teaches you your reading and your writing and your spelling... (Gary takes his questionnaire, erases, and changes his answer) So you don't mean never, you mean always?*
Gary:	*No, sometimes*
Andrea:	*Sometimes? So how come sometimes?*
Gary:	*I unno*
Andrea:	*Like, are there things about English class, like reading and writing and spelling and phonics that you have trouble with?*
Gary:	*No, I don't have trouble with no work*
Andrea:	*No? It's good? All of it's good?*
Gary:	*Yeah*

Gary's cumulative records show that his statement is not accurate. He is an average student, in terms of marks, in all areas except Language Arts. In this subject area, specifically Spelling, Phonics, and Writing, Gary's marks are D's, which indicate that he is experiencing difficulty with these areas. I can attest to these difficulties, having worked at some length with Gary on Spelling and Phonics. He seems unable to sound words out and, at times, his spelling makes his writing almost impossible to understand. What is curious to me regarding Gary's situation is that he has never been assessed regarding his difficulties in Language Arts nor has he ever attended resource room. It would seem to me that Gary could greatly benefit from time spent reviewing phonics.

Students are also rated on their work habits. A score ranging from 1 (*excelling*) to 4 (*not yet meeting the target level*) is given regarding the ability to demonstrate a number of skills. Gary is rated as meeting all of the following criteria: listening attentively, understanding and following directions, working independently, using class time effectively, finishing assignments on time, demonstrating organizational skills, displaying a positive attitude and demonstrating appropriate behaviour and self-control. Gary is evaluated as beginning to show courtesy and respect to others.

Focus on Gary's performance in Language Arts seems to have been redirected to his behaviour in school. In both Grade 1 and 2, Gary received suspensions, an uncommon punishment for children of these grade levels. In Grade 1, it was for a period of three days and the reasons are described as, "refusing to work, defiance, and fighting." In Grade 2, he was suspended for two days and the circumstances were,

"disrespect to staff, refused to work, and kicked a teacher." Since December of Grade 3, Gary has been taking Ritalin once a day. At 9:00 each morning, his classroom teacher gives his tablet to him. Normally by 9:30, Gary is able to work without distraction.

Gary does seem to be struggling with impulse control. At times, he seems angry and makes unkind remarks to his classmates. At other moments, it would appear that he is provoking simply to have a reaction from his friends. He does not respond well to reprimands from female adults. He is often disrespectful when working with either of the two classroom assistants. He told me to "get lost" on two mornings when I spoke to him before his Ritalin had begun to take effect. I did not observe him being disrespectful to his male classroom teacher at any time during my three weeks in the classroom.

The CAT testing provides some interesting results for Gary. His Total Battery score evaluates him at grade level of 3.2. In Total Language, Gary is rated at grade level of 3.2. In Total Mathematics, Gary is evaluated at a grade level of 4.2. In Total Reading, he is rated at a grade level of 2.5. The two Reading areas where he scored the lowest are Vocabulary at 2.6 and Dictation at 1.4.

As discussed, Gary has been referred for assessment of his speech. His first assessment was when he was in Kindergarten. The reasons given for the assessment were as follows: "Gary was referred by his classroom teacher due to concerns that it is difficult to understand what he is saying, and that words may be mixed up or left out." The results of this assessment were that Gary "presents with a moderate articulation or phonological disorder with low-average language skills. Gary's

understanding of language at the single word level exceeds his expression of words."

In Grade 2, Gary was seen for a review of his speech and language development. The

area in which Gary scored the lowest on this test was Sentence Imitation, "the ability

to repeat complex sentences accurately." On this assessment of Gary's abilities, it

was stated that "his use of grammatical structures was inferior to his understanding of

the same structures." Without entering too deeply into discussion at this point, all of

these statements could be made when evaluating any dialect speaker's speech using

Standard English criteria.

4.3.4   John

John, a dialect speaker of Indigenous English, has attended this school since

Kindergarten. His cumulative record reveals that he repeated Kindergarten. By

Grade 2, he was placed on a modified program in Language Arts and Math. His

report card marks in Grades 1 are mostly D's and C's and even one E in Spelling,

which indicates a failing grade. In Grade 2, once again on a modified program, his

marks are all C's and B's, except for one D in Language. In the first term of Grade 3,

again on a modified program in Math and Language Arts, John received mostly D's

and C's with one E in Science. Due to his placement in modified programs in Math

and Language Arts, John sits in the section of the room where these students are

placed.

In terms of his work behaviour in the first term of Grade 3, John was rated as

not meeting the following criteria: listening attentively, understanding and following

directions, working independently, using class time effectively, finishing assignments

on time, demonstrating organizational skills, displaying a positive attitude and

demonstrating appropriate behaviour and self-control. He was rated as demonstrating the ability to show courtesy and respect for others.

His cumulative file shows no evidence of having been assessed by an educational psychologist or of being referred for any testing. He does see the resource room teacher five times each 6-day cycle. Three of the sessions are used for working on his reading and the remaining two are dedicated to Sound City. The resource room teacher says that her testing shows that John is at grade level for spelling and sight words (words which do not follow rules of phonics but that must be recognized by sight) but that his reading ability is at a pre-primary level. She describes John as a non-responsive child, unenthusiastic and that she is working on encouraging him to speak more. She says that he is likable and causes no problems.

In the CAT testing, John received a Total Battery score of a grade level of 2.2. His Total Reading score indicates a grade level of 1.9 and his Total Language is rated as 2.4. In Total Math, John's results place him at a grade level of 1.8. The two areas where John scored the lowest are Vocabulary and Language/Writing Conventions. In Vocabulary, John's test results indicated him to be at a grade level of 1.5. In Language/Writing Conventions, John is rated at a grade level of .5-, indicating that he is at a level of Kindergarten or lower.

4.3.5   Jason

Jason, a speaker of Standard English, has attended this school since Kindergarten. His cumulative record for Grades 1 and 2 show straight A's in all subjects. In the first term of Grade 3, he received A's in all subjects except Penmanship, Social Studies, and Art in which he received B's. In terms of work

habits, Jason was rated as excelling in all of the following areas: listening attentively, understanding and following directions, working independently, using class time effectively, finishing assignments on time, demonstrating organizational skills, showing courtesy and respect for others, displaying a positive attitude and demonstrating appropriate behaviour and self-control.

Jason's CAT results give a similar description of his abilities. The Total Battery results place him at a grade level of 3.7. His Total Reading results indicate him to be at a grade level of 4.1. In Total Language, Jason's results place him at a grade level of 3.6. Finally, in Total Math, Jason is placed at a grade level of 3.6.

Jason is a popular child and well liked by both peers and adults. In addition to experiencing success in his academic performance, Jason is athletic. In the classroom, he sits in the section of the room where the students who follow the regular program are placed. For Language Arts, he and the other students following the regular program leave the room with another teacher while the students following the modified program remain in the Grade 3 classroom. The Language Arts classes of the students following the regular program, Jason's group, are conducted in a classroom in the Middle Years section of the school.

4.3.6   Caitlin

Caitlin has attended this school since Kindergarten. She began her Kindergarten in December 1998 and completed a full year and a half of Kindergarten before continuing on to Grade 1. In Grade 1, Caitlin followed a regular program and received grades of C's and B's in her core subjects. By Grade 2, she was following a modified program in Language Arts and she received C's in all of her core subjects.

Caitlin visits the resource room five times in each 6-day cycle. The first three visits are devoted to listening comprehension and silent reading. The two remaining periods are assigned to the phonics program "Sound City". This is Caitlin's first year in resource room; a referral was made by her current classroom teacher. According to the resource room teacher, Caitlin has difficulty recalling details after reading a story. She also appears to be shy to sound out words and is described as being easily distracted. The resource room teacher evaluates her reading and listening comprehension at a grade level of 1.6. Her recognition of sight words is closer to grade level. The resource room teacher feels that Caitlin's problems are not so much a cognitive issue as a maturity problem.

Caitlin sits in the section of the room where the students following modified programs are placed. She is one of three girls in a group of twelve students on modified programs. Caitlin works well with the students around her. Furthermore, she is caring and helpful to her peers. She is especially watchful of John and Earl who both sit behind her. I saw Caitlin remind them, on a number of occasions, to "get back to work." Caitlin does, however, struggle with some of her friendships with the other girls in her class. She and another girl who sits in the regular program section have been advised by their parents to not spend too much time together because of their frequent fights. It would seem to me that most of this friction is caused by the behaviour of the other girl. As previously discussed, Caitlin seems to be bothered by her family situation. It would seem to me that her sadness over those matters is most likely affecting her self-esteem.

4.4   Summary

The familial backgrounds presented in this chapter vary greatly in the case of

each child. Each of the First Nations children originates from large families with the

number of siblings ranging from five to ten, whereas the two White children have

only one to two siblings. The First Nations children speak frequently of their siblings

and seem to relate strongly to these relationships. The socio-economic status of each

family, again, differs for each child, though given the inner-city location of the school

it is probable that the income of each family is somewhere below the community

average. Three of the four First Nations children appear to have strong ties to First

Nations reservations; John, however, does not display evidence of any such

relationship.

Parental involvement in the children's education ranges from a strong

presence, as in the case of Corey, to being almost completed removed, as in the

situations of Keith and John. In terms of academic achievement, all of the Indigenous

English speaking children, as well as Caitlin, demonstrate below grade level

performance. Only Jason, the Standard English speaking male, achieves grade level

results in all subjects. Each of the Indigenous English speaking children follows a

modified program, as does Caitlin, and see a number of specialized educators

including Resource Room teachers and a speech pathologist. Jason follows a regular

program and is not removed from the classroom for any assisted programs.

Having explored the familial and academic environments of both the

Indigenous and Standard English children, it is now possible to examine the language

and perceptions of speech of each child. Furthermore, the discussion of home and

school provide support for the subsequent examination of the speech of each of the

six children and their beliefs regarding Indigenous and Standard English.

CHAPTER 5: LANGUAGE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the speech of each child as well as their perceptions

of English in Saskatchewan. For each child, the salient characteristics of their speech,

in addition to their discourse features, will be examined in detail. Moreover,

examples of these characteristics, taken from the oral interviews and classroom

observation, will be presented and discussed. In doing so, a comprehensive

description of Indigenous English will emerge making the differences between this

dialect and Standard English even more apparent. Finally, the discussion will

conclude with an examination of the children's awareness of the differences between

Indigenous and Standard English

5.2 Speech

In this discussion of the children's speech, areas to be examined include:

lexical choices, non-standard syntax, as well as discourse features. In addition, the

students' average number of words per turn will be discussed as well how these

results could possibly impact the children in the classroom. These numbers were

calculated by examining the transcripts of our oral interviews. Each child's total

number of words was divided by the number of turns they took during our discussion

and compared to my own results. The results of these calculations are displayed in

Table 1.

Table 1

Child and Interviewer: Average Number of Words per Turns during Oral Interview

	Number of Words/Turn	
Child's Name	Child's Count	Interviewer's Count
Caitlin	10.88	13.40
Jason	6.47	13.50
Corey	5.29	13.00
Gary	4.30	10.44
Keith	3.61	10.82
John	1.81	19.80

5.2.2   Keith

Keith is a monolingual speaker of English. He does possess a small amount

of Cree vocabulary words but nothing that would enable him to communicate at even

a beginner level. Phonologically, Keith's speech has not been heavily influenced by

Indigenous English. It is probably for this reason, in addition to his White

appearance, that I did not begin to focus on him early in my research. The distinctive

pronunciation of Indigenous English speakers of the Prairie Provinces is not easily

discernible in his speech. This being said, Keith seems to have begun to develop the

ability to code-switch between the two dialects according to the race of his

interlocutor. It would be interesting to listen to the aspects of Keith's speech when he

visits his grandfather's reserve. There is evidence of consonant and suffix dropping

in his speech. Keith pronounces most words ending in *ing* as *in*. This is common

practice for most informal speech in English. What is different about this pattern in

Indigenous English is that once the *g* is dropped, the pronunciation of the syllable is

stressed as opposed to the unstressed *in* of Standard English.

In considering morphological and syntactic features of his speech, many examples

of Indigenous English influence can be found. Keith usually uses the double negative

as seen in the following example:

Andrea:	*You know some Cree?*
Keith:	*Yeah, but I'm not goin' to tell you none*
Andrea:	*No?* [Laughter]
Keith:	*No, 'cause I'm shy*

It would also appear that Indigenous English rules govern his use of the verb

to be. The following conversation contains an interesting example of this:

Keith:	*I used to play with white kids*
Andrea:	*You did? How come?*
Keith:	*'Cause, they're more better than Indians*
Andrea:	*At what?*
Keith:	*Um, what?*
Andrea:	*Like what do you mean they're more better? They're better people?*
Keith:	*Yep*
Andrea:	*How come?*
Keith:	*'Cause they're better friends than Indian friends*
Andrea:	*Why*
Keith:	*'cause, I dunno, 'cause they be mean to me and that stuff*

The final utterance of "cause they be mean to me and that stuff" does not

follow Standard English rules of the verb *to be*. In our conversation, Keith was

describing events that took place in the past at his school when he used to live in a

different community. Standard English would necessitate phrasing the statement as,

"they were mean to me." This pattern of the uninflected copula is also found in the

Indigenous English of American First Nations (Olson Flanigan, 1987).

Another interesting characteristic of Keith's language use is his developing ability to produce both Indigenous and Standard English variants of the same message. This can be seen in the previously stated example of, "a lot of drunk Indians is there. I mean, a lot of drunk Indians are there." I would speculate that his switch was perhaps a result of his awareness of my race and speech. That is to say that because I am a Standard English speaker, Keith chose to restate his phrase using the Standard English verb conjugation.

It is also interesting to discuss Keith's discourse behaviour throughout our oral interview. It would seem to me that we were operating with the same rules. There were no conflicts regarding turn taking. Keith answered all questions promptly, maintained eye contact, and indicated to me that his answers were complete by restating his ideas. Our discussions flowed easily and without confusion. I am unaware, however, as to whether or not Keith is able to participate in a discussion using Indigenous English discourse patterns, which will be discussed in detail in the case of John.

Though Keith and I appeared to be using the same rules in terms of turn-taking, his average number of words per utterance seem much more representative of an Indigenous English speaker than Standard English. He averaged 3.6 words per turn, which is the second lowest count of the six students; only one First Nations male placed lower than Keith. The interactions where Keith averaged higher in word count were exchanges where Keith held information about which I knew very little: members of his family, descriptions of reserve life, and his life in Calgary. Darnell (1981) describes this pattern of discourse behaviour of First Nations people as a need

for asymmetry. That is to say, if both speakers possess equal knowledge of a topic, then there is no impetus for discussion. Discourse asymmetry will be addressed in greater detail in relation to the case of John as it is a particularly salient component of his discourse behaviour.

5.2.2   Corey

Corey is a monolingual speaker of English. The language of his family is Indigenous English and while he may have some ability to understand Ojibway (due to living on the reservation with elders who continue to speak the indigenous language) he is not able to speak the language. The differences between Corey's speech and Standard English are evident at the phonological, lexical, syntactic, and morphological levels; he is a dialect speaker of Indigenous English.

There are a number of patterns in Corey's speech, which I observed during class and that surfaced again during our interviews. One such tendency is the omission of function words in his utterances, a characteristic of other Indigenous English speakers in the United States (Dubois, 1978; Olson Flanigan, 1987). The following excerpt from our interview demonstrates this pattern. Corey and I are having a conversation about the consequences of not paying attention to his homework when he is at home. Corey explains to me how his father reinforces the importance of concentrating on his oral reading. The function word *if* is left out of the utterance but its meaning has already been implied in the discussion leading up to this statement:

Andrea:	*Who do you like to read books out loud with?*
Corey:	*My dad*
Andrea:	*Yeah? How come?*

> Corey: Because, when I read and I don't pay attention, he either, he lets me read two books.
>
> Andrea: Oh yeah?
>
> Corey: Yeah, I bring one book home and [if] I'm not paying attention to him, I have to read two books

This tendency to omit words that are not essential in conveying meaning is also evident in the following exchange:

> Andrea: Do you and I speak the same way?
>
> Corey: Nope
>
> Andrea: No? What are the differences?
>
> Corey: 'Cause boy talk and girl talk

Corey's message is that boys and girls speak differently and because I am a girl and he is a boy, we, therefore, speak differently. All this is conveyed in his six words. I would argue that a speaker of Standard English would not have reduced the utterance to this point. A Standard English speaker of Corey's age might have produced something more similar to, "you talk like a girl and I talk like a boy." While it is clear that Standard English speakers do not speak in complete grammatical sentences, I am not convinced that Corey's utterance would be natural for a Standard English speaking child.

Corey's utterance might be explained by the work of Basil Bernstein (1975) regarding social class and code. Though this researcher's stance is perhaps controversial (Crystal 1987), it can help to provide some explanation for Corey's reduced word choice. Bernstein (1975) argues that two general types of code can be distinguished: restricted and elaborated. He explains that restricted code is used in informal situations and is characterized by a reliance on situational context, a lack of stylistic variety, an emphasis on the speaker's membership of the group, simple syntax and the frequent use of gestures and tag questions. Elaborated code is used in

formal situations and is characterized by less dependence on context, wide stylistic range (including the passive voice), more adjectives, relatively complex syntax, and the use of the pronoun *I*. Bernstein's argument is that middle-class children have access to both of these codes while working-class children have access only to restricted codes. In the case of Corey's utterance, it would seem to fall into the category of restricted code, certainly in the sense that it is completely reliant on the conversational context and demonstrative of simple syntax.

The double negative can be found in most non-standard varieties of English (Wolfram et al., 1999). Like Keith, Corey also employs the double negative as seen in the following example from the interview transcript:

> *Corey:*   *Sometimes, my dad doesn't want to fish no more because every time he fishes he pulls a muscle and it hurts*

Another characteristic of Corey's speech is the consonant cluster reduction and stressed pronunciation of words ending in *ing*. There are many examples of this pattern throughout Corey' interview. The following utterance demonstrates this trait:

> *Corey:*   *an' readin', there's readin' and then writin'*

Throughout the oral interview transcripts, there are numerous instances of words beginning with *th* that Corey pronounces as *d*. There are, however, many instances where he uses the Standard English pronunciation. I am not clear as to what rules, if any, govern his variable pronunciation. What follows is an example from the interview transcript where both pronunciations can be seen:

> *Andrea:*   *Is there good hunting around Bear Lake?*
> *Corey:*   *Yeah, we go, me an' my brother, we went hun, we went huntin', he shot a deer, we came back an' then Ritchie got attacked from one because that deer was injured an' den that deer was tryin' to attack him*

Andrea: *Oh yeah?*
Corey: *Yeah, an' my, an' Ritchie was holdin' dat deer down so my*
                brother had to shoot him in the head because that deer was
                sufferin', he had a shot in his leg

Also noticeable in Corey's speech are the different ways that some of his verbs are conjugated. Each of the following utterances—some from our interview, some from classroom interaction—is an example of how Corey's verb usage differs from Standard English:

> *Two of us gets beat up*
> *I just done two*
> *Didja been it? Ryan been it*
> *I seen that*
> *That ain't the headdress*
> *Yeah, an' then Lennie come with the rifle*

In the above utterances, we see evidence of lack of subject-verb agreement, irregular conjugation of the verb *to be* in the present tense, as well as differences in how irregular verbs are conjugated in the past tense.

Olson Flanigan (1987) describes lack of plural marking as a trait of Indigenous English in the United States. I also found evidence of this characteristic in Corey's English. In the utterance, "write our name", Corey tells his work partner to write their names at the top of their assignment. It is clear that each boy has his own name, which in Standard English would necessitate the addition of an *s* to the end of the word *name*. Perhaps the obviousness that each boy has a name, combined with the use of the pronoun *our*, offsets the need to use the plural marker *s*. That is to say, the addition of an *s* would be redundant in conveying a plural meaning already indicated by *our*.

Finally, it is also important to discuss some of the differences in Corey's discourse behaviour. The first item of note is his average number of words per utterance. Of the four First Nations boys, Corey's average word count is the highest at 5.3 words per utterance. This still places him below the 6.5 words per utterance of Jason, the Standard English male speaker and below the 10.6 words per utterance of Caitlin, the Standard English female speaker. Accordingly, my average word count decreased from the 13.4 and 13.5 average words per utterance (with Caitlin and Jason, respectively) to 13 words per utterance. Of interest in the case of Corey's word count is the large variance in his word counts from page to page of the transcript. There are periods where he averages 1.5 words per utterance and then one block where he averages as high as 11.7. The instances in which Corey speaks more freely arise when he is describing things of which I have little or no knowledge such as his family, hunting, and life on the reserve. The blocks in which he remains more silent are times spent discussing school, reading, writing and differences in language. As previously mentioned, this pattern is symptomatic of the need for discourse asymmetry (Darnell, 1981) and will be further explored in the discussion of John's speech.

One final item for discussion is Corey's use of narration to answer my interview questions. According to Preston (1975, p. 10) narration "functions to convey to the hearer a whole and precise perception sometimes almost a visual image, within the appropriate, inherent context." Evidence of Corey's use of narration is especially apparent in the following exchange from our interview:

Andrea: *Do most people on the reserve have a boat?*

> *Corey:*   *Not everyone because we had a boat that, it was a red one an'*
> *some of these, an' then someone stole it on the road, an' then*
> *they took it, an then they were swimmin' with it, an, then they*
> *pushed it all the way to the middle of the water*

At the time of this exchange, I remember feeling confused and not understanding why

Corey did not simply answer my question with *yes* or *no*. In addition, I saw no

relation between the *not everyone* portion of his answer and story of his boat being

stolen. It was only upon examination of the interview transcripts that I realized that

he had used storytelling as way of supporting his answer. His explanation was

descriptive in nature and designed to help me understand that not everyone on his

reserve has a boat; therefore, they have to steal the boats of others.

5.2.3   Gary

Gary's speech provides us with many examples of Indigenous English

characteristics. Phonologically, many of the patterns already discussed regarding

Keith and Corey are also present in Gary's speech. Gary pronounces most words

ending in *ing* with alveolar rather than velar nasalization. Additionally, pronunciation

of this final syllable is stressed. This trait is seen in the following excerpt:

> *Gary:*   *'Cause I'm good at talkin'*

Like Corey, Gary also pronounces words beginning with *th* as a stop. As in

the case of Corey, there are also instances where he uses the Standard English

pronunciation and, again, I cannot be clear as to what motivates his choice. It is

possible that both sounds are interchangeable for Gary; the variation is not systematic

but, rather, free. The last sentence in the following excerpt from our interview

displays examples of both pronunciations:

> *Andrea:*   *Oh okay and what do you guys go hunting for?*

Gary:	*Wha?*
Andrea:	*What kind of...*
Gary:	*...uh geese*
Andrea:	*Geese?*
Gary:	*And moose, and elk, for elk we usually go over dere, way way over there*

During my classroom observations, I also heard Gary pronounce *th* as *d* in an exchange with some of his peers where he was explaining directions:

Gary:	*Den dis, den dis*

Another salient characteristic of Gary's speech is use of multiple negation. The following utterances were heard in both the oral interview as well as regular classroom interaction:

> *No, I don't have no trouble with no work*
> *I can't see nothing*
> *I don't got no numbers*
> *His leg broke, I never did nuttin'*

I had the opportunity to listen to Gary during a number of oral reading exercises. In one such activity, I listened to Gary read a paragraph, which contained two examples of the possessive, *Lita's colour*, and *lizard's home*. In both cases, Gary deleted the *s* and pronounced the words as *Lita colour* and *lizard home*.

Another aspect of Gary's speech is the way in which his verb usage differs from Standard English. I found examples of this in our interview transcripts, classroom observation and, in writing, in his math notebook. The following question appears in Gary's math textbook: "How many bones are in the face and skull?" Gary's answer to this question was, "There is 20 bones in the face and skull." This example lacks subject/verb agreement. Interestingly, the Standard English agreement was used in the original question, "How many bones <u>are</u> in the face and skull?" Gary

restated parts of the question in his answer (face and skull) and knew to answer in a

complete sentence but his verb use appears to have been governed by Indigenous

English rules.

Another difference between Gary's verb use and that of Standard English is

how verbs are conjugated in the past tense. The following example was noted during

an oral reading exercise. Gary was reading a text, which contained a number of verbs

written in the past tense: *came, became* and *upset*. When Gary read these words

aloud, he altered their pronunciation. Consequently, he read *became* and *came* as

become and *come* respectively and the word *upset* was read aloud as *upsetted*.

The final point of discussion regarding Gary's verb usage is found in the

following example:

Gary:	*Yeah, but I don't write those kind of stories anymore*
Andrea:	*No? How come?*
Gary:	*Cause there had too much violence in them*

In Standard English, this utterance would have probably been said in one of

two ways. The first Standard English possibility is, "cause there was too much

violence in them." The difference between that Standard English utterance and

Gary's actual statement would be that Gary chose to use the auxiliary *to have* as

opposed to *to be*. The second Standard English possibility might be "cause they had

too much violence in them." The difference between that statement and Gary's actual

utterance would be that Gary chose the subject *there* in place of the Standard English

they. As I did not hear this characteristic repeatedly, I cannot be sure of its frequency

nor the rules that monitor its usage.

Gary's English also displays some interesting lexical differences. In a discussion about his youngest sister and the activities that they like to do together, Gary produced the following statement:

Gary: *Yeah, she tries to always scrap me*

His message in this phrase was that he and his sister like to play fight. The word *scrap* is used in informal Standard English, often as a noun as in "We had a scrap" but rarely has a verb. If we were to use *scrap* as a verb in Gary's statement, it would be necessary to add the preposition *with* before the word *me*. The sentence could also be said in Standard English as "We always scrap" but in general, *scrapping* is not something you do to someone else. This usage of the word *scrap* is similar to examples provided by Heit and Blair (1993) in their discussion of Indigenous English in Saskatchewan First Nations and Metis people. Heit and Blair (1993) state that "there are many expressions in Indigenous English that differ from Standard English" (p. 119). Two examples that seem to mirror Gary's usage of *scrap* are "We really suffered him" (instead of "we really made him suffer) and, "Those kids are always meaning on him" (instead of "being mean to him") (Heit & Blair, 1993, p.119).

Finally, it is important to discuss Gary's discourse behaviour during our oral interview. Throughout our discussion, Gary averages 4.3 words per utterance while I average 10.44, slightly down from my average word counts of 13.4, 13.5 and 13 with Caitlin, Jason, and Corey, respectively. Similar to Corey and Keith, Gary's count increases when discussing subjects such as hunting and his family that he knows well and of which I am much less informed. This behaviour, again, indicates a need for asymmetry in knowledge; this phenomenon will be explained in the case of John.

One final pragmatic difference in the case of Gary is the use of eye contact. Rules governing the use of eye contact differ between the First Nations people and White Canadians. First Nations children are taught to avoid eye contact with Elders as a sign of respect (Piquemal, 2001). All four of the First Nations boys in this study display this trait and it was very apparent throughout my oral interview with Gary. Stated simply, Gary did not look me in the eyes at any point during our interview.

5.2.4　John

It is my experience that the notion that First Nations people are silent and choose to speak sparingly is an integral aspect of many educators' belief systems regarding Aboriginal Education. While First Nations people are a group of individuals as much as any other cultural group, it is nonetheless my experience that First Nations people do indeed tend to be taciturn, certainly in comparison to White people. My Aboriginal friends, former students and acquaintances listen carefully, speak when necessary and ask questions when they require further information and not in a need to demonstrate their own knowledge of a subject. A Metis friend of mine has explained to me that White people seem to need to "fill up her silence." In examining the communication of John, I found that I could not rely on analysing his speech. While I do have samples of his speech containing examples of some of the systematic differences already discussed in the cases of the other children, I think it more important to examine why it is that John chooses to "to give up on words" (Basso, 1970, p. 213).

To be clearer, I will begin by referring to the results of the analysis of the average number of words count per turn. John averages 1.8 words per turn and,

consequentially, I filled in all his silence with an average of 19.8 words per turn. This

places John as the child using the lowest number of words per turn on average. With

the exception of some proper names, the words John produced during our interview

consisted of *yeah, no, nope,* and *I dunno.* Furthermore, I cannot be sure that he would

have naturally produced these utterances if I had not reminded him on two occasions

that the tape recorder could not pick up his shrugs or nodding. Darnell (1981) argues

the following:

> Ethnographers of speaking have distorted the realities of communicative
> events in native American societies by focusing exclusively on speech. The
> Cree of northern Alberta, along with other native peoples, place far greater
> emphasis on the use of silence and on pause between turns at talk. Listening,
> rather than speaking, is the highly valued communicative skill. Lack of
> understanding of different communicative systems is responsible for
> considerable inter-ethnic conflicts. (p. 55)

It is with these differences in mind that I add the use of silence and listening to this

discussion of Indigenous English.

John does not speak very much during classroom activities. He does,

however, communicate a great deal with Earl, another First Nations boy in the

classroom, but this communication is not always through speech. Their desks are

side by side and while they do speak quietly to one another from time to time, they

seem to be able to enjoy one another's company through a lot of smiles, eye contact,

and giggling. Often, both boys are off task and spend their time doodling or creating

small toys; they like to show each other these creations. This behaviour goes beyond

the boys being shy; they are communicating with one another in a different way.

Darnell (1981) states that "potential interactors must have a shared understanding of

the meaning of the actions of others, whether or not those actions are verbal. They

must have the ability to extract information from person and situation" (p. 56). I would argue that John and Earl have this "shared understanding", and they are communicating their ideas to one another in this less verbal way. "For native Americans, it is co-presence rather than talk which is the organizing principle of interactional etiquette" (Darnell, 1981, p. 56).

While it is apparent that John and Earl share the same understanding, it is even more clear to me that John and I do not. The transcripts from our interview show very clearly that he and I were not communicating in the same way. Beyond the word count results, there are at least two other interesting items to be discussed. First, whereas in the cases of Gary, Corey, and Keith, I had managed to turn the discussion to subjects of which they had knowledge and I did not, this did not happen during John's interview. This affected our discussion because, as Darnell (1981) explains succinctly, "Cree conceive interactions as basically asymmetrical. The one who speaks must have something to say which is not known to the addressee...if there is no asymmetry of knowledge, there is no need for verbal communication" (p. 57).

Most of my discussion with John was school related. To the children of this Grade 3 classroom, I was just another teacher who could help them with their work. I had a desk and was in the classroom throughout the entire school day. John was aware of my role and that I had been examining his schoolwork for the past two weeks. Questions like, "Do you speak the same way as everyone else in class?" and "Who do you like to work with in class?" must have seemed ridiculous to him because he could assume I already knew the answers. There was no asymmetry in

our knowledge of classroom events and therefore, no need for John to expand his answers beyond "yes" or "no".

Secondly, my own interview behaviour must have seemed inappropriate to John. As the interview progressed and John remained silent, I began to fill in his silence with needless chatter. Darnell (1981) explains the importance of silence: "pauses are long between utterances because important messages require assimilation and thought before an equally serious response is possible" (p. 59). My own personal and work-related experiences with First Nations communities had already revealed these characteristics to me. Going into the interviews with the First Nations children, I thought that I was ready to wait out the silence, listen to their answers, and not be affected by the lack of eye contact. Upon reflection, it seems that my own communication patterns were stronger than my good intentions.

The following exchange is a good example of our duelling discourse behaviour:

> *Andrea:*   *Okay, number 8: Do you like it when your teacher calls on you in class? So when Mr. X asks you a question. You said "never" [in the questionnaire]. What don't you like about it?*
>
> *John:*   *Sometimes*
>
> *Andrea:*   *Sometimes you like it? When do you like it and when do you not like it?*
>
> *John:*   *Never*
>
> *Andrea:*   *You never like it? So how come? What don't you like about it? Some of the other kids said they don't like it when they didn't know the answer, is that what you don't like about it?*
>
> *John:*   *Yeah*

I used all my best techniques to help him communicate, which, normally, would work with a Standard English speaking child. John continued with the discourse behaviour

that is appropriate to him. I know I felt confusion and, if I am honest, probably some annoyance and I can imagine that John must have felt something similar.

5.2.5   Jason

Jason is a speaker of Standard English. His English is like that of most White children his age in Saskatchewan. His average word count per utterance (6.5) is the second highest of the six children interviewed. Throughout our interview, my own average word count per utterance was 13.5. Our discussion flowed smoothly; Jason answered in one-word utterances when necessary and expanded upon his answers without prompting. The following exchange is an example of this pattern:

> *Andrea:*   *Do you ever write about hockey?*
> *Jason:*   *No, I had to a report in Grade 2 about...I picked sharks to do,*
>   *it was for animals, and I like researching*

Jason could have answered *no* to my answer but it would seem that we share the same understanding of discourse behaviour. He anticipated that if he did simply answer *no* that I would follow up with, "What do you write about?" Jason provided me with an answer to that unspoken question and indicated to me that his answer was complete by telling me why he liked writing about animals.

5.2.6   Caitlin

Like Jason, Caitlin is a speaker of Standard English. During our interview, she averaged the highest word count per utterance (10.88) of all the six children. My average word count per utterance (13.4) was almost the exact same as it was during my discussion with Jason. Caitlin makes use of many of the discourse markers used by adult Standard English speakers such as *you know* (to seek confirmation), *well*

(filler), *kind of*, and *sort of* (hedges). These abilities are apparent in the following

excerpt from our oral interview:

Caitlin	*Well, you know, like sometimes I don't like to be watched on t.v.*
Andrea	*Hm-hmm*
Caitlin	*It's kind of like, I get frightened, I don't like people watching me all the time, it kind of gives me, it's like on the stage, I get stagefright so it's like on t.v., I'd get t.v. fright*

During our interview, she also made use of expressions such as *that kind of*

thing and *stuff like that* at the end of her answers to indicate to me that her answer

was complete. These abilities can be seen in the following excerpt from our

interview:

Andrea	*No? How come? What don't you like about it?*
Caitlin	*Well, you know, cause the kids would yell and stuff like that*
Andrea	*Oh okay*
Caitlin	*It would give me a headache, but I would like to be a daycare teacher*
Andrea	*Oh you would? With small children? Yeah?*
Caitlin	*Yeah, better than bigger kids, cause you know*

Caitlin frequently made eye contact with me; our interview was comfortable

and the conversation flowed easily. Her ability to appropriately use such discourse

markers is apparent; she is the only child of the six studied to have done so.

5.3   Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Language

In this discussion, the children's beliefs about English in Saskatchewan are

examined. Also discussed, are their feelings regarding their own speech. Keith's

perceptions are described as an individual while the remaining students' attitudes are

explored as a group. This choice is due to the similarity between the responses of

Gary, Corey, John, Jason and Caitlin and the fact that their perceptions differ

radically from those of Keith.

5.3.1 Keith

What is perhaps most interesting in Keith's case is his strong awareness of the

differences between the English of First Nations and White people in Saskatchewan.

In fact, Keith is the only child interviewed with any awareness of these differences.

His clear understanding of the situation as well as his increasing First Nations self-

identification can be seen in the following excerpt:

Andrea	*Who speaks...what are the differences? Who speaks like you?*
Keith	*No one*
Andrea	*No one?*
Keith	*Nope*
Andrea	*Do you think, are you talking about the way your voice sounds or the way you, the way...the words you choose to use?*
Keith	*Words, words I choosed to me*
Andrea	*Okay, so how are your words different then?*
Keith	*Um, I dunno, cause I sound different?*
Andrea	*How do you sound different Keith?*
Keith	*Like...*
Andrea	*Just relax*
Keith	*Like an Indian (laughter)*
Andrea	*You sound like an Indian?*
Keith	*I am an Indian*

Though Keith appears to struggle with some of the negative experiences his

family had while living on the reserve, he displays a very positive attitude towards

First Nations people, the population that he considers as his in-group despite his

outward appearance. It would seem that perhaps his in-group feeling used to be for

his white peers when he was living in Calgary but since his family's move to

Saskatchewan these feelings have been transferred to his First Nations peers.

Evidence of this shift can be seen in the following example:

Andrea:	So you preferred to have white friends when you lived in Calgary?
Keith:	Yep
Andrea:	And now who do you prefer to have as friends?
Keith:	Indian kids now
Andrea:	Yeah? How come? How come?
Keith:	Because they're gettin' nicer
Andrea:	They're nicer to you?
Keith:	Yeah
Andrea:	Yeah, cause here on your list you named Gary and John [as friends] cause they're both Indians, right?
Keith:	Yeah
Andrea:	So they're your friends?
Keith:	Yeah
Andrea:	What do you think has changed? Do you think that Indian kids are getting nicer or do you think you have changed?
Keith:	I think ah, I've changed to an Indian now
Andrea:	You're an Indian now?
Keith:	Yeah
Andrea:	How, what's different?
Keith:	No, I never been White kid. I was just born White [laughter]. That's funny

His perception of Indigenous English is also very positive which, again,

demonstrates a high collective self-esteem (Taylor & Wright, 1995). These feelings

are evident in the following example:

Andrea:	Before you told me that, you say that Indian and White people speak differently, they speak English differently, do you, do you think one is better than the other?
Keith:	Yep
Andrea:	Which one is better than the other?
Keith:	Indian speak
Andrea:	It's better than Engl, er, better than White?
Keith:	Yep
Andrea:	Yeah? How come?
Keith:	Because they sound better than white people

This exchange provides further support to the argument that Keith feels most

positively towards the First Nations people, the population that he evidently views as

his in-group.

5.3.2   Corey, Gary, John, Jason, and Caitlin

In terms of perceptions and attitudes towards language, the remaining children can be discussed as a group because, generally, they seem to share the same ideas regarding this subject. None of these children see any difference between the English of White people and First Nations people in Saskatchewan. I began by asking the children if everyone in the class speaks the same. They seemed to focus on the sound of voices and, in some cases, whether certain classmates used swear words. From there, I became more specific and asked them whether people, in Saskatchewan, speak English in different ways. Curiously, three of the six children told me that Chinese people speak Chinese, which is an odd response for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Saskatchewan is not a racially diverse province. Statistics Canada results from the 1996 census (www.statcan.ca/english) show that, at that time, Saskatchewan's population was 976,615. Of these people, 111,245 claimed aboriginal backgrounds, roughly 11%. Of the entire Saskatchewan population, 26,945 were from a visible minority group, indicating 3% of Saskatchewan's population. Of the visible minority group, 8830 people were of a Chinese ethnic background, approximately 1% of Saskatchewan's population. These numbers mean that, in 1996, 86% of Saskatchewan residents were White, 11% were First Nations, and 3% were visible minorities.

Secondly, the Chinese community in the children's own community consists of a handful of families. Their answers are probably explained by the presence of one of their classmates who is of Chinese ethnicity. Though she is a visible minority, this classmate was born in Canada and speaks Standard English. Caitlin went so far as to

claim that this student speaks English with a Chinese accent, which is simply not true. Their answers are also curious because I did not ask if other languages are spoken in Saskatchewan but, rather, if everyone speaks English in the same way.

None of these Indigenous or Standard English speakers seem able to discern, or at least verbalize, any differences in the way the two groups speak English. I believe this may be a question of their young age. I grew up as a Standard English speaking child in rural Saskatchewan. I know that, by early adolescence, my friends and I were aware of these differences. It may be the case that these children are still too young to notice the differences in the way the two groups speak English. It is perhaps because they cannot perceive these differences that they chose to focus on their classmate's ethnic background. It is because these five children seem completely oblivious to the differences that Keith's acute awareness of them is so interesting. It is plausible that Keith's experience of living in the large Standard English speaking city of Calgary, contrasted with his year spent on the Indigenous English speaking reservation of his grandfather, has permitted him to detect the differences between the two codes and, consequently, to begin to develop the ability to code-switch appropriately.

5.4   Summary

This chapter has examined the speech of the six children selected for this study. It is apparent that there exist differences between the English of the First Nations and White children in regards to lexical choices, non-standard syntax, as well as discourse features. Furthermore, in regards to discourse patterns, the analysis of

the average words per turn seems to indicate that the Indigenous English speaking children require an asymmetry in subject knowledge between interlocutors. Moreover, the use of silence and co-presence also seem to be integral aspects of Indigenous English.

Also examined in this chapter's discussion are the children's perceptions of the English spoken in Saskatchewan. Interestingly, with the exception of Keith, the children seem completely unaware of the differences that exist between the Indigenous and Standard English present in their classroom. These results, as well as their relationship to those of the previous chapter, provide an excellent framework for the final discussion.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1   Introduction

The previous chapters have presented descriptions of the children's family

backgrounds, school experiences, speech, and perceptions of speech. The discussion

of this final chapter will present a thorough synthesis of these findings. The areas of

discussion of this chapter include the relationship between Indigenous English and

academic achievement, the notion of institutional racism, and solutions and future

research in this field.

6.2   Indigenous English and Academic Achievement

Gary, Corey, Keith and John, the First Nations children of this study, are

dialect speakers of Indigenous English. Their English differs phonologically,

morphologically, syntactically, and lexically from the Standard English of the White

children in this study. The Indigenous English speaking children construct their

speech differently than do the Standard English speaking children. These differences

include: the use of multiple negation, lack of subject/verb agreement, the conjugation

of the verb *to be*, omission of function words, consonant cluster reduction and

stressed pronunciation of words ending in *ing*, variable pronunciation of words

beginning with *th*, lack of plural marking, omission of the possession marker *'s*,

conjugation of certain verbs (*came, became* and *upset*) in the past tense, and lexical

differences such as Gary's use of the verb *scrap*. These characteristics are mirrored

in studies conducted on American Indian English in the United States (Leap, 1974,

1993; Wolfram, 1984, 1986; Olson Flanigan, 1987; Schilling-Estes, 2000).

The present study also discovered pragmatic and discourse differences between Indigenous and Standard English. These differences include: the limited use of eye contact with Elders, the roles of silence and listening, narration, shared understanding, and asymmetry of knowledge. These characteristics are documented in the work of other researchers (Basso, 1970; Crago, 1992; Darnell, 1981; Piquemal, 2001; Preston, 1975). These differences became especially apparent during the analysis of the oral interview transcripts. Furthermore, it can be argued that these differences have the potential to affect classroom discourse between the Standard English speaking educators and the Indigenous English speaking children (Crago, 1992).

Being a speaker of Indigenous English within the Standard English school system affects these four children in a number of ways. First, it would seem to be interfering with the process of learning to read and write Standard English. All four of these boys are below grade level in English Language Arts. They follow modified programs and work with the resource room teacher on a regular basis. Corey has been removed from the Grade 3 classroom and relocated to the Adapted Learning Centre. Difficulties such as these are common to the experience of many dialect speakers of English (Roy, 1987; Wolfram et al., 1999). Success in Language Arts is often the determining factor in allowing children to progress to the next grade level.

The argument that these students' academic performance is affected by their dialect is supported by comments made by the Resource Room teacher. In our discussion of Corey, she described his struggles with: deleting the plural "s" when reading aloud, "taking words to the end", and hearing word endings and likenesses

between words. All of these concerns can be linked to characteristics of Indigenous English. Similarly, Gary's issues with phonics and errors made when reading aloud can also be attributed to interference from his dialect. This stance is further supported by the results of the CAT testing. His CAT portrait indicates average scores in most sections (3.2) with above average results in Math (4.2). In Reading, however, his score is only 2.5; his area of greatest difficulty is Dictation with a score of only 1.4. A low score such as this could be explained by his difficulty with phonics, a problem that I believe to result from being a dialect speaker of Indigenous English in a Standard English school system.

Furthermore, in the case of these children, lack of achievement in Language Arts leads them to be assigned to the low achievement group and to be seated, as such, in the classroom. I would argue that creating a ghetto of under-achievers is not an effective way to encourage the children and that it is probably having lasting negative effects on their self-esteem. Additionally, in a classroom of 22 students, it is not going to be unnoticed that six of the seven First Nations children are seated in the low achievement group. These images can only lead to the reinforcement of the negative stereotype, for both the Non- and First Nations students, that First Nations children are somehow "not as smart" as White children.

It is also important to state that these academic difficulties cannot simply be attributed to lack of parental involvement or differing cultural values regarding the importance of education. Often, these are the arguments used by educators to explain the low academic standings of First Nations children. The inaccuracy of this belief system is especially apparent in the case of Corey, one of the four First Nations

children. His parents are highly invested in his education and that of his siblings. This is evidenced by their decision to relocate the family in an effort to ensure a strong education for the children and the father's strong presence in the school community.

That these Indigenous English speaking children are not experiencing academic success is already apparent, even at their young age. Also apparent is that they are beginning to feel frustrated, and even apathetic, in terms of continuing to work towards goals that they never seem able to fully achieve. In Gary, Corey, Keith, and John, these feelings of underachievement manifest themselves in behavioural problems, self-esteem issues, incompletion of schoolwork, and the inability to remain on task. These children experience little academic success and that which they do is tainted by the fact they are following modified programs. This problem will only be compounded by the oncoming years that they will spend submersed in the Standard English School system.

Finally, I would like to make the argument that the differences in Gary, Corey, Keith, and John's pragmatic and discourse behaviour are affecting their experience in the classroom and the expectations of their classroom teacher. As teachers, we value participation in classroom activities (Crago, 1992). Children who are vocal and raise their hands to answer questions are seen as active and independent learners. Those who remain silent, particularly John, are perceived as not understanding the discussion or as not being interested in learning. A child's behaviour in the classroom affects the perceptions of his or her teacher. These perceptions influence

the teacher's expectations of the student, which, in turn, influence the performance of the child (Cecil, 1988; Ford, 1984).

6.3   Institutional Racism

The impact of teacher expectations of dialect speakers is also related to another reality of these children that influences their academic achievement, that of institutional racism. Cummins (2000) defines institutional racism as "ideologies and structures which are systematically used to legitimize unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of race" (p. 131). Fully examining the relationship between institutional racism and Canada's First Nations people would be a lengthy exploration. I will expand upon a number of previously mentioned instances where this phenomenon seemed especially apparent during this study.

I would like to state that these situations are not described with malice as I feel that the teachers, staff, and administrators at this school have positive intentions. Cummins (2000) states that "there is usually no intent to discriminate on the part of the educators; however; their interactions with minority students are mediated by a system of unquestioned assumptions that reflect the values and priorities of the dominant middle- class culture" (p. 132). I believe this to be the case in the context of this study.

The Community School Model creates a welcoming environment for First Nations children and their families. In theory, it would seem that this atmosphere could serve as a safe place for Gary, Corey, Keith, and John. The school in this study

has been recently designated as a Community School and, as such, extra funding is provided for a number of activities. While a transitional period is to be expected, it would seem that several areas of the Community School framework are being neglected in this school. First, as previously mentioned, the Community School Coordinator is a White American female with no experience in First Nations culture or education. This lack of experience limits her ability to effectively plan the cultural activities, which are meant to be an integral aspect of the Community School model.

Secondly, the school has only one First Nations employee, a teacher associate to whom the planning of all cultural activities is allocated. This is an insufficient representation of adult First Nations people and perpetuates the myth that the school system is the "White Man's world". In order to build on the Community School model, a school must hire Aboriginal people from the community to serve as role models for the children and as liaisons to families.

Thirdly, as is the case of all Community Schools, this school received funding to hire school Elders, both male and female, and to run cultural programs. The School principal claims that she is unable to find suitable candidates for the positions of Elders or those of cultural facilitators. Given the number of reservations in the area, the aboriginal population in the community, and the available school parents, this claim seems difficult to believe. In addition, the classroom teacher recounted that parents in the school community felt that, because there is more than one culture within the school population, the First Nations culture should not receive more attention than any other. This argument borders on racism and were the matter not so serious, it would seem almost absurd that members of the school community view

this as a valid point to be argued. Society celebrates and affirms the culture of the majority population every day, in all that takes place in life. Special programming is not needed to ensure the success of White children in society.

Another previously mentioned issue that I find disturbing is that John was made to repeat Kindergarten. This is not a common practice among schools and I question the necessity of this decision. Strangely, no record of any parent/teacher meetings is included in his cumulative file. Normally, the decision to retain a child involves a series of such meetings with the final decision being made by the parents and children. It is peculiar that school officials did not document this important process in this child's educational development.

Next, I would like to briefly discuss a comment that was made to me by the classroom teacher. This information was provided to me in an informal conversation regarding the specifics of my study. I do feel obligated to mention this comment in an effort to illuminate the experience of these First Nations children. The teacher in question inquired about the educational experiences of aboriginal people in Central and Eastern Canada. I explained that I am not knowledgeable about their experiences, having never taught in that area of the country. His next comment was that natives from that area of the country seem smarter to him when he sees them on television. He wondered if it is because they were originally a people who were more settled, had farmed, and built communities. He felt that this contrasted with the society of prairie natives, which had never developed to that level.

My reaction to this statement and his belief that the First Nations people of the prairies are lacking in intelligence are feelings of alarm, sadness, and shame. It

saddens me that these two groups of people have lived side by side since first contact and, yet, misunderstandings of serious magnitude continue to arise. My alarm stems from the knowledge that Gary, Corey, Keith, and John, and other Indigenous English speaking children, must navigate a multitude of challenges, both spoken and unspoken. Finally, I feel shame that the balance of power is so heavily weighted in favour of White Middle-class speakers of Standard English.

In this description of the educational reality of Gary, Corey, Keith, and John, one final aspect of institutional racism remains to be discussed, that of special needs education. In DIAND's 2002 report on education, the following recommendation regarding special needs education was made:

> Due to over-representation of First Nation students in special education programs in provincial and territorial schools, the quality and effectiveness of special education programs must be the subject of an immediate joint investigation to ensure First Nation learners are accurately identified and receiving effective and relevant support and remediation to ensure improved academic success in the long-term (p. 43)

I would argue that the First Nations children in this study were being incorrectly assessed in terms of special needs. Corey has been relocated to the Adapted Learning Centre, John and Keith regularly meet with the resource room teacher, and Gary works with the speech pathologist. While I believe that they require assistance in attaining grade level, I do not believe that it is due to any cognitive difficulties. I maintain, rather, that the teaching of reading and writing needs to include additional steps for these dialect speakers in an effort to make the differences between the two systems salient. This stance on the reading and writing learning process of dialect speaking children is supported by the work of other researchers in this field (Roy,

1987; Wolfram et al., 1999). Children who speak non-standard dialects do not

automatically become fluent in the standard variety of a language upon entering

school. This lack of fluency can cause interruptions and delays in their mastery of

subject matter (Blake & Van Sickle, 2001). Dialect speaking students require

instruction, encouragement, and support in order to perceive the differences between

the two systems (Roy, 1987).

6.4   Solutions and Future Research

Canada's Aboriginal people live in a society that racially discriminates against

them. Our denial of this reality, and our embarrassment at the situation, prevent us

from adequately examining the impact of these prevailing attitudes. In DIAND's

2002 report on education the recommendation was made that:

> Canada acknowledge that racism and discrimination directed at Aboriginal
> people is a national problem that must be addressed immediately. In
> particular, in light of the Statement of Reconciliation issued by the Minister of
> Indian Affairs and Northern Development on January 7, 1998, Canada, in
> cooperation with First Nations, must examine all departmental policies and
> practices to identify and eliminate those that are discriminatory or racist
> (p.49).

This report also argues that, "schools can play a pivotal role in transforming the

relationship between First Nations people and Canadian society. Schools must

actively oppose personal, institutional and systemic racism directed at First Nations

students, parents and teachers" (2002, p. 49). I would agree with these statements but

counter that the school administrators and teachers of this study are seemingly

unaware of the role that they can play in transforming this toxic relationship. A

thorough examination of this relationship, and the policies and practices that govern

it, is the first step to making the Standard English Education system a better place for Indigenous English speaking children.

Many aboriginal people in Canada speak a dialect of English, referred to in this study as Indigenous English. In the Prairies and the North, the two areas of Canada where the First Nations population is highest, this dialect is especially discernable. For the most part, it would seem that the Canadian people are unaware that the English spoken by many Aboriginal people is a dialect. The educators involved in this study do not consider it as such; this is an obstacle limiting the academic progress of Gary, Corey, Keith, and John. I believe that another essential step to improving the educational success for aboriginal people is the acknowledgement of Indigenous English as a dialect by government and educators.

Finally, there is a need for more research in the field of Indigenous English. Research in this area is limited to linguistic studies conducted in the United States. It is important to describe the characteristics of Indigenous English and there is certainly room for growth in this domain. More pressing, however, is the need to examine how best to improve the educational experience of these dialect speakers. Proposed solutions include teaching dialect speakers to read and write using the non-standard code, designing reading and writing programs to include additional steps for dialect speakers, teacher training, and dialect awareness courses for dialect speakers (Roy, 1987; Siegal, 1999; and Wolfram et al. 1999). While some of these designs, or even the combination of several, may be possible, not enough is known at this time and further research must be conducted.

The aboriginal population is growing at a rate of almost twice that of the Canadian national rate and for many reasons, all discussed in this study, the linguistic differences will not soon be levelled between Indigenous English and Standard English in the Prairie Provinces. Education is a basic right for all people living in Canada. The present school system is failing Indigenous English speakers and it is imperative that more research be conducted in an effort to discover viable solutions. It is my hope that my own PhD research will contribute to filling this unfortunate void.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Acceptability

MCGILL UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR
FUNDED AND NON FUNDED RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMANS

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│           Received              │
│                                 │
│         NOV 1 4 2002            │
│        McGill University        │
│        Faculty of Education     │
│   Associate Dean (Academic Programs, Graduate Studies and │
│   Research)                     │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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The Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee consists of 6 members appointed by the Faculty of Education Nominating Committee, an appointed member from the community and the Associate Dean (Academic Programs, Graduate Studies and Research) who is the Chair of this Ethics Review Board.

The undersigned considered the application for certification of the ethical acceptability of the project entitled:

A Study of Indigenous English Speakers in the Standard English Classroom.
as proposed by:

Applicant's Name _____ Andrea Sterzuk _____   Supervisor's Name _ Roy Lyster _

Applicant's Signature _____   Supervisor's Signature _____

Degree / Program / Course _ MA in Second Language Education _   Granting Agency _____

The application is considered to be:
A Full Review _____   An Expedited Review _____ X _____

A Renewal for an Approved Project _____   A Departmental Level Review _____
                                                                          Signature of Chair / Designate

The review committee considers the research procedures and practices as explained by the applicant in this application, to be acceptable on ethical grounds.

1. Prof. René Turcotte
   Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education

   Ken _____ Nov.18/02_
   Signature / date   Please see comment.

2. Prof. Ron Morris
   Department of Integrated Studies in Education

   Ron Morris   Nov.21/02
   Signature / date

3. Prof. Ron Stringer
   Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

   _____ Nov 25/02
   Signature / date

7. Member of the Community

   _____
   Signature / date

4. Prof. Kevin McDonough
   Department of Integrated Studies in Education

   _____
   Signature / date

5. Prof. Brian Alters
   Department of Integrated Studies in Education

   _____
   Signature / date

6. Prof. Ada Sinacore
   Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

   _____
   Signature / date

Mary H. Maguire Ph. D.
Chair of the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee
Associate Dean (Academic Programs, Graduate Studies and Research)
Faculty of Education, Room 230
Tel: (514) 398-7039/398-2183   Fax: (514) 398-1527

Mary Maguire   November 26, 2002
Signature / date

Appendix B: Parental Permission Letter

Dear Parents,

Andrea Sterzuk, a graduate student from McGill University, is conducting a research project in Community School classrooms in the X Public School Division. The study has been designed to study how children interact and communicate in the community school classroom. The results will be analysed and published in the form of a Master's thesis

The Grade 3 class of X School has been selected to participate in this study. This means that students will be asked to complete a questionnaire and may be asked to participate in an oral interview. In addition, some classroom activities may be tape-recorded.

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to have your child participate in the interviews and the completion of the questionnaires. The questionnaires will be used for research purposes only and will not be used by the school in the calculation of your child's marks. As is appropriate in such research studies, neither student names nor even that of the school will be reported. Finally, even if you agree to have your child participate, you or your child may decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

Please return to your Mr. X before December 20, 2002.

I will allow _____

-to participate in the questionnaires administered to the whole class.

Yes_____/No_____

-to be interviewed individually. Yes_____/No_____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Name : _____

<u>Participant Questionnaire</u>

1. Who do you like to play with at recess?

_____

_____

_____

2. Who do you like to work with in class?

_____

_____

_____

3. Who do you like to read books aloud with?

_____

_____

_____

4. Do you think you would make a good English teacher?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

5. Do you think you would make a good t.v. broadcaster?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

6. Do you speak the same way as everyone else in class?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

7. Are you are a good writer?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

8. Do you like it when your teacher calls on you in class?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

9. Do you like working on projects in small groups?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

10. Do you like to write stories?

    Sometimes   Always   Never

11. Do you like to read your stories out loud to the class?

Sometimes   Always   Never

12. Do you think that your teacher thinks you would make a good English teacher?

Maybe   Yes   No

13. Do you speak the same way at school as you do at home?

Sometimes   Always   Never

14. Do you like to read your stories out loud to a small group?

Sometimes   Always   Never

15.Does your family think that you are a good writer?

Sometimes   Always   Never

[seulement] rappelle le caractère «unique» de la nuit comme lieu de l'acte poétique. D'ailleurs, la nuit représente ici un moment d'extase : «alegría de naufragio» [joie de naufrage]. Ce n'est pas la nuit que le poète «a perdue» en écrivant, mais plutôt ses «journées» : «he querido sacrificar mis días y mis semanas / en las ceremonias del poema» [j'ai voulu sacrifier mes jours et mes semaines / dans les cérémonies du poème]. La nuit revêt donc ici un caractère davantage positif que négatif.

Dans un poème manuscrit du 14 avril 1970, «Casa de la mente» [Maison de l'esprit] (*Poesía completa* 355), on peut constater l'emprise de la nuit sur Pizarnik. En fait, la nuit est tellement importante qu'elle a le dernier mot. Elle n'est pas seulement un instant ou un espace, mais carrément un personnage. En effet, elle y est identifiée à une musique tangible, visible et bien vivante : «nuevo orden musical / de colores de cuerpos de excedentes / de formas pequeñas / que se mueven gritan dicen nunca» [un nouvel ordre musical / de couleurs de corps d'excédents / de petites formes / qui bougent crient disent jamais]. Tout comme ce «nouvel ordre musical», la nuit prononce le mot «jamais» : «dice nunca». Force créatrice, la nuit ne se tait pas, elle parle, agit, donne naissance tant au poète qu'au poème : «la noche me pronuncia / en un poema» [la nuit me prononce / dans un poème]. La nuit, en nommant le poète, lui donne une place dans le poème, lui donne le droit d'exister. Dans «En esta noche, en este mundo» aussi, la nuit est reine du poème, mais elle choisit cette fois de se taire : «extraordinario silencio el de esta noche» [extraordinaire silence celui de cette nuit]. La nuit ne permet donc pas au poète d'habiter ce poème.

2.3. *La foi du poète*

Nous avons vu que la nuit est un moment privilégié de réflexion. Il s'agit aussi d'un moment de solitude, de recueillement. En fait, «En esta noche, en este mundo» ressemble étrangement à une prière. Non seulement les répétitions de vers lui prêtent un air d'incantation[86], mais certains symboles ramènent

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[86] Les formulations suivantes font l'effet de refrains entonnés en chœur (et par cœur) par les fidèles à la messe : «en esta noche, en este mundo», «¡oh quédate un poco más entre nosotros!», «ayúdame a escribir».

inévitablement au monde religieux, plus précisément au catholicisme[87]. D'abord, le poète utilise le mot «resurrección» pour se référer à l'incapacité de la langue de faire vivre ou rendre réels les objets qu'elle nomme. Or, la résurrection de Jésus forme la base de la religion catholique. Ensuite, le pain est synonyme du «corps du Christ» dans l'iconographie catholique. Enfin, les concepts «alma» [âme] et «espíritu» [esprit] renvoient directement au «Saint-Esprit», dernière pointe du signe de croix. Il convient de constater la critique sous-jacente aux termes mentionnés : il n'y a pas de résurrection possible («nada es promesa» [rien n'est promesse]); il est improbable que prononcer le mot «pain» le fasse apparaître; l'âme et l'esprit refusent de se faire voir, de confirmer leur présence («conspiración de invisibilidades» [conspiration d'invisibilités]). On dirait presque que le poème représente un genre de «profession de perte de foi» d'un «Thomas» qui aurait besoin de voir pour croire une fois pour toutes. Paradoxalement, le poème finit sur une supplication : le poète prie, demande de l'aide, ce qui suggère qu'il veut avoir la foi ou pense en avoir besoin pour pouvoir continuer à écrire.

«En esta noche, en este mundo» n'est pas le seul poème où apparaît un «je lyrique» criant au secours, un poète dont la seule issue reste la prière et la foi en sa réalisation. Dans «Solamente las noches» traité plus haut, l'acte d'écrire est identifié à celui de «demander» et à celui de «perdre» : «escribiendo / he pedido, he perdido» [en écrivant / j'ai demandé (prié), j'ai perdu]. D'une part, l'acte d'écrire un poème est perçu comme un geste de tendresse et d'amour, d'intense communion avec un interlocuteur – que ce soit la langue, le lecteur ou soi-même : «abrazada a vos» [dans tes bras]. D'autre part, ce moment d'osmose peut faire en sorte que le poète perde son individualité ou l'unité de sa personne[88]. En effet, le poète tend à s'abandonner au bonheur que lui procure cette union, cette étreinte,

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[87] Bien que Pizarnik elle-même ait été juive, il ne faut pas oublier qu'elle vivait en Argentine, un pays où l'Église catholique jouissait d'une très grande influence.

[88] «En esta noche, en este mundo» décrivait aussi le danger de fragmentation du «je» lors du processus d'écriture : «Mi persona está herida / mi primera persona del singular».

se laisse même volontairement dériver sans but : «alegría de naufragio» [joie de naufrage].

Rédiger un poème relève donc ici aussi du domaine sacré, religieux : il s'agit de rites où le poète doit être prêt à immoler son temps : «he querido sacrificar mis días y mis semanas / en las ceremonias del poema» [j'ai voulu sacrifier mes jours et mes semaines / dans les cérémonies du poème]. Écrire est acte de recueillement et d'humilité : le poète doit descendre en lui-même et supplier qu'on l'aide : «he implorado tanto / desde el fondo de los fondos / de mi escritura» [j'ai tant imploré / depuis le fond des fonds / de mon écriture]. Trop souvent, il risque de prier en vain, puisqu'il ne reçoit aucune réponse à sa prière : «Coger y morir no tienen adjetivos» [Prendre/baiser et mourir n'ont pas d'adjectifs]. À première vue, il n'y a en effet aucun adjectif dans le poème. Aucun mot n'arrive à qualifier ce que vit le poète, ni l'union (coger) ni le sacrifice (morir). Cela signifie-t-il que le poète croit en vain, que son entreprise est vouée à l'échec? Peut-être pas : bien qu'aucun adjectif ne lui soit venu en aide, quelques substantifs et verbes ont suffi à communiquer au lecteur l'état d'âme du poète. Après tout, le sujet de «En esta noche, en este mundo», qui ne croyait pas non plus être en mesure d'écrire des «mots», a malgré tout réussi à en prononcer pas moins de 334, faisant de ce poème en vers un des plus longs de l'œuvre pizarnikienne.

Rédigé en 1971, la même année que «En esta noche en este mundo», le poème «no, la verdad no es la música» [non, la vérité n'est pas la musique] (*Poesía completa* 431) présente également un sujet qui sacrifie son temps pour le poème : «yo, triste espera de una palabra / que nombre lo que busco» [moi, triste attente d'un mot / qui nomme ce que je cherche]. On peut remarquer ici aussi de fortes allusions aux croyances religieuses : «no el nombre de la deidad / no el nombre de los nombres» [pas le nom de la déité / pas le nom des noms][89]. Bien que l'objet de sa quête ne soit pas «Dieu» proprement dit, l'absolu auquel aspire le poète requiert une foi tout aussi gratuite que peut l'être la foi religieuse. Même

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[89] Le «nom des noms» est synonyme de Dieu dans le vocabulaire judéo-chrétien.

confronté à ses propres doutes, aux non-croyants en lui qui tentent de le décourager, le poète ne perd pas confiance pour autant «Te dimos todo lo necesario para que comprendieras / y preferiste la espera, / como si todo te anunciase el poema» [Nous t'avons donné tout le nécessaire pour que tu comprennes / et tu as préféré l'attente, / comme si tout t'annonçait le poème]. Même si sa destination est probablement inatteignable, le poète s'entête à avancer, scrutant l'horizon : ([el poema] que nunca escribirás porque es un jardín inaccesible / - sólo vine a ver el jardín[90] -)» [le poème que tu n'écriras jamais car c'est un jardin inaccessible / - je suis juste venue voir le jardin]. Le chemin parcouru importe autant, sinon plus, que le but. Finalement, le poète n'est pas aussi passif qu'il ne le pense. En vérité, il fait plus qu'attendre : il cherche le jardin que ses yeux grand ouverts espèrent voir.

Dans «En esta noche, en este mundo», «Solamente las noches» et «no, la verdad no es la música», le poète doit faire appel à une force suprême. En effet, il croit que le résultat de sa quête de vérité ne dépend pas que de sa bonne volonté. Comme il n'est pas le seul artisan de son avenir et ne contrôle pas le degré de sollicitude de son sauveur, il est normal qu'il se sente castré, impuissant. Il y a tout un mystère qui entoure la création d'un poème, une longue nuit d'obscurité dans laquelle le poète ne peut avancer qu'à tâtons. Accepter (et même accueillir) ses handicaps est une condition nécessaire à son cheminement dans l'écriture. Il doit faire preuve d'une grande humilité et être prêt à supplier qu'on l'aide en faisant confiance qu'un jour on entendra sa prière et que sa nuit prendra fin.

2.4. *La trinité poétique*

À l'image de la religion catholique, la poésie est souvent constituée chez Pizarnik de trois principes sacrés qui semblent intimement reliés : le langage

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[90]«Pizarnik le confiesa a Moia [...] que siempre ha estado obsesionada por la frase '- Sólo vine a ver el jardín' que dice Alicia en el país de las maravillas» [Pizarnik confie à Moia qu'elle a toujours été obsédée par la phrase '- je suis seulement venue voir le jardin' que dit Alice au pays des merveilles] (Caulfield 9).

(nommons-le ici le «verbe» ou le *logos*), le sexe (*eros*) et la mort (*thanatos*)[91].
Tout au long de son aventure poétique, le «je lyrique» pizarnikien met ces trois
forces en interaction dans l'espoir de créer un lieu réel (et non fictif) où il pourrait
physiquement exister, vivre : «Traducirse en palabras es la tentación suprema del
sujeto poético» [Se traduire en mots est la tentation suprême du sujet poétique]
(Evangelista 47). Ces trois principes sont tellement indissociables qu'on les
retrouve parfois réunis dans un même vers, comme en fait foi la dernière ligne de
«Solamente las noches» : «Coger [*eros*] y morir [*thanatos*] no tienen adjetivos
[*logos*]». Le *logos* apparaît ici comme la pointe médiane entre *eros* et *thanatos*,
puisque ces deux derniers sont reliés par la conjonction de coordination «y» [et] et
que le mot «adjetivos» [adjectifs] se réfère tant à l'un qu'à l'autre. Dans «En esta
noche, en este mundo», la strophe consacrée au triangle suggère également une
hiérarchie ou une chronologie entre les concepts :

> los deterioros de las palabras
> deshabitando el palacio del lenguaje [*logos*]
> el conocimiento entre las piernas
> ¿qué hiciste del don del sexo? [*eros*]
> oh mis muertos [*thanatos*]

> [les détériorations des mots / déshabitant le palais du
> langage / la connaissance entre les jambes / qu'as-tu
> fait du don du sexe? / oh mes morts]

Le langage chapeaute à nouveau le sexe et la mort, laissant sur eux son empreinte
indélébile. Voyons ces trois pointes du triangle poétique de façon à mieux
comprendre la poétologie exprimée dans «En esta noche, en este mundo».

2.4.1. Logos : *une maison dans la tête*

Il n'est pas rare que Pizarnik identifie la langue à un lieu où se réfugier, où
habiter : «More than a talisman, the poetic word for Pizarnik is the very roof
under which she dwells or even 'mi única patria' [my only homeland]»
(Nicholson 166). Dans son œuvre, plusieurs symboles font étrangement écho à

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[91] À ce propos, il est intéressant de mentionner que Pizarnik identifie justement la poésie, «el lugar
donde todo sucede» [le lieu ou tout se produit], à l'amour et au suicide, trois actes qu'elle
considère «profundamente subversivo[s]» [profondément subversifs] («El poeta y su poema» 67).

Martin Heidegger et à sa théorie de «Sprache als Haus des Seins» [langage comme maison de l'être][92] : «Lo que protege puede ser una 'pared', un 'jardín', una 'casa', una 'choza' o un 'palacio', según el grado de seguridad o de inseguridad que Pizarnik delate en su relación con el lenguaje» [Ce qui protège peut être un 'mur', un 'jardin', une 'maison', une 'mansarde' ou un 'palais', selon le degré de sécurité ou d'insécurité que Pizarnik trahit dans sa relation avec le langage] (Lasarte 874). Néanmoins, l'apparente image de «sécurité» ou «d'insécurité» de ces symboles peut parfois être trompeuse.

Dans «En esta noche, en este mundo», on retrouve la métaphore du «palacio del lenguaje» [palais du langage]. Normalement, un palais est richement décoré, plein de trésors; c'est le siège de la cour royale, un village habité par des souverains, des courtisans, des serviteurs. Au contraire, le «palais» de Pizarnik est en ruines. Il fait sombre et humide dans les «corridors noirs» et «visqueux» du palais délabré, où le seul trésor caché n'est ni une couronne ni un joyau, mais plutôt la «pierre de la folie». Ses seuls habitants, les mots, sont «détériorés», en voie de décomposition. «Invisibles», ils hantent le château plus qu'ils n'y vivent, le «déshabitent». Ceux qui y restent sont condamnés à mort : «muselés», ils seront tous jetés à l'encre, «la liquéfaction noire». Loin d'être accueillant, ce palais-fantôme inspire la peur. Le langage ne constitue donc pas le refuge rassurant qu'il prétendait être et dont le poète a tant besoin.

Le poème «Casa de la mente», rédigé un an avant «En esta noche, en este mundo», présente un contraste intéressant, car il définit le langage comme une «maison de l'esprit» en «rénovation». En effet, l'adjectif «reconstruida» implique une destruction préalable. Le poète voit petit : il veut bâtir une modeste maison plutôt qu'un opulent palais. Il prend son temps pour la construire étape par étape. D'abord les fondations, les lettres, puis les murs, les mots : «[...] letra por letra / palabra por palabra». La terre sur laquelle repose la maison manque toutefois de solidité : «en mi doble figura de papel» [sur ma double figure de papier]. L'esprit du poète est instable, car le papier est un matériau bien mince, friable, transparent,

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[92] Voir à ce sujet le chapitre de revue de littérature sur Ingeborg Bachmann.

bidimensionnel, qui manque de profondeur. De plus, l'adjectif «double» suggère que la «figure» en question a deux faces, manque d'unité. La légèreté de la maison de papier a pourtant un grand avantage : elle lui donne la possibilité de «traverser la mer d'encre». En comparaison, le palais de «En esta noche, en este mundo» est trop lourd : il s'écroule et sombre dans «la negra licuefacción». La «maison de l'esprit» était une image simple et viable qui traduisait un changement positif dans la tête du poète : «[...] dar una nueva forma / a un nuevo sentimiento». Le «je lyrique» avait foi en les mots et gardait espoir d'habiter une nuit au cœur de son texte : «la noche me pronuncia / en un poema» [la nuit me prononce / dans un poème]. Le poète de «En esta noche, en este mundo» a vu sa folie des grandeurs, son «palais du langage», s'écrouler sous ses yeux.

2.4.2. Eros : *la plume entre les jambes*

L'esprit et le corps sont intimement liés dans la poésie de Pizarnik, qui parle souvent du langage en employant des images érotiques : «En efecto, para Pizarnik la experiencia de lo absoluto sería una combinación de goce sensual, éxtasis místico y placer estético» [En effet, pour Pizarnik l'expérience de l'absolu serait une combinaison de jouissance sensuelle, extase mystique et plaisir esthétique] (Lasarte 872). À l'endroit des organes sexuels du «je lyrique» de «En esta noche, en este mundo» se trouve justement «el conocimiento» [la connaissance], le savoir. Or, nous lisons dans la première strophe que la langue est «órgano de conocimiento» [organe de connaissance]. Pizarnik met ici à profit la double signification intrinsèque du mot «langue» : langage et muscle de la bouche. Le premier est un moyen de communication verbale; le second, de communication sensorielle. Autrement dit, en tant que partie du corps, la langue est un moyen d'explorer le monde. Elle permet d'émettre des sons, de détecter des saveurs, de caresser un autre être. En ce sens, une langue dit en mots ce que l'autre peut transmettre, par exemple, au moyen d'un baiser. L'une reconnaît aux sons ce que l'autre reconnaît au toucher ou au goût. Voilà pourquoi elle est aussi «órgano de re-conocimiento» [organe de re-connaissance].

En outre, le poème nous dit que la langue est «órgano de re-creación» [organe de re-création]. D'un côté, le fait que le préfixe «re» soit en retrait, séparé

du reste du mot par un trait d'union, souligne la fonction mimétique de la langue, sa capacité de créer «à nouveau» la «création», de l'évoquer en la nommant. D'un autre côté, ce procédé visuel attire l'attention sur un brillant jeu de mot, puisque le verbe «recrear» peut effectivement être traduit de deux façons : soit par «recréer», soit par «récréer» (amuser, divertir) (*Grand Dictionnaire Larousse* 689). Le poète fait appel à la fonction «récréative» de la langue, qui peut ici à son tour être investie d'un double sens : le langage qui amuse grâce à des figures de style, des calembours; la langue qui excite le corps de l'autre de ses caresses. Une chose est sûre : la langue a clairement le potentiel de générer le plaisir, qu'il soit intellectuel ou charnel.

Dans ce poème, la langue «natale» est toutefois loin d'être plaisante : elle «castre». Elle a enlevé le pouvoir reproducteur, créatif, des organes génitaux du «je lyrique», le rendant stérile, infertile : il a perdu le «don du sexe». Celui-ci n'a donc plus que la plume et l'encre, une «voix lyrique», entre les deux jambes. Le poète rêve de faire l'amour avec les mots, mais doit se rendre à l'évidence : «no / las palabras / no hacen el amor / hacen la ausencia» [non / les mots / ne font pas l'amour / ils font l'absence]. À la fois, les mots charment et déçoivent, promettent et trahissent : «Las palabras [...] constatan la presencia del deseo y la ausencia de su objeto» [Les mots constatent la présence du désir et l'absence de son objet] (Malpartida 40). Cette absence du «don du sexe» constitue en quelque sorte une forme de «mort» : «oh mis muertos» [oh mes morts].

2.4.3. Thanatos : *le poète nécrophile/nécrophage*

Dans l'iconographie pizarnikienne, la mort est un véritable *leitmotiv* : «Pizarnik seems to be writing, always, against or toward death» (Chávez Silvermann 206). Jacobo Sefamí va même jusqu'à avancer que la mort constitue la «metáfora principal de la obra de Pizarnik» [métaphore principale de l'œuvre de Pizarnik] (Sefamí 112). Dans le présent poème, la mort est «prononcée» dès le deuxième vers, dernier maillon d'une énumération de mots qui entretiennent, ainsi

dépourvus de virgules, une relation d'appartenance : «las palabras del sueño de la infancia de la muerte»[93].

D'abord, le mot «sueño» provient du monde de la nuit, dont nous avons plus haut souligné l'importance. En outre, «sueño» signifie à la fois «sommeil» et «rêve». Cela suggère que le poète se réfère tant aux mots de la fatigue (désespoir) qu'à ceux du désir (espoir). Quant au mot «infancia» [94], il peut également être interprété de deux façons : au sens propre comme «l'enfance», le début de la vie ou l'innocence de l'âge; ou au figuré comme un «commencement», en l'occurrence le début de la mort. En fait, le poète est ambivalent face à la mort : il la craint et la désire, la veut en même temps passive (endormie) et active (rêveuse). Qu'il s'agisse des mots de la torpeur ou de ceux du fantasme d'une mort-enfant, retenons qu'il est avant tout question de «mots», de langage.

Le «je lyrique» affirmait précédemment être blessé («mi persona está herida») et ressentait le besoin d'écrire «como quien con un cuchillo alzado en la oscuridad» [comme avec un couteau levé dans l'obscurité], ou pour se défendre ou pour s'auto-mutiler. Or, une blessure peut causer la mort. L'acte d'écrire implique donc le danger de mourir. Plus loin dans le poème, on constate que la mort n'est justement pas étrangère au poète, mais qu'elle lui appartient : «oh mis muertos» [95] [oh mes morts]. La «voix lyrique» n'évoque pas n'importe quels défunts, mais les siens propres, les parties d'elle qui ont cessé de vivre.[96] Non seulement elle interpelle ses morts, mais elle va même jusqu'à les avaler : «me los comí» [je les mangeai]. Le «je lyrique» essaie de se nourrir, de s'inspirer des

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[93] Comme la ponctuation est plutôt rare dans le poème, on peut toutefois envisager que ces mots pourraient s'additionner : «las palabras del sueño», «las palabras de la infancia», «las palabras de la muerte».

[94] Le thème de l'enfance est omniprésent et presque toujours à connotation négative dans l'œuvre de Pizarnik, où il évoque généralement un sentiment de solitude, souffrance et nostalgie : «Though she writes a great deal about childhood, it is never comfortable, safe or pleasant, but always a time of fear, the moment of her realization of the terrors of living in the world» (Bassnett 132).

[95] Il se peut que ces «morts» représentent les «mots qui font l'absence» ou ceux qui, «muselés», se sont noyés dans l'encre.

[96] En outre, rappelons-nous que le poète «sacrifiait ses jours» dans les «cérémonies du poème» dans «Solamente las noches», un texte qui présente plusieurs analogies avec «En esta noche, en este mundo».

morts, de les intégrer à même son corps, mais il est boulimique : il mange trop et trop vite. Il se rend malade : «me atraganté» [je m'étouffai]. Ainsi gavé de ses morts, le poète s'étouffe et a mal au cœur : «no puedo más de no poder más» [je n'en peux plus de n'en plus pouvoir]. Il est arrivé à un cul-de-sac : il veut goûter à la mort sans mourir, et cela relève de l'impossible.

2.4.4. *Vivre de sa plume*

En définitive, *logos*, *eros* et *thanatos* ne font qu'un : *poesis*. Le «je lyrique», amoureux du langage, s'investit corps et âme dans l'aventure poétique. D'abord, il cherche un refuge intellectuel dans la langue : il empile les mots comme des briques pour se rebâtir une «maison mentale» en espérant qu'elle résistera au déluge d'encre, mais il finit par construire un palais qui tombe vite en abandon : «Ultimately she cannot conceive of language or poetry as a dwelling; far from a foundation, it acts as a quicksand [...]» (García Moreno 82). Cependant, la «connaissance» des mots n'est pas seulement dans l'esprit, dans la tête du poète, mais aussi entre ses jambes. Malheureusement, les mots ne répondent pas au désir physique qu'ils génèrent, puisqu'ils ne remplacent pas un corps humain. Ils «font l'absence» et enlèvent au poète le «don du sexe» : «En vez de crear una plenitud de índole erótico-mística, la palabra poética produce un vacío y forma una impenetrable barrera entre el ser y el nombre» [Au lieu de créer une plénitude de nature érotico-mystique, le mot poétique produit un vide et forme une barrière impénétrable entre l'être et le nom] (Lasarte 871). Toutes les facettes de son être en sont affectées : le «je lyrique» (grammatical et réel) est blessé. À chaque échec, le poète en meurt un peu. De la même façon qu'il désirait s'unir aux mots en leur «faisant l'amour», il veut faire un avec ses morts en les mangeant, mais s'étouffe : il n'est pas prêt à perdre la vie. L'expression «vivre de sa plume» prend ici une toute nouvelle signification : continuer à écrire équivaut à la tentative d'habiter le langage, de s'unir à lui, de vivre et mourir un peu avec lui : «no se trata de escribir sino de ser la escritura» [il ne s'agit pas d'écrire mais d'être l'écriture] (Aronne-Amestoy 231).

2.5. *La voie du silence*

Le poète de «En esta noche, en este mundo» est en conflit avec le langage. Il l'aime et le hait à la fois, le renie et l'appelle à l'aide à l'intérieur d'un même poème. Le langage est mensonger, imparfait : il ne crée qu'un semblant de vérité. Les chemins du poème, pavés de bonnes intentions, ne mènent qu'au mensonge. Dans de telles conditions, il ne reste plus au poète qu'à attendre un miracle, aussi improbable soit-il : «el resto es silencio / sólo que el silencio no existe» [le reste est silence / sauf que le silence n'existe pas].

Loin d'être tu ou inexistant, le silence est nommé à trois reprises dans le poème. Or, «[l]a tendencia a dar voz al silencio, a enunciar su existencia por medio de palabras, representa la aspiración fundamental de la poesía de Alejandra Pizarnik» [la tendance à donner la parole au silence, à énoncer son existence au moyen de mots, représente l'aspiration fondamentale de la poésie de Alejandra Pizarnik] (Soncini 7). La fascination que Pizarnik voue au silence est néanmoins ambiguë. En fait, la relation qu'elle entretient avec lui est tout aussi complexe que celle qu'elle entretient avec le langage : «on the one hand, silence is the desired object of her writing [...]. But, on the other hand, the purpose of writing [...] is to defeat silence [...]» (García Moreno 82-83). Les différents silences de «En esta noche, en este mundo» valent donc ici la peine d'être examinés de plus près.

2.5.1. *Silences impossibles?*

À la fin de la première strophe, le poète affirme que tout ce qui se dit est mensonge et que «el resto es silencio» [le reste est silence]. Faut-il en conclure que le non-dit, le tu ou le silence représentent obligatoirement la vérité? Si tel est le cas, le problème du poète n'est pas réglé, puisque : «el silencio no existe» [le silence n'existe pas]. En fait, trois choses paraissent à première vue relever de l'impossible dans «En esta noche, en este mundo» : le silence («[...] el silencio no existe»), la sincérité absolue («la sinceridad absoluta continuaría siendo / lo imposible») et le poème («[...] todo es posible / salvo / el poema»). Ce parallèle dans les formulations crée entre les trois concepts une relation d'équivalence, suggérant que le poème idéal représenterait à la fois le silence et la vérité. Cette

supposition semble être renforcée par l'affirmation suivante que Pizarnik faisait en entrevue :

> Creo que la pregunta ¿Qué es para usted la poesía? merece una u otra de estas dos respuestas : el silencio o un libro que relate una aventura no poco terrible : la de alguien que parte a cuestionar el poema, la poesía, lo poético; a abrazar el cuerpo del poema; a verificar su poder encantatorio, exaltante, revolucionario, consolador.
>
> [Je crois que la question 'Qu'est-ce pour vous que la poésie?' mérite l'une ou l'autre de ces deux réponses : le silence ou un livre qui relate une aventure pas peu terrible : celle de quelqu'un qui part à questionner le poème, la poésie, le poétique; à embrasser le corps du poème; à vérifier son pouvoir enchanteur, exaltant, révolutionnaire, consolateur] (Pizarnik citée dans Tamargo 36).

Le poème devrait donc bel et bien être, selon Pizarnik, à la fois un silence et une recherche de vérité, une remise en question de l'ordre préétabli des choses. Cette affirmation souligne l'importance du questionnement plutôt que celle de la réponse ou du but à atteindre. D'ailleurs, la complexité de l'entreprise poétique semble en soit prédire son improbabilité : le silence pur ne peut ni se dire ni s'écrire; le poème ne peut être réellement «embrassé»; la poésie est irréelle. Pas étonnant que le poète qualifie un tel poème-silence-vérité de texte «superflu» : à quoi sert au poète de laisser parler par eux-mêmes silence et vérité, si son office consiste justement à leur voler la parole en rédigeant des mots, en inventant des fictions? En fait, le rôle du poète consiste davantage à aspirer au silence, à tendre vers la vérité, plutôt qu'à vraiment atteindre l'un ou l'autre.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, les formulations de «En esta noche, en este mundo» renferment des éléments qui nous permettent de douter du degré d'impossibilité des trois concepts. En effet, le poète place dans son texte une série d'indices qui ébranlent la solidité de ses convictions : soit le poète se contredit lui-même, soit il donne à ses affirmations un air d'hypothèse, soit il permet une double interprétation de ses propos. D'abord, le poète commence par nous dire

que «le reste est silence», puis il affirme que le silence «n'existe pas», mais admet deux strophes plus loin la présence d'un silence «extraordinaire» dans la nuit de son poème. Ensuite, le poète utilise le mode conditionnel – «continuaría» [continuerait] au lieu de «continúe siendo» [continue d'être] – pour se référer à la sincérité absolue, comme s'il mettait une condition à l'impossibilité de son existence. Enfin, le mot «salvo» suggère peut-être deux interprétations contradictoires par rapport au poème soit-disant «impossible». En effet, le choix d'isoler le mot sur une ligne et l'absence de ponctuation dans la strophe permettent deux lectures :

1. tout est possible / **sauf** / le poème
2. tout est possible / **je sauve** / le poème

Dans le premier cas, on lit «salvo» comme une conjonction qui exclut le poème du «tout» possible et on en conclut que le poème n'existera jamais (un peu comme le silence). Dans le second, on lit «salvo» comme conjugaison du verbe «salvar» [sauver] à la première personne du singulier, et on suppose que le poète, empreint de la confiance (ou du rêve) que «tout» est possible, tentera de «rescaper» le poème de la mort. Cela ne signifie pas pour autant que le poème sera «possible», mais implique que le poète essaiera de l'écrire quand même. Les deux options sont viables, surtout si on considère le vers qui suit, également composé d'un seul verbe conjugué à la première personne du singulier : «hablo». Selon la logique ici tracée, ni la vérité, ni le poème, ni le silence ne sont complètement impossibles : le poète laisse la porte ouverte à leur réalisation éventuelle (même si elle est plutôt improbable).

2.5.2. *Silences possibles*

Certes, le poète ne peut écrire tout seul sans l'aide de la langue, mais il n'a pas pour autant tout à fait perdu la voix et est même incapable de se taire. Toutefois, bien que ce poème regorge de mots, il compte aussi certains «trous», des manques visibles et audibles que le poète a choisi de ne pas combler[97]. Au

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[97] D'ailleurs, le silence – ou l'absence de mots, qui eux-mêmes «font l'absence» – devrait constituer une présence.

niveau grammatical, le poète élimine presque tous les signes de ponctuations impliquant des silences : aucune virgule, aucun point n'y sont marqués. Seuls une parenthèse et quelques points d'interrogation[98] et d'exclamation, parsemés avec parcimonie, confèrent à leur interruption du discours un poids encore plus important. En fait, le poème fait l'effet d'un discours effréné où des cascades de mots alternent avec des reprises de souffle nécessaires, représentées par les coupures sèches entre des vers aux enjambements parfois forcés ainsi que par les lignes vides entre les strophes.

Graphiquement, le poète isole certains mots, certains vers, leur donnant ainsi une voix qui, au milieu du silence, les fait retentir beaucoup plus fort. Par exemple, «no», «sombras», «salvo», «hablo» forment de très courts vers contrastant avec le reste; les strophes de deux ou trois vers (5e, 8e, 9e) se distinguent elles aussi des autres par leur brièveté. Vers la fin du poème, on retrouve même deux vers en retrait – «el que no sirva ni para / ser inservible» [celui qui ne serve ni même / à être inutile] –, comme si le poète avait besoin de bien réfléchir et de respirer profondément avant de les prononcer. Il va sans dire que nommer à haute voix le silence ou écrire le mot «silence» empêche ce dernier d'exister vraiment. En revanche, montrer le silence concrètement à l'aide de procédés grammaticaux ou visuels lui permet de briller de tous ses feux.

2.5.3. *Silences extraordinaires*

Sans doute, le poète vise juste lorsqu'il qualifie d'«extraordinaire» le silence présent dans «En esta noche, en este mundo». Toute l'ambivalence qu'il peut ressentir face au silence est exprimé dans l'adjectif «extraordinaire». Au sens propre, «extraordinaire» signifie «qui n'est pas selon l'usage ordinaire» (*Nouveau Petit Robert* 873). Le silence de ce poème déroge effectivement à l'ordre normal des choses, puisqu'il ne devrait théoriquement pas «exister», si on en croit les dires du poète. Or, le silence est inséré un peu partout dans le poème, tant au niveau thématique que formel.

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[98] En outre, les questions qu'on pose dans le poème sont rhétoriques : elles n'appellent pas de réponse, mais invitent au silence.

Au sens figuré, «extraordinaire» qualifie ce qui «suscite la surprise ou l'admiration par sa rareté, sa singularité» (*Nouveau Petit Robert* 873). Ainsi, sa présence étonne le poète, le fascine et lui fait peur à la fois. En plus de se retrouver au beau milieu de «mots invisibles», le poète est confronté à des mots «inaudibles». Après avoir perdu la vue, il perd l'ouïe. Il doit donc se servir de ses autres sens pour se guider dans les «corridors noirs» du poème, tâter les «enceintes visqueuses», goûter «ses morts» et surtout parler et, malgré le fait que lui-même n'entende plus sa propre voix, espérer que quelqu'un entende sa prière.

2.6. *Synthèse*

«En esta noche, en este mundo» présente deux mouvements contradictoires : la révolte du poète martyrisé contre son bourreau, la langue, et la contrition du poète pénitent qui désire ardemment continuer à écrire (et à vivre). Il est clair que le «je lyrique» vit de paradoxes : il se croit incapable d'écrire mais produit des poèmes; il ne peut écrire que la nuit mais la nuit lui fait peur; il veut faire l'amour mais en est physiquement incapable; il a le goût de la mort mais ne peut la digérer. En pleine crise d'identité, le poète n'a aucune liberté d'action : castré par sa propre langue («mi persona está herida»), il doit avaler sa défaite («mis muertos») et crier au secours s'il veut survivre («ayúdame»).

Ce va-et-vient entre le désespoir profond et l'urgence de la foi caractérise non seulement «En esta noche, en este mundo», mais toute l'œuvre de Alejandra Pizarnik. En définitive, la poésie pizarnikienne s'enracine dans la tension entre le mot et son absence : «En el punto exacto de la contradicción entre la herida de la separación ontólogica y la búsqueda de la palabra total, se constituye su poética, que oscilará, dolorosamente, entre el decir y la voluntad de silencio» [Sa poésie se constitue au point exact de la contradiction entre la blessure de séparation ontologique et la recherche du mot total et elle oscillera, douloureusement, entre la parole et la volonté de silence] (Evangelista 46). Avec les années, il est vrai que la poète doute de plus en plus de sa capacité à écrire : «en sus últimos poemas Alejandra Pizarnik se va rindiendo gradualmente al lenguaje, más poderoso que ella» [dans ses derniers poèmes Alejandra Pizarnik se rend graduellement au

langage, plus puissant qu'elle] (Lasarte, 874). Cependant, l'auteure n'a jamais vraiment abandonné sa quête poétique. Elle a d'ailleurs écrit jusqu'à la toute fin, comme en témoigne le dernier poème qu'elle a laissé sur le tableau de sa chambre le jour de son suicide, «criatura en plegaria» [créature en prière] (*Poesía completa* 453). Lucide, ce poème prouve que la poète n'avait pas encore dit son dernier mot : «no quiero ir / nada más / que hasta el fondo» [je ne veux pas aller / plus loin / que jusqu'au fond]. Cette phrase témoigne de son entêtement à trouver le poème idéal, expérience physique, émotionnelle et intellectuelle, poème superflu s'il en est, car il ne sera pas **écrit**, celui-là, mais bien **vécu**.

3. SYNTHÈSE COMPARATIVE

Toute leur vie, Ingeborg Bachmann et Alejandra Pizarnik ont été préoccupées par le pouvoir communicatif du langage. «Keine Delikatessen» et «En esta noche, en este mundo» expriment tous deux une forte critique du langage. Ces poèmes font partie des derniers qu'elles ont rédigés, bien qu'ils ne constituent pas la «fin» de leur poésie en soi (puisque les deux auteures en ont écrit quelques autres par la suite); ils sont néanmoins symptomatiques de la crise créative aiguë dont ont souffert Bachmann et Pizarnik dans les années précédant leur mort. On y lit la révolte de deux poètes qui en ont assez de vivre sous le joug de leur langue, mais qui sont pourtant incapables de s'en libérer vraiment. Certes, les deux poèmes n'offrent pas que des ressemblances. D'abord, le discours social présent chez Bachmann est tout à fait absent du texte de Pizarnik. Cette absence s'explique lorsqu'on considère le désintéressement de Pizarnik pour les réalités quotidiennes. Ensuite, l'appel à l'aide de Pizarnik dans la dernière strophe de son poème suppose une foi (aussi ténue soit-elle) que Bachmann ne partage pas du tout dans «Keine Delikatessen» : le poète de Bachmann ne prie pas, ne supplie personne[99], puisqu'il est convaincu qu'il faut s'aider soi-même. Or, le poète «n'est pas son assistant» et n'a donc aucune issue : sa part «devra» forcément se perdre[100]. Ces deux textes écrits de plumes bien différentes dans deux langues aux sonorités contrastantes présentent toutefois des ressemblances indéniables qu'il vaut la peine de relever sur le plan de la thématique et de la forme.

Premièrement, on remarque des similitudes au niveau de la conception et de la critique de la langue. Par exemple, on constate dans les deux cas que le

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[99] Néanmoins, remarquons que le sujet de «Meine Gedichte sind mir abhanden gekommen» demande justement de l'aide à ses «schöne Worte» [beaux mots] : «Tut dort für mich, Haltet dort aus, tut dort für mich ein Werk» [Faites là pour moi, endurez là, faites là pour moi une oeuvre].

[100] Par ailleurs, il est intéressant de souligner que Bachmann disait dans une entrevue de 1973 croire obstinément «qu'un jour viendra» même si elle sait pertinemment «qu'il ne viendra jamais», ce qui semble faire étrangement écho à la foi «désespérée» de Pizarnik : «Ich glaube wirklich an etwas, und das nenne ich 'ein Tag wird kommen'. Und eines Tages wird es kommen. Ja, wahrscheinlich wird es nicht kommen, denn man hat es uns ja immer zerstört. Es wird nicht kommen, und trotzdem glaube ich dran. Denn wenn ich nicht mehr dran glauben kann, kann ich auch nicht mehr schreiben» [Je crois vraiment en quelque chose que j'appelle 'un jour viendra'. Et un jour, ça viendra. Oui, probablement que ça ne viendra pas, car on nous l'a toujours détruit. Ça ne viendra pas et j'y crois quand même. Car lorsque je ne pourrai plus y croire, je ne pourrai plus écrire non plus] (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 145).

langage sert à apprivoiser le monde, à mieux le cerner. Bachmann dit qu'elle a «appris à voir avec les mots qui sont là (pour la classe la plus basse)»; Pizarnik écrit que la «langue est un organe de connaissance». Toutefois, le langage ne procure aucun refuge au poète : le «palais du langage» de Pizarnik est un lieu plutôt sordide, tout comme la «phrase-cellule» de Bachmann, prison peu éclairée. Force est de constater de part et d'autre que le langage n'est qu'une belle façade, une tromperie : celui de Bachmann ne fait que «nourrir yeux et oreilles»; celui de Pizarnik ne fait qu'évoquer «eau» et «pain» sans les faire apparaître. Les mots n'alimentent que l'intellect, ne servent à rien de concret. Non seulement les deux poètes font appel à une métaphore «diététique» pour se référer au manque de substance des mots, mais elles expriment toutes deux qu'aucun contact physique n'est possible entre le poète et le langage au moyen d'une métaphore «érotique» : «la libido d'une voyelle» dont parle Bachmann n'est pas acquise, puisqu'elle a besoin d'être «étudiée» (erforsch[t]); chez Pizarnik, cette «libido» n'est que fantasme inassouvi, car «les mots ne font pas l'amour». La mort fait surface dans les deux poèmes : nommée à deux reprises chez Pizarnik, elle est une présence tacite chez Bachmann, qui parle de «détruire» les pronoms personnels et de «s'abandonner soi-même» au lieu d'abandonner l'écriture. Si on récapitule, on retrouve en fait chez Bachmann les éléments du tryptique poétique de Pizarnik : *logos*, *eros*, *thanatos*. Cela n'est pas surprenant quand on se rappelle que pour les deux poètes, la poésie et la vie sont des concepts qui vont de pair.

Les deux poètes, pourtant en quête de clarté, restent «dans le noir». En effet, les «effets de lumière» de Bachmann sont artificiels : la «noirceur» règne et le «poids de trois cents nuits» écrase le poète. Quant à lui, le sujet de Pizarnik écrit de nuit, entre les «ombres» des «corridors noirs». Les deux textes revêtent ainsi un caractère cauchemardesque et les images qui décrivent l'acte de rédiger un poème sont vivement douloureuses. Bachmann «se casse la tête», «désespère», a «la tête grêlée» et «la guerre d'écriture en main». Pizarnik se sent «castrée»,

«blessée», elle écrit le «couteau à la main»[101], «s'étouffe», «n'en peut plus». La violence évoquée par ces images prouve qu'écrire fait mal aux deux poètes.

Leur douleur est issue du fait que leur médium, la langue, est imparfait, vicié. Bachmann dénonce les artifices linguistiques qui ne représentent pas la réalité. Elle s'attaque principalement au langage poétique, revendiquant plutôt celui, plus simple, des «mots qui sont là». Pizarnik s'en prend quant à elle au caractère factice des mots, pâles copies de la réalité. Elle critique surtout sa langue «natale», la seule dont elle dispose pour écrire. Bien que Bachmann et Pizarnik critiquent deux langages de nature distincte, elles en blâment toutes deux le caractère faux, mensonger.

D'un côté, les deux poètes critiquent vertement la langue, mais de l'autre, aucune des deux n'est capable d'échapper à son esclavage. Les deux «je lyriques» en sont à un point de non-retour : ils se sentent tous deux exaspérés mais impuissants. Écrasés par leur langue, ni l'un ni l'autre n'a du pouvoir sur elle : Bachmann se sent obligée «d'emprisonner» ses pensées dans des «phrases-cellules»; Pizarnik voit ses mots «muselés» se diriger tout droit vers une mare d'encre asphyxiante. L'échec du poème est une fatalité aux yeux des deux sujets : Bachmann croit que sa «part se perdra» et Pizarnik, que «tout est possible sauf le poème».

Le manque de contrôle des deux poètes sur la langue se reflète à première vue dans leur traitement du silence au niveau de la thématique. En effet, l'impératif du silence pèse lourd dans chaque poème. Bachmann l'évoque au moyen de métaphores en parlant de «déchirer le papier», de «balayer les opéras-mots». Elle voudrait taire elle-même le poème (sileo), mais en est incapable. Elle doit plutôt accepter un silence fatal, imminent : sa «part» de poésie «se perdra» qu'elle le veuille ou non (taceo). Pizarnik nomme quant à elle le silence explicitement à trois reprises dans son poème : elle rêve d'un silence pur et «vrai» qui contrecarrerait le caractère «mensonger» du langage (sileo), mais craint que ce silence «n'existe pas» ou pire encore, qu'il la tue (taceo). En outre, les deux

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[101] Notons que dans «Meine Gedichte sind mir abhanden gekommen», Bachmann utilisait elle aussi l'image du couteau : «müßte einem einfallen. Aber mit dem Messer im Rücken» [ça devrait venir. Mais avec le couteau dans le dos].

auteures posent des questions qui restent sans réponse et qui aboutissent donc à des silences «ignorants» qui renforcent le caractère «mystérieux» de l'art poétique. Par conséquent, le silence qui est nommé explicitement ou implicitement au moyen de mots en est un qui s'impose aux deux poètes (taceo), justement parce que celles-ci n'exercent aucun contrôle sur le langage.

Au niveau formel, par contre, il semble que ce sont cette fois les poètes qui décident de créer volontairement le silence (sileo). En effet, elles laissent toutes deux une place au silence par le biais d'enjambements forcés, de signes de ponctuation[102] et d'interlignes irréguliers qu'elles auraient pu décider d'éliminer au moment de publier leur poème. Leur choix de faire contraster des vers de un mot avec d'autres plus longs, d'isoler des mots ou de mettre des vers en retrait par rapport au reste du texte, donnent l'impression qu'elles se servent des espaces blancs de la page pour contrer la force des mots. Or, ces procédés rappellent le «silence de rupture»[103] de Paolo Valesio, qui est précisément «fonctionnel» – et donc fertile – lorsqu'il «serves to enhance the forms of saying that frame it» (Valesio 30). Les silences visuels de Bachmann et Pizarnik constituent ainsi les signes bien «parlants» des quelques coups que le poète a su asséner à sa langue. Se taire complètement entraînerait en quelque sorte la mort du poète[104], mais faire des pauses dans son discours permet au poète (et au lecteur!) de reprendre son souffle et de bénéficier de ses silences.

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[102] Elles font toutes deux un pied de nez à leur grammaire respective, en omettant par exemple des virgules ou des points de toutes sortes.

[103] Quant au silence de la plénitude, Valesio le décrit comme «the silence of lovers, and of the mystic» (Valesio 35). Dans le cas des amoureux, il s'agit du silence du désir quand ils sont seuls, et le silence du bonheur quand ils sont réunis. Pour ce qui est du mystique, cela équivaut à un genre de recueillement solitaire (Valesio 35). Le silence de la plénitude n'est pas considéré comme une «cessation of speaking» mais plutôt comme une «occasion to listen» (Valesio 36). Ce silence est absent de «Keine Delikatessen» et impossible à réaliser dans «En esta noche, en este mundo».

[104] En ce sens, Valesio précise que le silence de la rutpure est «non fonctionnel», et donc stérile, lorsqu'il se transforme en «writer's block» ou en censure forcée (Valesio 31).

CONCLUSION :
DEUX MONDES, UNE NUIT SANS DÉLICATESSE

«Aufhören ist eine Stärke, nicht eine Schwäche.»
[Arrêter est une force, non une faiblesse.]
Ingeborg Bachmann
(*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden* 105)

«no quiero ir / nada más / que hasta el fondo»
[je ne veux pas aller / plus loin / que jusqu'au fond]
Alejandra Pizarnik
(*Poesía completa* 453)

Dans ce mémoire, nous avons établi un parallèle entre deux génies littéraires que tout semblait pourtant séparer : deux continents, deux cultures, deux langues. Nous avons vu que, malgré leurs différences initiales, Ingeborg Bachmann et Alejandra Pizarnik étaient comparables à trois niveaux : leur vie réelle, leur œuvre en général et en particulier la dernière phase de leur production poétique. Premièrement, nous avons constaté à la lumière de leur biographie respective que les deux auteures partageaient certaines expériences : leurs relations familiales, amicales et amoureuses difficiles; leur nervosité innée et leur dépendance aux narcotiques; leur sentiment d'étrangeté dans leur pays; leur prédilection croissante pour la prose. Ensuite, notre revue de la littérature secondaire nous a permis de montrer à quel point Bachmann et Pizarnik étaient des exceptions au sein de leur génération littéraire tant par leur personnalité que par leur production littéraire et qu'elles faisaient toutes deux preuve d'ambivalence vis-à-vis de leur langue. Enfin, notre analyse comparative de «Keine Delikatessen» et de «En esta noche, en este mundo» a souligné de fortes ressemblances entre les deux poèmes en ce qui a trait au sentiment d'impuissance et d'exaspération du sujet lyrique face à son manque de contrôle sur un langage «factice» qui trahit la réalité. Nous avons observé que les deux poètes se servent de symboles similaires pour se référer au langage poétique : la nuit comme lieu du poème, des métaphores alimentaires et érotiques, des images violentes évoquant la mort. Aussi, elles insèrent toutes deux dans leur texte des silences formels pour essayer de faire face (ne serait-ce que visuellement) au pouvoir du langage.

Nous avons identifié que «Keine Delikatessen» et «En esta noche, en este mundo» sont représentatifs de la dernière phase poétique de Bachmann et de Pizarnik. Sans être eux-mêmes des «poèmes-suicides» (car ils ne constituent pas les derniers de leur auteure), nous ne pouvons toutefois nier le «désespoir» qui s'en dégage et qui constitue en quelque sorte le «début de la fin». Effectivement, la dépression littéraire dont elles souffraient a eu des répercussions bien concrètes dans leur vie respective : la crise de Bachmann a résulté en un «suicide» poétique à petit feu (elle s'est graduellement tournée vers la prose), alors que celle de Pizarnik a abouti à un suicide bien réel (et longuement prémédité). Nous avons relevé dans les deux poèmes un lien étroit entre la littérature et la vie – également omniprésent tout au long de leur œuvre. Il était donc inévitable et tout à fait logique que la crise créative de Bachmann et de Pizarnik s'accompagne chez les deux poètes d'une crise existentielle.

À première vue, le «suicide» respectif des deux auteures a l'air d'un abandon, d'une défaite. À ce sujet, Paolo Valesio opine que le suicide constitue la «strongest form of silence as rupture» et ajoute : «the silence of self-killing cannot be anything else but the most definitive rupture of any kind of saying» (Valesio 33). Pour lui, seule la mort naturelle forme un silence de plénitude au sens positif du terme. Tout en lui donnant raison sur ce point, nous sommes néanmoins d'avis qu'une mort choisie est plus positive qu'une mort imposée et qu'elle peut donc elle aussi parfois constituer un silence de plénitude. D'ailleurs, Eduardo Chirinos explique justement que le silence intentionnel, le «sileo» revêt un caractère positif par rapport au silence forcé, le «taceo». Dans notre analyse, nous avons vu que les silences thématiques menacent sans arrêt d'étouffer le poème ou son créateur (taceo). En revanche, les silences visuels du poème, parce qu'ils sont volontairement conservés par les deux poètes, font un croc-en-jambe au langage, contrecarrant ainsi son indépendance (sileo). Vu qu'il est lui aussi un silence délibéré, le suicide (poétique ou réel) pourrait-il être considéré comme une certaine prise de contrôle (sur le langage ou la vie), le soulagement bien mérité d'une longue souffrance?

Deux mondes se rejoignent ici en une même nuit de détresse intense, au point culminant de la crise créative (et existentielle) de Ingeborg Bachmann et Alejandra Pizarnik. En raison des contraintes d'espace imposées aux mémoires de maîtrise, la présente étude se limite à la dernière phase de la production poétique des deux auteures. Une analyse de l'ensemble de leurs poèmes permettrait de chercher les sources de leur crise ainsi que de tracer l'évolution de leur doute systématique du mot et de leur préoccupation pour le silence, tant sur le plan thématique que formel. Ainsi, nous pourrions probablement établir des parallèles supplémentaires entre les deux œuvres.

Annexes

KEINE DELIKATESSEN

Nichts mehr gefällt mir.

Soll ich
eine Metapher ausstaffieren
mit einer Mandelblüte?
die Syntax kreuzigen
auf einen Lichteffekt?
Wer wird sich den Schädel zerbrechen
über so überflüssige Dinge –

Ich habe ein Einsehn gelernt
mit den Worten,
die da sind
(für die unterste Klasse)

Hunger
　　　Schande
　　　　　Tränen
und
　　　　　　　Finsternis.

Mit dem ungereinigten Schluchzen,
mit der Verzweiflung
(und ich verzweifle noch vor
　　　　　　　[Verzweiflung)
über das viele Elend,
den Krankenstand, die Lebenskosten,
werde ich auskommen.

Ich vernachlässige nicht die Schrift,
sondern mich.
Die andern wissen sich
weißgott
mit den Worten zu helfen.
Ich bin nicht mein Assistent.

Soll ich
einen Gedanken gefangennehmen,
abführen in eine erleuchtete Satzzelle?
Aug und Ohr verköstigen
mit Worthappen erster Güte?
erforschen die Libido eines Vokals,
ermitteln die Liebhaberwerte unserer
　　　　　　　[Konsonanten?

Muß ich
mit dem verhagelten Kopf,
mit dem Schreibkampf in dieser Hand,
unter dreihundertnächtigem Druck
einreißen das Papier,
wegfegen die angezettelten Wortopern,
vernichtend so : ich du und er sie es

wir ihr?

(Soll doch. Sollen die andern.)

Mein Teil, es soll verloren gehen.

(*Sämtliche Gedichte* 183)

PAS DE DELIKATESSEN

Je n'aime plus rien.

Devrais-je
affubler une métaphore
d'une fleur d'amande?
crucifier la syntaxe
pour créer la lumière?
Qui se cassera la tête
avec des choses si futiles –

J'ai appris à voir
avec les mots
qui sont là
(pour les plus bas étages)

faim
      honte
            larmes
et
                  noirceur.

Avec les sanglots malpropres,
avec le désespoir
(et je désespère déjà de désespoir)
de la grande misère,
la maladie, le coût de la vie,
je m'arrangerai.

Je n'abandonne pas l'écriture,
sinon moi-même.
Dieu sait que les autres
s'en tirent
avec les mots.
Je ne suis pas mon assistant.

Devrais-je
emprisonner une pensée,
la jeter dans une phrase-cellule éclairée?
nourrir yeux et oreilles
avec des bouchées de mots de première?
étudier la libido d'une voyelle,
estimer la valeur de nos consonnes?

Dois-je,
la tête grêlée,
guerre d'écriture en main,
sous le poids de trois cents nuits,
déchirer le papier,
balayer les opéras-mots complotés
écrasant ainsi : je tu et il elle

nous vous?

(Dois bien. Les autres doivent.)

Ma part, elle devra se perdre.

WAHRLICH
(für Anna Achmatova)

Wem es ein Wort nie verschlagen hat,
und ich sage es euch,
wer bloß sich zu helfen weiß
und mit den Worten –

dem ist nicht zu helfen.
Über den kurzen Weg nicht
und nicht über den langen.

Einen einzigen Satz haltbar zu machen,
auszuhalten in dem Bimbam von Worten.

Es schreibt diesen Satz keiner,
der nicht unterschreibt.

(*Sämtliche Gedichte* 176.)

VRAIMENT
(pour Anna Achmatova)

Celui qu'un mot n'a jamais fait taire,
et je vous le dit,
celui qui sait juste s'en tirer
et avec les mots –

on ne peut rien pour lui.
Ni par la voie courte
ni par la longue.

Rendre une seule phrase tangible,
durable dans la cacophonie.

Personne n'écrit cette phrase,
qui ne la signe aussi.

ENIGMA
(für Hans Werner Henze aus der Zeit der Ariosi)

Nichts mehr wird kommen.

Frühling wird nicht mehr werden.
Tausendjährige Kalender sagen es jedem voraus.

Aber auch Sommer und weiterhin, was so gute Namen
wie «sommerlich» hat –
es wird nichts mehr kommen.

Du sollst ja nicht weinen,
sagt eine Musik.

Sonst
sagt
niemand
etwas.

(*Sämtliche Gedichte* 181)

ENIGME
(pour Hans Werner Henze du temps des Ariosi)

Plus rien ne viendra.

Le printemps ne sera plus.
Des calendriers l'annoncent depuis des millénaires

L'été non plus, ni même ce qui a de beaux noms
comme «estival» –
plus rien ne viendra.

Mais tu ne dois pas pleurer,
dit une musique.

Sinon
personne
ne dit
rien.

(MEINE GEDICHTE SIND MIR ABHANDEN GEKOMMEN.)

Meine Gedichte sind mir abhanden gekommen.
Ich suche sie in allen Zimmerwinkeln.
Weiß vor Schmerz nicht, wie man einen Schmerz
aufschreibt, weiß überhaupt nichts mehr.

Weiß, daß man so nicht daherreden kann,
es muß würziger sein, eine gepfefferte Metapher.
müßte einem einfallen. Aber mit dem Messer im Rücken

Parlo e tacio, parlo, flüchte mich in ein Idiom,
in dem sogar Spanisches vorkommt, los toros y
las (sic) planetas, auf einer alten gestohlenen Platte
vielleicht noch zu hören. Mit etwas Französichem
geht es auch, tu es mon amour depuis si longtemps

Adieu, ihr schönen Worte, mit eurem Verheißungen
Warum habt ihr mich verlassen. War euch nicht wohl?
Ich habe euch hinterlegt bei einem Herzen, aus Stein.
Tut dort für mich, Haltet dort aus, tut dort für mich ein Werk.

(*Ich weiß keine bessere Welt – Unveröffentlichte Gedichte* 11)

(MES POÈMES M'ONT ÉCHAPPÉ DES MAINS.)

Mes poèmes m'ont échappé des mains.
Je les cherche dans tous les coins de la pièce.
Ne sais rien de douleur, comment on note
douleur, ne sais absolument plus rien.

Sais qu'on ne peut pas dire n'importe quoi,
ça doit être plus piquant, une métaphore poivrée.
ça devrait venir. Mais avec le couteau dans le dos.

Parlo e tacio, parlo, fuis dans un idiome
où même de l'espagnol apparaît, los toros y
las (sic) planetas, sur un vieux disque volé
peut-être encore audible. Avec un peu de français
ça va aussi, tu es mon amour depuis si longtemps.

Adieu, jolis mots, avec vos promesses.
Pourquoi m'avez-vous quittée. Ça n'allait pas bien?
Je vous ai déposés près d'un cœur de pierre.
Faites là pour moi, endurez là, faites là pour moi une œuvre.

(MEINE SCHREIE VERLIER ICH)

Meine Schreie verlier ich
wie ein anderer sein Geld
verliert, seine Moneten,
sein Herz, meine großen
Schreie verlier ich in
Rom, überall, in
Berlin, ich verlier auf
den Straßen Schreie,
wahrhaftige, bis
mein Hirn blutrot anläuft
innen, ich verlier alles,
ich verlier nur nicht
das Entsetzen, daß
man seine Schreie verlieren
kann jeden Tag und
überall

(*Ich weiß keine bessere Welt – Unveröffentlichte Gedichte* 145)

(JE PERDS MES CRIS)

Je perds mes cris
comme un autre perd
son argent, sa monnaie,
son cœur, je perds
mes grands cris à
Rome, partout, à
Berlin, je perds dans
la rue des cris,
des vrais, jusqu'à ce que
mon cerveau soit rouge sang
en dedans, je perds tout,
mais je ne perds pas
la frayeur qu'on puisse
perdre ses cris
tous les jours et
partout

EN ESTA NOCHE, EN ESTE MUNDO
(A Martha Isabel Moia)

en esta noche en este mundo
las palabras del sueño de la infancia de
                    [la muerte
nunca es eso lo que uno quiere decir
la lengua natal castra
la lengua es un órgano de conocimiento
del fracaso de todo poema
castrado por su propia lengua
que es el órgano de la re-creación
del re-conocimiento
pero no el de la resurrección
de algo a modo de negación
de mi horizonte de maldoror con su perro
y nada es promesa
entre lo decible
que equivale a mentir
(todo lo que se puede decir es mentira)
el resto es silencio
sólo que el silencio no existe

no
las palabras
no hacen el amor
hacen la ausencia
si digo agua ¿beberé?
si digo pan ¿comeré?

en esta noche en este mundo
extraordinario silencio el de esta noche
lo que pasa con el alma es que no se ve
lo que pasa con la mente es que no se ve
lo que pasa con el espíritu es que no se ve
¿de dónde viene esta conspiración de
                    [invisibilidades?
ninguna palabra es visible

sombras
recintos viscosos donde se oculta
la piedra de la locura
corredores negros
los he recorrido todos
¡oh quédate un poco más entre nosotros!

mi persona está herida
mi primera persona del singular

escribo como quien con un cuchillo
                    [alzado en la oscuridad
escribo como diciendo
la sinceridad absoluta continuaría siendo
lo imposible
¡oh quédate un poco más entre nosotros!

los deterioros de las palabras
deshabitando el palacio del lenguaje
el conocimiento entre las piernas
¿qué hiciste del don del sexo?
oh mis muertos

me los comí me atraganté
no puedo más de no poder más

palabras embozadas
todo se desliza
hacia la negra licuefacción

y el perro de maldoror
en esta noche en este mundo
donde todo es posible
salvo
el poema

hablo
sabiendo que no se trata de eso
hoy ayúdame a escribir el poema más
                    [prescindible
        el que no sirva ni para
        ser inservible
ayúdame a escribir palabras
en esta noche en este mundo

(*Poesía completa* 398-40)

EN CETTE NUIT, EN CE MONDE
(À Martha Isabel Moia)

en cette nuit en ce monde
les mots du rêve de l'enfance de la mort
ce n'est jamais ça qu'on veut dire
la langue natale castre
la langue est un organe de connaissance
de l'échec de tout poème
castré par sa propre langue
qui est l'organe de la re-création
de la re-connaissance
mais pas celui de la résurrection
de quelque chose en guise de négation
de mon horizon de maldoror avec son
         [chien
et rien n'est promesse
dans le dicible
qui équivaut à mentir
(tout ce qui peut se dire est mensonge)
le reste est silence
sauf que le silence n'existe pas

non
les mots
ne font pas l'amour
ils font l'absence
si je dis eau, je boirai?
si je dis pain, je mangerai?

en cette nuit en ce monde
extraordinaire silence celui de cette nuit
ce qui se passe avec l'âme c'est qu'on
        [ne la voit pas
ce qui se passe avec la conscience c'est
        [qu'on ne la voit pas
ce se passe avec l'esprit c'est qu'on ne
        [le voit pas
d'où vient cette conspiration
        [d'invisibilités?
aucun mot n'est visible

ombres
enceintes visqueuses où se cache
la pierre de la folie
corridors noirs
je les ai tous parcourus
oh reste encore un peu parmi nous!

ma personne est blessée
ma première personne du singulier

j'écris comme avec un couteau levé dans
        [l'obscurité
j'écris comme en disant
la sincérité absolue continuerait d'être
l'imposible
oh reste encore un peu parmi nous!

les détériorations des mots
déshabitant le palais du langage
la connaissance entre les jambes
qu'as-tu fait du don du sexe?
oh mes morts

je les mangeai je m'étouffai
je n'en peu plus de n'en plus pouvoir

mots muselés
tout glisse
vers la liquéfaction noire

et le chien de maldoror
en cette nuit en ce monde
où tout est possible
sauf
le poème

je parle
sachant qu'il ne s'agit pas de ça
aujourd'hui aide-moi à écrire le poème
        [le plus superflu
    celui qui ne serve même pas
    à être inutile
aide-moi à écrire des mots
en cette nuit en ce monde

«CASA DE LA MENTE»

la casa mental
reconstruida letra por letra
palabra por palabra
en mi doble figura de papel

atraviesa el mar de tinta
para dar una nueva forma
        a un nuevo sentimiento

abre la boca
verde de sin raíces
la palabra sin su cuerpo

un nuevo orden musical
de colores de cuerpos de excedentes
de formas pequeñas
que se mueven gritan dicen nunca
la noche dice nunca
la noche me pronuncia
en un poema

(*Poesía completa* 355)

«MAISON DE L'ESPRIT»

la maison mentale
reconstruite lettre par lettre
mot à mot
dans ma double figure de papier

traverse la mer d'encre
pour donner une nouvelle forme
        à un nouveau sentiment

ouvre la bouche
verte de sans racines
le mot sans son corps

un nouvel ordre musical
de couleurs de corps d'excédents
de formes petites
qui bougent crient disent jamais
la nuit dit jamais
la nuit me prononce
dans un poème

SOLAMENTE LAS NOCHES
(A Jean Aristeguieta, a *Árbol de Fuego*.)

escribiendo
he pedido, he perdido.

en esta noche, en este mundo,
abrazada a vos,
alegría de naufragio.

he querido sacrificar mis días y mis semanas
en las ceremonias del poema.

he implorado tanto
desde el fondo de los fondos
de mi escritura.

Coger y morir no tienen adjetivos.

(*Poesía completa* 427)

SEULEMENT LES NUITS
(À Jean Aristeguieta, à *Árbol de Fuego*)

en écrivant
j'ai demandé, j'ai perdu.

en cette nuit, en ce monde,
dans tes bras,
joie de naufrage.

j'ai voulu sacrifier mes jours et mes semaines
dans les cérémonies du poème.

j'ai tant imploré
depuis le fond des fonds
de mon écriture.

Baiser et mourir n'ont pas d'adjectifs.

(NO, LA VERDAD NO ES LA MÚSICA)

no, la verdad no es la música
yo, triste espera de una palabra
que nombre lo que busco
¿y qué busco?
no el nombre de la deidad
no el nombre de los nombres
sino los nombres precisos y preciosos
de mis deseos ocultos

algo en mí me castiga
desde todas mis vidas :
- Te dimos todo lo necesario para que comprendieras
y preferiste la espera,
como si todo te anunciase el poema
(aquel que nunca escribirás porque es un jardín inaccesible

- sólo vine a ver el jardín -)

(*Poesía completa* 431)

(NON, LA VÉRITÉ N'EST PAS LA MUSIQUE)

non, la vérité n'est pas la musique
moi, triste attente d'un mot
qui nomme ce que je cherche
et qu'est-ce que je cherche?
pas le nom de la déité
pas le nom des noms
mais les noms précis et précieux
de mes désirs occultes.

quelque chose en moi me punit
depuis toutes mes vies :
- Nous t'avons donné tout le nécessaire pour que tu comprennes
et tu as préféré l'attente,
comme si tout t'annonçait le poème
(celui que tu n'écriras jamais car c'est un jardin inaccessible

- je suis juste venue voir le jardin -)

(CRIATURA EN PLEGARIA)

criatura en plegaria
rabia contra la niebla

escrito
en   contra
el   la
crepúsculo   opacidad

no quiero ir
nada más
que hasta el fondo

oh vida
oh lenguaje
oh Isidoro

(*Poesía completa* 453)

(CRÉATURE EN PRIÈRE)

créature en prière
rage contre la brume

écrit
dans   contre
le   l'
crépuscule   opacité

je ne veux pas aller
plus loin
que jusqu'au fond

oh vie
oh langage
oh Isidore

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