ACCORD OR DISCORD: RETURNING TO ORAL TRADITIONS?

Satoru Nakagawa
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada, T6G 2R3
nakagawa@ualberta.ca

Abstract / Résumé

What are the functions and meanings of oral versus written texts for Indigenous peoples? In this document, I consider how oral and written texts have possibly contributed to the construction of society[ies] and to the foundational differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. I then consider the systematic shifts in norms over time, arguing that oral societies developed as consensus-based societies, functioning with internal accord. Finally, I consider the question: how can we, as Indigenous peoples, continue to transfer accord accurately with our meaning of truth, by which I mean our ontology, epistemology, values, and world views?

Quels sont les fonctions et le sens de la tradition orale et des écrits pour les peuples autochtones? L'article examine comment la tradition orale et les écrits ont pu contribuer à bâtir les sociétés et à établir des différences générales entre les sociétés autochtones et non autochtones. On examine ensuite les déplacements systématiques des normes avec le temps en mettant de l'avant que les sociétés de tradition orale se sont développées comme des sociétés fondées sur le consensus et l'accord commun de leurs membres. Finalement, on pose la question suivante : comment pouvons-nous, à titre de peuples autochtones, continuer de transférer la notion d'accord avec notre définition de la vérité, c'est-à-dire notre ontologie, notre épistémologie, nos valeurs et nos visions du monde?

Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to understand human communication systems, in particular, the functions of, and differences between, oral communication and written text communication. To do this, I first briefly outline what I mean by communication and language for both humans and other animals, following which I explore the functions of oral and written text communication and try to come to some reasonable understandings of the meanings of oral and written text communication. By exploring the functions and meaning of oral and written text, I next consider how these have possibly contributed to the construction of society[ies] and to the foundational differences between societies that are based on oral texts and those based on written texts. These attempts lead me to try to understand the systematic shifts in norms which play themselves out through the hegemony of one truth, in this case globalization and a capitalist mentality. I argue that oral societies develop as consensus-based societies, functioning with internal accord. Finally, I consider the question: how can we, as Indigenous peoples, continue to transfer accord accurately with our meaning of truth (e.g., ontology, epistemology, value, and world view)?

A Story

It must have been September or October, 1996. My daughter was just a baby in a front pack, and we were walking at the Rieffel Wildfowl Refuge in Richmond, B.C. During our tour, the guide stopped and showed us two fields filled with white Snow Geese. As he explained, the geese filled both fields, one inside and one outside the refuge. But, he explained, on the day hunting season opened, every year, at the exact hour hunting season began, all of the geese would move to the field inside the refuge. The Snow Geese had learned to read human behavior. They had also developed intra-species orality that would allow them to move as one, in consensus. When survival is at stake, a specific function of orality (what I will explain as "accord") is of paramount importance.

Communication and Language

We use language to communicate on a daily basis. Our languages are often taken to be like the air that we breathe—something taken for granted, normally invisible (unless there is something peculiar), and effortless—therefore, we do not even think twice about the function and meaning of language itself: What is language? What is communication? Who communicates? Are humans the only communicative animals? Are

communication systems restricted to live beings?

It seems to me that the question of "who, other than human beings, uses communication?" is much easier to answer than "what is the function and meaning of communication through language?" The most apparent answer to the question of "Are humans the only communicative animals" is "No, we humans are not the only communicative animals or forms of life" (see, for example, Sinha, 2004; Snowdon, 2004). Many animals use communication as their means of survival: "Chimpanzees (indeed, most apes), lions, wolves, hunt cooperatively" (Snowdon, 2004, p. 131); "Animals hearing a call respond with behavior that is appropriate to the danger posed by the predator..." (Cheney & Seyfarth, 1981, cited in Sinha, 2004, p. 217). From these, as well as many other examples, we realize that much "raw material" for building a language exists in non-human species as well as human species, including complex vocalizations that contain subtle variations (for breeding, danger, predation for example), means of expressing different motivational states and/or different contexts, simple finite "grammars," and behaviors much like human babbling (Gottfried, Andrews, & Haug, 1985; Snowdon, 2004) being some of them. Even without citing academic papers, most of us know from our own experiences that dogs, cats, birds, bees, ants, and all other animals communicate within their own species, and even across different species. For example, in addition to the example of the Snow Geese noted above, I have also told a story previously (Nakagawa, 2006) about how my father was able to interpret the different bird calls that indicated "danger" when a poisonous snake was present, and how he was therefore able to avoid being attacked, by killing the snake before it could kill him. Within and across bird species, the birds gave verbal warning. Across species, my father has developed the ability to distinguish normal bird communications from those communications which signified "predator."

On the other hand, there seems to be some level, or perhaps depth, of difference between human and other animal communications. The differences between human and other animal communications appear to be based on assumptions and understandings about both the function and meaning of human languages—and how these are manifested, or not, in the languages of other species. Therefore, there has been research done within the various categories and disciplines of human knowledge, specifically animal behavior, psychology, engineering, natural sciences, medicine, education, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, marine biology, to name just a few, attempting to understand animal communications as well as the differences and similarities between human and other animal communications.

Communication and Communities

Communication within a community has been described as the relationship-building activities in a group, seen in such behaviors as social grooming as a bonding mechanism (Dunbar, 2004). Working with primates[1], a term commonly used to refer to lemurs, monkeys and apes (with human beings considered to be apes—though they were not part of his study), Dunbar (2004) noted that "primates are highly social animals and, by comparison with all other taxa, devote an unusually large proportion of their day to social grooming" (p. 258). However, humans are able to overcome the need to engage in such lengthy social grooming behaviors by using language to combine socialization with information exchange. By doing so, humans were able to reduce community development time from 43% of available time to 20%, as compared to old world monkeys and apes living in groups of approximately 150 members (Dunbar, 2004). In other words, Dunbar (2004) suggested that all humans, apes, and monkeys require community bonding time in order to sustain their communities/groups, and this bonding time must take place according to their communication systems and surroundings. Moreover, the length of time it takes to create and maintain bonding correlates to the size of group; that is, the larger the group, the more time it takes for such bonds to develop. Therefore, Dunbar (2004) argued that humans developed a more efficient means of bonding, utilizing language so that the objectives of actual physical contact can be accomplished instead with simultaneous information exchange, a more efficient means of communicating. If social bonding and information exchange can be accomplished more efficiently, then more information can be exchanged in the same time frame.

At the individual level of communication, a similar process takes place with human infants, that is, a human baby will eventually be able to focus his/her gaze in response to his/her mother's gaze (Sinha, 2004). Over time, this ability to focus on the mother/caretaker's gaze (and thus communicate non-verbally) will be replaced by symbols (i.e., language), and, as a result, a child will become capable of using language to communicate, as well as to see and to make observations about the world as other community members do (Sinha, 2004). In other words, through language (in both verbal and non-verbal forms) the child will further learn the values, wisdom, beliefs, and knowledge of his/her community. Explaining how important these primary socializations in first-developed language forms are, Wong Fillmore (1991) argued:

> Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to

> be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influ-
> encing their children, rifts develop and families lose the inti-
> macy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings.
> (p. 343)

Almost all of the research studies done in the area of human com-
munication have been based on the fundamental idea that there are two
means of communication used by humans: (1) oral communication (i.e.,
listening, speaking and non-verbal forms[2]) and (2) written text commu-
nication (i.e., reading and writing). Oral forms of communication are used
by all human societies, as well as in the animal kingdom; however, writ-
ten communications are limited to specific societies (at a minimum, writ-
ten communications do not exist in the animal kingdom in the same
form as the text writing of humans).

Following this brief description of the connection between commu-
nity, communication, and language, I will next outline the distinctive uses
of oral and written texts in the next section.

Oral Communication (Tradition)

The language we use in oral communication changes and shifts over
time and between users, and we see this shift and change throughout
history and experiences. English for example, has changed tremendously
over the last approximately 300 years, so that we really do not have
good understanding of communication in the 1700s in England without
learning the writing system of 300 years ago. We have less understand-
ing still of oral communication in Britain at that time because written
records are not simply transcriptions of oral speech. Moreover, the us-
age and pronunciation of English has shifted throughout the various lo-
cations where it is used, such as England, United States of America,
Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, Singapore, and
many other places. Even the forms and means of daily greetings such
as "hello, how are you" have shifted and changed and continue to shift
and change across time and space: "hey, how's it going?"; "what's up?"

Similar shifts and changes have also occurred in the animal king-
dom. Bird songs, for example, have shifted and changed for a number
of reasons—due to mistakenly copying the songs of other bird species,
through the introduction of new song systems by migrating birds, and/
or through innovation and environmental change allowing late-hatched
chicks less time to learn their species' songs properly (Slater, Ince, &
Colgan, 1980). Even though this shift and change in language has oc-
curred, the content of such communications seems to have remained
the same, meaning accurate and precise information is transmitted which
is able to alarm other group members and thereby enable survival. Some

researchers have noted that when danger arises because of the emergence of a predator, calls of alarm will be sent to an animal's closest group members and kin first, indicating that there is a direct implication of alarming individuals, individual-to-individual communication even within a group (Cheney & Seyfarth, 1981; Gottfried et al., 1985). Animal oral communications illustrate the importance of conveying information that is accurate and precise in sound.

Human oral communications have been proven to convey similar accuracy and precision in meaning over time within a fixed geography and context. While "no one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience and explain the how and why of present day conditions" (Vansina, 1985, cited in Reagan, 2005, p. 12), Claunchy (1979) has also pointed out that, historically in western societies, written texts "did not immediately inspire trust" (p. 230, cited in Ong, 2002, p. 95), that oral testimonies were considered to be more trustworthy, particularly as testimonial givers could be questioned. In fact, such accuracy in oral forms of communication was officially recognized in current times through the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997, in the Delgamuukw versus British Columbia decision (Supreme Court of Canada, 1997). According to the Supreme Court of Canada website at the University of Montreal, the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada read that:

> The most significant evidence of spiritual connection between the Houses and their territory was a feast hall where the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people tell and retell their stories and identify their territories to remind themselves of the sacred connection that they have with their lands. (Supreme Court of Canada, 1997, http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1997/1997rcs3-1010/1997rcs3-1010.html)

The legitimacy of oral history and oral texts in this case were also emphasized by Means (2002) who, reviewing the decision, noted that:

> Native stories, in various forms, have independent standing in proving historical facts concerning prior occupation and continuous possession of land…[and that the Supreme Court of Canada] would scrutinize rulings of fact which were dismissive of oral histories that were not just recounted by culture experts but "enacted" by authoritative participants. (Aboriginal Elders) (p. 224)

Means (2002) also suggested however, that this legitimacy needs to be authenticated by authority, a suggestion that is supported by arguments on the website.[3] And, notably, the decision was recorded in writing, legitimizing oral testimony by way of written text. Where does the legiti-

mizing function of text come from?

Written Text Communication

Currently, the majority of countries (if not all of them) around the world that use capital as the base of their countries' economies use writing systems to record and communicate information over time and distance. Yet, only 2.5% of human languages have writing systems. To explain further, Edmonson (1971) reported that there are approximately 3000 different languages[4] in existence around the world, but only 78 languages have literatures, or text writing systems. Despite Edmonson's (1971) assertion that there are 78 writing systems in existence around the world, the United Nations currently recognizes only 34 languages—all of them written languages—as the "official languages" of those countries which are also recognized, that is, the official languages of the 192 countries that were recognized by the United Nations by 2006 (United Nations, 2006). Out of those 34 languages, six languages are official languages for the United Nations, meaning languages that are used to represent all continents, cultures and language groups around the world in the official workings of the United Nations: Chinese[5], English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic (United Nations, 1998). The remaining 28 languages that are recognized by the United Nations are viewed to be unofficial languages (United Nations, 2007; see Appendix A for list). None of the world languages based on oral traditions are listed as official languages, or even unofficial languages, by the United Nations. This single fact suggests that without written language systems, nations/peoples cannot be recognized as "real" nations. That the United Nations acknowledges only those world languages which have writing systems (and not even all of those) can also be interpreted as a clear illustration that most Indigenous people who live within/under countries which are members of the United Nations cannot be considered to have languages because they do not have writing systems.

One of the necessary standards for being a dominant culture, recognized by the United Nations, therefore seems to be having a written language system. Countries with written language systems are either those colonized countries that decided to use, or were forced to use, their colonizers' language systems, or countries that were themselves colonizers. Simple observations of the United Nations and its structure suggest that the countries with written languages are also those countries which have historically expressed the desire to take resources used by others (including human resources, meaning slaves) for their own purposes, that is, those countries which are currently successful capitalist countries, those countries which became abusive and individual-

istic. (And, according to Gunn (1989), the potential to suffer abuse at the hands of the dominators is never far from the Indigenous consciousness). It may be that the shift of language from an oral to a written system may have been related to the development of countries or cultures which became colonizers; colonizers developed self-consciousness and an identity based on the accumulation of capital, with [scientific] knowledge increasingly becoming one form of capital. Capital could be exchanged for food sources as a protection against starvation, and for future security. Having a system such as this in place may have been related to the development of written systems of languages, since the appropriation of the resources of others meant that time was available for people at the top of the hierarchy (who did the appropriating) to develop writing systems—and because the development of writing systems was required to keep track of their accumulated wealth.

This assumption is also supported by Ong (1977; 2004) who argued that the development of a writing system signaled the start of self consciousness in human beings. Self consciousness also seems to be associated with the beginning of human's need to control their own environments, that is, changing their surroundings to achieve their own advantages rather than leaving the environment so that it works to the advantage of others who have learned to live within the environment, and who need to live at the same time. This approach to environmental control was finally concentrated into the knowledge system called "science." Ong (1977) argues that modern science and technology developed from written languages which were primarily spoken by males, which were learned through writing rather than being learned as mother tongues, and which therefore were separate from the human lifeworld (pp. 35-49). With the development of pre-capitalist systems and market economies, it is easy to imagine how writing systems would be necessary to track accumulated wealth among the emerging capitalists.

One example of the differences between the writing-system-based knowledge and oral tradition-based-knowledge, and demonstrating the dominance of written forms of communication, was illustrated in the scientific approach and Indigenous approach to agricultural practices in Mexico described by Esteva (1996). Esteva (1996) explained that agricultural practice in Mexico was torn between the scientific approaches that were imposed by the dominant form of western science and the traditional farming techniques that had been developed by local people over time.

As Esteva (1996) describes, on the one hand, it is clear that scientific approaches to farming were automatically legitimated by the dominant society (banks, politicians and others) since their approaches were

scientifically controlled and had been proven to show results (Esteva, 1996). On the other hand, the local knowledge and techniques of farming were not legitimated. Specifically, after viewing and experiencing their environments and surroundings, how the land operates, how the weather patterns alternate, and after having summed up all the variables that affect the local area in order to take advantages of all of the natural conditions and forces from nature itself, farmers made decisions. This kind of holistic knowledge had been passed down through the generations and was made possible through observation and experiences over time. The local farmers' experiments and experiences were, in fact, multivariate analysis specific to the land and therefore, *could have been* seen as legitimate even in western scientific terms. While the scientific approaches to farming were shared through written reports, based on quantitative data that was presumably universal and based on current conditions, the traditional knowledge of the Mexican people came from local qualitative data over time (as I have argued earlier, in other papers, qualitative data over time is a very "deep" form of quantitative data) and was shared among farmers without it being written down.

Because the local knowledge of the Mexican community described by Esteva (1996) was not written down or considered to be "scientifically sound" (which means that it is not based on the dominant way or approach), this knowledge was often ignored and dismissed by mainstream propaganda from the government which promoted scientific methods of farming. Because the scientific approach was viewed as more rigorous and controlled; the results seemed to be more accurate, reliable, valid, and generalizable to the world. Such scientific approaches test single variables one at a time within a well-controlled environment. By approaching the problem in this way over a very short time, science seems to forget about real life which is specific to local conditions, that is, the traditional knowledge represents a multivariable analysis approach which even the current supercomputers are having problems analyzing. The human brain and the accumulation of collective experiences over time may be able to make much better sense of this data that represents food supply, the most sensitive area of people's lives (science does not take this sensitivity to food supply into account). That their decisions are critical and affect their own survival and life expectancy provides local farmers with sensitivities to the multivariate data analyses passed down from generation to generation that is specific to the local environment and conditions. According to Esteva's (1996) description, the communities, by replacing their local traditional knowledge with scientific approaches such as building dams to control flooding, were led into multiple unforeseen problems such as the need to create a new irriga-

tion system, the need to use more pesticide, and the need for fertilizer, all of which actually resulted in a lesser amount of production compared to farming based on the traditional land usage.

In short, the relationship between the writing system and self recognition (consciousness), led the dominant society to rely on and trust their system as the only way to see the world. Since Mexican traditional farming was not written down, but was instead based on oral traditions, the local traditional "truth" was easily replaced by the "truth" represented in the dominant writing system.

Nadasdy (2006) discusses a similar discord between the deep local knowledge of First Nation hunters and that of Western-science trained biologists and of capitalist outfitters with regard to the population of sheep and the methods needed to protect herd numbers. Short term, scientific knowledge that could be written down was more politically powerful than the knowledge of First Nations hunters which was oral and based on historical memory, and therefore became the norm.

To take this argument a bit further, the humane way is to recognize that there is more than "I" in the world. On the other hand, the materialist way is to recognize "self-pleasure" knowledge, which is such knowledge that we know as science, engineering, medicine, education, arts, foreign language, and so on. These are the areas of knowledge which were not necessities for the "prehistoric" or "primitive" worlds, which lasted much longer than we can even think, and which are still not necessities for the harmonies of Indigenous societies or the animal kingdom.

By using and forcing other peoples to use the writing systems of languages of dominant societies and cultures, dominant societies were then able to record their own histories and stories according to their own perceptions/values/meanings/world views/truths. That is, because they are represented in writing systems, such recordings themselves become the "one and absolute truth" to the societies and cultures which are being dominated. This one and/or absolute truth can be seen in many forms throughout recorded time. North America, for example, was discovered by one man (Columbus). The other countries in the world were "discovered" by dominant societies such as England, Spain, Portugal, France, and many other countries which had a colonizing history behind them. Those discoveries were recorded according to the time frames of the colonizers (that is, based on the birth of Jesus Christ and expressed in terms of Year of our Lord). Moreover, the map of the world locates the North Pole at the top, with most of the lower part of the map controlled by the upper part of the map, and is typical of such hegemony. All of this truth production was made possible because certain groups of people

were willing to take over other peoples' resources and accumulate them, and they were able to record this, in writing, as proof in history as justice. As mentioned earlier, recording these accumulations must be accurate; once recorded, the written documents represent one truth, the truth.

These written perceived truths must be viewed as merely truths representing the social norms of dominant societies which are supported by physical violence. In other words, I suggest that written documentation is itself symbolic violence that has been enforced through physical violence, both historically, and in the current era. Thus, I argue, Ong's (2004) notion that the development of writing systems marked the discovery of self (consciousness) and allowed cultures to achieve thoughts and forms of complex reasoning that cultures based on oral tradition systems can never reach, may require observation and interrogation from a different angle. Instead of believing that dominant cultures or societies possess more and better ideas, more and better world views, we might argue that dominant cultures, in developing writing systems, willingly switched their cultural consciousnesses from harmonious living within their surroundings to controlling the environment according to their needs (in which "need" is defined as "want"). By shifting this idea, we might be able to also shift our belief that writing systems are superior to a belief that writing systems simply force one opinion, truth, value, belief system to become dominant over those of other groups/cultures/societies/nations. We might instead accept that primary orality and oral traditions are superior to writing systems because of the particular ways in which they structure those societies which use them.

Primary Orality (Consensus Building)

The first question that I have to ask is "what is meant by orality and oral traditions?" In this section, I will extend the arguments put forward by Weber-Pillwax (2001), that primary orality builds understanding among, and participation of, members of group, that orality leads to good relationships between and among group members, and thus allows the Northern Cree people to live good lives. Ong (1977) describes (primary) orality as a previous communication stage which did not involve writing, in fact he goes so far as to argue, "the world of primary orality was *torn to pieces* by writing and print…" (p. 10, my emphasis). In current times, oral languages are often considered to be, and referred to as, "primitive", "savage", and "inferior" even though no one who speaks an oral language wants to described or recognized according to these adjectives (Ong, 2002, p. 171). Havelock (1986) notes that from the beginning of contact between French and Spanish explorers and the inhabitants

of the New World to the present time, there has been a key question about oral cultures: "Were they 'savage' on the one hand, and yet 'noble' on the other, possessors of an ethical simplicity, a direct feeling, which Europeans had lost?" (p. 35), a question that was eventually answered: "If you did not write and read you were, culturally speaking, a nonperson" (Havelock, 1986, p. 38), at least for European intellectuals concerned with commerce, consciousness, and communication. Citing Havelock's 1963 work *Preface to Plato*, Ong (1977) notes that,

> Primary orality, the orality of a culture which has never known writing, is in some ways conspicuously integrative. The psyche in a culture innocent of writing knows by a kind of empathetic identification of knower and known, in which the object of knowledge and the total being of the knower enter into a kind of fusion, in a way which literate cultures would typically find unsatisfyingly vague and garbled and somehow too intense and participatory. To personalities shaped by literacy, oral folk often appear curiously unprogramed [sic], not set off against their physical environment, given simply to soaking up existence, unresponsive to abstract demands such as a "job" that entails commitment to routines organized in accordance with abstract clock time (as against human, or lived, "felt," duration). (p. 18)[6]

This stigma attributed to primary orality then, that of primitive, savage, and inferior language, can be traced to similarities with ideologies of the animal kingdom cases cited earlier. There seems to be some consensus within the current world order that, without writing systems, people cannot have development of civilization, industries, education, or even humanity; that they are animals (or worse sometimes because developed world pets are animals that live with more respect from developed nations' peoples than "Other" humans do).

Primary orality is simply understood as conversation-based languages in societies in which no records of information are stored. Since no information is stored in their systems, primary orality/oral tradition language systems are widely seen to have no system of transference of information-based knowledge. Despite evidence that this is simply not true[7], these types of impressions have allowed the dominant written-language-based people to view oral tradition languages and cultures as having a lower status.

Before going further with the current theme I need to define the distinctions between oral tradition and orality. "Orality" and cultures of "primary orality" were the terms coined by Ong (1977, 2002) to refer to languages without writing systems. I use the terms "orality"/"primary oral-

ity," and "oral tradition" somewhat differently. What Ong calls "orality" is, in his and other texts, often synonymous with "oral tradition." That is, oral traditions belong to cultures in which there is verbal communication without writing. In this case, what Ong calls orality can be seen as the foundations of human beings or their belief systems, in reference to peoples/groups/communities, or even in reference to societies/nations/countries (this is ontology).

In my view, therefore, orality goes one step further than "oral traditions." The fundamental value systems of individuals within any of the peoples described above, as well as those of literate societies are formed through primary orality (primary orality referring to socialization within oral cultures). We can observe that there are different belief systems operating in members of different cultures and language systems, even in members of different strata of the same culture and language system. Most of us have to face this fact on a daily basis when we encounter anything from government policy to neighborhood disputes. We, as individuals, and then at each level of group formation have different priorities as our reference group gets bigger. I refer to each belief system as having an "orality" which, to distinguish it from how Ong has used it synonymously with "oral tradition," I will call *accord*. Accord refers to the primary oral consciousness that we all have, the ways in which we are shaped and taught by the shapes and content of language from birth. Accord (which would have its opposite in discord) incorporates ideas of harmony, social contract, concurrence, unity, agreement, voluntary-ness, and is derived from the Latin word for heart. Accord, refers to oral tradition, but also to dance, symbol, ritual, art, sign language, and other performance arts that require human beings to be present with and to one another, and to achieve a meeting of the minds (which of course includes a meeting of the hearts).

How do we develop accord? As Ong (1977) notes, we as humans all need to learn our mother tongues from our mothers, since we (humans) are all borne from mothers and they have love and compassion for their children:

> The concept of "mother" tongue registers deeply the human feeling that the language in which we grow up, the language which introduces us as human beings to the human lifeworld, not only comes primarily from our mother but belongs to some degree intrinsically to our mother's feminine world. Our first language claims us not as a father does, with a certain distance that is bracing because it is both austere and founded in deep love, but as a mother does, immediately, from the beginning, lovingly, possessively,

> participatorily, and incontrovertibly. Mother is closer than father: we were carried in her womb. In her and from her we were born. Our world is a fragment of hers. (Ong, 1977, p. 23)

By learning from the language from our mothers, we also learn her value systems, her world view, her meaning, and her truth of being; most importantly, we rely on her for our lives. Mother is the world for us, the only one who can provide life to each one of us through her love and compassion. Once this point is raised, it introduces the need to differentiate within Ong's (1977) notion of "orality." Human beings, those from written language cultures and non-written language cultures alike, are all brought into a world of primary accord, and later develop literacy as an artifice. Even in highly literate societies, some members function in primary accord,[8] which does not mean that they have been socialized into an oral language culture, but rather that they function within a literate culture in a manner associated with primary orality.

Taking this notion of accord to the animal kingdom, animals simply but absolutely rely on oral traditions (i.e., vocal communications) which are based on their own accord (i.e., world view, value, meaning, and truth). Birds and primates provide warning songs and other vocalizations to their own communities; therefore, the observer(s) of predator(s) have both duty and reason to protect their own communities/groups. Simply put, without communicating within their own societies, animals' lives are in danger both in the short time period (intrageneration) and in the longer time period (intergeneration). To carry out these practices, the information senders (speakers) must be very accurate with what they communicate; for example, vervet monkeys have been observed to provide accurate information about four types of predators (i.e., leopard, eagle, baboon, and python) for other group members (Cheney & Seyfarth, 1981). This practice of vervet monkeys has used to this day and will be used far into the future unless their environment changes (correlating to a change in their ontology). Both the scientific approach (e.g., Cheney & Seyfarth, 1981) and the legal approach (e.g., Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia, 1997) clearly provide evidence that a considerable amount of accurate and precise information is transferred through the oral tradition system. Oral traditions, then, are a necessary precondition for accord.

In addition to the accuracy of information transmitted through oral traditions, there is a possible explanation for consensus-based societal formation in reference to oral traditions. Aboriginal societies are traditionally consensus-based decision making societies (Alfred, 1999; Canadian Heritage, 2003; Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2006; Okalik,

2006), as are the societies of other Indigenous peoples worldwide (Reagan, 2005). In fact, consensus-based decision making is widely regarded as one of the criteria for considering a people "Indigenous." Alfred (1999), for example, notes:

> There is no central or coercive authority, and decision-making is collective. Leaders rely on their persuasive abilities to achieve a consensus that respects the autonomy of individuals, each of whom is free to dissent from and remain unaffected by the collective decision. (p. 25)

and, later,

> The governance process consists in the structured interplay of three kinds of power: individual power, persuasive power, and the power of tradition. These power relations are channeled into forms of decision-making and dispute resolution grounded in the recognition that beyond the individual there exists a natural community of interest: the extended family. Thus in almost all Indigenous cultures, the foundation order of government is the clan. (p. 26)

Thinking through this, I note that, in consensus-based communities, oral traditions seem to make a great contribution. In the same way that Ong (1977) suggested that mothers teach their languages to their children, and, therefore, it is safe to assume mothers also teach their values to their children, we can determine that through oral traditions, first family and then community values are passed on as "absolute values" to the next generations according to the society's worldview; in short, accord is passed on. When absolute values are passed orally in both the most intimate and public ways in support of a community's worldview, then the community people are, by definition, working toward one value, one meaning, and one truth, accord, which is extended throughout the community, establishing the base for consensus. In other words, in consensus-based communities, accord is achieved through oral traditions.

Not being able to record the words of speakers in writing, people (listeners) are forced to understand the meaning and positionality of speaker in order to synchronize their meanings (and/or values) with those of the speaker. Unable to rely on recorded minutes of meetings and discussions to verify decisions, participants are forced to come to consensus within one value/meaning. The words of speakers disappear as soon as they are spoken. Of course, when words disappear, then there can be no concept of ownership of words, thoughts or knowledge. When words, thoughts and knowledge cannot be "owned" by individuals or groups, then they also cannot be commodified, but that is an idea that requires more space than is available here, so it is the subject for another paper.

Words spoken belong to the group. For words to be passed on, there must be consensus in understanding; the words must support the truth of the community.

Finally, in Indigenous societies (or groups/communities) the economic system seems to revolve primarily around one source (hunting, fishing, or gathering of food from the surrounding environment). When there is only one economic condition within the society, there are no means to differentiate the social positions of members on the basis of how to live, meaning that all members' work is equally important and valued as an important link in survival. When misunderstanding or miscommunication arises, harsh consequences are paid: not getting food, risking everyone's lives. These are strong motives for oral traditions to express precise information, to share knowledge among group members, and for consensus to be achieved by all members coming to one truth.

As a final note about accord, I question about whether or not we can reach accord-like states through writing systems, that is, without using oral traditions? The answer to this would appear to be a tentative "yes," conditionally. That is, instantaneous written communication can be seen as much like the current instant messaging system, meaning that, as with oral communication, there is no history of what people have written on the page. In the past, most North American children and their parents have played with Etch-a sketch, or other magic eraser toys; immediately after one person writes on it, the next person must erase that message in order to write another one. In this type of communication, people no longer rely on recorded information; instead, the information has to be internalized and memorized as the writer's experience. Through activities like this, people can establish a further and deeper understanding of each other which may lead to accuracy and consensus in written communication. These types of communication require the presence of both communicators (speakers and listeners) since estimates are that 93% of communicated meaning comes from non-verbal communication, that is, facial linking (55%), vocal linking (38%) rather than verbal linking (7%) (Mehrabian (1981). In this form of written communication, writer(s) and reader(s) will be likely to rely greatly on their facial linking and an abundance of non vocal linkage can be assumed. Again, the point here is to raise question of writing system be able to build consensus and provide for the transfer of precise, accurate meanings, a question that raises profound questions for the future with the advancement of synchronous text communication over the Internet.

Secondary Orality

Electronic and Digital Media

At the present time, the advancement of electronic and digital media are spurring newly emerging applications in information transferring systems, which is changing the nature of orality from primary orality to what Ong calls "secondary orality" (Ong, 2002, p. 333). These new media (in this case, radio and television; this book was written before the World Wide Web) are capable of carrying both the sounds and images of the speakers (senders) and thus transferring information. Ong argues that, "like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience…" (p. 134). But radio and television information technologies do not allow senders to receive information, nor do they allow listeners to send their messages back to the sender. These media have therefore only allowed senders to distribute information, rather than allowing for a sharing time and space between persons who are trying to communicate. It is a one-way communication system, as are most digital communications, such as e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging. The exception to this is video conferencing through internet access, a two-way communication using sound and video images simultaneously over long distances. Unfortunately, due to the distance between the communicators, anything other than visual and auditory impressions are not transmitted through the information media (i.e., digital and electronic signals), and owing to the distance, there is significant distortion of sound and image and/or a time lag develops, owing to which, consensus of communicators is often not obtained. We are able to save some forms of secondary orality on the Internet or in digital and analog archiving systems which record and store stories and images.

How do we use this stored information from secondary orality? This electronically accumulated information, both analog and digital, is only capable of expressing the authors' and creators' messages from their own particular points of view, in terms of images and sounds. It seems that clear that this stored information is no longer able or intended to communicate with viewers/listeners. The importance of electronically stored information is not for it to be used as a communication tool or a language "safe box." When speakers tell stories and/or narrations are recorded either for the purposes of archiving or for another purpose which results in archiving, the speakers' words and sentences become almost impossible to translate, impossible to understand as the words were understood when the speakers told their stories and/or narrations. The speakers are no longer there, no longer present at the conversation

site, to communicate with listeners, to respond to a particular audience through their body language, spiritual essence, physical strength, dominance, or other factors. The word and sentences are no longer disappearing from the world as they are spoken. When words and sentences disappear as fast as the speaker tells the stories and/or narrations, then listeners must be able to understand the "core meaning" of the speakers, and reflect on both the means of communication, including all nonverbal communication, and their own experiences, to store as meaning as a record in their own bodies. If the information being shared is essential to their survival and/or if it has important future implications, then it will have greater importance for the listeners. Therefore, listeners will integrate the information with their own thoughts much more deeply, and it will have a more lasting impact than any future viewings or playing of the recorded messages. In short, in secondary orality, accord is not achieved.

Differing from Ong, my own view is that secondary orality should be viewed as much less *similar to* oral traditions (primary orality) than *distinct from* oral traditions. Secondary orality should be viewed as much more like writing rather than like oral traditions, since electronically stored information/representation of past can be seen as symbols without meanings. It is important to understand that anyone can "decode" a language or any other symbol, even after it has been dead for a long time (for example, Latin and many other lost languages that are maintained in written forms for future generations). A hermeneutic approach can be taken to text and recorded messages, and some understanding may result, but a reader will not able to travel back (or bring speakers to our presence) and ask questions of what their lives were like, and how they perceived their lives within the power structures that existed at the time (Foucault, M. 1977).

The advantages of storing stories and narratives are somewhat the same as the advantages of written text; that is, the information can last over a longer period of time—at least as long as electronics and technologies are retrievable. This advantage contains still another irony since our technologies change so fast. In recent memory, state of the art technology has changed from the 8mm camera to web streaming and memory sticks. We now have problems with revisiting our own stored information, since equipment no longer exists, or is hard to find, or because the information has degraded and can no longer be retrieved. It seems that, as technologies fade away with time, so do stored images.

Objects/Arts/Crafts/and Other Abstract Creations

The idea of storing and archiving expressions needs to be extended

to objects/arts/crafts and other abstract creations. These symbols are the representation of their creators' (peoples') ideas. They convey meaning, not just in linguistic and semiotic terms such as "signifier" and "signified" (i.e., words and meanings), but also in terms of ontological and epistemological meanings. An ontological meaning, for example, can be understood from how hinged doors open in Japan and how they open in Canada. In Japan, hinged doors open outward from the inside of the house, but the hinged doors of Canadian houses open to the inside of the house. I have often wondered why this difference developed. I can only provide a Japanese perspective on why anyone would open the door to the inside; it is more difficult for a stranger to move into the house. Opening the door to the outside allows people to come in. After living in Canada for a while, I realized that if the door opened to the outside, then the people in the house might be exposed to greater risk because five or even possibly ten feet of snow could fall overnight, and then no one would be able to get outside since door is shut tight, for the winter! Of course the door must open inward rather than outward. Our epistemology and information-based knowledge must be tightly connected to our being (ontology). If not, then the meaning of the actions (conversations/symbols/ideas and other human activities) cannot be shared (epistemology and information based knowledge) or they will lose meaning for those who live in different times and places.

When symbols (including conversation/stories, arts, even our symbolized actions) are stored in a museum as artifacts then they lose all meaning (both the ontological and the epistemological meaning of why the creators have done/made it the way that they did). We can still read the text which contains an explanation but when symbols become artifacts, the process turns the meaning of symbols into text, with the result that meaning resides in the readers and is not shared with the creators.

Symbols will automatically turn into artifacts when they turn into physical preservatives for other cultures (i.e., people who have different ontologies and epistemologies) which do not share time and place. Symbols must be used by groups of people to have meaning. Even when used symbols become worn down and break, the users can recreate the symbols because they share in their meanings. However, once the meaning is gone, then the symbol turns into an artifact to be stored in archives and valued in terms of preservation. The shift can also happen the other way around. Symbols can be stolen or taken by other people and the meaning they represented for a community will eventually be lost, since there are no other ways to express this meaning (for example, a tree which is the site of a particular spirit may be cut down, and the spirit as well as its meaning will be lost to the community). The meaning

will likely shift, change and finally be forgotten in the future. In this case, the meaning which came from shared ontology and epistemology expressed in symbols can be seen as the accord of culture and people. In other words, accord is the "Truth" of the community or group.

This argument can also be seen in the animal kingdom, in such instances as when animals' sexual and territorial disputes affect food gathering behaviors. If a male peacock were to lose his tail, he could no longer express his sexually-triggered display to the female of the species. The female would no longer recognize, nor receive, the male's meaning if he decided to flap his wings instead of displaying his tail. Even better, if all male peacocks were to lose their tails over some generations, then their sexual behaviors must also be changed since that change would affect the fundamental existential essence of the peacock as a species. This idea is based on, and extrapolated from, Darwin's theory of evolution.

Additionally, scientists are forced to (or willingly do so) explain dinosaur's behaviors according to the little bits of their bones that remain in existence. Scientists can only extrapolate from our lives to imagine how dinosaurs would have behaved, or even what color they were. In fact, the color spectrum that existed at the time of the dinosaurs is unknown, so scientists base their generalizations on references to the colors of our world. Likewise, since we do not share time and space with our ancestors, the meanings of their symbols cannot be really understood unless those meanings were consistently conveyed over time and place (presumably through oral traditions). Even when the meanings are consistently conveyed, our environment changes and shifts over time (changing the meaning incrementally over time). Thus, our meanings must change according to our surroundings (i.e., nature).

Return to Oral Traditions?

To summarize my argument in short, oral traditions/primary orality are used to build consensus. They build one truth, one worldview, which I have termed accord. Cultures that have developed and maintained oral traditions, such as Indigenous cultures, therefore develop as consensus-based societies. Their accord is their ontology and epistemology. Written text, on the other hand, records the personal truth of the writer, or the dominant truth of an oppressor. There is no consensus, and no accord. Cultures of written text are often dominator cultures, in which "truth" is forced onto some of their members. Secondary orality functions more like written text than like oral tradition, particularly in that it can be interpreted by other cultures in other times, badly. But, the question is: what and how can we, as Indigenous peoples, continue to trans-

fer accord accurately with our meaning of truth (e.g., ontology, episte-mology, value, and world view)?

The answers seem to lie in how we communicate our lives and life experiences to the next generations. Since there are multiple ways of communicating, choosing among and combining oral traditions, sec-ondary oral traditions, and written texts, we need to consider all combi-nations with a view to finding the best methods of accord transfer, by which I mean conveying our truths as accurately as possibly. Oral com-munication, which we have all been doing as long as verbal communi-cations have existed in history, will be the first step. Second, in written text, as we considered earlier, the actual meanings being communicated belong to the writer, however, the reader also interprets meanings ac-cording to the accord he or she has developed within his/her own cul-ture. In other words, this second stage brings self (consciousness) into communication. Third, secondary oral communication will also follow the same pattern as written communication. We must keep in mind, however, that these second and third communication methods can be used in ways that achieve very close simulations to the first method of oral communication, if the writer(s) and speaker(s) have previously shared the same accord as the reader(s)/listener(s)/viewer(s). This is a similar argument to that made by Weber-Pillwax (2001), who suggested that writing done by Northern Cree follows oral rather than written conven-tions and achieves similar goals. In other words, in this case, the infor-mation sender(s) and receiver(s) likely have the same ontology, episte-mology, values, meaning, and world view.

This is the norm and assumption through which dominant societies/ cultures operate. They can, and do, assume that dominated peoples and cultures will learn to interpret and work within their accord. Unfortu-nately, Indigenous/minority/oppressed/colonized people cannot, and should not, assume that their own current accord will be passed onto the next generations; this is because the dominant societies' social he-gemony will operate through capitalism, human rights, food sources, and many other materialist factors and lifestyles, changing, shifting, and stealing the accord of marginalized/Indigenous groups. For marginalized/ Indigenous groups to have accord over the next generations, I believe it will be most important for us to spend more time with our next genera-tions, passing on our own accord through primary oral traditions. I be-lieve it is more important to spend time in this form of apprenticeship, rather than engaging in archiving and preserving museum pieces in writ-ing or some other form of recording for the next generations. Ong (2002) has noted that human beings in primary oral cultures practice wisdom, but they do not study, that they "learn by apprenticeship—hunting with

experienced hunters…by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them…" (p. 9). This is a long and hard process, and the results are not immediately visible as they are when we create archives and museum pieces and texts. However, it must be done in order to pass on marginalized Indigenous peoples' accord to the next generations; then, and only then will our writing systems and secondary oral traditions (orality) be meaningful. It is up to us to ensure that we pass on rather than preserve accord. In the words of Alfred (1999) "Don't preserve tradition (in this case, in the sense of archiving or writing down the words and values of our ancestors); live it!" (p. 145). Failure to do so will mean that we will also lose the mark of Indigenous societies, consensus and accord.

Currently, not just the survival of Indigenous and marginalized groups, our consensus-based societies, or our ways of life, are at stake. At this point in history, human survival is at stake. As I suggested in reference to the Snow Geese, when it comes to survival, orality, and the consensus that comes from shared beliefs, values and understandings, that is, accord is essential. Accord is not compatible with capitalism's abuses, with self-conscious individualism, or with human and animal hierarchies. Accord is essential to the only gift we can give the next generations: survival.

Appendix A
(Unofficial Languages of United Nations)

1.   Armenian <u>Yerevan</u> (Armenia)
2.   Bangla <u>Dhaka</u> (Bangladesh)
3.   Belarusian <u>Minsk</u> (Belarus)
4.   Czech <u>Prague</u> (Czech Republic)
5.   Danish <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
6.   Dutch <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
7.   Farsi <u>Tehran</u> (Iran)
8.   Finnish <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
9.   German <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)   <u>Vienna</u> (Austria)
10. Greek <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
11. Hungarian <u>Vienna</u> (Austria)
12. Icelandic <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
13. Italian <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
14. Kiswahili <u>Dar es Salaam</u> (Tanzania)   <u>Nairobi</u> (Kenya)
15. Japanese <u>Tokyo</u> (Japan)
16. Malagasy <u>Antananarivo</u> (Madagascar)

17. Norwegian <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
18. Polish <u>Warsaw</u> (Poland)
19. Portuguese <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)   <u>Rio de Janeiro</u> (Brazil)
20. Romanian <u>Bucharest</u> (Romania)
21. Slovakian <u>Vienna</u> (Austria)
22. Slovenian <u>Vienna</u> (Austria)
23. Swedish <u>Brussels</u> (Belgium)
24. Thai <u>Bangkok</u> (Thailand)
25. Turkish <u>Ankara</u> (Turkey)
26. Ukrainian <u>Kyiv</u> (Ukraine)
27. Urdu <u>Islamabad</u> (Pakistan)
28. Uzbek <u>Tashkent</u> (Uzbekistan)

from
http://www.un.org/aroundworld/unics/english/non-un-language.htm

Notes

1. While some researchers might object to comparisons between humans and animals as being non-scientific, I point out that first, Indigenous peoples do not draw a clear line between the animal and human forms of life as Western people do, and that, somewhat paradoxically in terms of such arguments, Western-based medicine uses animals extensively for testing and transplant because of the similarity in DNA and response to chemicals. Moreover, as Weber-Pillwax (2001) suggests, "social interactions include relationships with animals, fishes, birds, plants, trees, water, other people, spirits of those who have died, spirits of all created beings, as well as the Creator spirit and the grandfather and grandmother spirits" (p. 152).

2. Psychologist Albert Mehrabian (1981) established that: 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken; 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said); 55% of meaning is in facial expression. In other words, 93% of communication is through non-verbals. However, these figures cannot be extrapolated from the human-to-human, face-to-face communication that Mehrabian studied to other situations (such as written text, or telephone conversations, or formal speech events).

3. It is written: Delgamuukw, 42 (para 91)

> 91 One objection that I would like to mention specifically, albeit in passing, is the trial judge's refusal to accept the testimony of two anthropologists who were brought in as expert witnesses by the appellants. This aspect of the trial

judge's reasons was hotly contested by the appellants in their written submissions. However, I need only reiterate what I have stated above, that findings of credibility, including the credibility of expert witnesses, are for the trial judge to make, and should warrant considerable deference from appellate courts.

Source: http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1997/1997rcs3-1010/1997rcs3-1010.html

4. Citing this, I am aware that there is no linguistic criteria for determining where an oral language ends and another begins, what is a language and what is a dialect. The difference between a dialect and a language is political and ideological, not linguistic. I have chosen this number because Edmonson's (1971) figure is conservative. The ethnologue compiled by Gordon (2005) actually lists 6912 living languages in the world, leaving a smaller percentage of them written languages.

5. By listing this as "Chinese" rather than as "Mandarin, Cantonese, and Toisan (among others)" the United Nations is further acknowledging only the written form. The spoken forms of Chinese are mutually unintelligible (and therefore considered different languages) but there is only one writing system.

6. I am reminded in this of Brody's (2004) description of the passage time in the decision-making/planning of the hunter (pp. 38) who says "tomorrow morning" many times before he sets off, and my wife's frustration in dealing with island ways, when "we will leave shortly" never comes. Time, I might suggest, in primary oral cultures, is fused with space, intention, a blending of the physical and metaphysical.

7. In one study, for example, Wong Fillmore notes the sophisticated knowledge of a six year old on what to do if you are lost on the tundra: "The boy explained that you should never stick moss into your clothing for insulation, since it holds moisture. He went on to tell me how to beat the moisture out of grass and use it to stuff your clothing, since grass doesn't retain water." Retrieved March 17th, 2007 from http://gse.berkeley.edu/admin/publications/termpaper/spring00/fillmore_alaska.html.

8. For example, my daughter is dyslexic. She is constantly tested, judged, and "fixed" within the school system. She struggles with reading, and it does not come naturally to her. But, she functions in primary orality, or rather, accord. In orality, there is nothing wrong with her. She only needs to be "fixed" because of the literate conventions of the society she lives in. For example, if my daughter has to do multiplication tables and sees them printed, she is baffled.

But, she can chant all of the times tables in Japanese. To do multiplication, she first translates the sight numbers or English spoken numbers into Japanese sounds, then chants the Japanese times table until she finds the answer, then translates that into English to answer her teacher.

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