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Kubai enchants us: an indigenous story in Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Kubai nos encanta: uma história indígena em Comunicação Aumentativa e Alternativa

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Abstract: This study is part of an ongoing research. In this paper, we analyze the production and potentiality of a multiformat children's book, whose content is based on a mythological history of the Kubeo indigenous people, which describes the history of the creation of the world. The book is written in Brazilian Portuguese and Guarani indigenous language, mediated by Augmentative and Alternative Communication. This bilingual book is relevant to the recognition of indigenous cultures in children's literature and the need to provide access to indigenous and non-indigenous children to books that narrate the stories of native peoples. The methodology, with a qualitative approach, has as references the systemic thinking of Bateson, as well as the indigenous cultures of Munduruku, Martins and Gomes and Kambeba (2018), among others. We collected enrolment indicators from the School Census Microdata (2020) of indigenous children aged 0-12 years, from which we observed the higher number of enrolments in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. The multiformat book allows access to both languages, providing opportunities for reading and getting closer to the chosen story. The analysis of this study indicate that this type of production can open a path for cultural exchange, allowing indigenous (or not) children to access and approximate indigenous cultures and books that tell their

stories. Another important finding of this study is the possibility of indigenous children to recognize themselves in written children's literature.

Keywords: Multiformat literature; Guarani Language; Augmentative and Alternative Communication; Inclusion; Indigenous children's literature.

Introduction

Nossa fantasia era alimentada e visitada por esses pequenos seres – verdadeiros – trazidos até nós pela voz cantilena de nossas avós^{1:14}.

Indigenous children's literature is part of a culture that has historically been silenced, denied and devalued by the colonizer's culture, as Eliane Potiguara mentions: "In the past, our grandmothers spoke strongly. They also fought. Then came the evil white man, an Indian killer, and made our grandmother shut up"^{2:69}. Therefore, today, it is essential to guarantee and value indigenous cultures in our country, also guaranteed by the legitimacy of each language¹.

It may be said that one of the ways to weaken a culture involves the imposition of a language such as the one considered official, the only one that has value. This has been unleashed in our country for five centuries. In 1500, at the time of the beginning of colonization, the natives totaled 5 million people occupying the Brazilian territory³ and today it is essential to put this issue on the agenda, guaranteeing the visibility of the stories and cultures of the native peoples. Going against a prejudiced and racist society, Professor Fernanda Kaingang⁴, stated in a testimony recorded during the Mekukradjá event, that education would be able to enable learning and apprehension of other cultures, especially those historically been put down, downgraded, in the Brazilian context. Thus, proposing alternatives that make it possible to overcome inequalities becomes urgent. The exponent indigenous author Graça Graúna talks about the pains and hopes related to the resistance present in contemporary indigenous literature.

Our contemporary literature is one of the instruments we also have to reflect on the tragedies committed by the colonizers against indigenous peoples; literature is also an instrument of peace in order to sing the hope of better days for indigenous peoples in Brazil and in other parts of the world^{5:275}.

The role of indigenous authors is one of the main particularities of the perspective of the place of speech and of this same speech as ancestry. "In Brazilian indigenous literature, writers strive to clarify

that indigenous culture is formed by different groups that have different traditions and practices from each other”^{6:230}. The magic that words evoke comes from the various types of stories that can be known: adventure, poetry, *cordel*¹, real life and fiction. Traveling in the ancestry allows us to find approximation with ancestral voices “who were prevented from expressing their thoughts over more than 500 years of colonization”^{7:170}.

Recent data on the numbers referring to the indigenous population in Brazil unfortunately show how significant the practices and policies of the colonizers were: “According to the 2010 IBGE census, there are more than 305 indigenous peoples, totaling 896,917 people. Of these, 324,834 live in cities [...] outside indigenous lands. These are now known as urban or urbanized indigenous”^{8:11}.

People who live in an urban context have access to schools and live with the Portuguese language, often as if it were their first language. However, it is necessary to question: how to guarantee the written and spoken indigenous language in schools? How can non-indigenous children enjoy and learn about indigenous cultures? In this regard, author Daniel Munduruku highlights some indications of how precious the possibility of hearing indigenous stories can be:

One day, I was telling stories to a group of young children. He narrated one that he had heard from my grandfather. It was a touching story. In the end, a girl raised her finger and asked me: “Indian uncle, where can I find these stories for me to read?”. I was embarrassed because I didn’t know what to say. But it was like a switch was flipped in my head: I had to spread those stories^{9:2}.

Access to indigenous children's literature is quite recent compared to other books aimed at young children, as can be seen from this comment by Graça Graúna^{7:174}: “In the early 1990s, there was almost no reference of indigenous publications. The voice of the other predominated and not the native voice”. Today, however, they include an expressive number of authors recognized for their precious children's stories and names such as Daniel Munduruku, Roni Wasiry Guará, Tiago Hakity, Cristino Wapichana, among others, stand out. It is remarkable that this gap is beginning to be filled after a history of silencing the original peoples of Brazil. Currently, we can find an expressive offer of titles written by indigenous people, even though they are in Portuguese. Few and rare are the stories written in some indigenous language and shared with all children.

In Brazil, for basic education, knowledge of the traditions and history of indigenous peoples is guaranteed through Law 11.645, March 10th, 2008¹⁰ of Brazilian education. This regulation has made it

¹ NdT: Cordel: folk poems and stories distributed through booklets, typical of the countryside in Brazil, mainly in the Northeast.

possible that published books by indigenous authors may be closer to children, indigenous or not, in the context of school practices. We emphasize that from the perspective of ethnic-racial relations, there is the beginning of “the implementation of (new) pedagogical practices in the school curriculum, more specifically in the context of teaching history, Brazilian literature and artistic education”^{11:199}. In this sense, establishing approximations between the chosen story and the language that could be told, led us to analyze our context: Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul.

We identified at least five indigenous state schools in Porto Alegre/RS, three of them in an exclusive indigenous context. One of these in a Guarani scenario: State School of Early Childhood Education and Elementary School Pindo Poty, which, according to the School Census Microdata¹², has four indigenous children between five and nine years old. It does not seem to be an expressive number, however, when we look at the total enrollment of this group in Porto Alegre, between zero and 12 years old, as shown in the following table, this index is equivalent to 1.7%.

The enrolment indicators of indigenous children from 0 to 12 years old in Porto Alegre indicate that the state system has been involved in the schooling of these children, since it holds 52% of these enrolments. The total data, considering the age group of the children, suggest that there are 29 enrolments in Early Childhood Education, 14 of which are children aged 0 to 3 years old (nursery) and 15 children aged from 4 to 5 years old (pre-school). It is possible to observe that the highest concentration occurs in the initial years of Elementary School with 197 enrolments.

These data show the intensity of enrolment of indigenous children in Porto Alegre, which requires a careful look from the recognition of their cultures and languages, as well as in relation to the adequacy of materials that promote accessibility to children's books.

Method

The present study is part of an ongoing research¹¹ aimed at the development of children's books in multi-format. For this article, we aim to analyse the production of a children's book, whose content is a mythological story of the Kubeo indigenous people about the creation of the world, developed in the

Guarani and Portuguese languages, these being mediated by Augmentative and Alternative Communication² (CAA in the Portuguese acronym).

This study has a qualitative approach, with a theoretical basis in the perspective of systemic thinking¹³⁻¹⁶ as well as articulation with indigenous cultural references^{8,9}. However, it should be remarked that the dialogue with indigenous cultures was present – and necessary – at all times, both in dialogues and in joint productions with indigenous students and researchers, as in access to indigenous references about cultures and literature^{15, 17,18}.

The prospection of enrolment data^{III} of indigenous children from 0 to 12 years old in the Microdados do Censo Escolar (School Census Microdata)¹², previously highlighted, was carried out in order to observe the intensity of enrolment of these children in the context of Porto Alegre in order to understand the importance of production of a book that contemplates indigenous cultures.

The research is located on the Multi/UFRGS research group, and is articulated from investigations with the multidisciplinary knowledge of a collective formed by professionals such as pedagogues, special education teachers, visual impairment consultants, design specialists, undergraduate students of different areas and an indigenous woman from the Kubeo people. At times, depending upon the project, the group expands its scope of work and new guests are included in order to guarantee aspects such as cultural legitimacy to give reliability to the project. For this research, it was possible to dialogue with people from the Kubeo and Guarani culture and, for that reason, we sought the theoretical-methodological direction that allowed “doing the ‘researchWITH’ the other and not ABOUT the other - but also because the movements inter-weave collectively”^{19:153}.

Kubai, the Charmed: a multi-format indigenous story

Among indigenous peoples in various parts of the world, the word is a sacred element. In the Guarani view, for example, the word has a soul. Words and identity are confused; word that passes from father to son, from grandparents to grandchildren; word laden with water, word coming from the earth, word heated by fire, word as necessary as the air we breathe; word that crosses time^{7:173}.

² A system of communication by symbols/pictograms that aims to supplement, complement, increase or give alternatives to communication (PASSERINO; BEZ, 2015).

The search for an indigenous history was a challenge that led us to many invaluable productions, and that search led to an encounter with an animation: “El Retorno del Kubai (Kubai Comes Back)¹²”. This video inspired and guided one of the group's researchers, who has roots in the Kubeo people's identity. Afterwards, the group begins to weave the story of Kubai the Charmed:

Once upon a time there was Kubai, an enchanted, adventurous and curious being, who created things using the magic of words. Once, in a distant and dark place, he said: “May beautiful coloured leaves, let yourselves to be felt”. Creating then a beautiful forest. In the midst of those huge trees, he had another idea: “there can be animals in this forest”. And suddenly, the first one appeared: it was big and with soft fur, it was a happy and observant jaguar. Kubai noticed, from the top of the trees, that there was still a lack of sounds there and, playing with words, he created singing birds. The most colourful bird soon gave him a beautiful headdress, thanking him for the freedom to fly. Kubai looked down and, feeling the earthy ground under his feet, realized that there was a lake being made: it was the anaconda that was crawling, inventing her trail. Then Kubai the Charmed followed the path and reached the refreshing waters of the Rio Negro, where he dove to the bottom and continued to create and play. What will he invent now²⁰?

From the initial story, represented in the video^{IV} from the telling of the Kubeo people, a (new) story emerged. In this process of creation and adaptation, we sought a translation into writing in Guarani, as we had a positive reception from the indigenous researcher of the group. Between online meetings for the development of the book and the adaptations of resources, a careful translation into Guarani was guaranteed. Thus, with the text in Guarani and Portuguese, the group turned its attention to translation/mediation in CAA.

The development of the book Kubai the Charmed generated a great challenge: to reconcile the representation of the rich Kubeo culture with accessibility standards. For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAA), the pictogram system³ chosen presented a European vision for the representations of several key terms of history inconsistent with the culture of origin of the myth. Thus, it was necessary to develop new pictograms to correspond, following accessibility guidelines and seeking to maintain the unity of style with the other official pictograms of the system.

The production of illustrations

³ The pictographic symbols used are the property of the Government of Aragon and were created by Sergio Palao for ARASAAC (<http://www.arasaac.org>), who distributes them under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA License.

For the production of the images, we initially sought the geometrization of forms, characteristic of the indigenous culture, which ended up conflicting with the requirements of realism in the proportion and rigidity of the images. In the development of the research, we analyzed the indigenous productions available among important publishers in order to develop graphics for the images in order to make the relationship between this culture and nature more representative.

In this literary and cultural encounter, a special place emerged for the indigenous ancestry that happens according to the ethnic group to which the story belongs¹⁸. They are the myths, mysteries of each culture, which reveal the way of thinking and “the little ones see and learn ways to provide their food”^{17:164}, for example.

Such knowledge is initially transmitted orally, considering the importance of narratives transmitted orally as a heritage of each people¹⁸. The Culture of Indigenous Peoples is a true book that has been written for generations and which, today, many are leaning to know. These narratives are present in different ways: some peoples transmitted their knowledge orally and through the drawings they made on the stones and on their artifacts such as ceramic bowls, pots, etc. The graphics, in turn, have their own meanings and are easy to read and interpret for everyone.

The production of history in CAA

As was already noted, and considering the previously elucidated articulations, for the composition of the story we started, as a first step with a mythological history of the Kubeo indigenous people regarding the creation of the world. From the choice of this story, the production of the adaptation of the story began and, subsequently, the production of illustrations and the development of the articulation between the text in Guarani and Portuguese with the mediation in CAA later, aiming to guarantee accessibility for children belonging to the Guarani indigenous culture or not. “CAA encompasses different forms of communication such as: gestures, sign language, facial expressions, and even the use of software capable of supporting communication”^{21:5}.

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⁴ Documentary Film. Available at: https://youtu.be/miRLD_-IhUK

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The present research was directed to develop a book in multiformat^{VI}, capable of integrating different technological, physical and digital resources, with the objective of enabling access to different audiences. Kubai the Charmed, in addition to being written in Guarani and Portuguese mediated by CAA, offers access to audio description and storytelling in Guarani, Portuguese and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) through QR Code or DVD.

The creation of the book was based on the need to establish dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. The fabric of history aimed to highlight one or the other language, without any being defined as the first language, thus seeking to guarantee the shared use of the book by indigenous and non-indigenous children.

Results

The history of Kubai was developed in multi-format with text in Guarani and Portuguese associated with some writing in symbols. The quality and relevance of the translation into the Guarani language made by Neusa Poty Quadros, an indigenous of the Guarani Mbya ethnic group, teacher of Guarani language and culture at Mbya Aldeia Tekoa Palmeirinha and a member of the Guarani Yvyrupá commission, are remarkable, as there is, in the meeting with the words, much more than new (and old) ways of saying what we already know, that is, there are possibilities for discoveries for one's own curiosity, sharpening the desire to understand more. Thus, in this shifting between Portuguese and Guarani, there is exactly what Kubai, in its mythological essence, offers: enchantment.

The book is in multi-format, providing not only access to the two languages, but also the possibility to listen, watch, feel, allowing the sharing of history, sensations and emotions. Specifically, we can say that this book guarantees an approximation with the history and languages involved.

We also emphasize that the Guarani people have great diversity in the organization of subgroups, three of which are recognized in Brazil by their names: Mbyá, Kaiowá and Ñandeva. During the research for the production of the book, we sought to approach the Mbya culture, present in the state of Rio Grande do Sul^{VI}. Aspects such that emphasize and expand the relevance of literature in indigenous languages.

Discussion

Browsing through dozens of works already published by authors of different ethnicities, it is remarkable how important the books are for interlocution to present the indigenous world not only to indigenous children, but also to non-indigenous children, in partnership between indigenous and non-indigenous people, a children's story. We recognize the opportunity of this partnership to understand “the need for interaction between a holistic attention to the internal logic of each people and their interpellation with the cosmos”^{22:20}.

Telling stories to very young children, or even reading them aloud, from picture books, supports the importance of emotional and cognitive development. Regardless of whether it is an action developed by the teacher or among them, exploring stories, telling them, listening to them or just observing their illustrations, it is never a single action, it is always accompanied by imagination, emotions, the elaboration of new ideas, possibilities, of exchange “[...] we can think of the story, not as an isolated instrument, but as a mediator capable of favouring interactions [...]”^{23:86}.

The words and emotions, whether they enter the narration or not, validate the direction of allowing learning and putting oneself in the other's shoes, an ingredient that, over time, is also contributing to individual narratives, facilitating relationships and learning. For young children, such an enjoyable and important experience forges precious food for the mind and heart.

Final considerations

Following Bateson¹⁴, we all think in terms of history. The research group Multi/UFRGS considered this premise when proposing to develop a children's book around the topic of an ancestral story of the Kubeo people, which explains the origin of all things in the world as a gift from this enchanted being to human beings.

The idea of telling the story in two languages is linked to the constitutional law, autonomy and self-determination of the native peoples of Brazil. In addition, it involves the recognition of its importance for the cultural identity of the country, which can be considered recent in our history, although essential. Likewise, it connects with the bases of the Multi/UFRGS group, which seeks to value and give visibility to the diversity guaranteed in children's books in accessible multiformat.

The history of Kubai has been transmitted orally since the beginning of the world according to the tradition of the Kubeo people, an aspect that gave rise to the transmission of the wisdom of the ancients and the culture as it is known today. In indigenous peoples, this happens under the responsibility of the elders, such as the sages, generally known by the name of shamans, allowing this wisdom to reach out to present days.

The literature of indigenous peoples and the perspective of revitalizing indigenous languages in the conception of interculturality in this research are important for accessing an indigenous history offered in the Guarani language. Such an initiative opens possible paths for a cultural exchange that involves different ways of communicating. Through the history of *Kubai, the Charmed*, promoted in CAA, it is also possible for children, indigenous or not, to get closer to this ancient culture. Another aspect to be highlighted refers to the importance of children of the Guarani ethnicity having access to a book whose history is written in their language and which deals with their myths and traditions. This element gives visibility and recognition to indigenous children, considering that until recently they did not identify themselves in children's literature.

A book was edited by the Graphic of UFRGS: *Kubai, o encantado*, as a partial output of the research. The expected result, from the offer of the history of Kubai, in Guarani and Portuguese and mediated by CAA, is related to the process of resignification of the way readers can have access to literature. Ensuring the right to read as well as the right to preserve the cultures of original peoples in Brazil, consequently, is something that will benefit all audiences.

Notes

^I It is important to say that there is a Bill in progress (PL 3074/2019) that: “Provides for the Co-officialization of Indigenous Languages in Brazilian municipalities that have indigenous communities.” The project is in line with the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (2009). In: https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra;jsessionid=F7C66B70C3DC2E24F8DA5B12F1B211D4.proposicoesWebExterno1?codteor=1846199&filename=Avulso+-PL+3074/2019

^{II} This research is funded by the Research Support Foundation of Rio Grande do Sul - FAPERGS.

^{III} A system of communication by symbols/pictograms that aims to supplement, complement, increase or give alternatives to communication (PASSERINO; BEZ, 2015).

^{IV} Documentary Film. Available at: https://youtu.be/miRLD_-IhUk

^V The pictographic symbols used are the property of the Government of Aragon and were created by Sergio Palao for ARASAAC (<http://www.arasaac.org>), who distributes them under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA License.

^{VI} The story has a second version with print in braille and enlarged ink, as well as tactile illustrated images. We also emphasize that the idea of a multiformat book is to expand access through the various formats, being able to offer technological resources fostered from the idea of expanding formats in order to enrich the experience for all.

^{VII} It is worth mentioning that the Guaranis Mbya are also in the Southeast Region of Brazil, from the Coast to the Atlantic Rainforest, and also in Paraguay.

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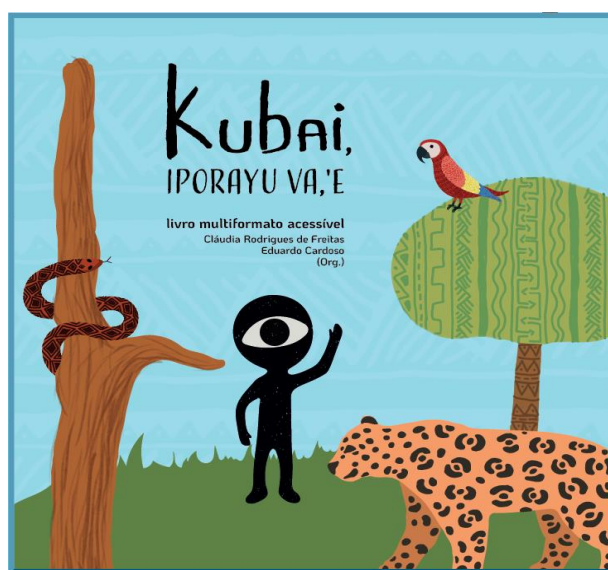
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Ilustrações, tabelas e quadros

Tabela 1. Enrolments of indigenous children aged 0 to 12 years in Porto Alegre by administrative dependency.

DEPENDÊNCIA ADMINISTRATIVA	IDADE														TOTAL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
FEDERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MUNICIPAL	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	16	13	3	8	7	12	65	
ESTADUAL	0	0	0	0	1	4	7	24	17	16	20	18	11	118	
PRIVADA	0	6	3	5	7	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	1	43	
TOTAL	0	6	3	5	9	6	16	44	33	21	31	28	24	226	

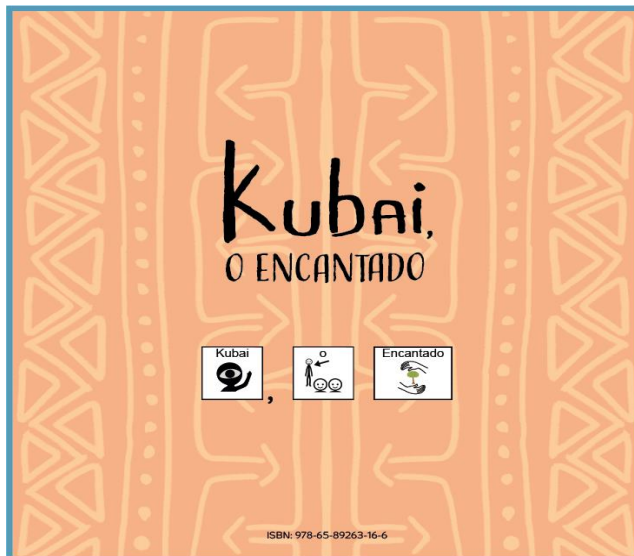
Source: Authors, based on Microdata from the School Census¹².

Figure 1. Book Cover *Kubai the Charmed*.

Source: Grupo de pesquisa Multi/UFRGS.

Image Description: On a light blue background with indigenous graphics and with slanted lines and triangles lined up horizontally, the characters of the book and the title in black appear: Kubai, the charmed. In the centre, Kubai; to his right, a large tree with a green crown with a red macaw on top and, further on, a jaguar. To the left of Kubai and a little further on, in line with the jaguar, an orange snake coiled around the trunk of a long tree. Below the title, in black: accessible multi-format book. Cláudia Rodrigues de Freitas, Eduardo Cardoso – organizers.

Figure 2. Cover Sheet.



Source: Grupo de pesquisa Multi/UFRGS.

Image Description: Against an orange background, in light orange, indigenous graphics. From the sides to the center, a vertical row of triangles fitted together, followed by a long row of polka dots between two vertical lines and, in the center, straight lines in sequence that resemble arrows. On the drawings, in black the title: Kubai, the Charmed..

Figure 3. Book with pictographic communication symbols.



Source: Grupo de pesquisa Multi/UFRGS.

Image Description: Two tilted, side-by-side, photos of the open book on a white surface, spanning two pages. The left page, on a white background, consists of four lines with communication

pictographics. In the first line, it is written: “Kubai perceived, from the top of the”; in the second line, “trees, which still lacked sounds”; in the third line, “over there and, playing with the”; in the fourth line “words, created singing birds.

On the right page on a green background, indigenous graphics in dark green composed of several vertical rows of straight lines in zigzag, dashed and with triangles interspersed with polka dots. In the center, very large, a red macaw seen from the side, to the left, on a brown trunk. The bird's body and most of its wings are covered in red feathers. At the top of the page, written in Guarani: Kubai oexã'ã vy, yvyra ary katy gui, oatama mba'emo onhendú va'e. Ha'e ipara va'e gui rive ojapo guyra'i iporã va'e kuery.

Authors' contribution

The first author carried out the research that gave rise to the text. The authors participated in the design and analysis of the article and are members of the research group in which the research was developed. The organization of the data, its analysis and interpretation were shared, as well as the elaboration of the text. The last author described the images presented in the publication.

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