

Confusion of languages in mythology: structural possibilities

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Résumé: Le multilinguisme représente pour la pensée mythique une étape après une situation de monolinguisme généralisé. Dans ce travail, nous recourons à une pensée mythique qui recueille la diversité des langues et la présente de manière originale à travers des structures spécifiques dans les mythes. Ce type particulier de narration folklorique déploie un univers de possibilités qui aide la psyché à saisir l'extérieur et à rationaliser les antinomies de la vie sous des formes symboliques et allégoriques.

Mots-clés: Mythologie comparée; mythes étiologiques; cosmogonie; mythes de la création ; mythes sur les inondations; multilinguisme; changement de code.

Abstract: Multilingualism represents for mythical thought a stage after a situation of generalized monolingualism. In this work, we resort to mythical thinking that collects the diversity of languages and presents it in an original way through specific structures in myths. This peculiar type of folk narration unfolds a universe of possibilities that helps the psyche to grasp the exterior and rationalize the antinomies of life in symbolic and allegorical forms.

Keywords: Comparative mythology; etiological myths; cosmogony; creation myths; flood myths; multilingualism; code switching.

The opposition between mythical thought and scientific thought has led to a misinterpretation of myth as a fictitious story, a prelude to a rational mind, or even as a synonym for a story for entertainment. The origin of this discrepancy can be traced in the conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines in the twelfth century, going through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, dialectical materialism and a series of events and historical stages whose product is a Modernity totally removed from the mythological world and from the sacred understanding of the world. The association of myth with ludic functionalities through the staging of monstrous and unreal characters and dream landscapes has been deployed to justify the illusory character that, although it has an anthropological interest, it is not apt to explain reality. The problem with this interpretation is that myth does not compete with scientism for the best possible explanations. It is not its goal to anchor the truth, or even to reframe it. Rather, the myth narratively and ornamentally

presents fears, passions, and the deepest emotional charge that guides human life and decision-making.

The literalness of the stories hides heteroclitic readings, its characters are carriers of archetypal and opposite moral systems and the so-called “mythical time” endows the myth with a historical and ahistorical character at the same time. Historical because, as an oral product, it is limited to the succession of the speech act that occurs at a specific moment. And ahistorical because mythical events occurred “long ago”, “at the beginning of time” or even “before the creation of the world.” This timeless sense frames the myth in a cyclical rather than linear succession that the prolific Romanian author Mircea Eliade categorized as the “eternal return”.¹

Many peoples of the world condense historical memory in their folktales to express their hopes and uncertainties. We are not faced with the crude simplification that explains the myth as what could have happened in the remote past. It is the collective emotional charge that frees the mind and gives free rein to narratively project the most atavistic turmoil or the most exalted illusion. The myth is nothing more than a reaction in narrative form to the uncertainty of the momentous questions that have troubled humanity throughout its history. It is a spontaneous product of the psyche to order, classify, and give meaning to emotions derived from worldly experience that would otherwise only be phenomenal. The myth is at the root of all human culture, since the desire to discover and rationalize the mysteries of life has guided the successive philosophical and scientific paradigms throughout the millennia. The myth as a sociocultural artifact tacitly agrees on the state of affairs, moral guidelines and the distribution of socio-political functions in a harmonious combination with natural and transcendent issues. Thus, we are faced with an instrument to help the mind overcome the antinomies that the senses perceive of the world and escape the fear of external reality.

Human beings, past and present, are well aware of the contradictions of the place and time in which they live: day gives way to night, good

1. Eliade, 1949.

battles evil, harvest season requires a period of rest from the earth, happiness has no reason to exist without the fear of sadness and, as an extreme in this logic of pairs, life precedes death. The alternation between these opposing states generates an imbalance in which people struggle to position themselves and get as far away from the dark forces as possible. However, due to the inevitability of these transitions, our species cannot escape their effects, so it looks for mechanisms, such as myth, that reconcile its contradictions, paradoxes and latent fears.

One of these antinomies consists in the multilingualism present in the world. The human being has always been aware of the diversity of languages. As social animals, we need the community to survive and communicative resources intervene to promote relationships, jointly dominate nature and obtain its fruits to perpetuate the group. The most evident and exclusive communicative element of the human being is the capacity of language. This mechanism with which we are genetically gifted is reflected in its social use through thousands of possibilities depending on the community in which the newborn is brought up. Thus, the new individual will acquire one or more languages that facilitate his incorporation into the world, both natural and social.

This diversity of languages encourages individual adherence to a broader ethnocultural or national identity. The operative language among the closest interlocutors supports, on the one hand, loyalties and identification with the in-group and, on the other hand, the need to strengthen that identity by contrasting it with that of the outgroup, which will use a different language. Given the individual need to relate to others and the social need to dominate the environment for the common benefit, mythical thinking has attached paramount importance to multilingualism. Linguistics scientifically orders this variety of languages by resorting to multiple genetic and typological clues to establish connections and periodicities between one another. Mythical thought has confirmed multilingualism and has made it intelligible in a creative way to give understanding and meaning to the reality.

The myths of the world start from a primordial time in which people enjoyed harmony and an idyllic state. Peace reigned in the four cardinal

points and only one language was spoken. This blissful state was soon to be traumatized by the confusion of languages and a sudden ethnogenesis that split an early human group into autonomous ethnolinguistic communities. Such a paradisiacal situation was exempt from human and divine disputes, but, in a short time, it staggered in favor of chaos and the world lost that utopia that many heroes and gods seek to restore. The primordial calm gives way to agitation and silence to noise. A succession of phases leads to today's world ruled by disease, war, and death. Between that primordial idyll and the present state, stages are developed whose meaning coincides in spite of the variations of phases according to the peoples.

The tranquility of the group is threatened when its individuals turn their eyes away from themselves and perceive the danger posed by neighboring groups. This is how the values of rectitude, community loyalty and, ultimately, social control are justified to avoid incursion. But to all social control the principle of individual freedom is opposed, represented at this moment as a subversion. The Promethean myth is the one that has most influenced our cultural context in this regard. Known for his philanthropy, Prometheus stole fire from the gods to deliver it to humanity. Fire is the symbol of divine energy and intelligence, that which is halfway between the bestial and numinous states. Thanks to Prometheus, the human being achieved a gift not without repercussions in the face of such an outrage of trying to resemble the gods. The immediate consequence from Olympus was the alteration of the cosmic order that generates pain and death on earth. That order was first followed by a transgression, also exhibited mythologically as natural cataclysms, and its consequent effect in the form of chaos that characterizes the present. At the linguistic level, a monogenetic and monolingual state leads to a multilingual world. The golden age gives way to the confusion of languages.

This article establishes a classification with four types of myths about the diversity of languages. The myth is a fluid, creative and adaptable mechanism, so this catalog does not aspire to organize the myths in sealed drawers. A slight variation could open the door to a new classification

adapted to that literary conjuncture and, as we know, there are as many versions of a myth as there are narrators. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect common archetypes between different myths. Narrative fluctuations with respect to characters, locations or minute details do not invalidate a more generic structuring such as the one proposed here. We will use schemes based on the logic of propositions to synthesize the four structural possibilities detected.

In the first place, we refer to a vertical construction from which, for different reasons, humanity falls into sin and, as divine punishment, confusion of languages occurs. Secondly, the universal archetype of a flood gives way to the dispersion of human groups throughout the world, whose isolation favors the differentiation of languages. Thirdly, this group isolation may be due to a premeditated exodus in which different human communities spread, beginning to speak differently with respect to the common trunk from which they came. Finally, on some occasions the cause of this language confusion is spontaneous, in the sense that it is not possible to detect a cause that leads, through logical reasoning, to multilingualism. These four possibilities are represented by certain myths that vary in structure. It is our objective to propose and explain the structural schemes from which each particular folktale finds its genuine development.

Macrophases and phases in narrative development

The myths described in later chapters and their classification into broader sets according to core elements are constructed following specific narrative parameters. We propose three fundamental macrophases subdivided into other more specific stages that have been detected. Obviously, not all the myths of each group follow all these phases of development, but they are complementary to each other. Within this framework of alternatives, each myth selects a particular way to give consistency to its story. Therefore, in the schemes that we propose in the following chapters, we make use of logical signs that establish the relationships, alternations, and concatenations between the different possibilities.

Regarding the three archetypal macrophases, we find a trigger as the generator of the narrative plot, an action of the collectivity as a reaction to that first cause and the action of a deity that generates a definitive state of affairs. As we have mentioned, these macrophases contain a series of possibilities that we establish below together with their corresponding abbreviations with which we will construct the schemes of each structural typology.

Trigger (TR)	Natural cause (NC)	Flood (FL)
		Illness (IL)
	Human cause (HC)	Ambition (AM)
		Curiosity (CU)
		Bad behavior (BB)
		Refuge (REF)
		Life improvement (LI)
Spontaneous cause (SC)		
Human action (HA)	Escape on ark (EA)	
	Exodus (EX)	
	Vertical structure (VS)	
Reaction (RE)	Rage of a god (RG)	
	Talk (TA)	
	Collapse (CO)	
	Dispersion (DI)	
	Language distribution (LD)	

Table 1: Narrative phases in myths about confusion of languages

As can be seen in Table 1, the three main macrophases display a series of possibilities that have been detected in myths around the world that deal with the confusion of languages. The trigger that fuels the stories may be (1) a natural cause, such as a flood or illness; (2) a human

cause derived from collective feelings like ambition, curiosity and bad behavior, or from a motivation understood as necessary for survival, such as the search for a safe refuge or better material living conditions; or (3) a spontaneous cause, understanding as such an illogical relationship between the cause and the consequence derived from it.

Next, the humans consciously take an initiative that sets them off to flee from the place where they live due to a previous event that puts them in danger. The archetypal element of the ark or chest is well attested in myths from different cultures. When there is no prior explicit or implicit danger, human characters, presenting themselves as a national or ethnic collectivity, may undertake an exodus to another destination or use a vertical structure, such as a tower that they build intentionally or a tree, to ascend to the heavens. Finally, these human actions often lead to reactions in which a god usually intervenes, although on many other occasions it is humans themselves who react to adversity. The result that is definitively shaped is the current *status quo* in the form of widespread multilingualism in the world. The entry on the scene of the gods can occur in any part of the mythical story, but in any case it responds to instructive interests, such as generating the confusion of languages due to human arrogance, or civilizers, such as the planned distribution of a primordial human group by all the corners of the world to populate it and give rise to the wealth of languages.

In subsequent chapters, we show the four generic structural possibilities that have been detected from a corpus of written mythical texts from around the world. We will schematize each structure taking the abbreviations of Table 1 and three basic signs of the logic of propositions – \wedge (logical conjunction *and*); \vee (logical disjunction *or*); \rightarrow (implication *if... then...*)– and we will illustrate each typology with its respective characteristic myths.

Different Babel constructions

The diversity of languages finds one of the most widespread types of myths in a vertical construction erected by humans with the intention of approaching the gods or their incarnations in heavenly bodies. Across

the globe, this archetype has sparked a proliferation of folktales. The debate around the possible influences between cultures to explain the repetition of such a specific literary motif is beyond the limits of this work. We do not address a historiographic problem that gives meaning and coherence to this eventuality, but we do verify a common direction in several mythological traditions that address the origin of multilingualism. Below is the prototypical scheme that condenses the narrative variability in this type of myth:

TR [HC (\wedge NC=FL)] \wedge HA [VS (\wedge EX \vee EA)] \wedge RE [TA \vee DI \vee (RG \rightarrow CO \vee / \wedge DI)]

Scheme 1: General structure of the myths about *confusio linguarum* developed from the central element of a vertical construction

What we find in this scheme are three narrative parts that occur in myths in which language confusion occurs due to a vertical construction that we will later exemplify. The trigger that animates the mythical argument is a human motivation, whether it is the result of the indomitable character of individuals —ambition, curiosity and bad behavior— or it is an instinctive reaction to save life —such as the search for a refuge or improvement in living conditions—. Additionally, but not necessarily, the trigger may be influenced by a large deluge that causes a flood. Secondly, the chaotic situation generated in the previous phase encourages human beings to make the determination to erect a vertical structure to reach heaven. In addition, sometimes this main archetype is accompanied by a previous exodus or an escape in an ark or chest, thus leaving behind the original settlement and settling in a new location. Thirdly, the attempted ascent of human beings by that vertical element finds a reaction, either from humans themselves or gods. A god often tries to establish a peaceful negotiation with people with the aim of having them abandon his greedy enterprise. Other times, however, the god intentionally disperses human beings over the earth's surface, with the consequent germ that will give rise to the multiplicity of languages. Likewise, the deity can assume an enraged character, as human beings are trying to catch up with it, which generates an angry reaction by

which the construction collapses or spreads people throughout the world. However, stories in which there is no explicit divine intervention are also frequent; rather, humans realize that their original language has been altered in the form of multilingualism and they react by taking trips in different directions.

One of the most influential narratives in Judeo-Christian cultures is the myth of the Tower of Babel. This account is documented in different sources, the best known being Genesis, 11 (New International Version) and the Jewish *midrashic* literature, although references abound in various apocryphal books. Only one language was spoken on the earth. Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson, had defeated the king of Babylon, thus consolidating his power over all lands. His knowledge of astrology had revealed to him that a man would arrive who would preach the worship of the true god, an occurrence that filled him with anger and arrogance. He decided then to restrict the worship of God in his kingdom. Nimrod encouraged his subjects to build a great city to hold them together. Immediately afterwards, he stirred them up to erect a great tower that reached up to the sky to fulfill two objectives: to serve as a subterfuge in the event of a possible fire or flood and to wage war against the ruler of the heavens, to remove him and to place in his place a warrior idol that protect the people of Nimrod. Six hundred thousand people gathered in the valley of Shinar, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, to begin the construction of a tower that would give them the glory of a new government. As we can see, it is the arrogance of Nimrod, a human cause, that initiates the plan to build a tower.

To raise the mass, the alluvial terrain on which they were standing did not provide them with stone, so they made bricks that were placed until they completed a height of four miles. At that time, the patriarch Abraham found out of the work that was being carried out in Shinar and did not hesitate to appear at the place to dissuade such a sinful undertaking. Being ignored, Abraham asked God to confuse the language of those people so that they could not be understood and thus boycott the building. God commanded seventy-two angels to descend into the valley and deliver different languages to the builders. Once the

divine mandate was fulfilled, those people could not make each other understand and the *confusio linguarum* resulted in a battle in which half of the population perished, while the other half distributed over the earth carrying different languages.² In order to avoid a new attempt to ascend to the sky, God ordered the tower to be destroyed. The upper third collapsed due to a fire, the middle third fell after an earthquake and the base of the building remained standing. Probably the base that remained erected symbolizes the latent arrogance in people who can fall again into the sin of trying to reach God who, in reaction, would unleash catastrophes to reverse human pretense.

Similar folktales abound in other parts of the world and the Pacific coasts are a privileged enclave to find myths in which the narrative axis passes through a vertical element that humans want to climb to reach heaven. The natives of the Hao Islands, in French Polynesia, say that, after the great flood, the three sons of Rata—a character in Polynesian mythology—tried to raise a building that reached the sky to see Vatea, the Creator. When the god noticed that construction motivated by human presumptuousness, full of anger he destroyed it and altered the languages of the locals. Consequently, since then the world stopped speaking a single language. Here an alternative cause is introduced that we indicated with parentheses in Scheme 1 and that has to do with a flood that motivates humans to erect a building. This is not the only cause of the construction, as the myth specifies that the children of Rata wanted to see Vatea. In other words, human curiosity fuels action, but it also unleashes the god's wrath at such audacity. The result, again, is the diversity of languages.

On the Admiralty Islands³ of Papua New Guinea, Muikiu, head of the Lohi family, is said to have incited his people to build a house that reached up to the sky. When they were about to touch the sky, a man named Po Awi forbade them to continue. Muikiu complied with the order and immediately sprinkled water on his kindred, whose members at that moment began to speak different languages.⁴ In this myth, the human

2. According to the source, there were seventy or seventy-two languages delivered by angels to humans.

3. Not to be confused with Admiralty Island in the Alexander Archipelago of Alaska.

4. Frazer, 1918, p. 383-384.

cause must be found in Muikiu's own intention to build that house. It is a personal decision, the result of his will. The divine reaction does not take a violent form, but rather a man, whom we cannot even identify as a god, orders to stop construction. In the absence of a genuinely godly reaction as in the previous cases, the usual divine punishment is substituted by the deterrent power and presumed authority of Po Awi. Consequently, multilingualism does not come from a divine plan, but from a rather spontaneous cause such as sprinkling water on the population. Although this myth does not fit perfectly in Scheme 1, the main motive that guides the development is the archetype of the construction of an axial element that unites earth and sky.

Often, the collapse of the building is followed by the dispersal of human groups. When verifying that they do not understand each other, either people decide to emigrate and settle in another place, or it is God who executes the diaspora, locating each linguistic community in a place on the planet. Hindu religious mythology tells that the magnificent "tree of the world" or "tree of knowledge" was found in the center of the earth, sheltering human beings under its branches. The proud tree thought that its crown would be held in the sky to protect mankind under its shadow. Notwithstanding, Brahma thought that this could disturb the order of the world, so he decided to cut its branches and disintegrate them along the earth's surface together with humans. These branches sprouted where they fell in the shape of banyan trees and gave rise to different languages, customs and beliefs. Only Sanskrit, which was the original language of mankind, was saved from dispersal.⁵ The vertical element of this myth is undoubtedly the world tree, which also acts as the protagonist, since humanity is represented as a passive actor of the myth that does not incite any reaction or intervene in development. Multilingualism comes from the decision of Brahma, which disintegrates human groups on the earth's surface.

The Ghaiko people belong to the Karens ethnic group and live in southeastern Myanmar. According to their mythology, their thirtieth-generation ancestors after Adam built a great pagoda to reach heaven. In

5. Doane, 1910, p. 36.

the middle of the work, their god descended and confused the languages of the Ghaikos so that they would not be understood again and thus frustrate their transgressive claim. Eventually, people left there in different directions to settle in other lands.⁶ This myth acquires the prototypical phases of Scheme 1. The trigger is detected in the human attempt to reach heaven. To do this, they erect a vertical construction, but a god intercedes to prevent the ascent and confuses his languages. Once people cannot understand each other, they go on a journey in different directions depending on the different languages they speak.

A myth attributed to the Toltecs of Mexico tells that a flood destroyed the first world, which lasted for seven hundred and sixteen years. The flood was so devastating that the highest mountain peaks were submerged seven meters under water. However, a few people survived by entering a *toptlipetlacali*, a kind of ark in the Nahuatl language. They reproduced and, when the town increased in number, they built a ziggurat with the pretense of taking refuge from a new eventual flood. The myth depicts the stepped pyramid as a building driven by the need for shelter and not by the human ambition to touch the sky as in other mythologies. However, once erected, the people stopped understanding each other because they began to speak different languages, a fact that made them separate from each other and seek new settlements.⁷ There is no divine intervention, so this myth would be classified in the second macrogroup that we will see in the next section. Nevertheless, the fundamental element that leads us to include it here is the construction of a ziggurat, a characteristic building of some pre-Columbian civilizations in Mexico that, symbolically, represented the union of heaven and earth.

The Tibeto-Burmese people of the Mikyirs say that, in the times of the descendants of Ram, the rulers coveted power and wanted to conquer heaven. Arrogance as a human cause in this myth is evident. To do this, they ordered a building to be erected to climb and wage war on. The gods and demons allied themselves in fear that those people would overthrow them and scattered them to the four corners of the planet.

6. Mason, 1868, p. 163.

7. Frazer, 1918, p. 382.

This distribution caused the original language to be separated into different languages.⁸ In this case, the confusion of languages is not a direct divine curse, but is produced by isolation between human groups and the consequent ethnogenesis.

If so far the main incentive for the erection of a building consists of human arrogance to reach the sky, except for the peculiarity of the Toltec myth of looking for a lair, this is not the only emotion that triggers the confusion of languages. Feelings as primordial as curiosity and the search for better material conditions lead to constructions similar to the previous ones in various myths.

The Choctaw Amerindian people say that the Aba spirit created man with yellow clay and gave him the Choctaw language. After several generations, people looked up at the sky wondering what the clouds and the blue cloak above their heads were. After much debate, they decided to raise a mound of rocks to reach the sky. During the mornings they worked hard, but at night the wind blew hard and threw the stones to the ground. On the third night, the builders slept on the rocky mountain itself and this time the wind blew so hard that it displaced people and stones. At dawn, they all emerged from the rubble and were perplexed that Choctaw was no longer the only language spoken there. Those who could not understand this original language quarreled and eventually separated into different tribes to the north, east, and west.⁹ The reason for such an event is curiosity. The Choctaw people wanted to find out more about their world, but access to a forbidden knowledge such as reaching heaven resulted in a confusion of languages.

A myth from the Chin community in Myanmar tells that there was a time when all the people lived in a large village and spoke a single language. One day, those individuals met in council to make a decision regarding the damage that the phases of the moon caused to their crops and the result was to capture it and to make it shine permanently. After many years of work building a tower, it was so high that the descent of the builders to eat and rest lasted several days. In an effort to avoid

8. Stack, 1908, p. 72.

9. Bushnell, 1909, p. 30-31.

this waste of time, they designed several levels throughout the tower to transport food more agilely without having to go up and down. The workforce was thus divided into different groups settled on each floor, which reduced contact between them and each one developed their own language and customs. For the Chin people, that mass of stones was the beginning of the great mountain range that separates the Burmese plain from the Bay of Bengal.¹⁰

The effort to kidnap the moon is induced by a need, not by ambition or arrogance as in most of the myths of vertical constructions. The Chin people has a problem related to their daily lives that, if it worsens, could affect their own survival: the phases of the moon affect crops. It is, therefore, an emotion directly related to community perpetuation. This need leads them to erect a tower that, due to its design, requires intermediate floors in which the builders begin to isolate themselves until develop different tongues. There is no god intervention here, but popular knowledge operates. This knowledge is not far from the scientific findings that establish a causal relationship between isolation and the proliferation of differentiated linguistic traits that end up leading to different languages.

The Hopi creation myth begins when Tawa, the spirit of the sun, created the first world. This world displeased him because the only beings that inhabited it were insects that did not know the meaning of life. Tawa sent the Spider Grandmother¹¹ to guide them to the second world. Once there, many bugs turned into animals, but they still did not understand life. Once again, Tawa asked the Spider Grandmother to lead them to the third world, where some animals took on human form. Some people learned weaving and other useful crafts, but the *powaka*, who were fake

10. Scott, 1918, p. 266.

11. It is not uncommon in the myths of the world to disguise an elevated condition with insignificant appearances. The spider may seem like a tiny insect and in no case the bearer of a splendor such as that found in the Spider Grandmother of the Hopi myth. This character is a totemic element possessing a privileged knowledge and organizer of the different worlds. Usually, the internal greatness of a character is disguised by an unclean appearance. Remember the decrepit state of Jesus of Nazareth during his passion and the enlightening force that he continued to transmit and that today still transmits to millions of fellow believers.

healers, led many astray. The children roamed alone and dirty, there were robberies and murders. So the Spider Grandmother exhorted good people to leave that place.

These people sent several birds to investigate what was up there on their heads. The birds informed them that there was a different world in the skies, so the Hopi decided to get there. To do this, they planted a sunflower seed that grew the more people sang. However, the base of the stem gave way under the weight of those trying to climb and all fell. They then planted a pine tree, but it did not grow enough to reach the sky. As a third project, they planted a bamboo that, this time, was strong enough to support the weight and high to touch the heaven. As the people entered the sky, the Yawpa nightingale gave them the language that each would speak. The *powaka* kept climbing and other people did their best to keep them out of the sky. Finally, they yanked the top of the bamboo off. Thousands of people who followed the wrong path fell to the dark surface of the earth.¹²

The archetype of the flood

The allusions to a strong flood in a primitive stage of the world that led to a flood never seen since then is one of the most recurrent motifs in cosmogonic and etiological myths. Numerous past and present cultures record in their myths a golden age that was devastated by a huge flood. Known in the Judeo-Christian tradition is God's challenge to Noah to gather couples of each animal species and introduce them into an ark with very precise dimensions before the great flood that would last forty days and forty nights took place. After this cataclysm, the genealogies after Noah were scattered everywhere and different nations were founded with their respective languages (Gen. 8:16-17, 9:7, 10:1-5).¹³

12. Voth, 1905, p. 38-39.

13. In the previous section we indicated that Gen, 11 relates the attempted construction of the Tower of Babel, when humanity spoke the same language. It is paradoxical that the previous chapter, Gen, 10, indicates that the descendants of Noah dispersed throughout the world and different languages were formed. Does multilingualism, then, precede monolingualism and this, in turn, led to confusion of languages? This contradiction reveals the mythological character of a hieratic text like Genesis, which must not be interpreted literally since, like all myths, its reading is plural.

Several mythologies explicitly link the strong rise of the waters with subsequent confusion of languages. The generic scheme that we find in this typology is the following:

$$\text{TR} [\text{NC}=\text{FL} (\wedge \text{SC})] \wedge \text{HA} [\text{EA}] \wedge \text{RE} [\text{DI}]$$

Scheme 2: General structure of the myths about the *confusio linguarum* developed from the central element of a universal flood

The main reason for classifying a myth in this category is in the trigger of the plot, which alludes to a huge deluge that generates an unprecedented flood. We point out the possibility of an additional cause detected in a single myth, that of the Tlingit people that we will see later, and that relates the diversity of languages to a spontaneous cause whose connecting link escapes the logic between cause and effect. Faced with this chaotic situation in the habitat, the reaction of human beings is to flee through an ark or a chest to save life. The last macrophase develops from the dispersion of human beings on the planet, whether this is a voluntary decision resulting from intelligibility between them, or at the initiative of a civilizing god.

This type of myth can be grouped into two categories depending on the intervention of a god or the absence of him. As for the first, the deity is not the cause of the flood, or at least the accounts do not attribute it specifically to the decree of a supernatural being. Rather, that great flood is due to natural phenomena disconnected from all divine interference and the figure of the god is essential inasmuch as he acts as administrator or distributor of languages. Once a normalized situation has been recovered after the collapse of the world, the deity distributes different languages to human groups, sending them in opposite directions, or it is the people themselves who undertake the dispersal.

The Aztecs thought that the first race of human beings was eaten by jaguars, the second was carried away by the wind and they became monkeys, the third burned in the flames of fire and the fourth sank under the waters and became fish. Of this fourth race, only Xochiquetzal¹⁴ and

14. Some accounts indicate that Xochiquetzal's husband was Tlaloc, god of rain, and a minority of them identify her husband with her twin brother Xochipilli.

her husband Coxcox survived thanks to a small boat in which they got into until they reached the Colhuacan mountain. There they sired large offspring, but all were born mute. Then the gods sent a dove to teach those children to speak, of which only fifteen managed to articulate a speech, but they confirmed that they spoke different languages and originated the nations of the world.¹⁵

In the Gulf of Bengal, the inhabitants of the Andaman Islands say that the god Puluga created the first pair of humans after a great flood. In order for them to survive, he taught them some essential skills such as fishing or making arrows and bows. He also gave them the Bojig-yâb language which, according to tradition, is still spoken in the south and south-east of Middle Andaman and is the language from which all others derive. When the group began to reproduce, the islands became too small to house these people, so they decided to emigrate, taking with them that language that varied and germinated current multilingualism.¹⁶

The Inca creation myth includes different archetypes that make it difficult to classify. Myths are linguistic and literary products characterized by a fluctuation that affects various versions and interpretations. Its classification is not alien to this indeterminacy and it could well be seen in the following myth certain core elements that would classify it in other categories. The Spanish clergyman Cristóbal de Molina collected this myth of the Peruvian Incas from the paintings of the Puquin Cancha temple —House of the Sun— in Cuzco.¹⁷

During the life of the first Inca Manco Capac, idolatry to the sun spread and news of a great flood began to be heard in remote times. The waters reached the highest hills and all traces of life perished, except a man and a woman who took shelter inside a drum box. When the storm ceased, the waves carried them to Tiahuanaco and the creator Viracocha ordered them to stay there. In that place, Viracocha began to create more

Xochiquetzal, in addition, is the goddess of beauty, love, flowers and the arts for the Toltecs and the Aztecs. She was in charge of supervising the birth, attending to the mothers and was the patron of the artists (Taube 1993).

15. Bingham, 2010, p. 144.

16. Radcliffe-Brown, 1922, p. 212.

17. Molina, 2011, p. 4.

people from clay painted with the colors and shapes of clothing that would represent each nation. The creator gave each one the language they were to speak, the songs they were to sing and the seeds and food they were to sow. Once the figurines were molded, he gave them their respective souls and ordered them to go down to Titicaca, from where they expanded on the earth's surface. Viracocha gave them a moral code of behavior and instructed them in skills like weaving garments. He then ordered the heavenly bodies to ascend to the firmament, where they would remain indefinitely. Viracocha's civilizing mission was completed by his sons Imaymana Viracocha and Tocado Viracocha, who gave a name to all the trees and fruits and taught each people which herbs were edible.

The Ndee Jicarilla people of New Mexico —popularly known by the derogatory term “Apaches”, meaning “enemies”— report that in the beginning of time peace and tranquility reigned and all humans and animals spoke the same language. Coyote¹⁸ had an omen that this paradise would not last long because it would be washed away by a great flood, so he warned his friend Montezuma, who built a boat in case Coyote's prediction came true. Indeed, a great flood struck the earth, which was covered with water and all humans perished. Coyote and Montezuma managed to survive in that boat and, when the waters decreased in level, they looked for a solid land. There they managed to reestablish the human and the other animal species. Then the supreme god Yi-ná-yěs-gǎn-i led the people to the west. During the journey, they disintegrated and settled along the way, giving rise to the Cheyenne, the Utes and other communities. As time went by, each group developed its own language.¹⁹

On the other hand, in another series of myths there is a total or partial absence of a god. As in the previous ones, the flood seems like a natural disaster due to an atmospheric reaction and the linguistic split occurs after the reestablishment of the original order as a consequence of the

18. Coyote is a very frequent character in the mythologies of the native peoples of the western United States. His form and his role vary in the stories from one community to another and he is often one of the protagonists in creation myths.

19. Russell, 1898, p. 253-254.

dispersion that the waters have previously exerted on human beings. The Kaska people who live in British Columbia relate that, in a distant time, there was a great flood that covered the land. Some people managed to escape the disaster in rafts and canoes dragged in all directions by the force of the water. The original people were thus separated into multiple subgroups throughout the planet. People were scattered without knowing where the others were and if someone other than them had managed to survive. Much later, some peoples met other communities, but they no longer spoke the same language and could not understand each other.²⁰

In this province of Canada live the Nuxalk people, or Bella Coola, whose myth about the origin shares certain aspects with that of the Kaskas. The god Masmasalanich created humans and fastened the earth to the sun with a rope so that they were at an appropriate distance and prevent the earth from sinking into the sea. One day, he stretched out the rope and the earth gradually submerged under the water until the sea covered the surface and reached the mountains. At that moment, a terrifying storm broke out, sending humans who had taken refuge in boats everywhere. When Masmasalanich managed to pull the rope to raise the earth, humanity was already spread out throughout the world and spoke different languages.²¹ This myth is certainly carried out by a deity, so it would apparently not make sense to fit it into this second group of the classification we propose. The reason for including it here is the type of cause that gives rise to linguistic diversity. Masmasalanich does not distribute the languages to each human group, as it does in the Aztec, Andamanese, Inca and Ndee myths. The god remains oblivious to this confusion and his role is focused on restoring the primordial order that he himself had inadvertently broken with the rope that joins the earth and the sun. The trigger for the confusion of languages is the flood, which carries each boat loaded with humans in different directions. Without straying from British Columbia, the Tlingit people are found in the extreme south of Alaska and narrate a very particular myth of dispersion

20. Teit, 1917, p. 442-443.

21. Frazer, 1918, p. 320.

after the great flood. The story goes that this event was followed by a great flood that swept everything away. Some people managed to take refuge and flee in a huge ark. When the storm subsided and the water receded, the ark collided with a rock and split in two. This event caused the language that those people spoke to separate into a multitude of different languages. For the Tlingits, the two halves of the ark symbolize, on the one hand, their own ancestors and, on the other hand, the ancestors of the remaining peoples of the earth.²² In this myth there is no prototypical dispersal, but all the survivors take refuge in a single ship, so the course it takes affects all its crew members. The effect caused by linguistic diversification is the accident suffered by the boat when it collides with a rock. Therefore, there is no logical sequence of events that generates this confusion. In the previous myths, the waves disseminate the original population, isolating it into subgroups throughout the planet and favoring the development of particular linguistic forms. The confusion of languages from the clash of the ark in the Tlingit myth is a reaction in which the reasoning between cause and consequence is a syllogistic excess. Having said that, as we already know, we are in the universe of myth, not of coherent reasoning.

Exodus

The gods or supernatural beings as mediators in myths about the confusion of languages is a recurring factor to establish classifications. In the stories in the previous section, a climatic element that causes human dispersal is reported. In the case that concerns us below, there is also a spread, but motivated by the group's own will or by divine decree. The myths recorded here reflect the joint exodus of the entire community that is settling in different places along the migratory journey or this distribution is based on the determination of a god or other mythological being. Below we show its corresponding prototypical scheme:

$$(TR [NC=IL \vee HC=AM]) \wedge HA [EX] \vee RE [DI \vee LD]$$

Scheme 3: General structure of the myths about the *confusio linguarum* developed from the central element of the exodus

22. Pauly, 1862, p. 14.

When there is an explicit cause that originates the setting in motion of subsequent events, this cause can be natural—in which case it is an illness that devastates the human group— or human—with ambition as the motor of action—. Next, the second and third macrophases are interrelated, as both refer to the displacement of the human group from its place of origin. This emigration may be due to the order or will of a god, who decides to displace or incite people to displace, or to the initiative of exodus of the human group as a result of a previously established distribution of languages. It is for this reason that Scheme 3 opts for the sign of disjunction, and not of conjunction, between the second and third macrophase. In any case, there is an exodus from the human group, since this is the crucial element around which the diversity of languages revolves. The two alternatives that we indicate have more to do with the nature of the characters who decide to undertake the journey: we will be before the second macrophase when the decision falls on the human side and we will be before the third macrophase when it falls on the divine side. In both cases, the movement of human beings stands out. In the first place, the exodus can be influenced by a cause that negatively affects human lives. Within the Salishan ethnolinguistic group, settled in Canadian British Columbia and in several western states bordering the United States with Canada, the myth of the argument is discussed. Two people were arguing about the source of the high-pitched buzz that ducks emit during flight. The debate was incorporating more and more individuals and acquiring more tension. For some, the noise was undoubtedly coming from the peak; for others, of the wings. The arguments and reasoning of one group did not convince the other, so the chief of the tribe summoned the leaders of the neighboring towns to a council to clarify the enigma. At that meeting, the dilemma increased and no one agreed, so some people decided to move. Those who left began to speak progressively in different ways and over time new languages were formed. Although the reason for the discussion and the exodus may seem ridiculous, this myth includes a basic principle of linguistics: if human groups separate, the evolution of their languages will be divergent due to the influences of neighboring languages and the variations of each group of speakers.

The Bantu people of the Wa-sanias say that, in the beginning of time, all people spoke the same language. Soon a famine broke out that hit hard and many people died of starvation. Those who survived went mad and, erratically, marched in all directions in search of other more favorable places to live. This exodus transformed the original language into the rest of the languages spoken today.²³ Both in this myth and that of the Salishan people, the human group decides to leave their territory of origin voluntarily and without divine mediation. The exodus occurs after a factor that affects people's lives: the impossibility of reaching an agreement in the Salishan myth and a devastating famine in the Wa-sanias myth. Once launched, the main branch gradually disintegrates and settles in different locations. Again, this isolation supposes the evolution and independent transformation of the way of speaking of each community, thus becoming the current languages.

Secondly, emigration occurs in certain stories by the influence of a deity or other class of superior being that incites dispersion, guides and physically accompanies the human group to establish in different locations or directly executes the distribution. Be it one way or another, the inescapable factor is the divine decree. In this type of myths, linguistic diversity can occur during or immediately after the migration process and follows two possible sequential modalities: (1) the god places each group of people in a different place on the planet and gives each one a language; and (2) the divine being stimulates the exodus through an order or directly guides the group along its journey, and delivers a language to each people or this multiplicity is produced by the isolation of each community.

The anthropologist Alfred Kroeber published at the beginning of the twentieth century the first compendium of myths and legends of the Yuki people, who live in the California county of Mendocino. The author warned that he found different episodes without an organic connection in the Yuki creation myth and, including several versions told by the same narrator, then the exegesis that he included in his work is a model of many similar stories.

23. Frazer, 1918, p. 384.

At the beginning of time everything was water. From a feather upside down on a lump of foam came a voice and a song. He was Taikomol, the supreme god, whose self-creation was contemplated by Coyote. Then Taikomol assumed a human form and created the earth. He traveled to every land with Coyote hanging around his neck to hold the four ends. Next, he made the sky out of the skin of four whales, and finally, he created people. To do this, he anchored sticks in the ground of the houses overnight and the next morning those stakes had turned into people. Still under Coyote's supervision, Taikomol traveled the entire planet operating in the same way to create people. In each land, he placed sticks in the houses during the night and gave them their customs, their ways of life and their languages. Once mankind was formed, he decided to create mountains, springs, and other landforms. When he finished the work, he ascended to heaven, where he still continues.²⁴

In the Californian county of Humboldt live the Wiyots or Wishosks, who tell how the god Gudatrigakwitl created the world and people by joining and extending their hands, without the need for any tools. The first horde of humans lacked reason and perished. The god wanted people with ten lives, but this wish was impossible to fulfill. He definitely created all the people at the same time scattered throughout the orb. For this reason, there are many languages. Gudatrigakwitl gave them medicinal plants, taught them to dance, and gave them some tricks to eat properly.²⁵

The native Kunwinjikus, or Gunwinggus, from the city of Darwin, in northern Australia, narrate a myth in which a rainbow snake carried many children in bags that it was leaving as it traveled around the world. Sometimes it represents Mother Earth, called Yingarna. The first bag was deposited in a plain near the East Alligator River. Each of these bags gave rise to a tribe with its own language and customs.²⁶

The Rumsen aborigines of California say that Coyote wanted to marry other women because with his wife he had only had one child and he longed for more offspring. The wife refused this idea at first, but later

24. Kroeber, 1907, p. 183-185.

25. Kroeber, 1905, p. 93-94.

26. Żywicznyński, 2018, p. 12.

she agreed. Coyote had five more children with other women. The children asked their father where they were going to live, to which Coyote replied to go out into the world. So these five sons left and founded five towns with five different languages. These peoples were the Ensen, Rumsen, Ekkheya, Kakonta and Wacharon.²⁷ Coyote resorts to adultery as a source of lineage renewal and biological expansion. A single son with his wife is insufficient to carry out a larger project. The main deity of this myth is Coyote, but he is not directly the one who places each community in its respective place. Rather, the children he has in these extramarital affairs serve as intercessors. Coyote gives the order that they spread out around the world and his children are the creators of five peoples with their own languages. As in this typology of myths, human beings are created at the same time in different locations and with different linguistic characteristics.

Finally, we find those myths in which a god has two main functions: to indicate to each human group which route to follow so that the earth is populated and to give each of them a particular language. In a version of the myth about the confusion of languages of the Kunwinjikus that we have already alluded, Waramurungundju —also called Narlinji-linji or Narkundee-undee depending on the territory— is an ancient woman who came from the other side of the sea. Upon landfall, she had children to whom she indicated where they had to live and what languages they had to speak. Later, she decided to circumcise the boys she had engendered, but her first attempt was unsuccessful and the babies expired. Little by little she perfected her technique and even today some people continue with this practice of circumcision.²⁸ The myth does not specify how many children Waramurungundju had, and therefore how many languages she shared. Contrary to the version we saw above, in this case multilingualism precedes emigration. The woman gives the different languages to her children and they spread throughout the world, while the rainbow serpent of the previous version is depositing bags that contain the different peoples and their linguistic characteristics.

27. Kroeber, 1907, p. 200-201.

28. Berndt and Berndt, 1981, p. 252.

The Colla kingdom was annexed by the Inca Empire in the mid fifteenth century, culturally influencing the Colla people. The creator god of the Collas was Tutujanawin, considered to be the primal life-giving energy. When there was only darkness, the Creator appeared on Lake Titicaca in human form and created the sun, the moon, the stars, and finally, the mankind. Tutujanawin divided them into groups with hairstyles and costumes characteristic of each. Humans left Titicaca and spread across the world. Once installed, Tutujanawin gave them different languages and taught them how to live.²⁹

In these myths, the divine figure instructs people to reach their destination and gives them a specific language. Notwithstanding, below we have a myth in which the god acts as a guide and companion of the crowd, but linguistic diversity is not caused by the deity, but is seen as a logical phenomenon caused by the segregation and isolation of the communities along the route.

The Tuscarora creation myth allows to conclude not only that the god Tarenyawagon granted the human being the ability to speak, but also that the linguistic multiplicity in the six Iroquois nations is due to the dissemination of the original people in different subgroups through a long exodus. David Cusick, a member of the Tuscarora people, collected the traditions and myths of his community in writings and drawings. David died in 1831 and, fourteen years later, his brother James Cusick wrote to Henry R. Schoolcraft, a leading Native American anthropologist, indicating the location of David's last book that he was unable to publish in life. Among that documentation was a myth that reflects the mutual intelligibility between the peoples of the Iroquois Confederation.

Long ago, a group of people hid in the mountains that fringed the Kuskehsawkich Falls –today Oswego Falls—. Tarenyawagon, or Holder of the Heavens, released them and ordered them to follow him the next morning. The entire retinue behind him, who had assumed human form, descended the bank of the Yenonanatche tributary to the main river Shaw-nay-taw-ty –today the Hudson River—. Nearby they decided to camp and spend a few days. All the people were grouped into six families

29. Bingham, 2010, p. 34.

who collaborated for the common good so that the chain did not die out. Moving a little further along the bank of that river, Tarenyawagon indicated to the first family, the Te-haw-re-ho-geh —now Mohawks— to build his residence there. Shortly after, their language changed. The company continued towards sunset for two and a half days until it reached Kaw-na-taw-te-ruh stream, where Tarenyawagon ordered the second family to go, that of the Ne-haw-re-tah-go —today Oneidas—. Shortly after, their language changed. The group continued walking towards sunset and Tarenyawagon commanded the third family to build their village on Onondaga Mountain. It was the family of the Seuh-now-kah-tah, who from then on took the name of that mountain. Shortly after, their language changed. Again, the company continued to advance into the sunset until Tarenyawagon ordered the fourth family of the Sho-nea-na-we-to-wah to erect their village near Cayuga Lake, from which they took their name. Shortly after, their language changed. The group continued on their way towards the setting sun, and when they reached a great mountain, Tarenyawagon informed the fifth family of the Te-how-nea-nyo-hent that they must settle there. From then on they would be the Seneca nation. Shortly after, their language changed. The sixth family followed the Holder of the Heavens into the setting sun. Upon reaching the Mississippi River, they noticed a vine on the other side of the river. Some wanted to reach it, but when they reached the plant, it broke, making enemies of those who crossed the river of those who did not. The sixth family of the Kau-ta-noh —today Tuscaroras— were instructed to settle near the mouth of the Neuse River. Shortly after, their language changed. The six families were thus dispersed, but not enough so that they did not understand each other with those variations of the original language.³⁰

Spontaneous confusion

The exodus is a common archetype in myths about the origin of linguistic diversity. In the myths of the previous section, the cause is known, being a divine figure or the dispersion to which people are

30. Schoolcraft, 1847, p. 476-478.

subjected the reason for a multilingual final situation. On the contrary, the myths presented below diverge from the previous ones in the knowledge of the reason for confusion of languages. In this group of myths, the element or act from which the confusion arises can easily be identified, but this circumstance does not necessarily and logically imply the narrated consequence. The causes of heterogeneity are spontaneous and are arranged around four main frameworks linked to primary human actions: (1) the preparation of fires, (2) the ingestion of a dietary element, (3) the hunting of an animal and (4) the exit to the world from a closed and dark cavity. These four actions represent vital human needs: (1) fire protects from the inclement cold of the open environment, (2) feeding is a main vital function, (3) hunting dangerous animals safeguards individual and community safety, and (4) going out into the world symbolizes one's own birth. In this category of myths, the stories are structurally simpler than the previous ones:

TR [SC] (∧ HA [EX])

Scheme 4: General structure of myths about *confusio linguarum* developed from a spontaneous cause

We can only verify a spontaneous cause of diverse nature as the generator of multilingualism. Thus, the narrative scheme is reduced to a trigger and, alternatively, to a reaction on the part of the human group in the form of an exodus.

The American anthropologist Roland B. Dixon collected much of the mythology of the native Maidu people at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in Genesee, Plumas County, and in Chico, Butte County, California. Their creation myth begins with a world covered by water and with the creator descending from the sky to form the earth and the stars. He also tried to endow humans with immortality, but Coyote, in his typical role in opposition to the creator, refused such a privilege even though his son would later pass away. At this time, all the people spoke the same language, but when one afternoon they were preparing the fires for the next day, they suddenly began to speak

various languages during the night. Only husbands could understand their wives, so each couple spoke differently. During that night, the creator had visited a man named Ku'ksu to whom he granted the ability to speak all those languages and gave him instructions on how to proceed after sunrise, at which time all the people would perceive that diversity. Ku'ksu brought the people together and taught each couple the names of the animals in their respective languages. He showed them how to hunt and cook, gave them laws, and appointed their dates for festivals and dances. He also gave names to the towns they were going to found and directed them along different paths to populate the earth. He sent the warriors to the north, the singers to the west, the flute players to the east, and the dancers to the south.³¹

As is customary in the myths of the dispersal of communities, people emigrate by order of Ku'ksu who, in turn, is the intermediary between the creator and humans. The principle that originates the linguistic split is an element totally disconnected from a syllogist reasoning. Stoking fires does not affect linguistic variation in any way, but mythical thought, which does not operate according to Cartesian logic, observes this daily act that is indispensable for the proper functioning of the community as a symbol from which multilingualism is unleashed as inexorable phenomenon.

We also find a group of myths that link the appearance of multiple languages with the intake of some type of food. The Tikunas, who live on the narrow line that separates Peru, Colombia and Brazil, share the idea that there was a time when all nations were a single tribe. They lived together and spoke the same language. The separation occurred when someone ate two hummingbird eggs. At that time, the people began to speak different languages, so the original town was subdivided and each group migrated in one direction.³² The Ngarrindjenis of Encounter Bay, in the state of South Australia, tell a story of cannibalism that originated multilingualism. The people detested the old woman Wurruri, who was engaged in setting fires near people's houses. When this woman passed away, the locals sent messengers to communicate the news to all the clans

31. Dixon, 1902, p. 44-45.

32. Carneiro, 2008.

of the confederation.³³ Men, women and children burst into happiness because they could finally live in peace. The Raminjerar arrived first, eating Wurruri's corpse. They instantly began to speak in a slightly different way, but understandable by all the Ngarrindjenis. The eastern tribes then devoured the intestines, and again their speech varied somewhat. Finally, the northern clans ate the leftovers, and then, their language varied so much that it became unintelligible to the other tribes.³⁴

On the other hand, the maneuvers to hunt down some type of animal from where the confusion of languages occurs do not seem to be linked to the previous dietary taboos according to the myths that are exposed below. Rather, catching these animals involves a need for safety, not food. The Kachcha Naga people of Assam, India, relate that, in an early time, all people belonged to the same nation and spoke the same language. The king had a daughter named Sitoylê who loved to spend the day in the jungle far from home. This hobby caused great anxiety to her parents, who feared that some animal would devour her, so her father drew up a plan to keep her at home. He made her bring a basket full of seeds, which, falling to the ground, ordered her to pick them up one by one, a task that would occupy the girl all day. Sitoylê finished the job, so she hurried to take a walk through the jungle. She was missing for several days and her parents sent all the subjects of the kingdom to look for her. During the hunt, they found a huge python which they attacked with arrows and spears. Instead of perishing, the reptile changed shape and people found themselves speaking various languages. These groups that were formed from that event engendered the nations that exist on the planet. What was never known is whether that snake had swallowed the princess Sitoylê or if she was returned to her parents.³⁵

33. In 1879, the Reverend and missionary George Taplin published a work on the folklore, customs and ways of life of the aboriginal peoples of South Australia. In describing his social organization, he proposed a list of eighteen *lakalinyeri* or clans, with their corresponding locations and totemic elements (Taplin, 1879, p. 33-35). This list was completed decades later by anthropologists such as Alfred William Howitt (1904), but Taplin would mark the beginning of studies on the native communities of South Australia.

34. Woods, 1879, p. 60.

35. Soppitt, 1885, p. 15.

Also in India, in the state of Manipur, the Kukis say that, once, the three grandchildren of the village chief were playing at home, when their father ordered them to catch a rat that was disturbing. The children rushed towards the animal, but suddenly began to speak incomprehensible languages among themselves. Unable to understand and organize, the rat escaped. From then on, the oldest son spoke the Lamyang language, the middle son spoke Thado, and the youngest began to speak Waiphie, although other people said that his language was Meitei-lon.³⁶

The characters in these myths catch the snake and the rat as a means of defense against an attack that has already occurred or against the anticipation of a danger. In any case, it is from the capture that a linguistic variation is generated spontaneously that prevents communication between people.

Finally, we find two myths in which the exit to the outside world from a closed and dark element is accompanied by the diversity of languages. The hollow from where people emerge reflects the maternal placenta or the bowels of the earth, a space that invites rest, calm and security. Outer space, on the other hand, is full of chaos and dangers that must be faced in order to survive. In the mythical conception, multilingualism is a vortex of generalized disorder that limits intergroup communications. In several states in the southern and southeastern United States, the Alabamas and Koasatis report that their peoples arose from within the earth. In a remote time, their ancestors saw a groundhog dig up and decided to follow it. They made their way through the mud and camped three times along the way to rest. When they came to the mouth of a cave, they saw a very ancient tree whose roots snaked everywhere. Alabamas surfaced on one side of the roots and Koasatis emerged on the other side. These separate ways of opening to the outside caused that each town began to speak a different language. The sunlight brought forth plants and woods and meadows flourished in abundance. Some people marveled at these landscapes, but others did not get used to such a drastic change in their lives, so they returned to their caves during the day. These fearful people ended up completely withdrawing into the

36. McCulloch, 1859, p. 56.

bowels of the earth when an owl hooted and they were scared. If it had not been for the howling of the bird, more Alabamas and Koasatis would inhabit the world today.³⁷

The Bamars of Myanmar have a cosmogonic myth in which sixty human ethnic groups emerged from the interior of a large pumpkin and were divided into four classes: those who ate rice, those who lived on corn, those who ate meat and those who lived in the roots. Each community had its own language, dress, and way of life. From these four primal types of people arose the five Yang clans —the Karens—, two Pawng clans of whom there is no record, five Tai clans —the Shan—, six Hkè clans —the Chinese—, ten Hpai clans —also indeterminate—, two clans other than Hkè and Tai, and ten Hpilu Yek-kha clans.³⁸

The main difference between the two myths as far as multilingualism is concerned is the number of primitive and derived languages. In the Alabama and Koasati folktale, the classic monogenetic hypothesis prevails whereby a supposed language shared between the two groups broke into two after going out into the outside world by separate paths. On the other hand, the Bamars are situated on the side of polygenesis, so that four languages emerged at the same time from the conjunction of the sixty ethnic groups in four groups.

Conclusions

Throughout this work, four possible narrative structures have been proposed regarding the myths of the world that deal with the confusion of languages. Starting from a primordial time characterized by monolingualism, different communities compile in their mythological heritage stories in which they present the transition between this stage and the derivation in a situation of multilingualism that characterizes the planet. The different narrative sequences allow them to be condensed into three macrophases within which different possibilities unfold. The structural schemes that we have proposed have been formed from abbreviations and logical signs that help to shape four archetypal possibilities.

37. Archer, 2000, p. 182.

38. Scott, 1918, p. 292.

In the first place, the myths fundamentally characterized by the construction of a vertical element—a tower, a tree, a ziggurat or a building without major morphological details—stand out, as it serves as *axis mundi*, a link between earth and heaven, as well as centrifugal and spreading force. People decide to climb motivated by negative emotions such as arrogance or the ambition to reach the gods and even challenge them, or by other feelings without such an obvious negative value, such as the curiosity to know more and the need to improve the conditions of life because the situation on earth is desperate for some cause. The result is not always the same. In some cases, people manage to reach heaven, but most of the time they fail in their attempt. The main cause of this frustration is the wrath of the gods, who see their dominion over the earth in danger and decide to tear down the vertical construction and disperse the humans. Confusion of languages occurs before the collapse or after the isolation to which different human groups are subjected.

Secondly, another category of myth revolves around the main event of a great flood of inordinate proportions. There is thus a deluge and the corresponding escape of those who get a means to flee. Once the initial situation of stillness is restored, confusion of languages takes place for two main reasons: (1) a god distributes different languages to each human group and later indicates their new geographical locations throughout the world or, alternatively, it is the human group itself that decides to emigrate, and (2) people are scattered throughout the world due to the strong waves that have dragged them to different places. This dispersion generates variations in the way of speaking of the people that lead to subsequent multilingualism.

The third set of myths exposed is developed based on an exodus. The journey that humans undertake is produced by order of a god to populate the entire earth's surface or is the consequence of the lack of intelligibility between communities.

Fourthly, many myths display a final narrative typology constituted by a very particular framework since the cause of linguistic diversity is unknowable from the rationalist perspective. In all cases, the action or event that immediately and spontaneously produces the confusion

of languages can be delimited, but these circumstances do not imply the resulting consequence. What can be established is a relationship of the triggering factors, all of them circumscribed to behaviors and primordial human acts. Far from dogmatic and closed interpretive hypotheses, it can be argued that mythical thinking in this type of myth understands multilingualism as a fundamental property inherent to human existence. According to this approach, linguistic diversity is as natural and necessary a phenomenon as those actions that keep us alive.

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