

## **Religious genres, entextualization and literacy in Gitano children**

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the connections between the oral genres displayed by Gitano (Spanish Gypsy) children and adults during religious instruction classes at an Evangelist church and the writings produced by Gitano children in an after-school computer program in the same community. Results are discussed in relation to two strands of received assumptions regarding Gypsy culture and recent theoretical insights in the study of literacy and discourse. On one hand, previous portraits of Gitano culture as exclusively oral need to be revised, in line with a more social and situated perspective on literacy. On the other, the results are a basis for critical examination of dominant explanations regarding the educational failure of Gitano children, an argument that highlights the importance of engaging intratextual linguistic analysis with discussions of the social and institutional orders. (Entextualization, vernacular literacy, ethnography of communication, Romani, Spain.)\*

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Recent approaches and contexts in the study of literacy*

For a number of years, we have had available a well-developed approach to the study of literacy as social practice. Adherents of this perspective have criticized traditional accounts of literacy and literacy acquisition as unitary phenomena with clear social and cognitive consequences. Stemming from work in the ethnography of communication (e.g., Schieffelin & Gilmore 1986), the New Literacy studies (e.g., Barton et al. 2000), and neo-Vygotskian sociocultural theory (e.g., Scribner & Cole 1981), an alternative portrait has been drawn of the nature of literacy. From these perspectives, literacy is better characterized

by taking into consideration, at least, the six traits that Barton & Hamilton 2000 have recently summarized: (i) literacy should be understood as a social practice embedded and to be studied in specific social events; (ii) there are different literacy practices associated with different domains of life; (iii) power relationships and social institutions make some domains and literacy practices more visible and influential than others; (iv) literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in larger cultural practices; (v) literacy is historically situated; and thus, (vi) literacy practices change and new forms are appropriated through daily sense-making.

Both contributing to and drawing on this transformation, there has been an increase in the sites in which literacy is studied and seen as relevant. Most research traditionally focused (and still does) on formal educational institutions and their official practices as the sites where literacy is acquired, and on bureaucratic (work and state) institutions as the main arenas where acquisition needs to be displayed efficiently (cf. Hull 1993). Other sites and practices (such as families or literary literacy) were rendered much less relevant or were considered only in relation to how they contribute to the acquisition of literacy in other contexts (e.g., how families support the acquisition of school-like reading and writing). However, recent studies have complicated this scenario significantly. Several reports have shown how, inside the above sites, multiple forms of literacy coexist. Some of these practices run parallel to publicly sanctioned uses of written language, such as “unofficial” family literacies (Gregory & Williams 2000) or the “vernacular” writings that adolescents circulate in schools (Camitta 1993). Other literacy practices present in institutions may conflict with their formal goals and are “proscribed,” such as the oral spelling games practiced by African-American girls in school, described by Gilmore 1983, 1986.

In addition, new spaces for literacy display and acquisition have been considered in the process of uncovering the range of resources and institutions available in local communities (cf. Silverstein 1998). Religious institutions and after-school community programs for children and youth draw researchers’ attention for several reasons. First, although religious institutions and community programs are settings of very different kinds, when focused on children and youth they both can be seen as intentional learning environments (McLaughlin 2000) – although the particular goals and means to achieve learning across individual sites vary significantly. Second, participating in both these settings requires acquiring and displaying new forms of oral and written language, and these forms are specially marked by the constraints of their particular domains – whether religious language (Keane 1997) or the specific registers of different after-school programs (the “languages” of science, sports, computers, or art; see Heath 1998, 2001). Third, both religious and community organizations have been instrumental in the political and social mobilization of different social groups, especially in the case of minority communities (these transformations are discussed for Gitanos<sup>1</sup> below).

Religious literacy practices have been the topic of recent studies that highlight several processes. Religious instruction has been examined as a space for linguistic socialization (e.g., Schieffelin 1996, Tusting 2000). In these sites, children are socialized into a set of moral and religious values through language (Aminy 2003) and are socialized to use language (e.g., to display new genres and discursive practices associated with religious rituals) and to interpret texts (e.g., the Bible) in specific ways (e.g., Zissner 1986, Reder & Reed Wikelund 1993). The introduction of Christian religion in non-Western “traditional” societies has been related to cultural and social change and the development of new relationships between local communities and Western agents and institutions (Duranti & Ochs 1986, Schieffelin 1996). In industrialized societies, religious congregations formed by minority and immigrant communities have been seen as sites for the construction of collective identities and for the management of relationships with mainstream society (Baquedano-López 2000, 2001).

Community organizations and their programs are also analyzed in similar terms, especially when designed for minority and “at risk” children and youth. In these programs, students with a presumed history of school failure often develop and display rich literacy achievements and develop new discursive repertoires not contemplated in other contexts (McNamee & Sivright 2002, Cushman & Emmons 2002). Equally, participation in community organizations is considered a form of social and individual mobilization by social actors who, otherwise, have been pushed to the margins of the social system (Fine et al. 2000).

#### *Assumptions and shortcomings in the study of Gitano literacy*

Given this interest in community literacy in minority and subordinated groups, it would seem that this should be a privileged topic in the study of Gypsy communities. However, a review of the available literature shows that this (along with many other aspects of Gitano culture) is a clearly under-researched theme. This situation can be explained by taking into consideration some broad assumptions commonly held regarding Gypsy culture. These, in turn, have configured the conclusions that are extracted from the little research that has focused on literacy in Gypsy communities.

There is an often unarticulated pan-cultural assumption that Gypsy culture is essentially oral and has not developed any role for written language in its repertoire or transmission (e.g., Smith 1997). In this context, literacy acquisition is seen as an index of acculturation (San Román 1990). Gitanos who are more literate are so because they have engaged with non-Gypsy institutions such as formal education and with literacy domains (e.g., press, written literature) that are not internal to Gypsy culture, while “written culture seems incompatible with traditional Gypsy culture. And, obviously, it has no use or cultural support to stimulate it” (San Román 1990:114, our translation). From the perspective of non-Gypsy *Payo*<sup>2</sup> agents, this is often taken for granted. Consequently, concerns about literacy acquisition focus on school-based initiatives and school literacy,

or on adult literacy and education. These programs have the goal of securing Gypsy children's participation in a non-Gypsy institution (formal education) or, in the case of adults, of providing resources to move on to economic sectors traditionally not occupied by Gitanos.

Complementarily, from the perspective of Gypsies, literacy is supposedly viewed as an instrument that is important exclusively to transact with the majority group in economic, bureaucratic, legal, and similar contexts. Further, this "restricted" use for literacy highlights two properties regarding its social organization inside Gitano communities. First, illiteracy is not a "social problem" as long as each family or social unit has at least one member who is literate and can play the role of MEDIATOR with the Payo social system (see Baynham 1993 and Jones 2000 on the notion of literacy mediators/mediation). Second, this version of literacy apparently is acquired mostly in adulthood and by informal means rather than formally in school during childhood (Liégeois 1998).

Framing Gitano literacy in this way seems to have some parallels with discussions regarding the introduction of literacy in indigenous communities (cf. Duranti & Ochs 1986, Reder & Reed Wikelund 1993, Schieffelin 1996) in which literacy, to some degree, is considered an external technology introduced by external agents. Eventually, these literacy practices are transformed and considered internal to the community, but still it is possible to consider a time before this contact and use of literacy took place. However, in the case of Gypsies, since their arrival in Europe, contact and transactions with other social groups has been a constitutive element of their social life and a necessary (whether "desired" or not) feature of the Gitano cultural repertory. This difference requires a more dynamic theory of acculturation and group contact that contemplates the range of practices and institutions that social groups develop to manage their social boundaries and exchanges (Mulcahy 1979, San Román 1990). This theory is even more necessary because a feature of Gitano communities in Spain is precisely that, in recent decades, important cultural transformations have taken place. These transformations affect, among other things, the resources and ways through which Gitanos construe their relationship with Payo society and their role in the Spanish social system.

The establishment and development of new social institutions has been instrumental to this change, and the literature highlights two institutions as playing a key role: associative movements and the Evangelist Church (San Román 1997). These community organizations have been expanding strongly during the past two decades and are seen as crucial sites for the development of Gitano cultural expression and group identity (Abajo 1997; Méndez 2002, in press). In addition, they are institutions internal to the Gitano community: They are sustained by Gitanos, are directed to Gitano members (which does not preclude others from participating in them), and are organized according to Gitano social principles and practices. Yet often their goals, especially in the case of associations, refer to a relationship with the larger social system regarding education, work, housing,

welfare policies, and so on, and to Gitanos' socio-political advancement in a Payo-dominated society.

It is not possible to delve fully into the history and nature of these organizations, but we predict that the development of new institutions will require developing new skills and practices which members of the community will acquire as they engage with these new sites (Wenger 1998, Eckert 2000). New ways of using written and oral language are certainly part of this new repertory. Further, after examining these uses of literacy in the Gitano community, we hypothesize that the features outlined above for Gypsy literacy will need to be revised. Alternatively, literacy in these contexts becomes a culturally supported achievement, relevant to a large proportion of community members and intentionally transmitted in social occasions explicitly designed for this purpose in these community sites.

The goal of this study is precisely to investigate this set of questions and to examine the development and display of certain literacy achievements of Gitano children in two community settings: religious instruction classes (*escuela dominical*) organized on Saturday mornings by the "Gitano" Evangelist Church (the Evangelist Church of Philadelphia), and writing in an after-school computer program organized several evenings a week by a Gitano cultural association in the same locality. Our goal is to discuss the connections between the discourse genres developed in each site as forms of Gitano community literacy, in light of the theoretical points that open this article – concepts which, to our knowledge, have not previously been introduced in the study of reading and writing in Gypsy communities. While the case we examine shows continuity with the changes at the national level we have described above, the particular forms and implications of our results are intimately tied to particular social and historical changes in the locality under study. This level of analysis illustrates several of the features that Silverstein 1998 has argued reflect transformations in local linguistic communities. Specifically, the focus of our study is on apparently new forms of entextualization. This definition of the research problem draws on a set of theoretical tools developed in recent linguistic anthropology, which will be reviewed in the next subsection to close this introduction.

### *Genre, entextualization, and natural histories of discourse*

The research scenario outlined above (and further described below) suggests that children and adults in this community are producing and circulating a set of oral and written texts that are deeply intertwined with the institutions and activities in which they participate. Bakhtin's (1986) seminal work on HETEROGLOSSIA and genre highlighted the principle that all utterances and discourse practices are historically embedded and contain the ideological and formal resources of previous speakers and community members. These resources are contained in speech genres, which serve as flexible interpretive frames for communication regardless of whether or not speakers are consciously aware of their workings.

This conception of discourse invites one to question empirically what allows texts to be produced as part of a specific sociocultural activity, DECONTEXTUALIZED or DECENTERED from this original context, and transposed and RECONTEXTUALIZED or RECENTERED in a new context for different purposes. Work drawing on the process of ENTEXTUALIZATION (Hanks 1989, Bauman & Briggs 1990, Silverstein & Urban 1996a) delves into this set of issues. Defined in simple terms, entextualization “is the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – A TEXT – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (Bauman & Briggs 1990:73). Indeed, as analysts and participants we are aware that several of the texts and genre instances we engage with are recognized as units and manipulated as “things” (Silverstein & Urban 1996b:1). However, it is possible to proceed “backwards” and ask what allows this, given that speakers may see it as a conspicuous feature of their linguistic behavior. Bauman & Briggs (1990:75–77) outline what analytic points could be addressed, roughly formulating complementary sets of intratextual and extratextual questions. Potential elements in a text that configure its entextualizability are its framing (metacommunicative management), form (rhetorical design), function (perlocutionary and illocutionary force), indexical grounding (of person, time, and place), translation (across languages or modes), and the emergent structure of this process. Potential elements in the social system that sustain this process (facilitate or inhibit it) are the institutional structures in which texts are inserted, the legitimacy and authority of participants, the competence of speakers, and the value system that organizes the relative status of different texts.

This article draws on this analytical framework and examines a set of verbal genres that could be tied to religious events and recognizable oral practices in related settings, such as religious instruction classes, and that reappear in written form in the texts produced in the after-school computer classes. After we present the research methods and outline recent social changes in the community of our study, the analysis focuses on some of the intratextual devices that may allow this entextualization to take place by consecutively examining a corpus of texts from each setting. In the conclusions, this recentering will be examined in relation to its sociopolitical context, specifically focusing on what dynamics might explain this discursive permeability among Gitano community contexts, and why this permeability fails to exist in similar situations within the formal educational system.

#### METHOD

The results of this study are part of a larger project in which the linguistic practices of Gitano children have been examined in various community settings. Participants in this part of the study are the children and supervising adults of the Gitano community of a small city in mideastern Spain, which we will call Mid-City, who are actively engaged in the activities organized by two institutions of

the community: a local Gitano cultural association, and the city's Gitano Evangelist Church. In total, we have worked with around 30 children ranging from 5 to 13 years of age who participated in an after-school computer program three times a week during weekday evenings and in the religious instruction classes organized by the Evangelist Church on Saturday mornings; of this group of children, some participated in both activities and some only in one. Except for a social worker who has been employed for several years by the cultural association and was responsible for the computer classes, all other adults were Gypsy community members voluntarily involved in maintaining these activities.

During winter 2001, we paid a number of visits to the cultural association's after-school programs, as a follow-up to a study conducted during the previous summer. Initially we had not planned a new data collection process; however, when we observed the children working, we discovered that most of them were intensely engaged in writing on their computers, and that the content of these writings deserved analysis. As a result, the researcher and the social worker saved several of the writings on disk as the children completed them, and the researcher took field notes during a small number of visits to the program that winter. In total, we recorded 38 texts written by the children (several by the same child) throughout the year.<sup>3</sup> Also, as part of ongoing collaboration with this cultural association, we conducted in-depth interviews with the president and social worker of the association, compiled varied documentation on the institution and the wider living conditions of Gitanos in this community, and had numerous informal conversations with Gitanos of the community as part of each of the successive periods of participant observation within the project.

A first analysis of the texts showed that the most frequent themes are religious in content, so we felt that their origin had to be found elsewhere. Therefore, at the beginning of 2002, we made contact with the Evangelist Church to discuss our interests and to establish a new study site. The pastor and other adults of the church pointed out their escuela dominical as a key site to be observed, and, in consequence, we undertook a small ethnographic study of these religious instruction classes between January and May 2002. In this part of our fieldwork, we took field notes and made audio and video recordings of the classes, gathered several documents used in these classes and/or related to the church's activities, organized semi-structured interviews with the children we identified as having participated in both settings, and held several informal conversations with the adults regarding their religious practices. Finally, this information was complemented with a few visits to the church's regular evening services.

The written and oral texts were transcribed and edited using the conventions and tools developed in ethnopoetics (Hymes 1981, 1996a) and stanza analysis (Gee 1996), for both oral and written discourse (Hymes 1996b). These procedures build on classic conceptions of the poetic function of language (Jakobson 1960) and follow largely inductive criteria to uncover the textual organization of discourse at multiple levels, organizing transcripts around two basic units: the



line/verse and the stanza. Given the differences between the types of texts that have been analyzed, the specifics of edition and transcription of each set will be discussed separately below.

GITANO CHILDREN IN MID-CITY: LOCAL CHANGES  
AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Mid-City is a small city situated in central Spain, in a largely rural region. Like many old cities in Spain, it is clearly divided into two sectors: the “historical center” with its narrow streets, old houses, and apartment buildings, and a newer part that has grown over the last century around this center. Gitanos have been present in the province since the beginning of the 18th century, and in the urban locality since the 1930s. Upon their arrival, Gitano extended families settled in one of the “upper” peripheral neighborhoods of the historical center, where, despite cultural differences from their neighbors, they shared similar economic activities (tied to agriculture, temporal employment and small-scale trading) and multigenerational familial patterns. From this first entry, Gypsy families began to spread out in the city, going to “lower” parts of the center and then, at the end of the 1960s, to a newly built neighborhood in the periphery of the new section.

This latter neighborhood, known as “the 300 Houses,” was one of the first public housing initiatives of the city and was primarily targeted at lodging Gitano and working-class residents. Again, in this neighborhood, Gitanos settled in extended multigenerational families and shared several social and economic features with their Payo neighbors. By this time, agricultural activities (except seasonal work) had lost ground in favor of small-scale trading, with a minority of families finding employment in local construction or service industries (occupations that are most important to this day in Mid-City’s Gypsy economy).

Finally, since the 1980s, Gitanos have primarily been settling in a new sector of the city, known as San Pedro, in public housing developed in this section during the past two decades. However, there are several features that make this settlement substantially different from the previous movements. Often, only the younger families move to this sector; dividing the Gitanos of Mid-City in generational terms. The vast majority of families in San Pedro consist of young parents and their children and, at most, the grandparents (who, given the early age at which Gitanos traditionally wed and have children, are often below 50 years of age). In turn, the 300 Houses is currently thought of as a “neighborhood of grand-(great)-parents and elder people,” where only a minority of Gitano children live – and these children expect to move with their parents to San Pedro sometime in the future. San Pedro, unlike previous sites, is not a peripheral and socio-economically homogeneous district. Rather, it is one of the growing parts of the city where an increasing number of infrastructures, services, and commercial areas are found. Also, the neighborhoods of this district combine modern



single-family houses with apartment buildings and public housing, allowing a wide range of socio-economic conditions to coexist here.

These transformations run parallel to changes in social policies affecting Gitano communities and children. Over the past two decades, the regional government has been developing social programs and funding nonprofit private initiatives aimed at the social integration and socio-educational advancement of marginalized communities such as Gitanos. At the moment, in San Pedro, for a total Gitano population below 1,200 members there are several social programs run by numerous organizations which provide after-school support for children and work-related training for youth. Gitano members have also been actively involved in these processes. Since 1985 there has been a Gitano cultural association (the one we have been working with), run by Gypsy members, developing its own programs and using its resources for similar purposes – and competing on equal standing with other nongovernmental organizations for public funding of its programs. For over a decade, this organization has had its own facilities in the 300 Houses, and for a few years it also had an office and site in San Pedro where it developed several programs for children until economic pressure made maintaining two sites unfeasible and the newer office was closed.

Finally, as another visible Gitano institution, the Evangelist Church has had a presence in the community for several decades. Traditionally, worship took place in the homes of church members in small gatherings, but in the 1980s the local Church of Mid-City was able to set up a chapel close to the 300 Houses, and since then has been able to maintain regular services and have an assigned pastor. Having a site for worship has also facilitated the development of several church-related public activities such as the choir, religious instruction classes, or the gatherings with other churches that are becoming increasingly important in the network of Evangelist churches in Spain.

In short, Gitano children in Mid-City today are being raised in a social environment substantially different from what was traditional for Gitanos of the locality. Within Gitano homes, smaller “nuclear-type” families are becoming more common. The children live and participate in a community much more heterogeneous and intertwined with the larger social and economic structure of Mid-City; and the educational and economic expectations for these children are also quite different from what was traditionally contemplated. Finally, there are established and visible Gitano community institutions (not just in symbolic terms, but with assigned spaces, materials, and activities) where children participate and are often the targeted audience of the institution’s work.

Obviously, not all families and children participate in these changes with equal intensity. Yet the current living conditions of the Gitano community make available a number of resources that, if taken up by Gypsy children, demand acquiring and displaying new skills and knowledge, and adjusting to the demands of a changing social environment. In this context, we focus on part of the discursive knowledge that circulates across these community sites and that is developed in

the children who participate in them. Note, however, that the characteristics of the community that we have outlined above may make the case of Mid-City relatively different from other Gypsy communities in urban contexts, especially in the larger Spanish metropolitan centers. Nevertheless, to our knowledge there is not much comparative research on Gitano children's discourse socialization in the community, and so the generalizability of our case remains an empirical question to be answered with future studies.

#### VERBAL GENRES IN THE ESCUELA DOMINICAL

In the community of our study, religious sites are genre-rich settings. Activities during church services (*el culto*) and religious instruction classes are organized as successive sets of verbal formats and activities that are clearly bounded, labeled, and recognized by participants. *Presentaciones* 'presentations' and *despedidas* 'farewells' open and close religious events in both church and classes. The *culto* is composed of verbal activities such as *alabanzas* 'hymns', songs performed in chorus and accompanied by instrumental music; *dar la palabra* 'give the word', the reading of the Bible and comment produced by the pastor or other religious leaders of the church (e.g., invited pastors from other congregations or *candidatos* 'apprentice pastors'); and *testimonios* 'testimonies', in which church members narrate personal experiences in which the work of the Lord played a significant role in times of hardship and precipitated a key episode in their conversion or faith consolidation (cf. Jacobs-Huey 2003). The religious classes have versions of hymns and giving the word, and also what participants properly call *escuela* 'school', instruction on religious matters organized by the teacher with "book and pencil work" as supporting materials.

All these verbal genres are experienced with an orientation toward performance in its "marked" sense, toward the display and evaluation of verbal competence by participants (Bauman 1977, Bauman & Sherzer 1989, Bauman & Briggs 1990). Speakers who produce elaborate instances of the above genres are said to have a *buena palabra* 'good word', and many verbal productions receive immediate interactive feedback in the form of applause or praise at the end, or inserted religious response cries ('amen', 'praise the Lord', etc.). In the "negative," if the instance is perceived by the congregation as unoriginal (e.g., the orator instead of improvising a prayer reproduces the verses of a known song), it may be received in the pews with moderately disparaging comment. Complementarily, speakers may "disclaim" their ability to produce an instance of the genre (Bauman 1977, 1993), both to avoid designation as speakers and to calibrate the possible assessment that will be offered after their performance.

Presentations and farewells share all the above traits and will be the focus of our analysis, since in the context of religious instruction they clearly show a developmental progression across children of different ages, and they are modeled and scaffolded by adults in an explicit process of genre teaching and acqui-

sition (cf. Bakhtin 1986). Religious instruction classes took place Saturday mornings approximately between 12:00 AM and 2:00 PM in the congregation's church, which was opened specifically for this purpose. They were attended by a varying number of children and several adults (male and female) responsible for the classes: two or three women, one of whom was the responsible teacher while the others acted as assistants, and two male adults who supervised the activities and were primarily responsible for the children's choir rehearsal, which also took place in these classes. One of these adult males was a highly regarded pastor candidate who also participated in the discussions during school, served as an authority to maintain order, and, as we will see, was often invited to open and close the session.

In the *escuela dominical*, presentations and farewells opened and closed the event. When the classes began, once all the children were inside the church and the teacher had turned on the lights, organized the materials, and moved the front benches into a square, she asked the children to form a circle (including adults), standing up, holding hands, bowing their heads, and closing their eyes. Then she designated two to four children to successively "present" the class, or allowed one of the available adults to do that. At the end of the class, after school, choir rehearsal and other planned activities were completed, the teacher gathered the children again, reviewed the work done during the morning (regarding both content learning and the children's behavior), and gave instructions and reminders about the events and work planned for the coming week. After this, she organized the group in the same manner as in presentations and again designated a set of children and adults to bid farewell to the class. Then the group broke up and participants gathered their belongings and left the church (which was closed and locked by one of the adults until the evening) to go home on foot or by car, alone or in groups accompanied by the adults.

Presentations and farewells are relatively brief instances of discourse that can be generically characterized by a set of traits relating to their rhetorical design, illocutionary content, and metric structure, as summarized in Table 1.

A presentation or farewell is composed by improvising a set of lines, which are often begun or closed with a reference to God with one of several alternative tokens ('Jesus', 'Father', or 'Lord'), and built by developing and recycling a number of syntactic constructions. These presentations/farewells, in their oral version, center on a limited set of verbal actions directed to God (illocutionary content), which may be realized in one line or over a set of lines in which the same basic act is elaborated. Although we have no evidence that the actions that may be performed in presentations or closings should be restricted to what appears in the corpus we have gathered, these seem to be limited to three kinds of verbal tasks: thanking God, asking God to bless (*bendecir*) various people, and asking God to cure various people. In terms of content, the recipients of these actions to be performed by God can be those immediately present in the class (the teachers and the children), other known community members who are per-

TABLE 1. *Generic traits of oral presentaciones and despedidas in religious classes.*

Rhetorical structure	Organized in lines Contextualized by religious formulas: <i>Jesus, Oh señor</i> ‘Oh Lord’, <i>Padre</i> ‘Father’ Syntactic and semantic parallelisms
Illocutionary content	Thanking Requesting blessing Requesting curing
Metric structure	Variable: Short verses: 5–9 syllables Long verses: 11–20 syllables

sonally named or identified by role (‘the pastor’, ‘my family’), or segments of society at large who are prayed for (‘the sick’, ‘the poor’, ‘the good’, etc.). The following example, produced by José Luis, the adult pastor candidate, is an elaborate instance of the genre as a farewell:

(1) Oral farewell (José Luis)<sup>4</sup>

- |   |      |   |      |
|---|------|---|------|
| A | 1JL: | Señor estamos a tu divina presencia agradecidos (.) Señor           | (19) |
|   | 2    | y como no (.) agradecerte Señor                                     | (11) |
|   | 3    | Padre estos jóvenes estos niños y estas niñas Señor                 | (16) |
|   | 4    | que (.) Padre que desde pequeños se proponen Padre                  | (15) |
|   | 5    | cantarte a ti alabanzas para ti Señor                               | (12) |
|   | 6    | (y aprender todo lo bueno de tu camino)                             | (13) |
| B | 7    | gracias Padre porque tu Señor tu XX XX XX XX razones                | (16) |
|   | 8    | nos pones XX para que Señor   | (9)  |
|   | 9    | administremos a estos pequeños Señor                                | (12) |
| C | 10   | bendícenos Señor  | (6)  |
|   | 11   | gracias por (.) por los compañeros que están que están con nosotros |      |
|   |      | Señor   | (19) |
|   | 12   | bendícelos Señor  | (6)  |
|   | 13   | Señor tócales el corazón  | (9)  |
|   | 14   | XX XX de una manera necesaria                                       | (12) |
|   | 15   | y que Señor te des a conocer en ellos                               | (13) |
| D | 16   | Señor gracias Padre por la Angelines por (.) por Ester Señor        | (17) |
|   | 17   | por Vanesa por Israel por Samuel                                    | (11) |
|   | 18   | por mí y por estos jóvenes y estas niñas                            | (12) |
|   | 19   | gracias por todo en el nombre de Jesús                              | (11) |
|   | 20G: | ameen ((elongating the final vowel))                                |      |

English translation:

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| A | 1JL: | Lord we are here in your divine presence grateful (.) Lord |
|   | 2    | and how not (.) thank you Lord                             |

	3	Father these youngsters these girls and these boys Lord
	4	that (.) Father that at young age they attempt Father
	5	sing to you hymns for you Lord
	6	(and learn all the good [things] of your path)
B	7	thank you Father because you Lord XX XX XX XX reasons
	8	you put us XX so that Lord
	9	we minister to these youngsters Lord
C	10	bless us Lord
	11	thank you (.) for the 'partners' that are that are here with us Lord
	12	bless them Lord
	13	Lord touch them in their hearts
	14	XX XX in a necessary way
	15	and that Lord you let yourself be known to them
D	16	Lord thank you Father for [the] Angelines for (.) for Ester Lord
	17	for Vanesa for Israel for Samuel
	18	for me and for these youngsters and these girls
	19	thank you for everything in the name of Jesus
20G:		ame:n ((elongating the final vowel))

In this example we have a rather long text organized in four stanzas, in which José Luis builds elaborate “thankings” and “requests for blessings” of three sets of participants: the children attending classes (stanza A and the second part of stanza D); the adults and himself, who are first cited in general in stanza B and then named in particular in stanza D, as those responsible for the religious education of the children; and us, the researchers, as visiting observers, in a mild instance of proselytizing (stanza C). Structurally, this adult speaker is able to produce fluently a combination of rather long and shorter verses in which improvised verbal formulas are recycled in different versions and grammatical forms (e.g., lines 10, 11, 12). Finally, he contextualizes several of his lines and stanzas with a varied set of referential tokens for God, such as *Señor* ‘Lord’, *Padre* ‘Father’, and *Jesus*.

As an adult and authorized figure in this religious setting, José Luis produces instances of the genre that serve as a model for the children of the community. In this way, some of the older and more competent students in the class are capable of performing presentations and closings that make use of the templates that have been provided by adults, as is the case of the girl in example (2), a presentation:

(2) Oral presentation (Meli)

A	1M:	gracias te damos Señor	(7)
	2	por-porque nos has permitido venir hoy aquí en tu gloria Señor	(18)
	3	te damos también las gracias por XX XX XX XX	(13)
	4	te damos también las gracias Señor por Angelines y la Vanesa y la Ester	(23)
	5	y guárdalas en el hueco de tu mano Señor	(14)

- B 6 por los tres compañeros que han venido hoy aquí (14)  
 7 que los guardes en el hueco de tu mano (12)  
 8 por todos los que no han venido (hoy aquí) XX XX (13)  
 9 que los guardes en el hueco de tu mano (12)
- 10CH: amen ((single child))  
 11GR: amen ((group in a chorus))

English translation

- A 1M: thank you we give you Lord  
 2 be-because you have allowed us to come here today in your glory Lord  
 3 we give you also thanks for XX XX XX XX  
 4 we give you also thanks Lord for Angelines and [the] Vanesa and [the] Ester  
 5 and keep them in the hollow of your hand Lord
- B 6 for the three 'partners' that have come here today  
 7 that you keep them in the hollow of your hand  
 8 for all that have not come (here today) XX XX  
 9 that you keep them in the hollow of your hand
- 10CH: amen ((single child))  
 11GR: amen ((group in a chorus))

This presentation contains several of the elements pointed out above that we saw in adult performances, but, as expected, in simplified form. The explicit illocutionary content is reduced to thanking, and the same parties as in the first example are mentioned: herself and her fellow students, both present (line 2) and absent (line 8), the researchers (line 6), and the adult women in charge of the class (line 4). In this case, Meli's thanking is made from the perspective of the children, and she simply thanks the Lord for the presence of the teachers. This contrasts with José Luis's perspective as an adult, where he thanks the Lord for providing him and the other adults with the capacity to educate the children (1, lines 7–9). Also, throughout her presentation Meli, of the available alternatives, only uses one token to refer to God (*Señor*). Finally, as a complementary activity to thanking, in her presentation she asks the Lord to 'keep in the hollow of his hand' each of the participants. This is a complete formula that allows for little improvisation and internal variation, and that appears in the prayers and songs of the congregation. In this case, Meli produces three couplets (lines 4–5, 6–7, and 8–9) in which the second part is the canonical formula and the first part successively mentions the different constituencies of the class (the adults, the visiting researchers, and the children who have not come to class). Given this development, while the overall presentation has a compact design in comparison to the adult version, the degree of personal elaboration is reduced.

Meli was one of the more competent children in the class, yet even the youngest students in the class (4 or 5 years of age) were encouraged to participate and produce their presentations or farewells. These instances may be fully scaffolded by adults, as in the following farewell performed by César, who closed the class that morning:

## (3) Oral farewell (César)

- 1 ANG: (...) después de haber dado mucha guerra tienes que orar venga  
[repite con Ester]  
2 EST: [gracias Señor  
3 CES: gracias Señor  
4 EST: por habernos permitido  
5 CES: por haber(nos) permitido  
6 EST: estar delante de tu presencia  
7 CES: estar delante de tu privencia  
8 EST: gracias por todo  
9 CES: gracias por todo  
10 EST: amén  
11 CES: amén  
12 GRO: ameen ((elongating the final vowel))  
13 ANG: ¡muy bien! ((kisses César))  
14 GRO: ((applause))

## English translation

- 1 ANG: (...) after causing so much racket you have to pray come on  
[repeat with Ester]  
2 EST: [thank you Lord  
3 CES: thank you Lord  
4 EST: for allowing us  
5 CES: for allowing (us)  
6 EST: to be in your presence  
7 CES: to be in your priv-ence  
8 EST: thank you for everything  
9 CES: thank you for everything  
10 EST: amen  
11 CES: amen  
12 GRO: ame:n ((elongating the final vowel))  
13 ANG: very good! ((kisses César))  
14 GRO: ((applause))

In this instance, the usual components are reduced to a minimum. The farewell is reduced to two instances of thanking; the first of which one of the teachers (Ester) breaks down into three segments to be repeated by the child, and it contains only one token for God. However, there are two aspects of this presentation that are relevant. First, it is a collective construction by a child and an adult, so the perspective it adopts in relation to its interlocutor is common to both, as opposed to the adult- or child-produced instances, which we have seen develop distinct participant frameworks (Goffman 1981) between all the mentioned parties and the performer's interlocutor (i.e. God) (cf. Keane 1997). Second, there is an explicit assessment of the child's achievement, a move that helps to index the marked nature of this speech and explicitly to insert the children in a developmental path.

To restate what has been said so far about presentations and farewells, they represent a recognizable genre in the community that is associated with a number of religious events and practices in which they play a specific social role. Formally, presentations and farewells can be characterized by a set of flexible



rhetorical and content features that allow members of the congregation to improvise specific instances of the genre. Further, although all these instances share the traits that allow them to be recognized as part of the same generic framework, there are important variations among instances that reflect broader social processes among the participants implicated in their production and reception. Speakers vary in the competence they display in the genre depending on both age and institutional role in the community (children, adults, students, teachers, pastor candidate, etc.). Within the *escuela dominical*, different classes of participants emerge – adult teachers, students, and observing researchers – and this distribution is reflected in the different positions that individual performers construe as members of one segment in relation to other groups of participants and the performer’s supernatural interlocutor. In short, while some “general” generic elements allow for production in a wide range of social events, the particular social conditions and relations in effect on these occasions also determine the specific traits of each generic instance.

This combination of textual processes may explain the varying characteristics that were displayed in texts of religious content produced by children in a very different social setting, to which we turn in the following section.

#### RELIGIOUS WRITINGS IN A COMPUTER AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

As we have said, Mid-City’s Gitano cultural association has been working over the past 15 years for the social, political, and educational advancement of local Gypsies. It is a small institution chartered as a nonprofit organization, with very few paid employees, and it develops two main lines of action. On one hand, it serves as a base of advocacy and consultation for most political affairs that affect Mid-City Gitanos, such as housing policies, schooling measures, and social programs. On the other hand, it organizes and runs publicly funded socio-educational programs designed for adults, youth, and children. While all programs share a central concern for the educational and economic advancement of Gitanos, the specific design and implementation of programs vary each year to meet changing political priorities in funding and the human-resource and economic pressures that the association always confronts. During the years we have worked with the association as part of our research project, three programs have been implemented for school-aged children: a summer school program, an after-school computer program, and a home-study support program.

Computer skills programs have been developed for some time by the association to provide Gitanos access to new technology, and, in the case of youth and adults, skills that might facilitate their entrance into the labor market. However, as explicitly expressed by the social worker in charge of these programs, computer classes (especially those designed for adults) also have a goal of

general literacy acquisition and development. Both these goals have been continued in the development of the after-school program for school-aged children, as evidenced in the fact that children's main activity during the class sessions was writing.

The educational approach in the program for children was rather open. Classes took place on three weekday evenings per week; the children were allowed to enter and exit the program freely, and were only reprimanded or invited to leave class when their behavior was excessively disruptive. Participating children, around 20 students on a regular basis, organized in pairs, groups, or individually in front of computers and worked freely with different software. The children would ask the social worker to turn on the computer and run different programs depending on what they intended to do (e.g., 'play' with a CD-ROM, 'paint', 'write'). By far the most frequent activity was writing, which usually took place in word processing or painting software. Children wrote freely on their computers, and their texts were corrected and edited by the available adults only when the children requested. Some of these texts were saved or printed out (which allowed for further development on later occasions), while others were erased at the end of the session or when the program was closed and the computer turned off.

The content and structure of the texts varies significantly, ranging from ritual insults and personal letters to texts of exclusively religious content, which has allowed us to establish a preliminary classification based on different generic traits (Cano et al. 2002). In terms of content, the most frequent references are to religious themes, which appear in 37% of the texts. An initial analysis of the texts, applying the accumulated knowledge of verbal activity in religious contexts, shows that presentations and farewells in fact provide the main generic grid for religious written texts. However, these writings are not a simple transcribed version of oral presentations/farewells; they show a number of particularities, summarized in Table 2, that complicate the text-context relationship.

Religious writings share with the oral versions a rhetorical structure based on parallelism, the contextualization of lines with formulas, and a textual organization that can be divided into lines/verses and stanzas.<sup>5</sup> However, they involve a much wider range of illocutionary acts – including declarations of love, commitments, requests for forgiveness, and explanations – that do not appear in the oral presentations/farewells. Also, in texts that must be seen as instances of generic hybridization, we have writings of religious content in which the author identifies himself or herself as well as other acquaintances (by name, surname and other personal information) or blends religious formulas with canonical elements of other genres, such as letter closings. Finally, the written texts combine verse constructions that vary in length and are contrasted within texts; but in comparison to oral versions, the lines seem to be much more regular.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 2. *Generic traits of the written texts with religious references in the after-school program.*

Rhetorical structure	Organized in lines Contextualized by religious formulas: <i>Jesus, Señor</i> ‘Lord’, <i>Dios</i> ‘God’ Syntactic and semantic parallelisms
Illocutionary content	Thanking Requesting Declaring love Asking for forgiveness Promising / Making a commitment Explaining Self-identification Letter closing
Metric structure	Variable: Short verses: 3–8 syllables Long verses: 9–18 syllables

The following text, produced by Talia, a 7-year-old girl, shows how some of the features of oral presentations/farewells are entextualized in the written texts and intertwined with other generic frameworks:

(4) Written text (Talia)

- |   |   |  |      |
|---|---|--|------|
| A | 1 | para dios                                      | (3)  |
|   | 2 | mi padre                                       | (3)  |
|   | 3 | y quiero que sanes a los enfermos              | (11) |
|   | 4 | y me sanes a mi                                | (6)  |
| B | 5 | gracias por mi padre por mi madre por miermano | (14) |
|   | 6 | y gracias por todo                             | (6)  |
| C | 7 | muchos besos                                   | (4)  |
|   | 8 | talia  | (2)  |
|   | 9 | gracisa.aa                                     | (3)  |
- English translation
- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| A | 1 | for god  |
|   | 2 | my father  |
|   | 3 | and I want you to cure the sick                        |
|   | 4 | and that you cure me                                   |
| B | 5 | thank you for my father for my mother for my brot(h)er |
|   | 6 | and thank you for everything                           |
| C | 7 | lots of kisses   |
|   | 8 | talia  |
|   | 9 | tha(kn.ss)   |

This text shares several of the features that we discussed in the previous section. It is limited to two discursive actions – requesting a cure and thanking –

which in form are produced in a way very similar to the instances discussed above (compare line 6 in this example with lines 8–9 in ex. 3). The participants in these actions are God (lines 1–2), who continues to be the direct interlocutor, an anonymous segment of society, ‘the sick’ (line 3), and more immediate beneficiaries such as herself or her family (lines 4–5). However, the full text is opened and closed with devices that are not easily associated with the generic frame we are familiar with. The opening ‘for god’ (line 1) makes explicit the intended interlocutor, an explicitness that is obviously redundant in a formal religious activity and that never appears in oral versions. The opening could also be seen as a device typical of the personal letter genre. This second possibility becomes relatively clear with the closing of the text, where Talia completes her text with a highly personal and informal formula (line 7) and “signs” her writing (line 8).

In short, this text combines features of two separate genres: religious openings/farewells and personal letters (cf. Guerra & Farr 2002). These genres are heavily grounded in oral and written modes, respectively. Among other things, this determines the degree to which different participants are made explicit in the texts. In an oral routine within a religious event, both the final interlocutor (God) and the author (the speaker) are not problematic, and thus their participant roles do not have to be stated. In contrast, in a written text (a potentially permanent record) produced in a nonreligious context, these roles need to be established explicitly, both in terms of the designated addressee (‘for’) and the author (signature). Further, children not only signal explicitly these differences in their texts, they also have different notions of the social consequences and uses of each type of text. Specifically, in the interviews several children explained that letters are written to ‘print out and send in the mail to someone’, while religious texts are written for ‘oneself to keep and express what one feels’. Thus, when conventions from nonreligious genres are inserted in texts with religious content, it is clear that it is the former that are subordinated to the latter, since the practical uses of each type of text are very different. However, writing occurs in a context which potentially favors interpretive ambiguity (regarding the situation and participants involved in the texts), which, in this case, is resolved through this hybridization

Children’s sensitivity to these variations shows that they are developing working distinctions among modes of transmission (oral vs. written) and the constraints of different communicative situations. While the above contrast can be seen as a byproduct of established generic conventions, children can also use oral/written distinctions for much more expressive purposes, as in the following text authored by a 10-year-old boy:

(5) Written text (Luis Ángel)

A	1	Teamo jesus solo ati	(7)
	2	as quese bajen los queno crean enti	(11)
	3	oseñor teamo	(5)

- B 4 nopuedocansarme de ti de decirtelo (13)  
 5 manda tumandato luis angel (9)  
 6 oseñor (3)
- C 7 debería escribir minombre connalluscula (14)  
 8 pero llosoloescribo con mallusculas solo parati (18)
- D 9 oseñor te amo sobre todas las cosas (12)  
 10 y guardanos enlapalma detumano (12)
- E 11 oseñor teamo oseñor (8)  
 12 no puedo cansarme deti (8)  
 13 porque todo lo quetengo es gracias ati. (13)

English translation

- A 1 Ilove you Jesus onlyyou  
 2 do thatthose that do not believe in you come down  
 3 olord Ilove you
- B 4 Icannotgetired of you of telling you  
 5 send yourcommand luis angel  
 6 olord
- C 7 I should write myname in uppercase  
 8 but Ionlywrite in uppercase only foryou
- D 9 olord I love you over all things  
 10 and keep us inthepalm of your hand
- E 11 olord Iloveyou olord  
 12 I cannot get tired ofyou  
 13 because all Ihave is thanks toyou.

In this text, Luis Ángel continues some of the discursive acts that we have seen so far but does so while simplifying the verse design. The text develops a central statement, which is recycled several times (lines 1, 3, 9, 11), accompanied by a complementary act which is also repeated (lines 4, 12), and by relatively fixed religious formulas (lines 5, 10) in which he also identifies himself. More relevant to our discussion, the texts contains a metalinguistic stanza (C) in which Luis Ángel explicitly discusses capitalization, a problem restricted to the written mode, as a way to organize a hierarchy between God and himself and to establish his subordination to the higher being. In other words, the child draws on an established written convention and infuses it with theological meaning for his own expressive purposes in the text.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in the corpus of religious written texts, although presentations/ farewells are the main generic resource, other verbal formats present in religious contexts are entextualized in this new context. Some children incorporate full lines of songs and hymns or exploit established maxims of the Evangelist Church (such as *Dios es amor* ‘God is love’, an oft-repeated statement that also appears printed in church banners and bulletins), producing hybrid texts of several reli-

gious genres. Also, children may draw primarily on other, single religious verbal formats. In the following example, an 11-year-old boy produces a relatively long text that is grounded in 'giving the word' (the sermon) in the church service:

## (6) Written text (Antonio)

- (T) **Dios vive**
- A 1 Dios es mi mejor amigo  
2 el demonio antes era un angel  
3 y se queria ser mas poderoso que dios  
4 y por eso dios lo echo al infierno
- B 5 y el hijo de dios murio por nuestros pecados  
6 y a los tres dias resucito  
7 dios es mas Poderoso que los brujos
- C 8 hai jente que no baja al culto  
9 ermanos el culto no te va ha salbar  
10 no solo tienes Que ser bueno en el culto  
11 si no tienes quesar bueno en todas las partes
- D 12 no todas las personas son perfectas  
13 Todas las personas tienen defectos  
14 pero hai algunas personas que se rien de las personas  
15 y tan bien hai Personas que fuman  
16 y son alcolicos  
17 y drogadicotos  
18 yo no vevo por que llo soi un hijo de dios
- E 19 el demonio Es el hijo de satanas  
20 y la bestia es poderosa  
21 pero dios 'es aun mas poderoso que la bestia  
22 y cuando Venga dios tambien bendra la bestia  
23 y nos pondra el 666  
24 pero llose que me boi con dios.

## English translation

- (T) **God lives**
- A 1 God is my best friend  
2 the devil was an angel before  
3 and he wanted (be) to be more powerful than god  
4 and that is why god sent him to hell
- B 5 and the son of god died for our sins  
6 and (three) days later he was resurrected  
7 god is more Powerful than the wizards
- C 8 the(r)e (p)eople who do not go to the culto  
9 brot(h)ers the culto is not going to sa(v)e you  
10 you not only have To be good in the culto  
11 rather you haveto be good everywhere
- D 12 not all people are perfect  
13 All people have faults  
14 but there are people who make fun of people  
15 and al so the(r)e are People who smoke

- 16 and are alco(h)olics  
 17 and drug addicts  
 18 I don't (drink) because (I) am a son of god
- E 19 the devil Is the son of satan  
 20 and the beast is powerful  
 21 but god 'is still more powerful than the beast  
 22 and when god Comes al(s)o the beast will (c)ome  
 23 and he will put us 666  
 24 but (I know) that I am (g)oing with god

As an instance of writing, the text opens with a title (which in the original is presented in boldface, centered in a single line and in much larger font than the rest of the text), a resource grounded in print conventions. As an instance of giving the word, the text exploits the more cryptic religious discourse regarding conflicts between good and evil and God's presence. It is only in the central part of the writing (stanzas C and D) that Antonio turns to more immediate matters addressing possible co-members of a congregation, who are referred to as 'brothers' (line 9), and speaks broadly of the human faults that need to be overcome (which from the child's perspective are making fun of others, drinking, smoking, and using drugs).

The interesting aspect of the rhetorical stance of this text is that it develops in a direction opposite to what is recurrently stressed during religious instruction. The teacher and other adults in the class appreciated children's broad references to God, good and evil, and human faults, but they also insisted that children speak and pray about "little things" and establish connections with their daily lives and specific problems and needs (with families, friends, school, etc.) (cf. Moore 2003). Further, such a concern for the specifics of daily lives and the establishment of connections between religious beliefs, the Bible, and members' immediate concerns is a fundamental trait in the growth of the Evangelist Church among Gitanos at a national level (Méndez, in press) and is reflected in the content and structure of the verbal practices that constitute religious events.

To summarize the discussion of this section, children's texts in the after-school computer program draw on varied resources including a set of established discourse genres developed in an oral mode in religious settings – most prominently, presentations/farewells. However, their recentering in a written mode in the program can not be seen as a simple transcription, since the previous generic frameworks undergo several important transformations in the written instances. First, children build hybrid texts that draw on diverse genres, both religious and nonreligious, and that are socially grounded equally in oral and written modes. Second, children exploit, tacitly and explicitly, features of the written mode for their own rhetorical and expressive purposes. This process, while it does not show that the children generally master standard written conventions, does indicate that they have established important distinctions between the oral and the written codes (cf. Blommaert 1999). Finally, children show sensitivity to the new participation frameworks that permeate writing in



the after-school program in which the relationships and identities of authors, designated addressees, and overlooking readership (those present in the after-school setting at the time of writing, and the full set of unspecified readers who may access the text if it is stored) are diluted.

In combination, these analyses of genres in two contexts and the interconnections between them have a series of theoretical consequences that, first of all, require that we revisit several assumptions regarding literacy among Gypsies. The findings also have implications for a final topic that we want to develop in the conclusion: our understanding of Gitanos' performance in formal education, and of how linguistic practices are embedded in larger institutional and social systems.

### CONCLUSIONS

The results we have presented suggest the need to reconceptualize the portrait of literacy in Gitano culture that we presented in the introduction. Reading and writing have sanctioned roles inside the community, and Gitanos have organized for themselves different institutions in which literacy plays a fundamental role. Important elements of these literacy practices, most notably religious literacy, do not have the immediate function of transacting with non-Gypsy institutions and segments of the social system. Currently, acquiring and displaying these literacy practices is something that is expected of all or the majority of members of the community. This expectation is strengthened in the case of religious literacy, since Evangelist theology places great emphasis on individual reading and interpretation of the Bible (an interpretation that is scaffolded by religious leaders). Consequently, the Gitano institutions that we have examined have developed spaces and occasions explicitly and intentionally designed as literacy instruction events. Children, as developing members of the community, are the targeted participants of these events.

All these transformations should be seen as evidence of cultural change, and thus, previous conceptualizations of Gitano literacy need not be judged as incorrect but rather can be put in historical perspective. One among the several factors that may account for this process of cultural change is, indeed, contact and exchange with majority non-Gitano society. However, this contact cannot be seen as an addition to Gypsy culture, since transacting with the majority group of each territory in which they have historically settled should be seen as a constitutive element of Gypsies' cultural repertory. What has changed, especially as a result of the political and ideological mobilizations of recent decades, is the terms under which these transactions are going to take place. Redefining this relationship requires Gitanos to build new competencies, such as those we have been discussing. Furthermore, because Gitanos are a part of the social system, transformation in this community requires transforming the totality of the social system and the role that the majority group has built for itself in this system. These

ideas blend well with current debates at a national and international level regarding the role of Gitanos and other Romani communities in the nation-state, yet we have also seen how these transformations take local forms. These transformations at the local level are configured by, among other things, the housing patterns, kinship structures, and urban policies that determine Gypsies' local social ecology, their access to resources, and the types of contact that take place between Gitanos and Payos daily. Further, these factors have been shown to be determinant in either inhibiting or sustaining the development of community institutions (churches, associations, etc.) and social networks. In the case of Mid-City, the historical developments we discussed at the outset seem to have allowed rather favorable conditions for these processes to take place (at least in comparison to other cities of the region or localities of similar size in the rest of Spain) – which is not to say that Mid-City Gitanos do not still face many disadvantages and forms of discrimination in the social system.

We consider that these general statements have powerful implications for discussions of Gitano culture and the practical socio-political applications that may derive from this portrait. The argument outlined above could be supported by several pieces of evidence that we have been observing and gathering for the past few years, of which the particular forms of entextualization presented here are only one part. Yet the specific nature of these results does have relevant implications for our understanding of processes inside formal education.

We have shown how Gitano children acquire a set of verbal practices associated with specific domains and are able to transpose these in new forms in different settings. This is possible because the children and other community members are able to establish continuities between different social settings and find this circulation of textual practices across varied contexts legitimate. Several factors contribute to this in the case under study. As suggested already, Mid-City's Gitano community has a relatively small and close-knit population in which all members have knowledge of one another and are related by different kinship, neighborly, and economic ties. Institutions such as the cultural association and the Evangelist Church play important and uncontested roles in the advancement and maintenance of this collective identity and social ties.

In practical terms, the leaders of each institution work in close contact and support each other in common causes, such as access to public resources and facilities or the dissemination of Gitano culture. For example, the president of the cultural association is an active member of the Evangelist congregation, and his political oratory is infused with religious references. In turn, the teacher of the escuela dominical, who is also a social worker, was a speaker in a seminar organized by the cultural association for educators working with Gypsy children. It is the same pool of children who participate in the educational programs of each organization, and several of the children who participated in the Saturday morning religious classes have also been actively involved in the educational activities of the cultural association (e.g., summer school and computer

classes). As an illustration of these interconnections, to facilitate participation in both institutions, the hours of the computer after-school program were set not to interfere with the evening church services. In short, children are provided with opportunities to learn valuable skills and feel legitimated to circulate and transfer these skills to different community contexts.

When we consider what role schools might play in this matrix, all available evidence suggests that the “circulation” is interrupted there. None of the discourse and literacy skills that we have documented seems to have any presence in schools, even in a transformed and adapted version similar to what is seen between the *escuela dominical* and the after-school program. Alternatively, the prevalent educational discourse regarding the educational competencies of Gitano children is infused with deficit explanations that stress children’s lack of cultural resources, familial support, motivation, and basic skills. Consequently, the instructional adaptations geared toward Gitano children are of a compensatory nature and often are translated into a curriculum that stresses narrow, mechanical literacy skills.<sup>8</sup>

Although all adult Gitanos we have worked with underscore the importance of formal education for the socio-economic advancement of their community and children, they also openly state that Gypsy children’s experience with the educational system is very complicated, and that many things would have to change for Gitano students to find themselves on equal standing with their Payo peers. In an in-depth interview, the president of the cultural association clearly stated this position: Schools are not prepared to receive Gitano children; Gitano culture (from the historical contributions and references to national culture and history to day-to-day arrangements) is ignored and remains invisible in the educational system. Under these conditions, the daily requirements of compulsory education are seen as an imposition on Gypsy children – and these children often respond to this imposition by disengaging from the objectives and procedures of formal schooling.

Of course, similar arguments regarding cultural conflict and discontinuities among minority students in schools have already been reviewed extensively (Ogbu 1994, Mehan 1998). Available theories build explanations that range from general cultural adaptive oppositional strategies to mismatches in the interactional patterns developed outside and inside schools. In the case of our data, we believe the fundamental question is legitimacy. It is not difficult to imagine ways in which the oral and written practices that we have presented could be adapted and used productively inside schools to advance Gypsy students’ success in schools. However, the value of these achievements is being systematically ignored, if not disparaged.

Currently, schools strive to develop and maintain connections with community organizations such as parental associations, libraries, civic organizations, and museums. Equally, even though the Spanish political system upholds the separation of church and state and Spanish public schools are not confessional, the Roman Catholic Church occupies a privileged position in the educational

system, both through formal Catholic religion classes available during school hours and through the conspicuous presence of Catholic celebrations in the curriculum and school calendar. The possible participation of the Gitano institutions we have been discussing is clearly underdeveloped, and, in this case, they are doubly discriminated against – as ethnic minority and as members of a minority religion. In short, these contributions are not given the legitimacy necessary to participate on an equal standing and proportionally in the network of community-school exchanges that are built and maintained daily among members of the majority social group. Consequently, any transformation of current conditions would require and precipitate changes in the social and institutional order of the schools and the community, as well as in the daily interactional order of educational exchanges (Heller 1995, Heller & Martin-Jones 2001).

In conclusion, to return to the opening concepts of this paper, the decentering and recentering of texts that we have presented is embedded in larger socio-political dynamics as well as grounded in discourse-internal features. Therefore, any extension of the textual trajectories of instances such as those we have examined would have implications both for the generic frameworks of the texts and for the social order in which they are inserted.

## NOTES

\* We first thank the research participants for their warm welcome to the different sites that are part of this study. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments. This study began when David Poveda worked in the School of Education and Humanities of the University of Castilla-La Mancha, where Ana Cano and Manuel Palomares-Valera completed their training. The research project was funded by the University of Castilla-La Mancha through an internal research grant (Principal Investigator: Beatriz Martín).

<sup>1</sup> “Gitano” is the term used to refer to the Gypsy or Romani communities in Spain. It is also the term preferred by Gitanos to refer to themselves. Here we will use “Gitano” and “Gypsy” as its literal translation to refer to this community, since in Spain the term “Gypsy” does not have the negative connotations that have been pointed out in other European countries. As a very brief introduction, it is believed that Gitanos first arrived in the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th century and since then have constituted an integral part of Spanish society; yet have always been pushed to a marginal position in the social system, experiencing throughout Spanish history different forms of persecution and socio-economic exclusion that continue in contemporary times. It is estimated (imprecisely, since there is not an official census on the matter) that currently Gypsies comprise about 600,000 to 1 million persons distributed throughout Spain, with a presence in all regions and types of localities, from urban centers to rural communities.

<sup>2</sup> “Payo” is the term used by Spanish Gypsies to refer to the non-Gypsy population, and we will use it to refer to the majority Spanish, native segment of society.

<sup>3</sup> The file was saved with the child’s name and age as identifiers. Also, the file information saves the date in which it was created, so it is possible to trace the temporal relations between related texts by the same child or group of children.

<sup>4</sup> The oral texts have been edited in lines/verses using intonation as the primary criterion, organizing each tone unit into a line. Lines may be reorganized later to unify what are clearly first parts or endings of a single predicative structure. Verses have been grouped into stanzas following semantic criteria or by using clear parallelisms as boundaries of stanzas. To facilitate the readability of the transcripts, symbols have been kept to a minimum and words have been transcribed conventionally, although certain phonological variations may be present in the participant’s speech. Possible transcription of unclear speech is shown in brackets, and non-transcribable fragments are written in rough groups of XX per syllable. Mid-line pauses are indicated with (.). In the English translation,

brackets are used to supply morphological information that is necessary to understand the Spanish version. Verses are measured following conventional Spanish literary metrics and are counted into syllables, which are blended if successive words end and begin with a vowel. The total count is indicated in brackets in the right-hand column.

<sup>5</sup> Written texts have been organized into lines following clause structure and different forms of semantic, syntactic, or rhetorical parallelism. The “natural” alignment of texts has been considered accidental and determined by the configuration of the page on the word processor. Punctuation has been subordinated to the first criteria, and all spelling and case choices have been maintained. In the English translation, brackets are used to indicate instances in which nonstandard constructions appear by producing “equivalent” deviations. Several of the original texts use multiple colors in their lettering, but its role has been postponed for a possible later analysis, since the theoretical tools we are currently using have not developed insights into this feature of writing.

<sup>6</sup> In any case, given the controversies surrounding criteria for verse analysis and the fact that we are comparing two different sets of texts produced in different modes and edited through different criteria, discussions regarding contrasts in verse structure should be considered tentative.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding children’s understanding and use of written conventions this text is illuminating. Luis Ángel restates a norm but only partially implements it, since his name is written in lower case but none of the tokens used for God is written or begun in upper case. Also, this text is one of the most deviant examples in terms of nonconventional word segmentation. However, the original was written in a painting program, and the final result may be a product of screen formatting, different use of keyboard keys, etc., and thus may be difficult to interpret in terms of metalexical skills.

<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, in this part of the research project we have not observed these children inside schools. This characterization is developed from the available literature (e.g., Enguita 1999), other work by ourselves (Martín & Poveda 2002) and, most immediately, by observations and conversations with teacher-students, teachers, counselors, and supervisors that were part of our daily work in the School of Education and Humanities of the regional university. Many of these students and professionals work with the very same participants whom we have studied out of school, and they almost never contemplate or consider possible the achievements that we have observed (see Varenne & McDermott 1998 for a more general statement on similar issues).

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