

## ***Kuna or Guna? : The Linguistic, Social and Political Process of Developing a Standard Orthography***

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In June 2004, the Kuna Congresses<sup>1</sup> sponsored the first in a series of seminars in order to establish a standard writing system for the Kuna language.<sup>2</sup> Although most indigenous peoples have principally been considered to have “oral cultures,” many indigenous *pueblos*<sup>3</sup> are in the process of creating, or have already created writing systems and bodies of literature that challenge dualistic notions of orality and literacy. The process of creating a standard writing system is an important one for indigenous *pueblos*, as their understanding of writing and literature is reflected in the development of the writing system and the ways in which it is employed.

On a social and political level, a standard orthography is important in the way that it is conceived of by the community and then developed. It is through this process of imbuing a writing system with meaning, beliefs and cultural understandings that a written abstract representation of a language becomes a writing system. The development of a standard orthography is a dynamic process that is inextricably embedded in a larger socio-historical framework. Colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and now globalism have created and are continuing to create barriers that the Kuna and other indigenous peoples struggle against in their quest for self-determination. This is the process I explore here through the social, political and linguistic issues that shape it.

In order to explore the social aspects of creating a standard Kuna orthography, I draw on the theory and methodology of the discourse-centered approach, using actual instances

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<sup>1</sup> There are two Kuna Congresses, the General Kuna Congress and the Congress of Kuna Culture, which serve as the elected governing bodies for the Comarca of Kuna Yala, a self-governing province in Panama.

<sup>2</sup> The Kuna language is generally classified as belonging to the Chibchan family, a large language family stemming from Colombia and greater Amazonia in which many distantly related languages are classified (Constanta 1991). There are approximately 50,000 to 70,000 Kuna in Panama, and another couple thousand in Colombia, making the Kuna the second largest indigenous group in Panama.

<sup>3</sup> *Pueblos* is used here as an alternative to “communities,” because this is the word used in Spanish by the Kuna, and because both the English “community” and the Kuna “neggwebur” can have narrower connotations meaning “singular community.”

of discourse in this research. The discourse-centered approach, first elaborated by Sherzer (1987) and Urban (1991), grew out of the ethnography of communication and the ethnography of speaking, which were developed by Hymes (1962) and Bauman and Sherzer (1974). The discourse-centered approach grounds the researcher in actual instances of socially-produced discourse, which is “the actual medium through which knowledge (linguistic and cultural) is produced, conceived, transmitted and acquired” (Sherzer 1987, p. 305). Such an approach allows the researcher to focus on language as a cultural medium which both shapes and is shaped by human understandings. I take the theory and methodology of the discourse-centered approach seriously in my research, using excerpts of spoken and written discourse from Kuna scholars, writers and activists. Through this approach, the ways that the Kuna are talking about developing a standard orthography, and hence creating and recreating a cultural understanding of this task, can be illustrated.

This research also relies on discourse analysis, which uses actual instances of discourse, spoken and written, to analyze how discourse constructs social subjects. Discourse analysis is similar to conversation analysis in that it looks at actual instances of discourse, documenting the micro workings of discourse that create social actors. Discourse analysis, however, also examines how these discourses function on a more macro level to create social constructions. In looking at these larger patterns of discourse, Fairclough notes that “it is in the concrete discursive practice that hegemonic structurings of orders of discourse are produced, reproduced, challenged and transformed” (1995, p. 95). By looking at how the Kuna are conceptualizing and realizing a standard writing system through discourse, it becomes clear how they are challenging, subverting and appropriating the hegemonic orderings of writing and literacy established by the dominant society.

Due to the political concerns of those involved with Kuna cultural movements and the language seminars, I have attempted to align my methodology with their concerns, highlighting issues that they have openly designated as important to the Kuna *pueblo*. I have used the discourse-centered approach and discourse analysis to develop a methodology that better reflects the ways that actual instances of discourse are being used socially and politically to support the development of new spaces for the Kuna language. Utilizing these concepts and tools, I analyze written and spoken discourse that reveals social structures of power. The discourse analyzed in this research generally addresses hegemonic discourses of language politics by speaking against them, revealing not only the structure of dominant language ideologies but also the structure of the discourse that has emerged to counter them.

This paper has emerged from my interaction with Kuna writers and language scholars over the past two years as well as my observation of the first two Kuna language seminars. I take an active supportive role regarding issues involving Kuna language and literature and pursue dialogue with Kuna colleagues, so that academic work such as this can be developed collaboratively. I take an active position in supporting Kuna language rights, but a non-interventionist, non-prescriptivist stance regarding linguistic issues and internal Kuna language politics. In addition, my involvement in Kuna language politics as a non-Kuna is heavily restricted by the Kuna, and is constantly being negotiated, especially in new social spaces, such as the Kuna language seminars. My participation in the seminars is therefore appropriately restricted to observation, while my support is seen as manifesting itself in other ways, such as this research. paper.

## 1. Oral and Written Traditions

When considering new writing systems emerging from oral culture, questions arise as the typically juxtaposed Western notions of oral and literate, traditional and modern, and indigenous and colonial are shown to be intersecting, overlapping and often coexistent. I argue that the process of standardizing Kuna orthography challenges these dichotomies and works to transform the system in which they are embedded.

The Kuna, like many other indigenous groups of the Americas, did not have an established phonetic writing system before the arrival of the Spanish. With the implementation of colonial rule, the Kuna, along with all the other indigenous groups of Panama and Colombia, became subjected to the domination of the Spanish language and its writing system. Recent work by Kuna scholars and activists are challenging these systems of oppression by questioning the prestige associated with the colonizer's language and literature and producing Kuna literature in the Kuna language. Many novels, short stories and collections of poetry have been published over the last thirty years, as well as works of non-fiction, including works on biology, history, oral histories, in addition to the material that has been published in school books.

Here I examine a short excerpt from the forward of one these works, Iguaniginape Kungiler's compilation of Kuna stories, *Yar Burba, Anmar Burba* (Spirit of the Earth, Our Spirit) (1997). As *Yar Burba, Anmar Burba* is one of the few books of Kuna oral literature published in Kuna, various considerations had to be taken into account by the author, many of which are analyzed in the forward written by Arysteides Turpana Iguaigninya. Turpana has written a forward that not only addresses the content of the book, but explores the sociocultural and political context from which it arises. Turpana explains in Kuna in the first half of the book, and then in Spanish in the second half of the book, how this book speaks to the national cultural rhetoric of the Panamanian State:

Emi sega Banama Yar sogdaed "el indio debe civilarse" (dulemar daed yobi núed suli yobi sundo). Deg soggu iti libro egissundo ue Banama daed obaredi dulemar daed obarmoga, al Banama yarde: akarakardaed, akarakar sunmake, akarakar negguebursibali. Deg soggu *Yar Burba, Anmar Burba* ibu dulemar Banama Yargi nabir na dakmoga: aa obardo. (Turpana 1997, p. 13).

*Until now the Panamanian National State has predicated that "the Indian should integrate himself" (as if an independent human being were not an ontological category). That is why this book illuminates and at the same time brings under judgment the tenuous homogeneity of the Panamanian culture: the true Panamanian culture is not homogenous, on the contrary, it is heterogeneous, hence our National State is multicultural, multilingual and multinational. We must understand once and for all that integration does not mean assimilation, it is rather contribution and participation: this is the most important message we receive from Yar Burba, Anmar Burba: Espiritu de la Tierra, Nuestro Espiritu. (Turpana 1997, p. 67)<sup>4</sup>*

Turpana's framing of Iguaniginape Kungiler's book shows how Kuna literature, arising from Kuna experience published in the Kuna language, challenges the Panamanian State and notions of Western superiority propagated through discourse of a homogeneous

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<sup>4</sup> This translation is taken from the Spanish original. All translations are done by the author unless otherwise noted.

national culture. In this context, Kuna literature is more than just writing in a different language, as Turpana is employing discourse that objects to the centuries of written Spanish tradition imposed on indigenous cultures.

Literacy has always been permeated by power, empowering the literate while simultaneously divesting the illiterate of their authority. The Kuna, along with other oral societies, have been subjected to this process since the beginning of colonialism and have responded by becoming literate in the dominant language, both of their own accord as a mode of self-defense and through force. The standardization of the Kuna writing system on behalf of the Kuna Congress is a move to reclaim the power that was usurped from Kuna and other unwritten languages with the hegemonic implementation of writing.

At the same time, when new literacies are being developed, the way in which literacy is valued must also be questioned. When asked in an interview about the importance of writing and literacy for the Kuna, linguist Reuter Orán responded<sup>5</sup>:

An be soge, igala, nue be ito. Nue be itodibe a, basuli yob dakle, dakledabali, igala. Sunna be egisdo, babgan degite an neg sesgua garda sulí sedsogeye? Deg selesdo asig be itodibe. Sunna be sogsardo, gwen garda basur itoleye, gwen garda wissuli, dakargua garda an abesuli .... Ibmara abe surmodo dakargua, deg garda guar nikateye, bega ibmara naid. Bega sunmakedeje. Wedi inikibardo, emiskin, aaga an be sogeteye, ibgwen a, la escritura es como un complemento.

*I'm going to tell you why, listen well. If you listen well, all of this will seem unimportant, but you will see why. You can ask yourself, how were our grandfathers able to govern without knowing how to write? That's how they governed for a long time. You can also say that literacy isn't that important, some people are illiterate, so they say that literacy isn't necessary... We don't need materials and texts if we already have them in our environment. They speak to you. That's how it should be, and now, that's why I tell you, that writing is like a complement.*

Orán deconstructs arguments for Western styles of literacy by showing that not only have Kunas effectively managed without knowing how to read or write Spanish, they have their own knowledge systems that are found in the environment. Orán shows how writing Kuna is supplemental to and not constitutive of Kuna knowledge systems that exist apart from Western epistemologies and the conceptions of literacy. Writing Kuna is therefore a complement to other Kuna creative activities that are valued in their own right.

In addition to these social and political issues, there is another level on which Kuna orthography holds great significance: spirituality. Understandings of Kuna spirituality are shaping the ways in which Kuna orthography and literacy are being conceptualized. In an interview Kuna educator and linguist Abadio Green (personal interview, June 23, 2004) elaborates on the relationship between the Kuna language and Kuna culture:

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<sup>5</sup> The Kuna Congress is still developing a standard orthography, hence there is no set of rules to guide the writing systems used for Kuna in this paper. In deciding this issue, I use the as-of-yet unofficial Kuna orthography that is currently emerging from the Kuna language seminars, to be revised when the Kuna Congress comes to a decision. Published writing in Kuna will be left as published.

An sogdibe an an gaya narmakbie, an igar danikid wisguegala, an garda narmaknaidi, an wisi ibu narmaknai, ibu obare, deyob sogele, sunnsoged, itos, ibigala, emi anmar gwabin soged, anmar sunmakedi, bergwable danikid, Bab Dummad, Nan Dummad napa imaknaigun anmar daed danikid niinaidba, Ibelele, Bugsu, Ologwadule, Nanakabayai, Daadmago. Aaba bergwable binnisdaniki anmar gwabin...

*If I say that I want to write in my language, in order to better understand my past, I am going to write, I am going to know and understand that it is important, you see, why our language today, our way of speaking, everything comes from Bab Dummad and Nan Dummad and the beginning of time our origins can be traced back to the Moon, to Ibelele, Bugsu, Ologwadule, Nanakabayai, and Daadmago. Through them our language has slowly developed..*

Green's argument points to the importance of Kuna spirituality in the development of an orthography and subsequent bodies of literature. Knowing these spiritual and historical Kuna figures is culturally important for the Kuna. Writing in Kuna necessarily takes Kuna history and spirituality into account, because as Green mentions, this is the origin of the Kuna language.

## 2. Kuna Orthographies

Integrated into these social and political issues are the linguistic debates that actually shape the writing of the Kuna language. When arriving at a standard orthography of Kuna, these linguistic issues cannot be separated from the social and political. A movement of Kuna intellectuals is striving to create a writing system that reflects the essence of Kuna grammar and simultaneously addresses the social and political issues that frame and shape literacy. Deciding on an alphabet or standardized orthographic practices is not an uncharged move for the Kuna. Through deciding whether Kuna should be written with a "k" or a "g," for example, the Kuna are addressing centuries of social injustices.

Beginning in June 2004, the Kuna Congress (*Congreso General Kuna*) began sponsoring a year-long series of seminars in order to establish a standard orthography and sort out grammatical issues. I attended the first of these seminars, which was held on the 23rd and 24th of June, 2004, along with subsequent seminars. The following details and description of the seminars is based on my participant-observation in the seminars and personal interviews. The main coordinator of the seminars is Dr. Aiban Wagua, who moderates the seminar and simultaneously contributes his linguistic knowledge to the debates. The first seminar included approximately thirty specially invited Kuna linguists, teachers, organizers and activists, with individual floor time allotted to the main orthographic specialists, Lino Smith, Reuter Orán and Abadio Green. One month later, the second seminar was held with the same group in order to confirm decisions reached at the first seminar. The second seminar also included a special teacher session, which was dedicated to dialoguing with all Kuna school teachers in Panama. This teacher session enabled communication between the more linguistically oriented group and the educators that are already employing some form of Kuna-oriented education. These seminars are still in progress and are scheduled to conclude in 2005.

In order to understand the complex social and political arguments revolving around Kuna orthography, it is necessary to explore the linguistic arguments from which they cannot be divorced. These linguistic elements fuel many of the debates themselves and at the same time are affected by the outcomes of these social and political arguments. Each

alphabet is associated with its proponents, its literature and its linguistic reasoning, all of which are politically positioned. Although the seminar does attempt to approach some of these differences from a scientific linguistic standpoint, everyone in the seminar recognizes the personal stakes involved for Kuna linguists and the Kuna community.

There are currently two principal orthographies being considered by the Kuna of Panama in the Kuna Language Seminars, one of which can generally be referred to as the “u/ú” writing system proposed by Reuter Orán, and the other as the “w/u” writing system proposed by Lino Smith. Both of the proponents are active members in Kuna linguistic circles and have been advocating Kuna language education since they began Kuna teacher training in the 1970’s. Another writing system, developed by Nils Holmer (1947) from Sweden in the 1940’s, is used by linguistic anthropologist Joel Sherzer (1990) in his representations of the Kuna language and also by Kuna scholar and activist Abadio Green. Although Green is a key intellectual figure in the Kuna language seminars, he is not advocating the implementation of this system, mostly due to his regional ties to Colombia.

The “u/ú” writing system proposed by Reuter Orán is currently in use in the bilingual education program on the island community of Tupile in Kuna Yala. Orán has published at least two grade school primers in Kuna using his writing system (1992, 1994). A new textbook published by the Kuna Congress also utilizes this system, although it has not yet been distributed to all the Kuna community schools. The same writing system was employed in the publication of *Yar Burba Anmar Burba* (Kungiler, 1997). Orán’s system has been employed in various other small publications in Kuna and seems to be the most popular system among Kuna writers in Panama at the present time.

The “w/u” writing system proposed by Lino Smith also has a large sphere of influence in Panama, especially within evangelical circles. Smith has worked with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and has translated the Bible into Kuna using the “w/u” writing system. There has been a wide distribution of these Bibles and other written materials among Kuna Protestant churches. As the Kuna language seminars progress, elements of this writing system seem to be gaining more acceptance than the others based on some convincing linguistic arguments, although it also shares many of the same conventions as that proposed by Orán.

The third writing system, developed by Nils Holmer of Sweden (1947), has largely been employed in historical documents and other documentation and is presently used in Kuna publications in Colombia. This writing system has been used in American academic writing by scholars such as Joel Sherzer (1990, 2000) and James Howe (1998) who used this system to represent the Kuna language in their many publications on Kuna language and culture. This writing system was also used in the first translation of the Bible, and is therefore more widely recognized by older generations in Panama. Although this specific system is not being proposed in the Kuna language seminars, Abadio Green often draws on its linguistic elements in contributing to the current orthographic debates.

The similarities and differences in the three main Kuna alphabets that are currently in use are delineated in Table 1. The boldfaced letters are letters of the alphabet and the non-boldfaced letters are recognized orthographic conventions that are not officially included in the alphabet. While the differences between these systems extend far beyond the alphabet itself, this table does help separate out the occasionally overlapping systems.

Table 1. Proposed Kuna alphabets

	u/ú system R. Orán	w/u system L. Smith	p/pp system A.Green (Holmer/Sherzer)
voiceless/voiced stops	<b>p,t,k</b> bb,dd,gg	<b>b,d,g</b> bb,dd,gg	<b>pp,tt,kk,kkw</b> <b>p,t,k,kw</b>
short/long (sing./double) nasals	<b>m,n</b> mm,nn	<b>m,n</b> mm,nn	<b>m,n</b> <b>mm,nn</b>
short/long (sing./double) liquids	<b>r,l</b> rr,ll	<b>r,l</b> r <sup>16</sup> ,ll	<b>r,l</b> <b>rr,ll</b>
fricatives/affricates	<b>s</b> <b>ch</b> ss	<b>s</b> <b>ss</b>	<b>s</b> <b>ch</b>
short/long (sing./double) approximates	<b>u,y</b>	<b>w,y</b>	<b>w,y</b> <b>yy</b>
short vowels (single)	<b>a,e,i,o,u,ú</b>	<b>a,e,i,o,u</b>	<b>a,e,i,o,u</b>
long vowels (double)	aa,ee,ii,oo,uu	aa,ee,ii,oo,uu	<b>aa,ee,ii,oo,uu</b>

### 3. Kuna or Guna?

Although the two main orthographies being considered in the Kuna language seminars principally differ on their use of “ú” and “u” or “u” and “w,” one of the most significant orthographic rules that these two systems have already embraced is the use of the voiced stops “b,” “d” and “g” in word initial position. Indeed, the Kuna language does not differentiate between voiced and voiceless stops in word initial position, which are generally pronounced as voiced in most variations of Kuna. While the older orthography developed by Holmer (1947) made the same distinction (with “p,” “t,” and “k”), the representation of the voiced stops in Kuna with “p,” “t” and “k” has overwhelmed led to voiceless pronunciation of Kuna words by speakers of Spanish and other Indo-European languages. Well-known Kuna words such as *Kuna*, *Kantule*, *Tule* and *Panama*<sup>17</sup> are pronounced with voiced stops in Kuna and according to the both of the new proposed orthographies, would be written *Guna* and *Gantule*, *Dule* and *Banama*. Seeing as how these words carry great political significance, both nationally and internationally, many participants in the Kuna language seminars hold that these words should still be written in their widely recognized voiceless forms, *Kuna*, *Kantule*, *Tule* and *Panama*, although the voiced forms have also appeared in various publications.

Both of the new writing systems (proposed by Orán and Smith) utilize “p, t, k” for voiceless stops and “b, d, g” for voiced stops, although they also allow for the morphophonemic representations of doubled voiced stops in order to retain the morphological roots. For example, although one would write *obbie* [op.i.e] “want to bathe,” which derives from the words *obe* “to bathe” and *-bie*, a desiderative, in order to preserve the morphology, one would write *dupu* [du.pu] “island” because the etymological roots, if there are any, are unknown. The p/pp system, however, uses “pp” for both *oppie*

<sup>16</sup> In the Kuna language seminars Smith has contended that the examples of contrasting “r” and “rr” are too few to show a definite contrast.

<sup>17</sup> Panama is popularly thought to be derived from the Kuna word *bannaba*, meaning “far away.” This word is thought to have been the Kuna’s response to the Spanish when they asked where the Pacific Ocean was located. Although the etymology is not certain, all words beginning with stops, including Spanish borrowings, are pronounced voiced.

and *tuppu* because they can both be analyzed as having double stops. This example, along with others, is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Stops in Kuna

	u/ú system R. Orán	w/u system L. Smith	p/pp system A. Green (Holmer/Sherzer)
<b>Stops voiceless/voiced</b>	<b>p,t,k</b> <b>b,d,g</b> bb,dd,gg	<b>p,t,k</b> <b>b,d,g</b> bb,dd,gg	<b>pp,tt,kk,kkw</b> <b>p,t,k,kw</b>
[du.pu] “island”	dupu	dupu	tuppu
[g <sup>w</sup> .i.li] “parakeet”	guili	gwili	kwili
[o.be]+[bi.e]=[op.i.e] “want to bathe”	obbie	obbie	oppie
[du.le] “human,” “kuna”	dule	dule	tule
[gu.na] “layer of the earth,” “kuna”	guna	guna	kuna

Only the p/pp system recognized the velar consonant /g<sup>w</sup>/ in its alphabet, which is pronounced as [g<sup>w</sup>] in its singular form and [k<sup>w</sup>] in its double form, and is recognized, as seen in Table (1), as “kkw” and “kw.” While linguistic arguments can be made for /g<sup>w</sup>/ as a separate consonant, this is perhaps not currently being explored in the seminars as separate phonemes because of the fact that these orthographies already include independent letters for “g,” “k,” and “w.”

#### 4. Kuna Culture in Orthography

In working to establish Kuna literary practices on their own terms, the Kuna have developed certain orthographic practices that reflect Kuna culture and simultaneously work as active cultural agents. Maintaining the morphophonemic structures and etymology of words in orthography is one way that the Kuna community is looking to preserve cultural meaning. I will use it here as an example of how orthography is being used by the Kuna to express cultural knowledge.

There are many examples of morphophonology being retained in Kuna orthography, such as in verb construction. Verb construction in Kuna is highly agglutinative and tends to combine many morphemes together to form words. For example, the verb *gobe* “drink” and the desiderative *-bie* meaning “want to” come together as *gobbie* “want to drink,” pronounced [gop.ie]. By maintaining the underlying morphophonemic structure in writing, the Kuna are using writing to reflect individual morphemes that undergo phonemic changes due to the agglutinative nature of the language.

Closely related to the preservation of underlying word structure through morphophonemic writing is the preservation of etymological roots in writing. Delving into the etymology of Kuna words is interesting for the Kuna on many levels. Older words from which present day colloquial forms have emerged are considered special because they belonged to earlier generations, which are also associated with having great cultural knowledge. The etymology of many words is unknown or questionable, leaving them open to speculation and word games. Word play is entertainment in Kuna culture, and is often the center of Kuna jokes (Sherzer, 2002). The search for etymological roots and the



written structure that can reflect them has been an important topic in the Kuna language seminars. Abadio Green is especially knowledgeable in this subject and can make etymology and morphology interesting even for those uninvolved in linguistics. A popular example of such etymological analysis is that of [matʃered], which means “man”:

- (3) mas + sered → massered [matʃered]  
 “plantain, boy” “old” “old boy” (“man”)

The word *massered* has undergone a semantic shift in Kuna to the point where it is no longer analyzable in every day Kuna, perhaps due in part to the phonological rule that two [s] become [tʃ]. Yet upon analysis, it is easily recognizable by Kuna speakers. Other examples are not as easily recognizable and their etymologies can still be debated, as in the following example offered by Reuter Orán for [atʃu], meaning “dog”:

- (4) as(u) + su(id) → assu [atʃu]  
 “nose” “long” “long nose” (“dog”)

In example (4), the final vowels and consonants are dropped, as is common in Kuna, in addition to the phonological process of two [s] becoming [tʃ]. This word is no longer analyzable in everyday Kuna and may indeed simply be [atʃu], lacking any modern etymological roots (although it is thought that [tʃ] only occurs synthetically as the combination of [s] with other consonants). Another possible etymology for this word has been proposed by Abadio Green as the following:

- (5) as(u) + (a)su → assu [atʃu]  
 “nose” “nose” “one who uses his nose repeatedly” (“dog”)

This possible etymology is based on the grounds that reduplication is a highly productive process in Kuna and that “nose” + “nose” can be understood as “one who uses his nose repeatedly,” such as a dog who is always sniffing.

Other examples are only analyzable on very in-depth levels, such as *gugle* “seven” and *gurgin* “hat,” for which Green has proposed etymologies based on both his linguistic knowledge and cultural studies with Kuna elders. Green explains that *gugle* “seven” is thought to come from *guli*, a set of Kuna pan pipes made of seven reeds and possibly a second meaning of *guli*, which means “dawn”:

- (6) gu(li) + g(uli) + le(le) → gugle [gugʲle]  
 “pan pipes” “pan pipes” LOC<sup>20</sup> → “seven”

Considering the productive tendency in Kuna to reduplicate and the fact that pan pipes are indeed made up of seven reeds, this is a very plausible etymology, albeit very removed from everyday Kuna. In addition, Green shows how *gurgin* “hat” is also related to “seven”:

- (7) gul(i) + gin(e) → gu(l)gin [gurgin]

<sup>20</sup> *-lele* is a locative suffix that is especially common in chanted forms of Kuna and appears in its shortened colloquial form *-le* in everyday Kuna.

“seven”                      preposition “on”                      →                      “on seven” (“hat”)

Using the etymology of “seven” *guli* to reference the seven orifices of the head (the ears, the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth), Green shows how *gurgin* can be shown to be derived from a metaphor of head meaning “seven orifices.”

By looking for etymologies and cultural meaning that underlies Kuna words, linguistic analysis and the development of a standardized writing system are couched in Kuna culture. Such word play is not only a productive linguistic exercise: it serves to provoke Kuna speakers to search for meaning in their language within the Kuna language seminars, it draws upon important larger cultural meanings, and it entertains and intrigues audiences by being both playful and intelligent. Such examples that have emerged from the Kuna language seminars show how Kuna writing and literary practices are being developed in ways that differ from dominant literary practices, using both culture and linguistics to inform their decisions.

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