

The Legacy of Academic Stories in Applied Linguistics¹

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Abstract: The Graduate Institute of Linguistics (GIAL, www.gial.edu) grew out of a proprietary school run by SIL International (www.sil.org) and supports the linguistic and translation goals of that organization, the Wycliffe Bible Translators (www.wycliffe.net), and other like-minded agencies. It follows the legacies of men like Professor Kenneth L. Pike (1912-2000) and Wycliffe cofounder William Cameron Townsend (1896-1982), by offering programs in applied linguistics and language development. Both Pike and Townsend were skilled storytellers and mentors. I discuss their contributions to the topic of orality, including stories that form and inform parts of the GIAL and SIL corporate cultures. Because storytelling has a long academic tradition in seminaries (e.g., studying the parables), in elementary and in secondary education, and in the college humanities, I describe some of the ways that SIL and GIAL have continued this tradition. Storytelling is also germane in cultural studies (oral histories) in developing-world universities, and is also a vehicle that literacy efforts promote for minority languages. Finally, story (or narrative) is the dominant theme and style of the Bible and its translation, a primary concern of GIAL and SIL. With such efforts and history in mind, this article concludes by outlining how features of story-telling are incorporated into the curricula of GIAL and thereby contribute to the legacy of SIL academic storytelling.

1. Institutional storytelling

Silverman (2006:47) claims, “When people remember a story, they remember its intent”. She relates how a particular supervisor mentors more than a hundred associates a year—supervisors and Vice Presidents—mainly through stories. This is because “Using carefully selected stories in mentoring allows leaders to learn from others’ life experiences” (p. 50). However, to use stories there must be an organizational culture without a lot of fear, not one that is excessively hierarchical. For strategic information the mentor must first identify the message that is important, then select and develop a story that reinforces it. The mentor must further determine when and where to tell the story and solicit feedback on the message (pp. 53-54). Leaders in organizations need to consider what story best outlines their goals and values.

Denning (2001) comments on how storytelling, when directed towards a particular audience, contributes to organizational change. He notes that “Time after time, when faced with the task of persuading a group of managers or front-line staff in a large organization to get enthusiastic about a major change, I found that storytelling was the only thing that worked” (2001:xiii). He believes that the standard management manual has too much theory and relies almost entirely on analytic thinking. According to Denning the management tools are strong on fixing the system, re-engineering the processes, enhancing the quality, streamlining the

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procedures, reforming the organizational structure, and analyzing things in terms of grids and charts. But such tools do not necessarily promote change.

According to Denning (2001, 2005) “Springboard stories” are those that do promote changes in an organization, just as Bible stories promote changes in individuals and in the culture as a whole. Such stories have certain characteristics² (that are not unique to original stories):

- They are told from the point of view of a protagonist who is in a predicament
- The change proposal in the story should solve the predicament
- The story should be plausible, even familiar, and be told as simply and briefly as possible
- The story should spark new stories in the minds of the listeners, but not details
- The listener’s minds should be encouraged to race ahead, to imagine further implications
- The story is only as good as the underlying idea being conveyed
- If the idea in the story is bad, telling the story may reveal its weaknesses
- Further conversations can debate the feasibility of the change idea
- Every teller or listener is potentially an “expert” with a different idea of what is best

2. SIL International

The website of SIL International outlines its story briefly as follows: “SIL International is a faith-based nonprofit organization committed to serving language communities worldwide as they build capacity for sustainable language development. SIL does this primarily through research, translation, training and materials development. ...The organization makes its services available to all, without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnolinguistic background”.³

The SIL academic story begins in 1936 when W. Cameron Townsend started a linguistics and translation organization in a renovated chicken coop in Arkansas. Townsend invited a number of trainees at the school to work with him in Mexico. However, the agency that forwarded funds to Mexico insisted that Townsend’s field workers belong to an organization. Townsend suggested to his recruits that the Summer Institute of Linguistics or SIL be the name of the new organization because of the required summer training. The organization now continues as SIL International, although its name has two further senses: 1) the organization for field work in some countries and 2) some of its applied and formal linguistic training courses.

The story is unique because the concept and eventual formation of SIL was the first time in mission history that an organization’s primary purpose was to reduce languages to writing and to translate the Bible for minority groups (Hefley and Hefley 1974:96). Townsend decided that

²SIL has numerous “springboard stories”. Note, for example, the story about how Kenneth Pike was prompted to write his classic phonetics textbook (Pike 1943): There was a predicament (Townsend needed the book to teach students at his summer school); a change proposal to solve the predicament (Townsend asked Pike to do it); the story is plausible, even familiar (Pike didn’t want to do it because of other obligations); it also sparks new stories (of how others benefited from Pike’s work), and so on. In many ways, the institutional academic story of SIL International revolves around Pike. A memorial volume of his life (Wise, Headland, and Brend, eds., 2003, with 38 chapters) was dedicated to his memory.

³From <http://www.sil.org/sil/> (last accessed May 2012). See the site for additional information on the worldwide scope of SIL, as well as academic and related topics.

the organization would be decidedly academic and it would be field-oriented. When he moved to Peru to begin SIL work there, he made a novel suggestion to the new members. Rather than following the lead of other missions at that time which had their governing board in home countries, the SIL group would elect their Director and Executive Committee on the field and make their own decisions about their field work. The group was surprised that Townsend, who was an obvious choice for director, wanted to work under a field committee. However, “Townsend believed it was dangerous for one man to have control” (Hefley and Hefley 1974:96). This policy and story continues today-- SIL membership controls the field work because they best understand the local needs.⁴

The SIL translation and linguistics scene for Townsend multiplied when requests for help came from other Latin American countries. When three missions in Guatemala asked for assistance, several SIL members went to help. Further requests came from North and South America, then expanded rapidly beyond the Americas to Africa, Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific. To date (May 2012) SIL’s linguistic investigation exceeds 2,590 languages spoken by over 1.7 billion people in nearly 100 countries. At this writing, the SIL Bibliography (see <http://www.ethnologue.com/bibliography.asp>) contains a subset of over 28,000 citations from the more than 40,000 publications representing 75 years of language research in over 2,700 languages. These include references to books, journal articles, book chapters, dissertations and other academic papers about languages and cultures authored or edited by SIL International staff or published by SIL. Each minority language effort encapsulates a story of its own.

3. SIL training

SIL courses continue to impact missionary work around the world and, as already indicated, SIL International was responsible for the formation of GIAL, which we will discuss later. When Townsend began the first session of SIL in 1934 in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, he combined rustic living and a training program geared to prepare his students for village life and language learning in Latin America.

Today, the story continues, with many SIL training programs worldwide, as well as individual courses and field workshops in many countries where SIL works. The teaching staff comprises experienced field linguists and specialists in related fields.

We offer training for language development work in partnership with educational institutions around the world. Over the last 70 years, over 15,000 people have been trained through these cooperative programs. At present, SIL has eight academic training programs in North America,⁵ four in Africa, three in Europe, two in South America, four in Asia, and one in the Pacific. Graduates work on six continents as partners with many organizations.

Townsend added a further dimension to training when he realized that fieldworkers needed training for the hardships of the Amazon jungle life, so he searched for and found a “jungle camp” site in southern Mexico. Today Wycliffe requires most members to attend a Field Orientation Course in the field area where they will work. The training was, and still is, divided

⁴For more on Townsend’s ideas and contributions, see, in particular, Svelmoe (2007).

⁵This includes courses SIL began in several well-known Christian universities, Bible schools and seminaries. Graduates work on six continents as partners with many organizations. See <http://www.sil.org/training> for details on the programs offered.

into two parts: teaching practical skills along with healthy, efficient living in an isolated setting, and living in a village or urban center to apply the skills learned.

The story of scholarship in SIL is an important component because Pike encouraged members to do graduate studies. This effort continues — for example, between October 2004 and March 2008, 34 members received their PhDs. Currently there are almost 300 SIL members in graduate studies (61 in PhD programs) in the fields of linguistics, translation, theology, Hebrew, missiology, education, sociolinguistics, computer science, anthropology, management, intercultural studies, NT exegesis, counseling, literacy, ethnomusicology, and others. This kind of emphasis is largely due to the legacy of Professor Kenneth L. Pike.⁶

4. The Wycliffe Bible Translators⁷

It is appropriate here to examine briefly the story of W. C. Townsend and his legacy. Ralph Winter, noted missiologist, believed that the first era of mission history began with William Carey, India; the second era began with Hudson Taylor, China; and the third era began with Townsend. Winter states, “Surely in our time one person comparable to William Carey and Hudson Taylor is Cameron Townsend. Like Carey and Taylor, Townsend saw that there were still unreached frontiers and for almost half a century he has waved the flag for the overlooked tribal peoples of the world” (Winter and Hawthorne 1982:174).

Townsend’s missionary career began in 1917 when, at age 21, he dropped out of a Bible college to sell Spanish Bibles in Guatemala. Very soon he observed two things: the natives usually spoke their indigenous languages in their homes and market places, and indigenous evangelists were effective because they used their own languages to explain the Gospel.

This use of local languages in the building of God’s kingdom changed Mr. Townsend’s life focus. Though he learnt Spanish and established some growing churches, he became convinced that indigenous languages were the best way to evangelize, plant churches, and to teach and train local citizens in God’s Word.

Francisco Díaz, a Cakchiquel Indian of Guatemala, challenged Mr. Townsend to respond to the needs of his people, numbering about 200,000 speakers, most of whom spoke no Spanish. Townsend decided to learn the Cakchiquel language and to translate the New Testament into it.

About this time, in 1919, Townsend married Elvira Malstrom, a missionary already working in Guatemala. They joined the Central American Mission and were the first missionaries devoted to translating Scriptures into an Indian language in Guatemala. While living in a village named San Antonio, they learned Cakchiquel, wrote it phonetically, and developed a grammar. They began literacy classes for a group of 80 believers who were keen to learn to read Cakchiquel so they could understand the Bible better. By 1931, the Cakchiquel New Testament was published, dedicated and plans for extensive literacy campaigns were underway.

The Townsends also promoted schools, clinics and other helpful community projects. Cameron Townsend always worked with appropriate local governmental and educational agencies to help the people acquire self-esteem and dignity, as well as national identity.

⁶Pike (and Townsend) intuitively practiced what excellent mentors do (see Johnson and Ridley 2004) and established many mentor-protégé relationships.

⁷Two affiliated organizations in the U.S. are The Seed Company (<http://www.theseedcompany.org/>) and Wycliffe Associates (<http://www.wycliffeassociates.org/>).

Townsend was diagnosed with tuberculosis and, while recovering in California, his vision grew for the isolated language groups in Peru, South America. Since seeing the power of the gospel in Cakchiquel, “he knew that the Bible in the tongues of the South American Indians was their only hope. It would be a long, hard and costly job, but it was the only way” (Wallis and Bennett 1959:37). But many friends and missionaries advised him it would be futile: “They’ll kill you”, “Those tribes are dying out anyway”, and “The language groups are too remote”, they claimed. But Townsend felt that the Lord gave him a verse to answer the critics: the tribal groups were like the “one lost sheep” (Matt. 18:11-12).

The story goes that Townsend’s vision had to wait some time because his wife was diagnosed with a serious heart ailment that needed a long recuperation. So he used this time to research the world’s language situation. He remembered his struggles to learn, write and analyze the Cakchiquel language, so he knew that missionaries needed training in three major activities: linguistics, translation, and literacy. He also knew that scientific help in these studies was available.

Townsend’s training institute in rural Arkansas was first called “Camp Wycliffe” after the first translator of the English Bible, John Wycliffe, and the legacy of practical linguistic training is tied closely in his story. Besides academic work, prayer was a constant emphasis at the school. Students prayed earnestly, “asking God to undertake in behalf of the hundreds of tribes of Indians in Latin America as well as unevangelized tribes elsewhere in the world” (Wallis and Bennett 1959:48). Later the course was renamed the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) because it was held only in the summer. Mexico, with its many languages, was the first country entered by newly trained linguist-translators from Camp Wycliffe.

Townsend’s legacy has grown until today (2012) there are Wycliffe organizations in 40 countries that recruit members for languages with documented needs for language development. About half of such members are linguists, translators and literacy workers. The other half are support personnel: teachers, secretaries, pilots, mechanics, printers, doctors, nurses, accountants, and others. No matter what work they do, Cameron Townsend saw their role clearly from the very beginning of the organization: “Our tools are linguistics and the Word, administered in love and in the spirit of service to all without discrimination” (Winter and Hawthorne 1982:251).⁸

The glue that now holds together the many Wycliffe home organizations around the world is Wycliffe Bible Translators International (WBTI—now known as Wycliffe Global Alliance) with its own set of officers who serve on a Board elected by the members. The Board meets twice annually and every four years holds a general Conference for elected delegates who discuss common issues related to the goals of the sending countries. The Board membership is elected at the general Conference and is multi-national.⁹

WBTI also has area directors in the regions of Asia, Americas, Africa, and Europe, who are responsible for strategy, training, encouragement, and public relations.

⁸For additional information on Townsend, see <http://www.sil.org/wct/> and Svelmoe (2007).

⁹For more on Wycliffe Global Alliance see: <http://www.wycliffe.net/home/tabid/37/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

5. Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics

In November 1997, the Board of SIL International commissioned the formation of the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics (GIAL).¹⁰ As required by academic accreditation authorities, GIAL is a completely autonomous institution, but with affiliations with both the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators. The Board of GIAL charged it with developing a curriculum which would both (a) satisfy the minimum academic training requirements for specialist service with SIL and (b) allow those who completed such training to attain internationally recognized graduate degrees.

In July 1999, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board granted GIAL a Certificate of Authority to award graduate degrees and, in the same month, GIAL admitted its first degree-seeking students. This Certificate of Authority was a prerequisite to an application for academic accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS awarded GIAL its initial accreditation in December 2005 for a five year period. After a successful reexamination in 2010, GIAL has since been granted an additional ten years of accreditation.

In some ways the training at GIAL is more like the seminary tradition – essentially a graduate-level professional school, with well-defined career paths, although there are important differences between GIAL and most seminaries. For example, seminaries typically prepare graduates for service within the Christian church, and their academic standards are different from those adhered to by the secular academic world. In common with SIL, however, it is important for GIAL to seek and maintain academic credibility in the secular academic world.

GIAL thus characterizes an interesting development of both the Christian college concept and the seminary concept. While having roots clearly traced to both traditions, it remains distinct from both, and faces challenges different from either. However, as part of its continuing credibility in the secular world, it encourages opportunities for dialogue between peers both inside and outside the Christian tradition.

The establishment of GIAL has also opened up cooperative ventures between educational institutions on a peer-to-peer basis. Although some educational institutions (secular and Christian) were initially reluctant to enter cooperative relationships with SIL (since higher education was only one of the interests of SIL), many have now entered into such relationships with GIAL. One clear beneficiary is the traditional Christian college, which by cooperating with GIAL, can “funnel” their graduates into the GIAL graduate program, to the advantage of both institutions.

GIAL is a natural outgrowth of SIL’s academic legacy and holistic nature. From its inception Pike had insisted that our study of language and faith should be integrated and demonstrate dependence upon God (K. L. Pike 1962, 1967a; E. Pike 1981). SIL and GIAL, as scholarly and educational institutions, continue to make legitimate contributions to the study of language, culture, and related areas such as literacy, translation, and the Biblical languages.

The formation of GIAL therefore carries on the SIL tradition of interacting and cooperating with institutions of higher learning. It consciously adopts a Christian set of values to its pedagogy and methodology.

¹⁰The school had been called the Texas Summer Institute of Linguistics after moving to Dallas and beginning year round courses and cooperating with the University of Texas at Arlington.

6. Storytelling in general: the emic and etic perspectives

In Pike's linguistic theory, there are two viewpoints, the "emic" and "etic". Etic and emic are two ways to view the same thing, resulting in two ways to describe it, providing, as Pike (1957) says, "A stereoscopic window on the world". The detached observer has one view, and the native participant has another, but both are necessary. The outside observer is attempting to understand the inside viewpoint and as he does so, he moves back and forth from the objective etic categories that he has been trained to utilize to a subjective understanding of what the categories mean—their emic nature. The etic view is alien, cross-cultural, prepared in advance as a typological grid, somewhat absolute, often measurable, and created by the analyst, while the emic view is domestic, mono-cultural, structurally derived, relative and contrastive in reference to a system, and discovered by the analyst.¹¹ Another way to think of the differences is that an analyst may use various discovery procedures (e.g., Longacre 1964 on grammar and 1996 on discourse) to outline the etic structure of cultural units, but he would need to write an ethnography or grammar to provide a derived emic understanding of them.

The stories we hear or tell are often variations derived from some original story. The insider's view, or emics, of a story represents a cultural viewpoint. The story may undergo transformations, which may result in a distorted view or interpretation of the original story or text. For example, when John the Baptist stated that he was unworthy to untie the sandals from Jesus' feet, his statement may present a problem of interpretation in another culture. Do people need to know the etics of sandal classification to understand the story? Why would John want to untie them anyway? Of course the idea behind John's statement comes out later when he says that Jesus must become more important and he less. Untying the sandals was an act of a servant. However, in Papua New Guinea some other figure might be better if hearers are to understand it as an emic concept, and translators have tried a variety of them.¹²

An emic story uses linguistic styles (verbal and non-verbal) that are cultural. It may therefore legitimately start with the equivalent of "once upon a time" and not be considered false or a fairy tale. Kewa stories¹³ often simply start with a statement such as "There was a man named *Yalo*", and there may or may not have been such a man. But from the insider's view, i.e. the emic view, *Yalo* exists for the story. On the other hand, if I, as an outsider, hear a story and the reference is to a mythical gigantic pig named "*Puramenalasu*", I don't know initially whether it is true or not. With more information from insiders, I may consider that it is not true because such a pig appears only in stories and has miraculous attributes. Nevertheless, it turns up in Kewa emic stories, developed from within the culture, that have certain values attached to them. The notion of emic is not the same as that of truth.

¹¹See Pike (1967b:37-40) for discussion and amplification of these points. They are also paraphrased in Berry (1990:85-86).

¹²An interesting question that a language assistant once posed to me was, "If John wanted to show that he was a servant, why wouldn't he want to untie and carry the sandals of Jesus?" As a servant he would certainly be "worthy" (deserving) to do this.

¹³The Kewa people number over 100,000 (in three main dialects) and live in the Southern Highland Province of Papua New Guinea. For a brief summary of Kewa culture, see Franklin (1991). Over a period of 15 years the author and his wife lived in two separate villages and learned to speak two dialects of Kewa.

Etic stories therefore represent or assume a cultural viewpoint where the insider must often explain the meaning to outsiders. Etic behavior also takes place outside of stories: For example, new believers may hear stories about the value and magic of baptism. They may then carry certain things into the water when baptized because they think the water and process are magical and will somehow protect them from their enemies. But outsiders won't understand and appreciate this viewpoint until they hear such an application about baptism from an insider—their etic view.

Once the main point of a story is understood from the insider's cultural perspective, people can re-tell it easily or naturally within their culture. The story takes on a life of its own, and, of course, there will be variations of their etic story. For example, the story of baptism is an etic one for a believer but performed in a variety of ways by different denominations. They, in turn, exegete passages on the subject differently. For the cultural insiders, eventually the prevailing denominational teaching will become the dominant etic view. As Lett (1996:382) reminds us, "The native members of a culture are the sole judges of the validity of an etic description, just as the native speakers of a language are the sole judges of the accuracy of a phonemic identification".

When insiders retell stories, they reveal what they consider etic or meaningful. An example would be the so-called "Jack Tales" (Pavesic 2005) when tellers introduce aspects of Appalachian culture into the folktales. The re-told stories are etic derivations in their interpreted variations, but in their original form they were simply etic folktales to the Appalachian storyteller. Without cultural adaptations and without cultural inside interpretation they would remain etic stories. Outsiders could retell an Appalachian version of the story in such a way that it would underscore their stereotype of the insiders. In theology an etic viewpoint provides a classification for certain cultural or theological viewpoints and interpretations.¹⁴

Coles (1989) reflects on how the etic story of the patient is crucial to a doctor understanding what is relevant to any diagnosis. Later (1999) he writes on how the prevalent cultural world view and secular mind underscore many of the books we read and stories that we hear.

6.1 Bible storytelling

Consider the Genesis account of the Biblical flood, which took place over 40 days and nights. This is a literal account that most Christians consider etic. However, without a number for 40 in a culture the length of time cannot be immediately etic to insiders. In such cases the translator may try to derive an etic understanding by borrowing the number from another language. The assumption is that the number corresponds to the same literal 40-days that is provided in an exegesis of the source text of the Biblical story. However, in such cases, some instruction and teaching of numbers from the outside culture would be necessary.

In many instances the Bible storyteller (or translator) must base his or her interpretation of a story on etic forms that are in the present-day culture. Lexical problems from PNG occur in translating fig tree and sheep, temple and synagogue, priest and scribe, where no such forms or functions exist in the languages or cultures. Such an initial outside etic account requires an interpretive framework or grid for teaching because insiders cannot readily understand a story

¹⁴A simple example is the difference between what Catholics and most Protestants include in the canon of the Scriptures. For the Protestants, it took centuries and the rulings of an ecumenical Synod to decide.

when told using these literal forms. In addition, an outsider interpreting the etic account interposes a personal interpretive viewpoint into the story, forming new dimensions for the hearers. Similarly, outsiders often choose particular Biblical narratives because they believe that they are more relevant and necessary than others. This is also an etic (and often theological) decision.

Westerners have a linear account of history, so our stories include themes that use a Western dating orientation. However, when speakers in another culture retell the story, they may not imitate the linear perspective of the original teller. To overcome this “problem”, Western missionaries often discuss the meanings of the story from their denominational perspective, which in turn is taught to cultural insiders, eventually illustrating the maxim that you teach (or interpret) like you were taught. Nevertheless, in some places, such as in Papua New Guinea, cargo cult interpretations suggest an amalgamation of the insider’s cultural events and heroes that are mixed in with external biblical chronological accounts—a blending of the stories.

Outsiders begin with Bible stories in order to teach insiders the “facts”, which they often explain by means of cultural analogies. This of course can only go so far, as in Bible stories—it is not acceptable to have Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a water buffalo or picking walnuts from a fig tree. At the same time the stories need to be retold and understood in a culture where there are no donkeys or figs. The outsider as storyteller is telling an etic story but needs to do it in such a way that there can be cultural emic derivations and meanings.

Missionaries who initially told Bible stories in most of the world’s cultures gave, what was to the insiders, etic accounts.¹⁵ The stories were brought in by outsiders and represented many categories and linguistic forms that were alien to the inside culture. For example, flood stories from around the world are an etic collection, told in areas where there are deserts as well in areas where there are flood plains. Initially such stories are etic to the insiders. Classifying Bible stories as etic may not be obvious because we expect hearers in another culture to eventually understand them and accept them as emic (and true). But the hearers weren’t there when the story took place, nor was (in all likelihood) the writer of many stories, such as the flood story in Genesis 6-8. The story is an etic account, except for Noah and his family, as well as those who drowned in the flood. In the same way, although there are various flood stories in many parts of the world, accounts of them would, in each instance, be part of an etic collection, gathered by outside observers or told by insiders who were never there. However, once insiders understand the Genesis flood account in terms of the forms and images assigned to it from within their culture, with their own interpretation and perspective, it becomes a derived emic story. Of course, to the unbeliever it remains one of a set of etic flood stories.

It follows that etic and emic always occur within a framework of cultural interpretations and their concomitant scripts: what is etic for me as an outsider, one who does not know or participate in the cultural scripts, may be emic to you as an insider. Each component of the script will also have a range of variation. Not all traditional flood stories have the same script

¹⁵This is because outsiders take a long time to become familiar with a culture and they don’t know what is the most relevant for a particular culture. Note Bailey (1976), who uses oriental exegesis (not Western) to recover and interpret the Middle Eastern life style of the peasants. Bailey imposes certain constraints before he considers their comments to be emic, such as: 1) The person must have spent 20 years of his life in a peasant community; 2) The materials gathered from the person must be oral and in Arabic; 3) The person must have been a friend for at least five years; 4) The person must have Bible background knowledge.

throughout the world: there are differences for when the flood took place, where it took place, how long it lasted, and so forth. The similar features of each account may lead to a composite set of derived etic features (Berry 1990). This allows analysts an etic interpretation of the flood as “universal”. In other words, they consider the universality of the flood as etically factual because there are flood stories in various cultures around the world. It is also possible to interpret these accounts as etic variations of one Biblical emic story.

On a different and personal level, etic variations also occur because not everyone tells the flood story using the same grammar, figures of speech, and so on. Some storytellers may give it a wider geographical range, others a longer time depth, or there might not be agreement that it happened at all. It may be dramatized, sung about, or have poetry written about it. In each case the story will have different linguistic forms and images. These will be etic variations that represent the emic or insider’s view.¹⁶ Another example of etic variation is the New Testament stories of the feeding of the 5000, told by four different authors. No author claims that only 4,999 ate the bread and fish or that the food was bagels and mutton. All of them say that it was fish and bread and that there were leftovers. What they change in their stories is certain peripheral and etic details: how many people sat in a group, where the loaves and fish came from, and so on. The story is from the emic viewpoint of the disciples who were there for the occasion, but there are variations of the story, demonstrating how the perspective of the storyteller is crucial in interpreting the event.

6.2 Oral traditions and literature¹⁷

Everyone has a story to tell, based upon memory and imagination, not necessarily upon facts systematically recorded as empirical evidence. If a Kewa person tells me a story about fighting, it is built upon images in his mind that deal with fighting. These may be from experience, but he will draw upon the experiences of others. For me to understand his story, I will also have to build upon some of the experiences that I have, because I will be forming mental images as I listen to the story. When a Kewa friend tells me his story he introduces background that I may not recognize. If I didn’t know the names or locations of the clans that were fighting, then his story about fighting will not make complete sense. The scenes and scripting for the storyteller and hearer may have some parallels, but there will be important and contrastive differences. The Kewa as an insider has the advantage of knowing what is important about fighting, but he may not give me the best plan or script to follow the activity. As an insider he may assume that I know too much and leave out details that I, as an outsider, would need to prepare a much more elaborate script about fighting.¹⁸

¹⁶An example from the Kewa culture would be the traditional counting systems. There are numerous etic variations to the body tally system. There are also emic variations to how counting is done. See Franklin (2003:247-62).

¹⁷Adapted from Franklin (2007). See also Franklin (2008).

¹⁸How much do we need to know to be adequate cultural observers? Some writers, such as Hirsch (1988, and in a later edition with co-authors), claim that without 5000 essential names, phrases, dates, and concepts, Americans are at a disadvantage to talk to each other because they cannot assume adequate cultural background. In communication, there is a valid searching for the “shared schema” that form a part of our cultural knowledge. We can apply the same principle to our knowledge or lack of it in those cultures that have literacy or translation programs.

In traditional societies people who use the oral approach do not have a dictionary or encyclopedia to refer to—they rely upon mental images, not written or literate forms. Nevertheless, although storytelling seems to be natural in every society, the way it is done can be improved and taught to others, including children (Rodari 1973). Coles has demonstrated that medical students can perform more helpful and accurate diagnoses if they listen to the stories of their patients (Coles 1989). Stories are of course more attractive and enhanced by good methodology and pedagogy (MacDonald 1993, Maguire 1998, Sawyer 1942), regardless of the particular culture. And in many instances their moral cultural values are implicit (Murphy 2000, Bailey 1976) by means of cultural knowledge.

However, once outsiders introduce literacy into a society, a more elaborate and widely acclaimed method of telling a story changes. This process may be slow, but observers can study it by the so-called “scientific method”, where they make observations, form an hypothesis, and write texts to account for the nature of the observations. Because observers can measure their findings and write them down, others can agree or disagree with the results and test the hypothesis. Criteria established by the examining community allow the acceptance or rejection of the findings.¹⁹ But as science changes, with new discoveries and paradigms, the stories change too.

6.3 The academic storytelling legacy in SIL and GIAL

We have already recounted some of the stories of Dr. Pike’s influence on SIL through his academic scholarship and stories. Pike was a distinguished SIL scholar and was nominated many times for the Nobel Peace Prize. He studied the Mixtec language in Mexico and while there, he broke his leg, requiring a time in hospital. Later he would comment that had it not been for his broken leg, he would not have taken time to write the first definitive book ever published on phonetics (the study of language sounds), a classic that is used even today. He also published many other linguistic and devotional books and articles appearing in major linguistic journals. He was SIL president from 1942 to 1979 (37 years) and then was president emeritus until 2000 when he died. His stated goal was academic excellence and Christian commitment.

Pike instigated SIL’s linguistic workshop strategy. He traveled to many countries, bringing together SIL linguists for intensive investigation of the languages they were studying. He gave his expertise to solve many difficult language problems, and workshop participants were expected to write publishable papers about the languages they were studying. Pike also identified and trained consultants and encouraged promising linguists to get advanced degrees in universities. When not conducting workshops, Pike was a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan, U.S.A, until retirement.

The most important part of Pike’s legacy, however, was the personal stories he told, for example, how he became a missionary.²⁰ Pike relates how he believed God was leading him into missionary work, only to be rejected by the mission agency he applied to. He was not interested

¹⁹Of course “science” doesn’t really work in this mechanistic fashion, as Polanyi (1958) and others have pointed out. The intuitive grasp of the investigator often turns out to be crucial in new “discoveries”. The Mars Hill Audio has published a set of tapes on the life and thought of Michael Polanyi called “Tacit Knowing, Truthful Knowing”, that are very instructive on the part that intuition plays in “science”.

²⁰See Pike (1997) for details.

in writing about linguistics until he broke his leg and was laid up in a hospital in Mexico. There he wrote the first half of what was to become his PhD dissertation on phonetics. Pike had initial problems about guidance, physical weakness, and nervousness, all of which he relates freely. Townsend fostered and supported his interest and studies in linguistics and Pike went on to conduct workshops around the world where he encouraged hundreds, if not thousands, of colleagues. Because he was a professor at the University of Michigan and (later, when retired) at the University of Texas, Arlington, his personal reflections (Pike 1962, 1967a and Pike and Steven 1989) have been held in high esteem and have continued to encourage and inspire students and fieldworkers around the world.

SIL and GIAL can carry on the legacy and tradition of Pike and Townsend (and of course many others) by demonstrating the usefulness and application of storytelling as a discipline for study. To this end, each year for several years I offered a course at GIAL that included aspects of entertainment, but it is also an art form and a disciplinary study.²¹ My introductory course demonstrated how various disciplines and topics contribute to the general field of storytelling, particularly its oral aspects. It enables students to participate and use storytelling to understand and support the oral dimensions of a society, even as those societies may become literate and have translated materials available. The content of the course was practical as well as theoretical. The theoretical component explored the communicative dimensions of storytelling, such as the social and cultural knowledge necessary to interact with another culture and transmit information, while the practical aspects include telling, retelling, and critiquing stories in and out of class. It is still being taught at GIAL by Associate Professor Dr. Pete Unseth.

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²¹A discipline is an area of study that is well-defined: storytelling contrasts with courses in literature, drama or rhetoric, for example, but includes variations of these, as well as oral history, myths and legends. Although there are various studies that interact with storytelling, we focus on the oral aspects of communication in indigenous societies.

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