De l’Oral à l’écrit/LTO 6241.1: M1

- Technique de collecte de données
- De l’oral à l’écrit

I. Course Aims and Outcomes:

I.1. Aims

This course introduces Master I African Studies majors to the conceptual schema of indigenous knowledge systems and to the ways in which this may interface with writing. As the course develops in theoretical assumptions of the mnemonic Oral-style modes of expressions, it grounds Orality in the precinct of a holistic science. The course thus presents the dynamics of orality in the light of a psycho-physiological process of human expression. 

NB: The overall course is designed to combine theoretical presentation and practical work that will run concurrently or alternatively to respond to the learners’ specific needs.

I.2. Learning Outcomes

I.2.1. General Outcomes

At the end of this workshop, the learner will be able to:

- identify the dynamics of Orality and literacy interface
- identify critical theoretical assumptions of the oral style
- identify oral narratives universals and particulars

I.2.2. Specific outcomes

At the end of this workshop, the learner will be able to:

- identify data collection techniques in orally traditioned cultures
- reflect on the ways in which stories/proverbs are conceptualized, memorized, and transmitted over to generations.
- identify the mnemotechnical devices of an oral style text
• identify modes of record of the mnemonic Oral-style

I.2.3. Critical-Cross-field Outcomes

At the end of this workshop, the learner will be able to:

• apply indigenous knowledge systems as a holistic science
• highlight oral characteristics in literary genres

I.2.4. Exit level Outcomes

At the end of this workshop, the learner will be able to:

• specify ways and means of dealing with specific cultural data
• specify knowledge of the universal and abstractions in oral cultures

II. Format and Procedures:

II.1. Introduction - Conceptualizing Indigenous Knowledge systems

II.2. Modes of expression

Laryngo-buccal (speaking/immediate), Corporeal-manuelage (body language/immediate), Mimographism (writing/mediated)

II.2.1. The mnemonic Laws of human expression

• Mimism
• Rhythmism
• Bilateralism
• Formulism

II.3. The Mnemonic Oral-style

II.3.1. What is a Mnemonic Oral –style text?

II.3.2. Mnemonic Oral-style texts and research
II.3.3. problems related to research method in mnemonic Oral-style texts

III. The Rhythmo-stylistics

III.1. The Mnemotechnical devices: ‘Rhythmo-stylistic analysis’
III.2. Types of record of the mnemonic Oral-style

III.3. Method

III.4. Typographical approach: ‘Putting performance on the page’/
‘caging winged words’
III.5. The role of and challenge to the computer in this scenario

**Research Perspectives**

- Understanding principles underpinning orally traditioned and indigenous knowledge systems.
- In what ways are indigenous and orally traditioned knowledges conceptualized, developed and conveyed?
- What evidence is there that complex and sophisticated thought/emotion/ideas are possible without scribal writing?
- Typographical considerations: ways and perspectives

**Research Methodology**

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis

- Content analysis
- Inquiry
- Contrastive

**Theories and practice**

- Oral Formulaic theory – the Parry-Lord theory.

**Suggested activities**

The following learning activities should effectively help learners to achieve the specific outcomes.

1. Collect and record a number of ethnic proverbs and tales
2. Examine the mnemonic structure of an ‘oral style’ text
3. Examine the mimismic conceptualization of an ‘oral style’ text
4. Compile a Portfolio

**Questions to bear in mind**

1. What is a text?
2. What is an ‘oral style’ text?
3. How is an ‘oral style’ text structured?
4. What effect does an ‘oral style’ text have on the way in which it is memorized in oral style milieus?
5. How is an ‘oral style’ text recorded by human beings without writing?
What happens to an ‘oral style’ text when it is written down?

What are the functions of storytelling, proverbs, telling (hi)stories, or any other oral genre?

Examine the modes of expression and recording f storytelling

How do stories tie up with (hi)stories?

What are the characteristic Laws of human expression, and how do they apply to oral style texts?

Assessment procedure and criteria

- **Midterm written assessment**: oral assessment: 40% (group dynamics, interaction with audience, diction, relevance of topic, coherence and logic)

- **Passing grade**: 10/20.

List of suggested reading materials (copies are available at the English Department)

3. “my Song is my Weapon”: Satire as a Communicative Strategy in Xhosa Folk-songs
4. Strategies for the Presentation of Oral Tradition in Print – Eric L. Montenyohl
5. Oral-Print Transfers and Linguistic Mediations: Cultural Translation of the /Xam Bushmen – Duncan Brown
7. Oral and Performance Poetry
8. The Numbers Game: Oral History Compared with Quantitative Methodology – Rebecca Sharpless, Baylor University
10. Epilogue: A Note of the Future
12. If It's Africa, This Must be a Tribe
13. An American in Africa: Interviewing the Elusive Goldsmith – Marian Ashby Johnson, Brigham Young University
14. Techniques of Data Collection
15. What is Orality - If Anything? - Ruth Finnegan
16. The “Oral-Style” Text – Joan Conolly
17. *Du support graphique à l’écriture* – Anne Marie Christin
18. *De l’écrit Africain à l’oral* : le phénomène graphique africain – Simon Battestini
19. It All Adds Up – Margaret Wertheim / *Science and African Logic*, by Helen Verran
20. Hunting, Tracking and Reading x 2 – J. Edward Chamberlin
21. Writing is a technology that restructures thought – Walter Ong
22. The Invention of “Oral Man”: Anthropology, Literary Theory, and a Western Intellectual Tradition

Recommendations

- Reference/source works
- Library research sources
- The online catalogue
- Internet sources
- Keep track of sources
- Create a computer file for the working bibliography
- Note useful information
- Verify publication information
- Convert the working bibliography to the works-cited list. NB: Accuracy and reliability.
- Draft working outline/thesis statement/hypotheses/chapters, etc.
- Identify primary and secondary sources

The workshop

1. Introduction

How does man placed at the heart of all the immeasurable actions of the universe manage to conserve the memory of these actions within him and to transmit this memory faithfully to his descendants, from generation to generation?

The answer is that in Oral Traditions there are ‘mnemotechnically’ supportive modes of expression for the recording of the ‘socio-cultural archives’.

In fact, the privileged mode of recording and transmitting information in oral milieus is intrinsically gestural-visual and oral-aural, and posits that the process of learning and learning language are indivisible: it is psycho-physiological, an idea which lays down the foundation of the dynamic anthropology, ‘the anthropology of geste and rhythm’.

In his The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm (1997, 2000), the French Anthropologist Marcel Jousse demonstrates that the psycho-physiology of human expression is a tri-phasic proposition of ‘An Acting One Acting on an Acted Upon’. He explains that the essential element of the cosmos is an action which acts on another action” (Jousse 1997: 116). In other words, Jousse sees the cosmos as a set of interactions between the elements that compose the cosmos. The elements that compose the cosmos are so involved in constant and dynamic actions of the ones over the others that one element’s actions come as the result of the other’s. Since the interplay of actions is indefinite, the cosmos becomes an ‘imbrication’ of interactions which man, placed at the heart of the universe, ‘intussuscepts’ or interiorises: he
becomes the reverberation or mirror of his universe. Man’s expression thus becomes the ‘re-
play’ of the actions of his (immediate) environment.

‘‘Mimism’’, ‘‘Rhythmism’’, “Bilateralism”, and “Formulism” are thus identified as structural anthropological elements that characterize human expressions. Consequently, we can establish the mnemonic structure of a text and account for its mnemonic function. How are texts held in human memory?

2. Modes of expression

Laryngo-buccal (speaking/immediate), Corporeal-manuelage (body language/immediate), Mimographism (writing/mediated)

Jousse begins by identifying the “original language as corporeal, it is the expression of the whole body, of the entire being of the whole of man” (Sienaert 1990:96). Jousse identifies that the corporeal-manual mode of expression is that which is immediate to the inner microscopic reality of human thoughts and emotions, viz. the body and hands serve as interface between the thoughts and emotions recorded in the viscera and their ‘ex-pression’ in movement, mime and dance. Jousse identifies this as the least reduced of the modes of transmission, and therefore the most faithful of human communication. He identifies further reduction in the localization of expression of from the body and hands (corporeal-manual) to another immediate mode of ‘ex-pression’, the larynx and lips (laryngo-buccal), in sound, speech and song. Sienaert (1990: 96) comments that

The shift from mimic global corporeal and gestural language to laryngo-buccal language is a vital one, for at this point man moves from anthropology into ethnology: the initial global universal and spontaneous mimage becomes localized conventional and socialized language. Sienaert (1990: 96)

Sienaert goes to observe that

Jousse’s ethnic laboratory reveals to him beneath a great diversity of cultural, social and linguistic mechanisms, underlying unchanged anthropological laws – common strains in graphic and oral testimonies which form a style: the Oral Style. Sienaert (1990: 96)

The Oral-style is constituted of “Mimism, Rhythmism, Bilateralism, Formulism”, which is profoundly rooted in the body, hence its great efficacy from the mnemotechnical point of view for in it the movement of the body and voice contribute to the shaping of thought in memorisable form.

2.2. The mnemonic laws of human expression

Jousse demonstrates that if man’s actions are the ‘mimismological’ re-play of the interactions of the universe then man’s memory is the direct consequence of impression and the source of expression. He identifies the nature of memory support under four characteristic laws or principles which form the psycho-physiological Laws of human expression. They are: Mimism, Rhythmism, Bilateralism, and Formulism. These laws are psycho-physiological in
that any psychological (intellectual, emotion, or spiritual) experience will have a physical (physiological) response, and vice versa.

- **The Law of Mimism**

The Law of Mimism is the first law of human expression. It is expressed in both immediate and mediated forms; whether corporeal-manual, laryngo-buccal, or mimographic modes of expression. This law is established in keeping with man’s ability of re-playing things that surround him (Eg. Child). Man is a mimic; he receives, registers and replays his actual experiences.

- **The Law of Rhythmism**

Rhythm is the drive of the energy that translates into action in the cosmos. Jousse perceives rhythm in everything. “No activity or matter can escape rhythm”, he says. The logic of rhythm is the logic of meaning/sense because the cosmos itself is not a chaos. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the anthropos who registers the rhythmic actions will replay the registered actions rhythmically. Rhythm is a biological characteristics of man whose heartbeat, breathing, balancing of hands, footsteps, and actions observe rhythmic patterns. As a result, the rhythm of man’s expression becomes viscerally embedded with the rhythm of his body functions, and then the whole body remembers.

- **The Law of Bilateralism**

Based on the observation he made of the human bilateral construct, Jousse identifies the balanced pattern of the process of human expression. Man can only express himself in accordance with his physical structure which is bilateral – left and right, up and down, back and forth- and like his global and manual expression, his verbal expression will tend to be bilateral, to balance symmetrically following a physical and physiological need for equilibrium. Hence the omnipresence of parallelism in oral style not just in form but also in thought as the recurrent recourse to comparison and analogy shows. In other words, the law of Bilateralism governs the binary complementarity in terms of which human expression translates harmony. Eg.  

As n the heaven thus on the earth

- **The Law of Formulism**

Jousse argues that by repetition, a balanced rhythmic proposition creates a formulaic pattern which embeds in memory. In fact, the balanced imitations become conventionally structured through constant and repeated use. The biological tendency towards the stereotyping of gestures creates habit which ensures immediate, easy and sure replay. Formulism is the storehouse linking in with memory in order to maintain firm teaching, founded on faithful tradition. In oral style, stereotyped formulas can be juxtaposed in new, more or less original combinations, although these will always accord with the physical laws of the body from which they arose (Sienaert 1990:96-7).
The mnemonic laws of Mimism, Rhythmism, Bilateralism, and formulism apply to the oral style performance and effect the composition. They inform memory which in Jousse’s terms ‘is the whole of man’.

3. The Mnemonic Oral-style

3.1. What is a Mnemonic Oral –style text?

The mnemonic Oral –style text is records and expressions of sophisticated complexity of creative composition in performance that accommodates the knowledge and wisdom of oral traditions: the hokmah of the ancient Galileans, the sophia of the Greek orators, the ubuchule of the nguni imbongi, and their equivalents among the eastern sufis and African griots.

3.2. Mnemonic Oral-style texts and research

3.2.1. The aim of research of mnemonic Oral –style texts

Mnemonic Oral –style texts reflect the ways in which human identity is recorded in memory and performance at the intersecting levels of the individual, the group, and the species without writing. Research of this medium includes recording and analyzing the explanation of oral traditional ‘memories’ performed as ritual and dance in movement and gesture, protest, slogans, and praises, narratives, epics, and fables, negotiations, genealogies and histories, speech and songs, cave painting, beadwork, masks and sculpting, riddles, storytelling, proverbs, hymns, lullabies, incantations, legends, chronicles, ballads, ode etc.

These expressive behaviours, most of which have been over-simplistically identified by their aesthetic form as ‘art’, ‘poetry’, and ‘craft’, actually perform a no less important function than that of recording the structure and norms of civilization: the socio-cultural archive.

Mnemonic Oral-style texts are performed texts. Recorded in memory, these texts are mnemonically structured for reliability and validity which reflect authenticity. Consequently the mnemonic Oral-style is intrinsically aesthetically pleasing. The recording and analysis of mnemonic Oral-style texts are constantly challenged by the limitations of the medium available for their record and analysis. Therefore, any research solution must address and incorporate the role of the visceral memory, a capacity to record and analyze texts that are vitally and dynamically multi-faceted: records constitute not only words, but of the voice, body, and the hands as well. Technology, including computer, provides a range of solutions to aspects of the problems that are identified, but its applications are dependent on human understanding of the psycho-biology of human memory and performance.

3.3. Problems related to research in mnemonic Oral-style

Accessing Oral-style texts from an academic literate viewpoint is a contradiction of considerable proportions, as the intrinsic natures and functions of scribal and gestural-visual/oral-aural modes challenge and even exclude their mutual substitution.

Oral traditions are expressed in the gestural-oral mode as a matter of intrinsic function and
identity, and are the product of human behaviours that flavor the gestural-oral mode over the written mode for a number of reasons.

The gestural-oral mode is a performed mode which is indivisible from its visual-aural reception, and its accompanying material representation, hence the identifying term ‘gestual-visual/oral-aural’ which is holistically and immediately expressive. This form of representation includes, (1) movement, mime, and dance (corporeal-manual mode); (2) sound, speech and song (the laryngo-buccal mode); (3) material attire and domestic, persona socio-cultural objects as media of expression (the mimographic mode). Mnemonically structured, the Oral-style text is psycho-physiologically and holistically engaging thus intussuscepting its meaning through performance in the viscera of the performer, and effecting ‘apprehension’ or understanding with the whole being’.

Simultaneously, the use of gestural-visual/oral-aural mode implies the recording of traditions in human memory, which enables portability and immediate access, dependent upon the capacity of memory, which is particularly important for itinerant peoples in all ages and societies.

Academic research is historically a scribal/literate exercise of a specific and high order, for a number of reasons. Scribal literacy fixes large number of information outside of the human author(s) for dissemination across time and space. It also allows the revision of a text before transmission, thus providing for refinement and concision of complex thinking, as well as allowing the modification and further refinement, revision and concision of the text even after its original transmission. It also allows writing to exist on paper independently of its author, and for this reason becomes a defined and identifiable entity in its own right, which can be analyzed and critiqued independently of its author(s) and in its own terms. Finally, scribal literacy frees human memory from the task of extensive record keeping, the benefits of which are ambiguous and debatable.

While the scribal record captures and records aspects of the linguistic elements of the performance, i.e. the actual words are recorded, it does not record the dynamic vitality of the performance as an indivisible whole manifest in (1) the kinaesthetic features, i.e. movement and gesture; (2) the spatial features, i.e. line, form, shape; (3) the paralinguistic and non-verbal aural features, i.e. non-verbal sounds, pitch, inflection, timbre, emphasis, vocal modulation; (4) the temporal features, i.e. pace, pause; (5) the interactive features, i.e. the responses of the audience.

By virtue of the transitory nature of the gestural-visual/oral-aural mode(s) of record, oral traditions are subject to the vagaries of human endeavour and survival. Diseases, pestilence, oppression, war, technology, inter alia all inform and threaten the survival of Oral-style traditions. In the face of these threats and notwithstanding its shortcomings, it can be argued
and demonstrated that the scribal recording of Oral-style traditions is preferable to their disappearance.

III. The Rhythmo-stylistics

Rhythmo-stylistics or Rhythmo-mnemonic analysis identifies the macroscopic gestural-visual/oral-aural mode of expression holistically. Rhythmo-stylistics allows the identification of that which makes the text memorisable. It incrementally creates a mnemonic gestural-visual/oral-aural ‘web’ which interfaces with the geste and rhythm of the human memorizing psycho-biology. Rhytmography records the Rhythmo-stylistic analysis and is in some wise reminiscent of the strategies for the presentation of oral traditions in print and does not exclude the use of aspects of other approaches for recording, eg. Film, video, audio, posters, photographs, material objects.

III.1. The Mnemotechnical devices: ‘Rhythmo-stylistic analysis’

The term ‘Mnemotechnical devices’ is coined by Jousse to emphasize their intrinsic and original oral-aural Oral-style nature, and distances them from an association with literary and poetic devices which tainted and distorted their operation and application.

How does a text work as a mnemonic text? viz. How does a text embed itself in human memory?

III.2. Types of record of the mnemonic oral-style

Types of text (we are analyzing these texts in their performed mode) are ritual and dance in movement and gesture, protest, slogans, and praises, narratives, epics, and fables, negotiations, genealogies and histories., speech and songs, cave painting, beadwork, masks and sculpting, riddles, storytelling, proverbs, hymns, lullabies, incantations, legends, chronicles, ballads, ode, etc.

III.3. Method

A step-by-step description of the process of ‘Rhythmo-stylistic analysis’ follows:

1. Perform the text (‘corporeal-manually and laryngo-buccally’) to establish the patterns of ‘rhythmism’ (rhythm) which energizes and revivifies the human memory.
2. From the performance we establish the ‘Bilateralism’ (balancing) in the text, viz. whether ‘Yoke’ (side-to-side) or ‘Burden’ (back-to-front) or ‘Berceuse’ (cradling which is a combination of the yoke and burden balancing). The pattern of balancings can usually be established by the pattern that the feet make on the floor, and the upper body in the air (R. Laban identifies this process in fine details in his Labanotations or Choreutics)
3. Record the words of the text on paper (‘mimographically’) centered on the page to establish the spine of the text (‘reflecting the spine of the body’ – Sinaert).

4. From the record of the centered text, establish the balancing on paper in ‘rhythmic schemas’, which reveals one level of ‘Formulism’ in the text, and are drawn in ‘boxes’, each box recording a ‘formula’, or ‘pitgama’.

5. Arrange the ‘boxes’ in a structure which reflects the performed text, revealing the rhythmic ‘shape’ of the Oral-style texts, establish in terms of ‘binary’ and ‘ternary’ balancing in the ‘Yoke’ or ‘Burden’ or ‘Berceuse’ manner.

6. Identify repetitions at each level in descending order to reveal the incidence of mnemonic factors. repetitions of: rhythmic schemas, of parallelisms in ‘pitgamas’ or ‘formulas’, of ‘words’ (‘annomination’), of identical parts of words (morphemes), of vowel sounds (‘avocalisation’ = assonance in literary terms), of consonant sounds (‘aconsonantisation’ = alliteration in literary terms)).

7. Incidence of ‘Mimism’, the way in which the text will reflect mirror the concrete realities of human experience: a story, ‘pair’ words which simultaneously reveal the complementary-oppositional relationships and experiences which life represents, viz. day/night, man/woman, joy/sorrow, elation/depression, victorious/defeated, good/bad, pain/comfort, etc.

8. Identify pivots (regular repetitions of single ‘pitgamas’).

9. Key-words (frequently repeated)

10. Calling and clamping pitgamas (like key-words, but used to enrich the meaning of the performance)

11. Countdows (numerical sequence establishing the order of the narration)

These constitute the ‘Mnemotechnical devices’ which operate mnemonically and creatively at the same time.

**NB:** The principles underlying the operation of all ‘Mnemotechnical devices’ are the mnemonic laws (“Mimism, Rhythmism, Bilateralism, Formulism”), which implies repetitions of one kind or another.

Creatively, the rhythm-mnemonic Oral-style informs improvisation with a memorial bank of previously impressed elements, which Jousse called the ‘living dominoes’ and their ‘textual atoms’. They register motion in the visceral memory of the Oral-style recite and therefore available for use in improvisation.

**III.4. Typographical approach: ‘Putting performance on the page’/ ‘caging winged words’**

Attempts in the scholarly world to recapture and oral-style performance in a more authentic/pragmatic way have been made (and are still being made) by specialists in the field of orality and literacy studies. To quote a few:
- Eric Montenyohl: uses example of a recording of a Zuni narrator’s performance to recapture ‘loudness, pauses, silence, etc.’
- Duncan Brown: uses example of a recording of the /Xam Bushmen oral performance in short verses to recapture pauses and rhythm, etc.
- Elizabeth Fine: in The Folklore Text – Doctoral thesis, uses the example of an African American toast, ‘stagolee’ to include aspects such as paralinguistic features and the initial performance related textual characteristics;
- Rudolf Laban (Choreutics 1966): uses various graphic signs – the ‘Labanotation’ – to recapture the structure and chronology of movement (distance/space/weigh)
- One well-known example may be The Palm Wine Drinkard by Amos Tutuola: he uses a free-flowing English writing to stay as close as possible to his native Yoruba language.
- Haun Saussy (1996) and Edgard R. Sienaert (1996) both remind us that there is a need to consider ‘Rhythmography’ as a mode of recording dynamic mnemonic performance. As research mode and record, Jousse developed ‘Rhythmo-stylistics’ (Conolly 2000) and Rhythmography (Sienaert 1996).

III.5. The role of and challenge to the computer in this scenario

The computer facilitates the recording of levels of text because of the numerous functions which can be performed quickly and effectively: use of colour functions, centering of texts, balancing of rhythmic schemas of two or three pitgamas in ‘boxes’, including the capacity to cut/copy and paste, draw and fill the text boxes, etc.

The computer can also be used to replicate a ‘Virtual Reality’ into which human can be immersed (The Piero Project, by Alexander 1997; Lavin 2002). The Virtual Reality moves around the human.

It is now possible to create theatre and dance movements by computer.

The advances in new technology that create a world dematerialized by digital media also opens of new opportunities for live performance to (re)discover the nature of its physicality, its materiality. (Brunel 2002)

By a simple extension of logic, one can anticipate the computer’s capacity to translate the moving images photographed by a digital camera into a rhythm-stylistic record of a performed text revealing the underlying rhythms, balances and formulas in a dynamic rhythm-graphic representation for analysis. This is in effect “the study of the rhythmic aspects of the person-computer interface” or “man and the computer coming together in time”, for which Orr (2000) coins the term

Anthropocybersynchronicity, and considers this aspect of the
“person/machine interface” largely unexplored, but which holds great promise(...). Untapped aspects of our being can greatly enhance the contact between people and computers. The secret: Rhythm. Human scale rhythms – visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic – can and should be incorporated into the design of effective computer systems. (Orr 2000)

Candice Pert reminds us that

These recent discoveries are important for appreciating how memories are stored not only in the brain, but in the psychosomatic network extending into the body, particularly in the ubiquitous receptors between nerves and bundles of cell bodies called ganglia, which are distributed not just in and near the spinal cord, but all the way out along pathways to internal organs and the very surface of our skin. (Pert 1997:143)

These insights will help us understand the operation of the oral-style text as writing of a visceral kind, and of this visceral writing as memory as a psycho-biological phenomenon. Such an understanding of memory extends beyond the architectural visual memory of Yates (1996), Clanchy (1979), and Carruthers (1990). Memory and intelligence are embedded in the “wax tablets of your mind” (Small 1998:244), in the body as Keller records:

Before the arrival of my teacher, says Helen Keller in her simple way, when I wanted an ice-cream (which I liked very much), I felt a delicious taste on my tongue (which, by the way, I have never since experienced) and felt the handle of the ice-box in my hand, I made the appropriate gesture and my mother understood that I wanted ice-cream. I thought and wanted things with my fingers and if I could have made a man, I would certainly have placed his brain in the tips of his fingers (Jousse 1990:28)

Assessment by Portfolio 60%
Rubrics comprise summarized reading materials (4 summaries from the suggested reading material) – 3 summaries of the personal readings – silenced voices (a visual ethnic or cultural material to comment on half a page, eg: mask, woven material, pottery, some ethnic artifact) – personal reflections (1 page) – a book review (1 page) – report back on a seminar or conference/ workshop/ colloquium/ symposium.

All the best!