Digital documentation of oral discourse genres

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Abstract

This article presents the design of an interoperable database for digital documentation of oral discourse genres in multiple languages. Focussing on stylistic form and cultural specificity of artistic expression, the categories of study that serve as data fields build on contextual and functional approaches to verbal art performance. The database is part of a larger project known as VOVA (VOcal and Verbal Arts archives) that seeks to create digital tools for editing and annotating stylized oral discourse for purposes of comparative study of oral traditions and the preservation of endangered languages. Detailed descriptions of fields and numerous examples of the type of data solicited by VOVA, taken from leading scholarship in the field, help to clarify the scientific aims of the project. Search modes for consulting the database are also provided. Relations between the symbol-making and symbol-using activities of language use, text editing, and the digital humanities are discussed in light of the anthropological and linguistic research that will serve as a basis for a systematic study of stylistics in speech.

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1 Designing the VOVA Exchange Platform

Editing oral discourse in an attempt to forefront stylistic design is tricky business. Creating a text from a speech event requires far more than getting words onto paper in accessible fashion. Moving the task to yet another level, VOVA (VOcal and Verbal Arts archives) was created to take on the challenge of editing stylized oral discourse into the digital universe. As at least one author has pointed out, digital editing is not the same as building a digital library (Lavagnino, 2009). And when we consider the process of decontextualizing speech into a mute transcription, the role of audience participation in the shaping of meaning, the complexities of intercultural interpreting, and those of representing oral stylistic dynamics—all thorny issues in linguistic ethnography—there is more than enough matter to belabour the point. As if that were not enough, the VOVA project also seeks to standardize the inquiries of multiple methodologies, allowing for prisms of digitally edited and annotated texts. These digital representations of stylized discourse will be linked to a database classifying information obtained from ethnographical studies related to vocal and verbal performance and the practice of poetics in social life.

The VOVA exchange platform is currently in designing and initial programming stages for use by ethnographical researchers. The aim of the platform is to stimulate comparative research in performance ethnography and, more specifically, in the study of stylized oral discourse. More broadly, it is intended to further our understanding of cultural forms of speech styles and communication, and to ground the study of oral stylistics more firmly in the broader field of linguistics. Two main tools are to be designed and programmed: (1) a text editing tool using TEI markup for

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formatting and annotating 'texts' transcribed from live performance, and (2) a database for detailed description of performance-related phenomena, focussing on stylistics.

An Advisory Board of linguistic ethnographers and computer linguists having experience in text editing, endangered language preservation, and oral discourse interpretation has been formed (and will be expanded) for the validation of the platform design. This Board will review and resolve matters concerning nomenclature, organization and association of data, priorities and models for interpreting, editing, interface priorities, and analytical models for furthering research in the field of oral tradition as well as the major issues, disagreements and controversies as have been posed. These matters include the standards that have been set over the past decades for handling cultural materials of verbal artistry (Boas, 1911; Sapir, 1921; Parry and Lord, 1954; Jakobson, 1960; Lord, 1960; Lévi-Strauss, 1964, 1967, 1968, 1971; Calame-Griaule, 1965; Labov, 1972; Tedlock, 1972, 1977, 1983; Bauman, 1977, 1986, 2004; Okpewho 1983, 1992; Swann, 1983, 1992; Hymes, 1981, 1985, 2003; DeMallie, 1984; Swann and Krupat, 1987; Briggs, 1988; Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Foley, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995; Ahenakew and Wolfart, 1992; Parks and DeMallie, 1992; Revel, 1992; Sherzer, 2000; Mason 2004, 2008). An Editorial Board of linguists and other field collectors of oral tradition material has been formed to oversee the inputting of ethnographical data relating to oral speech styles and genres as well as text editions. It is imperative that all data entries be reviewed by one or more member(s) of this Board.[1]

The VOVA platform will provide safe storage for textual, audio, and visual documentation of live performance. The VOVA Text Editing Tools will allow for the formatting of texts according to the editor's methods of transcription and electronic representation of oral discourse and the annotation of all interpretive data to be stored. The database will provide fields reflecting literary, linguistic, sociolinguistic, ethnolinguistic, musicological, sociological, geographical, and cultural information. Consulting devices will be provided with the aim of promoting language preservation and revitalization, language instruction, and a widespread appreciation of community-based performance, particularly in languages that are endangered. With this complex animated tool, we hope to influence the way people perceive cultural differences and to promote world diplomacy, as an integral part of our research objectives.

The purpose of this article is to describe the initial design and the types of use of one of the VOVA databases, namely one that will gather information related to oral speech genres. Before moving onto the actual configuration of this database, we will first have a look at some of the methodological and historical background leading to this endeavour.

2 Genre Identification

From the very start of our database configuration of speech genres, we found ourselves in a conceptual muddle. Indeed, the attempt to attach a name to a cultural discourse practice proves to be an ethnographical challenge. A number of linguistic ethnographers have reported difficulties in naming genres when working cross-culturally. Cécile Leguy has observed that proverbs and riddles in Bwa social life are identified using the same name—wàwé—despite their distinct formal differences (Leguy, 2005). Scholars have also observed that genres overlap in subtle and culture-specific ways, blurring the boundaries between, say, soul and funk music (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1976; Mason 2007, 2008). Moreover, language, literary practices, rules, and tastes evolve over time and will give way to new styles and forms of performance.

Joxerra Garcia, scholar of Basque oral tradition, gives us yet another view of difficulties in genre identification that he attaches to 'the uneven nature of the corpus at our disposal':

> Some genres continue to thrive (that is, they are still produced and consumed), although their degree of social validity differs (*bertso-paperak*, masquerades, pastorals, and so on), while others are little more than a relic of the past—they are still consumed to some extent, but no new pieces are produced,

> at least orally (old *koplak*, ballads, and so forth). It is sometimes difficult to specify whether or not a genre is still alive. Old *koplak*, for example, which I described above as relics of the past, still abound in written Basque poetry, and some of them have even become quite popular when made into songs. (Garcia, 2000)

All these facts make it difficult to interpret how individuals may (or may not, in some instances) define, perform, and re-perform cultural forms of expression that scholars may come to identify as a specific genre. We scientific-minded listeners would like to place these forms into neatly compartmentalized categories that are more often than not defied by actual performance. Nonetheless, it is possible to advance our understanding of, and appreciation for, both the formal features and the practice of forms of speaking as they prove, at some level and at some time in cultural life, generic.

The task of identifying a specific genre in a specific culture group requires, first of all, determining whether the practicing culture group acknowledges the genre and identifies it using a name, without formal definitions from the ethnographer, or, as in many cases, does not have a name for it. In the case of acknowledgement without outside suggestion, it is imperative to document the name that the practicing culture group attaches to the practice. In the case of no prior acknowledgement, the VOVA platform user must specify 'no known name in language of practice.'

Two fields will thus be provided for the identification of a genre documented in the VOVA database. One will require a name in English, taken from a pre-conceived list of documented genres, or a coined one (to be approved by the Editorial Board). This designation will derive from pre-defined categories of genre. If no appropriate name should exist, then the ethnographer will coin a name using a reference to the performer(s) and a contextual descriptor of the practice (for example, sports fans dispute at a sport's event). Another field will allow for the name of the genre practice as it is known in the culture group that practices it.

The legitimate ideological concern of emphasizing English terminology when documenting genre practice in non-English languages arises. To what extent does the English term, which after all derives from an Anglophone practice of an Anglophone genre, truly reflect the genre practice identified in another culture group? Is it possible to erase the English term from the forefront of the database interface?

Several options have been considered. The most viable option would be to erase the English-term field and include this term in a more general defining field. For example, instead of listing the practice of 'war songs' in a separate field, the user would include this term in a dictionary-like definition or general description of the genre practice that explains in more detail the actual purpose or characterizing feature of the practice. This option would, however, complicate the query process so important to database management and consulting. It would be especially disruptive for consultation by non-specialists, or even time-pressured specialists who might not read general descriptions carefully.

For reasons of quick reference, and also for purposes of comparative investigations, we have therefore decided to implement the separate field using the English term and to make this list readily available for consultation. English standardization of scientific purposes and categories of study is a fact of today's world and one that we simply cannot get around. We seek, however, to discourage our users from the potential conceptual misunderstandings and ideological risks of reducing the description of a social phenomena of such high value to one single language, especially when that language is that of the dominating power of current world hegemony, in two ways. First, we have chosen to call this field 'Name of Genre Practice in English' as opposed to the handier label 'Genre'. Secondly, we seek to highlight contextualized features in a data field for a general, but contextual description of the genre practice (see below), and in more refined database fields (See 'Research Data') deriving from, as has been pointed out, authorized ethnographical methods, analytical models, monographs, and continued experience.

3 General Description of Genre Practices

We remind the reader that all data entered into the Genre Database concerns general genre practice without depicting a specific performance. These descriptions, entered into a unique data field and intended for quick reference and general information, will be dictionary-like in response to the following systematic questions: who speaks? to whom? in what form? on what occasion? and to what purpose? In some cases, content may prove a necessary feature for describing a genre (see example below). In addition to highlighting cultural specificity, these questions help editors and other data-inputters as well as consultants to focus on genre as a practice as opposed to a fixed object.

To illustrate, the general description of a lullaby may read: an individual (usually a mother or another relative) sings to a baby or young child at (usually) naptime or in the evening to put him to sleep. War song: (usually) men sing among themselves and to their community just before going to war in order to build courage and solidarity. Myth: a community member tells a story that involves supernatural powers to another member or members of the community for purposes of instruction as well as confirming social values and roles.

In addition to this general information, specific information with respect to the specific genre practice may prove necessary for a general grasp of the actual performance practice. For example, myth in Chinook cultures was always and only performed in the winter. In some cultures, personal anecdotes are limited to intimate social spheres while in others perfect strangers may reveal the secrets of their lives in humorous detail. Teasing may be sex-specific in some cultures; in many others, we find that rules about teasing are age-specific. Prayers are also practiced according to the specific rules of a given culture. These examples show that, while databasing may seek to keep general descriptions brief and to the point, a lack of this type of information would be misleading. In such cases, it is left to the discretion of data-inputters to provide these data. It is thus our hope that the specificities of the general description will counteract any obscurities and ideological misconception that the use of the English term may carry (Table 1).

With this general outlay of information, it is already possible to compare performance practices with respect to genre throughout the world. It is interesting to note that the context-focussed data may serve in the long-term development of the Genre Base as more comparative information becomes available, thus leading to more systematic questions based on the data. By placing context in the forefront, it will also be easier to do queries related to the social aspects of events. Some genres, for example, will prove more context-oriented than others. Also, this quick reference interface provides the focus, the gaps, the issues, and a minimum of interpretive data for the definition and application of more complex categories.

4 Linguistic Community

A linguistic community is a group of individuals who, through common activity, interests, experience, and, most especially, verbal exchange, together, create a way of speaking that is guided by a set of codes, rules and references unique to that group. Sociolinguists identify linguistic communities for studying the ways in which society uses language for constructing personal and collective identities, reinforcing values and principles, and for creating culture. In this light, we may observe how a linguistic community reflects a specific practice of language and social context, and may refer to it as a culture group.

The identification of linguistic communities allows ethnographers of performance to distinguish the rules and codes of genre practices from one group to another more precisely, and to provide more specific information concerning performance practices in given social contexts. It is an important means of guarding against misleading generalizations about social and cultural practices. For this reason, a Linguistic Community Table 2 will be linked to the Genres Database as a requirement

Table 1 Description of performance genre

Name of performance genre in English	Language of performance genre	Name of genre in language of performance	Country of (documented) genre practice	General description
Griping	French	Râlerie	France	An individual complains critically and vehemently to another individual or group of individuals in any context in order to create or relieve tension, to humour listeners, to influence a decision or policy, and/or to gain power (votes, for example).[2]
Myth	Clackamas Chinook	K'ani	United States of America	An adult tells a story of supernatural powers that takes place during a time in which the world has not yet taken its present state to another individual or group (often children) at night during the winter months. (Jacobs, 1958)
Epic	Ohafia Ibgo	No name given	Nigeria	A bard tells a story of heroic achievement to community members consistent with the 'beliefs and customs of the community' and for purposes of inspiration, enlightenment, historical documentation, awakening of patriotism, and generally, the perpetuation of the heroic spirit. (Azuonye, 1994)
Wedding reception speech	Japanese	Not documented	Japan	An individual of high ranking speaks to the newly-wed couple and their guests at their wedding reception to honour, encourage, congratulate, and sometimes advise them. (Dunn 2006)
Patterned Weeping	Kaluli	Sa-yalab	Papua New Guinea	A group of (usually) women interpellate other mourners of a loved one using a pattern of melodically designed cries for purposes of lamenting and 'to make others cry.' (Feld, 1990)
Curse	Somali	Kuhaanka	Somalia	An af-ku-leeble ('one whose mouth is a dart') pronounces malevolence upon another to cause her or him harm. (Samatar, 2008)
Riddle	Boomu	Wàwé	Mali	An individual (often a child) formulates a play on words using a metaphoric or some other linguistic equation, generally descriptive, inviting another individual (often a child) to unravel. (Leguy, 2005)
Proverb	Boomu	Wàwé	Mali	An individual utters a (often formulaic) a general statement intended to interpret a present situation or reality with the wisdom of ancestral heritage in order to strengthen her or his argument or to present a point of view that would best not be presented explicitly. (Leguy, 2005)
Córdovan Historical Explorations	Mexicano	None given	Córdova, New Mexico	An individual between the ages of 30 and 50 tells a story of a person, events, or conditions of the past to an individual or group of individuals of the same age group. (Briggs, 1988)
Myth	Arikara	Tiraa'iitUxwaa RUxti'	Missouri River Bottoms of South Dakota	And individual tells a story of sacred value to the community of a time called the 'holy period' in which mysterious events took place and the world was not in its present state to an individual or group of individuals. (Parks, 1991c)

Table 2 Linguistic community

Linguistic community	Culture group type	Language variety	Region/location
19th century New World North West Coast Traders	Commercial; Geographic	Chinuk Wawa (Chinook Jargon)	New World North West Coast
Suburban Besançon Maghreb youth (ages 10–25) (Seifiani, 2003)	Social; Geographic; Age-related	Franco-Arabic-Maghreb	Les Clairs Soleils and Planoise (quarters) in the suburbs of Besançon, France
Middle-aged (ages 30–50) Córdovans	Social; Age-related; Geographic	Córdova Spanish	Córdova, New Mexico

for further data entry. The table fields and explanations are as follows:

4.1 Linguistic community identification

Social, cultural, or geographical qualifier(s) plus any additional essential qualifier(s) are to be used to designate a linguistic community documented by an ethnographer. Examples: Bwa primary school boys, American High School junior prom organizers, Lagos market women who sell produce, American Indian Pow Wow dancers, New York subway passengers, Chinook fishermen, Wolof students in Lower Normandy.

4.2 Culture group type

This field indicates the general characterizing feature of culture that defines the linguistic group. The group type may be identified from the following social and cultural categories: ethnicity, age, class, recreation, arts, region, nation, institution, religion, social life, family, sport, and club membership. This list may be expanded as users enter data with other group categories.

4.3 Language variety

A dialect is a distinct way of using a given language that is not always comprehensible to other speakers of that language. This field will be filled in using an adjectival form of nationally, regionally, ethnically, socially influenced language practice followed by the name of the language group. Examples: Butcher's French, Children's Ibo, Clackamas Chinook, Southside Virginian English, Cockney English, Western Japanese, Algerian Arabic.

4.4 Region/location

A more or less detailed geographical description of the region and/or location in which this group lives and gathers must be designated. If the group comes from various places in the world, this must be specified as in these examples: International (aids researchers), American Indian (people), Portuguese (rugby players), Western African (immigrants in London).

The documentation of linguistic communities for purposes of oral tradition studies has had a tremendous effect on ethnographical expertise. Most importantly, it leads ethnographers to focus on internal relations, functions, and factors of social groups in the making of culture. A more elaborate VOVA Linguistic Communities Database—storing information about community codes, rules, references, social roles, instruments, use of space, politics, and the like—to be linked to the VOVA Genre Database will prove necessary as a later development in mapping out relations between cultural and linguistic behaviours.

5 Referencing and Tracking Data

The Genre Database, and probably all VOVA databases to come, will be founded upon a one record—one reference principle, attributing all data in the record to one researcher. This person is identified with an official user_id and is responsible for all information entered into the platform modules. In some cases, a researcher may hire an assistant to enter their data. The assistant will sign in using the researcher's user_id and it is the responsibility

of the researcher to confirm the correct entry of the data.

Another reference field will indicate the source of the researcher's data. In some cases, information is taken from a published source and the user will thus enter a bibliographical reference. In other cases, the researcher may be entering information directly from her or his own unpublished observations. In this case, the user will enter 'personal fieldwork' into the database.

A third reference field will be reserved for a community reference or references ('field consultant(s)' or 'no information provided' indicator) to include any and all informants or field associates living within the community being studied who inform or assist the ethnographer as she or he gains insight into the genre practice.

In addition to people and publication sources, it is important to keep track of dates for the collection, publication, and platform entry of the data. These three dates will allow consultants and data analysts to quickly monitor the relative age of the data and make projections about its historical as well as contemporary relevance. This information will also allow us to compile data on a given tradition with respect to historical and structural transformations of performance practices, the varying results of different researchers in the same tradition, and comparative cultural changes and influences in time.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 must be completed for any and all continued entry and validation.

Ultimately, with expansion of the platform for capacity in documenting audio and audiovisual sources, tables for references to such material will be linked to the Genre Database.

6 Context Data

We have already pointed to the valuable insights provided by a contextual approach to performance and genre practices. Table 4 documents more specific information concerning the social and political environment, traditions, and background linked to a genre performance. The fields heading this table and their specifications are as follows:

6.1 Type of event

All social (family, religion, institutional) and temporal (time of day, time of week, time of year, seasonal) factors that help to create the context.

6.2 Catalyst to event

Any and all routine and especially non-routine events or circumstances (accident, death, weather, someone's arrival or departure), personal or social acts (new job, new commitment, freedom from some sort of burden), or personal or social motivations (loss of loved one, unexpected news, emotions, catching of fish) that give rise to the performance.

6.3 Situation

Social relations, surrounding events, historical influences and impacts, nuances, psychological states (disorientation, spiritual fervour), social states (unemployment, holidays), outside

Table 3 Referencing and tracking

Performance genre	Research data enterer	Source of data	Ethnographer	Field consultant(s)
Panel A				
Clackamas Chinook Myth	Current user	Jacobs, 1959.	Melville Jacobs	Melville Jacobs
Arikara Tale	Current user	Parks, 1991b, 1991c.	Douglas Parks	Lilian Brave
French Griping	Current user	Personal fieldwork	Catharine Mason	Numerous

Performance genre	Date of entry	Year of publication	Date of collection
Panel B			
Clackamas Chinook Myth	Current date	1959	1929–930
Arikara Tale	Current date	1991	1984

Table 4 Description of context in genre performance

Name of genre practice in English	Type of event	Catalyst to event	Situation	Organizing elements	Place of event
Japanese Wedding reception speech	Formal/invited guests	Marriage	Celebration. Each guest knows at least one of the couple. The speaker speaks to people s/he knows and ones s/he does not know. Respect for hierarchical status is a key in the performance strategy.	Formal dinner is served to the guests.	No precise information provided.
Basque Processional Caroling (Koplak) (Garzia, 2007)	Formal public. Begins at twilight	Performed on a special day such as a holiday. Example: Saint Agatha's Day or New Years' Eve	The singers gather in comradery for fun and celebratory effects.	Food and drink or money is offered to performers by the farm residents as an award; Satirical koplak may be sung for rewards considered insufficient. Wearing of traditional clothing. The singers seek out personal information about the farm dwellers in order to better improvise their songs on the next trip.	The participants gather at a designated place in town. They travel from farm to farm, stopping at each to sing.
Córdovan Historical Explorations (Briggs, 1988)	Social	Stimulation of personal or collective memory of a person, event, or conditions of the past.	Relative to a given generation of people between the ages of 30–50	Spontaneous occurrence of remembrance of a bygone person, event, or conditions of social life	Private or public spheres in which social gatherings take place
Swahili manganja (Bacuez, 2000)	Social gathering of several days at night-time, often during marriage festivities or during circumcision rites, after the season of the rains and before the monsoon, after the harvesting of the sorghum and the sale of the cashews on the market	A quarrel or dispute ranging in social and political connotations such as adultery or opposition of a group to a political decision	Social and/or political conflict between two or more people relating in some way to the moral views of the community	Gathering of a public audience respecting the mores and codes of the genre practice	No information provided

news or events that have a hand in creating the context.

6.4 Organizing elements

Preparations, rituals, props that help to create the context.

6.5 Place

Spatial, architectural, geographical phenomena that serve to create the context.

7 Data Reflecting Formal Characteristics and Configurations

To some extent, by 'research data' one simply means more detail. In the study of vocal and verbal arts, we will be zooming in on more microscopic details in Tables 5–7. The focus is more on the actual performance event. The traditional practices of a given genre will be described using as much detail as possible according to structural, musical, and functional characteristics as defined here:

7.1 Structure

Structural design or formal configuration of the genre; any information concerning form, verse units, internal structure, organizational parts and their relations, and the linguistic and musical elements and devices that serve to mark textual form.

7.2 Musical composition

Description of musical elements (rhythm, timbre, melody) structuring the genre performance; information about the use of musical instruments including the voice.

Table 5 Formal characteristics and configurations of genre performances

Name of genre practice in English	Structure	Musicality	Function(s)
Maori Women's Love Song (Waiata Aroha)	An introduction addresses the setting of the sun just before speaking of one's sorrow. Text development relates the poet's distress and its cause. The ending serves as a final statement and is often an appeal to send greetings to the loved one. Improvised lyric.	Common melodic composition of two phrases, the first being shorter than the second. Use of tripartite lines.	Recalling the memory of a loved one. Lamenting the loss of a loved one. Overturn gossip or slander.
Kaluli Weeping Pattern (Sa-yalab) (Feld, 1990)	Four-tone melodic pattern	Melodic pattern of four descending tones in descending intervals of major second and minor third. Imitation of the call of a fruitdove.	Self- and group-expression of lament.
Basque Processional Caroling (Kaplok)	A couple of *koplaris* (*koplak* singers) are soloists accompanied by a large group of followers.	Musical accompaniment: *Trikitixas* (small accordeon) and tambourines.	'It is likely that in former years these processions were an important element for the communication and social cohesion of the marginalized Basque-speaking community. And perhaps they continue to be so today as well.'

Table 6 Stylistic elements, devices and operations in genre practices

Name of genre in language of genre practice	Stylistic element, device or operation	Linguistic function	Performance function
Maori Women's Love Song (Waiata Aroha) (Orbell, 1990)	Extensive use of metaphors, especially spatial metaphors.	Creates new layers of meaning	Proposes new perspectives for coping with pain; highly poetic function
Kaluli Weeping Pattern (Sa-yalab) (Feld, 1990)	Voiced inhalation	Phonological, rhythmic device	Heightens emotions
Córdovan Mexicana Historical Discourse (Briggs, 1988)	Combination of simple past tense and imperfect aspect forms to evoke 'bygone days'	Grammatical manipulation for situating events in various perspectives of the past	Places performance participants 'squarely in the middle of the action.' Used for habitual actions that, in turn, characterize bygone days. Creates a feeling of 'depth and continuity as embodied in actions and values that saturated the past and are projected toward the present.'
Kwakw'ala Myth (Berman, 1992)	Pattern of 'Action-Response'	Narrative pairing of two events: act and verbal response. Examples: Invitation/ Consequence; Prohibition/ Response; Problem/Solution	Orients point of view, creates a parallel relation between units, creates coherence
Southern USA Blues Songs (Mason, 2007)	Binary Blues Clauses	Juxtaposition of independent clauses in an often implicit relation unconstrained by rules of syntax	Creates new layers of meaning calling for more thoughtful interpretation of audience participants
Napo Quichua Myth (Uzendoski, 1999)	Increased rate of speech at the end of a line	Phonological emphasis of alliteration	Enhances expressive quality and embellishes the sound patterns of the telling
Ndebele Praise Poetry (Groenewald, 2001)	Metaphoric description of praised subject	Use of metaphor for characteristics, deeds, qualities of the praised subject	Generalizes and gives higher value to such qualities

7.3 Functional aspects

How does the genre function in social life? What purpose does it serve? In what type of event is this genre performed?

For example, we know from Dennis Tedlock's study of Zuni oral traditions that tales, called *telapnaawe* in their language of practice, have a formulaic frame of a three-part opening and a three-part closing (structure). Women's love songs, called *Waiata Aroha* in Maori oral tradition, have been intricately described in Margaret Orbell's 1990 article (Orbell, 1990) from which we may glean the data as documented in Table 5.

8 Stylistic Functions

In Table 6, researchers will be focussing more on vocal and verbal elements (sounds and words, for example), devices (figures of speech to a great extent), and operations (grammatical, syntactical, narratological, and verse configurations) that are used for poetic effect. This information brings to light some of the smallest identifiable units that go into performance art.

In addition to the general poetic function of such phenomena, described by Roman Jakobson (Jakobson, 1960), linguistic functions and

Table 7 Stylized terminology gleaned from genre performance

Genre identified	Term or formula	English translation	Function	Description of use
Karuk Myth (Pikvah) (Bright and Gehr, 2005)	Kupánakanakana	Not available	Narrative semantics	This term is used to mark the end of a myth-telling.
Kuna Myth (Sherzer, 2000)	Teki	So it is	Narrative semantics	The performer uses this formula to punctuate a narrated event and/or a narrative unit.
Kuna Myth	Apiinsuet	Responder	Role in Performance Event	Formal name of a performance participant who responds to specific utterances of the performer as a way of contributing to the oral rhythm.
Kuni Tales (Telapnaawe) (Tedlock, 1983)	So'nahchi	Now we are taking it up	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	The performer uses this formula to open the tale-telling.
Kuni Tales (Telapnaawe)	Eeso	Yes indeed	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	The members of the audience respond to the performer's opening formula 'So'nahchi.'
Kuni Tales (Telapnaawe)	Sonti ino—te	Now it begins to be made—long ago	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	The performer uses this formula to close the tale-telling.
Kuni Tales (Telapnaawe)	Le'n inoote teyatikya	This was lived long ago	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	The performer uses this formula to close the tale-telling.
Kuni Tales (Telapnaawe)	Lee—semkonikya	Enough—the word was short	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	The performer uses this formula to close the tale-telling.
Samoan ceremonial address (Fa'alupega) (Duranti, 1994)	E le'I liua	It has not been changed	Narrative semantics; Formulaic	This formula evokes sacredness and the idea of immutability in an eternal world. Reference to traditional ideals.
Arikara Myths (Tiraa'iitUx-waaRU-xti') (Parks, 1991c)	WaaRUxtií'u'	Mysterious power held by myth characters	Genre specific	This term evokes the sacred quality of the character, the story, the narrative, and its telling.

performance functions may be identified and described for each stylistic element, device, and operation documented. This table seeks to compile information about these two functions, the first relating to internal logic and structure of the performance stylistics, and the second focussing on the interactive effects of the phenomenon among performance participants, and the general context of the performance.

9 Stylistic, Stylized, and Stylizing Terminology in Oral Literature

A seventh Genre Database table will provide fields for storing stylized vocabulary and formulae commonly employed in a tradition's practice of a given genre. The data compiled in this table will serve as a basis for literary glossaries in the languages that are documented by VOVA.

10 Interface Design and Digital Interpretation of Ethnography

The first three tables of the Genre Database, as we have seen, present general descriptive and referential information of the performance genres documented by VOVA researchers. The element of text interpretation comes into play in the types of information to be compiled in the context tables as well as both tables relating to stylistics. Interface carries, of

course, enormous weight in how the database will be queried, how it will be fed, how data will be interpreted for the development of further tables and database architecture. Interface will also have a major impact on how the practice of performance ethnography will be affected by use of the VOVA platform. It is important that researchers are able to use the platform with ease, finding compliance to the ethnographical approach intuitive and beneficial to their own individual inquiries. It is also our intention that the systematization provided by the database structures will provide pedagogical guidance for students and researchers unaffiliated with research institutions in organizing the results of their research.

10.1 Entering data

The Genre Database interface will be screened in English. With funding, French, Spanish, and Arabic interfaces will be provided. The User Registration Database will distinguish between the user's language of communication and that of study.

An initial interface will provide the title of Table 1: 'Description of Performance Genre.' The first three fields of this table—'Name of Performance Genre in English', 'Language of Performance', and 'Name of Performance Genre in Original Language'—will provide the identification field of all related tables as a reminder of the user and as a link between tables. The computer will automatically pull the data from these fields to provide, for example, 'Clackamas Chinook Myth (K'ani)' as data for an initial field of Tables 4–6.

When Table 1 is completed, the researcher will click the 'Done' button, and a new interface will automatically provide the titles for the two tables inquiring about the linguistic community and references. By clicking onto anyone of them, the fields of the particular table will appear with spaces for filling in the information required. Each of the tables will provide an initial field indicating the identification of the genre. Once a table is completed and the researcher has clicked onto 'Done', the VOVA interface will screen the name of the uncompleted table and invite the researcher to continue data entry. The field 'Source of Data' in Table 3, panel A will require a link to separate tables from a Sources Database for formatted bibliographical references, distinguishing articles and books, and identifying them by the author's name and the year of publication. Specifications for this database will not be discussed here.

When the three prerequisite tables are completed, the titles of the three interpretation tables will appear on the screen. The genre identification data will be automatically transferred to this new interface, along with the name of the researcher, inviting her or him to continue entering data. This information, automatically gathered from the descriptive tables, will provide the first two fields of all tables.

As we have seen, the design of the Genre Database will aim at compatibility with future database designs based on performance ethnography. In addition to an archive of annotated texts using TEI markup, we foresee a Performance Database explicating documented performances according to social, historical and corpus research, and a Stylistics Database storing annotations of the specific elements and devices of an interpreted texts. It is our hope that analytical models will provide organizing incentive for the databases. We are confident that the processes of compiling information into the databases will give rise to new and revised tables and fields.

10.2 Consulting data

By clicking onto the initial headings (indicated in capitals below), the database consultant will acquire tables with the information followed by the arrow.

> NAME of PERFORMANCE GENRE in ENGLISH ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance + Language of Performance Genre + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region ⇒ All stylistic data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information ⇒ References
> NAME of GENRE in LANGUAGE of PERFORMANCE ⇒ Name of Performance Genre in English + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region ⇒ General

Description of the Performance Genre ⇒ All stylistic data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information ⇒ References
LANGUAGE ⇒ Performance Genres (documented in that language) ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region ⇒ General Description ⇒ All stylistic data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information' ⇒ References
COUNTRY ⇒ Performance Genres (documented in that country) ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance ⇒ General Description ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region ⇒ All stylistic data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No available information' ⇒ References
FIELD RESEARCHER ⇒ Performance Genres (documented by that researcher) ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance + Language of Performance Genre + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ General Description ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region + Description of the LC ⇒ All data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information' ⇒ References
FIELD CONSULTANT ⇒ Performance Genres (documented with assistance from that consultant) ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance + Language of Performance Genre + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ General Description ⇒ Linguistic Community that Practices the Genre + Region + Description of the LC ⇒ All data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information' ⇒ References
CULTURE GROUP TYPE ⇒ Performance Genres documented in that culture group type ⇒ Name of Genre in Language of Performance + Country of Genre Practice ⇒ General Description ⇒ All data available concerning the documented genre practice or 'No more available information' ⇒ References

A general public interface will provide all of the names in English of the performance genres documented by VOVA researchers. From this list, the user is invited to consult the database by clicking onto the Name of the Performance Genre (in English) of interest to her or him.

10.3 Validating data

All entries will be coded with dates and time of entry. They will be automatically directed by the platform toward an editor, or, in the case that no editor for a given language is associated with the VOVA Editorial Board, toward an editor, or a committee of VOVA editors, consultants and/or participants who are most qualified for reviewing data in the given language of study. These reviewers may request a biography of the research data-enterer's field and study experience. The data will then be validated and made available for consultation (see below), or declined. The committee may request revisions. The new research inputter may also be invited to become an editor.

11 Conclusive Remarks

The standardization of descriptive stylistics is only in its embryonic stages and has no parallel to the major advances of grammar, syntax, and phonology. Applying the tools of digital humanities computing, however, will allow us to make the more concrete results of performance studies accessible to non-specialists as well as to scholars in related disciplines, to place context and variation at the centre of our investigation in a systematic way, and to make considerable advances in our means of research in comparative stylistics.

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Notes

1 Qualified members of the Editorial Board may officially, of course, review their own data entries. It is our hope, however, that the exchange platform will provide the opportunity for data enterers to easily and readily seek out the feedback and critique of other users as well.

2 Mason, Catharine. 2008–present. Field notes.