

## **“Siete, cinco, tres, uno, que se te caigan los gusanos hasta que no quede ninguno”: some linguistic aspects of the practice of curing by words in Uruguay**

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***“Siete, cinco, tres, uno, que se te caigan los gusanos hasta que no quede ninguno”:*  
some linguistic aspects of the practice of curing  
by words in Uruguay<sup>1</sup>**

Le surnaturel naît du langage,  
il en est à la fois la conséquence et la preuve :  
non seulement le diable et les vampires  
n'existent que dans les mots,  
mais aussi seul le langage permet de concevoir  
ce qui est toujours absent :  
le surnaturel  
(Todorov 1970: 68)

### **Introductory remarks**

Throughout various times and cultures, magical practices have been used in order to cope with life's afflictions and hardships.<sup>2</sup> In the event that something is stolen or someone goes missing or falls sick, people tend to resort to the supernatural when other means or institutions are not available (cf. Ruff 2003: 25; Hughes 1985: 240). Whereas present-day Uruguay has a comparatively efficient and affordable healthcare system, this has not always been the case. For most of its history, people – especially in rural areas – had to rely on their own knowledge when

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1 The citation “*Siete, cinco, tres, uno, que se te caigan los gusanos hasta que no quede ninguno*” is taken from a magic formula that appears in a slightly different form below – namely without the plural -s in *gusanos*. This is due to phonetic deletion of syllable-final -s, which is common in Uruguay. These phonetic (and other) substandard features of rural Uruguayan Spanish are largely retained in the cited speech extracts, not in phonetic transcription but following the spelling traditions of regional literature from Uruguay. Punctuation, too, reflects the interdisciplinary nature of this study.

In the following article, the use of <> in *God* and *Dios*, is due to editorial discretion.

2 For comprehensive historical overviews, see Levack (2013) and Muchembled (1994); for more anthropological approaches, see Mauss (2001) and Lehmann & Myers (1985); and see Roper (2009) for a series of studies on “Charms, Charmers and Charming” in various, mostly Nordic, societies.

dealing with health-related problems. Distances were long and formally-educated doctors scarce. In such circumstances, people often developed – or rather inherited (cf. Faget 2012: 123) – a mixed system of folk remedies, based both on practical experience and superstition. Even today, this system includes the use of certain substances, but also involves magical actions and verbal charms which form an integral part of treatment. Some of these procedures are common fixtures of household medicine, while others are the dominion of secret wisdom held by specialists, usually called *curanderas* or *brujas* (they seem to be mostly women), depending on whether they use their skills for good or evil. Far from offering a complete overview of Uruguay's folk medicine and the magical rituals it involves, the following discussion offers insights into some of these issues, drawing on interviews with informants for the Linguistic Atlas of Uruguay (*Atlas Lingüístico Diatópico y Diastrático del Uruguay: ADDU*). These recorded conversations show that even in a largely secular and modern society, some traditions and beliefs die hard. In the spirit of the present edition, attention will primarily be directed to language-related aspects.

## Database

As the interviewees were not chosen with folk medicine or magic practices in mind, the information presented in the following does not necessarily constitute expert knowledge. Rather, the interviewees were ordinary people from various professional backgrounds who served as informants for the ADDU, a Uruguayan-German project directed by Harald Thun (Kiel) and Adolfo Elizaincín (Montevideo). The interviews were conducted between 1989 and 1992 in an attempt to gather data on linguistic variation throughout Uruguay.<sup>3</sup> The database allows for differentiation between older and younger speakers (GI (*generación I*): 18 to 36 years old; GII (*generación II*): over 60 years old), as well as between different sociocultural classes (Ca (*clase alta*): informants who completed secondary school; Cb (*clase baja*): informants who only completed primary school (six years in the public school system)).

Among the questions in the extensive questionnaire, several ask for ethnographic information about taming horses, about werewolves and vampires, and about saints and witchcraft and similar phenomena. Some of these questions were

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3 Interviews were conducted in 75 different locations. Apart from the 18 *departamento* capitals, at least one rural town or village was visited in each *departamento* in order to allow comparison between rural and urban speakers. In accordance with Uruguay's demographics, more locations in the south were explored than in the less-populated north.

optional, i.e. they were asked only when the interviewer felt that the informant might have something to say about the topic. From these conversations, some of the richest ethnographic information and most interesting linguistic findings have been collected in a two-volume anthology of transcribed oral texts: Thun, Steffen, Steffen & Figueiras (in print) and Thun, Steffen, Steffen & Frank-Kersch (in print). The following analysis is based on sections that refer to magic rituals, particularly those involving verbal charms and the practice of curing by words. Short segments of the conversations are given in order to let the informants speak for themselves, although – as often in spoken language – these testimonies are sometimes erratic, due to the dynamic nature of the dialogue situation.

### Reasons for applying magic

Judging from the conversations with ADDU informants, there seem to be two main reasons that people picked up knowledge about magical procedures to treat diseases and other conditions. Commonly cited by the older generation is the fact that other kinds of medical treatment were simply not available in rural areas and that doctors were a long distance away, as explained by Don José<sup>4</sup> (CbGII<sup>5</sup>) from Durazno:

(1)<sup>6</sup>

J: *todas esa eran cosa, todas esa eran cosa de antes que no había dotore, ahora lo llevo a usted el dotor le encaja un antibiótico, le pon-, al rato ta, ta aliviau, ta, pero ante que no había, en la campaña que no había dotore ni había nada, había todos yuyero*

A similar explanation is offered by Doña Bernardina (CbGII) from Treinta y Tres:

(2)

E2<sup>7</sup>: *¿se podría decir que Vd. es una curandera o es otra cosa una curandera?*

B: *no quiero decir curandera*

E2: *¿no? ¿Qué es una curandera?*

B: *Son cosas que uno aprende como tiene hijos y uno trabajó en campaña, ¿vivo? Y en campaña, uno está lejos del médico y de todo*

E: *claro*

B: *por eso yo aprendí*

E2: *y curanderas saben mucho más o, ¿cómo es la diferencia?*

4 For speakers of the older generation, *Don* or *Doña* is added to the name, respecting Hispanic tradition.

5 Short for: *clase baja, generación II* (see preceding section).

6 Translations of the conversations are given in the appendix.

7 Interviewers are marked with the letter *E* (short for *Encuestador*).



B: ¡Ah sí!, las curanderas son curanderas

E2: son

B: saben como yo, pero claro ya son curanderas, que la gente activa a ellas

E2: ¡ah!

B: por una cosa o por otra, ¿no?

E: ¡ah!, pero saben más o menos lo mismo que usted, ¿Hacen las mismas cosas que usted?

B: si es pa criatura sí

E: para curar, ¿sí?

B: yo por ejemplo, de porquería no entiendo nada, ¿no?

E: ¿cómo de porquería? ¿qué es eso?

B: de brujería, vamo a decir

E: ¡Ah!, y la curandera, ¿sí?

B: sí, sí hay curandera, seguro, pa eso hay curandera, por ejemplo a veces una persona se enferma y lo llevan al médico y lo desas-, eh, los desausean [des+auscultar] y no saben qué tiene y es alguna porquería que tiene, que le echaron

E: mh

B: van a un curandero y los cura, mh

While she, too, mentions the absence of doctors and the need to find a substitute for their services in everyday situations, Doña Bernardina tells us yet another important reason for *curanderismo* practices, i.e. that certain kinds of illness are not recognized by doctors:

(3)

[...] lo ojean porque tienen locura con la criatura por ejemplo usted ve una criatura y le gusta y juega con ella, o los mismos padres de repente los niños están durmiendo y, y ellos les prosean y, igual, dormidos y los miran y ahí es que los ojean, y cuidado con un ojeo y los médicos no entienden, yo a mis hijas cuando vienen de campaña que tienen algo en el estómago que me doy cuenta que es algo que les asentó ma-, mal, yo se los benzo y le digo, bueno, decíle a fulano, a los doctores, que los conozco a todos, que yo lo benci pa tal cosa, que pa mí es eso, pero vos llevalo al dotor y ellos me mandan decir que está bien

According to Doña Bernardina, doctors tend to be blind to certain illnesses, especially those resulting from a spell cast by a malevolent *curandera* or witch. In this specific case, she is talking about the *mal de ojo* disease ("evil eye") and *empacho* (a sort of constipation), both of which will be discussed in further detail below. Only other *curanderas* can diagnose and cure these diseases. In this sense, folk medicine is not only a substitute but rather a necessary complement to conventional medicine because the latter neither understands nor even knows about such diseases.

Some informants claim that even doctors occasionally admit that certain conditions are outside their bailiwick. These may be minor disorders like a *culebrilla* (herpes zoster), which is mentioned in the following excerpt by Washington (CbGI, Durazno):

(4)

E: *e incluso de vez en cuando el médico manda a los pacientes a la curandera, ¿no es así?*W: *sí, cuando ve que no es para él sí*R<sup>8</sup>: *ah, mandan sí*E2: *el médico sabrá por qué, ¿no?*E: *la culebrilla, por ejemplo*W: *seguro, eso te mandan*R: *sí, de eso curan, ¿ves?*W: *los médicos no la curan*

Some conditions, however, are particularly grave, as in the following dramatic account by Don José (CbGII, Durazno):

(5)

J: *pero, aquí en Durazno no, aquí hubo un caso pero lo llevaron a Paso de los Toro que era donde estaba un brasilero, ese curandero era bueno, curaba, hubo un viejito que estaba ahí, levantaba quinela, y había un negro ahí que se había enfermado, trabajaba en la OSE<sup>9</sup>, lo llevaron al hospital, taba defavorido, el hombre moría, y los doctores no dabanlo que tenía, y el viejito ése que, que levantaba quinela era muy conocido con él, iba a la casa a preguntarle si no [?] y el doctor, dice que le dijo, un doctor ahí en el hospital: "Mirá, si querés ver algún curandero vé, nosotros no podemos dar lo que vos tené", y el viejito ese le, le dijo: "¿Querés?, yo te llevo a un curandero", dijo: "Yo te llevo a Paso de los Toro, hay un curandero muy bueno", dice bueno, pa-, "Sí", le dice el hombre, tenía, el hombre trabajaba, era empleado de la OSE ahí, y dice, "Sí, ¿cómo no?!, vamo", fue al curandero, curandero lo vio, dijo: "Sí, yo lo curo", bueno le hizo unas cosa allí, le dio unos remedio pa' tomar, unas agua, unos yuyo, no sé qué, dijo: "Bueno, váyase tranquilo, esté mañana a la una de la noche", dijo: "De la madrugada, mañana a la una de la madrugada, usted va heder del cuerpo, pero ni usted va a poder sentir el jedor que va a echar, es insoportable, pero usted se cura", el hombre vino y a la una fue y dice que era una de un jedor que ni él podía aguantarlo del cuerpo pero se curó, hasta la fecha, hace como, el negro vie- [= viejo] el pardo viejo ese que lo, que lo llevó murió hace año porque era un hombre vie-, pero el negro hasta la fecha vive, un negro viejo ya pero, ta jubilado*

O<sup>10</sup>: *no sé si está jubilado ya*J: *sano, y los doctores no podían dar lo que tenía*O: *ni le podían mover el vientre, porque él no movía el vientre, a veces le-*J: *parece que era una, un atraco que tenía adentro que, que no lo movían con nada y el curandero ese con lo yu- [= yuyos] porquería que le dio*E: *lo curó*J: *lo curó*

8 R is Richard, Washington's son.

9 OSE: *Obras Sanitarias del Estado* is the public company responsible for water supply and drainage in Uruguay since 1952.

10 O is Doña Odilia, Don José's wife.

Thus, according to believers, there are certain domains for each of the participants in the health business. Lesser problems can be dealt with by common people who have picked up healing skills. Such remedies can, and very often do, involve charms and minor magic rituals. If a more serious physical disease has to be dealt with, a conventionally trained doctor should be consulted. Within the realm of grave spiritual illnesses, two opposing forces come into play: benevolent healers (*curanderas*) and malevolent witches (*brujas*). The boundaries between the categories – with the exception of the doctors – are not always clear-cut.

### Who can apply magic?

Anyone can become a *curandera* (or *bruja*) by learning the skills of the trade. None of the informants mentions any innate ability or characteristic needed to apply magic. Most of those who claim to know magic say that they learned from their mothers; some also mention non-relatives, such as neighbors. Usually, skills and charms are transmitted orally, but most of the interviewees admit to being rather cautious about passing on their knowledge, as does Doña Bernardina (CbGII, Treinta y Tres):

(6)

E: *¿y dónde aprendió?*

B: *me enseñó una vecina*

E: *ah*

B: *una señora vieja*

E: *¿y ahora usted se lo va a enseñar a alguna de sus hijas?*

B: *sí, eso no, eh, eso uno tiene que guardarlo para uno, yo se lo digo a ustedes porque ustedes no son de acá, claro quieren conocer*

She seems to be reluctant about teaching her daughters her magic secrets – possibly because of the responsibilities that come with them – but makes an exception by discussing some of them, apparently because the interviewers have come such a long way. Don Héctor (CbGII, Artigas), himself a *curandero*, expresses his thoughts on whether, or rather when, to pass on his skills to his daughters:

(7)

H: *porque yo a la vez de enseñarlo*

C: *mis hijas han querido–*

E: *–ah, sí*

H: *yo tengo que abandoná*

E: *ah... claro*

H: *dejar, al enseñar a otro yo tengo que dejá*

C: *hay otra hija que pide también y él no deja*

E: *ah, claro*

H: *eh, como yo tengo mucha gente que*

E: *ah, sí*

H: *ya me tienen fe... que siempre vienen pa traer niños y*

E: *ah, sí*

H: *personas mayores para bencer, yo no puedo dejar*

E: *no, claro, sí*

H: *y yo enseñalo a usted, ni pa mis hijo yo lo enseño porque si yo lo enseño bueno, yo lo enseñé a él, él que siga yo ya no puedo seguir*

E: *sí, sí, ¿Usted va a transmitir esta, este saber a, a un solo de los, de los hijos... o a, o a varios?*

C: *no*

H: *no... yo pienso que a la vez de dejar yo puedo enseñar a dos hijos.*

According to Don Héctor, he would have to give up the practice of healing others the moment he passed on his knowledge to his daughters. What keeps him from doing so is the fact that he has a number of elderly patients whom he would have to stop seeing if he retired. This underscores the great responsibility that comes with the secret art. In this respect, his story about the circumstances in which he learned this knowledge is important:

(8)

E: *sí, sí. ¿Y este es eh, un poder que le vino?—*

C: *que es de Dios*

E: *¿de, de la madre?*

C: *no, de Dios*

H: *no, ella me enseñó—*

C: *—porque él no sabía*

H: *algunas bendecura*

E: *ah, sí, mh*

H: *pero Dios me ha enseñado otras*

E: *ah, sí*

H: *porque yo, a mí nunca más me enseñaron, me, ella me enseñó dos bendecuras*

E: *mh*

H: *de aire, que a veces uno se agarra un aire*

E: *ah, sí*

H: *se saca la ropa con el cuerpo caliente, un golpe de aire en la espalda*

E: *ah, sí, claro*

H: *¿no?*

E: *mh*

H: *entonces ella me enseñó eso*

E: *sí*

H: *pero Dios me enseñó esas otras cosas porque a mí nadie más me enseñó*

E: *ah, sí*

H: *y Dios me dio ese, ese poder, otras*

E: *sí*

H: *quiere decir que yo para, para bencer*

E: *sí*

H: *yo primero oro a Dios*

E: *sí*

H: *y pido la, el poder de él*

According to Don Héctor, his mother only taught him two *beneduras* (charms), while the others were bestowed on him by God. He bases all of his procedures on his Christian faith. It may seem surprising that magic healing and Christian beliefs are so closely intertwined in Uruguayan popular beliefs. Yet this is common throughout the Spanish-speaking world<sup>11</sup> and in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> Popular religiousness often deviates from the official religion and is adapted according to local or individual needs. In Uruguay, elements from Catholicism are typically the basis of popular expressions of religiousness and are combined with different creeds. These can be rooted in personal transcendental experiences, as described above by Don Héctor, who declares that his charms were communicated to him by God. In most cases in Uruguay, though, collective beliefs in miracles and saints can partly be traced to Afro-Brazilian religions. Da Costa (2003: 138) states that 47% of the population avouches having participated in "experiences of popular religiousness", a term that is not clearly defined in his study but appears to amount to cults that are not organized or led by the Catholic Church, although most of the cases mentioned are in honor of a Catholic saint (e.g. San Pancracio and Virgen de Lourdes), the exception being Iemanjá, the supreme divinity of the Afro-Brazilian cults. To conclude, it is important for most of the interviewees who perform magic rituals to emphasize that these are based on Christian faith, a fact that will be significant when looking at the form and structure of charms in the following sections. Indeed, curanderos and curanderas see themselves as a force for good. When asked about malicious spells, Doña Bernardina decidedly rejects knowing about this "porquería" ('filth'):

(9)

E: *¡Ah!, ¿y esas cosas usted no las sabe?*

B: *¡no!, no sé ni quiero aprender tampoco*

E2: *¡pero no hay una diferencia en- -?*

11 In the context of popular Catholicism, see, for example, the terminological approaches and numerous case studies collected in Álvarez Santaló, Buxó i Rey & Rodríguez Becerra (1989).

12 See, for example, the various essays about syncretic practices in Latin America in Kohut & Meyers (1988).

B: *pero creo, creo que haiga, creo*

E: *mh, mh*

B: *es una diferencia muy grande*

E2: *mh*

B: *a curar una criatura, a curar una brujería, es mucha diferencia, ¿eh?*

E2: *pero la, para la brujería, ¿no son brujas, que hacen brujerías?*

B: *y son las mismas brujas*

E2: *son, ¿curandera es lo mismo que bruja?*

B: *a veces sí porque tanto usted le paga pa que lo cure como le paga pa que mate a otra persona igual*

E2: *¿Hay acá?*

I: *hay*

E2: *¿Curanderas y brujas?, ¿sí?*

B: *hay sí*

As the name suggests, *curanderas* use their skills in order to heal, not to make others sick or even kill them, as the *brujas* do. Still, a personal union can exist between the two kinds of sorceresses. This view is conveyed in this short excerpt by Richard (CbGI, Durazno):

(10)

R: *hay buenas y malas*

E: *ahá*

R: *porque usted va y se hace santiguar cuando, eh, tiene una culebrilla y se la cura pero si usted anda hablando capaz que le encaja una doble, ¿me entiende lo que quiero decir?, hay curanderas y curanderas*

Notably, Richard does not make a terminological distinction between good and bad *curanderas*, which confirms that the categories have fuzzy edges and that sometimes the same person applies good and evil spells.<sup>13</sup> Apart from the intention of charming, there is another criterion that decides whether someone should be considered a *curandera* or a *bruja*:

(11)

L: *yo me, me río porque, van a decir allá que es una, estuvieron en la casa de una vieja bruja*

E: *¡no!, pero, eh, ¿hay diferencia entre la señora que cura como usted y la bruja?*

13 At any rate, deciding between the two may lie in the eye of the beholder, as the famous historic case of the *benandanti* described by Carlo Ginzburg exemplifies. The *benandanti* were members of an agrarian cult who gathered to perform ecstatic rites in order to thwart the plans of evil witches and thus save the annual harvest. When the inquisitors in Venice gained knowledge of these cults, they interpreted them as a form of devil-worship, eventually convincing the *benandanti* of this view (cf. Herzog 2013: 259–260).

L: *hay, claro, es claro porque el brujo es hacer mal, al contrario*

E: *gualichos*

L: *seguro, y es una cosa que, que lo hace por plata*

E2: *sí, por eso*

E: *¿y usted, usted no cobra?*

L: *no, no, no, al contrario, si me vinieran a pagar por una cosa de esas no, no lo recibo porque estoy de, deseo que se cure esa persona y si le puedo enseñar a una persona, ¿vía?, a usted se los digo en confianza así pero a otra persona no le puedo decir porque lo primero que dice, este: "Es bruja", es la primera palabra que sale, sin embargo es un bien que usted está haciendo*

This principle of not accepting direct payment for one's magic deeds is, in fact, mentioned by many informants. It also becomes clear from the passage that being a *curandera* is a touchy issue because others could easily suspect the healer of being a *bruja* who uses her knowledge as a force for evil. This shows that in order to shed light on the linguistic aspects of folk magic, the charms and rituals should not only be viewed in the pragmatic light of what language users want to achieve, but also as part of the complex of social networks of the community. It is especially in this light that we can understand the indignation of Doña Bernardina and her daughter Iris, who blame much of the evil witchcraft that is around on the influence of books introduced from Brazil:

(12)

I: *y brujas también*

B: *hay sí*

E: *¿Cómo?*

B: *¿Qué, que no hay?*

I: *van y compran un libro y, y ya saben*

B: *que no hay, que dicen que ahora pasan ahí pal otro lado y compran libros y saben todo, porque ahora vienen los libros esos de ellos*

E: *¡ahá!, ¿en Brasil?*

As these books come from outside the community and make knowledge about magic so easily accessible for anybody who crosses the border, they are seen as a threat to the local architectonics of magic that rely on oral transmission from healer to healer.

### A secret performative language

Those informants who are not magic healers themselves but have witnessed a *curandera* or *curandero* perform a ritual cannot, in most cases, recite the magic words used by that person because these are usually not clearly pronounced, as Richard, Washington and Iris (CbGI, Durazno) explain:

(13)

E: *¿qué tipo de simpatías?, ¿te acordás de alguna para, así para curarlas?*I: *claro, lo que pasa que la, la, la curandera que te haga eso no, no te lo dice fuerte*R: *ah, no [?]*W: *nunca vas a escuchar porque nunca sentís lo que te dice*

The same behavior has been observed by Mary (CbGI, Tacuarembó):

(14)

E2: *¿qué palabras dice la persona?*M: *jah!, y eso es lo que yo no sé porque es ella sola que lo sabe, ¿vio?*E: *¿y las dice en brasilero o en español?*M: *ah, en brasilero me parece*E: *te parece en brasilero*M: *sí*E2: *¿lo dice bajito?*M: *bajito, de, para ella nomás se lo dice*

This observation should be seen in the context of the communicative situation. The healing words need to be pronounced (or in rare cases, written down) in order to be effective. In the pragmatic sense, their illocutionary force (cf. Austin 1955: 94–108) is directed towards the demon, the saint or the sickness itself. For instance, a demon can be ordered to leave the body of the possessed, and a saint can be implored for assistance. Even the disease itself, be it an *evil eye* sickness or a wart, can also be ordered to “begone”.

In the first place magical rites act upon their object directly without any mediation by a spiritual agent; moreover, their effectiveness is automatic. However, as far as these two properties are concerned, the first is not universal, since it is admitted that magic – in its degenerate phase, when it became contaminated by religion – has borrowed figures of gods and demons from religion [...] in the cases where we have intermediaries, the magical rite acts on them in the same way as it does on external phenomena; magic forces and constrains, while religion conciliates. This last property, which seems to distinguish magic from religion in every case where there is a temptation to confuse the two, remains [...] the most general feature of magic. (Maus 2001: 16).

The afflicted person – or other bystanders – need not, and ought not, make out the exact words of the charm, since this might be detrimental to their magic force; moreover, murmuring or whispering them adds to the effect of the supernatural powers of the charmer (cf. Ruff 2003: 159).

Also, those informants who claim to have knowledge of verbal charms usually do not readily share them in the interview situation. As already mentioned, this is partly due to the knowledge being part of a family tradition, which entails responsibility in dealing with it. However, in the interview situation there is yet an-



other reason why some informants say that they could not possibly cite the magic formula, as exemplified by Doña Generosa's (CbGI, Cerro Largo) statements:

(15)

E2: *¿y cómo son esas palabras?*

G: *¡ah!, yo qué sé, fulano ta, mhmhmh*

E2: *mh*

E: *¿pero no te acordás las palabras?*

G: *sí, pero ta, ¡pará!*

E: *pero es un secreto*

G: *¡claro!, no te las voy a decir, yo qué sé*

E: *¡ah!, no se dicen así*

G: *no*

E: *sólo cuando se hacen*

G: *sólo cuando se necesita la persona*

As on other occasions, Doña Generosa is adamant in her conviction that the words of the charms cannot simply be said aloud, because the very act of pronouncing them is identical to the act of applying the magic. In other words, the performative nature of the formula is so deeply ingrained in its vocalization that the locutionary and the illocutionary act must be seen as one and the same. In magic matters, there is no saying without doing. This general rule also seems to guide Doña Bernardina (CbGII, Treinta y Tres), who in the following passage still finds a way around this impediment:

(16)

E: *¿Cómo hace con el ojeo?*

B: *bueno, el ojeo yo se lo hago a dedo*

E: *mh*

B: *o sí no, con carbones; ¿No?*

E: *¿Cómo?*

B: *por ejemplo, con carbones uno agarra una brasita y un vaso de agua, entonces ahí va, hace la bendecura sobre el vaso de agua y si el carbón va al fondo, ta ojeado*

I: *ah sí, yo lo vi*

B: *y a vece hasta se parte al medio cuando están muy ojeado*

E: *ahá*

E2: *¿Y si queda arriba?*

B: *si queda arriba, no tiene, no ta ojeado*

E2: *ah, no*

B: *no es ojeo*

E: *mh*

E: *y que, ¿y usted tiene que decir una bendecura mientras hace eso con el carbón?*

B: *¡ah!, sí*

E: *¿Qué dice, cuál es la bendecura?*

B: *bueno, se la hago a ella*

E: *bueno*

B: *si está ojeada, si me la ojearon, ya, ya se compone, [laughter] por ejemplo, ella se llama Iris,*

E: *sí*

B: *bueno, yo le digo Ramona*

E: *sí*

B: *le digo: "Ramona, tu madre te parió, tu madre te lambió, y Dios te criará, si quebranto tú tenés yo te lo curaré, en el nombre del Padre, el Hijo, el Espíritu Santo, amén", y ahí echo el carbón al agua o hago así, ¿no?*

E: *lo tira para atrás*

B: *si no lo benzo, si no lo benzo con agua*

I: *si es sin carbón no*

B: *si no lo benzo con carbones yo lo tiro atrás así con mi mano nomás, ¿No?, eso le hago tres veces, ¿No?*

E: *¿Tres veces seguidas o tres veces en el mismo día?*

B: *en el, la misma bendicencia se la hago tres veces, tres veces al día*

E: *ahá, ahá*

E2: *y con la mano derecha eh, hace*

E: *la señal de la cruz*

E2: *la señal de la cruz*

B: *claro, me persigno [= persino], le hago: "En el nombre del Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo, amén", me persino yo*

Note that instead of simply quoting the formula against the *mal de ojo* – apparently a gradable sickness (*cuando están muy ojeado*) – she says that she is going to “apply it” to her daughter for the demonstration (*se la hago a ella*). However, presumably in an effort to avert a potential magical disorder by directing a charm towards a person who does not actually require it, she changes her daughter’s actual name, *Iris*, to *Ramona* in the act of doing it.

## Examples of verbal charms for curing various kinds of disorders

As seen above, it is usually only with difficulty that an outsider can come by the actual magic formula that is used in a given ritual. This section will look briefly at some of the charms that were indeed shared with the interviewers – either because the interviewees were not dogmatic about the secrecy or out of sheer altruism – beginning with the formula used in the ritual described in the preceding section (“*Ramona, tu madre te parió, tu madre te lambió, y Dios te criará, si quebranto tú tenés yo te lo curaré, en el nombre del Padre, el Hijo, el Espíritu Santo, amén*” [“*Ramona, your mother has born you, your mother has licked you, and God will bring you up, if you have some kind of rupture I will cure it, in the name of the*

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen”]). The formula is a variation of a traditional Uruguayan verse quoted in Roberto Bouton’s book on rural life in Uruguay (1961: 504, 520). A similar variant is also cited by another informant (Doña Lucía; CbGII, Durazno): “*Yo te paro, yo te crío, en el nombre de Dios y de la Virgen María yo te curo del ojo*.” [“I give birth to you, I bring you up, in the name of God and the Virgin Mary I cure you from evil eye”]. While the variation of the verse is a typical feature of oral traditions, the fact that it is combined with a complete formula or elements of liturgical origin can be viewed as typical of popular Latin American Catholicism, which is often represented by laypersons who invoke the Divine Spirit, the Virgin Mary or various saints in order to take control of their own fate instead of relying on official representatives of the Church. This form of subjective faith constitutes an element of personal liberation, e.g. taking the form of small interventions in the domain of individual health, as in this case, but has sometimes also been at the root of political campaigns for independence in Latin America (cf. Dussel 1988). Using verbal magic is therefore a strategy of personal liberation by taking matters into one’s own hands (or creating the illusion of doing so).

Finally, a few structural observations about the charm itself may be made. First, the name of the person is pronounced, thus gaining power over it. We again see the close relationship between the “thing” itself and the word it is called by.<sup>14</sup> The verse starts with a half rhyme (*parió* – *lambió*) in two otherwise identical sentences. However, the rhyme pattern is not maintained and is even broken, both in sound and in grammatical structure ([a] vs. [o], future tense vs. past tense), in the following line (ending in *criará*), thus creating a contrast between the elements invoked: the mother and God, representing the biological and the spiritual foundation of the charm, or possibly the pagan and the Christian that converge in the magical traditions of Uruguay. Without speculating further on the origin and exact symbolic meaning of each of the words uttered, it is obvious that elements from church liturgy and folk traditional elements are combined, whereas the charm is accompanied by a series of operations and gestures that bear a similar mark of syncretism. When the ritual involves some kind of verbal utterance,<sup>15</sup> the procedure is known as a *bencedura* (written with a <c> in the literary tradition of

14 This makes the exchanging of the real name with a fake one even more plausible. If name and name-bearer are considered a unity, changing the name is enough to deflect potential harm from its owner (see also the section about tabooed personal names in Frazer (1951)).

15 When this is not the case, the procedure is often called a *simpatía*, but again the terminological borders are fuzzy.

Uruguay, despite its Portuguese origin, cf. Faget 2012: 22), which is derived from the Portuguese verb *benzer* ('to bless somebody').

From the charm used to diagnose and cure an evil eye spell, we now turn to a more profane example: hiccups. Here, a combination of words and actions is again used. Clearly, hiccups are a minor inconvenience, not a disease. Still, the beliefs surrounding their treatment are a good example of magical thinking and practice. In addition to putting a piece of red wool on the forehead, Doña Olga (CaGII, Durazno) recommends saying the verse "*Hipo tengo, hipo me dio, Dios me lo dio y Dios me lo quitará, ya se me quitó*" ['Hiccup I have, hiccup I got, God gave it to me, God will take it from me, it's gone already'] three times in a row without taking a breath. We see here that the hiccup is seen as something imposed by God, and it is therefore perfectly reasonable to appeal to God in order to get rid of it. Like the example considered at the beginning of this section, the verse is quite simple but doesn't maintain a clear rhyme scheme. Unlike poetry, the main function of the magic verse is not to be aesthetically pleasing but to fix a problem. Therefore, rather than being acoustically harmonious and syntactically symmetrical, the magic formula works best if it is a little odd in these respects. Another part of the procedure is holding one's breath. Since hiccups are caused by an involuntary contraction of the diaphragm, this measure alone may have an effect on the respiratory system as well as on the vagus nerve. The magic charm will also have psychological effects on the person concerned. Clearly, psychological aspects also play an important role in the recovery from more serious diseases as the overall state of the immune system is not independent of mood. Mood, in turn, can be influenced by language in many ways. Whether evil eye disease or hiccups, each disease has a specific treatment but responds to the same basic necessities. Like a mother blowing the pain away or caressing a bruise, the sick person feels better because something is being done about the problem. Whatever the psychological or anthropological interrelations may be, for the informants a spoken formula is considered a vital part of the remedy.

This is also true for the disease *empacho*, which, like *mal de ojo*, is a classic menace to the health of Uruguayan children. Like evil eye, it is not entirely clear whether *empacho* is somatic or spiritual in nature or cause. Sometimes, *empacho* is even believed to be the result of an evil eye look. At any rate, its effects are indigestion and stomach ache. As the informant Don Luis (CaGI, Durazno), who was very skeptical of the whole *curandera* tradition, put it: *como nos decía una vez un médico, los niños se empachan si los padres creen en el empacho* [as a doctor once told us, the children get *empacho* disease if their parents believe in it]. Again, Doña Bernardina (CbGII, Treinta y Tres) and Doña Lucía (CbGII, Durazno) have

very similar versions of a formula to counter an *empacho*, as displayed here side by side:

(17)

Doña Bernardina

*comida mal comida,*

*agua mal bebida*

*comida empataada*

*o viento enganado*

*no me cortes con cuchillo*

*ni con hoja de cortar*

*te cortaré con las palabras*

*mantfjimas [=santísimas] de Dios*

*y el Espíritu Santo, amén*

Doña Lucía

*Agua mal bebida,*

*bocau mal comido*

*no se corta con cuchillo*

*ni con cosa de cortar,*

*se corta con las palabra*

*de la Santísima Trinidad*

Again, we see the typical variation of a verse that is passed on through oral tradition. The two first lines are inverted but otherwise identical. Not by chance, the variation is mostly limited to the parts that do not rhyme and are therefore harder to remember. Due to grammatical concordance in gender, though, the final vowel in *comido* changes to [o] in Doña Lucía's version because of the noun selected (*bocado* 'a bite' instead of *comida* 'food'). We see how changing a lexical element from within the verse can change the whole rhyme. Doña Bernardina's version is a bit longer, having another couplet in the middle, but all of the first section seems to be about naming or summoning the potential causes for the stomach ache, which, as in previous examples, is done in order to gain power over them. The versions differ in the next section. While Doña Bernardina's version reads 'don't cut me with a knife', Doña Lucía says 'it is not with a knife that one cuts [you]', which is most probably the original version, given the ending which states that the *empacho* can be 'cut' by holy words. The fact that Doña Bernardina's version does not really make sense in this textual detail is not necessarily a disadvantage. As seen before, a charm that is a little odd and mysterious may be viewed as particularly powerful by those who believe in them. What is explicitly stated, however, is that the holy words of God and the Holy Spirit (or the Holy Trinity, in the other version) are seen as the most powerful tool against the sickness, more powerful even than a knife. This line of the formula sums up the whole belief system behind the practice of curing by words as represented by these two *curanderas*, who would adamantly defend the effectiveness of their charms, or as Doña Lucía puts it: *enseguidita sana* [you're cured instantly].

Here are several further charms:

- To cure a headache, Doña Bernardina has the following remedy: "*Santa Lucía tenía tres hija, una bencia ataque de cabeza, otra bencia dolor de estómago, otra bencia dolor de barriga*" ["Saint Lucy had three daughters, one blessed headache, one blessed stomach ache and one blessed bellyache"], which is supposed to be pronounced three times, followed by "En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, del Espíritu Santo, amén".
- To cure herpes, Doña Lucía has two formulas, one for each name that the disease goes by in the region (*culebrilla* and *cobrero*, derived from portuguese *cobreiro*): 1. "*Cobrero bravo, yo te corto el rabo, te corto la cola y la mitad del rabo*" ["Wild *cobrero*, I will cut your tail, I will cut your tail and half of your tail"<sup>16</sup>], accompanied by cutting through the air three times with a knife; 2. "*San Pedro, con qué se cura la culebrilla, con la rama del monte y el agua de río, en el nombre del Padre y del hijo de María*" ["Saint Peter, with what do you cure the *culebrilla*, with a twig from the forest and water from the river, in the name of the Father and the Son of Mary"], making the sign of the cross three times.
- To cure an "air disease", diagnosed by sudden indisposition and a sore throat, Doña Lucía recommends: "*el aire del sol, el aire de la noche, el aire del sereno, el aire de la, de la mañana, el aire de la madrugada, el aire del sol, el aire del sereno*" ["the air of the sun, the air of the night, the air of the evening, the air of the morning, the air of the dusk, the air of the sun, the air of the evening"], spoken three times and followed by "*Yo te pido en el nombre de Dios y de la Virgen María que te libre del aire*" ["in the name of God and the Virgin Mary I ask you that you be free of the air"] and making the sign of the cross three times.
- To cure an *ingua*, i.e. an inflammation of the lymphatic ganglions of the groin and armpit areas, Doña Bernardina says a *benedicere* towards a star: "*estrella, quiero que vivas tú y muera ella*" ["star, I want you to live and her [i.e. the ingua] to die"], pronounced three times on three nights in a row while making a sign of the cross in the direction of the inflamed region.
- To get rid of warts, Doña María Dolores (CbGII, Lavalleja) suggests putting the same number of grains of salt into an envelope as one has warts on the body, saying: "*Verrugas traigo, verrugas vendo, aquí las dejo y salgo corriendo*" ["Warts I bring, warts I sell, I'll leave them here and run away"]. The envelopes are then left on the ground for someone else to pick up. The warts will then be passed on to that person. Note that in this trick, no appeal to God is made. It

16 In Spanish, *cola* and *rabo* are two words for 'tail'.

could be considered a mild case of *brujería*, as one person is cured, but to the disadvantage of another, albeit due to his or her own curiosity.

We see that there are charms for quite a lot of different conditions, many of which, however, are unspecific illnesses that may be symptoms or epiphenomena of a generally weakened immune system, such as sore throat, headache and skin diseases. The specific formula is usually short and simple, its power depending in most cases on the invocation of a divine being and an accompanying gesture. For the present topic, it is important to remember that it is essentially the words themselves that are believed to have the ability to cure.

The last case will make clear something that has already been mentioned in passing, namely that the charm is not aimed at the sick person directly, which is why he or she does not need to hear or understand it clearly. This is also evident in that a charm can be used to cure animals, as in the following account by Don José (CbGII, Durazno):

(18)

J: [...] había un potrillo y era muy arisco era muy cimarrón, se había, lo habíamos castrado y se había abichau y yo digo pa estarlo volteando todos los día pa curar este animal lo vamo a deshacer más, y vino un amigo, un conocido así y me dice: "Yo te voy a dar una simpatía", dice: "Que te garanto que lo curás", bueno, le digo: "Sí", dice: "Pero se la voy a decir a la señora porque vos no parás", si era cuando yo estaba en la policía que estaba en un destacamento, yo salía, dice: "Y ella está siempre en las casa, y ella se lo hace dos vece al día", dice: "Una de mañana y otra de tarde", dice: "Y en dos día o tres está sano", dice: "Contá, mirándolo, decí: 'Siete, cinco, tres, uno, que se te caigan los gusano hasta que no quede ninguno'", nada más; "Hacele dos vece al día", dice-

O: sí, pero, con el pastito, pero yo lo hacía con, con el medio del nudo del pasto, le contaba eso, de atrás para adelante

J: y sanó, a los tres, cuatro día estaba sano otra vez

O: o de adelante para atrás viene a ser

E: ¿cómo, de adelante para atrás?

O: seguro, sí

J: si contar de, de, de siete, hasta el uno y contás salteado siempre los none, "siete, tres, cinco, uno, que se te caigan los gusano hasta no quedar ninguno"

E: ¿y se curó?

J: y se curó

O: se curó sí

J: se curó, a los tres, cuatro día estaba sano

O: y era en enero, febrero, imagínese, unos soles tremendo, la mosca trabajaba horrible

J: él me decía, dice: "Vos sabés que yo estaba en una estancia", dice: "Y había un toro malísimo", dice, "Y se había abichau, y cómo iba a agarrar el toro yo!", dice: "Me enseñaron esa simpatía, se la hice, lo curé", dice

We see how a charm is used as the ultimate coping strategy. The problem is two-fold: the bull (or the colt) is bug-ridden but too rambunctious and fierce to approach. The charm therefore allows the charmer to work from a safe distance. Instead of interacting with the world of objects and states of affairs, the charmer acts upon the symbolic world created by language.

## Concluding observations

As we have seen, the act of curing by words relies on a few basic principles. First and foremost, it is through language that a secondary, symbolic level is created, on which the problem can subsequently be acted upon, also symbolically. In other words, returning to the quote from Todorov (1970) prefacing this article, the devil and the monsters that the *curanderas* have created through language are henceforth subject to their will. Unlike in literature, however, in magic thinking there is no boundary between the symbolic and the object world that it refers to (cf. Schröder 2009: 237; see also Cassirer 1953: 48). Saying a magic formula is performative *per se*, as we have seen in the examples above. The *curanderas* cannot simply quote the verse, but have to apply it to someone. This is the pragmatic side of verbal magic, i.e. how the charmer tries to influence the object world by manipulating the symbolic world.

The practice of verbal magic needs to be seen within its social context, though, because the communication situation involves people other than the charmer alone. The afflicted person is usually present, but is not the person spoken to. He or she isn't even supposed to understand the words pronounced on his or her behalf, as these are commonly mumbled or whispered. Yet it is important that he or she hear that they are, in fact, pronounced. All of these elements show that verbal magic is embedded in a complex system of customs, beliefs and social relations. As we have seen, inside this system it is generally more important that something is said in the presence of others than what is actually said. Nevertheless, both the healer and the patient attribute extraordinary healing power to the words spoken, which makes the procedure of curing by words a unique category of human communication. From the perspective of the healer, who actually knows what is being said, the charms are conventional formulas, learned and passed on through oral tradition. In other words, the power lies within the spells themselves, not within the charmer.



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## Translations

(1)

J: All of these were things, all of these were things of yore, when there were no doctors, now I take you to the doctor's and he shoots you an antibiotic, he gives-, and soon you are better, but before that didn't exist, in the countryside there were no doctors nor anything else, only potion mixers.

(2)

E2: Could you say that you are a curandera [= healer] or is a curandera something else?

B: I wouldn't say curandera

E2: No? What is a curandera?

B: These are things that you learn when you have children and work in the countryside, you know? In the countryside you are far away from the doctor and from everything

E: Sure

B: That is why I picked it up

E2: And curanderas know a lot more, or what is the difference?

B: Ah yes! Curanderas are curanderas

E2: They are

B: They know what I know but they are real curanderas, people activate them

E2: Ah!

B: For one thing or another, see?

E: Ah! But they know more or less the same things as you do, they do the same things you do?

B: If it is for children, yes

E: For curing, yes?

B: Me, for example, I don't understand anything about *porquería* [= filthy stuff], see?

E: What do you mean, *porquería*? What is that?

B: Witchcraft, let's say

E: Ah! And a curandera does, does she?

B: Yes, yes there are curanderas, sure, there are curanderas for those kinds of things, for example, sometimes someone falls sick and they are brought to the doctor's and they are

*auscultated and they do not know what he has and it is some kind of filthy spell that has been cast upon them*

E: mh

B: *They go to a curandero and he or she is cured, mh*

(3)

*[...] they give them the evil eye because they are infatuated with the child, for example, you see a child and you like it and play with it, or even the child's own parents, when the children are asleep, and they just talk to them and look at them, and that's when they give them the evil eye, and be careful with the evil eye because the doctors don't understand it, what I do when my daughters come in from the fields and they are sick in the stomach and I note that something has befallen them, I charm them and I'll tell you, say that to anyone, to any doctor, I know them all, I charmed them for this, because to me it is about this, but if you bring them to a doctor and they'll tell me that everything is alright*

(4)

E: *And sometimes even the doctor will send a patient to the curandera, won't he?*

W: *Yes, if he sees that it is not for him, yes*

R: *Ah, yes they do send them*

E2: *And the doctor probably knows why, doesn't he?*

E: *The culebrilla [= herpes zoster], for example*

W: *Sure, for that they will send you*

R: *Yes, from that they will cure you, see?*

W: *The doctors won't cure it*

(5)

J: *But, here in Durazno, no, there was a case here but they brought him to Paso de los Toros where there was a Brazilian, that curandero was really good, he cured, there was an old man there who tended to the football lottery, and there was a black man there who had fallen ill, he worked for OSE, they brought him to the hospital, he was out of luck, he was dying, and the doctors couldn't figure out what he had, he told me that a doctor said to him in the hospital: "Do you want me to bring you to a curandero?", he said: "I'll bring you to Paso de los Toros, there is a very good curandero there", he said, well, "Yes", the man said, he worked for OSE over there, and he said "Yes, sure, let's go", he went to the curandero and the curandero saw him and said: "Yes, I will cure you", well, he did some things to him, he gave him some remedies to drink, some potions, whatever, and said: "Well, you can go and stop worrying, tomorrow at one o'clock at night" he said, "you will stink from your body but you yourself won't notice the stench you will emit, it is unbearable, but you will be cured", the old man went to see him at one o'clock and he says that there was a stench coming from the body that not even he could tolerate, but he was cured, until this day, the old man who had taken him to the curandero died a few years back because he was an old man, but the black man lives to this date, he's retired now*

O: *I'm not sure whether he's retired*

J: *Healthy, and the doctors could not figure out what he had*

O: *They couldn't even move his stomach, because he wasn't moving his stomach, sometimes—*

J: *It seems that it was an obstruction that he had inside that could not be moved by anything, and the curandero with his potions, the nonsense that he gave him*

E: *Cured him with that*

J: *With that he cured him*

(6)

E: *And where did you learn it?*

B: *A neighbor taught me*

E: *Ah*

B: *An old lady*

E: *And now you are going to teach one of your daughters?*

B: *Yes, well no, that is something you have to keep to yourself, I'm telling you because you're not from here and of course you want to learn*

(7)

H: *Because the moment that I teach others*

C: *My daughters have asked to be taught-*

E: *-Ah, yes*

H: *I will have to give up the practice*

E: *Ah... sure*

H: *When I teach somebody else I will have to give it up*

C: *We have another daughter who wants to be taught but he won't allow it*

E: *Ah, sure*

H: *Eh, as I have many people*

E: *Ah, yes*

H: *who already have faith in me... who come to me and bring me their children and...*

E: *Ah, yes*

H: *elderly people to charm, I can't simply leave*

E: *No, of course, yes*

H: *And me teaching you, I don't even teach my children because if I teach them, I have taught him, he has to go on and I can't go on*

E: *Yes, yes, are you going to pass on this knowledge to only one of your children... or to several of them?*

C: *No*

H: *No... I think that at the moment that I leave it I can teach two of my children*

(8)

E: *Yes, yes, and that is a power that has come upon you?-*

C: *It is from God*

E: *From, from your mother?*

C: *No, from God*

H: *No, she taught me-*

C: *-Because he didn't know*

H: *Some benceduras [= charms]*

E: *Ah, yes, mh*

H: *But God has taught me others*

E: *Ah, yes*

H: *Because nobody showed me anymore, she only showed me two benceduras*

E: *Mh*

H: *The bencedura of the air, you sometimes catch an air draught*

E: *Ah, yes*

H: *You take off your clothes when your body is hot, and you catch a blow of air on your back*

E: *Ah, yes, sure*

H: *No?*

E: *Mh*

H: *So that one she taught me*

E: *Yes*

H: *But God showed me these others because nobody else taught me*

E: *Ah, yes*

H: *And God gave me this, this power, others*

E: *Yes*

H: *So in order to charm I*

E: *Yes*

H: *I first pray to God*

E: *Yes*

H: *And beg for power from him*

(9)

E: *Ah! And those are things you don't know?*

B: *No! And I don't even want to know*

E2: *But there is no difference between-*

B: *But I think, I think there is, I believe*

E: *Mh, mh*

B: *There is a very big difference*

E2: *Mh*

B: *To cure a child or to cure a malicious spell, there is a big difference, eh?*

E2: *But for witchcraft, is it not the witches that do witchcraft?*

B: *They are the same witches*

E2: *Is a curandera the same as a witch?*

B: *Sometimes they are, because you either pay them to cure a person or you pay them to kill a person*

E2: *Are there any here?*

I: *There are*

E2: *Curanderas and witches?*

B: *There are, yes*

(10)

R: *There are good and evil*

E: *Aha*

R: *Because you go and let yourself be charmed when you have herpes, and she will cure you, but if you go on and gossip she might give you a double, do you understand what I'm trying to say? There are curanderas and curanderas*

(11)

L: *I'm laughing because they are going to say over there that you were in the house of a witch*

E: *No! But, eh? Is there a difference between a lady that cures like you and a witch?*

L: *There is, of course, because it's the sorcerer who does evil, on the contrary*

E: *Gualichos [= an evil spirit from Mapuche mythology]*

L: *Sure, and it is something he does for money*

E2: *Ah, that's why*

E: *And you, you don't take money?*

L: *No, no, no, on the contrary, if they paid me for something like this I wouldn't accept it because I wish the person to be cured and if I can teach a person, see? I'm telling you these things confidentially, but I couldn't tell them to another person because the first thing he or she would say would be: "She's a witch", it's the first word that comes out, although, in reality, it is something good that one is doing*

(12)

I: *[Are there] also witches?*

B: *There are, yes*

E: *How?*

B: *How could there be no witches?*

I: *They go and buy a book and already they know*

B: *How could there not be [witches], they go to the other side [of the border] and buy books and they know everything, because over there they sell their books*

E: *Aha! In Brazil*

(13)

E: *What kind of sympathies? Do you remember a specific one used to cure?*

I: *Sure, the problem is that the curandera that charms you, doesn't say the charms aloud*

R: *Ah, no [-? -]*

W: *You'll never make out what she says because you can't hear it properly*

(14)

E2: *What words does the person speak?*

M: *Ah! That I don't know because only she knows, see?*

E: *Does she speak them in Spanish or Portuguese?*

M: *Ah, in Brazilian, I believe*

E: *You believe in Brazilian?*

M: *Yes*

E2: *Does she speak them in a low voice?*

M: *Very softly, only to herself she speaks them*

(15)

E2: *And what are those words?*

G: *Ah!, I don't know, somebody is, mhmhmh*

E2: *Mh*

E: *But you don't remember the words?*

G: *Yes, but they are, wait!*

E: *But they are secret*

G: *Sure! I won't tell them you, I don't know, they are not spoken simply like that*

G: *No*

E: *Only when they are done*

G: *Only when a person is in need of them*

(16)

E: *What do you do about evil eye?*

B: *Well, the evil eye I diagnose with the fingers*

E: *Mh*

B: *Or otherwise with pieces of coal, see?*

E: *How?*

B: *For example, with pieces of coal you pick up an ember and a glass of water, then you speak the charm over the glass of water and if the piece of coal sinks to the bottom the person has evil eye*

I: *Ah yes, I have seen that*

B: *And sometimes it breaks in half when the person has a very bad case of evil eye*

E: *Aha*

E2: *And what if the piece of coal floats?*

B: *If it floats, the person doesn't have evil eye*

E2: *Ah, no*

B: *It's not evil eye*

E: *Mh*

E: *And do you have to say a *bencedura* [= charm] while you do that with the coal?*

B: *Ah, yes*

E: *What do you say? What is the charm?*

B: *Well, I will apply it to her*

E: *Alright*

B: *If she has evil eye, she will yet be cured [laughter], for example, her name is Iris*

E: *Yes*

B: *Well, I will call her Ramona*

E: *Yes*

B: *I say to her: "Ramona, your mother has born you, your mother has licked you, and God will bring you up, if you have some kind of rupture I will cure it, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen", and with that I throw the piece of coal into the water and do this*

E: *You throw it back*

B: *If I do not charm, if I don't charm with water*

I: *If it is done with coal, no*

B: *If I don't charm with coal I throw it back with my hand like this, right? I do this three times, see?*

E: *Three times in a row or three times on the same day?*

B: *During the same charm I do it three times, three times a day*

E: *Aha, aha*

E2: *And with your right hand you make*

E: *the sign of the cross*

E2: *the sign of the cross*

B: *Sure, I cross myself and say to her: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen", I cross myself*

(17)

Doña Bernardina

Doña Lucía

*Food badly eaten*

*Water badly drunk*

*water badly drunk*

*a bite badly eaten*

*food undecided*

*or wind gone astray*

*don't cut me with a knife*

*is not cut by knife*

*nor with a cutting blade*

*nor thing to cut*

*I will cut you with the holy*

*it is cut with the words*

*words from God*

*of the Holy Trinity*

*and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

(18)

J: [...] *there was a foal and it was very rambunctious, very wild, we had castrated it and it had been befallen by vermin, and I said if we have to knock this animal over each day in order to cure it we will harm it even more, and there came a friend, an acquaintance of mine and told me: "I will give you a sympathy", he said, "I guarantee you that you cure it with that", "Well", I said "Yes", and he said: "But I will tell your wife because you don't stop [= you are hardly ever around]", because it was when I worked in the police force and I was often gone to detachment, he said: "And she is always at home, and she will do this twice a day", he said, "once in the morning and again in the afternoon", he said, "and within two days it will be cured", he said, "look at the animal and count: seven, five, three, one, let the worms fall off you until there is none left", nothing else, "do this twice a day", he said-*  
O: *Yes, but, with a little grass, but I did it with, half of a bunch of grass, I counted to him, from back to front*

J: *And it was cured, within three or four days it was healthy again*

O: *Or from front to back, that is*

E: *How from front to back?*

O: *Sure, yes*

J: *Yes, counting from seven to one and you count, always skipping the even numbers, "seven, three, five, one, let the worms fall off you until there is none left"*

E: *And was it cured?*



*J: It was cured*

*O: It was cured, yes*

*J: It was cured, in three, four days it was healthy again*

*O: And that was in February, imagine that, in the burning sun when the flies are working terribly*

*J: And he said to me, he said: You know that I worked on a farm", he said, "and there was a really evil bull", he said, "and it had been befallen by vermin, and how was I supposed to grab the bull!", he said, "Someone taught me this sympathy, I applied it to the bull and I cured it, he said"*