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ANALYSIS AND RECOVERY TO POPULAR SINGING PLAYGROUND GAME FOR KINDERGARTEN KIDS: “HILITOS, HILITOS DE ORO”

Jesus Alberto Leyva Ortiz

Benemérita y Centenaria Escuela Normal del Estado de San Luis Potosí (San Luis Potosí State Teacher Training College); Academic Body of contemporary literature: BCENE 06
ORCID: 0000-0002-8892-7446

Nayla Jimena Turrubiarres Cerino

Benemérita y Centenaria Escuela Normal del Estado de San Luis Potosí (San Luis Potosí State Teacher Training College); Academic Body of contemporary literature: BCENE 06
ORCID:0000-0002-8908-505X

Víctor Hugo Vázquez Reyna

Benemérita y Centenaria Escuela Normal del Estado de San Luis Potosí (San Luis Potosí State Teacher Training College)
Academic Group of Contemporary Literature: BCENE 06
ORCID: 0009-0006-9738-7062

Nubia Marissa Colunga Trejo

Benemérita y Centenaria Escuela Normal del Estado de San Luis Potosí (San Luis Potosí State Teacher Training College)
Academic Group of Contemporary Literature: BCENE 06
ORCID: 0009-0005-5851-7867

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Abstract: This article analyzes a traditional Mexican children's game called "Hilitos, hilitos de oro", its structure, linguistic functions and implications as a children's game in order to make a proposal of inclusion for current preschool children in Mexico. The intention is that the reading of this document will motivate the basic education teacher to include a traditional round in his proposal to work with children in the classroom both for psychomotor development and in their orality or use of language, in addition to showing empathy towards others, establishing and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and developing a sense of community.

Keywords: children's round, preschool, play, learning, preschool pupils

INTRODUCTION

Nothing is far from tradition, we ourselves are its living product, what we do based on our thinking has an attachment to traditions. From the way we express our faith to the way we play has to do with them. We remember playing the spinning top as children many times, just as our parents and grandparents did; so it happened with marbles and so many other games that we Mexicans have in common.

We are a people heir to pre-Hispanic traditions, but also Hispanic, we have adapted and adopted, we have broken and rebuilt them in order to create what we now call Mexican traditions, making them our own. And just as for men and women, by inheriting the culture of our ancestors, and adapting it to the present we have had an evolution in order to get used to today's way of living.

This is the case with the popular rondas. A ronda is a children's game that is taught from generation to generation, it has been transmitted orally and its source is the romances, a poetic composition that

emerged in the Renaissance in Spain and that reflects its most singular expression of daily life, anonymous and popular. All these compositions are called Romancero (González, 1971).

Here is a popular round:

Little threads, little threads of gold
that are breaking me,
that the king commands to say
how many daughters he will have.

That I have the ones I had
that nothing matters to the king.
I am already leaving disconsolate
to give the news to the king.

Come back, come back gentleman
do not be so rude,
that of the daughters I have
choose the most female.

I do not choose it because it is pretty
nor do I choose her for a woman,
what I want is a pink one
just born.

Popular round.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Mercedes Díaz Roig, it contains 42 versions, but there are many others in America: "seven of them coincide with witnesses from the other American countries: *Hilitos de oro*, *Delgadina*, *Las señas del esposo*, *Bernal Francés*, *Mambrú*, *Don Gato*, and *La adúltera*" (Díaz, 2003). For the author *Hilitos de Oro* is a version very similar to the Spanish one, the difference is given in the change of words only that does not modify the original story, in this respect she points out:

...in *Hilitos de oro* the usual Spanish opening, "De Francia vengo, seõra, / de por hilo portugués" (I come from France, my lady, / for Portuguese thread) is changed to "Hilitos, hilitos de oro, / que se me vienen quebrando" (Little threads, little golden threads, / which

are always breaking for me) or “Angel de oro,/ arenitas de un marqués” (Golden angel,/ sands of a marquis) and their variants, but similar openings are found in other regions of Spain and in several American countries. (Díaz, 2003,626)

The Spanish origin and antiquity of this round can also be corroborated with what Gonzalez mentions: “The oldest romances were made in verses of sixteen syllables, divided in hemistichs of eight, with uniform assonance” (González, 1971); the text presented here contains 16 octosyllabic verses; however, in the version compiled by Gabriel Zaid in his *Ómnibus de poesía mexicana* there are 9 verses in which seven of them are composed of sixteen syllables. This author also emphasizes under the title of *hilitos de oro* that it belongs to a version for children’s games (Zaid, 1995).

It is clear then that orality has done its part over time by adapting to the region and its vocabulary; however, this particular round has remained in force, albeit with minor changes only in form for the most part, but in history intact.

What can children like in this round? It is the first question I ask myself in this attempt to understand the text and the answer is in the rhythm, we are rhythmic beings, we have the cardiac for example, but we also manifest others when we walk or talk. As a child I liked rhythms, the easy and simple ones, those of which there is not much awareness until you have the acuity or the academic obligation to do so; however it is the rhythm that is important.

Why do I like *Cri Cri*, “There in the fountain there was a little stream / it became big, it became small / it was in a bad mood, poor little stream was hot”; it is the rhythm again, the verse itself marks the sound, the tonic syllables are always the same throughout the verses, so the second, fourth, sixth and tenth syllables will always sound. In the case

of *Hilitos de oro*, it is given in the second, fourth and seventh or eighth syllables; it is a little music box that when opened or read as in this case, will sound rhythmically the same. Who does not like to open music boxes? It is understandable then that this simple form of versification is aimed at a child listener so that it is the phonetics that frames the entertainment and attraction for the text.

The text itself is important, what does it say then. Here I confess that my initial prejudices did not let me move forward, Gadamer already says: “it is the unperceived prejudices that with their dominance turn us deaf towards the thing of which the tradition speaks to us.” (Gadamer, 2001). My short and adult eyes told me that it is a child’s thing; but it is not so, now the child and the adult that I am interact in my mind as in a dimension that was opened thanks to the text, the meeting point.

The text implies two interlocutors, it is an exchange between sender and receiver and vice versa. The first initiates the dialogue as one who comes to chance or to the reason for interaction, it would seem that something is happening to him because there is agitation in him, even his threads are breaking because he comes so quickly to meet his interlocutor, but these threads are not of any kind, they are of gold, that gives a value to his clothes, who wears gold sewn but the courtiers, the opulence of the royal court. So much haste has a reason, he brings a message from the king, he asks then on behalf of the latter. “how many daughters will he have”.

Who does not feel annoyed or invaded by anger when a stranger touches the subject of the mother or daughters as is the case, the stranger then commits a first failed contact by asking such an intimate question to a stranger; it is natural then that discourtesy is answered, even if it comes in the name of the king: “Let him have those that he had / that nothing matters to the king”.

The king's errand boy then, not having achieved his goal, mentions to return to the addressee¹ taking as a message the discourtesy, time that the interviewee takes the opportunity to reflect on the origin of the interviewer and become aware of what his answer could imply, since it is certain that the king will take it as a lack of respect to such a high and distinguished character; so now he responds softening the tone and offering the messenger to choose the most feminine of all his daughters; of course, it is for a king.

The king's errand boy confirms that he does not want the most womanly or the prettiest, but a little rose just born, which may imply that he is not looking for any connotation of courtship, much less something erotic, nor the woman for the woman herself as a symbol of attraction, but something more tender, subtle, aromatic and mystical like a rose in bud, a little flower just born. The king has been struck by the beauty and candor of a little girl only; which implies that the royalty recognizes the beauty in his people and is capable of throwing flowers with the courtesy of his attention and oral expression, especially to the smallest whom he compares with dignity and politeness.

In *Hilitos de oro* there are positions of power, one is given by the king, the highest authority in colonial times. The monarch was the lord and master of the lands, goods and people. There is no other authority in the land than the king, above him, God. The other position of power is lower, it is a messenger of the king who intervenes on behalf of the monarch to interact with a father or mother of several daughters, this position makes him a means, but also an extension of the word or desire of a sovereign. Finally, the father or mother is the last position of power, the one with the lowest hierarchy, the one who is at the service of the first, the one who represents the people. It should not be forgotten that daugh-

1. In Greimas' actantial matrix, the addressee is the one who sends the object to an addressee.

ters are also characters referred to as objects of interest. And seen from a gender perspective (DOF, 2013), this round does not contain the conditions for change to allow progress in the construction of gender equality.

The roles of the characters are explicit in this round, two of them participating, the courtier on behalf of the king and the subject, people of the people; of course the monarch also counts, but here he is presented only as a secondary character: absent or referred to, even though he is still the highest authority in this communication, since both, courtier and subject always refer to him to celebrate this communicative act.

THEORETICAL BASIS.

In one version of the round, the protagonists are two, a mother and a prince, instead of "hilitos" they are called "hebritas" and the game consists of the mother marrying all the daughters to a prince, in essence it should be the same prince, but since two groups of children are participating, one of girls and the other of boys, the role of the prince varies with respect to the intervention of each child involved, they approach as princes on one foot or as little lamenesses and choose a partner until the mother (a single girl) is finally left alone by marrying all her daughters represented by the group of girls (Cruz, 1980).

If we go back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mexico, the game underlies a teaching or way of acting in the fact that the king disposes and the people obey, marrying a daughter to royalty is transcendent, but also connotes the fact that the mother fulfills the social task of offering her daughters in marriage, it is also important to note that the daughters do not intervene, nor the text itself, they never take the floor and that implies abiding by the provisions of the authorities, the mother in the family and the king in the so-

cial. Let us take into account that currently and even with these rounds, it is necessary to “promote the elimination of established stereotypes based on sex” (DOF, 2006).

The game in the 21st century has already taken on didactic uses in order to develop psychomotor skills, the ability to adopt roles, respect game rules, socialize with peers, learn to collaborate and work in teams.

In the pragmatic aspect of language, learning the rules in speech: one asks, the other answers, if one breaks courtesy it is likely that the other will do so as well, if the one who breaks courtesy is of a higher hierarchy, then the affected may yield to the needs of the sender and abide by provisions either by convenience, empathy, social roles or certain cultural values that force those interacting to submit to the prevailing tradition or custom in the social group to which they belong.

The humanistic approach of the current curricula proposed by the New Mexican School (NEM) proposes to favor the integral development of girls and boys through different types of languages used in playing, singing, reading, and diverse artistic expressions that are carried out in interaction with other girls and boys. It also mentions that by focusing preschool education on the human and community aspects, it favors the awareness of being an active part of a collective and the participation from diversity in the transformation towards a better community and country.

It is essential to develop social skills that allow children to relate positively with people of different ages and cultural contexts; to encourage the adoption of prosocial behaviors, which implies the development of rules for equal participation in games and activities; to propose rules of coexistence such as taking turns, resolving conflicts, sharing material, among others; to understand how their actions can affect themselves, others and others, and that the needs of each person are equally important. (p.55).

Daniel Cassany points out that: “The characteristics of a game are: - an important ludic and motivating component, / - the students are actively involved, / - there is a task to be performed or solved” (Cassany, 1994). And although in the didactic aspect *Hilitos de oro* fulfills these three characteristics, it is still an organized game without many options to vary it intentionally, unless the teacher shows great linguistic creativity to do so while combining physical activity. The round has a certain mechanical component, which makes us think that within the target child audience, this is limited to ages no older than 4 or 5 years, where the direction of the activity is established, you have to learn the simple mechanics and ready, the child acquires security by playing a restricted game, because repetition in children provides security, they like to know what will happen and doing so allows them to face communication without fear, they already know what to say. For children older than the age mentioned above, it would become a monotony, the older children expect more challenge, problems to solve and a certain freedom of action could apply better to the expectations of today’s children.

Hilitos de oro is an invitation to a role play, to understand the hierarchies that at the time of its creation were fundamental to survive in a world dominated by monarchs; underlying its structure is a mode of linguistic interaction and power that the child learns, with a certain subtle mischievousness that is quickly amended to rectify the behavior towards the designs of a king. On the other hand, the role of the mother whose task is to give her daughters in marriage and on the other, the function of an errand boy of the king who is an extension of the monarch’s word. It should not be forgotten that this round implies that the daughters obey dispositions and never take the floor.

The ronda is attractive in that it arises and is maintained from tradition, its popular origin celebrates the personality of a Spanish Renaissance people. The work is a piece preserved thanks to the custom and was inherited almost intact in Mexico, a country that assumed during the colonial era European ways of life and that gradually adapted to the way of being and perceiving the world in New Spain.

Hilitos de oro keeps an extraordinary phonetic register, given also in the tradition of romance and its modes of versification that by its tonic syllables highlight voice strokes that attracts and facilitates the singing, it is a piece that invites the encounter with the musicality of language, worthy for the entertainment of a rhythmic audience such as children, full of kings, princes, mothers and daughters who dream of marrying a monarch or prince although no one ever asks them in these rounds if they want it or not, it is taken for granted. The pretty little roses just born nod with their scent and go off to marriage leaving a trail of silence behind them.

Nowadays, due to the circumstances of the times in which we live, it is difficult for children to dedicate part of their childhood life to play together. This is due to their parents' way of life, the relevance given to technology as a form of entertainment, because they live in small spaces, do not have access to open air or the dynamics of a sedentary life does not allow them to take time to go out and play with other children. For these reasons, games or ludic activities are becoming less and less frequent, therefore, the school context becomes the ideal space where recreational practices and group games should be systematically and intentionally promoted to favor social skills and dynamize learning processes in educational contexts, in a didactic and pedagogical way, as well as to strengthen cultural identity. In this sense, traditional

games are part of the cultural heritage of the context and allow the identification of customs and traditions. In this regard, the Synthetic Program of Studies of Preschool Education (2024) refers that

Both at home and in other contexts of their community, girls and boys build a sense of identity, belonging and mutual help that is reinforced by sharing upbringing styles, historical ties, traditions and customs that unite the past with the present and contribute to the construction of possible futures (p.43).

Play has great value for preschool age, and in fact it is considered as a methodological strategy to develop competencies, skills and knowledge of children considering a pedagogical intention and the expected learning from the needs and interest of each school group, through play infants can reach complex levels of learning by the initiative they show. Traditional play is a cultural element and a generational reflection of the experiences and customs of society. In the educational context, it is a didactic resource that favors interaction, socialization and the exchange of knowledge, which leads to cognitive and social-emotional development, the construction of meanings and cultural identity, in a spontaneous manner, while favoring sociocultural development.

In this sense, the perspective of the New Mexican School (NEM), the current curriculum for early childhood, preschool, primary and secondary education in Mexico, legitimizes through its program the community and cultural aspects and places children "in the territory, as part of the story, the narratives, the readings, the songs and the poems. Making children protagonists and participants in the appropriation and revitalization of languages" (SEP, 2024, p. 103)

On the other hand, "in the traditional popular game, the characteristics that make playing become a pleasure and a source of

learning are synthesized and experienced” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 68). (Muñoz, 2006, p. 68) On the other hand, the book *Juegos de mi México, una propuesta del Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas* (Games of my Mexico, a proposal of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples), states that

Through traditional games, children develop their physical, mental and social skills. On the one hand, they improve their strength, balance, flexibility and coordination, and on the other hand, they practice their ability to find solutions and create strategies. Also, especially in games with many players, they learn to work as a team, to be patient and to recognize the efforts of others. (p.1)

Play is essential for children in early education. Piaget, (cited by Ribes, 2011), considers that play has a close relationship between the child and his environment; it is a way of knowing it, accepting it, modifying it and building it.

This is how traditional play is a great ally for children’s learning; through it, they discover abilities and skills to organize, learn about traditions of their own culture and those of other countries, propose and reaffirm; it also fosters conditions for children to affirm their identity and also to value the particularities of others.

As can be observed, play activities are tools that the child uses to elaborate and develop mental structures, through games the child assimilates new experiences with previous learning and adapts them according to his needs, from the assimilation that consists of modifying or changing the information that the child receives from the external environment according to his individual needs and demands.

Within the rules involved in playing traditional games, they occupy a prominent place because of the legacy they provide in terms of the cultural transmission of popular practices. Traditional games are the result of

the cultural construction of a society. They are created and recreated from everyday life and are a representation of the world close to children.

In children’s rondas such as hilitos de oro, it is easy to find in their lyrics and songs characteristic elements of the era in which they arose, reflecting the reality of the times, from wars and conflicts to customs and ways of life. In short, we consider accurate the statement made by authors such as Méndez and Fernández (2011) who point out that “on the other hand, traditional games reproduce changing social values in each era since they are a reflection of the society in which they are immersed.” (p. 54).

The popular games are typical games of each country and at the same time patrimony of humanity and have survived the time passing from generation to generation until arriving to our days. They are part of the way of being of a whole people.

Traditional games are a way of learning, as well as encouraging coexistence, problem solving, motor activity, among others. As already mentioned, traditional games allow children to interact with a specific group and learn rules of coexistence that will allow them to develop interpersonal relationships.

In addition to all the benefits provided by the game and which have already been mentioned, it is important to emphasize that traditional games are a good option for young children to learn about the culture in which they live, and not only that, but also to learn to identify generational differences in terms of values, traditions and culture that occur over time in a given society, through these games children begin to accept a series of norms and rules, which leads them to establish a series of social relationships among themselves, involving decision making and reaching a series of agreements. Based on this idea, Trigo (1995) points out that traditional games

favor the establishment of social relationships between children and their peers, or older people of different sexes and conditions.

Sharing lifelong games with close adults such as teachers, parents and grandparents will allow children to identify and recognize their origin as well as to become aware of generational changes. In this regard, Sarmiento (2008) points out that “the school can promote the cultural values of these games, it becomes a vehicle for their conservation, for the understanding of the dynamics that interweave the daily life of today with that of yesterday” (p. 121).

From an early age, children form their own ideas about their immediate world, both in terms of nature and social life. They begin to recognize the roles played by the members of their families; understanding cultural, linguistic and social diversity (customs, traditions, ways of speaking and relating to others), as well as the factors that make life in society possible (rules of coexistence, rights and responsibilities, services, work), are some of the notions that are fostered by the pedagogical work in preschool.

The key learning program for preschool education, in the section on culture and social life proposes that:

Exploration aspects are linked to customs, traditions, productive activities, services, civic commemorations and changes over time. The situations that the educator proposes to the children should be oriented towards the recognition of the cultural diversity that is manifested in the social groups to which they belong, in some transformations that are experienced with the passage of time, as well as to identify some forms of organization and functioning that make life in society possible. (SEP, 2017, p. 206)

In this sense, hilitos de oro is a traditional game option for children to have opportunities to learn about the past based on the information provided by their

families (through testimonies, anecdotes and legends) and evidence with which they can establish relationships with respect to the ways in which they live (with photographs, films and vestiges that show the ways of life in the locality)”. (SEP, 2011, p. 62)

By providing knowledge of traditional rounds such as “hilitos de oro” (golden threads), children not only obtain the benefits of the game as a playful and enjoyable activity, but also recognize the differences that exist between the traditional games played by their grandparents, their parents and the current ones.

The game of hilitos de oro provides a rich generational differentiation in terms of the roles that a society expects of women and men, being that, in the oral tradition that marks the round, girls are chosen to marry, regardless of their opinion, rather, the important thing is to choose “the most womanly”.

We teachers are agents of preservation and transformation of culture, the ways in which we present the game can also change, in fact the fact that traditional games prevail has much to do with their capacity to adapt to new generations: the king can be queen, the daughters can be sons and the role of the chooser can be masculine or feminine. On this aspect, Contreras and Turrubiarres (2022) explain that:

It is important that, as teachers, promoters and mediators, we are critical of the readings we offer and read with our students. Presenting a different type of literature allows us to have different opinions and to use them to create dialogues that encourage reasoning and criticism, since nothing is good or bad, it simply is, and it is up to us to rethink those beliefs we held as true (p.81).

In turn, Valdez, González Arratia, Arce, González, Morelato, Ison (2008) comment that not many years ago “the choice of a partner in a personal, free and independent way was practically impossible since parents

and families in general arranged marriages for business purposes, association, pact, with the purpose of growing economically, in power and status over other people” (p. 263). (p. 263).

The challenged female stereotypes are broken when, during the game, the structure of the chooser and the chosen one is maintained, only that the traditional female-male roles are reversed, no matter who assumes the role of king or daughter, everyone has the opportunity to be one or the other.

Children’s and young adult literature, as a cultural product, is a reflection of society and a generational representation. Therefore, as mediators, it is important not to fall into the stereotype of the “pedagogical stepmother”, by virtue of which teachers become critics of literature and leave within their students’ reach only the books considered “correct” according to age, social status, context, among others. Reading and talking about texts with children requires an accompaniment that teachers must assume. Contreras and Turrubiartes, 2022, p. 81).

Talking with grandparents, fathers, mothers, and adults in the community about

the traditional games they played in their childhood and identifying generational differences allows children to understand and appropriate the values, customs, and norms of social interactions with the objective of recognizing the cultural transcendence of human beings.

CONCLUSIONS

The intrinsic value of hilitos de oro as a traditional game is a reality resulting from social interactions; being considered an open system, susceptible to receive influences and modifications of the context, in the same way, the game can influence the socio-cultural system. The intention is to understand and value the elements that contributed to be ourselves and its evolution.

The final point is that girls and boys live the experience of knowing the traditional games for pleasure, that they enjoy them as a playful activity and learn from a living referent, about the socio-cultural changes of a direct generational transmission.

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