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En/countering Indigenous Bilingualism

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The articles in this issue advance scholarship on Indigenous-language ideologies and practices in important ways. By focusing on youth, the authors "counter" traditional ideologies about Indigenous languages and "encounter" a more dynamic Indigenous bilingualism that has remained understudied. By combining careful ethnography with interviews and longitudinal studies, the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of language attitudes and practices among Indigenous youth is attested.

As with other scholarship on Indigenous languages, the authors argue here for the maintenance of Indigenous-language practices. The difference here is that they acknowledge the multi-layered dynamism of the bilingualism of Indigenous youth in the Americas and do not simply paint a picture of inevitable language shift and linguistic shame. Instead, they tap into the youth's language activism, as they recognize the "tip" toward English and their ensuing bilingualism.

One reason that the authors in this issue give us this broader view of Indigenous-language practices is that their studies focus on youth. The young people whom they observe and interview are at a developmental stage at which recursivity between childhood and adulthood practices is inevitable. Youth are shaping language practices that are much more dynamic than those of children under the purview of parents and teachers, or of adults who are often restricted by jobs in their language practices. Furthermore, youth's ease with electronic interactions aided through technology allows them greater flexibility in ways of using language. Language practices in the 21st century are increasingly multimodal—oral and written—and linguistic modes of meaning are intricately bound up with other visual, audio, and spatial semiotic systems (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996). This integrated discourse is also reflected in the Indigenous youth's bilingual practices, as meaning and semiotic systems of both the majority and minority cultures and languages become integrated.

The contributions in this volume affirm yet break away from some of the views espoused by the Indigenous language rights movement (for more on this movement, see Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; McCarty & Zepeda, 2006; Reyhner, Cantoni, St. Clair, & Parsons Yazzie, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This issue, and especially the contribution by Nicholas, insists on the importance of the maintenance of Indigenous-language practices for ecological knowledge and the inclusion of youth in adult subsistence roles and communities of practice. But as the "I live Hopi, I just don't speak it" quote that introduces Nicholas's contribution makes clear, youth's understandings of language practices go beyond traditional notions of language. Indigenous youth in this theme issue insist on the importance of maintaining Indigenous-language practices.

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And yet, there is also resistance to the discourse of authenticity, which demands that Indigenous languages not be "tainted" by more-powerful European languages, such as English or Spanish, out of respect for the language of ancestors (see Messing, this issue, on *legítimo Mexicano*). To legitimize the youth's position, we need to consider how others have questioned the concept of language itself and the traditional notions of bilingualism.

Makoni and Pennycook (2007) have proposed that our present conception of language was originally constructed by states that wanted to consolidate political power and missionaries eager to evangelize colonized populations. Errington (2001) has shown how missionaries and colonial officers then imposed these "invented" monolithic languages onto specific territories.

Mühlhäusler (2000, p. 38) has also explained that the "notion of 'a language' makes little sense in most traditional societies where people engage in multiple discursive practices among themselves." Speaking of the Pacific region, he continues: "the notion of 'a language' is one whose applicability . . . in . . . most situations outside those found within modern European nation-states, is extremely limited" (p. 7). Romaine (1994) concurs when describing the complex language use in Papua New Guinea: "The very concept of discrete languages is probably a European cultural artifact fostered by procedures such as literacy and standardization" (p. 12).

In general, languages have been constituted separately "outside and above human beings" (Yngve, 1996, p. 28) and have little relationship to the ways in which people use language, their discursive practices, or what Yngve (1996) and Shohamy (2006) call their *languaging*—language practices of people. Language is truly a social notion that cannot be defined without reference to its speakers and the context in which it is used (Heller, 2007).

In most settings throughout the world "languaging bilingually" or what I have called "translanguaging" is the usual way of languaging (García, 2009). It is then normal and unmarked to translanguage in interactions between individuals who belong to the same bilingual culture. Translanguaging, or engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices, is an approach to bilingualism that is centered, not on the constructed notion of standard languages, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable. These translanguaging practices are the normal mode of communication that, with some exceptions in some monolingual enclaves, characterizes communities throughout the world.

In the 21st century, we can no longer hold static views of American Indigenous languages as autonomous languages completely separate from English or Spanish. If we take the perspective of the language practices of young Indigenous speakers themselves, and not of separate languages, what these articles show is that the youth "language," or rather "translanguage," by integrating language practices from different communities with distinct language ideologies, as they draw from different semiotic systems and modes of meaning. But these articles also affirm the youth's loyalties toward their Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices, with their hybridities, complexities, and ambiguities.

The five articles here also document the language shift underway among different Indigenous communities in the Americas. Nicholas tells us that in 1983, most Hopi children came to school speaking Hopi, but by 2000, the shift to English was evident. Wyman documents the same in southwestern Alaska where in the decade of her study, children shifted from entering school as Yup'ik speakers to entering school as English speakers. Lee reveals that whereas 10 years ago, 90% of Navajo children arrived at school speaking Navajo, today only 10% do. Although the five contributions offer evidence of language shift, there is a questioning of the concept itself. McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, and Zepeda claim that language shift is not necessarily linear

or unidirectional. And Messing claims that both ideological orientations and language practices can change over time.

In studying the language shift of New York Puerto Ricans, I have called this multilayered and dynamic process of shift, "*linguistic shift with vaivén*" (García, Morín, & Rivera, 2001). Linguistic shift in contemporary contexts in which there is increased identity and linguistic consciousness, as is the situation of colonized minorities in the Americas, is rarely unidirectional toward language loss. Instead, like the "vaivén" of sea waves, language practices come and go as the sociolinguistic environments of language socialization themselves shift. In so doing, it gives us the impression of retreat, but despite the dynamism of the surface the ground itself is solid, although, as the ocean floor, never static. So are the linguistic practices of everyone, but especially of bilingual populations in situations of unequal power. These five contributions make clear that Indigenous youth perform language practices and language ideologies that, despite their complexity, variation, and dynamism, are rich and powerful, not gloomy and weak, pointing toward the possibility of a viable future of bilingualism for the Hopi and the Navajo in the U.S. Southwest, Mexicano speakers in Mexico, and the Yup'ik in southwestern Alaska. These youth are language activists, but their activism is not limited only to the Indigenous languages. Their activism encompasses their bilingualism and their own translanguaging practices that are claimed as also authentic and valid.

To accept this idea of promising Indigenous bilingualism for the future, one must shed the monoglossic ideologies that have limited our views of two languages as the sum of 1 + 1 = 2. In García (2009), I propose that in the 21st century we must go beyond the traditional models of subtractive and additive bilingualism to understand the more hybrid language practices of bilinguals—their translanguaging (García, 2009). I then advance two other models of bilingualism—*recursive bilingualism* and *dynamic bilingualism*. Both begin from more heteroglossic ideologies and language practices, with bilingualism itself, and not monolingualism, as the starting point. Languages are not conceived as separate autonomous systems, but as language practices tapping all points of the continua that make up a bilingual repertoire. I see *recursive bilingualism* as that used in situations of reversing language shift, through which speakers take pieces of past language practices to reconstitute new practices that will serve them well in a bilingual future. *Dynamic bilingualism*, on the other hand, refers to the complex bilingual competence needed in some 21st century societies. In the linguistic complexity of the 21st century, bilingualism involves a much more dynamic cycle in which language use is multiple and ever adjusting to the multilingual, multimodal terrain of the communicative act.

In the context of the Indigenous youth treated here in situations of progressive, although not total, language shift, we have both dynamic and recursive bilingualism. On the one hand, there is a dynamic cycle of language practices that are heteroglossic, hybrid, and multiple; on the other, there is some attempt to revitalize language practices, as in recursive bilingualism. This has to do with the fact that, according to McCarty et al., the sociolinguistic environments in which youth language socialization takes place are much more multilayered and varied than the notion of language shift, language maintenance, or reversing language shift may convey.

One theme that cuts across the articles is that of both the limits and possibilities of schools in the maintenance of community bilingualism. McCarty et al. cite schooling as a key cause of language shift in the communities they studied, yet also see new opportunities when schooling is reimagined to capitalize on youth's hybrid sociolinguistic strengths. In the Yup'ik situation, although Wyman tells us of the reduction of bilingual education programs since the 1980s, she

insists that bilingual education in itself, as presently practiced, will have little to bear in the success of language retention. Messing also questions the role of intercultural bilingual programs in the maintenance and development of Mexicano. In fact, she says that because Mexicano is mostly used with people with whom there is *confianza*, or trust, its introduction into schools creates an awkward sociolinguistic situation. And Lee confirms that the language shift of the Navajo youth has occurred despite Indigenous bilingual schools.

The reasons for the limited effect of schools have partly to do with our conceptualizations of bilingual education programs as following either purely a subtractive or an additive model. Instead, as McCarty et al. suggest, it is important to think of how bilingual schools can become more responsive to heteroglossic models of bilingualism. Despite many recent attempts to develop bilingual schools that reflect a recursive and dynamic bilingual model, schools, as products and agents of the constructed nation-state, often fail to recognize the complex language practices of bilinguals. For example, Messing tells us how linguists and educators only recognize "legítimo Mexicano," a constructed language that takes away all syncretic elements the source of which is Spanish. Wyman, quoting Jaffe (2007, p. 73) says that schools "are not set up to recognize multiple norms and mixed codes."

As described by McCarty et al., it is the different views of what constitutes viable language practices that account for the different perceptions that educators and youth have about their language use. The youth are comfortable with their translanguaging, although they want to develop more complex Indigenous-language practices. For the teachers, however, the notion persists that there is either a standard Indigenous language or nothing. It is monolingualism that is valued, even in bilingual education programs. These educators express a monoglossic language ideology, even as they espouse bilingualism.

Salir adelante, getting ahead, is the reason given by Indigenous youth in Messing's study for favoring Spanish, but it is not Spanish monolingualism that these youth are claiming. As Wyman makes clear, bilingual practices are needed for local work in the community. To get ahead as Indigenous youth, cultural and language practices cannot be one or the other, or, as Wyman says, local or global, Indigenous or English, traditional or modern. It is by integrating all of these that Indigenous youth will "get ahead." In doing so, they are affirming their past and their local lives, as they project them toward a better future. The dynamic translanguaging of the Indigenous youth in these articles could be a way of tapping their activism to guard their cultural and linguistic practices carefully but also to connect to the worldwide translanguaging practices that characterize the 21st century.

What is most important about these contributions is that the threat to Indigenous-language practices is made evident and Indigenous language activism is supported. What is different about these articles is that they propose that the threat arises not only from powerful monolingual English- or Spanish-speaking majorities but also from within. The lack of understanding of the construction of languages and a monoglossic ideology that values only monolingual ways of languaging, even if in Indigenous languages, also contributes to the dangerous language shift among Indigenous peoples. Educators' insistence that the youth do not speak their languages contributes to their linguistic insecurity and shame. Despite the wider societal discourse that, according to McCarty et al., marginalizes Indigenous languages and their speakers, Lee tells us that these youth are not embarrassed about the language itself; they are embarrassed of "their own limited Native language ability," an attitude that can only be constructed (and deconstructed) within the Indigenous community itself, by educators and linguists.

These youth's translanguaging practices are seeds for the hard work that must be done for Indigenous languages to survive. As with the affective nature of planting corn by hand that Nicholas describes, the labor of retaining Indigenous cultural and language practices is hard work. For Indigenous youth, this work could lead to the reemergence of language practices that are different from those of the times before colonization, but in their dynamic bilingualism—their translanguaging—could lie the means to a secure future for Indigenous lifeways in the 21st century.

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