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Language and Ethnifying

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In naming language and ethnicity as a verb instead of a noun, I bring to focus that it is people—individuals and groups—who use discursive and ethnic practices to signify what it is they want to be. The ability “to language” and “to ethnify” is precisely then the most important signifying role of human beings—that which gives life meaning. It is through languaging and ethnifying that people perform their identitying.

Language does not merely exist as an autonomous and a stable skill, and neither is ethnicity a static characteristic. Languaging refers to the discursive practices of people (Shohamy 2006; Yngve 1996). And ethnifying points to the act of signifying and calling attention to an identity by pointing to certain ethnic practices, including languaging. Thus, languaging and ethnifying are practices that are in dialogic relationship with one another. It is through their dialogicity that they signify what the individual and/or the Community wants to engage in interactions considered important (Fishman, this volume, 2010).

The dialogic relationship of languaging and ethnifying is important because as Joshua A. Fishman has repeatedly stated, it illuminates processes of cultural change and continuity. Thus, the contributors to this volume have used language and ethnicity *practices* as the lens to study important processes of how individuals and groups have transformed themselves or remained the same by making languaging practices the focal center of our acts of identity. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) discuss how these acts of identity are the ways in which individuals project their concepts of language and ethnic identity (and I would say their practices of languaging and ethnifying) on others and thus constitute groups.

In appealing to the concept of languaging, I agree with Makoni and Pennycook (2007) who argue that our present conception of “language” was originally constructed by states that wanted to consolidate political power. To do so, states and

