ROUTLEDGE

INDIGENOUS YOUTH AND MULTILINGUALISM

Language Identity, Ideology, and Practice in Dynamic Cultural Worlds

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12
COMMENTARY
En/countering Indigenous Bi/Multilingualism

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This book advances scholarship on Indigenous language ideologies and practices in important ways. By focusing on youth, the authors, mostly Indigenous scholars, "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 identities, ideologies, 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 multilayered 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 the ensuing bilingualism and fluid language practices. In so doing, the authors also question traditional understandings of language policy and planning. The chapters in the book extend the lens of language policy and planning studies to focus on negotiations of minoritized groups that are mediated by relations of power (McCarty, 2004).

This volume focuses on youth. The young people whom the authors observe, interview, and interact with are at a developmental stage where recursiveness 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, as well as pop culture, gives them greater flexibility in ways of using language. For example, O'Connor and Brown's chapter

documents the semiotic practices of a Navajo hip hop artist that circulate forms of popular culture in locally Diné-specific ways. Language practices in the 21st century are increasingly multimodal, and linguistic modes of meaning are intricately bound up with other visual, audio, gestural and spatial semiotic systems (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996). This integrated discourse is also reflected in the Indigenous youth bilingual practices, as meaning and semiotic systems of both the majority and minority cultures and languages become integrated.

The contributions in this book affirm, yet break away from, some of the views espoused by the Indigenous language rights movement (see also McCarty & Zepeda, 2006; Reyhner, Cantoni, St. Clair, & Parsons Yazzie, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). The chapters, especially the one by Nicholas, insist on the importance of the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous language practices for ecological knowledge, and yet the contributions extend the sense of traditional place by providing the possibility of an embodied space with youth activity at the center of place-making. This construction of an embodied space where youth enact global spaces in local ways is especially evident in the chapter by O'Connor and Brown.

As the "'being' Hopi by 'living Hopi'" quote that introduces Nicholas's contribution makes clear, youth's understandings of language practices go beyond traditional notions of language. Indigenous youth in this book insist on the importance of maintaining and revitalizing Indigenous language practices, often going to great lengths to do so, as in the case of the four Arikara activists in Kroupa's chapter. Other times, Indigenous youth organize transnationally into non-governmental organizations of support, as in the efforts by the Inuit youth described by Tulloch and others. And yet, there is also resistance to the discourse of authenticity that 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. This is the case of the resistance of youth toward *legítimo Mexicano* described in Messing's chapter. To legitimize the youth's position, we need to consider how others have questioned the concept of language itself and 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: "[t]he 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: "[T]he 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 many of us, extending Williams (1994) have called "translanguaging," is the usual way of languaging (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012a, 2012b). It is then normal and unmarked to translanguage in interactions between individuals who belong to the same bilingual culture, as Kroupa makes obvious for the Arikara. 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, or other languages. If we take the perspective of the language practices of young Indigenous speakers themselves, and not of separate languages, these chapters show that the youth "language," or rather "translanguage," is being created by integrating language practices from different communities with distinct language ideologies, as they draw from different semiotic systems and modes of meaning. But these chapters also affirm the youth's loyalties toward their Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices, with their fluidities, complexities, and ambiguities.

The chapters 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. Kroupa also describes the decimation of the Arikara by smallpox and the Garison Dam that divided their reservation. Although the chapters offer evidence of language shift, there is questioning of the concept of language shift itself. McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, and Zepeda claim that language shift is not necessarily linear or unidirectional. Messing claims that both ideological

orientations and language practices can change over time. The chapter by Tulloch also makes evident that not all Inuit are focused on language; for some, the Inuit language is a tool for belonging, for others, an instrument of alienation. Yet, youth want to know who they are, have a say in shaping their identities, and empower healthy Indigenous communities.

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 where there is increased identity and linguistic consciousness, as is the situation of colonized minorities in the Americas, is rarely unidirectional towards language loss or shift. 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 chapters 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 dynamic bilingualism for the Hopi and the Navajo in the southwestern United States, Arikara in North Dakota, Mexicano speakers in Mexico, the Yup'ik in southwestern Alaska, the Inuits in North America, but also in Greenland and Russia. These youth are language activists, but their activism is not limited only to the Indigenous languages. Their activism encompasses their bilingualism, including English, and their own translanguaging practices which 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 fluid 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 which is used in situations of reversing language shift, as in the cases in this book, where speakers take pieces of past language practices to reconstitute new practices that will serve them well in a bilingual future. Even in situations of extensive shift, as with the Arikara, there are ceremonial songs and ritual practices that subsist, and language practices of ancestors that are now available through the Web. *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 where 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, fluid, and multiple, sometimes tipping toward English as in the case of the Navajo hip hop artist; on the other, there is attempt to revitalize language practices through recursive bilingualism, as in the efforts made by the Arikara activists. This has to do with the fact that, as McCarty et al. say, 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.

The concept of language maintenance itself is also contested in these chapters, for the youth are not interested in static practices tied to essentialized identities. It is *language sustainability* that these Indigenous youth desire, "the capacity [of languaging] to endure, but always in interaction with the social context in which it operates" (García, 2011, p. 7). Unlike language maintenance, the concept of sustainability contains in its core the grappling with social, economic and environmental conditions by which systems remain diverse and productive over time and into the future; it involves a dynamic relocalization in space and time (García, 2011).

One theme that cuts across the chapters in this book is that of both the limits and possibilities of schools in the sustainability 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 fluid 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. This lack of faith in bilingual education for the revitalization of Indigenous languages is also the position of Kroupa, who describes a bilingual program for the last 30 years in the White Shield community that has not produced any speakers of Arikara.

The reasons for the limited effect of schools have partly to do with our conceptualizations of bilingual education programs as following either a purely subtractive or 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 whose source 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 constitute 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 in a new and generative becoming. The dynamic translanguaging of the Indigenous youth made evident in this book 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 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 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., marginalize 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 sociolinguists.

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 sustaining Indigenous cultural and language practices for the future is hard work. For Indigenous youth, this work could lead to the re-emergence of language practices that are different from those of the times before colonization, but in their dynamic bilingualism—their translanguaging—could lay the means to a secure future for Indigenous lifeways in the 21st century.

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