

Article No 3

Indigenous language revitalization and new media: Postsecondary students as innovators

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman
Principal Investigator, Tribal Colleges and Universities Project

Phelps Stokes
Senior Researcher
The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School

Keywords

Indigenous postsecondary students, Indigenous languages, language revitalization

Abstract

This article discusses the significance of Indigenous languages to human diversity and the challenges accompanying language loss posed to Indigenous peoples. The role of Indigenous postsecondary students as change agents is highlighted, and gaps are examined in current revitalization efforts where young postsecondary students are largely unrecognized. The need for innovation and creativity in addressing language issues conscientiously with postsecondary students is proposed by using an example of a new media project founded with Indigenous students at a U.S. university, raising possibilities and dilemmas with new media as tools for transformation through informal learning experiences.

Introduction

Indigenous languages worldwide are in serious trouble. There is undisputable evidence put forth by researchers in a diversity of fields—from the social sciences to the natural sciences—that paints a dire picture of what the languaged world will look like within the next two decades. By acknowledging the work of community members, language education stakeholders and scholars who have called attention to endangered Indigenous languages (Fishman, 1991; 1996), this article addresses opportunities and tensions in Indigenous language revitalization through the learning activities of postsecondary student language innovators in the U.S. First, by using the examples of language socialization and the link between language and knowledge, this article discusses the significance of Indigenous languages to underscore what their loss means not only to Indigenous people, but also in terms of global diversity. Second, the notion of postsecondary students as change agents is proposed using linguistic human rights (LHR) to emphasize their potential in revitalizing Indigenous languages as a political act, as well as transformational resistance (Brayboy, 2005) to describe their current efforts within higher education. Third, education system gaps and current models of language revitalization are discussed in order to draw attention to the need for innovation and creativity in addressing language loss and shift. Using an example of a new media project founded with students at an elite university in the U.S., possibilities and challenges for addressing language revitalization efforts by creating accessible and transparent flows of communication and resources for otherwise isolated students are discussed.

This article also acknowledges the world engaged with new media as having unprecedented impact on postsecondary student personal transformation, Indigeneity as complex rather than archetypal, and education as globally purposeful rather than narrowly defined. Inspired by Arora's (2008, 2010) work with rural populations in the Himalayas, the purposes of this article are

to, 1) draw attention to the rationale and significance of Indigenous postsecondary students' use of new media outside of their communities and beyond the formal classroom, giving three-dimensionality to Indigenous identity constructs, 2) move beyond the detrimental analysis of myth-holders who become myth-makers propagating the view of Indigenous people as "traditional," by provoking students, community members and scholars to clearly articulate the significance of Indigenous languages linked with daily practice that includes multiple uses of technology in revitalization efforts, and 3) argue for participatory redefinition of Indigenous rurality and urbanity as Indigenous populations in cities increase, and as national and transnational migration are part of the architecture of Indigenous lives.

The significance of Indigenous languages to human diversity

National political agendas shape the selection and influence of national languages within a particular state, and those languages become the primary method of communication for everything from school to commerce to political spheres (Garcia, 2006; 2009). No matter the population of speakers, Indigenous languages, many of which are spoken in rural areas, are subsequently marginalized, and speakers experience different degrees of language loss and then shift to the dominant national language (Hornberger and Coronel-Molina, 2004). While this process is complex and increasingly includes the interplay of dominant world languages like English, there is considerable evidence of its impact on human diversity. Today, 97% of the world's people speak 4% of the world's languages, and 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 3% of the world's people (Bernard 1996). This means that the majority of the world's population use a very small percent of the world's typically dominant languages, while an even smaller percentage of the world's population speak the majority of the world's vast diversity of languages. Most of these languages are spoken by Indigenous populations and are severely threatened. Already, of the world's estimated 6800 languages, 2500 are endangered, 200 are already lost (UNESCO, 2009) and overall 60-90% are predicted for extinction over the next century (Romaine 2006). In the U.S. and Canada alone, of the 210 Indigenous languages still spoken, only 34 are still being acquired as a first language by children (Romero and McCarty, 2006), and of the 175 Indigenous languages in the U.S., only 20 will remain by 2050 (Crawford, 2004).

For Indigenous communities, these figures represent a painful extension of colonial projects over the past several hundred years that is now largely their responsibility to reverse, resulting in a call for social change where predictions of language extinction are especially jarring when language is viewed as the pivotal axis from which people carry out their worldviews. The multiple forms and pathways of enacting worldviews are gained through language socialization processes rooted in our cultures whereby language both reveals and reinforces cultural norms. Linguistic and behavioral patterns being socialized clearly serve as the basis for teaching deeply rooted cultural values (Shieffelin and Ochs, 1986). For example, a Japanese mother's directives to her child foster empathy and conformity, and her teasing teaches the child that language is a resource for self-assertion and self-defense (Rudolph, 1994). In Indigenous communities, specifically the Pueblo de Cochiti in New Mexico, the Cochiti Keres language spoken and reinforced in community spaces where cultural practices take place, asserts identity formation in Cochiti children, teaching them to "be Cochiti" in their own process of contributing and participating as community members (Romero, 1994; 2003).

Not only is language a vital part of socialization, but the role that languages play in relation to local environmental knowledge and the teaching of that knowledge has also been gaining attention over the past two decades (Romero, 1994; Kawagley, 1995; Pierotti and Wildcat, 2000; LaDuke, 2002, 2005). Scientists also view Indigenous languages, cultures, environments and the knowledge that accompanies generations of living in specific ecosystems as inextricably linked yet rapidly threatened (Maffi, 2001; 2010). Indigenous people have historically argued the language-culture-environment connection, evident from treaties with national governments to current resistance to development (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005). However, the physical survival and knowledge survival of Indigenous populations capable of addressing some of the world's

most challenging environmental problems is constantly under threat due to development without their Indigenous consent (Godenzzi, 1997). Furthermore, because the socialization of Indigenous people, including exchanges of knowledge, takes place outside of the classroom and within community spaces, there is no guarantee of the perpetuation of the process (Aikman, 1999, 2002; Romero, 2009). Therefore, when dealing with postsecondary students, no assumption can be made of their cultural or linguistic knowledge base or participation in Indigenous sociolinguistic socialization.

Complicating this for generations of language speakers and learners is that language socialization at the community level is often inextricable from the enactment of language ideology at the national level. In North and South America, language ideology at the national level intended to trickle down has been critiqued as confined to school-based literacy efforts as the site for language planning, mimicking western academic genres and limiting the development of distinct Indigenous discourse practices (Luykx, 2003). This is relevant for Indigenous communities facing questions of how tribal, local, national and international policies are constructed and to what effect. Research demonstrates that mainstream schooling is often the cause of language shift and that school language classes are largely ineffective in producing speakers (Garcia, 2009). Notorious policies at the primary and secondary school levels, like the U.S. No Child Left Behind and Race To The Top, centralize attention on core areas geared towards standardized tests and other quantitative measures, conflicting with any language revitalization efforts underway in school spaces. Given the broader impact of threat of language disappearance for Indigenous peoples, there is an urgency to identify effective sites of language revitalization.

Furthermore, for several generations now, Indigenous youth have been encouraged by their own communities and government policies to adopt dominant languages and leave home for higher education opportunities. Simultaneously, they are expected to somehow maintaining tribal connections and distinct identities as Indigenous people in an increasingly globalized society. More recently, there is a mainstream push to create global citizens as a goal for higher education, but there is little evidence to explain what being a global citizen is or the process towards becoming one. In terms of Indigenous postsecondary students, these are appropriate questions since they may be grappling with both language and cultural revitalization and navigating multiple definitions of global citizenship. What this can mean in practice is that Indigenous languages may be viewed as competing with other world languages of interest. These are complicated issues that Indigenous postsecondary students should be equipped to answer and create global opportunities for themselves.

Postsecondary students as change agents

This article does not assume that all postsecondary students are, strive to be or even want to be considered change agents. Instead, this section proposes that postsecondary students who are interested in language loss and shift and actively engaged in language revitalization are potential change agents due to the global conversations and community of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers provoking such discussions. Further, transformational resistance (Brayboy, 2005) is proposed as a framework to understand Indigenous student experiences within higher education institutions, which may be broadly applicable to other Indigenous and ethnic and linguistic minority students at tertiary institutions nationally and internationally.

Ethnic minority and Indigenous languages are often the targets of “language genocide,” and obligatory language in human rights documents often provides ways for states to excuse themselves from the prevention of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). The consequence is that rights articulated have no method of actual enforcement against the process of subtractive learning leading to assimilation through formal education (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). In this case, countries are called to promote linguistic human rights (LHR) for their own productive interests, not just for the sake of ethics or a higher moral calling. Skutnabb-Kangas argues (2006) that this is because there has been a major shift from industrial societies

and commodity production to knowledge or information societies where knowledge and creativity constitute “product.” Within creative societies, diverse knowledge forms, information and ideas are elevated rather than assimilated or attacked, and in this postindustrial knowledge society, language diversity is a value form. Within higher education institutions that serve Indigenous students, their training as both knowledge producers and knowledge protectors can be instrumental in building capacity for Indigenous communities not only in terms of language and cultural development, but also environmental, economic and health development aligned with linguistic and cultural values unique to their people. Both in and outside of classrooms and using higher education resources and support, student-driven opportunities can be sought and solidified for this purpose. The most recent example of the need for this in Indigenous and human rights discourse is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 2010, the U.S. was among the last remaining countries to support the document, and after dialogue and consultation with American Indian communities, the document was finally endorsed. However, enactment of the document around land, language, governance, religious, educational and other cultural issues highlighted will be the greater challenge, and the need to train postsecondary students to do this work will be critical.

Linked with Indigenous rights discourse is the argument that Indigenous languages are inherently political. Indigenous languages, like Indigenous people have been historically viewed by national government policies as obstacles to development, and the stereotypical Indian is often seen as contrary to modernization—an example of myth perpetuation. Indigenous cultural practices are also typically viewed as in opposition to the assertion of a national identity that relies on language unification/assimilation and monolingualism most evident in compulsory education. English-only policies and ethnic curriculum controversies in Arizona schools is an example of such an agenda in action. Indigenous languages though in rapid decline, also represent Indigenous resistance towards assimilation into the mainstream where speaking, teaching and learning Indigenous languages are community-based acts of self-determination countering hegemonic state forces (McCarty et al., 2006).

The question for Indigenous postsecondary students engaged in language work is whether they are keenly aware of LHR and Indigenous language rights discourse and movements, as well as the politically charged nature of their own language and educational processes, and to what degree do they participate in and are supported in this work. In this regard, transformational resistance is useful for framing Indigenous student experiences within higher education. Transformational resistance reveals American Indian college students’ navigation within elite institutions for the purpose of social justice for their home tribal communities (Brayboy, 2005). The notion also revisits the dichotomy of being a “good Indian,” maintaining a link with the tribal community, while also being a “good student,” meaning achieving academic institutional success—identities that are viewed as conflicting yet achievable (Brayboy, 2005). The cultural norms of higher education and community can create tensions for students who can find ways to succeed, meaning completing their degrees while doing so with the needs of their home communities in mind and managing to stay connected to those often far-away places. This notion challenges tribes to consider their connectedness to their own students, as well as the cost to students who achieve transformational resistance—that is, working towards social justice may come at the cost of personal sacrifice since not all students who complete postsecondary degrees want to return home to their communities, yet feel compelled to do so. Those that do want to return may struggle to reintegrate into community life (Brayboy, 2005).

This is particularly relevant in the U.S. where roughly 30% of the total Indigenous population live on their reservations, and the majority now live in urban and suburban areas. There is no certainty that postsecondary students today will return to rural home communities, even if they were raised there. The question of where young Indigenous people will travel and settle provokes questions that Indigenous communities have yet to deal with regarding urbanization and Indigenous diasporas and how cultural and linguistic priorities are and can be actively maintained in those settings, redefining notions of Indigenous identities. Also, understanding

how postsecondary students navigate education is critical, particularly far away from home and in elite institutions where they constitute a small minority of the population. Further, exploring transformational resistance in rural and urban settings can significantly impact how we view postsecondary students as individuals, community members and advocates for tribal self-determination, including language revitalization, no matter where they go.

Education, innovation and new media possibilities and challenges

This section discusses some of the gaps in formal education and school-based efforts for language revitalization, current models of language revitalization and offers the “translanguaging” world of youth (Garcia, 2009), drawing attention to the need for innovation and creativity in language work. By using the example of a new media project in the form of a student-driven blog, designed and maintained outside of the higher education classroom, possibilities and challenges in language revitalization are offered. Instead of oversimplifying complex questions regarding the best sites for language revitalization, this section acknowledges the work being done on language revitalization through community-school partnerships at multiple levels in formal and informal spaces while challenging current approaches to consider the diverse roles of Indigenous postsecondary students—from learners to policymakers and advocates.

Inevitably, this looking beyond the school has posed new questions for researchers. Some of this inquiry has continued to focus on the school, examining the processes and outcomes of learning (or the failure to learn) in other places, often the family, to determine their influence on learning in the classroom. In this respect, questions have been raised about how education takes place in particular nonschool institutions and the similarity or dissimilarity between that education and the education provided in school...In inquiries of this sort, influence may be examined in two directions, asking by what processes the school reinforces, complements, contradicts or inhibits the efforts of the family and community and by what processes the family and community reinforce, complement, contradict, or inhibit the efforts of the school. (Leichter, 1973, p. 240)

The questions Leichter posed are relevant to students at all levels of education and in the conscientious building of any educational program, formal and informal. When viewing postsecondary students as potential change agents addressing critical Indigenous issues, the questions of how higher education institutions reinforce, complement, contract or inhibit the efforts of Indigenous communities, and how Indigenous communities reinforce, complement, contradict or inhibit higher education efforts is critical to address in order for the community and the school to work together. However, the relationship between Indigenous people and formal schooling institutions has historically traumatic roots: in the U.S, American Indian children were taken from their homes and communities and forced into Christian-run, government-supported boarding schools that banned Indigenous cultural practices and languages. Within these institutions, children often experienced massive physical, emotional, sexual and psychological abuse (Archuleta et al., 2007). Today, there are other kinds of injustices that surround inequality, access and quality of education issues, from the primary to tertiary levels. For example, in current university systems, Indigenous students experience stereotype threat and marginalization, Indigenous faculty are severely underrepresented (Brayboy, 2003), and Indigenous-serving institutions like tribal colleges are severely underfunded.

Furthermore, although schooling has been controversial, education as a process is highly valued by Indigenous communities. At the same time, research has demonstrated that mainstream schooling is often the cause of language shift, from heritage language to dominant language (Aikman, 1999; Kawagley, 1995; Garcia, 2009). This is not surprising as the medium of instruction in state-sponsored schools, with some exceptions, is the dominant language. There are, however, hard-won Indigenous language classes aimed at revitalization in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions at this time. Yet, questions remain regarding their effectiveness in reaching Indigenous community-driven goals since language is severely limited

by time, in-class instruction and at the primary and secondary levels, competition with standardized testing in national core subject areas like math and science. In addition, language and education policies are largely based on subtractive views of language as taking attention away from other subject areas and fluency in the dominant language, rather than viewing multiple languages using heteroglossic models or as additive and so adding to a student's repository of educational wealth (Garcia 2006, 2009). Language educators, including Indigenous language educators, may also fall into this category as they push a monoglossic value system aimed at saving Indigenous languages. So when examining the role of formal schooling and language, inquiry should also include diverse formal and informal educational programs at all levels.

In language revitalization in the U.S., goals are often geared towards "producing speakers," where fluency in the Indigenous language is a major aim. In fact, some major funders of language revitalization projects will not entertain proposals outside of those goals. In addition, federal government support may also include incorporation of technology in these efforts, such as producing interactive touch screens or mp3 language recordings. While there are youth to adult programs in communities, urban spaces, classrooms and tertiary institutions like tribal colleges and universities, language learning often tends to focus on the anticipated result of passing the language onto children to ensure sociolinguistic continuity. In community-based and school programs, a few dominant methods have demonstrated effectiveness in producing speakers or increasing presence of the Indigenous language in the community to varying degrees: teaching Indigenous languages as foreign languages using a foreign language/world language instruction model; two-way bilingual education where fluent Indigenous language speakers interact with fluent dominant language speakers; early immersion where infants as young as several months of age and children are immersed in Indigenous languages; and master-apprenticeships where expert, often first-speakers of Indigenous languages are paired with learner-apprentices for daily activities and special training. These are often strong, carefully constructed and tested models of working to regain speakers in Indigenous communities. However, they take funding, human capital, time and long-term commitment to execute and maintain. Indigenous postsecondary students today who are interested in language work are emerging generations who in many ways have benefitted from this work being done over the past two decades.

What has not been given as much attention in this work is exploration of the diverse interests and roles of youth and postsecondary students. As language loss and shift are rapidly occurring, maintenance, protection and revitalization of languages does not consistently take into consideration individualized and youth approaches towards learning and speaking, including language manipulation that reveals complexity navigated by speakers themselves. "Languaging bilingually" or "translanguaging" acknowledges an organically emerging multilingual world of interaction between human beings, whereby usage of two or multiple languages is practiced as a normal mode of communication (Garcia, 2009):

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 speakers themselves, and not of separate languages...the youth "language," or rather "translanguage" by integrating language practices coming from different communities with distinct language ideologies, as they draw from different semiotic systems and modes of meaning. (p. 4)

The view that Indigenous languages, like Indigenous communities, are not in isolation from other world languages and cultures is no longer questionable. Yet, the opposite is still perpetuated by myth-makers, (Arora, 2008) who alternately may view Indigenous communities as victims of globalization. Youth and their pursuit of language and cultural revitalization defy these myths as they simultaneously seek, identify and articulate their identities and translanguage in a naturally occurring process that employs recursive and dynamic bilingualism. Recursive bilingualism

occurs when speakers take parts of past language practices in order to construct new language practices that fit into what appears to be an inevitable bilingual present and future. Dynamic bilingualism reflects systems of language usage that are heteroglossic, hybrid, and multiple (Garcia, 2009). While “translanguaging” is not necessarily evidence of fluency or similar goals, these ideas may help us to better understand the daily languaged worlds of Indigenous youth and postsecondary students.

Important to recall in this discussion of schooling, translanguaging and students is how higher education interacts with Indigenous community priorities and goals around language loss and shift, and if and how higher education institutions are replicating colonial and industrial age structures of learning, not to mention dominant models of language revitalization in language instruction and to what result. However, within these institutions are models of adult language-learning, primarily for government-supported world priority languages and less commonly taught languages that form the foundation for building global citizenship in higher education. Largely absent from these globally-minded priorities is government categorization of severely endangered Indigenous languages as national or world priority languages at the postsecondary level, meriting full support, such as that received through Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships for the teaching of those languages. Additionally, addressing language loss and shift is not only a matter of acquiring knowledge of the Indigenous language through multiple pedagogical approaches, but for Indigenous languages, must also include learning how to manage, administrate, teach, facilitate, sustain and build capacity for formal and informal, rural, urban and transnational Indigenous language efforts. Because language loss and shift are profoundly impacting processes, further explanation on what they mean is provided here, followed by an example of how postsecondary students can craft different ways of addressing these problems using new media tools.

Language shift occurs when intergenerational language transmission proceeds in a negative direction, with fewer and fewer speakers each generation. The term “shift” refers to a collective or communal process, and “loss” refers to the reduction of linguistic abilities at the individual level. These processes are reciprocal. Internal change occurs when speakers begin to shift their language loyalties, “abandoning” their language in favor of a higher-status language, typically because they believe the higher status language is more socially useful and beneficial. Eventually, individuals come to believe that their heritage language has less utility, importance, and prestige than the language of wider communication, triggering language shift. (Romero and McCarty, 2006, p. 11)

Languages can be ranked as safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct (UNESCO, 2010). Postsecondary students whose communities are undergoing language shift where their immediate or extended families are experiencing or have experienced language loss have languages that are generally somewhere along the endangered spectrum. In this article, reversing this process by asserting language utility, importance and prestige is applied to students embracing innovative ideas in language revitalization. Innovation here is characterized by either a departure from the conventional forms of addressing language loss or new and untested ways of revisiting conventional forms—Indigenous languages as foreign languages, two-way bilingualism, bilingual education, early immersion and master-apprenticeships—being experimented with by postsecondary students handling rigorous academic course loads that may compete with their language interests.

As the director and lecturer for a pilot academic program at a small private U.S. university with an Indigenous population of approximately 140 students (less than .5% of the total student population), my work focused on linking students with Indigenous-centered educational priorities (Champagne, 2008). These priorities included addressing Indigenous research and language revitalization through teaching a course that focused on critical global Indigenous issues. However, outside of the classroom, I worked to create and establish with Indigenous

students an organization based at the university campus focused on Indigenous language issues where students determined their own agendas for engaging in language work. For example, some students were interested in language learning strategies to recover their own languages while others were interested in policy advocacy. The organization included regular weekend meetings open to students and individuals from the university and local community and a blog open to the greater online community of interested individuals and language workers. The student and university community response was overwhelmingly positive, with linguistics faculty, for example, readily becoming involved as advisors to students in the group. While the physical meetings were instrumental to building fellowship amongst group members who numbered from 10-12 regular participants, the focus of this section is the way in which students shaped the usage of new media to identify, articulate and promote their own language interests.

A site created by New York-based human rights attorney and Teachers College Columbia University lecturer, Chitra Aiyar, inspired the blog. In 2008, Aiyar, a Tamil language-learner, established “Reclaiming Mothertongues” to commemorate International Mother Language Day on February 21. Aiyar, a Tamil language-learner, extended the concept of the Day into a year-long process by inviting learners to commit to reclaiming their heritage language at any level and using any method. Over 20 learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds and including Indigenous languages, from Ojibwe to Quechua, logged their personal processes towards their own goals of what reclaiming language meant to them. The site stimulated access to freely shared language-learning strategies, transparency on language issues and tensions, camaraderie on language-learning challenges and provided a rare opportunity to discuss the personal significance of language loss and revitalization across diverse languages.

Similar to the set-up of Reclaiming Mothertongues, our blog provided all on-campus group members with administrator status, securing their total access to take full control of the site, which to date has had over 2,200 views and is listed as a resource for Indigenous language learners on other websites. The diversity of group members was described on the blog as nurturing “fellowship...for the process of reclaiming our Native languages, while others seek to reaffirm their own grasp and practice in fluency or semi-fluency in Native language. Others among us seek scholarly fellowship as emerging linguists, while others are engaged in Indigenous nation-building work that necessarily involves Native language and cultural development. There are those of us interested in language policy, national political agendas and globalization. Most of us have a stake in multiple issues, and all of us share concern, passion, intellectual rigor and responsibility for each other and our respective homelands and languages.”

Active posts welcomed readers to the in-person and online resources of group members, including priorities designed to serve as a model for other postsecondary student-driven language efforts. These priorities included information sharing and discussion of best practices around language revitalization; determining short and long-term goals in language work; learning from peers via in-person and online exchanges; acting as policy advocates, including co-authoring media and scholarly articles; representing the university and the group at national and international conferences; examining literature, written language texts, oral recordings and documentation and exercising critical thinking on those resources; and finally, connecting the group’s language efforts with campus activities in order to exercise visible, tangible, audible and other reminders of the significance of Indigenous languages. These goals demonstrated student efforts outside of the formal classroom where the blog was an important forum for the constant streaming of those efforts. The blog was divided into the following categories monitored by students: *Global issues* that focused on news, articles and statistics; *multi-media* where students posted and linked music, YouTube videos and other visually stimulating language bits; *phrases* where students rotated posting conversation phrases in various languages; *resources* that included document files of mainly scholarly journals regarding language issues; *tools for language learners* that focused on personal language learning reflections and resulting suggestions from rotating group members; and finally, *conference information* where students posted national and international conference information on language topics.

While students contributed to these categories, they also shared personal reflections. One student posted the following during a break in order to encourage peers to maintain the language group and to continue engaging in collaborative work:

Háida Shíká 'Oolyeed Laanaa. Taa' Shodí?

"I wish someone would help me. Please?" I chose this phrase in *Diné Bizaad* (the Navajo Language) as the headline for this post for two reasons, namely to breathe some life into the group once again and, secondly, to tell you I cannot do this alone. I write this post from the Navajo Nation library in *Tségháhoodzání, Hozdo* (Window Rock, Arizona). As I sit here, I can hear and see the Navajo Language alive, but not well. In the office behind me, a librarian is gossiping in fast Navajo to her younger sister. She is complaining about her daughter's boyfriend's habit of walking around in only his boxer shorts and scratching himself until noon everyday. At a nearby desk, an older man whom I will call Fred (because he seems like a Fred) is talking to his wife about tonight's dinner menu: *dibé at'sí* (mutton) and *ch'ééh jiyáán* (watermelon). He seems rather pleased by the prospect of this meal. I am at once hungry and envious. A few tables away, two young women about my age are sharing earphones and watching a video on YouTube. Their whispers are carried through the space in a mess of English, giggles, and the occasional word or two in Navajo. Within this language jungle, I was quite surprised to discover a young girl, approximately three years old according to her grandmother, speaking only Navajo with an occasional English word jumbled here or there. After speaking with *bimasaní* (her maternal grandmother) for a few moments, I learned this girl's parent's had left her in the care of the mother's mother and had moved away. *Masaní* (grandma) told me it was hard keeping up with her granddaughter because her legs are not what they used to be, but she insists in speaking to the girl in Navajo until she enters school in a few years. I was shocked to find such a sight: a little girl who spoke hardly a word of English. All at once, I was amazed and hopeful. Not because this small girl was largely unexposed to English, but because her grandmother recognizes the importance of sharing this knowledge with her. I would imagine this to be quite a great gift to give to any child. As *Masaní* and I spoke, I noticed the little girl had her eye on the small bag of strawberries next to my computer. So, I turned, picked up the berries and knelt down in front of her with the bag open and said, "*Da' shídeezhi dah woozh yishdeé holo?*" (Sister, would you like a strawberry?)" Her understanding eyes, went from the bag to her grandmother, who said only, "*Niina' awee'*" (Take it baby)." Without hesitating she grabbed one and calmly said, "*Ahe'hee shinaaí*" (thank you, brother)." As she and grandma walked away, it reminded me of the hard task each of us has ahead to protect and recover the sacred, spoken or otherwise. It is a something worth fighting for, but more importantly, it is something which cannot be done alone. *Shíká 'analyeed laanaa dooleef?* Will you help me? (Navajo student entry excerpt, posted March 30, 2010)

Personal reflections like these were powerful reminders that these postsecondary students have strong feelings about their languages. However, campus spaces for the expression and sharing of student feelings and ideas coupled with intellectualization and critical thinking on language issues remain scarce for these students. Further, because courses on Indigenous languages, revitalization, policy development and advocacy, and program administration are not readily available to these students, time outside of the classroom had to be established due to their interest and demand. Even within Indigenous communities, the assumption cannot be made that postsecondary students are creating opportunities for rich exchange or that they will receive training in the multiple areas required for language work. In this way, the language group and blog created confluent physical and virtual spaces where students could cultivate not only a sense of fellowship, but also consider solution-oriented language work, whether at home, in their communities, or thousands of miles away at school.

The language group is now faculty-advised and remains student-driven. Although issues like turnover due to student graduation may impact the leadership of the group and maintenance of the blog, the infrastructure for continued informal education and virtual exchange remains. Some key observations are offered here about the significance of what the usage of new media, and specifically social media, like blogs, provoke on the role of postsecondary students in Indigenous language revitalization efforts:

- a) The accessibility of the blog for similarly goal-oriented postsecondary students and language stakeholders builds a global sense of fellowship around problems and solutions not easily achieved in person.
- b) The site serves a 24-hour a day, 7 days a week reminder of the presence of Indigenous languages to users
- c) The site is a controlled and centralized repository of digital and multi-media resources, from journal articles on language policy to Inupiaq rap
- d) The site is malleable, change-able, and constantly open to creativity in its impermanence.

These are not novel results for social media, but as Indigenous postsecondary students search for ways to address language loss, exploring usages of new media and reflecting on the significance of those efforts is worthwhile. In this sense, innovation can be put on the table, openly discussed, debated and constantly redefined. Furthermore, promoting conscientiousness of new media objectives matched with content and actions is critical. For example, the goal of the blog established was not to produce fluent speakers of Indigenous languages, no matter the amount of digital and online language-learning tools and resources. What new media offered in this case was the ability to rapidly connect with the activities and experiences of others to gain exposure to a variety of language possibilities within revitalization, protection, preservation and maintenance—including specific ideas around leadership, policy development and advocacy, fellowship and acknowledgement and celebration of successes.

There are also challenges with using new media to connect Indigenous postsecondary students with each other and greater communities of language speakers and workers. Language education stakeholders still have much to do with regard to redefining new media uses along Indigenous-centered priorities. Firstly, in more rural areas in the Americas, access can be difficult due to cost or reluctance to use new media in language work, limiting language resource interaction with tribal members who live away from their home communities, including postsecondary students. Secondly, what constitutes quality and legitimate information in digital technology and new media is debatable as there is a great deal of “stuff” “out there,” but how much is usable for postsecondary students at different levels of knowledge and experience? Thirdly, there are major communication and transparency gaps in determining how to participate in language work that involves new media—like appropriate access to information and knowledge, developing protocols for working with Indigenous language communities, ethically and respectfully archiving and sharing information, and building networks and fellowship, and while doing so, being mindful of Indigenous cultural issues, even as we are members of those communities. Broader issues also exist. For example, teaching innovative skills needed to effectively run, participate in and sustain language revitalization programs that involve creative approaches is needed, and currently there is no guarantee that students will gain these skills via postsecondary institutions or on the job in their home communities. So spaces where these directions in learning can occur and be practiced must be fully explored and vetted. Finally, given there are over 350 million Indigenous people in over 70 countries worldwide (UNPFII, 2010), the type, scope and impact of work being done in language arenas on the ground, and using new media comparatively is yet to be determined. Understanding the problems and gaps facing current language efforts is critical in making decisions to meet challenges and embrace creative approaches towards engaging in language work at numerous levels and diverse spaces.

Indigenous cultures, world cultures

For almost a decade, the notion of a world culture, including the spread of certain powerful models of schooling, has argued the manifestation of a singular way of doing things (Meyer and Ramirez, 2002; Ramirez et al., 1987). For example, education is viewed as a universal model of structure, pedagogy and standards no matter where one travels. In educational research, world culture is contested by the theory that educators and local actors sometimes resist and always transform the official models and policies they are handed (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). New media may further challenge world culture theory due to its often unpredictable material and usage. In new media, hegemony may be displaced. This can apply to language revitalization work where questions emerge—as Indigenous languages are lost, will typical models of “saving” them, such as documenting, recording and archiving, suffice for Indigenous communities? Using new media and technology, how can we build capacity to address these efforts, and what is our criteria for success? These are questions that diverse representation of community could address.

Some of the world’s least powerful people are leading the way toward creative and ethical global media citizenship. Locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, Indigenous peoples are using radio, television, print, and a range of new media to amplify their voices, extend the range of reception, and expand their collective power. Emerging from the shadows of a shared colonial inheritance, the international movement of Indigenous peoples has fostered important social, political, and technological innovations. (Alia, 2010, p. 7)

Alia (2010) discussed not only the participation of Indigenous people in media, but also the production of media by Indigenous people as evidence of a new form of representation, the “new media nation”—a confluence of boundaries and places resulting in Indigenous and not state-controlled news and networks that promote cultural, linguistic and political interests. Using examples from around the globe that highlight Indigenous news, film, television networks and radio, Alia argued that Indigenous peoples are responding to legacies of their misrepresentation in media, shattering the myth of Indigenous people as incapable or uninterested in technology, and simultaneously creating diverse ways to express on issues they identify to be critical. The notion of a “new media nation” is a fundamental reminder that Indigenous participation and production in media are not merely reactions to a colonial history but are examples of active innovation by marginalized peoples. While the literature on Indigenous postsecondary students in the U.S. and their usage of new media to address language issues is thin, the language group and blog presented here provides one example of how Indigenous postsecondary students are also not simply reacting to historical and current linguistic repression, but are using the tools available to them at this time to create new approaches towards cultivating their interests, beliefs and hopes.

Although blogs are not the solution to language loss, their previously unanticipated uses and results should not be disregarded. For example, “When it’s gone, it’s gone,” a 2008 Google video shot and posted by American Indian students in Norman, Oklahoma, reached massive state, national and international circulation and relayed an important message—that young Indigenous people care about their heritage languages, so complicating the myth that youth reject their languages and cultures in favor of mainstream and Western lifestyles. The 2008 documentary, *The Linguists*, and the work of the two featured linguists at the Living Tongues Institute For Endangered Languages (www.livingtongues.org), received wide acclaim and drew attention to the complexity of language loss and revitalization, including the relationship between research, community ownership and intellectual property of languages. The Endangered Language Alliance (www.endangeredlanguagealliance.org) based in New York City, connects linguists with immigrant speakers of nearly extinct languages, raising the issue of endangered and Indigenous languages in the diaspora. Of course, there are caveats to these examples in that youth creating videos does not always mean youth sustainably engaged in language work, and linguists working with Indigenous communities does not always mean that culturally-appropriate frameworks and protocols are employed or that consistent training of Indigenous

community members to protect and preserve their own languages is taking place. However, exposure and rapid flows of information are important to the work being done and the work that could be done on the ground.

On the other hand, uses of new and social media still require examination by Indigenous communities and postsecondary students alike. For postsecondary students, limitations enforced by their communities can be overwhelming. For example, one student blogger came from a small community where tribal leaders ban the writing of the Indigenous language and its release in any form outside of community boundaries. For this young language learner, daily affirmation and reinforcement of language while attending an institution far from home was challenging, and using publicly accessible online media to do so was unthinkable. Students like this are forced in their time away to rethink and reshape their language identities, which can be an isolating experience. This particular student searched for alternatives to propose to tribal leaders, including a password encrypted, protected site accessible only to tribal members away from home, seeking exposure to the language. That idea and several others that would enable access to digital forms of language, including creating iPhone and iPod applications for tribal members did not reach tribal leadership due to the student's reluctance to cause controversy. However, these ideas were heavily discussed and debated through our organization, and through the blog, the student was exposed to additional possibilities shared by peers. In a global society where 1 in 10 people is a Facebook user and Twitter is a common tool, new media, especially social media frequently used by postsecondary students, including these Indigenous students, cannot be overlooked.

Conclusion

As Indigenous communities in the Americas are subject to national political agendas that include modernization and globalization, the concept of dominant culture and world culture shaping Indigenous communities is difficult to argue. With technology and new media, Indigenous community members may both participate in and fear the influence of the notion of a mainstream monoculture. However, postsecondary student navigation in education and time spent informally engaging in language work using new media provides an important indicator of their agency to act using the tools available to them. Through attention to language loss and their employment of the instruments of our time, Indigenous students provide important examples of not only operating in resistance to the oppression of their languages, but also to the pigeonholing of technology as a flat notion. Just as Indigenous community members recognize ancestral knowledge systems based in Indigenous languages, so are postsecondary students capable of honoring those systems while transforming their own educational experiences in unprecedented ways.

Scholars argue that local people reshape themselves in globalization where previous constructs of identity are challenged but not abandoned, and of education in this process, they ask, "will it be only to make us more productive and increase our ability to produce and consume, or will it be able to instill in all of us a democratic spirit with values of solidarity?" (Stromquist and Monkman, 2000, p. 21-22). These observations are relevant to discussions of globalization and development today where technology and new media take center stage. This article argues that postsecondary students are also shaping their own notions of globalization and education through usage of new media in order to simultaneously produce, consume *and* build solidarity with each other. As Indigenous youth and postsecondary students spend time away from home communities, the current constructs of Indigenous languages and student identities vis-à-vis language require understanding and innovation in both formal and informal settings in order for them to participate meaningfully in their cultures and to engage in language work, wherever that may be.

References

Alfred, T. and Corntassel, J. 2005. Being Indigenous: Resurgences against

- contemporary colonialism. In *The Politics of Identity-IX*, ed. R. Bellamy, R., 597-614. England: Government and Opposition, Ltd.
- Aikman, S. 1999. Schooling and development: Eroding Amazon women's knowledge and diversity. In *Education, gender and development: Beyond access to empowerment*, ed. C. Heward and S. Bunwaree, 65-81. UK: Zed Books.
- Aikman, S. 2002. Women's oral knowledge and the poverty of formal education in the Peruvian Amazon. *Gender and Development* 10, no. 3: 41-50.
- Alia, V. 2010. *New media nation: Indigenous peoples and global communication*. UK: Berghahn Books.
- Anderson-Levitt, K. 2003. A World Culture of Schooling? In *Local meaning, global schooling: Anthropology and world culture theory*, ed. K. Anderson-Levitt, 1-26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Archuleta, M., Child, B. and Lomawaima, T. 2000. *Away from home: American Indian boarding school experiences*. Arizona: Heard Museum.
- Arora, P. 2010. *Dot com mantra: Social computing in the Himalayas*. UK: Ashgate.
- Arora, P. 2008. Instant-messaging Shiva, flying taxis, Bil Clinton and more: Children's narratives from rural India. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1: 69-86.
- Bernard, H. 1996. Language preservation and publishing. In *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom up*, ed. N. Hornberger, 139-156. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Brayboy, B. 2003. The implementation of diversity in predominantly white colleges and universities. *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 1: 72-86.
- Brayboy, B. 2005. Transformational resistance and social justice: American Indians in Ivy League universities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 36, no. 3: 193-211.
- Champagne, D. 2008. Is American Indian studies for real? *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2: 77-90.
- Crawford, J. 2004. *Educating English learners: Language diversity in the classroom*, 5th ed. California: Bilingual Educational Services, Inc.
- Fishman, J., ed. 1991. *Can threatened languages be saved?* UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, J. 1996. What do you lose when you lose your language? In *Stabilizing Indigenous languages*, ed. G. Cantoni, 80-91. Arizona: Northern Arizona University.
- García, O. 2009. En/countering Indigenous Bilingualism. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education. Special issue on Indigenous Youth and Bilingualism*.
- García, O. 2009. Bilingualing without schooling: The role of comprehensive education. In *Theoretical Perspectives on Comprehensive Education: The way forward*, eds. H. Varenne, E. Gordon, E. and L. Lin. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Godenzzi, J.C. 1997. Literacy and modernization among the Quechua speaking

- population of Peru. In *Indigenous literacies in the Americas: Language planning from the bottom up*, ed. N. Hornberger, p. NA. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hornberger, N. and Coronel-Molina, S. 2004. Quechua language shift, maintenance, and revitalization in the Andes: The case for language planning. *International Journal of Society and Language* 167: 9–67.
- Kawagley, Oscar A. 1995. *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to ecology and spirit*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- LaDuke, W. 1999. *All our relations: Native struggles for land and life*. Massachusetts: South End Press.
- LaDuke, W. 2005. *Recovering the sacred: The power of naming and claiming*. Massachusetts: South End Press.
- Leichter, H. J. 1973. The concept of educative style. *Teachers College Record* 75, no. 2: 239-250.
- Luykx, A. 1999. *The Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia*. New York: SUNY Press.
- McCarty, T.L., Romero, M.E. and Zepeda, O. 2006. Reclaiming the gift: Indigenous youth counter-narratives on Native language loss and revitalization. *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 1, 2: 28-48.
- McCarty T., and Watahomigie, L. 1999. Indigenous community-based language education in the USA. In *Indigenous community-based education*, ed. S. May, 79-94. UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Meyer and Ramirez. 2002. National Curricula: World Models and National Historical Legacies. In). *Internationalisierung–Internationalisation*, eds. M. Caruso and H.E. Tenorth, 91 - 107. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group.
- Pierotti, R. and Wildcat, D. 2000. Traditional ecological knowledge: The third alternative. *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5: 1333-1340.
- Ramirez, F. O. and Boli, J. 1987. Global patterns of educational institutionalization. In *Institutional structure: Constituting state, society, and the individual*, eds. G.M. Thomas, J. W. Meyer, F. O. Ramirez and J. Boli, 150-172. California: Sage.
- Romaine, S. 2006. Planning for the survival of linguistic diversity. *Language Policy* 5, no. 2: 443-475.
- Romero, M.E. and McCarty, T. 2006. Language planning challenges and prospects in Native American communities and schools. *Educational Policy Studies Laboratory: Language Policy Research Unit*. Arizona: Arizona State University.
- Romero, M.E. 2003. Perpetuating the Cochiti way of life: A study of child socialization and language shift in a Pueblo community. PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley.
- Romero, M.E. 1994. Identifying giftedness among Keresan Pueblo Indians: The Keres study. *Journal of American Indian Education* 34, no. 1: 35-57.

- Rudolph, D.E. 1994. Constructing an apprenticeship with discourse strategies: Professor-graduate student interactions. *Language in Society* 23: 199-230.
- Schieffelin, B. and Ochs, E. 1986. *Language socialization across cultures*. Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press.
- Sims, C. 2001. Native Language Planning: A pilot process in the Acoma Pueblo community. In *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, eds. L. Hinton and K. Hale. New York: Academic Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 2006. Language policy and linguistic human rights. In *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method*, ed. T. Ricento, T., 273-291. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T., Garcia, O. And Torres-Guzman, M. 2006. *Imagining multilingual schools: Languages in education and glocalization*. UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Stromquist, N. and Monkman, K. 2000. *Globalization and education*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Retrieved December 2010 from <http://www.un.org/esa/socde/unpfii/>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization atlas of the world's languages in danger. Retrieved December 2010 from <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>
-

Author Biography

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman is of Wanka/Quechua and Japanese descent. As an educational researcher, she works on Indigenous education and language policy, Indigenous community education and Native language issues with Indigenous communities in the Americas. She also works closely with communities on in-school and out-of-school youth and educational development in the U.S., Canada and Peru. She earned her B.A. from Dartmouth College, her Ed.M from Harvard University Graduate School of Education and her Ed.D. in International Educational Development in the Department of International & Transcultural Studies at Teachers College, Columbia University. She is a Principal Investigator on a U.S. Tribal Colleges and Universities research project and Senior Fellow in Indigenous education and research at Phelps Stokes. She is also the Senior Researcher at The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico.

Contact Details

Email: eshuaman@phelpsstokes.org

Mail to: Phelps Stokes, 1400 I Street NW, Suite 750, Washington, D.C. 20005