

LANGUAGE MATTERS
LINGUISTIC RELATIVISM AND NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE
REVITALIZATION

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Jordan Friedman Brown has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Anthropology.

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Introduction

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Nothing human escapes language.

Language does not merely mark the boundaries of human life, but rather *constitutes* humanity itself. Explicitly present or not, language never ceases to structure and channel human thought and perception. This is *entanglement*, not omnipotence: as language acts, so is language acted upon, and language itself changes. Language, place, society, and individual and collective imagination all influence one another in diverse and complex ways. As a central thread in this diachronic fabric, language plays a multiplicity of roles in the development of human life. In order for human linguistic practices to be fully understood, these dynamics must be considered in detail.

For the past half century, however, much of linguistic scholarship has done just the opposite. Most linguists have focused on topics amenable to reduction and the illusion of completeness: syntactic structures safely severed from what meanings they might bear, cognitive processes decontextualized and sanitized in laboratory conditions. Such research has yielded interesting, and sometimes important results, but has come with a sense of stagnation, a loss of wonder at language. The attempts at rhapsody that preface or conclude many an undergraduate textbook seem incapable of any praise of the subject matter more compelling than the old saw of syntactic productivity.

This is alarming. It is one thing to judiciously confine one's research to a simplified subset of linguistic phenomena for productivity's sake; it is quite another to forget the entire world of language that lives outside of these bounds. Consider, for an alternative tone, this one of many lyrical passages from Edward Sapir's *Language*, written in the heyday of structuralism: "Languages are more to us than systems of thought-transference. They are invisible garments that drape themselves about our spirit and give a predetermined form to all its symbolic expression" (Sapir 1921:236).

Sapir's language is neither isolable mental 'module' nor sterile formal system, but rather the omnipresent fabric through which we weave the many and varied strands of human life. Instead of supposing certain universal principles to appear *structurally* in all languages, Sapir proposes a sort of dialogic universality, in which the diverse forms of individual languages interact creatively and constantly with "a larger, more intuitive linguistic medium" (Sapir 1921:240). With Sapir, the fundamental shape of language is neither immutable nor fixed prior to human influence, but rather develops in response to the linguistic actions of individuals over time.

All of these notions, more or less foreign to the mainstream of contemporary linguistic thought, draw heavily on Sapir's affinity for a property of language, the study of which his modern counterparts have almost entirely disdained to pursue — that is, poetry.

Not necessarily Pushkin or Keats, but *any* of the bits of language that associate creatively, that leap semantic hedgerows, that draw attention to the forms of things and to themselves, that imply rather than refer, that mean twice at once, that reach from the air or the page into the mind to stand on shifting memories of conversations heard or stories told, awaiting comprehension.

Language like *this* is not so much mathematical function, converting meanings to symbols and back again, as it is kaleidoscopic artwork: a living prism that in its infinite twistings and foldings both means things and *does* things, simultaneously refracting and reflecting itself, and the world it both structures and describes. The mainstream of linguistic thought seems to have forgotten this side of language, and only a few scholars have continued to ask or attempt to answer the questions it begs of us.

For modern linguistics, this selective ignorance is no longer tenable. The realities of language endangerment, alongside a growing concern for issues of language rights and linguistic diversity, have led to the involvement of many “straight-ahead” linguists in language revitalization programs. In this context, a reductionist approach to language is more than incomplete; it is destructive. Endangered language linguists are often directly responsible for research with the only remaining sources from whom it is possible to glean rich and accurate knowledge of a struggling language: its last speakers. If a linguist’s curiosity extends only so far as the collection of novel syntactic rules or interesting lexical items, then that extremely limited data may well be all that will remain to posterity. For the sake of Western research objectives, entire peoples stand potentially to be robbed of intricate linguistic worlds developed over millenia.

Conversely, a great linguist, attuned to the poetic as well as prose nature of language, might well be one of a very few people capable of ensuring the *survival* of just such a linguistically-inscribed world, in the context of language reclamation. This kind of linguist must possess both a sophisticated understanding of the holistic nature of language, and a nuanced and sensitive awareness of the reasons that a people and their language have come to be where they are at the present moment. And yet that linguist may still wonder:

What does it feel like to lose *your own language*? What exactly gets lost? And what is or isn't there in the struggle for reclamation that repairs the damage and makes the effort worthwhile?

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What follows is my attempt to develop a theoretical framework for approaching such questions, from the perspective (naturally enough) of a non-Native linguist. Chapter One lays out the historical and linguistic backdrop against which contemporary indigenous language revitalization — and its associated discourse — takes place. Chapter Two considers the important role that theories of linguistic relativism play in talk about American Indian language revitalization, and proceeds to advance one particular theory that seems best suited to revitalization as a linguistic context: the poetic vision of relativism proposed by linguistic anthropologist Paul Friedrich (1986). In Chapter Three, Friedrich's theoretical framework shapes my examination of the relativistic consequences of both language shift and subsequent revitalization. As this inquiry supports at least the internal consistency of viewing shift and revitalization in terms of Friedrichian relativism, I conclude with a brief discussion as to the implications of a 'poetic' understanding of indigenous language reclamation for linguists working in such contexts, both in terms of theory and method.

Chapter One

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North American Indigenous Linguistic History

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Native North America possesses one of the most complex linguistic legacies in the world. It is well documented that few other places on Earth have rivalled the pre-Contact North American continent for sheer linguistic diversity, but arguably even more intriguing to the linguistic anthropologist is the development of this unparalleled linguistic landscape through the sometimes subtle, sometimes catastrophic events of Western colonialism in the New World. While there are some overarching trends and universal features, the dominating theme of linguistic and cultural colonization and resistance in North America is one of diversity and uniqueness: in the multitude of "Indian" contexts that existed prior to the arrival of Europeans, there arose an equally distinct panoply of post-Contact sociolinguistic histories. Over the centuries of Euro-American expansion, Native societies came into contact with American, English, French, Spanish, Mexican, and even Russian colonists and colonial institutions. Concurrently, Native social and linguistic entities refashioned themselves — sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly — to both maintain preexisting indigenous systems of meaning and situate themselves favorably relative to new sources of power and wealth. All the while, Native individuals engaged and experimented in new approaches to social organization and identity construction (Collins 1998:54,190; Bright 1977:67-8). One important locus of the Indian struggle for self-determination was in youth education: missionary, boarding, and day schools where Western cultural values and possibilities for socioeconomic advancement

competed with Native institutions of learning and models of social achievement.

More recently, the fate of Indian cultural and linguistic worlds has been a central concern of tribally-run language revitalization programs, as these projects have led to the question: "What exactly is *our* language?" In many cases, this work of codification — aimed, for instance, at the development of a language textbook — leads to a direct engagement with the various ways that the group's particular version of 'Indianness' has been progressively reconstructed relative to the competing aims of maintaining 'tradition' and accommodating 'modernity' (Collins 1998:3-7; Gross 2007b:48). Native American language revitalization in many ways recapitulates the labyrinthine linguistic history of Native North America, as it obliges Indian communities at once to tease apart the fibers of pre-Contact plurilingual ecosystems, these ecosystems' responses to the sociolinguistic forces brought by the arrival of European colonists, Western practices of anthropological and linguistic documentation and scholarship, Indian ideologies of language as they contrast with those of Western scholars and administrators, the constellation of legal and political considerations encircling the status of Indian groups within the United States, and current issues of language shift and cultural change as they relate to indigenous identity. As such, a firm grasp of the linguistic history of indigenous North America is a great asset in grappling with the pressing questions of contemporary language revitalization work.

Pre-Contact Linguistic Diversity in North America

By various estimates, languages in North America prior to European contact numbered from a few hundred to nearly a thousand. This abundance was by no means due to a profusion of closely-related dialects: over 50 distinct

language families have been identified in Native North America, compared to the European continent's three — Indo-European (including Germanic and Romance subgroupings), Finno-Ugric (Finnish and Hungarian), and Basque (Kroskrity and Field 2009:12-3; McCarty 2013b:9; Mithun 1999:1). One of the most fruitful places of inquiry for modern linguistics, the North American linguistic landscape also boasts an extraordinary amount of diversity from a language typological point of view: extensive verbal paradigms, richly productive derivational processes, diverse phonetic inventories and phonological processes, subtly complex syntactical mechanisms, gender-, animacy-, and case-marking on nouns and verbal affixes, versatile discourse markers, productive sound symbolism, and much else besides (Mithun 1999). Beyond this structural richness, the social elements of Indian languages also demonstrate great variety, including both phonological and lexical distinctions between men's and women's speech, distinct ceremonial registers using specialized 'archaic' derived forms, oratorical styles of all stripes (often drastically different from Euro-American speechmaking), generational dialects *not* due to diachronic language shift, several types of specialized shamanic language, carefully infelicitous (think: opposite day) or otherwise obfuscated war talk, speech play (Pomo insults sung to the tunes of birdsong, e.g.), and so on (Miller 1996). Moreover, these languages were by no means cultural atoms hovering pristine in sociopolitical and territorial neutrality, but rather active players in vibrant and varied sociolinguistic economies. Only brief snapshots of these native linguistic dynamics exist, as they were frequently destabilized or reorganized by the arrival of European languages, but what examples we do have are intriguing: up-river versus down-river patterns of language expansion in Northwestern California, linguistic chauvinism among the Pueblo (except for the immigrant Arizona Tewa,

who carved out a multilingual niche as translators), vibrant and changeable patterns of individual and familial multilingualism among the Pomo, the rise of political lingua francas in the Creek and Iroquois confederacies, and complex trade pidgins among the Inuit (Conathan 2004; McLendon 1980; Miller 1996; Rigsby 1965; Silverstein 1996). Given such complexly developed indigenous language-worlds, it seems elementary to assume a nuanced and distinctly non-uniform response across North America to the arrival of Europeans and *their* linguistic hierarchies. This was most certainly the case, as evidenced in widespread bi- and multilingualism in successive European prestige languages (generally French/Spanish followed by English), corresponding patterns of lexical and semantic borrowing in order to preserve distinctions between integral Native conceptual domains and simply *necessary* European imports, creation and indigenous transmission of hybridized Indian-European trade pidgins (some of which were eventually creolized at the expense of local indigenous languages), development of literacy and other lingua franca functions in Indian languages in response to the influence of European lingua francas, and most strangely the genesis of novel and fully grammatically complex “mixed” languages such as Mitchif (French nouns and prepositional phrases with Cree verbal constructions) and Copper Island Aleut (Aleut phonology and derivation with Russian verbal inflection) apparently invented out of whole cloth by the children of mixed marriages, who spoke neither source language fluently (Bright 1977; Mithun 1999; Silverstein 1996)! These and other sociolinguistic adaptations were creative, and often quietly defiant responses to the developing impositions of Western colonial regimes, which constituted a complex history in themselves.

Colonial Language Policy in North America

The first Western effects on the linguistic state of affairs in North America did not involve the local presence of Europeans at all, but their consequences were nonetheless severe: as massive and recurrent epidemics of diseases such as smallpox, influenza, measles, dysentery, tuberculosis, and malaria swept through Indian communities across the continent, human destruction was accompanied by its linguistic counterpart. Many formerly extensive and populous speech communities suffered terrible losses, often comprising up to 90% of the original population over several decades (Gross 2007a:20). Some smaller Native languages likely disappeared completely, and nearly all were considerably enfeebled in terms of their speaker base (Mithun 1999:2-3). While there was little interruption of intergenerational language transmission at this point, these demographic losses would have considerable future repercussions: while there is nothing inherently at-risk about a smaller speech community, such communities are more vulnerable to drastic social shift. Unfortunately for many Indian languages, exactly that kind of shift was in store, as a sharply stratified Western state system made ready to envelop the largely egalitarian American linguistic landscape (Hill 2001:277; McLendon 1980:145; Miller 1997:227).

For most indigenous groups, first contact with European explorers or pioneers was followed closely by the arrival of missionaries and missionary education. In many cases, missionaries recognized the usefulness of the local indigenous language in presenting more effectively their Christian message to would-be converts, and invested considerable time and effort in learning and developing liturgical materials in the local language (Gross 2007:27). The overriding aim, of course, was still the 'civilization' — and the accompanying 'necessary' subordination — of indigenous peoples, and certain sects or

individuals espoused less accommodating techniques. In the 17th century, Puritan minister John Eliot developed an early forerunner of the infamous U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools of two centuries later. The Indian 'praying town' was a small, self-sufficient community intended to instruct Indian children in English language and Christian living by removing them from their homes and families. Ironically, one of the eventual outcomes of these schools was Native literacy *in the indigenous language* (McCarty 2013:49-50). Given the political and demographic realities of 17th and 18th century North America, local Native languages held too much social power both within and across indigenous and European societies to be simply shunted aside.

These relatively favorable circumstances for Native languages remained intact until the founding of the new American republic, the United States of America, and the commensurate inception of the American national project of unheeding expansion. As the U.S. gained its political (and military) footing, one of its most avowedly pressing policy interests concerned the state of the Indian nations contained within its official borders and within its lusted-for continental extent. Early on, policy makers recognized the importance of undermining the indigenous societies that so clearly flew in the face of American assertions as to the nature of the ideal nation, based on a radically capitalist economy predicated on the blind exploitation of commodified natural resources (and, later, commodified labor). A series of federal policies was introduced to serve this aim of indigenous disintegration, which spanned the better part of 150 years and significantly affected most all Indian communities (McCarty 2013:51). The first of these policies was the 1819 Civilization Fund Act, providing federal support for missionary schooling. In subsequent decades, the nation-building aims of the U.S. government began to overtake those less explicitly political goals of the

Christian missionaries, who desired above all to produce converts, no matter what was involved, and funding for missionary schools began to stipulate English-language instruction. Even well into the mid-1800s, however, many missionary educators refused these demands, instead making their own judgments as to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students and curriculum (Gross 2007:27-8). Thus, Indian languages and lifeways continued to be a considerable presence in even the dedicated "civilizing" apparatus of Indian education, interacting in a complex interchange with English and other prestige languages of the time (Field and Kroskirty 2009:15-6).

This situation began to change substantially only in 1887, when the U.S. government initiated two particularly aggressive policies against Indian cultural self-determination: 1) the Dawes or General Allotment Act, which decollectivized Indian reservation lands such that the resulting parcels largely ended in non-Indian ownership, and 2) the adoption of mandatory (and English-only) Indian education, enforced with the threat of imprisonment for noncompliance (Gross 2007a:30; McCarty 2013b:51). Missionary-run day schools, whether federally-funded or not, had been denigrated as too permissive of Indian ways of life, allowing for students to leave school for important gathering harvests or the like. The new BIA schools were predominantly boarding schools, and distant off-reservation schools soon became common, enrolling students from numerous historically-unrelated tribes so as to scramble all would-be sense of a specific Indian community (Gross 2007a:28-31). Following a notorious policy of "kid-catching" well into the 1930s, the BIA forced Indian children into these boarding schools with little intent to provide them with an education, and even less basic morality. The boarding schools were a barefaced attempt to separate the youngest Indian generation from their homes, their families, their elders, their

ancestral landscapes and social forms, all while providing the BIA administrators with endless opportunities to belittle and demonize all of these indigenous institutions, and to present mainstream American culture and values as the sole suitable alternative (Gross 2007a:31; McCarty 2013b:52-3). Concurrently, the fallout from the Dawes Act had so fragmented the Native land base that many geographically-oriented practices and major local and regional intergroup cultural events became impracticable, further eroding the basis for cultural transmission to the next generation (Collins 1998:190-2; McCarty 2013b:50-1).

Despite these most pernicious practices on the part of the BIA, Indian identities were hardly lost entirely, with examples of relatives (who developed Native language literacy with early Boasian linguists) writing letters to boarding school students in their shared Native language, determined families hiding their children or moving further out into the country to avoid BIA officials, and most significantly, Indian students carrying on their traditions as best they could in the boarding school setting (Gross 2007a:32-4; Gross 2007b:49; McCarty 2013b:56). Despite this resistance, the boarding schools dealt another devastating cultural blow (from the grave, as it were) to the *following* generation, as parents who had gone through the boarding school system were less likely to teach their children indigenous languages or cultural practices, for fear that their children would undergo the harsh treatment that they had in the BIA schools (McCarty 2013b:52-3, 60-1). Even with the BIA schools no longer active, this concern was not unfounded: English-language public schools had also played a considerable role in the devaluing of indigenous languages and cultures for many decades (Field and Kroskrity 2009:17; Gross 2007b:42).

The abuses of the BIA system finally reached the public gaze in 1928 with the publication of the independent Meriam Report, officially entitled *The Problem*

of Indian Administration. The report detailed the abhorrent abuses and inadequacies of the Indian education system, and even went so far as to advocate for Indian cultural choice as to the degree to which to pursue Euro-American versus indigenous ways of life (McCarty 2013b:54-5). In 1933, amid increasing criticism of its practices, the BIA received a new commissioner in John Collier, who served until 1945. Collier espoused a considerably more progressive stance with regards to the incorporation of Indian cultures and languages into government-run Indian education, resuscitating the notion of day schools and initiating some bilingual education initiatives (Gross 2007a:31-3). Despite these apparent improvements, however, the aims of BIA schools, and the attitudes of their administrators remained much the same, and they still constituted formidable negative forces in Indian processes of cultural transmission and acquisition (McCarty 2013b:55-6). Another reminder that circumstances had not substantially changed for Native peoples was the federal Termination campaign of the 1950s, in which the federal government declared numerous previously-recognized tribes to simply no longer constitute actual Indian groups, thereby depriving them of all reservation lands and any sort of federal funding, as well as forcibly removing families to urban areas and transferring authority from tribal governments to the states (McCarty 2013b:63-4).

With the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s steeped in civil rights — even language rights, with the passage of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act — and with a growing pan-Indian consciousness directed toward Indian self-determination, all the more after the Termination disaster, the time was ripe for a lasting effort to improve the status of Indian cultures in American officialdom (Haynes 2007:71; McCarty 2013b:56-7). Building on successes at the Navajo reservation — the Rough Rock Demonstration School, founded in 1966, and the

community college founded three years later — Native groups helped to realize the passage of the 1972 Indian Education Act, which (revised and expanded in 1975) led to the first bilingual/bicultural Indian education programs in the United States (Field and Kroskrity 2009:17; McCarty 2013b:58-9). With these pieces of legislation began an era in which the Indian education system developed rapidly, and due to overwhelmingly *Indian* efforts, from many different groups (Field and Kroskrity 2009:18).

This transition did not, however, provide a vista overlooking the proverbial Promised Land. Rather, in the process of tailoring Indian education programs to various groups, the dire situation of many indigenous languages and cultures became strikingly clear. For a few languages — Navajo, Cree, Ojibwe — with large, rural speaker bases where most children still learned the language in the home, Native program organizers discovered that the number of natively fluent kindergartners was decreasing steadily each year, and quickly apprehended the need for language maintenance programs (McCarty 2013b:38). The vast majority of other communities found instead that natural intergenerational transmission of the language had long since ceased in most all of the population, with only a few families continuing to pass down the language (Field and Kroskrity 2009:13-4). Still other groups discovered that their languages were moribund, that is, only actively spoken by older adults well past child-bearing age, such that the language would have been certain to die out as this older generation passed on (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:18; Hinton 2003:4; McCarty 2013b:17-21). Communities whose languages fell into the latter two categories were obliged to engage in the development of a more involved language-support program than those with a solid speech community and intergenerational transmission, that is, language *revitalization* (McCarty 2013b:38).

Language Maintenance and Revitalization

The majority of language maintenance programs, especially as they existed through the 1970s and 1980s, focused primarily on classroom instruction. This often meant *transitional model* bilingual teaching, pursued only until competence was developed in English and study could continue in that language alone. Due to the shaky nature of federal legislative and judicial precedent for bilingual educational rights, proposals for full-length, non-transitional bilingual programs were always at the mercy of state-level "English-only" legislation, or the whims of federal funding committees (Collins 1998:129-130). Another method of supporting indigenous languages was teaching them as "foreign" languages for course credit. This strategy could not supply the time to develop fluent speakers, but did much to raise awareness and appreciation for the language (Hinton 2001:7). After the passage of the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (funded in 1992), which understood language education as concerning a *collective* right, rather than just an individual right to an equal education, more expansive and creative educational programs began to take root: full-bilingual schools with considerable indigenous cultural curriculum and new academic domains for the local language, and the sorts of immersion schools already well-known in New Zealand and Hawai'i, focused solely on the Native language (Hinton 2001:8-9). These programs still faced the twin problem of combating the contraction of use domains for the language (i.e., modernizing it), without de-indigenizing it. By developing school or field-based environments mimicking traditional Indian contexts or teaching practices, as well as by reinterpreting otherwise Western concepts in Indian ways, language program organizers were often able to accomplish this balancing act (Hinton 2001:16). In more recent years, as the climate for indigenous language activism has improved, advocates

have followed further these ideas of creating culturally-fit “classrooms” by taking revitalization programs outside of the schools entirely. Intensive summer workshops for children and young adults, such as those run by the Myaamia Project, can provide cultural as well as linguistic immersion. In this way, a new generation of potential speakers can be socialized into a variety of situations where use of the Native language may simply seem natural (McCarty 2013b:100-1; Hinton 2001:10). As Collins writes of the Northern Californian Tolowa language: “There are ... diverse connections between the language program and other cultural activities such as fishing or dancing. ... [H]aving names for things and descriptions of actions, gave events 'a kind of resonance'” (Collins 1998:192).

Many language endangerment contexts require not only youth instruction in the language, but also the creation or rehabilitation of an intermediate generation capable of acting as language teachers, or even simply as supportive parents. Whether coming from a fluent speaker or not, parental home-based reinforcement of the language skills the child learns at school or elsewhere can play a pivotal role in knowledge retention (Hinton 2001:10,12-3). In the most severe stages of language shift — when only a few fluent speakers remain — intensive training strategies such as California's Master-Apprentice Program are important tools. Master-apprentice training consists of one-on-one immersive language use and instruction, pairing an adult language student with an often elderly speaker, and having them spend as much time together speaking the language as possible, with the end goal that the apprentice should acquire strong second-language fluency and enough pedagogical knowledge to later teach the language to new students, thus staving off the language's looming demise by way of evasive acquisitive action (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:60-3; Gross

2007b:51-3).

Progressive language documentation also plays a crucial role in revitalization work, as population bottlenecks in a language's history tend to result in a loss of linguistic information (especially in the case of oral traditions). There is simply too much information in a language to be fully transmitted by such vanishingly small speech communities. Consider the pruning that would occur were you and fourteen others to be the sole linguistic resource for the next generation of English speakers: there is simply no way that you could call to mind and transmit the full variety of forms and speech styles that exist in the language. As discussed above, each North American Indian language possesses at least as much grammatical intricacy and discursive diversity, and Native speech communities frequently *are* faced with just the above situation (Hinton 2001:11). This lot can be greatly ameliorated with good documentary work, either employing a non-Indian professional linguist or a linguistically-trained community member to probe the knowledge of the remaining speakers. Mithun (1990) notes that more organic types of linguistic documentation, where one brings multiple speakers together to converse and focuses on accurately recording that *natural* speech, can provide a boon not only of extensive and functional language-in-situ, but also of speakers more confident and excited about their linguistic knowledge, thus restoring the native speaker "heartbeat" of the endangered language (Hinton 2001:13). Even in less-fluent speakers, such natural conversation can awaken access to previously submerged linguistic abilities (Gross 2007b:50-1; Mithun 1990).

All of these revitalization techniques now play a role in language reclamation projects the world over, and popular interest in human linguistic diversity and concern for the plight of endangered languages has grown palpably

in the past few years, partially due to the consciousness-raising efforts of Western linguists, alongside (often indigenous) language advocates (e.g., Grenoble and Whaley 1998, Harrison 2007, Nettle and Romaine 2000). The close association between the two groups, and the frequent misunderstandings between them begs the question: how do linguists figure into the history of American Indian languages?

To begin with, (proto-)linguistics played a major role in the American colonial enterprise, recording and categorizing (or attempting to) all major languages spoken on the American continent, so as to permit effective language study for trade and military purposes (Silverstein 1996:117). Often, these categorization schemes (such as that of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft) were accompanied by large bodies of texts purporting to give clues as to the workings of the "savage mind", but really constituting a revisionist literary endeavor to construct a popularizable image of an indigenous American 'tradition' that could serve as a folksy poetic foil for the construction of American 'modernity' (Bauman and Briggs 2003:246-50; cf. McNally 2006). Later on, after the advent of Boasian linguistic anthropology, Western researchers often contributed to the effacement of contemporary Indian groups by focusing their researches on remembered pre-Contact social structures and forms, hardly acknowledging the present circumstances of their informants. Examined with some care, these same circumstances might have revealed a complex and ongoing process of indigenous American identity formation, mediating between past and present and notions of tradition and modernity (Collins 1998:3-7). As it happened, however, Kroeberian anthropologists' pronouncements of 'authentic' Indianness featured prominently in the rationale behind the disastrous Termination policies of the 1950s (Leventhal et al. 1992).

At the same time, Western linguists have done extraordinarily valuable work on Native languages, and sometimes their field notes are the only information of any kind left concerning an extinct language (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:194; Hinton 2001:11). Yet there appears to be a fundamental disjunction between indigenous and Western approaches to language, even among linguists in both camps. One example of such contrast is that much of indigenous thought characterizes language as widely inclusive of both referential and non-referential communicative, cognitive, and magical-agentive functions — and thus as *constitutive* of mental (and some physical) processes — while Western thought approaches language primarily as a separable and chiefly referential apparatus for communication, categorical perception, and rational reflection, and thus as strictly either representative of, or assistive in sharply delimited cognitive domains (Friedrich 1986:18,22,147-8; Momaday 1997:2,15; Urban 1991:2,15). Predictably enough, this ideological mismatch gives rise to more than a few disagreements and pronounced feelings of incompatibility between Indian language advocates and Western linguists working in revitalization contexts, where the question is often what particular vision of *language* ought to be *revitalized*. Despite such disagreements, however, there are more than a few areas of repeated ideological coincidence, one of which seems to be a general formulation of linguistic relativism as a central rationale for the valuation of endangered Native languages.

Chapter Two

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Relativism in Linguistic Theory

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As described in Chapter One, the language revitalization movement among contemporary American Indian groups is both complex in terms of its historical roots and diverse as far as its present forms and methodologies. Both characteristics are reflected in the variety of American Indian attitudes (as well as those of non-Native linguists and activists) toward endangered indigenous languages and their revitalization as a cultural project (Anderson 2009; Bunte 2009; McCarty 2013b:48-63,92-154). Among all of the culturally-constructed and often conflicting ideas about language present in the discourse of revitalization, one in particular dominates: that is, linguistic relativism, or the notion that each and every language determines or at least significantly influences the thoughtways of its speakers. The present chapter concerns the many forms of this important — and by no means uncontested — idea and its real or imagined relevance to contemporary language revitalization projects.

Relativism in Linguistics

In its most basic formulation, linguistic relativism holds (1) that language plays an important role in the structure and process of *all* human cognition, and (2) that every language is unique in form. Therefore, the thought patterns of speakers of any particular language will be unique in similar ways to the language itself (Friedrich 1986:12-15; Hill and Mannheim 1992). This theoretical standpoint is also known as Whorfianism, or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, after

the early to mid-20th century linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Over the course of their many and varied writings on linguistic topics, Sapir and Whorf together articulated a particular vision, or more accurately, several complementary and contrasting visions of linguistic relativism that have since been mostly submerged or forgotten due to the use of the two scholars' names to designate any of several formulations of the basic theory described above, whether or not such formulations truly stem from their work (Friedrich 1986:8-11; Hill and Mannheim 1992). I will use the terms Whorfianism and Sapir-Whorf interchangeably with that of linguistic relativism, but it is to be understood that I do not thereby refer to the ideas of Sapir and Whorf themselves, only to the theoretical question and accompanying tradition for which their names have become a cover term; their own theories will be discussed separately.

Linguistic relativism has deep intellectual roots in Enlightenment and Romantic era philosophy, reaching back to the writings of such philosopher-linguists as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt (McAfee 2004). While these early writings played a considerable role in laying the foundations for the more dedicated anthropological linguistic work that would go on during the first half of the 20th century, scholars such as Herder and Humboldt lacked the complementary theoretical paradigm of cultural relativism, and their ideas often focused on discussions of the relationship between language and national character, which often devolve into chauvinistic speculation (Bauman and Briggs 2003:181-2,191). Even the empirical researches of Humboldt — Herder did not conduct linguistic fieldwork — were tightly bound to the Western colonial project (Bauman and Briggs 2003:202; McAfee 2004). The ideological and historical elements of linguistic science are discussed in some detail elsewhere in this thesis. For the present discussion,

however, it will suffice to note the shift brought about by Franz Boas' development of cultural relativism as a theoretical alternative to the cultural evolutionism that underscored — and led astray — so many Enlightenment and Romantic works on the subject of language and culture (Bauman and Briggs 2003:6-7; Friedrich 1986:9-10). This very Boasian approach was the basis upon which Sapir and Whorf built their own unique conceptions of the interplay between language and thought.

Sapir himself studied under Boas and became an eminent linguist, with extensive field experience among Native American languages. He never set out all of his ideas about language and thought in a single publication, but rather they can be found spread across his considerable output in related linguistic and anthropological topics. His view of linguistic relativism relied on his considerable comparative linguistic knowledge, and the sense that perfect translation between any two languages was not possible (McAfee 2004). While a brilliant practitioner of logically rigorous investigations of linguistic structure, Sapir also concerned himself with the poetic and individual dimensions of language use — he himself was a prolific poet, and this interest appeared in his scholarly work. For this reason, the modern linguistic anthropologist and poeticist Paul Friedrich draws on Sapir for the basis of his own view of linguistic relativism, which will be discussed in detail below (Friedrich 1986:11-12). Sapir's remarkable understanding of the simultaneously individual and social nature of language is exemplified in his observation that "Language is itself a collective art of expression, a summary of thousands upon thousands of individual intuitions.... The language is ready, or can quickly be made ready, to define the artist's individuality" (Sapir 1921, cited in Friedrich 1986:53). In contrast to many subsequent characterizations of his work, Sapir was sensitive not only to the

effect of linguistic structure on speakers' thought patterns, but also to the speaker's active role in constructing, altering, or even ignoring the linguistic landscape through creative uses of the linguistic structures at his or her disposal (Friedrich 1986:43).

Benjamin Lee Whorf was arguably Sapir's most famous student, although he came to linguistics late in his life — he held a degree in chemical engineering and had spent most of his professional life working as a fire prevention consultant (Friedrich 1979:456-7). In comparison to his teacher's, Whorf's view of linguistic relativism was relatively unconcerned with creative uses of language by individual speakers, and concentrated instead on the suggestive power that he reasoned obligatory grammatical structures to exercise over all speakers of a given language. In order to illustrate and investigate these psychological effects, Whorf compares cross-linguistically different grammatical mechanisms that fill similar functional niches, such as (famously) tense in English and aspect in Hopi. He then proceeds to draw parallels between the grammatical processes described and anthropologically-attested cultural metaphysics (Whorf 1964:57-61). Though perhaps not so rigorous as Sapir or later scholars of relativism such as Berlin and Kay (1969), Whorf's work still draws a great deal of interest due to its philosophical depth: even if he doesn't give creative language the same agentive role as Sapir begins to do, Whorf is still concerned with the creative potential of language to articulate novel (at least for the Western linguist) world views (Friedrich 1986:14-15).

After the publication of Noam Chomsky's seminal *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and the subsequent genesis of generative grammar, linguists evinced relatively less interest in the sort of relativist research program proposed by Whorf. This shift can be traced to Chomsky's *mentalist* approach to

understanding language production and comprehension, which developed alongside generative linguistics in the concepts of *deep structure* and eventually *universal grammar* (UG), and postulated the existence of a prior and separate logico-grammatical linguistic faculty as a basic component of human cognition (Lepschy 1982:133). Scholars in a variety of disciplines interpreted this to mean that the observable, cross-linguistic grammatical particularities so fascinating to Whorf could not possibly play any formative role in cognition, as they were only the surficial byproduct of transformational syntactic rules going to work on the quasi-universal deep structure of the language, which was itself derived from the universal, psychobiologically-determined axioms of human thought (Lepschy 1982:134). If Chomsky's UG undergirded *all* of the empirical grammatical structures of all the world's languages, then it made little sense that the appearance of a particular structure in a particular language should have any great effect on the thought of its speakers, whose UGs already contained the logical structure from which the given grammatical feature had supposedly been generated (Lepschy 1982:136-7). The Hopi system of verbal aspect was no longer an active partner in a complex feedback loop with Hopi conceptions of the structure of time and space, but simply one surface outcome of the machinery of the generative syntax grappling with the universal human logical structuring of temporal and spatial relations; cultural and linguistic differences in thought patterns were epiphenomenal, not the result of real plasticity in human cognition. Where Whorf saw language as the simultaneous cause and substance of human cognitive diversity, Chomsky saw it as the key to underlying laws of universal human cognition.

This unifying Chomskyan approach was not reserved for the field of syntax, but also extended into the semantic researches of scholars such as

Berlin and Kay (1969). In their famous work, *Basic Color Terms*, a fairly broad (ninety-eight languages) and very shallow (color terminology as reduced to the simplest possible form of reference, in laboratory conditions) comparative sample was used to argue that all of the cross-linguistic diversity in color terminology is underlain by a universal scheme of so-called “basic” color terms — albeit with several distinct stages over the course of a sort of lexical evolution (Conklin 1973). In superb Chomskyan fashion, Berlin and Kay had analyzed a diversity of empirical linguistic form and identified a universal cognitive-perceptual construct supposedly prior to and formative of the linguistic domain in question. In doing this, however, they jettison all of the extensive and linguistically idiosyncratic polysemy inherent in color terminology — e.g., “a black day” in English, or *une nuit blanche* (a sleepless night, lit. a white night) in French — so that their conclusion of universality becomes not only somewhat circular, but also of minimal interest to a linguistic anthropologist working in the Americanist tradition of Sapir and Whorf (Conklin 1973; Friedrich 1986:14). The hypersimplification of language to such near-mythical phenomena as *basic reference* also has its roots in Chomsky’s methodological revolution, where syntactic data for analysis were generally composed of rather wooden sentences or non-sentences like “John ate the cake that Karen had baked” or “John ate the that Karen had baked cake.” These were generated by linguists themselves and reflected their culturally agnostic, cognitive universalist approach, more than anything about language itself (Hill and Mannheim 1992; Lucy 1997).

Relativism in Revitalization

While linguistics as a field moved away from its Americanist roots, some work in the true Whorfian spirit did continue, concerned primarily with capturing in

linguistic and cultural-symbolic detail the many and varied interactions between languages and cultures (cf. Collins 1998, Lucy 1992; Urban 1991). As described in Chapter One, it was only in the 1970s and '80s that the United States witnessed a major push by indigenous groups for linguistic and cultural revitalization initiatives (Field and Kroskrity 2009). Due to the dire state of many Indian languages, (generally non-Native) linguists were called in to assist in building and analyzing linguistic corpora for eventual use in language codification and pedagogy, among other tasks. While the subject of cultural contact phenomena between non-Native linguists and their Native partners will be explored in later, I would like to call attention here to one particular, culturally ambiguous characteristic of the revitalization movement: the revival of a sort of 'folk' linguistic relativism (cf. Pullum 1989 for discussion of a related phenomenon) among Native language activists and program participants, affiliated Native and non-Native linguists — especially in their writings for the general public (cf. Harrison 2007) — and in the public itself (cf. the Endangered Languages Project, launched by Google in 2012). In the case of Native North American languages, this folk relativism often equates a given language with its ancestral speech community's particular prototypical vision of Indianness, and warns that the language's loss will mean the loss of an entire way of thinking about and perceiving the world (Hinton 2003). These assertions, however, are generally stated without empirical support, and without subsequent discussion of their specific implications (Field and Kroskrity 2009).

Due to the scant scholarly treatment of language revitalizers' reported experiences of relativistic linguistic effects, I came to wonder if that narrative might have some explanatory value in terms of understanding revitalization as a cultural phenomenon. After all, the stated goal of many revitalization programs —

full restoration of pre-Contact linguistic patterns where possible — has so seldom been achieved that it begs the question (Collins 1998:179-81; Grenoble and Whaley 2006:48-9): why *e/*se do indigenous peoples undertake the revitalization of their languages?

While the felt importance of relativism among language revitalization participants does seem widely stated enough (see Kroskrity and Field 2009 for numerous examples) to potentially suggest itself as an answer to that question of purpose, a traditional Whorfian analysis of the relativistic dimensions of language revitalization is unsatisfying. The grammatical processes upon which Whorf's theory relied so heavily are simply in too much a state of flux, as a result of the small and often unbalanced (see Collins 1998:174-5) speech community found in modern North American Indian contexts. Moreover, the constant and varied use of language that Whorf identified as a major conditioning influence on habitual patterns of thought simply no longer occurs with endangered languages operating in considerably restricted cultural domains (Field and Kroskrity 2009; Hill and Mannheim 1992; Lucy 1997).

Many of those affiliated with language revitalization programs espouse the view that Indian languages-under-revitalization will relativistically resurrect indigenous thoughtways from the pre-Contact period. This is a problematic point of view, even beyond the difficulties of uncertain linguistic structures and vanishing speech contexts, because no linguistic product of any revitalization effort is interchangeable with the pre-Contact language that was its source (McCarty 2013a). I do not refer to subtle changes in phonology, grammar, or lexicon. Though these exist, they are not nearly so important as the single fact that pre-Contact indigenous languages and their revitalized progeny have inhabited radically different linguistic ecosystems. As a result, the two generally

exhibit quite distinct patterns of sociolinguistic, stylistic, and dialectal variation — the scope of which is generally reduced in the revitalized form (Fishman 2001). These differences cannot be ignored in an assessment of the revitalized language's ability to conjure relevant aspects of pre-Contact life and thoughtways and to provide adequate resources for the detailed formulation and adaptation of modern Indian identities. After all, many of the socially, regionally, and stylistically marked forms of speech present in pre-Contact languages — and so instrumental in linguistic processes of identity formation — have lost their meaning. The linguistic world to which they belonged and with which they constructed their relational significance has disappeared, and the revitalization process is powerless to replicate it (Anderson 2009).

Revitalized languages are also, it would seem, ill-equipped to grapple with the social and expressive realities of post-Contact Indian life. After the arrival of Whites in any given region, local pre-Contact languages generally lost out fairly quickly to European-influenced speech varieties, whether creoles, pidgins, or nonstandard varieties of English. For this reason, the greater part of the post-Contact Indian experience in North America was lived not so much in pre-Contact indigenous languages as in variously hybridized Indian-White vernaculars (Rigsby 1987). The term 'vernacular' applies here particularly because these contact languages and dialects occupied a well-defined space of extremely low status in the then-as-now dominant Euro-American sociolinguistic hierarchy. Unlike pre-Contact languages, they were not actively suppressed (whether by government or missionary fiat), but simply devalued. As a result, these ways of speaking evolved as integral parts of post-Contact Indian life — though many creoles and pidgins fell out of use as Indian-White trade networks collapsed in the late 19th century — and so developed their own sets of tools for

linguistic identity maintenance, uniquely suited to the post-Contact circumstances of American Indian communities (Mithun 1999). Indigenous languages, as revitalized according to linguistic informants or field notes of varying age, lack these particular tools. This is a considerable problem, given that the current situation of Indians in North America is in many ways little different than it has been for the past fifty to one hundred years of post-Contact time, in which non-indigenous languages often served the primary functions of daily life (Rigsby 1987). So, if revitalized languages are both sociolinguistically impoverished and out-of-touch with a critical portion of American Indian history, why is language revitalization touted as so well-suited to the work of reaffirming and reenvisioning Indian cultures and identities?

The key to answering this question is an understanding of the enormous role played by each individual speaker or learner in a revitalization context, as far as determining exactly which indigenous language (or combination of indigenous languages, and even non-indigenous tongues) he or she intends to employ as the linguistic alloy that will accompany his or her thought in at least some measure from then onwards (Haynes 2010; McCarty et al. 2006; Mithun 1990; Odlin 2005). This centrality of the individual hints at a certain lack-of-fit between Whorfian relativism and revitalization contexts: since the language itself is no longer sovereign, but rather subject to the individual speaker's linguistic (and political and cultural) ideals and aesthetics, then why should the language's formal structure alone (as divorced from the human mind in which it operates) be the sole interesting factor in investigating that language's idiosyncratic cognitive effects? Once again, from the aforementioned relativist perspective, it would seem unlikely that the pure grammatical or semantic structure of an endangered language experiencing so many variously angled tugs at its formal boundaries

would exert much influence at all on the thought processes of those using the language; it is simply being too actively constructed and deconstructed by its speakers. Following this line of reasoning, the notion that the revitalization of Indian languages should necessarily bring with it a renaissance of quintessentially Indian thoughtways seems unfounded.

I am not, however, prepared to believe that Indian people (and so many other communities pursuing their own revitalization programs) have simply been taken in by some linguistic pseudo-science. Indians involved in language revitalization overwhelmingly attest to the important effects of indigenous language study on their own *personal* thought, and on that of the community as a whole (e.g., Haynes 2007, Hinton 1994 and 2003, Hinton and Hale 2001, Kroskrity and Field 2009). Instead, what is needed is a different approach to understanding the interaction between language and individual thought, an approach rooted in language as a continually constructed, non-monolithic phenomenon, and in the individual as an important actor in constructing his or her language. These two criteria are met by a combination of Urban's (1991) discursive approach to language and culture, and Friedrich's (1986) incorporation of *poetic indeterminacy* into a dialogic vision of linguistic relativism.

Poetic Relativism

Ideal for our purposes, Friedrich's view of language places the individual at center-stage as a fully-realized speaker/hearer and agent, constantly and creatively interacting with the peculiarities of his or her language and the literary tradition thereof. The individual enjoys such pride of place due to the fact that — in Friedrich's view — it is the poetic function of language that most intimately and forcefully influences thought. While basic reference could possibly be argued to

occupy some portion of the speaker's linguistic input and output, it minimally engages the cognitive faculties of the individual, so that, while mundane habitual categorization may well affect the speaker's perception of his or her world, the effects are not so interesting as might be achieved at more complex levels of language. Differences between languages at this basic referential level are just not drastic enough to be very striking as regards their effect on thought. Friedrich writes, however, that *poetic* language employs such complex *language-specific* structures, and intertwines so closely with the mental life of the speaker, that its effect on the individual's processes of cognition is bound to be considerable (Friedrich 1979:492-3).

But what is poetic language, exactly? Friedrich proposes to recognize three main poetic tropes: figurative language, intensification of form, and association by analogy. Figurative language subsumes a great swathe of poetic techniques, ranging from descriptive metaphor to the extensive use of proverbs, all of which share a basic emphasis on language-as-ornament with which to clothe more immediate meaning. Intensification of form refers to the tendency of poetry to create linguistic landscapes that are densely populated with unusual and complex morphological and syntactic structures, making the language simultaneously very characteristic and somewhat outlandish, or at least *marked* (Friedrich 1979:456-8). The creation of meaning by analogical association relies on establishing linkages between two separate but somehow similar semantic domains, in order to draw out unexpected new understandings of the target domain; this contrasts with derivational approaches to meaning, which synthesize meaning from constituent parts, rather than transposing entire meaningful systems one onto the other (Friedrich 1979:469-70). The most important component of poetic language, however — that which employs the

above three tropes for its functioning — is what Friedrich calls the “poetic polarity” (Friedrich 1979:468). This “master trope” consists of the coordination of linguistic music (grammatical, phonological, etc.) and mythic meaning (partially universalistic, partially culturally-inscribed). It is the presence of these two powerful processes that allows poetry to attain its unique creativity, both in the realm of linguistic form, where uncommon or even unprecedented structures are permitted by dint of their mythic or emotional content (Friedrich 1979:478); and in that of symbolic meaning, where great topical and logical leaps are reinforced by suggestively crafted linguistic surfaces (Friedrich 1986:39).

Thus, Friedrich’s definition of poetic language requires the speaker to interact extensively not only with the formal structural resources of his or her language, but also with the repertoire of mythic topics addressed in his or her language’s poetic/literary tradition. This duality puts the speaker in contact with highly idiosyncratic linguistic features in a context of depthful meaning — in stark contrast with Berlin and Kay’s (1969) unremarkable “basic meaning” and simple semantic sets — which Friedrich argues creates a unique opportunity for the language in question to make its mark on the mind of the speaker (Friedrich 1986:3,21-2).

Referential relativism would seem to be a weak force in the context of an endangered language undergoing revitalization, as few speakers use such languages in the habitual, primary-language fashion imagined by Whorf and researchers like Berlin and Kay. However, revitalizers are constantly engaged in active dialogue with their language’s structure and its poetic/literary tradition — additionally charged with ideological meanings arising from Contact and post-Contact history (cf. McNally 2006) — in a way that closely mirrors Friedrich’s description of the poetic faculty in language. I submit that, viewed as an active

and extensive form of poesis, language revitalization programs provide all of the relativistic effects that participants attest. Friedrich (1986:35) writes that “poets... give new life to their languages” bringing into being new ways of understanding the world, while at the same time rejuvenating their language’s store of raw materials for *individual* expression (Friedrich 1986:33,49-50,53). This is precisely what occurs when Indian people work to revitalize their languages: they consciously and poetically work to fill a sensed linguistic and expressive void, in active dialogue with the discursive landscape that comprises both Indian and Euro-American languages and literary traditions (Urban 1991:18).

Theorizing Relativism for Revitalization

Before we begin our examination of language revitalization itself, let us flesh out the theoretical details of the relativist approach advanced above as best suited to analyzing language endangerment and revitalization. While Friedrich’s writings inform the core of our approach, the bare bones of linguistic theory upon which this approach rests have their roots in the thought of another great proponent of linguistic poetics, Roman Jakobson.

Though a preeminent structuralist, Jakobson seems to have been a semiotician at heart, and never was quite satisfied with the traditional Saussurean binary sign, composed of arbitrarily symbolically-linked *signifiant* and *signifié*. Jakobson — who uses instead the Latin terms *signans* (pl. *signantia*) and *signatum* (pl. *signata*) — posits that their relationship is in fact one of “habitual, learned contiguity,” thereby asserting *nonarbitrariness* as a fundamental character of the sign, in direct opposition to Saussure (Jakobson 1985:28). In Jakobson’s (1985) view, Saussure fundamentally mischaracterizes the way people relate to linguistic signs, ignoring the time-distributed process of

acquiring a proper understanding of the sign's meaning, and the feeling of nonarbitrary *motivation* that such an experience engenders. This semiotic motivation, Jakobson observes, also plays a role in some productive processes of language, such as stem-based derivation and sound symbolism (Jakobson 1985:29).

Jakobson takes an equally critical approach to that other tenet of Saussurean structuralism: combinational linearity. While the combination of individual *signantia* is constrained to linearity by physical limitations of utterability, there is no such restriction on *signata*, several of which may cluster under the umbrella of a single *signans*. One commonplace example of such combinational simultaneity is the multiple significance of inflectional verb endings in Romance languages — e.g., the syllable *-ez* in French *mangez* simultaneously implicates indicative mood, present tense, and second person plural subject (Jakobson and Pomorska 1985:21). Greater complexity is also possible, such as in the realm of metonymic language, where referential and associational meaning coexist and inform one another. As such, simultaneity may also act as a productive linguistic process (Jakobson 1985:29). Of course, *signata* may also be combined linearly, and a mix of the two techniques is most common, increasing the possibilities for formally-innovative use of linguistic structures.

With reference to Saussure's distinction between synchrony and diachrony, Jakobson rebels against the characterization of the former as static and the latter as dynamic, contending instead that any full picture of a synchronic moment in the life of language would include vestiges of past states and intimations of the future to come (Jakobson and Pomorska 1985:12-3). Moreover, these past and future inclusions are liable to be extended for the creative purposes of speakers, as in the reinsertion of a classical poetic or

literary tradition within a modern stylistic movement. Another example of such heterotemporal creativity appears in poetic verse, the reading of which relies on the poet's patterned rhythmic subdivision of *past* verbal time to create (and sometimes subvert) a particular *future* expectation of rhythmic form in the hearer (Jakobson and Pomorska 1985:22-3).

Just as synchrony is dynamic, so is diachrony systemic: linguistic change can be observed occurring non-randomly and even sometimes predictably through time. Jakobson and Tynjanov (1985:26) consider this indeterminate yet comprehensible development to be a central characteristic of language. An awareness of such interweaving synchrony and diachrony will prove useful for our eventual investigation into the poetic evolution of linguistic systems.

Once we move beyond the basic characteristics of the sign and the systems in which it subsists, and on to linguistic *meaning*, Jakobson's approach becomes somewhat problematic. Drawing on his work in phonology, Jakobson (1985:30) proposes distributional analysis as a primary tool for semantic investigation. In so doing, he fails to consider the inability of such an approach to comprehend his own plural view of language as a "system of systems" characterized by semiotic motivation and simultaneity. While Jakobson's basic theory is invaluable, our inquiry into relativism requires an approach to meaning that is somewhat friendlier to linguistic creativity.

Friedrichian Relativism and Linguistic Meaning

As we saw with Jakobson (1985:30), meaning subsists simultaneously in several subsystems, and must be described relative to all of them if it is to be described fully. Jakobson (1985:32) also tells us that language is significantly context-dependent, and that that context includes the position from which

discourse is being considered, whether speaker, hearer, audience, or someone else besides. Jakobson considers this dynamic primarily as a consideration for the linguist, so as they do not presume to paint a full picture of language while only considering it from the point of view of speaker, for such a description would lack the structural capacities required for comprehension from the hearer's standpoint. Friedrich (1986), however, follows this line of thinking beyond the cautionary uses to which Jakobson puts it, and realizes the fundamental importance of the *individual* speaker or hearer in producing or comprehending language: different speakers will use formally identical language to mean different things, and different hearers will comprehend identical utterances in different ways (Friedrich 1986:2-3,19). This variation may be predominantly associative or evocative in nature, but it is nonetheless a central feature of language. Such semantic indeterminacy inheres in any use of language, and can be used *productively* as a linguistic device (Friedrich 1986:32).

Friedrich's inquiry into linguistic relativism centers precisely on this *functioning* of indeterminacy, for which he credits the "individual imagination" (Friedrich 1986:2). In a sense, this imagination represents a sort of *internal* context, relative to which *all* linguistic forms could be considered Jakobsonian "shifters" — signs whose meanings *shift* depending on speech context — permitting linguistic creativity even more extensive than that which Jakobson attributes to the interplay of traditional shifters and external context (Jakobson and Pomorska 1985:23). Friedrich (1986:53) refers to the operation of this creativity as "poetic indeterminacy": the speaker employs the polysystemic nature of language to evoke new meanings deriving from their personal internal linguistic universe, while the hearer relies on the linguistic systems invoked as

well as their own idiosyncratic associative tendencies to frame those novel meanings in such a way as they may become comprehensible.

This creative use of indeterminacy is possible because public discourse is not the sole locus of language. Rather, the individual imagination is constantly engaging linguistic structures in its internal thought and creating thereby personal webs of discourse that may subsist *outside* of the public universe of discourse. (It is for this reason that the individual imagination is not simply analogous to the individual speaker-hearer's unique history of differential exposure to various portions of the total public discourse.) Friedrich (1986:65) discusses the nature of such internal linguistic life in a consideration of the role of language in both the structure and content of dreams, while Sapir (1921:239-40) hints at its presence in his discussion of poetic works that seem to trade on the poet's markedly nonstandard and somehow 'intuitive' idiolect. Sapir (1921:21) also writes: "[L]anguage, as a structure, is on its inner face the mold of thought." So it is that both the forms and meanings of an inner idiolect constantly interact with the language use of the individual in question, but it is only in *poetic* language that these factors may come to appreciably influence the language of *others*.

In poetic language, as Friedrich (1986:39-40) defines it, the central characteristic is an interweaving of linguistic music (e.g., soundplay, grammatical parallelism) and mythic or deep intellectual meaning. Because each of these two components draws on a robust foundation of corroborative discourse for its authority as either musical or significant, the poet (that is, anyone producing or interpreting poetic language) disposes of considerable flexibility of expression — poetic license. A poet may well advance frightfully novel ideas; if intertwined cleverly enough with existing *forms*, they may yet be comprehensible to an audience thus furnished with the requisite 'music' for framing and understanding

the new meanings. Conversely, the poet may use nonstandard forms to call forth deeply-felt or well-established ideas, and the audience will again likely have enough of a handle on the content to be capable of parsing the peculiar linguistic harmonies with which it is clothed. In similar fashion, poetic speech can also rely on the time-depth of the discourse universe (cf. Urban 1991:17), introducing new forms or meanings and recalling old forms and meanings upon which to moor them. Friedrich (1986:90-2,96-8) considers such a scenario in the use of the sonnet form in 20th century experimental poetry, as well as the deliberate treatment of sonnet subject matter by American Modernist poets without employing the form itself.

The processes described above demonstrate but a small fraction of the poetic creativity that is the core productive feature of language — syntactic generativity is small potatoes in comparison (Friedrich 1986:126) — and which is a direct result of indeterminacy. Friedrich (1986:35,39,53) argues, moreover, that from these same poetic devices arise the relativistic interdependencies of language and thought. As poets rely on extant linguistic form and meaning to express their ideas, they necessarily place novel form or meaning in close correspondence with existing structure (whether grammatical or semantic), and thereby effect an unprecedented interweaving of *signans* and *signatum*. In this way, individual instances of poetic discourse over time shape the evolution of form and meaning — both individually and in tandem — in any given language. As these poetic histories invariably differ cross-linguistically, no two languages ever develop formal semantic commensurability.

Moreover, because of the relatively high *emotional* salience of poetic language — a striking contrast with ‘basic meaning’ — such discourse exerts a particularly notable influence on the thought of its speakers and hearers, such

that the forms and meanings of poetry come to play a major role in the associative patterns of all linguistic, and even non-linguistic cognition (Friedrich 1986:18,22).

Relativism, in Friedrich's (1986:152) view, is at its core an issue of *freedom*, rather than constraint. Considered this way, the patterns of thought supported by any language depend on the productive potentials suggested by the language's existing structures. As such, linguistic systems of 'music' and deep meaning offer up certain avenues of creativity to the individual poetic imagination. The unique genius of a language lies in the artistic tools it provides its speakers. The Tarascan language of western Mexico, for example, boasts a set of spatial morphemes that offer the possibility of developing formal poetic relationships between ideas as diverse as *jaw*, *cliff*, *maize*, and *sky*, or *approaching clouds* and *dying flowers*, or even *suspecting another's intentions* and *spreading tendrils on the ground* (Friedrich 1986:47-8,52). This creative potential does not exist in contemporary English, but other such latent devices do that would be foreign to a Tarascan speaker even in translation. For example, the notion of language as constitutive of the Divine, which forms the basis of the following short poem of mine:

As I read this book of Yours,
It's become quite clear to me,
That amidst all our pious wars,
There's but one prayer we need,
So:
Just once, dear Word, I pray to You,
Let us *all* be heard, and all *listened* to.

Such poetic potentials in turn encourage poetic thought and creation where linguistic form and meaning are considered at once, and so the cycle continues

— both giving the language new life and allowing it to channel and amplify linguistically-idiosyncratic creativity among its speakers.

Chapter Three

Relativism and Revitalization in Practice

Having arrived at a formulation of relativist thought that seems to convene somewhat better to the realities of language shift, the time has come to approach the twin phenomena of endangerment and revitalization more directly. Most fundamentally our inquiry regards the effects of language shift on human thought patterns and intellectual legacies. The relative importance of this influence is one of the central issues in the discourse around language revitalization efforts worldwide. The majority of indigenous language activists and other advocates of revitalization (e.g., Grenoble and Whaley 2006, Harrison 2007, Hinton and Hale 2001) argue, firstly, that language loss has overwhelmingly negative consequences both for human knowledge systems in general and for those people and societies linked to the vanishing language in particular, and secondly, that revitalization programs may at least partially repair these damages, either by reversing processes of linguistico-intellectual attrition, or strengthening social relations and institutions to defend against further disjunctive shift. Some critics (e.g., Mufwene 2004) have rejected these claims entirely — admitting neither the destructive nature of sudden shift, nor the value of revitalization in its own right — while others (e.g., Rigsby 1987) have recognized the detrimental nature of language loss, though expressed doubts as to the efficacy of revitalization as a response (Romaine 2008). However, as we have shown, many of these criticisms have relied on narrowly-conceived, or otherwise problematic conceptions of the nature of language and its links to thought, culture, and

politics. The preceding chapter's extended discussion of Western approaches to language has provided us with a more balanced and appropriately targeted theoretical basis from which to interrogate the significance of language loss and revitalization in affecting the relative health of potentially endangered assemblies of human knowledge.

Relativistic Loss in Language Shift

In his discussion of the expressive consequences of language loss, Anthony Woodbury describes a study conducted among speakers of Cup'ik — a Central Alaskan Yup'ik language spoken in Chevak, Alaska — in the practical translatability of an important set of grammatical elements in the language, termed *affective suffixes*. Cup'ik, a highly agglutinative language, employs a large inventory of suffixes for diverse significative purposes. Affective suffixes form a part of this characteristic system, expressing judgments of one sort or another about the linguistic entity to which they refer, either a noun or the subject of a verb (in this last case, the suffix appears on the verb stem). Woodbury's study focuses primarily on the following forms: *-rurlur-*, 'poor dear N; poor dear (subject) does V'; *-rrlugar-*, 'funky N; funky (subject) does V'; *-llerar-*, 'shabby old N; shabby old (subject) does V'; and *-ksagar-*, 'darned N; darned (subject) does V' (Woodbury 1998: 240). All four of the above appear frequently in Cup'ik discourse and are used in a variety of contexts and functions, both as productive grammatical elements describing animate and inanimate referents with varied semantic import (e.g., age, character, functionality, physical strength, social standing), and as analyzable components of lexicalized placenames, kin terms, and nicknames. These same suffixes are also used extensively in Cup'ik narrative, and serve not only the purely descriptive functions suggested above,

but are also employed strategically to indicate, for example, the relative moral position of a character at a certain point in the story: whether they are to be viewed in a sympathetic role, or as the perpetrator of some evil or unjust act (Woodbury 1998: 252-3). This carefully artistic sort of suffixing lends an affective contour to Cup'ik narrative, and similar effects are in evidence in Cup'ik discourse at large. Indeed, the lexicalization of these suffixes permits a wealth of subtle commentary on the actual, expected, or desired character of particular people or places (Woodbury 1998: 242-4).

Due to the relatively low metalinguistic markedness of affective suffixes, these elements and the speech forms they encourage extend widely throughout Cup'ik discourse, influencing both productive and interpretive processes. Woodbury emphasizes the dual nature of lexicalized affect: whether or not the sense of the embedded suffix survives in the gloss of the new term, the form of the frozen suffix is still recognizable enough that any use of the host term calls to mind the entire *productive* affective system, and so creates the possibility for its rhetorical exploitation by the speaker, and all but ensures that it will play at least an associative role in the hearer's process of comprehension (Woodbury 1998: 244-6).

In order to ascertain what might be the fate of this rich expressive system in the context of accelerating Cup'ik language shift, Woodbury compared Cup'ik oral narratives with two types of corresponding English translations — line by line and paragraph by paragraph — obtained from full Cup'ik-English bilinguals. Divergences between the Cup'ik and English texts provide a preliminary picture of what elements of Cup'ik discourse are more or less likely to carry over into English, as that language expands in local use. That picture is not a pretty one, from the perspective of affective suffixation. In the line by line translations, not a

single Cup'ik affective suffix found a corresponding form in the English version. Woodbury attributes this to the unmarked nature of the Cup'ik forms, rendering them less likely to be explicitly accounted for in the metalinguistic task of translation (Woodbury 1998: 255). The same constructions fared little better in the paragraph-based translations: only a partial gloss, “poor N,” of the *-rurlur-* suffix appeared at all, and that not more than a handful of times. Woodbury questions if this use of English “poor” represents Cup'ik cross-linguistic influence, or simply a minimally coincident use of an English discourse marker. While the function of English “poor N” may sometimes overlap with that of Cup'ik *-rurlur-*, the English form does not carry the same sort of paradigmatic relations that make the Cup'ik suffix so dynamic. Even if the translator *is* using “poor N” in an attempt to render an affective suffix into English — unlikely, as the gloss does not appear consistently — then the device suffers considerably in translation (Woodbury 1998: 254).

Woodbury suggests that the nontranslation of Cup'ik affective suffixes into English — and thus the probable non-transfer of such discursive forms in language shift — has its roots in the difference in *form* between the suffixes and their English counterparts. In English, the speaker must employ highly marked adjectival constructions to represent the same semantic and grammatical content that Cup'ik conveys by means of comparatively unmarked suffixes. Cup'ik is able to express these meanings at relatively high densities without stylistic consequences, allowing for the development of a rich figurative and textural tool. Meanwhile, English is not only incapable of using this tool productively, but also lacks the particular stylistic nuance that would allow for the faithful representation in English of Cup'ik uses of the affective suffix (Woodbury 1998: 254-5).

From the semiotic perspective advocated by theorists like Jakobson and Silverstein, what is at stake here is a lack of cross-linguistic semantic equivalence between signs. In decomposing the Cup'ik signs, and the glosses given as their nearest English counterparts, into the traditional semiotic binary of *signans* and *signatum*, signifying and signified, it becomes clear that, while the Cup'ik and English *signata* are comparable (unsurprising, given that glosses are obtained largely by metalinguistic speculation as to a given sign's intensional meaning), the two *signantia* occupy structural paradigms that are almost completely incommensurable. The fact that, in practice, the translations that would be suggested by a purely *signatum*-oriented (i.e., form-agnostic) approach to semantics are simply not employed, strongly suggests that linguistic form affects semantic import. Urban's (1991) formulation of language-as-discourse clarifies this relativistic problem: linguistic meaning is always at least partly a function of use-history, and that use-history is shaped in part by the structural properties of individual linguistic signs. Over time, the paradigmatic position of the *signans* in its grammatical system influences the use patterns of the corresponding sign within the total universe of discourse, which in turn causes a shift in the paradigmatic position of its *signatum* (or *signata*) relative to the semantic system in which it resides.

This discourse-oriented approach to meaning, which considers the use-history of a linguistic element as an important component of its actual mental import, lends a theoretical background to Woodbury's attestation of low levels of practical intertranslatability for what he terms "form-dependent expression" in Cup'ik (Woodbury 1998: 256). The fact that these forms were not represented in direct translations produced by a fully Cup'ik-English bilingual individual, suggests that form-dependent expression is extremely vulnerable to language

shift, whereas other linguistic devices that have not had so intensive a co-evolution of form and content might not be — see, for example, Kwachka and Basham (1990, cited in Woodbury 1998) on Yup'ik and Iñupiaq pragmatics in English discourse. While Woodbury goes to great lengths to demonstrate the fragility of form-dependent expression in the face of language loss, he does not approach the question of why various aspects of language differ in this regard, and neither does he advance any notion as to possible differences in the relative cognitive salencies of these domains. These are, however, important issues for our inquiry into the consequences of language shift: is what is at risk central or peripheral to language cognition? Friedrich's theory of poetic relativism permits the formulation of at least a preliminary response to this question.

Linguistic Form and Continuity of Intellectual Practice

Woodbury designates form-dependent expression a locus of linguistic relativism based on his observation that translatability is there compromised — the precise connotations of one language cannot be rendered into another. He does not, however, address the question of how centrally such practically untranslatable linguistic systems figure into the mental processes of their producers and interpreters — this being the other major relativist concern. With Friedrich, we may be somewhat less timid.

First of all, it should be understood that we are uninterested in how *exactly* the thought processes of a Cup'ik speaker might be influenced by the presence of affective suffixation in their linguistic repertoire — such psychological speculation is more typical of Whorf's approach. Rather, what we *do* care about is what linguistic elements or domains play the most important roles in the cognitive-linguistic interchange. Friedrich proposes that the interactions between

language and thought are likely most significant in contexts where meaning and form are both of immediate concern to the speaker or hearer. This special situation occurs not only in literary poetic contexts, but also in day-to-day poetic language. Systems of form-dependent expression, as described by Woodbury, are excellent examples of this, as they represent cases in which the discursive history of a given linguistic subsystem has led to such intermingling of form and meaning that both are called to the mind of the hearer (or are available to the expressive faculties of the speaker), even when only one is explicitly present. Meaning is analyzed even when form is all that is obligatorily present, as in lexicalized Cup'ik placenames, and form is felt to be of constitutive importance when meaning is the sole apparent goal, as in the translation (or nontranslation) of Cup'ik narrative into English. Form-dependent expression thus clearly represents a cross-linguistic Friedrichian poetic context and, as such, its loss would constitute a terrible blow to the relativistic legacy of any language. As such expression appears to be one of the most at-risk elements of any endangered language (see, e.g., Collins 1998: 135-140, Hale 2001, Mithun 1990, Webster and Peterson 2011), it follows that language shift threatens severe relativistic consequences.

Rather than simply asserting the cruciality and relativistic value of form-dependent expression as a Friedrichian poetic context, let us trace its development as such, in order to give substance to this claim. To begin with, we have seen that form-dependent expression is strongly relativistic insofar as it is not translatable in practice — whence its extreme vulnerability in the context of language shift — and we have traced this untranslatability to a diachronic interweaving of semantic and formal aspects of the sign, ostensibly a chance occurrence. As we consider this process more closely, however, it becomes clear

that Friedrich's ideas apply here as well. As generations of speakers produce and interpret language in the course of developing form-dependent areas of expression, they are necessarily engaging the most creative processes of language — employing congruities within certain phonological or grammatical systems to give visceral import to linguistic artworks, or exploiting the expanded semantic and grammatical valence of poetic language to substantiate novel associations and meanings. It is this sort of hyper-creative language use that Friedrich identifies as the source of a language's influence on thought: speakers effect the bending of language to their artistic will, ensuring the transmission of their intellectual and linguistic legacy to future generations, all while imbibing the ideationally-charged discursive and poetic universe within and upon which they construct their own personal expression — the most intricate aspects of linguistic form clothing the most profound domains of intellectual meaning. This temporally and semiotically dynamic picture of the role of language allows us to appreciate form-dependent mechanisms of linguistic expression not only for their present functionality, but also for what they represent: histories of relativism, the eddies and currents of linguistico-intellectual co-development and specialization emanating from Friedrichian poetic contexts situated throughout the diachronic discourse universe of a language.

When a language falls, or is pushed out of use, the loss of form-dependent expressive systems signals more than simply another casualty of language shift, rather it constitutes the *crucial* casualty: form-dependent expression is a relativistic domain *par excellence*, exhibiting not only vanishingly low degrees of translatability, but also an extremely intimate relationship with the thoughtways and intellectual traditions historically linked to the language in question.

Language Loss and Accessibility of Intellectual Traditions

There can now be little doubt that language loss is devastating to the continuity of thought patterns that have developed in tandem with the disappearing language, but our Friedrichian analysis begs a second question: does language loss block only the future *production* of characteristic linguistic thought, or does it also endanger efforts to *interpret* extant traditions?

Jocks' investigation of the contemporary status of the Kanien'kéha language (Mohawk) *Kaianeren'kó:wa* — core linguistic document of the Iroquois Longhouse tradition — broaches this question by pointing out the considerable variation in English translations of the Mohawk text. Often this variation is the result of a particular stylistic positioning of the translated text, relative to Anglo-American linguistic genres and cultural touchstones. *Kaianeren'kó:wa*, roughly translatable as “great goodness,” becomes “The Great Immutable Law” or “The Constitution of the Five Nations,” conjuring the Enlightenment-rooted European tradition of the social contract in a nation-state (Jocks 1998:224). In a more recent translation, the canonical terminological triplet used to announce the *Kaianeren'kó:wa* in Longhouse practice — *skén:nen*, “peace,” *ka'shatsténhsera*, “power” or “strength,” and *karihwíio*, “good message” — transforms into the biblical “peace, *righteousness* and power” [emphasis mine] (Traditional Teachings 1984, cited in Jocks 1998:225). Amidst this variation runs a common thread: each translation undertakes to reorient the original Kanien'kéha oral text relative to some sector of the verbal or written Euro-American intellectual universe, underscoring the culturally and discursively-embedded nature of the act of translation. As any good ethnographer of speaking or discourse analyst would tell us, however, there is no guarantee that the linguistic and intellectual genre of the original will correspond to that of the translation, nor even that such a

correspondence is *possible*. This is certainly the case between Iroquois and Euro-American domains of learned discourse, so that the *Kaianeren'kó:wa* is quite incommensurable, as regards style and genre, with any Euro-American template or discourse tradition (Jocks 1998:228). This incongruity both elucidates the translator's dilemma and predicts its tenacity: much more than mere words or grammatical structures must be accounted for in translation.

All the same, a dilemma is no death sentence. Poetically-conscious translation (in the encompassing sense of Friedrich) would allow the creative rendering of the Kanien'kéha text into English in such a way as to challenge established English poetic and intellectual boundaries and practices. This is one of the implications of Friedrich's conception of a dialogic relativism: just as linguistic structure and poetic tradition can influence the thought of individual speakers, so can the imagination of an individual speaker (or the combined efforts of a community) defy or effect change in the intellectual predispositions of a certain linguistic system through innovative, poetic speech — all the more so if they have the differing tendencies of a Native language to rely upon in this endeavor.

Elsewhere in his description of Longhouse practices, however, Jocks raises a further issue that carries more significant consequences for our inquiry: “[I]n Longhouse epistemology knowledge is not a thing to be possessed, nor a static condition to be attained, but an activity. It is something you do, something you must maintain” (Jocks 1998:228). Continual interpretation and reinterpretation of the *Kaianeren'kó:wa* is a constitutive element of Longhouse thought. Only if both performer and audience enact a given intellectual text so as to render it alive and evolving does the text truly belong to the Longhouse tradition. Extant translations of the *Kaianeren'kó:wa* thus do not, in themselves,

constitute even a subset of the intellectual tradition that is their source. The knowledge intended to subsist in the translation does not hold its significance, existing as it does outside of the active discourse of knowledge that gives the Kanien'kéha original its meaning (Jocks 1998:227-8).

Any effort to avoid such stagnation requires that participants in discourse relating to the *Kaianeren'kó:wa* be able to engage the text as a living document, given that traditional exegetical discourse trades heavily in linguistic and poetic explorations of the text. Longhouse practice holds that “the background and composition of each word, including its relationship with other words, are all part of its ‘meaning’ – part of what one learns in order to use the discourse [of the *Kaianeren'kó:wa*] with authority. ... [T]he carriers of these traditions invariably assign great importance to, as well as take pleasure in, reflecting and discussing these relationships” (Jocks 1998:227). Here is another case in which speakers plumb the depths of linguistic form for intellectual — and, in this example, truly ‘mythic’ — meaning. Following our earlier argument, the discursive contexts in which such Friedrichian poetic activity occurs tend to exhibit high levels of co-evolution among formal and semantic systems, leading to the genesis of form-dependent expressive mechanisms that do not bear translation. This is in fact what has occurred in Longhouse discourse, and a command of the Kanien'kéha language is therefore crucial for the sort of intellectual engagement that constitutes the tradition, even in dealing with existing texts available to translation (Jocks 1998:226-7,230-1).

Language loss in Native American communities threatens not only the persistence in future generations of indigenous methods in the pursuit of knowledge, but also the very possibility of continued access to the extensive corpora of Native thought that have *already* been developed according to such

approaches. Moreover, as Jocks suggests in his analysis of the political correlates of translation, the specter of linguistico-intellectual devastation does not rear its head alone: translations of traditional texts have long played a role both in legitimations of hegemonic practices and in Native responses to these actions. In the best scenarios, American Indian communities with thriving intellectual traditions have been able to produce curated translations of certain key texts, emphasizing one or another aspect of indigenous practice, so as to support Native interests in political struggle against Euro-American economic and sociopolitical practices of oppression — in the Iroquois fight for recognition as a sovereign nation, for example, although Iroquois concepts of nationhood differ from their Euro-American counterparts (Jocks 1998:225-6). Behind such external negotiations, Jocks writes, “[t]he essential role of Iroquoian language proficiency ... is to ensure that *within* Longhouse communities at least, knowledge about the rest of the tradition’s field of meaning is not lost amidst the political struggle” (Jocks 1998:224). In a matter of years, language shift could cause this resiliency to vanish, and along with it not only a powerful indigenous resource for social action, but also a control on what Jocks refers to as the “cartooning” of indigenous culture (Jocks 1998:230). There exists the very real possibility that translation will so distort and blur the intricate meanings and distinctions of Native cultural life that Indians and non-Indians alike will be left only with gross and barren *misunderstandings* of Indianness, and an Indian “culture” entirely incapable of responding creatively to human social life. Were such a thing to occur, anyone nominally belonging to such a culture would be forced to rely overwhelmingly on dominant cultural systems and ideas, and social critique would be nigh impossible (Jocks 1998:232-3).

The foregoing discussion represents a relatively shallow probing of what is at stake in language endangerment, and yet the domains potentially affected are already clearly of incalculable value: the continuity of indigenous traditions of thought on a diversity of topics (often treated imprecisely, if at all, by the intellectual methods of other linguistic communities), the future accessibility of existing indigenous legacies of knowledge in their full complexity and activity, and the viability of Native cultures insofar as they are able in practice to negotiate their positions in the fabric of international life without being constrained to rely solely on dominant cultural narratives. These are the crucial correlates of language vitality that proponents of revitalization seek to safeguard by their efforts. But is revitalization, as a methodology, up to the task?

Relativistic Recovery in Revitalization

Due to the structurally and discursively embedded nature of the various nexus of relativistic linguistic potential described above, it would seem a particularly difficult task to *revive* a language that no longer has any native, or even semi-fluent speakers. Yet this is precisely what Leonard (2008) and Baldwin and Olds (2007) describe in articles on their work as leading members of the Myaamia Project, also known as *myaamiaki eemamwiciki*, or Miami Awakening. For the past twelve years, the language reclamation program — run by the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in cooperation with Miami University of Ohio — has made a concerted effort to reinvigorate the long-dormant Myaamia (Miami-Illinois) language, with surprising and, for us, telling results (Miami University 2014; Myaamia Center 2014c).

As there were no living speakers of the language at the project's inception in 2001, the initial linguistic work (which began, in fact, a few years before the

current joint project) was philological in nature: reconstructing the language's grammatical structure with the help of non-Indian linguist David Costa, identifying archival sources of Myaamia lexical data and transcribing their content in a standardized orthography, and compiling this and other information in such a way as to make it accessible for further curation and use. After these early data-gathering phases, project staff began preparation of teaching and teacher training materials, as well as the development of programs in which to implement them (Baldwin and Olds 2007; McCarty et al. 2013).

Scarcely more than a decade later, the *myaamiaki eemamwiciki* is in full swing, complete with youth immersion programs, summer language camps, a special relationship with Miami University for the training of linguists, language teachers, and cultural specialists, a newly published book of Myaamia narrative texts, an extensive learner's dictionary, various other print, audio, and Web-based learning materials, and much else besides (Baldwin and Olds 2007; Myaamia Center 2014b). The same language that, not 20 years ago, had been neither spoken nor heard in conversation by any living Miami has now attained a central and growing role in Miami home and community life (Leonard 2008:25-6; McCarty et al. 2013:100).

Significantly for our purposes, tribal members feel that the reawakening language has gradually reintroduced characteristically Myaamia ways of thinking about and interacting with the world (Baldwin and Olds 2007:287; McCarty et al. 2013:100-2). This testimony belongs to the same camp as that which prompted our initial advancement of Friedrichian poetic relativism as an explanatory approach to relativistic effects in revitalization contexts where more traditional, habitual categorization-based formulations of Whorfianism were untenable. Were it possible to demonstrate that Myaamia reclamation efforts have significantly

restored the poetic relativistic domains shown in the preceding section to be threatened under language shift, then our application of Friedrichian relativism in contexts of language revitalization would seem to be well-supported. To this end, then: does *myaamiaki eemamwiciki* confront the stagnation of poetic relativistic processes brought about by language dormancy, and if so how?

An encouraging sign may be found in the richness of the linguistic documentation the Myaamia Project has had to work with, consisting of records spanning roughly three centuries of missionary, amateur, and anthropological linguistic work (McCarty et al. 2013:92). Such a wealth of linguistic data has furnished the Miami community with a well-demonstrated (if not truly dynamic) picture of the Friedrichian ‘musical’ potentials of the Myaamia language. Already, these potentials are being enacted in modern Myaamia language use, and particularly in the context of developing novel expressions for modern concepts and phenomena: for example, the neologisms *kiinteelataakani*, ‘computer’ (lit. ‘the fast-thinking thing’) and *aacimwaakani*, ‘telephone’ (lit. ‘the narrating thing’) both make novel semantic use of a well-established Myaamia linguistic form in referring to a logical noun by way of a descriptive verbal construction (Leonard 2008:30). In this way, modern Myaamiaki engage in the formal aspects of the same processes of conceptual (re)configuration that mark the creativity with which Indian societies have historically negotiated their relations with various waves of colonizing groups (cf. Bright 1977). The linguistic art of previous generations of Myaamiaki is thus gaining a foothold in the speech practices of their descendants, who may otherwise never have had any contact with these linguistically-embedded ideas and their implicit poetic potentials, which are only now being realized as language use resumes.

However, as generally observed in Chapter Two, the relative abundance of these language structures in modern Miami speech ecologies is too low to exert strong relativistic effects through Whorfian habitual categorization alone, and yet an important component of the Friedrichian mechanism is still missing: the mythic meaning that accompanies linguistic music in forming the proper conditions for the functioning of poetic relativism. It might be argued, on the contrary, that such meaningful context is provided by the iconization of Indian language to vanishing or remembered Indian culture, but this is a diffuse kind of meaning, lacking the truly poetic significance that Friedrich intends — i.e., precise and multifarious symbolic value, and thus artistic malleability. If such an iconic ethnolinguistic relation is all that is available, then the complex oppositions between various Native language forms, which would normally be put to the purpose of developing and interrogating the interrelations of highly significant semantic constructs, are instead capable only of articulating cultural and linguistic difference and defiance. Though this is indisputably a valuable linguistic and semiotic act, it does not carry the creative, *emic*, and (in this context) intellectually revolutionary nuance and potential that Friedrich (1986) attributes to true poetic language (Whiteley 2003).

If the development of meaning in modern Myaamia language reclamation were to end there, it would be almost as though the Myaamia *signata* that had so long molded and been molded by their Myaamia *signantia* had suddenly been replaced by American English glosses, even as the Myaamia *form* of the language persisted. As discussed in the previous section, these glosses — linguists' analytical tools — are recorded once, in one context, and often with a targeted research aim in mind, all of which makes them *very* unresponsive to the complex webs of meaning that *signata* occupy in real discourse. Glosses seldom

convey even the barest glimmer of the mythical resonances that a particular *signans* might have within the extended intellectual medium that is the Indian knowledge tradition to which it belongs. If archival knowledge of linguistic form was all the Myaamia Project recovered, we would be forced to seriously doubt any suggestion that Friedrichian relativism was the process at work in the reported relativistic effects of language reclamation efforts.

Fortunately, while the project's founders certainly did not know what to expect at the outset, the Myaamia Project has uncovered much more than philologically-reconstituted linguistic form. One of the most striking examples of unexpectedly *total* language reclamation began as an archivally-based ethnobotany project in cooperation with a Miami University graduate student, aimed at recovering and reconstructing a Myaamia botanical lexicon for future use by the language program. The initial stages of the project progressed as planned, compiling botanical terms known to exist in Myaamia documentation and searching out potential new sources of similar information. However, when the botany project's leaders began to discuss their work with tribal elders, a curious thing happened:

[T]hey began to recall plants they had harvested in their youth. Suddenly, we realized that there was still a good deal of living botanical knowledge of which we were unaware. This living knowledge enabled us to take our research one step further, and we began looking at traditional harvesting practices. We also began preparing and cooking several of these native plants under the direction of community elders, and out of this activity arose information about seasonal diets. (Baldwin and Olds 2007:283)

Through the mere collection and discussion of Myaamia botanical terminology, the Miami Awakening stumbled upon an entire articulated field of Myaamia knowledge and practices yet subsisting in the minds of living elders! This sort of

'complete' knowledge, embedded in both Myaamia language and cultural practice, is an excellent source of the kind of deep meaning Friedrich considers integral to poetic language: linguistic expression, caught up and implicated in matters of survival and communal life.

Baldwin and Olds (2007:283) write that it was quite common for Myaamia Project initiatives to “blossom” in this way. Similarly significant Myaamia contexts engaged in the course of reclamation include approaches to the natural world and relationships with and between physical places and the webs of meaning they inhabit — a central focus of the field-based Eewansaapita summer program for Myaamia youth — as well as traditional Myaamia knowledge of the heavens and celestially-metered natural and cultural cycles like harvests — elaborated in the Miami Earth and Sky project, funded by a NASA grant and led by a NASA scientist and tribal member (Baldwin and Olds 2007:286-9). These projects and others like them have relied heavily on reestablishing links between recorded and living knowledge in order to develop as fully as possible the potential of the Myaamia language to describe a richly complex Myaamia culture and identity. The more completely the core elements of Myaamia culture are known (and understood in terms of their continued persistence in modern Miami life), the more creatively will modern Miamis be able to develop their own Myaamia identity and cultural contributions relative to this foundation (Baldwin and Olds 2007:287-9).

One result of all this is that even commonplace Myaamia talk now incorporates semantic, as well as formal creativity, seeing the development of new idiomatic expressions employing Myaamia cultural touchstones to extend the language's formal repertoire. For instance, the phrase, *piici wiihsa eetooki waapimotaya*, 'she must be an important person' (lit. 'she must have many

blankets'), derives from the common use of blankets in Myaamia gift-giving practices, as does another new idiom, *amahkisena noontiahtoonki*, 'he's in the doghouse' (lit. 'his moccasins were set outside'), from the Myaamia signal for a divorce desired, in which a woman would place her husband's effects outside their wigwam (Leonard 2008:30). With this sort of linguagenesis, Myaamiaki engage both the formal resources of their language, and relevant complexes of deep, culturally-inscribed meanings to produce new Myaamia ideas, poetically rooted in the potentials of Myaamia language and culture developed by their forebears. Whether these ancestors would themselves have formed the ideas in question is not at issue here; rather it is the poetic (and thus partially chaotic) continuity of the co-evolution of language and thought that we seek. In that Friedrichian light, *myaamiaki eemamwiciki* has indeed roused the Myaamia language's dozing processes of poetic relativism and begun to repair the many damages of dormancy.

Language Ideologies and Linguistic Relativism

With our examination of the Myaamia Project, we have seen that reclamation efforts can in fact go so far as to *reverse* certain detrimental effects of language loss by reinvigorating the poetic relativistic processes that had ceased to operate as the language fell into disuse. Such success in a language with no native speakers at all would seem to suggest that revitalization programs *with* living speakers should be extremely well-situated from a Friedrichian perspective. This, however, is not always the case.

Often, in the course of revitalization, certain of the beliefs and ideologies about language held either by linguists, native speakers, (would-be) program participants, or Western society at large come between new generations of

potential Native language speakers and the formally or semantically poetic elements of language with which they must be in contact for Friedrichian relativism to operate effectively. These language-oriented beliefs and practices have recently become a major subject of inquiry within linguistic anthropology (e.g., Kroskrity and Field 2009; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 1979; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994).

One of the broadest language ideology-related issues in indigenous language revitalization is voiced by Whiteley (2003), as he expresses his concern that modern discourses of “language rights” presuppose fundamentally *Western* language ideologies. These ideologies, he contends, effect the iconization of languages to ethnic and social identities — defined relative to the “hegemonic center” — thereby disrupting these languages’ functioning as complex systems in their own right (Whiteley 2003:712). This “flattening” of language, Whiteley proposes, owes to increased inter-ethnic global awareness and the processes of cultural reflexivization engendered thereby, embodied in the emblemization and even commodification of indigenous languages (Whiteley 2003:720). Whiteley worries that the language rights discourses so central to revitalization efforts in fact run so directly counter to Native language ideologies that a revitalization program may do as much to fossilize a language as enliven it, as Western linguistic ideologies encircle and infiltrate the nominally indigenous code (Whiteley 2003). In this rather bleak outlook, indigenous groups may either reject revitalization and the ideologies that come with it, or accept both and, in so doing, acquiesce to the loss of their own ways of thinking about language and its place in cultural life (Whiteley 2003:717).

This ideological absolutism bears more than a passing resemblance to the infamous anthropological tradition of equating cultural legitimacy with

conformity to some standard of 'authenticity' located in an archaeo-ethnographic record of the academy's own devising (Collins 1992; Deloria 2004; McCarty 2013a). With such a static prototype of Indianness in mind, it is extremely difficult for many academic 'experts' — let alone laypersons — to conceive of any sort of ongoing evolution of Indian identities in dialog with the diverse actuality of contemporary cultural contexts (cf. Collins 1998). In much the same fashion, Whiteley (2003) fails to imagine a situation in which Indian agency remains flexible enough to mediate between existing language ideologies and the exigencies of language reclamation, once such a project has been deemed worthy of pursuit.

Despite its partial basis in a failure to consider the creative adaptability of Indian culture — indigenous and Western ideologies of language have been developing alongside one another for several hundred years — Whiteley's well-intentioned alarm at the possible essentializing effects of language revitalization *does* have a theoretical pedigree. Studies of semiotic mediation within linguistics have greatly complicated our picture of linguistic sign, underscoring the importance and complexity of its indexical and iconic characteristics, which often outweigh the symbolism emphasized so strongly by structuralist approaches (Mertz 1985; Silverstein 1976). This insight has more recently been taken up by theorists of globalization as a tool for explaining the semiotic functioning of linguistic and cultural expression in global, inter-ethnic spheres of communication, as such practices differ from local uses that presuppose greater discursive commonality. As Whiteley (2003) correctly observes, the discourses of language rights that are situated predominantly in such global, international contexts are pregnant with Western ideologies of language. Given that the primarily non-symbolic signaling practiced in global venues is limited effectively

to indicating the position of the “speaker” relative to a web of metadiscourses iconically linked with particular globally-visible entities — ethnicities, *par excellence* — it seems logical enough that, by undertaking a language revitalization project and thus implicating wider language rights discourses, an indigenous group would be understood in the global sphere as advocating the associated metadiscourse that is Western language ideology (Ball 2011).

What Whiteley (2003) fails to consider is that it is only in global communication that language use carries exclusively indexical iconic significance: while indigenous language revitalization might be seen by the rest of the world as a legitimation of Western linguistic ideology, and while this global understanding may even have some currency among members of the indigenous community itself, such coarse-grained ideological import is far from the primary *local* interaction with the meanings of indigenous language. As Jocks (1998) emphasized, it is quite possible for indigenous communities to negotiate their relations with the overbearing international world by deliberately participating in the production of essentializing and implicitly Westernizing public discourses of indigeneity without compromising intellectual integrity or cultural continuity. The reason for this flexibility is that local spheres of language use — where revitalization is actually pursued — rely less heavily on purely indexical iconic signaling for creating meaning. *Within* the indigenous language community, the symbolic and polysystemic attributes of language (submerged in global communicative contexts) allow for the imaginative poetic reconfiguration of externally-dominant cultural discourses relative to existing indigenous forms and meanings. The dual nature of the poetic process, of course, is such that the relativized incorporation of these originally non-Native discourses *does* affect the future potentials of Native culture and language, but does so in an indeterminate

and non-disjunctive fashion. In this way, the ideological Trojan horse that so worries Whiteley (2003) may be disarmed at the gate, and infused instead with indigenous ideas about language before being employed in local metalinguistic discourse.

This poetic antidote to the potentially hegemonic content of public discourse on language reclamation does not, however, come for free. In fact, it requires just the sort of thoughtful consideration of indigenous linguistic and metalinguistic structures that reclamation aims to reinforce. Consequently, the process of community-based “ideological clarification” advocated by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and Kroskrity (2009) must be pursued in connection with careful (self-)study of indigenous poetic and intellectual traditions regarding language and its role in cultural systems more generally. Kroskrity (2009) offers an example of the poetic mediation of ideological conflict as he examines revitalization-related consequences of the Paiute belief that language transmission can occur non-communicatively (i.e., magically) in situations of need, and of the correlate view that direct language teaching is unnatural and unnecessary. To Western linguists involved in revitalization efforts, such a belief presents a clear danger to program success, but to dismiss it and uncritically implement Western methods could well initiate a domino-effect of discursive and ideological ‘redistricting’ of the language according to imposed ideological forms, ultimately alienating the Native language-as-revitalized from the crucial intellectual tradition represented by remaining native speakers. Such shift would sever the ties to mythic meaning necessary for ongoing relativistic effects in the speech community, and so represents a real threat to the aims of revitalization. In the actual event, however, the language program managed to develop consensus around an alternative approach that accepts the Paiute ideological

framework, addressing language attrition in part by providing for more frequent performances of traditional narrative — encouraging Native language use by demonstrating its efficacy and power in Native practice, rather than following the Western communicativist tradition in harping on mere quantity of linguistic exposure. The result, a markedly *Paiute* technique of revitalization, promises to be considerably more effective than the typically unimaginative and unpoetic alternatives proposed by native Western strategies for revitalization (Kroskrity 2009). Similarly ideologically-conscious approaches are to be found in numerous other Native language reclamation efforts (e.g., Debenport 2011, Hinton 2010, Johansen 2007:3-44, McCarty et al. 2012), which stands as a testament to the grounded creativity of which all languages and cultures are capable: Indian languages can be protected and enlivened in *Indian* ways, no matter that the term “revitalization,” uttered in global contexts of discourse, indexes primarily Western linguistic ideologies.

The same sort of poetic ideological reform can also be practiced in relation to community-internal ideological conflicts, such as those described by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and McCarty et al. (2006): it is possible to re-poeticize indigenous ‘elder purisms’ or concerns about the role of literacy in revitalization in such a way that they no longer endanger revitalization efforts, but rather enrich and inform their indigenous complexity (Deloria 2011; Johansen 2007:17; Leonard 2011). As such, neither internal nor external ideological interference in any way spells defeat for the poetic project of relativistic restoration and reanimation in indigenous language activism. On the contrary, by following Kroskrity’s (2009) recommendation and encouraging public discussion of language ideologies — thereby bringing such topics into the fold of poetically-accessible discourse — “ideological clarification” will allow individuals and

communities to engage even more creatively in re-forming and re-signifying these ideas. Relying on the realization and enactment of the various as yet unexploited poetic potentials of Native metalanguage, such activity enables the creation of new and relativistically influenced spaces for thinking about Native language, and language in general. As these processes are entirely within the reach of contemporary Native language reclamation programs, ideological conflict is nothing to fear — simply another obstacle to be creatively and deliberately overcome by the poetic imagination (McCarty et al. 2013).

Conclusion

Viewed in terms of Friedrichian poetic relativism, relationships between thought and language in Native American communities appear to be fundamentally disrupted by processes of language shift, as demonstrated in the case of both Cup'ik form-dependent expression and Kanien'kéha intellectual tradition. The relativistic disruption in question concerns not only the continued *practice* of active processes of mental and linguistic co-development, but also the future *accessibility*, in relativistically influential form, of these processes' past output. Language shift represents, therefore, a serious danger to the viability of Indian thought as an alternative to hegemonic Euro-American forms, imperiling thereby numerous other positive or resistive forces in modern Indian life.

Turning the same Friedrichian lens on language reclamation, we observe that such efforts do in fact exert their advertised rehabilitative effects, both in terms of encouraging formally productive use of the Native language, and reconnecting younger generations of potential speakers with the semantic resources of the language's associated intellectual traditions. As such, revitalization provides a worthy, potentially transformative response to indigenous

language shift, and is indeed capable of accomplishing the relativistic work attested by participants. Our Friedrichian examination of the relativistic aspects of language shift and reclamation has therefore demonstrated that American Indian groups possess both the justification and the means for reversing language shift, whether in reawakening an ancestral tongue or encouraging the continued use of an active one. Despite this common foundation, however, individual language programs may achieve varying degrees of success, as a function of their creativity in responding to the inevitable ideological conflicts arising from the confluence of so much cultural and intellectual diversity in such urgent contexts.

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Conclusion

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The Indian languages of North America represent one of the most extraordinary linguistic legacies in the world, and their history, one of the most compelling narratives of cultural creativity in the face of extreme and protracted (in fact, ongoing!) colonial oppression. Despite the against-all-odds vitality of some of these languages and the communities that support them, the established Euro-American tradition of situating “authentic” indigeneity in the pre-modern traditional past (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003) has not missed a beat: the discourse around Native language revitalization efforts is chock-full of ‘experts’ weighing in from all corners, as to which linguistic practices they consider scientifically valid, or authentically Indian.

These experts speculate as to the integrity of modern day indigenous languages, or declaim the futility of pursuing so Herculean a task as revitalization when failure is all but inevitable (e.g., Mufwene 2004). Having assumed Indian motivations congruent with those Western linguistic ideologies to which they themselves are subject, very few such experts consider asking of the Indian communities actually running the programs what characteristics they feel to be integral to their languages, or what successful revitalization might look like to them. Those among the experts who in fact *advocate* revitalization (e.g., Nettle and Romaine 2000), tend to respond with polemical appeals to either the irreplaceability of linguistic diversity, the wealth of knowledge and thoughtways embedded in vanishing languages, or the human tragedy experienced in losing

one's language, without developing any sort of detailed picture of *how* exactly these resources are lost in the disappearance of languages, or recovered in their revitalization (Silverstein 1998).

Meanwhile, the real complexity of Indian reasons and methods for revitalization is seldom engaged in any ethnographic or theoretical depth, such that the rapidly-growing contingent of linguists and linguistic anthropologists working with Native language programs finds itself exceedingly poorly equipped to negotiate these contexts, whether ideologically, methodologically, or otherwise (Grinevald 1998). The resultant blundering of linguists involved in revitalization has spawned a small cautionary literature unto itself, focusing on the identification and troubleshooting of particular problem areas: field methods ill-suited to endangered language documentation (Grinevald 1998; Mithun 1990), overemphasis on hot topics in theoretical linguistics at the expense of those issues important to the indigenous community (Grenoble 2009; Speas 2009), difficulty thinking creatively about language acquisition for the purposes of revitalization (Gerds 1998; Mithun 1998), naïve assumptions as to the internal structure of the language community in question (Kroskrity 2009), and crucial misconceptions about what "Indian language" actually means to those working toward its revitalization (Whaley 2011).

Despite these publications, however, there remains little generalizable theoretical understanding of revitalization as a *linguistic* phenomenon (Grinevald 1998). This greatly complicates the jobs of both researcher and participant or organizer. Despite some common practices, most every linguist who becomes involved in a revitalization project is in one way or another reinventing the wheel (Gerds 1998; Kroskrity 2009; Mithun 1998). Much of the friction that causes this kind of stagnation in a language program is ideological in nature, and often stems

particularly from rifts between the linguist(s) and the Native community. As discussed in the previous chapter, such disagreements may well be resolved by way of “clarification” (Kroskrity 2009). These resolutions, however, often take on the character of a truce at best, since the linguist is obliged to hold a *scientific*, or at least systematic ideology of language, and is offered little alternative to the reducto-universalism so prevalent in mainstream theoretical linguistics, and so ill-suited to the particularist demands of revitalization linguistics.

If Friedrichian poetic relativism were available as an alternative theoretical approach to understanding revitalization contexts, then I suspect ideological clarification would lead more frequently to creative compromises, embracing the positive (and potentially relativistically useful) aspects of Native linguistic ideology. As described theoretically in Chapter Two and demonstrated in miniature in Chapter Three, strongly relativistic language use such as that characteristic of well-conceived language revitalization programs presents unique and extraordinarily rich creative repositories and tools for generating novel Indian knowledge. Indeed, the magnificent flexibility of such oral archives and poetic aids to thought suggests one possible explanation for the extraordinary tenacity and adaptability of Indian cultures in North America.

In any case, a great deal more work would need to be done in order to verify the explanatory value of Friedrichian relativism in language reclamation contexts, and to work out its theoretical particulars in greater detail. Such research, however, would hold considerable theoretical interest for both linguistics and anthropology: essentially, what is called for is the investigation of complex formal and semantic processes implemented ostensibly for the purpose of negotiating cultural change through the creative use of individual imagination in dialog with intellectual-poetic precedent. Moreover, this is all taking place at

the intersection of local, national, and global spheres of discourse, throwing into sharp relief the inescapably polysemic nature of contemporary cultural production.

More important than all of this, however, is the possibility of coming one step closer to comprehending the deep resonances of language in human life, by gaining a profound — and ultimately transformative — understanding of what it is to face the *loss* of one's language.

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