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Indigenous Youth Bilingualism from a Hawaiian Activist Perspective

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The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo began 25 years ago with the call, “*E ola ka ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i!*” “Let the Hawaiian language live!” (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). This volume’s descriptions of language shift based on contemporary language discrimination link Hawaiian challenges to a broader community. The hopes and dreams of the young people who are the subjects of these articles are the same hopes and dreams we had as young people. Those dreams can come true!

Hawai‘i’s massive language shift began a century ago. There are numerous parallels to that shift with cases described in this issue. In the late 1800s, everyone spoke Hawaiian, but being monolingual in Hawaiian marked one as unsophisticated. Then Hawaiian medium schools were banned, resulting in young people speaking Hawaiian with adults and Hawai‘i Creole English with peers. The next generation could understand, but not speak Hawaiian. Finally, the generation born in the 1940s through 1960s sometimes heard elders speaking Hawaiian but knew very little of it beyond a few words and phrases. Yet, today, as the result of a language revitalization movement that began in the 1970s and 1980s, many young people speak Hawaiian fluently. Increasing numbers are raising their children with Hawaiian as the first language of the home, as we ourselves did. Later in this commentary we will describe how youth who learn Hawaiian become socialized into speaking it as their peer language, but we will begin by discussing 4 major themes found in articles in this issue.

DIVERSITY IN LINGUISTICALLY HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

All the articles in this theme issue, especially McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, and Zepeda, describe linguistic diversity in Indigenous communities. In a linguistically healthy community, the ancestral language is the regular means of community operations as well as the means of communication across internal-generational and peer-group boundaries. Fluency in other languages is individual and variable from person to person.

In cases of unhealthy linguistic diversity, youth have widely variable fluency in the ancestral language and exhibit insecurity regarding their own abilities in it. While avoiding use of the ancestral language due to this insecurity, youth may also develop a resistance toward full mastery of the colonizing language used in schooling. The result is a distinctive nonstandard dialect

marking a population as what Ogbu (2003) calls a caste-like involuntary minority. Among the characteristics of such a minority are poor academic performance as evidenced by the decline in Hawaiian academic achievement associated with a historical change from Hawaiian-medium to English-medium schooling (Wilson & Kamanā, 2006).

Unhealthy linguistic diversity is also characterized by class-based language differences. Peer-group use of the colonizing language characterizes the economically successful classes of the Indigenous community. Peer group use of the ancestral language characterizes the community's least successful, least progressive, and most unfashionable subgroups. Messing (2007, this issue) repeatedly draws our attention to the pervasiveness of this feature in Tlaxcala in the ideology of *menosprecio* (denigration) relative to the Mexicano language and its speakers. For the United States, Lee (2007) describes the low status of Navajo "Johns." A similar phenomenon once existed in Hawai'i. Today, however, a new high-status identity of Hawaiian has strengthened peer-group use of the language.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Messing (2007) associates the prestige of "pure" Mexicano without Spanish influence with a general Mexican population pride in pre-Western Aztec achievements. In the United States, pre-Western lifestyles are focused upon by the general population when assigning Indigenous identity. The internalization of these views by Indigenous peoples affects language revitalization.

Today many Hawaiian youth seek their Hawaiianess in growing taro. Nicholas describes Hopi youth who are "living their Indigenousness" as placing great importance on hand planting of corn. Wyman notes a parallel Yup'ik youth identification with the spring seal hunt. Both observe, as have we, that young people are especially eager to use the ancestral language in subsistence activities. Such activities must therefore be integrated into Indigenous language teaching and revitalization.

The close association of Indigenous language use with precontact-derived subsistence activities is part of a "two worlds" philosophy long promoted for Indigenous peoples in colonial schools. As Lee points out, under this philosophy one's life is divided between participation in both a "culture-less" world of modernity and a "culture-based" Indigenous world tied to elders raised in the past. These elders provide the ceremonies, names, and songs that afford a means for non-Indigenous language-speaking youth to be partially enculturated into a pre-Western Indigenous world, while living primarily in the "non-Indigenous modern" world. Youth awareness of the impending end of the lives of elders, such as described by Lee, can inspire youth-driven language revitalization movements, as it did in Hawai'i.

The two worlds philosophy sometimes includes a rejection of the creation of new vocabulary for the contemporary daily lifestyles of Indigenous youth. Yet, language is the vehicle that human groups use to maintain continuity of identity while modifying their economic systems and other features of their lives. We see this power of language in the historical movement of the Navajo from an older hunting-based life to European-introduced sheep herding fully incorporated into Navajo identity through the Navajo language. We also see this in newly coined Hawaiian terms for youth culture, including *pāleoleo*, "rap," and *hualono*, "iPod." In order to succeed, language revitalization must overcome the two worlds philosophy's placing of Indigenous languages solely in the past.

One answer lies in ritual and metaphor. Nicholas gives much attention to the role of Hopi ritual and metaphor in developing Indigenous identity among young Hopis. Hopi ritual bridges the past and present by recalling the people's moving through different worlds to their contemporary situation.

Rather than a two worlds philosophy, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo has a "one world" philosophy of integrating new knowledge and activities into a community defined by use of the Hawaiian language. This integration, described in the Kumu Honua Maui Ola philosophy ('Aha Pūnana Leo & Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, 2009), uses ritual and metaphor within a genealogical framework similar to the Hopi movement through different worlds.

'Aha Pūnana Leo schooling includes many daily and annual school rituals, including student production of pre-Western feast foods. The focus, however, is not on preparing students to live in a subsistence economy, but on preparing them to make historical and metaphorical connections to it. These connections are crucial to a firm Hawaiian identity.

MAINTAINING BONDS BETWEEN PERSON, LOCATION, AND LANGUAGE

Lee reports on the opinions of Indigenous youth that residing in an Indigenous area should be accompanied by use of the local language, yet, Wyman draws attention to the role of geographic mobility in language shift. Successful Indigenous-language maintenance is based on strong bonds between use of a language and a particular geographic location. Such bonds existed in all Indigenous communities in traditional times. The analogous contemporary situation is a political unit using a minority language particular to that unit. Examples of such political units in the Americas are Canadian Quebec, Danish Greenland, and the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. When a particular territory uses a language officially, there are mechanisms to teach that language to those who come to reside in the territory.

In spite of federal legislation in both Mexico and the United States according the right to use Indigenous languages officially, Native American governing bodies and Mexican townships with Indigenous communities do not generally assimilate speakers of the colonial language to the Indigenous language. Instead they often treat Indigenous language speakers parallel to immigrants, providing "accommodations" to assist them in participating in their own government and public functions carried out in English or Spanish. This is not true official use of Indigenous languages, but is instead transition to their replacement by dominant languages. A similar translation happened in the history of Hawai'i, yet today young Hawaiians are campaigning for full equality in official use of Hawaiian and English in government.

Language loss is so great in many Indigenous communities today that it is generally not possible to make a radical shift from use of the colonial language to use of the Indigenous language in government operations. Therefore a strategy of steps toward actualizing linguistic sovereignty must be developed. The most logical place to begin such steps is the schools.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN LANGUAGE LIFE AND DEATH

Throughout this special issue, schooling is identified as the major source of the elimination of Indigenous languages. Historically a two worlds approach identifying schooling as non-Indigenous removed children from Indigenous languages and identities.

Efforts to include Indigenous languages in schooling are currently widespread in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Writers in this issue draw our attention to the weaknesses of such programs. Wyman ascribes much of the language shift in her study area to lack of adequate support for Yup'ik language education. Lee awakens her readers to the fact that the Indigenous language and culture can be extensively included in the curriculum of a school and that school still be a vehicle for language shift. Messing points out that Indigenous language teachers themselves can undermine their teaching by raising their own children in the colonial language and allowing community-internal denigration of a language to permeate Indigenous-language schooling.

McCarty et al. draw attention to the increased recognition of immersion as an efficient means of teaching Indigenous languages. While we certainly support immersion, it is important to understand its various models. As described in Wilson (2008), some Native American communities are uncritically adopting the Canadian-style French immersion model designed for mainstream Anglo families. Distinctive language revitalization-focused models of immersion are required for language revitalization.

Beginning in 1983, the nonprofit 'Aha Pūnana Leo and its affiliated families have worked to redirect education, including state-operated and state-licensed education, to serve as the central institution for language revitalization using a "one world" approach. We have been explicit in our focus on Hawaiian language as the first priority in such schooling and built expansion through the stable base of the organization and parents affiliated with it.

We have moved education through the Hawaiian language from preschool all the way through to high school. Ke Kula 'O Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u (Nāwahī) is our most developed P-12 site. The Indigenous-language immersion model used at Nāwahī is distinct in explicitly pursuing a change from primary home use and peer-group use of English to primary use of the Indigenous language in one's peer group and the home. All instruction at all grades, preschool through 12, including the study of English, is through Hawaiian.

Consistent with the predictions of Ogbu's (2003) theory, the replacement of English with Hawaiian as the language of the classroom has positively affected academic and standard English acquisition outcomes for Hawaiian students (Wilson & Kamanā, 2006). Nāwahī has a 100 percent high school graduation rate and an 80 percent college attendance rate.

An important part of our success has been to keep an eye on the vision and continue to move forward by conceding only things that could be overcome later. When the 'Aha Pūnana Leo moved its preschoolers into the public school system, we were told by an administrator that there would be no reading and writing of Hawaiian because it was an "oral" language. We refused to comply with this. If we had conceded literacy, the pressure to conduct schooling in English would be too strong to resist. We also refused to have the teaching of English begin before grade 5 and refused all testing through English until grade 6.

The state initially insisted on a uniform curriculum for all standard subjects using books published outside of Hawai'i, including references to flora and fauna, customs, weather, and so forth, totally foreign to Hawai'i. We agreed to this but obtained funds to translate the books ourselves, controlling the language therein. We sometimes changed the wording to explain animals or customs from a Hawaiian point of view. While "culturally incongruent," these books assured that Hawaiian would be the language of all instruction and that we had some systematic way to capture contemporary mathematics and science for the Hawaiian language (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). Creating our own books in Hawaiian in a variety of

areas would come later as we strengthened our knowledge of content areas and developed new vocabulary.

Nāwahī is the main laboratory school site of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language of the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo (Ka Haka ‘Ula). Ka Haka ‘Ula serves as the main source of teachers and leadership at Nāwahī. Like Nāwahī, it is administered and operated through Hawaiian with a fully Hawaiian-speaking faculty and support staff.

Ka Haka ‘Ula grew out of a small set of courses teaching Hawaiian in the university’s foreign languages department and has a number of similarities with tribal colleges. Ka Haka ‘Ula’s courses provide idealistic college-age students an opportunity to learn Hawaiian from skilled second-language teachers and then to use it among themselves and with fluent speakers.

At the core of Ka Haka ‘Ula’s programming are 4 years of daily hour-long language-skills classes. At all levels there is intense teaching of Hawaiian grammar and lexicon from a somewhat purist perspective as expected by the Hawaiian elders who inspired the movement. This grammar translation approach produces student reflection and analysis of the language and culture necessary to move forward under difficult circumstances.

The teaching of Hawaiian is done within an expectation that students are fluent in both Hawai‘i Creole English and Standard American English. In support of the description by McCarty et al. of Indigenous linguistic diversity as a resource, the many similarities between Hawai‘i Creole English and Hawaiian allow more rapid learning and are extensively used in explaining grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. A heavy emphasis is also placed on the core of similarities between classical and contemporary Hawaiian culture and building a contemporary Hawaiian speaking society based on those similarities. This process is well described by the comment of Lee’s student, Doreen, regarding establishing the “energy necessary to regroup, revitalize and even, in some respects, reinvent who we are.” Language revitalization involves creating your own future based on your own past.

Students enrolled in Ka Haka ‘Ula’s bachelor of arts program begin intensive study of Hawaiian through English their first year. They transition to total use of Hawaiian in the classroom the second year. In the third and fourth years of their degree, in addition to their daily language study, students take courses beyond Hawaiian language through Hawaiian. While at the undergraduate level coursework through Hawaiian is restricted to the major, at the graduate level there are more recently developed programs conducted completely in Hawaiian, including a teacher education program and 2 master’s programs. A doctoral program in language revitalization open to other Indigenous language speakers has courses taught through Hawaiian in one elective stream.

The teaching of Indigenous languages, such as Hawaiian, at the college level faces a challenge by being in competition with prestigious foreign languages. As shown by Messing’s description of the competition between learning Mexicano and English among Tlaxcalans, such competition can sap language revitalization of potential participants.

Nāwahī has diffused such competition by bringing foreign language competence into its “one world” to further strengthen the Hawaiian language. All elementary students at Nāwahī study Japanese language and Chinese characters, while intermediate and high school students study Latin. This study is through Hawaiian and strengthens student awareness of Hawaiian structures as well as those of foreign languages.

THE INTEGRATION OF HAWAIIAN-SPEAKING YOUTH INTO A HAWAIIAN-SPEAKING PEER CULTURE

Besides ever expanding use of Hawaiian inside the classroom, Ka Haka 'Ula's program focuses on use of Hawaiian outside the classroom. Upon entering third year, students are expected to use Hawaiian exclusively as their classmate peer-group language outside class. Fourth-year students are expected to take a leadership role in triggering the use of Hawaiian among underclassmen. Experience using Hawaiian also occurs in social events involving the Ka Haka 'Ula community.

In contrast to the descriptions of the avoidance of Indigenous languages in public in areas where the language is receding, Ka Haka 'Ula and Nāwahī use Hawaiian in all official public gatherings. While highly fluent and proper Hawaiian is admired in all contexts, speaking English rather than Hawaiian to other Hawaiian speakers is more likely to draw negative comments from others than are one's mistakes in Hawaiian. However, mistakes are corrected by teachers and advanced students—sometimes on the spot or in more discrete ways, such as by e-mail or in meetings with teachers.

Students at Nāwahī have a very different experience from Ka Haka 'Ula students. The choice for schooling through Hawaiian was not their own, but that of their parents. They are very much accustomed to hearing and using Hawaiian and, unlike Ka Haka 'Ula students, tend to take Hawaiian for granted.

As with English-medium schools in Hilo, peer-group use of Hawai'i Creole English and out-of-school-derived slang comes to signify intermediate students entering adolescence at Nāwahī. However, Hawaiian skills continue to be developed through the total Hawaiian school curriculum. Students begin to move back to use of Hawaiian with peers as they mature in high school. As students move back to use of Hawaiian, they strengthen their repertoire of registers of Hawaiian appropriate for different situations. All students who graduate from Nāwahī can therefore participate in use of Hawaiian as young adults.

We have found that maturity and experiences away from Nāwahī increase (rather than decrease) the appreciation of Nāwahī graduates for their ability to speak Hawaiian and a desire to consciously participate in its revitalization. Quite a few graduates have gone on to polish their Hawaiian at Ka Haka 'Ula and are becoming leaders in the Hawaiian language revitalization movement. Most gratifying to us is the trend among graduates of Nāwahī and Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani to raise their children speaking Hawaiian as a first language. As the 'Aha Pūnana Leo enters its second quarter century, we expect that within a generation there will be several academically renowned schools in which the majority of children will be first language speakers of Hawaiian. There is also the potential to spread basic Hawaiian language fluency to the majority of Native Hawaiian college-educated youth in the next generation.

CLOSING

The articles in this issue show us that while each Indigenous community undergoing language shift is distinct, there are many similarities. For communities seeking to reverse language shift, these similarities often represent challenges to overcome.

The key demographic in reversing language shift is young people ages 12 to 30. For this demographic to ensure the survival of their language they must learn their ancestral language

fluently, maintain fluency by daily peer-group use, pass the language on to their own children, protect and educate those children in strong Indigenous language-medium schools, join with Indigenous language-speaking peers to expand use of the language into higher socioeconomic domains, and then live to see grandchildren repeat and strengthen the cycle.

Not all Indigenous young people are able to reach the first step of developing fluency in the ancestral language, but if those who do reach it concentrate on developing and operating schools taught totally through their ancestral language, others of their generation can send their children to such schools to learn the language and add to the Indigenous language-speaking population.

The articles presented here show great yearnings for ancestral language survival among youth in communities from Mexico to Alaska. Those young people should not be undervalued. They represent the hope of the future. *E ola nā ‘ōlelo ‘ōiwi a kōkou!* Let our Indigenous languages live!

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