

Things I've learned about Indigenous education and language revitalization

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I will tell you a few stories about things I have learned in my work with Indigenous communities, language activists and educators over the past four decades.

Ethnographers' stories are the fruit of painstaking, detailed, and often long-term participant observation, interviewing, and document collection in specific places, with the goal of understanding, analyzing and interpreting peoples' ways of speaking, doing, being, thinking, and feeling *in that place*. Ethnographers' stories are also informed by the ethnographer's own ways of speaking, doing, being, thinking, and feeling, as well as by a store of theoretical and empirical research – in my case my own and others' research on bilingualism and bilingual education, sociolinguistics, anthropology of education, language policy and planning, and Indigenous language revitalization, and the conceptual framework I have developed and worked with, written and published about--the Continua of Biliteracy contexts, media, content, and development (Hornberger 1989, 2003; Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester 2000)

The stories I tell here come from the highland Andes across several decades, the Amazonian rainforest in the 1990s, and Sápmi in the global far north in the 2010s, and the things they've helped me learn about are:

(1) *ideological and implementational spaces*: National multilingual language education policies may open up ideological and implementational spaces for Indigenous education; it is local actors who fill those spaces when they appropriate, interpret, and at times resist OR expand beyond policy initiatives (Hornberger 2002, 2005, Hornberger & Johnson 2007).

(2) *multilingual multimodal language ecologies*: Communicative repertoires in Indigenous education go beyond multilingual speaking and writing to include also

graphic, artistic, gestural, kinesic, digital and other communicative modes. The multimodal, multilingual ecologies characterizing language learning and teaching practices in these spaces offers potential to strengthen each participant's communicative repertoire while simultaneously fostering peer interaction and cooperative learning (Hornberger 1998, 2002, 2003).

3) *reclaiming Indigenous ways*: Indigenous education affords spaces for reclaiming, reaffirming, and revitalizing Indigenous ways of speaking, doing, being, thinking, and feeling (Hornberger 2009, 2014b, 2017).

(4) *language and voice*: When classroom practices are effective in fostering dynamic development of Indigenous learners' language and literacy, it is perhaps because of using their language in ways that mediate voice, as expressed through dialogism, meaning-making, access to wider discourses, and the taking of an active stance (Hornberger 2006, 2014a).

Before I get to my stories, I want to say how moved and grateful I am to be honored in Charles Ferguson's name. I can't approach the eloquence and warmth of Thom Huebner's wonderful personal reminiscences of Ferguson, on the occasion of receiving the first of these awards in 2015, but for me as for Thom, Ferguson and his scholarship have been mainstays from the earliest days of my academic career – I'll mention only his classic essay on Diglossia (1959) – still on my Sociolinguistics course syllabus and his essay on Language Development (1968) – still on my LPP course syllabus, and his co-edited 1981 volume with his partner Shirley Brice Heath on *Language in the USA* (1981) -- enduring early reference work on US language diversity in the tradition of Kloss' (1977) *American Bilingual Tradition* and Fishman's (1966) *Language Loyalty in the US*. I like to think that themes of Charles Ferguson's groundbreaking work are also threaded through my teaching and research. To be recognized in his name and by the Center for Applied Linguistics which he founded and which I have so long admired, turned to, interacted with and recommended to my students, means more than I can say. I hope my words will in some small measure reflect that inspiration and honor.

Ideological and implementational spaces

[National multilingual language education policy may open up ideological and implementational space for Indigenous education; it is local actors who fill those spaces when they appropriate, interpret, and at times resist OR expand beyond policy initiatives.]

At Kayarani School in Bolivia, a new school building was inaugurated the year before I visited in 2000 and the class rooms were welcoming, with tables and chairs set up for group work, unlike the ubiquitous rows of 3 students per ‘pupitre’ facing forward to the teacher. Teacher Berta’s classroom was decorated with posters she had made in Quechua, including models of a story, a poem, a song, a recipe, a letter; as well as both the Quechua and Spanish alphabets; Berta had been there three years, implementing bilingual intercultural education under the 1994 Bolivian National Education Reform. Also on the wall was the class newspaper, *Llaqta Qhapariy* ‘Voice of the People’, featuring an article in Quechua written by student Calestino about farmers’ wanting better prices for their potatoes, which constitute their community’s subsistence. There was also a library corner, housing the 80-book library provided by the Reform through the auspices of UNESCO, and including 6 Big Books in Spanish, 3 of them based on oral traditions in Indigenous languages. After the class left for recess, two children noticed my interest in the Big Books and gleefully held them up for a photo (Kayarani, Bolivia, 14 August 2000).ⁱ

Bolivia’s 1994 Education Reform sought to implant bilingual intercultural education (EIB), nationwide, incorporating all 30 Bolivian Indigenous languages, beginning with the three largest – Quechua, Aymara, and Guarani (Albó 1995, 1997; Hornberger & López 1998; López 2005, 2008; López & Küper 2004). The new law massively expanded the reach of EIB, from 114 experimental schools in the early 1990s to almost 3,000 schools by 2002, accounting for 22% of the primary school population, and accompanied by dropping school desertion rates and rising graduation rates (Nucinkis 2006, cited in Swinehart 2007). The 1994 Reform clearly opened ideological and implementational

spaces for the practice of multilingual Indigenous education, as at Kayarani where teacher Berta actively embraced and creatively put into practice the Bolivian Reform's multilingual pedagogy. But in other rural Bolivian schools, untouched stacks of the Reform's texts remained in locked cabinets in the director's office and little effort was made to implement EIB. Top-down policy is not enough: any policy may fail if there is no bottom-up, local support (cf. Hornberger 1987, 1988; Ricento & Hornberger 1996). Top-down policies may open up ideological and implementational spaces; it is local actors who fill those spaces when they appropriate, interpret, and at times resist OR expand beyond policy initiatives.

Multilingual multimodal language ecologies

[Communicative repertoires in Indigenous education go beyond multilingual speaking and writing to include also graphic, artistic, gestural, kinesic, digital and other communicative modes. The multimodal, multilingual ecologies characterizing language learning and teaching practices in these spaces offers potential to strengthen each participant's communicative repertoire while simultaneously fostering peer interaction and cooperative learning.]

Every year since 1983, an Indigenous teacher education course sponsored by the Comissão Pró-Índio do Acre (CPI) in Rio Branco has been held during the southern hemisphere's summer months (January-March) in the Amazonian rainforest of Brazil. At the 1997 session I attended, there were some 25 *professores índios* 'Indigenous teachers', representing eight different ethnic groups whose languages were in varying stages of vitality, from those with about 150 speakers to those with several thousand. One of the striking features of the course was the mutual multilingual understanding among the *professores*, in that the Indigenous languages were not only encouraged and used as medium and subject of instruction in the course and later in their own schools, but also the *professores* encouraged and exchanged among each other across their different languages. Although they did not necessarily speak or understand all the other languages spoken and written by

their peers, they read, listened, and looked at each other's work. To facilitate mutual understanding, they at times used Portuguese as *lingua franca*, at times drew on the geometric designs that were an integral part of their writing, and at times simply relied on their shared intra/inter-ethnic experiences. (Rio Branco, Brazil, 23 January 1997).ⁱⁱ

The multimodal, multilingual, mutual comprehension among the Amazonian Indigenous teachers was particularly striking given the great diversity of languages in the group and the salience of multimodal drawing and geometric design in their writing practices. Each written assignment bore the complex and colorful geometric designs and maps that are, as Brazilian scholars Monte (1996, 2003) and Menezes de Souza (2005) demonstrate, not merely illustrations to accompany the alphabetic text, but integral complements to it; and these multimodal expressions contributed to the Indigenous teachers' mutual understanding across language differences as well as to the development of their writing in those languages and in Portuguese. The multimodal, multilingual language ecologies characterizing language learning and teaching practices in these spaces offers potential to strengthen each individual participant's linguistic repertoire while simultaneously fostering peer interaction and cooperative learning.

Reclaiming Indigenous ways

[Indigenous education affords spaces for reclaiming, reaffirming, and revitalizing Indigenous ways of speaking, doing, being, thinking, and feeling.]

At PROEIB-Andes, a master's program in bilingual intercultural education for Indigenous students at the University of San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia -- a program created in the ideological and implementational space of the 1994 Reform, I did a series of workshops on ethnographic research methods with the 4th cohort -- 42 students from 6 Andean countries and at least a dozen different Indigenous language backgrounds. For our final unit, I told them about the Indigenous research agenda proposed by Māori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book *Decolonizing methodologies* (1999), where she talks in terms of 4 'tides' or conditions in which

Indigenous people live – survival, recovery, development, and self-determination; 4 directions or processes through which they move – healing, decolonization, mobilization, and transformation; and 25 projects Indigenous people undertake, such as reclaiming, renaming, remembering, revitalizing, networking. Smith’s metaphor of ‘tides’ is very much based in a Māori island-ocean ecology, so I wasn’t sure how this would go over with this group of mostly highland Andean Indigenous educator-researchers.

As it turned out, they were extremely attentive, taking avid notes and showing clear moments of resonance and response. The students really buzzed among themselves when I mentioned the project Smith calls Connecting and told of her example of reinstating the traditional Māori practice of burying the afterbirth after the child is born, indeed in Māori the word for afterbirth and earth is the same; students again resonated when I mentioned Smith’s Indigenous project of Renaming places and people with their original Indigenous names, and spontaneously came up with their own examples e.g. PROEIB students mentioned how Amazonian Aguarunas are reclaiming their own name, Awajun. At the end, I asked the group *¿Qué les parece?* ‘What do you think?’ and they immediately replied *Estamos con la Linda!* ‘We’re with Linda!’ -- a resounding endorsement (Cochabamba, Bolivia, 11 September 2004).ⁱⁱⁱ

Indigenous educators participating in the workshop resonated with Linda Smith’s notion of connecting – in the sense of connecting people to each other and to the earth. When, in later interviews, I asked these educators what it means to them to be Indigenous, the first and most prominent responses were about living close to the land, speaking one’s native language, and experiencing discrimination by others. These themes, about affirmation of one’s own ways of doing, being, and speaking – and at the same time experiencing discrimination by others for those very practices, were foremost in the collective story of these individuals’ experiences of and reflections about being Indigenous.

Envisioning and building an Indigenous future was another theme that resonated with the Andean educators, closely linked to reclaiming their locally rooted practices, renaming their world, and revitalizing their Indigenous identities. Summing up his sense of what it means to him to be Indigenous, Moisés, a Peruvian Aymara from Puno and Lima, touched on reclaiming, reaffirming, and revitalizing Indigenous ways:

‘For me, being Indigenous means identifying with my ethnic people, our past, our history, our worldview, our language; in the present, working to reclaim our rights, being actively committed; and in the future, projecting that our ethnic people might have a future with equality of opportunities with other peoples of our country.’ (M. Suño interview, 10 February 2005^{iv}).

Moisés’ commitment is to take and use his present graduate studies to improve the lives of his people, drawing on their collective past to project toward the future. Through both lived experience and intellectual study, he and his peer Indigenous educators are fully aware of the enormous structural obstacles and historical oppressions they face and they consciously choose the path of transformational resistance – often at great personal cost, in the sense Brayboy (2005) highlights in relation to American Indian students in the U.S. They opt to, as another PROEIB student says, *aprovechar el espacio que el Estado nos da* ‘exploit the space the nation-state gives us’ – through multilingual education – to work toward the future equality and dignity of their people and thereby of all people.

Language and voice

[When classroom practices are effective in fostering dynamic development of Indigenous learners’ language and literacy, it is perhaps because of using their language in ways that mediate voice, as expressed through dialogism, meaning-making, access to wider discourses, and the taking of an active stance. Indigenous voices thus activated can be a powerful force for constructing more just and democratic societies in our globalized and intercultural world.]

Multimodal multilingual communicative practices stood out to me as I learned about Sámi language revitalization classes taught out of the *SameTinget* ‘Sami parliament’ *Språkcentrum* in Östersund, Sweden – ideological and implementational spaces opened up in part by legislative recognitions of Sámi rights in Sweden beginning in the 1980s and appropriated here by two language teachers appointed by the Sámi parliament, whom I visited with a colleague in 2013. In the two teachers’ accounts of their Jågløe materials production, Mentor Program, and Language Barrier Project, a variety of materials and modalities emerged, including multilingual word cards for pre-schools; cooking and handcraft activities, theater and tourist office visits, and language network mapmaking with adult heritage language learners. Yet, most memorable in their accounts was what they called the ‘process of tears’ and the pain they found themselves working through with the elders and adults enrolled in their classes. They told us of the memories, anger, and shame their heritage learners felt for having learned NOT to speak Sámi, and of the resistance they met from their own families as they struggled to overcome their own internal ‘language police’ (in their words) to SPEAK -- resistance that arose sometimes from the learners’ own grown children who themselves resented not having been raised to speak Sámi. The teachers’ story was a moving account of how these ‘passive speakers’ became active speakers as they became a strong and supportive group: in the teachers’ words, “they learn[ed] as a group, they [rose] as a group” (28 May 2013).

Personal accounts by my Sámi colleagues at Umeå University where I have been visiting professor since 2012 document their own and their families’ experiences of discrimination in, for example, histories of Sámi schooling or contestation over land rights (Lantto 2010, Lantto and Mörkenstam 2008); or of political divisions among Sámi themselves (FN 2012) or the challenges of teaching combined classes of heritage and non-heritage Sámi language learners (FN 2015).^v At the same time, recent 2000 and 2009 Minority Languages legislation to strengthen historical minority languages in Sweden including Sámi, as well as Finnish, Meänkieli, Romany, and Yiddish, mark

continuing spaces for Sámi language revitalization and teaching, spaces Umeå University colleagues have taken up in designing curricula and teaching materials for Sámi language teaching, including distance and virtual learning spaces e.g. on the Second Life platform (Outakoski 2013, Motteram et al. 2014, Vinka et al. 2015), engaging in advocacy for Sámi immersion and primary education in Umeå municipality, undertaking a Sápmi multilingual literacies research project (Lindgren et al. 2016, Outakoski et al. 2019), serving on the Swedish Sámi School Council, developing and advocating for a Sámi language teacher education proposal, mentoring Sámi PhD students, and designing PhD research projects toward collaborative action research in Sámi primary schools.^{vi}

Indigenous educators' experiences in language revitalization, as told in these stories, are both profoundly different from and profoundly the same as that of other multilingual educators. The contested and highly politicized nature of Indigenous education and language revitalization is familiar to those engaged in multilingual education efforts in minoritized language communities everywhere. Yet, these stories of Indigenous educators and language activists filling up and expanding on ideological and implementational spaces opened up by top-down policies; enacting multimodal multilingual language learning and teaching practices; reclaiming Indigenous ways of speaking, doing, being, thinking, and feeling; and activating Indigenous voices speak eloquently of the possibilities for constructing more just and democratic societies in our globalized and intercultural world. It is in their advocacy for the oppressed – and Indigenous peoples are arguably the most deeply oppressed of all peoples – that Indigenous education and language revitalization are so politically controversial and at the same time why they offer so much hope for a better and more just future for all peoples.

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ⁱ For each vignette, the date and place denote that I was a participant/observer of the incident described. Real names are used, with permission of the participants.

Reprinted, with modification, from Hornberger 2006: 285–286.

ⁱⁱ Reprinted, with modification, from Hornberger 1998: 440.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reprinted, with modification, from Hornberger 2009: 206.

^{iv} *Para mi, [ser indígena] significa identificarse con mi pueblo étnico, con el pasado, la historia, cosmovisión, lengua; en el presente, hacer labores que reivindican sus derechos, comprometerse; y en el futuro, proyectarse a que nuestro pueblo étnico tenga un futuro con igualdad de oportunidades con otros pueblos del país* (English translation mine).

^v heritage learners may be resistant to non-heritage speakers learning their language because of the conflictual context of limited rights and powers the Sámi have gained in their national contexts

^{vi} Sámi schools in Sweden: Karesuando, Tärnaby, Gallivare, Kiruna, Jokkmokk plus 1 upper secondary in Jokkmokk. Kristina Belancic and David Kroik both hope to do collaborative action research in Sámi schools (FN 2015).