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Someone Else's Language
On the Role of Linguists in Language Revitalization

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Being invited to speak at the 2008 conference on Stabilizing Indigenous Languages was an honor about which I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was pleased to be thought of as someone whose work is relevant to people working to revitalize languages. On the other hand, I suspected that the conference organizers were hoping that I would share some wisdom about how important linguists are for language revitalization efforts, and I feared that I would disappoint them because I don't believe that language revitalization efforts need linguists. As Mr. Kipp said so clearly in his talk, what you need for language revitalization is a room and some adults speaking the language to some kids. In recent years linguists have been trying to find alternatives to the traditional model of research in which the linguist comes into a community, does research and leaves. Many linguists are eager to give back to the communities in which they do their research. However, linguists like me whose own languages are thriving often do not understand the needs of those whose languages are endangered, and so well-meaning linguists may struggle to find ways to contribute that are genuinely useful.

In this paper I will talk about my experience as a speaker of a dominant language involved in several ways with language revitalization efforts. First I will discuss some of the reasons why I do not believe that linguists are necessary for language revitalization efforts. In the process I will address some of the pitfalls encountered by well-meaning outsider linguists who are eager to be helpful to such efforts. Next, will describe my background and experience with speakers of Navajo and with the Navajo Language Academy. Finally, I will talk about my role as a co-author with a Navajo scholar and educator.

Linguists, language analysis and language learning

Linguists have a very specialized training in the analysis of language and are generally fascinated by languages, but it is not clear that their skills are the skills that a community needs for revitalizing a language. Linguists are interested in what all languages have in common and in what the properties of language can tell us about how the human brain works. Linguists are often very good at taking language apart and putting it back together, but just as you can be an excellent driver without knowing how your car's engine works, you can be an excellent language teacher without knowing how to do linguistic analysis.
In fact, the knowledge and perspective that one gets on language from studying it linguistically tends to be skewed toward the topics that bear on linguists' interest in language universals. This means that we are susceptible to a problem described by Virginia Woolf when speaking about the British view of American Literature:

> "In our desire to get at the heart of the country we seek out whatever it may be that is most unlike what we are used to and declare this to be the very essence." (1947, p. 269)

A linguist's expertise is often in constructions such as relative clauses, multiple questions, quantifiers, etc. that are not generally appropriate topics for introductory-level language

textbooks.

This point is important because people sometimes worry that they ought to work with linguists, despite finding linguistics arcane or incomprehensible. In fact, asking a linguist to help you develop a language program is a bit like asking a mechanic to teach you how to drive, asking a gastroenterologist to help you write a cookbook, asking a geologist to help you build a stone wall or asking a gynecologist how to meet women. Most linguists are trained as cognitive scientists and are more skilled at discovering mechanics than driving. I do not mean to say that what linguists actually do is misguided or useless. On the contrary, I have spent my life as a linguist because I think that linguistic analysis has led to fascinating insight about the human mind. It's just that learning to speak a language does not depend on these insights. Only speakers of a language know best how to speak it.

My mentor Dr. Ken Hale spent his life training speakers of indigenous languages to be linguists. He didn't think you had to be a linguist to pass on your language. He just found that there are people in every community who are interested in linguistics, and he believed that the knowledge he had shouldn't be held as esoteric knowledge that only members of the majority culture can have. In fact, the first Navajo people that I knew were linguists: one of my first teachers at the University of Arizona was Dr. Ellavina Tsosie Perkins, and while I was in my doctoral program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) I met a number of Navajo linguists who had worked with Dr. Hale over the years. Sometimes my students ask me whether the linguist's way of looking at language is part of a Western viewpoint, incompatible with the worldview of people from non-Western cultures. I tell them I have known people from numerous different cultures who were interested in linguistic analysis, and also that most people in Western culture aren't inherently interested in linguistic analysis, as I am reminded every fall when I teach Linguistics 101. The average University of Massachusetts undergraduate does not find it natural to pull languages apart. I find that in any group there will be some people who become fascinated with linguistics, and others who don't.

Ken Hale taught all of his students that languages belong to those who speak them, not to those who study them as outsiders. He taught us that if there are people in a given community who are willing to work with us on the linguistics projects that are important to us, we must be sure that we also contribute something that is useful to their community. Most linguists are eager to be helpful to the communities whose languages they study.

Eager outsiders are usually aware of the shameful history of people like us coming in to be "helpful," but each of us tends to assume that we are simply more enlightened than the missionaries, teachers, administrators and soldiers of the past. I think that anyone who considers herself or himself enlightened about a community that they do not know has learned the wrong lesson from history. Some of our ancestors were greedy, ignorant or self-serving, but many of them were eager to be helpful and were certain that they were enlightened about what Indians needed: They wanted to "help" by cutting children's hair and taking away their traditional clothing, so they would look more "civilized", by trying to exorcise the "demon" cultural customs, by teaching the "truth" about their religion, by training children's tongues away from their "savage" languages. Many of our helpful ancestors worked long and hard to figure out what was best for Indian people and then try to get them to do it. There is just one way in which our

ancestors rarely tried to be helpful: by listening to what Indian people said they wanted and then supporting these goals. I'm afraid that this is still the rarest form of outsider's help, and as Leanne Hinton (2001, p. 5) says, "It is only if an indigenous speech community itself desires and initiates efforts toward language survival that such programs should exist or would have any chance of success." In what follows I will discuss my experience as an eager outsider and will suggest ways that others like me might best contribute to efforts to stabilize languages that are not ours.

To begin the discussion, we can look at the commentary on the two roundtables on Stabilizing Indigenous Languages (SIL) held in 1994 and 1995. I assume that these symposia were quite productive and successful, judging by the impressive attendance, in the interesting papers collected by Gina Cantoni (1996) and the many interesting talks at this year's SIL conference, some 15 years later. According to Cantoni, the symposia identified barriers to language revitalization, such as the perception that English is a better vehicle for success, teachers' criticism of those who speak minority language at home and the tendency to teach isolated vocabulary items instead of complete language. In addition, the participants identified some "widespread misconceptions" (Cantoni 1996, p. vii) that impede language revitalization efforts:

(1) Misconceptions identified at the 1994-95 symposia:

- You have to give up your own language in order to master another one.
- You need special training to teach your own language to your children.
- Schools can take over the job of teaching a language if families do not teach it.
- Writing a language is what keeps it alive.

Most linguists would agree that these are widespread misconceptions that impede efforts to stabilize endangered languages. My students in Ling 101 at the University of Massachusetts generally come in with these views as well as others like the following:

(2) Other misconceptions about language:

- There is one “correct” way to speak, and all other ways of speaking are just sloppy or ignorant.
- Being bilingual holds a child back in school.

I, like most linguists, am convinced studying language carefully reveals that these beliefs are false. Linguistic research leads to the conclusion that:

- Children can easily learn two languages if both are spoken around them as they are growing up; By age 12, which is when most schools begin teaching second languages, children are already beyond the “critical period” for naturally learning languages.
- Spoken languages are living languages and writing is not essential for keeping a language alive.
- To learn a language you must learn sentence patterns, not just words.
- Nonstandard dialects are systematic and have their own implicit grammar rules, which are just as logical as the rules of standard dialects.
- Bilingual children are superior to monolinguals in many cognitive tasks, and by about age 9 are completely equivalent to monolingual children in their skills in the school language.

The viewpoint that results from studying language as a linguist is at odds with the usual viewpoint of the general public. Helpful linguists are often very earnest in trying to inform the public (or at least the population of their college classes) of the truth as they see it. This dedication to clearing up popular “misconceptions” leads to a conflict when the linguist goes to into another community to help with language issues. Naturally, people in Native communities often hold some of the same ideas about language and bilingualism as the general Anglo population, along with their own culture-specific views about their own languages. This means that the helpful well-meaning linguist often sees her task as one of disabusing members of Native communities of their “misconceptions” about language and sharing the truth with them. Does this sound familiar?

So what’s a helpful linguist to do? Must we choose between ignoring endangered languages and imposing our view on a community? What some linguists do is wait until they are invited to “help” by a community, and then providing either training of community members or practical materials requested by the community. This tactic has led to some very productive collaborations and useful materials. But as Benedicto (2008) points out, even this scenario usually involves significant power imbalances that are very difficult to overcome. In particular, the practical materials and the training almost always reflect the views of the linguist, since linguists have the training to produce grammars and dictionaries but not videos, children’s books, flashcards, etc. [See the papers on Ostler (1998) for discussion of this issue.] Also, since real language maintenance can only come when members of the community bring up their children speaking the language, there is a danger that the presence of an outsider linguist who is writing a grammar or dictionary will give the impression that experts rather than parents are the key.

Even though I hold the views of the average linguist, I would like to take a look at these views in order to address the question of whether it is actually helpful to zealously correct the “misconceptions” of speakers of endangered languages. I will focus on two of the

misconceptions: that there is one “correct” way to speak and that being bilingual holds children back. I think that it is important for us outsider linguists to remind ourselves of why these misconceptions are so widespread, and consider how the grain of truth within them is relevant to the role of linguists in language stabilization efforts.

On misconceptions about “correct grammar”

Let’s look first at the issue of “correct grammar.” Every introductory Linguistics course stresses the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive rules. All languages are complete systems of descriptive rules. Nonstandard grammar is a systematic and complete rule system. The kinds of rules that we learn in school, such as “Don’t end a sentence with a preposition” are arbitrary and often less logical than the way people actually speak. No language is “deteriorating.” In fact, we can see that people have been claiming that language is deteriorating for at least 2000 years, but there is no existing case of a living language that has become less expressive due to deterioration. Daniels (1983) made this point clearly when he presented the following series of complaints through the ages:

1961: “Recent graduates, including those with university degrees, seem to have no mastery of the language at all. They cannot construct a simple declarative sentence, either orally or in writing. They cannot spell common, everyday words. Punctuation is apparently no longer taught. Grammar is a complete mystery to almost all recent graduates.” -J Mersand. Attitudes Toward English Teaching

1917: “From every college in the country goes up the cry, “Our freshmen can’t spell, can’t punctuate.” Every high school is in disrepair because its pupils are so ignorant of the merest rudiments.” -C.H. Ward

1780: “The greatest improprieties…are to be found among people of fashion; many pronunciations, which thirty or forty years ago were confined to the vulgar, are gradually gaining ground; and if something [is] not done to stop this growing evil…English is likely to become a mere jargon.” -Thomas Sheridan

1st century BC: “Practically everyone…in those days spoke correctly. But the lapse of time has certainly had a deteriorating effect in this respect.” -Cicero

Daniels comments, “The earliest language ‘crisis’ ... that I have been able to discover occurred in ancient Sumeria....It seems that among the first of the clay tablets discovered and deciphered by modern scholars was one which recorded the agonized complaints of a Sumerian teacher about the sudden drop-off in students’ writing ability” (p. 33). As we can see by these comments, it seems that every generation fears that people (usually young people) are debasing and corrupting the language. Yet, people still communicate and literature continues to be produced. The truth is that living languages are always changing. Classical Latin “deteriorated” into French, Italian, Spanish, etc., just as Old Germanic “deteriorated” into the language of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare’s language “deteriorated” into the language of W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Jane Austin, John Updike and Toni Morrison. Attempts to freeze language at some supposedly perfect state are futile, as evidenced by the fact that the Academie Francaise, guardian of the French

language, has revised their dictionary of the purest French eight times since 1803.

Because linguists are aware that living languages change, we become quite uncomfortable when a speaker of an endangered language asks us to help in efforts to dictate what the “correct” way is to speak the language. We will either make an effort to clear up the speaker’s misconception, or we will ignore the request completely. We won’t take such a request seriously. We may even feel a sense of despair: If the speakers of the language insist on resisting language change, the language cannot remain a living language.

I would urge outsider linguists to take concerns about language “correctness” seriously for several reasons. First of all, as the quotes above illustrate, people have been resisting change in English for centuries, but this has obviously not caused English to become endangered. To my knowledge, there is no case of a language going extinct because older speakers were overly concerned about the “sloppy” speech of the young. If young people have the motivation to learn the language, and resources are available for them to learn it, they will learn it and make the same creative adaptations that young people always make with a living language. Second, the vast majority of linguists are, like me, native speakers of a standard dialect of a majority language. My child will have all the advantages of naturally speaking a dialect that marks him as intelligent and articulate. He is in no danger of being the target of language prejudice. Moreover, I must confess that I correct him when he uses an “incorrect” verb form (teached instead of taught, brang instead of brought). Isn’t it reasonable for parents who speak an endangered language to want their children to speak in a way that elders in the community will find articulate? Given that widespread concern about “correct” language has been with us for millennia, perhaps it is not particularly helpful to spend a lot of time on preaching the linguists’ truth about language correctness and language change.

On misconceptions about bilingualism

The second set of common misconceptions that I would like to look at are those having to do with bilingualism. As noted above, it is popularly believed in America that a child who is brought up bilingual will be behind her monolingual peers in school, will be confused by input from two languages and may have trouble achieving proficiency in any one language. For this reason, it is not uncommon for parents who speak a minority language to decide to bring up their children speaking the majority language.

Linguists know that studies of bilingual children tell a different story. For example, a recent University of Miami study of Spanish/English bilingual children (Pearson 2008) found that bilingual first graders have a larger vocabulary than monolingual first graders, by fifth grade, bilinguals’ English reading test scores were no different from those of monolinguals and bilingual children are better than monolinguals in cognitive tasks involving metalinguistic awareness, divergent thinking and selective attention. In fact, Pearson reports that to her knowledge there exist no non-linguistic cognitive tests in which bilinguals do worse than monolinguals. Doesn’t this mean that there is a pressing need for linguists to disabuse speakers of endangered languages of their misconceptions, so that they will bring up their children as bilinguals?

Maybe there would be in a world where speakers of minority languages were not socially stigmatized and school systems waited until fifth grade to give children language tests. In the real world, bilingual parents in America know that school systems care only about English skills and minority languages are not widely valued. Their children will be tested in kindergarten or first grade, and their knowledge of the home language will be generally ignored. A six year old who knows 8000 words of English and 8000 words of Spanish will be treated as "behind" a monolingual child who knows 10,000 words of English (See Slate 2001). The child will be given special English language instruction and will be expected to be behind in other subjects. It is well-known that teachers' expectations have a significant effect on performance. Children's attitudes toward their own abilities and teachers' attitudes toward the children are formed well before fifth grade. A child could be treated as "deficient" based on her first grade scores, and this could have an irreversible effect. Parents are not deluded to worry about the effects of bringing their child up bilingual. It takes a very strong parent with ample time to advocate for her children to counteract these effects.

The point of these two examples of "misconceptions" is to illustrate that clearing up misconceptions may not be the best task for an outsider linguist who wants to be helpful to a community. For linguists like me who are not trained in writing dictionaries, collecting texts or developing pedagogical materials, this might mean that imparting our central area of expertise is not the most helpful thing we can do. Understanding this took me quite a while. I knew from the beginning that most Navajo people are likely to be about as (un)interested in theoretical linguistics as most University of Massachusetts students are. But theoretical syntax is what I know about. What else would I have to offer? Since there are numerous materials about Navajo that are incomprehensible to non-linguists, I figured that I could help by explaining general concepts of Navajo grammar to Navajo people who want to know them. This is exactly what put me in the position of "clearing up misconceptions," in other words, explaining the truth about language from the linguists' perspective. Which is what precipitated the conflict that I'm talking about here. I have a desire to be helpful, like my nice well-meaning ancestors before me. But what if what I have to offer is simply not needed? Or to put it another way, what if what is needed is not what I have to offer?

As long as I restrict what I am willing to do to things that directly involve my expertise as a linguist, I am extremely likely to be doing what I think the community needs rather than what community members tell me they actually need. Of course when I am invited to teach Navajo speakers about grammar basics, I am thrilled to do so, but the Navajo community is fortunate to have Navajo people who are qualified to do such teaching. In retrospect, I think that the things that have made me most useful as an outsider have been independent of my linguistic wisdom. For example, one summer I babysat for a woman who was working as a consultant for me so that she could have time to pursue her own studies toward her doctorate. For the Navajo Language Academy, I volunteered to be treasurer, doing the bookkeeping and the paperwork for tax-exempt status so that the Navajo speakers would have time for their own linguistic work. People from the dominant culture have resources that might be more valuable than their linguistic expertise. We have access to people who would not listen to people from a stigmatized group. We have experience in expressing ourselves in the way that grant panels, college professors, legislators and school principals expect. We have jobs that allow us a significant amount of freedom to dictate our own activities. Gerdts (1998) gives a very useful list of things that a

linguists might do to contribute to a community, and only some of these are directly related to a linguist's formal training (See also Rice, this volume). These things are at least as valuable as our knowledge about the true nature of human language. They put us in a position to clear up the misconceptions about endangered languages in our own culture, to work for change in the role of testing in schools, to seek grant resources for community members and to take on tasks that community members want but do not have the time or resources to do, such as getting coffee for meetings, bookkeeping, lobbying legislators, finding materials and supplies, setting up archives and mailing out flyers.

Navajo Language Academy

The Navajo Language Academy (NLA) is a nonprofit group that has its origins in workshops given by Ken Hale in the 1970s. It is made up of Navajo linguists and people like me who were inspired by Dr. Hale's work. He believed that only native speakers have the subtle knowledge required for complete insight into what the language tells us about linguistic theory, and he also believed that native speakers and not outsiders should be the ones to set the research agenda for their language. The goals of the NLA are to give Navajo teachers a working knowledge of Navajo grammar, to support Navajo speakers who want to do research on Navajo, to demystify linguistics so that Navajo teachers can interpret linguistically-influenced information such as the Young and Morgan dictionary of Navajo (1994) and to provide resources to help teachers who are involved in language teaching and language stabilization. Although there are a substantial number of Navajo people over 40 who are fluent in the language, recent surveys show that fewer than 10% of five year olds are fluent in Navajo (Platero, 2001). Since 1998 the NLA has been conducting annual summer workshops for Navajo teachers. Attendance has averaged about 20 students, and workshops generally last for three weeks. Classes at the workshop are not intended to duplicate efforts of other programs, such as the Navajo Language Program at Diné College (described in Slate, 2001) or AILDI (described in McCarty, et al., 1997, 2001). Navajo classes focus on linguistics rather than on culture or literature, because it is intended to be a forum to continue and apply the work of Navajo-speaking linguists.

The NLA is far from achieving Dr. Hale's goal of an atmosphere in which speakers of Navajo set the research agenda, but we try in several ways. We have a policy that classes cannot be used for free data gathering for linguistic research projects. If linguistics research seminars result in publications, all who participated are equal co-authors. Any other research by outsiders must be conducted with paid consultants and researchers. We encourage participants to discuss things in Navajo without having to translate for outsiders. We try to have teachers of one class be students in other classes, so, for example, Anglo linguists participate as students in classes on Navajo pedagogy.

Many of the Navajo teachers who attend our workshops report that they are interesting and useful. A number of participants have returned for subsequent years. We have gotten some grant funding for the research of Navajo scholars and to compensate Navajo elders who helped with the editing of a Navajo textbook.

On being a co-author of a Navajo textbook.

Many linguists now working with endangered languages are concerned with "the issues of power inequalities that arise when members external to the language community engage in linguistic projects." (Benedicto, 2008) However, as noted above we linguists also hold strong opinions about the nature of language and language learning, and so our solutions to problems of power inequity rarely involve discontinuing our own linguistic research if the community prefers other approaches to language. In this section I would like to discuss some ways in which my recent experience as the co-author of a Navajo textbook illustrates some of the issues of power that outsider linguists need to deal with. First I will briefly explain my role as co-author and some of the issues of power that arose, and then I will talk a bit about the book itself, which is quite different from the kind of textbook that a linguist would write.
After she had worked with me on linguistics projects for a number of years, Dr. Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie asked me to work with her on an introductory Navajo textbook based on her college-level curriculum. Dr. Parsons-Yazzie has been teaching Navajo at Northern Arizona University for nearly 20 years. She asked me to work with her because she thought that I could explain basic grammar concepts without getting bogged down in too much linguistic detail. My role was to explain a few important grammar concepts in a way that is accessible to high school or college students and to help with prose editing and continuity.

Many people assume that if a Navajo and a Bilag1ana (European-American) are co-authors, the Bilag1ana must be the "real" author, with the Navajo being some kind of assistant. We found that people would sometimes persist in this belief even after being told that Dr. Parsons-Yazzie is the primary author. In part this reflects the prejudice that minority scholars routinely encounter. Even when the actual authorship was known, I was accorded what I call "gratuitous prestige." People would assume that a book written with a professional linguist must be of a higher quality than one written solely by a Navajo. The pervasiveness of this kind of prejudice is not news to any member of a minority group, but it is worth mentioning, because we found it more helpful to use it to our advantage than to try to pretend it doesn't exist. In particular, I tried to use it in the role I took on as a go-between with our editors. Dr. Parsons-Yazzie was writing the book to reflect the voice of Navajo elders, or of a Navajo parent teaching a child, using personal examples, repetition of important concepts and admonitions to students. Numerous times our editor wanted to revise the text into a more "neutral" (=non-Navajo) style and we found that the editor was able to hear explanations of the style when they came from me rather than from her, even though I know next to nothing myself about the speaking style of Navajo elders and parents. Outsider linguists can sometimes use their gratuitous prestige for situations like this, or for applying for grants or getting works published.

However, the assumptions that some people made about my role in the book also reflect the fact that when outsider linguists co-author books or papers with speakers of endangered languages, the research agenda is virtually always set by the linguist. Even if the project is a grammar, dictionary or other non-theoretical work, the outsider linguist is almost always the one who decides on the topics, organization and voice for the work. Of course there is nothing wrong with this when a community asks a linguist to produce a dictionary or grammar for them. Presumably the community expects the linguist to advise them on the appropriate topics and organization. They may even expect and need the "expert's" gratuitous prestige. (Grinevald

1998) However, before I became involved in this textbook, it had never occurred to me how rare it is to find a collaboration where the community member rather than the linguist controls the intellectual agenda.

Dr. Parsons-Yazzie's and my textbook, *Diné Bizaad Bínáhoo'aah* (*Rediscovering the Navajo Language*), is different in many ways from the kind of book that a linguist would write. I think it will be successful because it was conceived and organized by a non-linguist. I'd like to discuss just a few of the ways in which the book is unlike one that someone like me would have or could have designed.

First of all, as a linguist I believe that the most important thing about learning a language is learning to speak. I am not at all concerned with whether the learner has a non-native accent. Dr. Parsons-Yazzie designed her curriculum with the first two lessons (spanning a minimum of four weeks) devoted entirely to the Navajo alphabet and phonemes. This is shocking to most linguists, who would generally explain the sound system within a few pages and then move on. However, Navajo elders emphasize how important they feel it is for learners to pronounce Navajo correctly. Although most linguists would consider this to be based on a "misconception" as discussed above, Dr. Parsons-Yazzie knew how important it was for the community that the textbook reflect and respect the attitudes of Navajo elders. Moreover, most high school and college level Navajo classes combine students who have little to no exposure to Navajo with students who have heard Navajo and may even speak quite a bit but can't write Navajo. Those who have no experience with the way colloquial Navajo is pronounced often have an easier time learning the writing system, because they have not heard how the sounds actually blend together in casual speech. This can be very discouraging for the Navajo speakers. Spending a substantial amount of time on the sound system at the beginning of the course gives the Navajo speakers a chance to get used to the writing system and it gives the non-speakers a chance to learn from the students who already can pronounce the Navajo phonemes.

Secondly, a linguist would be likely to organize a textbook in terms of linguistic structure rather than conceptual topics and would include information on culture as a supplement to the language lessons rather than as a basis for them. Language teachers who are not linguists are more likely to organize material around themes like clothing, weather, food, etc. One important goal of Diné Bizaad Bínáhoo'aah was to teach Navajo culture as a living set of values rather than a list of foods, clothing and customs or a description of traditional ceremonies and beliefs. A substantial number of Navajo parents who are Christian are very wary of allowing their children to take Navajo classes, because they worry that culture lessons will teach traditional Navajo religion. Organizing the lessons according to conceptual topics made it clear how many facets there are to Navajo culture that can be made relevant to young people today. For example, the chapter about clothing begins with the story of an elder that Dr. Parsons-Yazzie interviewed in which the elder talks about the contrast between the attitudes people had toward clothing when she was young and the attitudes today. The chapters on family and kinship discuss the role that each family member plays in the upbringing of a child, and the chapter on the body includes information about Navajo views of health. Dr. Parsons-Yazzie worked with Navajo elders on all chapters. As mentioned above, she tried to write the culture sections to sound like a Navajo elder or mother teaching.

Third, linguists are analytical and interested in discovering generalizations. My preference as a linguist would be to explain grammar points once and expect students to discover how the grammar rules apply to new examples. This is not the approach that Dr. Parsons-Yazzie believes to be the most effective with her students. Ash, Little Doe Fermino and Hale (2001) report similar experiences in constructing Wampanoag language materials. Little Doe Fermino's Wampanoag students did not find it helpful to analyze verbal paradigms or syntactic structure. Parsons-Yazzie designed the Navajo textbook to reflect a Navajo teaching style, which includes repetitions of important points and emphasizes observation rather than generalization. I have to admit that it was sometimes difficult for her to convince me that my succinct analytical explanations were not appropriate for the book's audience, partly because I was anxious about what my linguistics colleagues would think about a book that does not conform to their conception of the linguistically-informed language textbook. But Dr. Parsons-Yazzie's knows her audience, and I do not.

We linguists rarely question whether our conception of how to teach language is correct, even when it is a conception about the teaching of someone else's language. Even if we know perfectly well that we do not have training in language pedagogy, we tend to feel that one of our primary roles is to keep "misconceptions" from creeping into pedagogical materials. Because of our "gratuitous prestige" (and our often exuberant certitude), members of minority communities have a hard time having their voices heard above ours, and sometimes even allow our supposed expertise to trump their experience.

I do not mean to advocate that linguists should withhold their expertise or abandon their convictions about language. Dr. Parsons-Yazzie believes that the book was enhanced by my expertise and analytical tendencies. I just mean to say that if we truly want to be helpful to someone with a goal of stabilizing their language, we cannot assume that we know best what is needed by a community that is not our own. Before working on this book I was not aware of how rarely listening was part of my interactions with Navajo specialists.

Conclusions

Over the past 20 years an increasing number of linguists have become interested in contributing to language revitalization efforts and have been trying to avoid destructive ways of interacting with speakers of endangered languages and to address (or at least acknowledge) the power imbalances that arise when outsiders try to be "helpful" to a minority community as also described by Rice and Grenoble in this book. My own experience suggests that as we train the next generation of linguists it is important to teach them that what they have to offer to the communities they work with might not involve "clearing up misconceptions" or even developing materials that make direct use of their training as linguists. It is clear to all who work on endangered languages that only community-based projects have any hope of success, and linguists who are committed to language revitalization must be willing to do those things that communities decide they need, rather than telling communities what is needed. Hinton (2001, p. 51) gives very useful advice about language planning that can be used by community members on their own, but which is also a good blueprint for a linguist going into a community, because it lays a framework for the community to articulate goals, which the linguist should then listen to. Fortunately, as Ash, Little Doe Fermino and Hale (2001, p. 20) say, "There is reason for

optimism because local language communities all over the world are taking it upon themselves to act on behalf of their imperiled linguistic traditions in full understanding of, and in spite of, the realistic perception that the cards are stacked against them." In closing I would like to thank all of those who are working to pass on their own language to future generations, and who have found creative ways to partner with those who want to help with Someone Else's Language.

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