America's Second Tongue

American Indian Education AND THE Ownership of English, 1860–1900

RUTH SPACK

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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America's Second Tongue

WOONSPE VI.

(De taku he.) (Woayupte.)

wicinyanna

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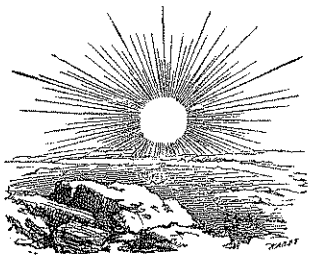

wi kin

ka	wan	cin	pi	wi	ca
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1. Page from *Wicoie Wowapi Kin* [*The Word Book*], by Alfred L. Riggs (1877, 1881). Used by permission of the American Tract Society, Garland, TX, 1-800-54-TRACT.

Introduction

I have tried to transplant the native spirit of these tales – root and all – into the English language, since America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue.

Zitkala-Ša, preface to *Old Indian Legends*, 1901

To discuss the use of the English language in the land we now know as the United States is to become caught in a linguistic paradox. Referring to English as the native language of Americans has the rhetorical effect of making the first inhabitants of this land invisible, for they, of course, were native speakers not of English but of a multitude of indigenous languages. When English-speaking Europeans called indigenous people *native*, however, they were referring not to their language status but rather to what they perceived to be their primitive state. In the context of language learning, a rhetorical inversion occurred, such that Native people became non-native speakers of English; yet it was the Anglo speakers who were non-Native.

The paradox is further complicated by the nativist movement in the nineteenth century, which favored the interests of native inhabitants over those of immigrants. To the anti-Catholic nativists, the "natives" were English-speaking Protestants of European descent. To add to the irony, in their secret societies nativists used what they perceived to be symbols of Native life as their trademarks. They called their leaders "sachems" and "chiefs" and gave their local chapters names such as "Oneida" and "Montauk." By non-nativizing the real Natives and appropriating their identities,

Europeans were in effect depriving Native people of their linguistic birthright.[1]

Despite the efforts of Europeans to keep Native people and their contributions invisible, Native ways of knowing have always been essential to the development of the European way of life on Native lands. Explorers, traders, pilgrims, and missionaries lacked the skills to feed and transport themselves in the territory they called the New World. They were thus dependent on indigenous people, who provided an education in survival. That education included language instruction, with initial communication taking place primarily through hand signs, pantomime, and pidgin. From the beginning, Europeans found it necessary to borrow Native words to identify unfamiliar entities such as topography, animals, plants, foods, weapons, and modes of lodging and transportation. In order to engage in trade and develop new political structures, they also learned "the language of Indian diplomacy," as Rayna Green puts it. Europeans became Americans – European Americans – as their old cultures and languages were transformed by the new.[2]

Native life too was transformed by contact, of course, and not necessarily in negative ways. For example, many communities adopted technically sophisticated goods and formed alliances with Europeans against their own Native rivals. Native languages expanded to include names for new materials and concepts. Some individuals learned one or more European languages in order to serve as intermediaries between Native people and the growing European population. These interactions were often personally and collectively beneficial. Such models of intercultural communication did not originate with European contact. For centuries many Native people across the country were bilingual or multilingual, having become fluent in the languages of their respective regions, including sign language and pidginized languages, so that they could conduct intertribal trade and ceremonial activities.[3]

On occasion, speakers of English and speakers of Native languages exchanged language lessons. In the 1630s, for example, pastor John Eliot learned Massachusett from Cockenoe, a Montauk who had acquired it as a second language while in captivity, and Eliot in turn taught English to Cockenoe. However, because such two-way lessons tended to be limited to one-on-one interactions and in any case were few and far between, they rarely led to large-scale language exchange. Furthermore, the uses to which

Eliot and Cockenoe put their new languages reflected a pattern that established the power of English and its associated culture. Eliot used Massachusett to preach the gospel and ultimately to establish several "praying villages" populated by "Christian Indians." Cockenoe used English to settle land disputes between Native and European people and ultimately to pursue a trade. Explaining why this cultural translation was essentially a one-way process, David Murray points to the unequal power relations in Eliot's interactions with Native people, noting that the latter were threatened with annihilation.[4]

As linguistic scholars Edward Tuttle and Raoul Smith have documented, once English colonists had learned enough of an indigenous language to guarantee survival, they no longer felt compelled to draw on Native sources for language, although inevitably Native words, in adapted form, continued to extend the English language. Furthermore, in the colonial era the route to Christianity was increasingly believed to be traversable through assimilation into the English-speaking world, so English began to replace indigenous languages as the conduit for conversion. And even when Native languages were deemed useful, they were typically described as defective: incapable of conveying European abstract thought. Stephen Greenblatt suggests that this deficit model was one way European Americans could account for the cross-cultural difficulty of translating the tenets and practices of Christianity without having to acknowledge the complexity of Native ways of communicating. An occasional observer provided detailed linguistic analyses that contradicted prevailing notions about the inferiority of Native languages – for example, Jonathan Edward Jr.'s *Observations on the Language of the Muhhekaneew Indians* (1787) and John Heckewelder's *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (1819) – but these observations were largely ignored. Native languages, like Native people themselves, were in the process of being colonized. Anglo Americans believed in the superiority of their own language and culture, and almost from the beginning they began to develop educational or civilization programs to impose the English way of life on the Native population.[5]

Margaret Connell Szasz traces the history of the education of indigenous people by the English back to the early 1600s, when charters issued to the Virginia Company included clauses requiring conversion of Indians. Like the French and Spanish before them, Anglo missionaries established schools

designed to "Christianize and civilize the natives" in order to raise them above what was perceived to be a debased state. Because Native people did not subscribe to the notion of European superiority, however, they had to be pressured to attend. In some cases English colonists brought students to school as captives. In cases where parents voluntarily chose formal schooling for their children, they were typically compelled by the need to help their children survive the devastation brought on by the economic changes and diseases that accompanied the arrival of Europeans – a pattern that would be repeated throughout the centuries.[6]

The attempts to civilize indigenous populations continued after the formation of the United States of America. Promising peace and schools in return for Native land, the federal government established its first educational policies for Native people through treaties (until 1871), which included provisions for vocational and literacy education. However, although the government increasingly gained control of the land throughout most of the nineteenth century, there was little peace and virtually no government-run education. Congress established a civilization fund of $10,000 per year in 1819, but because the government had no mechanism for dispensing the money, most of the funding was given to missionary societies. Thus government-aided schools became sites for Christianization. In both day schools and boarding schools on Native lands, classes were typically conducted in the vernacular to promote understanding of biblical teachings, although most mission schools eventually added English-language instruction.[7]

After the Civil War, as increasing numbers of European Americans moved westward and wars over land rights continued to bloody the plains, the United States government undertook a peace initiative that resulted in a large-scale English-only educational reform movement, the focus of this book. This English-only initiative held sway until 1934, when Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act, which allowed for tribal self-government and renewal of Native languages. That period of linguistic tolerance was short-lived, however. It was not until 1990, when Congress passed the Native American Languages Act, that the United States government was charged with the responsibility of working together with indigenous people to guarantee the survival of their languages and cultures. The new United States language policy calls on the federal government "to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages."[8]

I came to this subject out of a practical need to learn. A few years ago I was invited to speak to faculty across the curriculum at an English-language college in Quebec on the subject of linguistic and cultural diversity. I was told that the faculty members were concerned not only about students for whom French is the first language but also about Cree and Inuit students who were dropping out at a high rate, often within weeks of starting school. I realized then that I was ignorant about the language backgrounds of indigenous people in Canada and even in the United States, the country where I was born and raised. I determined to become more knowledgeable. Shortly thereafter I was introduced to Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*. When I opened the book and saw its large print, I thought it had been created for children. But as I started to read, I began to suspect that something subversive was unfolding before my eyes, especially when the narrator began describing a nineteenth-century English-only school designed for Native children. When I finished this astonishing work – a mixture of autobiography, fiction, and journalism – I began to search for whatever material I could find on Zitkala-Ša (1876–1938) and the education she had received in the 1880s and 1890s. As a teacher of English, I was especially curious about how Zitkala-Ša and other Native students had learned the language, for it occurred to me that the acronym ESL, which has always denoted English *as* a second language in the United States, actually signifies that English *is* the second language of this country, if we understand – as Zitkala-Ša reminds us (see epigraph) – that hundreds of Native languages came first. I began to recognize the extent to which the growth and development of the field of teaching English as a second language in the United States was tied to a process by which the federal government attempted to establish linguistic and cultural control over second-language learners. This is a history that no teacher of English can afford to ignore.

There is a growing body of literature on American Indian education in the late nineteenth century, including overviews and studies of particular schools and the United States government's language policy.[9] However, as I sought material specifically related to my field, I found no full-length historical work that focused exclusively on English-language teaching for Native students or that was written from the perspective of a specialist in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Sociolinguists have maintained an active interest in Native languages and bilingualism, but histories of the teaching of English as a second or foreign language typically deal only

with Great Britain and the British Empire or do not treat American Indian education in any depth.[10] No detailed investigation exists of the way teachers taught English to Native students in the nineteenth century and how fully Native students acquired and used the English they learned in the schools. This book is a contribution to that history.

Its title notwithstanding, *America's Second Tongue* deals with only one of the many countries that compose America. When I undertook this investigation, I wanted to avoid a monolithic characterization of a hegemonic English language and culture – for example, through comparison with the ways Spanish and Portuguese supplanted indigenous languages throughout South America. I had also hoped to complicate the analysis of the English-only ideology by providing examples of empires that allowed and encouraged subjected peoples to maintain their languages (e.g., the Incas) but that did not subsequently feel compelled to refrain from slaughtering them. Finally, I had considered enriching the analysis through an examination of the roles that European languages other than English (e.g., French, Russian, Spanish, German) played in the interaction between Native people and European colonizers or immigrants in Canada as well as the United States. But it became clear early in the project that to examine these issues thoroughly would both lengthen the book considerably and shift its focus. In the interest of conserving space and maintaining unity of vision, I narrowed my focal point to the role of English in the United States. Even then, this investigation does not seek to be a comprehensive record of the history of instruction in English as a second language in the United States. As Arnold Leibowitz has documented, English was imposed as the language of instruction not only on speakers of Native languages but also on speakers of German, Spanish, and Japanese, among others. Nor is this investigation a comprehensive record of the teaching of English to Native students in the United States. Instruction took place in hundreds of venues over hundreds of years and was influenced by the interactions between myriad Native and European American communities from a variety of spheres. Each local situation informs the larger understanding of what took place in this era, yet I could not address every one. Any study compels a researcher to follow some strands of ideas and events and to abandon others.

America's Second Tongue is a study of the development, implementation, and aftermath of the United States government's language policy for indigenous people at a particular point in time and within a particular set of cir-

cumstances. The examination of the language instruction itself begins at the time when the government began to formulate its language policy (1860s) and ends at a point when the policy became more or less fixed (1900). The investigation continues into the twentieth century in order to explore retrospective accounts of nineteenth-century school experiences. Because inhabitants of the Great Plains were the earliest targets of late-nineteenth-century educational reformers, my emphasis is on that locale. However, experiences of other regions enrich the narrative and complicate the argument. As the analysis will reveal, students' acceptance of or resistance to English-only education was intimately connected to their particular family and community histories.

This is a story of language and of how people used it to further their own political and cultural agendas. To tell this story is no easy task. It is a story of linguistic ownership, and the meaning of ownership keeps shifting, depending on whether one is perceived to own English or to be owned by it. Because language can be used to justify or resist oppression, to communicate deeply held beliefs or document inexpressibility, to create positive images or exploit negative ones, it is a site of struggle over power, meaning, and representation. As Mick Gidley says of all forms of cultural expression, language does not reproduce reality but rather represents it. Nevertheless, representations function in such a way as to constitute reality for the groups that create and disseminate them. Capable of exerting this power, of shaping consciousness, representations are inevitably linked to the ideologies and belief systems of the groups that create them.[11]

As Beatrice Medicine emphasizes, the historical casting of Native life into the printed word reified images that have had long-lasting and damaging repercussions, and those images need to be deconstructed. Yet to analyze only the representations generated by European Americans would be to limit the view of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the *contact zone:* the social space where multiple discourses converged, collided, and interacted in the context of colonization. Analysis of the discourse of European Americans in powerful positions can tell us much about how they represented Native people as well as how they represented themselves. But it certainly does not tell us how Native people represented *themselves* – or how they in turn represented European Americans. Furthermore, it does not take into account the dynamic processes of translingualism and transculturation that Native students underwent as they interacted with a variety of languages and cultures over

time. Nor does it attend to the extraordinarily diverse – and sometimes conflicting – ways Native people responded to the effort to impose English-language instruction on their families and communities. In an attempt to reflect this linguistic and cultural complexity, I have chosen to set this story of language in a larger sociocultural and educational context and to view it through a kaleidoscopic lens that takes in several perspectives. To that end I show various ways the English language was used by United States government officials and missionaries (chapter 1), European American teachers (chapter 2), Native teachers (chapter 3), Native students (chapter 4), and Yankton Sioux fiction writer Zitkala-Ša (chapter 5). The book thus reflects the shifting ownership of English as the language was transferred from one population to another and as its uses were transformed.[12]

Despite its multiple perspectives, this investigation does not pretend to present a balanced view of American Indian education at the turn of the twentieth century. Three of the five chapters are devoted to analyzing Native perspectives. The history and analysis in this book are themselves representations of the past as I came to understand it through careful examination of the documentary record. The documents spoke for themselves. Government officials and missionaries were not engaged in a covert operation. Practices that went underground in the twentieth century as "the hidden curriculum" (e.g., the imposition of a particular set of values) were explicitly promoted in nineteenth-century school records, as Elizabeth Vallance has shown.[13] I made every effort not to accept Native sources uncritically while applying a different standard to European American sources. Native representations can be as exoticized, exaggerated, misleading, or artful as any other representations. Still, I could not ignore the fact that government officials and missionaries situated themselves in a superior position, linguistically and culturally, and overtly expressed their disdain for Native languages and cultures. European Americans were relatively free to express their ideas – and their prejudices – to a European American audience. Native writers, in contrast, had to create texts that were palatable to that same audience and thus were compelled to express their own agendas more covertly. Although even within these two groups of texts there was variation in style and substance, inevitably I was confronted with more openly negative or exoticized images of Native people in European American texts and with more coded or equivocal images of European Americans in Native texts.

These competing images heightened my awareness of the political and cultural climate in which words reached print in this era.

Underlying the ideas in every chapter of this book is an understanding that the English-language program was situated in a colonialist context. This investigation never loses sight of the relation between ideology and curriculum or of the asymmetrical power relations between educators and students. Accordingly, chapter 1, "English and Colonialist Discourses," focuses on the way government officials and missionaries used the English language to promote their own educational agendas. This chapter shows that English signified much more than a mode of communication, for it was tied to particular religious, cultural, racial, and nationalist ideologies. Chapter 2, "Language, Pedagogy, and Ideology," looks at the role European American teachers played in implementing missionaries' bilingual programs and the United States government's English-only school system. This chapter reveals that even in the most compassionate or progressive schools, teachers were complicit in the endeavor to eradicate Native languages and cultures and thus – wittingly or unwittingly – often undermined students' potential and sense of self. While the government's language policy was promoted as an important feature of its educational and humanitarian program, it functioned as an instrument of linguistic and cultural oppression.

The unequal relations that characterized the schools extended to the production of texts on which the analysis of Native perspectives depends. Native teachers' and students' writings were sometimes reprinted in government reports and school newspapers, and they are a rich resource for investigation. However, they were typically published because they reflected the European American worldview promulgated in the schools. In order to achieve a closer understanding of Native people's representations of themselves and others, I draw on autobiographies and ethnographies of Native teachers and former students, produced after they left school, for the analyses in chapter 3, "Reproduction and Resistance," and chapter 4, "Translingual Ironies." These texts presented a challenge, however, for many of the published stories were produced in collaboration with Anglo editors, anthropologists, or sociologists. Only a few more than half of the Native autobiographical works examined in this project are original works written by the former students themselves, although presumably all of them were subject to the conventional process of copyediting. The original writers

are Ah-nen-la-de-ni (Mohawk), Jason Betzinez (Apache), Charles Doxon (Onondaga), Charles Eastman (Dakota), Francis La Flesche (Omaha), Lilah Denton Lindsey (Creek), Mourning Dove (Okanogan), John Rogers (Chippewa), Luther Standing Bear (Lakota), George Webb (Pima), Howard Whitewolf (Comanche), Sara Winnemucca (Northern Paiute), and Zitkala-Ša.[14] The other texts are based on oral testimonies gathered through audiotaped and transcribed interviews with Thomas Wildcat Alford (Absentee Shawnee), Asa Daklugie (Apache), Edward Goodbird (Hidatsa), Mary Little Bear Inkanish (Southern Cheyenne), James Kaywaykla (Apache), Annie Lowry (Northern Paiute), Frank Mitchell (Navajo), Edmund Nequatewa (Hopi), John Stands in Timber (Northern Cheyenne), Carl Sweezy (Arapaho), Don Talayesva (Hopi), and Albert Yava (Tewa-Hopi).[15]

It is difficult to determine how fully texts written in collaboration reflect the former students' actual perspectives, for the Native narrators were not in control of the work. Debate persists among scholars about what to call these texts – autobiography? ethnography? biography? – and for good reason. The introductions to the texts indicate that the accounts present former students' own ideas in their own words and from their own point of view. Wherever the text is a direct transcription of a taped interview, it is possible to discern the Native perspective. But the introductions also acknowledge that editors have added background material, rearranged the narrative, and in some cases even done some rewriting. Despite these explanations of the mode of production, the Anglo collaborators are virtually absent from the narratives themselves, leaving a reader the impression that they played little or no role in generating the texts.[16] If it is at all possible to discover what Native narrators perceived as important in their own lives, and I think it is (to the extent that it is ever possible to determine intent), it is necessary to focus on how they used English to represent themselves and establish their own identities within the constraints of colonialism. Although they collaborated with European Americans, Native narrators were not necessarily acquiescent or disempowered. They were able to introduce into these texts ideas and images other than those sanctioned by European American society.

For the purposes of this investigation, I approach these works as *autoethnographic* texts, a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt to identify writings in which indigenous people in the contact zone portrayed themselves and at

the same time engaged with the representations that others had constructed of them. In circumstances where Native people worked in concert with European Americans who had access to the print culture, these publications were not conventional forms of self-representation. They involved simultaneous collaboration and appropriation, accommodation and resistance.[17] Most historians of American Indian education have dealt with Native students' stories as sources of data about nineteenth-century school experiences. Many such experiential details emerge here. However, my primary goal is to analyze Native rhetorical strategies in light of the historical context in which the texts were produced. I apply a similar approach to the creative writing analyzed in chapter 5, "Transforming Women: Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories,*" where I pay particular attention to representations of Native women.

Through analysis of archival documents, autobiography, ethnography, and fiction, *America's Second Tongue* examines why and how government-sponsored English-language classrooms designed for Native students came into being, how European American and Native teachers mediated the government's English-only directive, and what students did with the language after they learned it. It focuses on the ways European American and Native people used English to represent themselves and each other as they sought to fulfill their own political, educational, and cultural agendas. Through these multiple perspectives, the book reveals yet another paradox. Even as English functioned as a disruptive and destructive instrument of linguistic and cultural control, it was also a generative tool for expressing diverse ways of seeing, saying, and believing.