

Language, Identity, Power Relations, and Discourse: A Cree Language Response to Linguistic Imperialism

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Linguistic imperialism is a concept that is rarely examined by Aboriginal scholars, yet linguist imperialism has affected Indigenous life monumentally. This paper articulates a Cree language worldview and juxtaposes it to the consequences of linguistic imperialism on Indigenous language speakers. Foucault's work on relations of power is applied to this analysis to demonstrate how the discourse of language is often saturated with power relations. This is particularly true when Eurocentric languages and worldviews are situated as more intelligible compared to Indigenous languages and worldviews. Globalization and diversification of literacy is explored in this analysis, and the discourses that emerge from these global phenomena demonstrate that language and literacy are cloudy and complex. For the Indigenous subject in a modern context, notions of hybridity emerge because identity is not fixed, but rather is in a constant state of making, remaking, and negotiating.

L'impérialisme linguistique est un concept rarement étudié par les chercheurs autochtones, mais qui a toutefois grandement affecté la vie autochtone. La présente étude décline une vision du monde fondée sur la langue Crie en juxtaposition avec les répercussions de l'impérialisme linguistique sur les locuteurs des langues autochtones. Les travaux de Foucault sur les rapports de force sont appliqués à cette analyse afin de démontrer que le discours sur la langue est souvent saturé de rapports de force. Cela est particulièrement vrai lorsque les langues européennes et les visions du monde qu'elles servent sont établies comme plus précises et fidèles que les langues et les visions du monde autochtones. La mondialisation et la diversification de la littéracie sont abordées dans cette analyse. Les discours qui se dégagent de ces phénomènes mondiaux illustrent que la langue et la littéracie sont des concepts fluides et complexes. En ce qui concerne les aspects autochtones dans un contexte moderne, les notions d'hybridité émergent de la fluidité de l'identité, qui consiste en un état constant de fabrication, de refabrication et de négociation.

Throughout my academic experiences, articulating myself in English has been a task characterized by resistance, discord, and struggle. Eng-

lish is not my native language; Cree is the first language through which my family and I view the world. In academia, I have resisted English and Eurocentric ways and have come to see this as an anti-colonial reaction. The English language has been a site of discord because, while learning it, my command was, and is, not as strong as monolingual English speakers. My lack of immediate clarity has frequently been the subject of laughter, an experience not unique to me. The Cree language worldview is drastically different from that of the English language, and so I have struggled with making quick and precise transitions from Cree to English. Even with time to reflect, English words do not always express what I sense to be true to my Cree worldview. It is from these tumultuous experiences that I feel compelled to "speak back" using the "Master's Tools" of English (Lorde, 1984).

Language affects our subjectivity. English language learners are socialized in a system that is often sharply contrasted with the social system of English monolingual speakers. There is often a deficiency model ascribed to non-native English speakers (Callahan, 2005; Harklau, 2000) because of the way one speaks, word selection, or the speed of speech. There are also competing discourses in language that influence our subjectivity. Language shapes how subjects are positioned. English language learners have to negotiate how they will position themselves in a colonial and Eurocentric system that is deeply immersed in contested discourses where certain identities are privileged while others are silenced.

The purpose of this paper is not only about "speaking back," but also about providing a lens through which a Cree language worldview is articulated. Although I speak Cree as a first language, this paper is not intended to essentialize all Cree speakers as having one worldview. However, there are commonalities that affect Aboriginal identities and Aboriginal language speakers that are based on an ideology of race. Despite the many challenging experiences I have faced with the social aspect of education and learning, I bring my voice to the process of learning English as an Aboriginal Cree speaker. I have come to understand that language is an ambiguous discourse that operates in the social realm where power is exercised. This paper is situated in a colonial framework where language(s) and identity merge, resulting in some identities being affirmed while others are minimized or held in question.

This paper will provide a theoretical framework to describe how relations of power operate in language (Foucault, 1995). I will articulate

a Cree language worldview, discuss the social construction of English language superiority, and examine some ways that language influences identity. The context of this paper will begin by distinguishing the differing worldviews of Cree and English. This paper examines how linguistic imperialism functions to racialize Aboriginal peoples, with a particular focus on the positioning of Cree language speakers in education and society.

Foucault's Relations of Power and Subjectivity

Language operates within relations of power (Foucault, 1995). What is said or not said is purposeful. Meaning derives from social processes conveyed through language. This paper will use a Cree context to contextualize how discourses in language can lack transparency. Michel Foucault's work on relations of power will be applied to this discussion.

Foucault believes that power and knowledge imply one another. Foucault speaks about relations of power between people. It is through understanding the relations of power that we learn how ideas of truth and knowledge emerge, and how in this process some people are privileged and others are excluded or silenced. Power is used to exclude, silence, or validate certain bodies. Foucault believes that power produces ideas of truth, and that truth and knowledge are socially produced. By employing Foucault's theory of relations of power, we come to understand that power is exercised through language.

We understand that ideas of truth and knowledge emerge through relations of power. Language as a discourse is important to the role it plays in the production of subjectivity. The self emerges through social processes and events in history. Next, I will elaborate on a Cree language worldview and juxtapose the differences between Cree and English by using an example of how the English language operates in relations of power.

Cree Language Worldview and Discursive Implications

This paper is largely motivated by a need to speak back and provide a lens through which I approach English as a Cree speaker. In this section, I will provide an example to demonstrate how discourses in languages differ. I will further discuss interpretations of a Cree language worldview and how the Cree language lens functions in the translations into English. Finally, I will provide an analysis of how power operates

in the discourse of Cree language revitalization. This paper is not about Aboriginal language revitalization. Rather, it is about creating awareness that Aboriginal identities are socially produced through language.

I will begin with an example of how languages or worldviews clash even in the most innocuous arenas. Tom Roberts is a Woodland Cree speaker from the La Ronge, Saskatchewan, area, where he had an ongoing program with CBC Radio. His program was in conjunction with Sheila Coles' radio program based in Regina. It is important to note that I admire and respect Sheila Coles' personality on CBC Radio, as I believe she makes some insightful points and is cordial with guests on her show. However, the following is a demonstration of contrasting worldviews that can also be interpreted as relations of power in operation.

Roberts was describing to Coles an upcoming event that was organized for high school students (CBC Radio, 9 March 2010). This event was a trek that was meant to physically challenge students. As Roberts was describing the upcoming event, he expressed some excitement about the physical challenge and what it would entail. Coles commented that she and Roberts might try the physical activity. Roberts enthusiastically accepted and was about to further the conversation. Coles, however, was not serious about the offer and gently ended the conversation with an apparent mirth. I will return to my analysis of this episode after providing a glimpse of a Cree language worldview.

Research shows that there are distinct differences between Cree and Euro-Canadian worldviews. Sutherland and Dennick (2002), whose research focused on Cree First Nations and Euro-Canadian grade-seven students in a Manitoba community, state that "a central hypothesis to this research programme is the possibility that the different world-views of two student populations, Cree and Euro-Canadian, are likely to influence their perceptions of science" (p. 1). The authors find that there were distinct differences in the responses of Cree and Euro-Canadian students. Sutherland and Dennick use Willie Ermine's work to show what an Aboriginal epistemology appears to be. Ermine, a Cree speaking educator from Saskatchewan who shares his insights on a Cree worldview, proposes that a Cree epistemology is about a journey inward in order to understand the reality of existence and harmony with nature. The inner space that Ermine articulates is within the context of the universe-of-being and is synonymous with the soul, spirit, and self. With this, there is a substantial subjective component to Aboriginal epistemology. Sutherland and Dennick observe that "the quest for knowing does not

end at the self but extends outwards to include the universe” (p. 2). In this relationship, the internal self and the external other are enmeshed in a complex dynamic that is inseparable.

In contrast to how knowledge is viewed in the Aboriginal epistemology that Ermine articulates, the Western tradition of viewing knowledge is based on access to power. From this standpoint, knowledge is something to be accumulated and possessed (Sutherland & Dennick, 2002). In English, there is a disconnection with others over how language is used. In an Aboriginal epistemology, one is positioned as coming-to-know as a life-long process in relation to the environment and other living beings.

Sutherland and Dennick (2002) propose that there are different meanings in languages from which many misconceptions may occur. The authors provide a few examples to show what this looks like. In many Asian languages, for example, stress is used to alter meaning. In many Aboriginal languages, one word may have a variety of meanings, which may cause delays in explaining concepts (Sutherland & Dennick, 2002). The authors also contend that in many Aboriginal languages, abstract concepts are positioned in direct relation to actual objects and relationships. For many Aboriginal students whose first language is not English, they may have the understanding of a concept but lack the vocabulary to share their understanding. Comprehending concepts and not having instantaneous and precise translations from Cree to English is not a sign of a lack of intelligence, but rather is influenced by the discourses made available.

There are differences of syntactic order between languages, which may influence the way students provide explanations (Sutherland & Dennick, 2002). Sutherland and Dennick offer a practical perspective of a Cree thought process:

If an English speaker says, “I see you” the sequence of ideas in his mind is: himself, the speaker, the action of seeing performed by the speaker and directed toward the person to whom he is speaking. But if a native speaker of Cree were to attempt to convey the same general information to a companion Cree speaker the sequence of ideas in his mind would be quite different. Automatically would spring into the field of his mental vision the image of the person to whom he intended to speak; it would be instinctive for him to think first of the other per-

son—just as it would be instinctive for an English speaker to think first of himself. Next in his sequence of ideas would be the idea that the person addressed is the target of an action performed by the speaker; the mental image of idea of the speaker himself being the last on his list (p. 5).

The syntactic order of the Cree language does not immediately concentrate on the speaker. Instead, it concentrates on the person with whom the speaker is communicating. For example, a Cree translation of "I see you" is *Kiwapamitin*. *Ki* refers to the person to whom one is speaking. *Wapamitin* refers to the act of seeing—the mental image of the person doing the speaking focuses on the other person, not the self. Providing an example of a Cree thought process opens up opportunities for teaching methods, rather than assuming that the Aboriginal language speaker is unable to learn or articulate in English.

Sutherland and Dennick (2002) found that according to traditional practice, Aboriginal people function with basic respect for all people. In social settings, many Aboriginal peoples will not answer questions unless asked, nor will they ask questions out loud and do not wish to contradict their fellow human beings. The reluctance to speak does not necessarily mean disinterest. Rather, the authors believe that "they [Aboriginal students] may make assumptions about my ability to understand them or have a fear of ridicule at these explanations, especially if a student has provided a traditional explanation in the past and has been told they are 'wrong'" (p. 20). Relations of power arise when interpretations are provided, especially when one is portrayed as being right and the other wrong.

Sasakamoose and Waskewitch (2008) provide insight into an Indigenous voice, which they call *Pikiskwewin*. They assert that an "Indigenous voice is metaphysical, that is, the community ethos has primordial connection and interconnections that imbue the spirit of dialogue with a truth and honesty" (p. 12). This means that one is accountable and responsible for the spoken word. A distinction Sasakamoose and Waskewitch make is that in a Cree-language worldview individuals are assumed to enact their talk, and by this they are taking responsibility for their actions and words. The Cree language has a purpose; it is relational to others, not hierarchal. In Cree, language is used within a paradigm of respect, truth, and humility. Therefore, language is about connections; English, on the other hand, often operates in competition, which is to say that it is about relations of power.

The work of Herman Michell (2005) informs the current analysis. Michell speaks about the worldview and epistemology of the Woodland Cree of Reindeer Lake in northern Canada. He acknowledges that the Woodland Cree are internally heterogeneous by social markers such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and even religion, all the result of residential schooling and colonial-based assimilation policies. But Michell asserts that “Woodland Cree epistemology is holistic in nature and represents both personal and collective contextual consciousness” (p. 36). This philosophy is guided by values of respect, compassion, generosity, and love for all relations. He warns that the idea of Euro-Western knowledge as superior to Indigenous ways of knowing disturbs the balance. For Cree people, nature is not something that is external to them. Michell explains his conception of balance: “Balance at the outer level is about maintaining respectful interconnected, reciprocal and sustainable relationships beginning at the individual level embracing family, community, nation, and extending out toward the environment, plants, animals and cosmos” (p. 40). In articulating a Cree worldview, the emphasis is on the relational aspect of living, or living amongst and within other valuable beings. Many Aboriginal language speakers who enter a Euro-Canadian space have this as a point of perspective.

Due to colonialism, most Aboriginal peoples are immersed in Western knowledge systems. In these systems, power is a major component of interaction, as Sutherland and Dennick (2002) assert. There are often practices of having, or needing, to trump another person’s input in English verbal exchanges. In exchanges like this, the relations of power are clearly palpable. A Cree-language worldview is not necessarily concerned with power, but rather about relationship and being true to one’s spoken word. When one speaks Cree, the assumption is that the person speaking is uttering his/her subjective truth. That is, speaking their truth according to their lived reality in relation to others. Put in another way, when Cree speakers are conversing with one another, the utterances are interpreted literally. Language is purposeful, and as Sasakamoose and Waskewitch (2002) contend, talking means one is going to be responsible for his/her words and actions. There is little power dynamic involved except for an adherence to the importance of relationships.

Sutherland and Dennick (2002) found that Cree speakers do not necessarily respond when another person speaks, and that many words in Cree have a number of different meanings. In Western knowledge systems, when one is vocal and states a position each time a comment is

made, this is often equated as intelligent or, at the very least, abiding by a rewarded discourse of being vocal. However, the problem once again is that this exchange is saturated with power relations. Many Cree speakers frequently understand scientific vocabulary, as found by Sutherland and Dennick. However, it is verbalizing the comprehension into English that often takes some time. While the translations may take few a moments, it is not necessarily a lack of understanding nor is it because the Cree speaker is "slow." When Aboriginal language speakers are labelled as slow, their level of participation is affected. The level of engagement in the classroom of Cree or Aboriginal languages speakers will vary, and two questions must be considered. One is, "How welcoming are their contributions in the classroom?" And two, "How often are Aboriginal identities viewed as deficient for their lack of participation or perceived lack of understanding?" Discourses in the English language differ from the Cree-language worldview. Although the Cree and English language worldviews differ, I argue that Cree language speakers inherently speak themselves into existence much the way Davies (2000) theorizes because the purpose of our speech is in reference to the discourses and the relationships.

At this point, I return to the conversation between Coles and Roberts. As Coles ended the on-air conversation with Roberts, he was expecting a response to the possible participation in the physical challenge. When listening to this exchange, I understood that Roberts took Coles literally when she put the idea forward. Coles, being a high-profile Saskatchewan radio voice, has a public image/voice of which she must be mindful, and not present herself as malicious over the radio. In the case of Roberts, after acknowledging the offer Coles made, and having his acknowledgement silenced, the exchange presented itself as ambiguous and lacked transparency. In a literal interpretation of the offer, it would seem that Roberts was publically minimized and ridiculed, even patronized. From a Cree language perspective, this exchange would seem perplexing because the words are not negotiated into action. I argue that this is a matter of differing worldviews. The power dynamic in this situation was that Coles could end the conversation even after she proposed a challenge. Uttering words that are not necessarily meant literally or sincerely with Cree language speakers is linguistically asymmetric, and when there is no follow through in the verbal offers, many Cree speakers are left distrustful of how the English language is used.

In a colonial system where white privilege (McIntosh, 1989) prevails and English language is dominant, Aboriginal people are often only marginally invited to participate in mainstream society. The term marginal is used because racism functions to exclude, reject, and construct others as inferior. The hesitation by Aboriginal or Cree language speakers to state a position is not necessarily because of a lack of intelligence or interest, but the invitation to participate is often monitored by a racist ideology waiting to prove Aboriginal inferiority. Meanwhile, intelligence is measured by Eurocentric ideals, and Aboriginal peoples who do not properly mimic this often have difficulty participating in a Eurocentric society.

Another dynamic of how language is enmeshed in relations of power is demonstrated in Cree language revitalization. St. Denis (2004) offers an insightful analysis that demonstrates relations of power in operation. While reclamation is crucial for Aboriginal languages to survive, there has emerged a power dynamic that merits mention. In these cultural or language revitalization movements, categories of real, traditional, or assimilated are often used by Aboriginal peoples to label other Aboriginal peoples. St. Denis argues that Aboriginal teachers face this dilemma of having to prove cultural authenticity:

Aboriginal teachers charged with the responsibility of supporting the development of a positive and strong cultural identity in their Aboriginal students must struggle with their own challenges of reclamation and revitalization. In the end, Aboriginal teachers must defend the actions of their parents and grandparents, who also struggled to make good decisions for their children, only to be told that they now had to try to reverse language and cultural loss (p. 38).

Aboriginal language revitalization movements were intended to promote Aboriginal ways of knowing as well as develop positive self-identity. Aboriginal language revitalization has also resulted in practices of power relations. The Aboriginal language revitalization movement is not an innocent discourse as some Aboriginal educators may project. Speaking or learning Cree can be viewed as rewarding a performed discourse. This performance is viewed as authentic Aboriginality and is, therefore, rewarded. Meanwhile, not performing this discourse can result in one being met with criticism or harsh judgements.

In summary, the works of Sutherland and Dennick (2002), Sasakamoose and Waskewitch (2008), and Michell (2005) present a picture of a Cree-language worldview that many Cree speakers bring into a classroom. A CBC-Radio conversation between Sheila Coles and Tom Roberts was analyzed to demonstrate the contrasting worldviews and how relations of power emerged. This section focused on how Aboriginal language revitalization programs also operate in relations of power that surface between Aboriginal people. One purpose of this section was to illustrate how a Cree and English language worldviews differ in their operation. Discourses in languages serve differing purposes, where some discourses are rewarded, others are silenced or punished. Discourses with regard to Aboriginal people are complex and surrounded by power relations. Aboriginal subjectivity emerges between these competing discourses. In the following section, I will elaborate on the social construction of English language superiority.

The Social Construction of English Language Superiority

Due to colonialism, there is a notion of English language superiority that has had repercussions for racialized identities, including those of Aboriginal people. This section demonstrates how upholding English language as superior implicitly turns non-native English language speakers into an inferior status. In this portion of the paper, I will examine linguistic imperialism, explore how speech and accent are frequently interpreted, and briefly examine the implications and possibilities of the globalization and diversification of languages. This section analyzes how speech and language are used to produce inferior or superior positioning. For Aboriginal identities, situating one's self in competing discourses is often scrutinized and labelled. The colonial gaze and grip on Aboriginal people is everywhere, and this requires continuous unlearning.

Canada's recognized official languages are French and English, but these are not the only ones spoken. Other languages become eclipsed by the official languages. The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre website (<http://www.sicc.sk.ca/>) recognizes the Cree, Dene, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, and Nakawe languages as currently spoken in Saskatchewan's Aboriginal communities, all of which precede the official languages Canada recognizes. Many Saskatchewan Aboriginal communities have first languages other than English or French. With these official lan-

languages being recognized, other languages are positioned on the margins, therefore encouraging a notion of European language superiority.

Shannon (1995) provides a detailed description of the hegemony of English, which she asserts is operating in full force in the United States. She proposes that the teaching of English language in the world is a sign of linguistic imperialism.

Wherever more than one language or language variety exists together, their status in relation to one another is often asymmetric. In those cases, one will be perceived as superior, desirable and necessary, whereas the other will be seen as inferior, undesirable, and extraneous (p. 176).

In linguistic imperialism, speakers receive elevated or devalued status, where speakers of dominant languages are celebrated and minority language speakers are positioned as inferior. Shannon argues that in order to maintain dominant status, the language has to be connected to politics, government, economics, and social domination. Moreover, it must have the consent of the people. Shannon notes that persuasion is achieved through domination if linguistic imperialism is to function successfully and continually. As a result of efforts to promote and construct notions of dominant languages over time, other languages come to be seen as inferior, and their speakers almost inevitably internalize that subjugated standing (Shannon, 1995). This is due to the relations of power in operation when one language is affirmed and another stigmatized.

Shannon (1995) asserts that linguistic hegemony is the same as linguisticism. She quotes from Robert Phillipson, a scholar of linguistic hegemony who argues that this “involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated language, for the purpose of exclusion” (as cited in Shannon, p. 178). Convincing speakers and learners that a particular language is important achieves linguistic superiority over others. A way in which non-native English speakers are persuaded to speak the dominant language is by convincing them that it is the way to modernization (Shannon, 1995). The same argument is made by Schecter and Bayley (2004), but they refer to this as Americanization. However, Shannon argues that advantages of modernization are not made available to non-English speaking people, and I would argue this applies to Aboriginal peoples.

Inferior and superior dichotomy is applied in languages. For example, Shannon (1995) argues that English speakers are often viewed as smarter, more successful, and more worthy than Spanish speakers. For the current analysis, this can be applied to Aboriginal language speakers. Speaking English is perceived to be the key to success, is a necessary tool for success, and a sign of good citizenship. Meanwhile, she proposes, speaking Spanish is viewed as extraneous, unnecessary, and an impediment to success. Shannon points out that Spanish speakers are often viewed as unintelligent, less successful, and less worthy than English speakers. These arguments about Spanish native speakers are parallel to those made about Aboriginal language speakers. Shannon warns that these messages can be internalized and cause non-native English speakers to develop a self-contempt.

Munro (2003) provides a useful analysis of how inferiority is constructed with regard to language accents. He writes, "Speech research indicates that people tend to be highly sensitive to even slight divergences from the pronunciation patterns of their speech community" (p. 38). Although there is a growing population of second-language speakers in Canada, Munro proposes that the increase in other accented speech does not always involve positive interaction. Along with skin colour, dress, or mannerisms, speech is a marker that identifies differences, and can be an excuse to discriminate. Much like Shannon's (1995) research, Munro found that listeners judged speakers with a Canadian-typical accent as suited to high-status jobs more often than were non-native English speakers with non-typical accents.

There is more than one way that accented speech is received. Even though some non-native English speakers may have trouble communicating, this does not necessarily mean a reduced intelligence. However, some accented speeches are viewed as undesirable (Munro, 2003). Objections to accented speech, Munro argues, may have more to do with an unwillingness to accommodate difference than a sincere concern over comprehension. Accented speech is a sign of discontent because of discourses that produce some as worthy and others as unworthy.

Accent stereotyping is a contested issue that requires attention. Munro (2003) observes that linguistic profiling is often used to assess potential tenants or employees. He writes that "on hearing a voice on the telephone, a landlord might deny accommodations to someone because the speaker is perceived to be of a particular race or from a particular place of origin" (p. 45). Munro found that a significant number of un-

trained listeners claimed that they were able to tell a person's race or ethnicity over the telephone after "hello" has been said. He provides an example in which a Ukrainian accent was misperceived as Aboriginal, and as a result a negative personality rating was assigned to Aboriginal people. As an illustration of this, consider a complaint that was made to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 2001 by a Cree woman from North Battleford. Munro (2003) writes:

In one recently settled case a woman of Cree background in North Battleford was told on the telephone that an apartment she wished to view had already been rented. When a friend who spoke without an accent called the same manager, she was told that the suite was still available (p. 46).

In this case, the landlord used linguistic profiling to discriminate against an Aboriginal woman, which I argue is a common occurrence for accented Aboriginal speakers. In this particular case, there was no hearing as the respondent agreed to pay compensation to the Aboriginal woman and was required to post a statement on the apartment building outlining an anti-discrimination policy.

Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) conducted research that examined how accents were perceived by non-native speakers. The authors found that "speaking with a non-native accent, but not a regional native accent, was significantly associated with feeling less belonging, and this difference was mediated by perceived problems in communicating" (p. 224). Gluszek and Dovidio claim that an accent is part of one's social identity, and that this communicates social information. The authors found that "[h]aving a non-native accent may lead speakers to question whether they are accepted in a community whereas individuals with regional native accents, which are less likely to interfere with communication, would be unlikely to question their belonging in the United States" (p. 225). The authors found that Asians and Latinos communicated more perceived stigmatization than did Europeans. Perceptions of accents are essential to investigate as it is one more avenue in which Aboriginal people may be constructed as inferior.

Much like Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), Derwing's (2003) research focuses on the self-perceptions of the accents of immigrant English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students. She asserts that this is a significant inquiry because speech communicates much more than the way one may

dress or the kind of car one drives. Derwing proposes that the further an accent is from one's own, the greater the likelihood that the encounter will be met with a negative reaction. Like Munro (2003), Derwing also contends that listeners tend to judge non-native English speakers as less intelligent or less educated. However, not all accents are equally devalued. Some accents are a status marker, as Derwing demonstrates with the example of two groups: Greek-Australians and Anglo-Australians. She found that there is a preference for Anglo-Australian-accented English, which is often associated with industriousness, power, intelligence, and competence. Marking an accent in one way is to position another accent in sharp contrast, or as an undesirable opposite.

With regard to visible minority status and accent, Derwing (2003) found that those who were associated with a visible minority reported more discrimination because of their accents than those in the non-visible minority population. In reference to other research, Derwing writes,

Lippi-Green has charged that accent is integrally related to ethnic stereotyping; indeed, she argues, in light of evidence in the US, that it is not all foreign accents, but only accents linked to skin that isn't white, or which signals a third world homeland, that evokes such negative reactions (p. 561).

She also offers that it is difficult to determine how much discrimination is attributed to accent rather than to the race of visible minorities. The points that Derwing makes are applicable to language issues that Cree language speakers face when communicating in English. Non-native English speakers must be mindful of how others will react, whether they will be invited to participate, or how invested others will be in communicating with them. The power dynamic in accented speech certainly affects how one will be positioned.

As a final note to this section, ideas of globalization and diversification deserve some mention as both have significance in the conceptualization of languages. Barton (1994) asserts that English and French languages are spreading throughout the world, and there are benefits of having shared languages. For example, by having a common language, people are able to readily communicate in a known language. Barton believes that the spread of one or two languages throughout the world as common languages is not the real issue. Rather, the problem arises when it is time to define literacy programs. In particular, dominant language literacy programs must consider how much influence they have

over other literacy practices and programs. He warns that while English is being imported to other nations, Indigenous languages are being stifled. Barton proposes that behind any literacy program anywhere in the world, there is a native language close by. How to reconcile the Indigenous languages with multiple literacies is one issue to be considered and not easy to resolve given how frequently Aboriginal peoples function in both Aboriginal and European languages. One question posed is: How welcome are Aboriginal people in participating in literacy programs or learning European languages?

Barton (1994) offers another concern with regard to dialects, creoles, and other language varieties. He suggests that the notion of a standard language is closely connected with literacy. In a historical synopsis of the spread of literacy, it is closely related to the standardization of the language. In a literacy program, the written varieties are valued, celebrated, and promoted. Meanwhile, spoken types, such as dialects and creoles, are positioned as on the edge of language. Barton points out that “issues of whether dialects can be written down, whether they should be written down and whether they are acceptable as literacies is an issue in many parts of the world” (p. 4). Given the many different Aboriginal languages in a post-assimilation policy era, many of these have woven European words into Aboriginal speech and languages. The Michif language would be a prime example.

Barton (1994) offers that globalization has become a literacy trend. Globalization happens in all areas of life, and literacy is certainly one area. He warns,

As English spreads throughout the world, British and American conceptions of literacy get exported in the same way as other goods and services are being exported, harmonised, standardized; and in particular it is western school practices which are becoming more dominant within societies and across different societies (p. 6).

In this process, literacies are often produced to be in a hierarchy. Limited versions of literacy programs are diffused throughout the world, and this is at the expense of many minority literacies, especially where Indigenous languages are spoken.

On the other side of the globalization of literacy is the diversification of literacy. The understanding is that as more languages and lit-

eracies are being written, literacy becomes broader, thus building more diverse literacies (Barton, 1994). Barton proposes that

[w]e can see that as the English language spreads to different societies, the actual English language changes through contact with different cultures, so there are different Englishes in different parts of the world, Indian English, Singapore English, Scots English, etc. People change and adapt the language and literacy is put to a wider variety of uses and develops more forms; in addition, biliteracy and multiliteracy are growing (p. 6).

Diversification of literacy practices throughout the world is wide ranging and can be viewed as enriching literacy. This perspective holds a great deal of potential as the reading and writing involved in literacy programs becomes multidimensional. With regard to Aboriginal literacy programs, diversification can be affirming and enriching, especially when speakers use Cree English.

In this section, I examined how the English language has become socially produced as superior. Shannon (1994) talks about linguistic hegemony, and how some languages are portrayed as less important than English. Munro (2003) offers insight into the perceptions of accents and how accents are used to discriminate. Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) write about the self-perceptions of accent speakers and its social effects. Derwing (2003) examines biases toward accented speech and characteristics associated with certain accents. Barton (1994) reminds us that literacy programs are often complicated and contradictory with regard to globalization and diversification. Speech, language, and accents are markers that are socially produced in a hierarchy. For Aboriginal language speakers, the colonial gaze is never turned off, which is often unwelcoming. Next, I will explore how language affects identity in a post-colonial context.

How Language Influences Identity

In this final section, I will examine how language shapes the positioning of ESL speakers' identity. There are three questions asked: 1) how are the identities of ESL students positioned in education?; 2) how does the homogenizing of ESL students occur; and 3) what is hybridity and how does it intersect with language and identity?

How are the identities of ESL students positioned in education?

Harklau (2000) argues that schools often function to categorize and position student identities. She suggests that learner identities are increasingly being constructed in the classroom. The interaction between educators and students can be a site for reinforcing or contesting categories. ESL students are often encouraged to perform certain discourses, which are assumed to be part of their identity.

There is an institutional force in which representations of ESL students are constantly being monitored. Harklau (2000) proposes that one of these constructed images is in regard to immigrants leaving their homes, bearing financial hardship, and enduring emotional challenges, but by working hard these immigrants are able to succeed. This institutional representation of ESL students presents them as hard working, determined, and able to persevere against all odds. Often times, teachers and students regenerate and perpetuate these representations. This representation of ESL learners has come to be associated with a common-sense observation for teachers and students. Harklau argues that this imagery is reinforced by having immigrant ESL students relate their personal stories in their classroom. Personal stories are often met with much sympathy, admiration, and support from teachers. Harklau proposes that the role of teacher and student are mutually constitutive in that the teacher is represented as the fulfiller of immigrant dreams, while the student is cast as the model student who overcomes tremendous hardship and adversity. This representation of immigrant ESL students is a dominant discourse in ESL classrooms.

The picture of a struggling student is one that often embodies ESL identities (Harklau, 2000). Harklau argues that this prevailing institutional representation of immigrant students may seem admirable, but this image could be interpreted as a lack of innate ability. Phrases such as “sticking to it,” “hard worker,” and “pure determination” are used to portray ESL student identities. Although educators may have viewed the immigrant student’s hard work as commendable, the teachers often doubt the student’s linguistic and academic competence. A deficit model is often ascribed to bilingualism when discussing student academic conduct. Some teachers did not see these students’ ability to speak two languages as a special talent. Rather, the students were contrasted against monolingual speakers’ ability to speak and write English. In a befitting observation about the construction of ESL identities, Harklau uses one teacher’s comments about ESL students: “It must be like somebody

who's very bright and has a stroke. And can't express themselves" (p. 50). An inability on the part of ESL students is strongly implied, thus contributing to ideas of student deficiency, as opposed to seeing strength in being literate in another language. This can be applied to Aboriginal language speakers in Eurocentric educational institutions who are learning English.

In reference to South African black students, Thesen (1997) observes that prior to 1993 black speakers of English often struggled to gain entry into university. Students who were previously excluded had identity categories ascribed to them. Thesen proposes that labels such as "disadvantaged," "underprepared," and "second language" were used to exclude students. With regard to white institutions, black students who gained entry into university encountered a new identity category, such as "disadvantaged." They were perceived to be disadvantaged because they went through the Department of Education and training school system, which are for ESL speakers. Thesen also argues:

The terms underprepared and second language are also used as institutional shorthand for historically excluded students. These labels signal an institutional discourse, which translates in practical terms into special paths for Black students. Tested on entry, they are placed on language development courses that simultaneously enable and stigmatise learners (p. 490).

What is implied in these classes is they have to catch up to other students. Thesen further notes that "the namer isolates the named, explains them, contains them, and controls them" (p. 490). This parallels the experiences of many Aboriginal students who are handed labels such as lazy, learning disabled, or lacking commitment or vision, all the while receiving a free post-secondary education. This representation of Aboriginal learners often ignites hostility and resentment. Once again, the colonial gaze is never turned off.

Thesen (1997) offers an analysis of the positioning of black students as that of insider, colonized, or outsider. She points out that those students are aware when they are in or out of discourse. However, it is the middle category—colonized—that is problematic, as Thesen asserts that this term implies a lack of awareness of power relations. With regard to the interviews she conducted with first year black students from South Africa, she writes, "[T]he interviews are coherent but often tentative ac-

counts of emergent identity across different contexts in which students are clearly agentic, making choices about where to merge and where to resist, assessing whether a strategy is working or not” (p. 504). Thesen believes that these students are aware of historical, social, cultural, political, and value-centred relations in specific knowledge systems and social practices. With this knowledge, the students are cognizant of the need to locate and assess transitions in social contexts and literacy practices. The discourses offered to black students often contribute to a narrowing of their identity, thus essentializing black students.

How does homogenizing of ESL students occur?

The production of identities is a social process (Foucault, 1995; Prado, 2000; Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997; Wethrell, 2001). There is often a need to homogenize groups in order to recognize them. This assembling is achieved through language. ESL identities are socially produced using language in order to recognize and label them.

An elaboration is necessary with regard to a perceived need to homogenize. Schecter and Bayley (2004) propose that there are contested terrains in language acquisition and learning. However, there is also a consistent appetite to homogenize. In contemporary society, children, family caregivers, and teachers are differently situated. Social networks merge and negotiate contested terrains. Schecter and Bayley suggest that the complexity of ESL learners’ lives must be recognized in social learning and that the historical contexts of these learners are now characterized by ambiguity and instability. This is similar to the experiences of Aboriginal peoples. Some differences between Canadian Aboriginal people include being raised in remote northern communities versus large urban communities, and whether they speak an Indigenous language. These negotiated terrains are complex and often contested.

Harklau (2000) speaks about constructed ESL identities, which she believes to be about representation. As representations, Harklau believes these to be images, archetypes, and even stereotypes used to identify students. These labels are used in an effort to homogenize heterogeneous groups (Harklau). The author proposes that identities may be multiple, fragmentary, and can be mutable. Meanwhile, representations are used to stabilize and homogenize identities. Harklau believes that there is a tendency to accept ESL identities as unchanging and self-evident, but they are actually locally shaped and continually being recreated. In second-language acquisition, Harklau (2000) suggests that there is a

process of reciprocity in social contexts and individual interactions that influences learner subjectivities. This perspective on emerging identities underscores that identity is fluid and unstable. Learners' identities are constantly being constructed by and for learners.

Harklau (2000) argues that ESL identities are far from self-evident, but are rather contextual, specific, and multiple. The representation of ESL students has the effect of creating images and archetypes, and these representations often result in fixed meanings that contribute to ideas of normalcy, common sense, and timelessness. Representations that are made in institutions encourage a belief in unchanging identities, but this limits the recognition of ESL students as heterogeneous.

Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) offer a useful analysis on the ambiguous nature of English language. A number of official documents recognize ethnic and linguistic diversities in society. However, English is cultivated and marked as the principle instrument for social cohesion. In this process, England is portrayed as a homogenous community with one culture and one language. England becomes this imagined community that outsiders only imperfectly aim to mimic. An irony pointed out by Leung, Harris, and Rampton is that the British education system is based on an assumption that teachers and pupils use standard English, but a majority of speakers use a non-standard variety of English. The authors purport that in the call for standard English, even native English speakers do not necessarily use a standard form.

Thesen (1997) examines the intersection between the social and the individual in the midst of discourse and voice. She proposes that discourse uses constraints, codes, and restrictions on language in institutional establishments. Thesen suggests that voice is an individual perspective that is often quiet in institutions. Voice is about individuality, which is situated in institutional structures where students are pushed to work toward sameness instead of recognizing differences. She writes: "I [also] use the term in Bakhtin's sense, referring to the speaking consciousness—the individual speaking or writing, at the point of utterance, always laden with the language of others, from previous contexts, and oriented toward some future response" (p. 494). Discourses are always present in institutions, and these discourses have their roots in history, and this affects how ESL identities will be received. This analysis mirrors Harklau's (2000) concern in that discourse is influential in terms of resistance or acceptance. However, problems arise when ESL students do not perform certain discourses, which, in turn, encourages labels defaulting to "deficient."

What is hybridity and how does it intersect language and identity?

This discussion requires elaboration in order to develop an understanding of hybridity. The work of Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) provides an illustration of hybridity. These authors propose that there are three assumptions when current second-language practices are used in England: 1) linguistic minority pupils are bilingual, and a minority language is spoken at home as they learn English at school; 2) bilingual learners are generally conceived as a social and linguistic outsiders; and 3) there is an idealized native speaker from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are immediately excluded. They suggest that teachers need to engage with circumstances around the language needs of creole-influenced languages and black English. One reason that teachers must pay attention is

that in recent years the English-born children of other settled migrant minority groups, like their Caribbean-descended peers from an earlier period, have become much more difficult to separate into clearly bounded ethnic and linguistic categories that neatly divide them from ownership of English ethnicity, standard English and local urban vernacular Englishes (p. 547).

English born children of migrants are linguistically positioned differently and cannot be simply fixed into ethnic categories because of their English language variations.

Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) ask, “[A]t what point are the people involved in migration to be considered as a permanent and integral part of the host nation and not as part of a kind of permanent otherness?” (p. 547). This is a loaded question that requires some deconstruction. The authors propose that particular ethnic groups have come to be constructed with continual otherness, which is a colonial discourse. In this process, they argue, notions of a British nation-state simultaneously construct Englishness while they exclude certain minority groups. The authors define this production as ethnic absolutism. Leung et al. urge that minority groups are not inheritors of fixed identities, cultures, and languages. Rather, they participate in continuous collective and individual processes of making, remaking, and negotiating elements. These destabilizing experiences produce dynamic new ethnicities.

Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) discuss the destabilization of ethnicity among youth in urban centres. With the diverse linguistic groups in urban areas, a local multiethnic vernacular emerges in a community of English. This vernacular is the primary means of communication between youth. The authors write, "[T]here is also relevance in the associated notion of language crossing, which involves the use of minority languages by members of ethnic out-groups (e.g., Creole used by White and Asian adolescents or Panjabi used by Whites and African Caribbeans)" (p. 548). In language crossing, adolescents do not require all members of a peer group to speak all its languages with equal proficiency. In the ensemble of language groups in this kind of setting, the idea of the native English speaker becomes unclear because the vernacular is a combination of borrowed languages. The idealized native English speaker fades into the background in a multiethnic vernacular. This mirrors the experiences of Aboriginal peoples where both Aboriginal and English words are used in a vernacular.

Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) propose that minority groups in Britain become part of a diaspora that can be both real and imaginary African, Asian, Caribbean, and other linguistic nations who are brought together to form British subjectivities. In the combining of groups and languages in the diaspora, cultures of hybridity emerge. The authors quote Mercer's observation of hybridity: "[I]n a world in which everyone's identity has been thrown into question, the mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities point to new ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition" (p. 549). Hybridity is about transitions, not fixing identities. It is a complex combination of many crossovers of cultures and languages. In an extensive description, Leung et al. quote Hall's depiction of transitions, which

describes those identity formation which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is they are not and will never be unified in the old sense, because they are irrevoc-

cably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several “homes” (and to no one particular home). People belonging to such cultures of hybridity have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of “lost” cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably translated. ... They are the products of the new diasporas created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered (p. 551).

Given the language variations that emerge, educators need to be cognizant of the origins of variations, and that identities are not static given the multi-ethnic influences in urban centres. This, once again, is reflective of Aboriginal people’s experiences, and I say this not because I am embracing colonial systems, but merely acknowledging the differences in a post-colonial era. For many Aboriginal people, we are also in a position of being translated as described by Hall.

Conclusion

Language and identity are intimately connected but are also complex and compromising. Foucault (1995) proposes that truth and knowledge are socially produced and that we operate in relations of power. Subjectivity emerges from the discourses and language. Given Foucault’s theory, I ask, What is the purpose of our language?

Cree and English language have different worldviews. In Cree, there is a substantial subjective component, while in the Western tradition knowledge is viewed as access to power. The syntactic order of languages vary, which would explain how some Aboriginal peoples find it difficult to instantaneously make transitions from an Aboriginal language to a European one. Cree language revitalization itself has become enmeshed in relations of power, creating categories of who is and who is not authentically Aboriginal. Aboriginal people’s positioning are complicated and complex. Providing a lens to a Cree worldview opens up opportunities for educators to learn about multiple worldviews and, in return, influence English language participation.

Linguistic imperialism involves relations of power where a few languages are celebrated, while others are positioned as inferior. Linguistic superiority operates to convince minority groups that adopting dominant languages will lead to modernization. English is often produced as superior to other languages and frequently English speakers are associated as smarter, more successful, and more worthy. Meanwhile, many other language speakers are perceived as unintelligent, less successful, and less worthy than European language speakers. Accent stereotyping is an issue that many ESL speakers must contend with, especially when one is a visible minority because negative assumptions are ascribed to visible minorities. Intelligibility should not be measured by the kind of accent one has. Somewhere along the colonial way, speech has been socially produced to be spoken in a particular manner that closely mimics a European ideal. Speakers who do not fit into the centre of this ideal are judged as unintelligent or somehow lacking, and where Aboriginal people are concerned one must be mindful of the default setting. Linguistic imperialism is one way in which racism materializes, and as a Cree speaker I cannot apologize for how I position myself when I preserve remnants of my Indigeneity.

Hybridity appears when there is a mixing of different languages and cultures in particular settings, predominantly in urban centres. A multi-ethnic vernacular emerges in urban centres when diverse cultures and languages are closely connected. When combining groups and languages within diaspora, cultures of hybridity materialize. Hybridity is about transitions and not fixing identity; it is complicated with many crossovers. Aboriginal peoples are also positioned to form hybridities in urban centres and this social phenomenon is a result of the mixing of Aboriginal languages and cultures with other ethnicities and Western ways. With regard to Aboriginal people and hybridity, it is imposing and difficult to aspire to sameness given the high number of influences in contemporary social life. Using language to define and control individual identities of Aboriginal people can be a form of neo-colonialism. It is subtle enough to continue to be perpetuated. I echo Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) when they urge that minority groups are not inheritors of fixed identities, cultures, and languages. Rather, they participate in continuous collective and individual processes of making, remaking, and negotiating elements, as this resembles Aboriginal peoples' complexity and positioning. The Cree language worldview is not intended to be essentialized; however, a Cree language worldview is incongruent

with Euro-Canadian systems and practices. This paper is meant to bring attention to how Aboriginal subjectivity is complex and emerges between competing discourses while resisting our racialization as inferior.

Being marginally welcomed in institutions, many Aboriginal peoples may perceive this as a sincere invitation to participate. However, there are a myriad of ways, obvious and subtle, in which Aboriginal peoples are confronted with unwelcome racism, hostility, resentment, and minimization. Many Aboriginal people who grow up in urban centres are also dissimilarly positioned from their parents who grew up in Aboriginal communities, often in remote areas. In the move from rural to urban locales, Aboriginal peoples' positioning changes both in the physical and linguist context, thus influencing subjectivity. As Leung et al. propose, there is a collective and individual process of making, remaking, and negotiating elements in which language and identity are impacted. Not only does linguistic-crossing surface, but diasporic Aboriginal people form cultures of hybridity in the mixing and crossing over with other Aboriginal nations and ethnicities in urban centres. Aboriginal subjectivity and languages are both in a state of transition, which I argue are not to be labelled as deficient but affirmed for a change that is almost inevitable.

Euro-Canadian society is populated by diverse Aboriginal groups. However, we are often left to prove this in mainstream society. Colonization has impacted all people and we cannot return to a pure past. Language and identity is fluid and our differences are not about superiority and deficiency. We are an effect of our colonial histories, where our Indigenoussness is often held at a distance and our Euro-Canadian characteristics are markers for judgement. Discourses influence our emerging subjectivities.

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