Activist Ethnography With Indigenous Youth

Lessons From Humanizing Research on Language and Education

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I just want to learn my cultural language. . . . [I]t is a big important part of my life if I am going to be Native.

—Youth interview, June 2004

Indigenous youth in endangered-language settings face multiple challenges as they negotiate their linguistic, cultural, and academic identities under pressure from both inside and outside their communities. On the one hand, they may be viewed as the "last line of defense" in maintaining community-specific linguistic and cultural continuity. On the other hand, they are likely to have incomplete knowledge of their heritage language as a consequence of their parents' experience with punitive English-only schooling and parental desires to protect their children from the humiliation and suffering they endured in school. Nor are youth immune to wider racializing discourses that stigmatize their heritage language as "backward" and lacking mobility in globalizing linguistic ecologies.

In this chapter we share insights and experiences from researching language and education with Indigenous youth in endangered-language communities. Language is both a repository and a carrier of a people's heritage and knowledge, and is thus central to the humanistic enterprise. How do we humanize our work with youth around this deeply felt core capacity? Why is youth research in Indigenous communities significant for understanding issues of language endangerment and education—and why is an activist stance in youth language research significant to youth researchers across diverse communities and academic disciplines? How can we, as insider-outsider activist researchers, negotiate our journeys into Indigenous youth research?

We begin by contextualizing our project in the wider literature on youth language research, focusing on recent research with Indigenous youth in North America.

We then illuminate key questions that have arisen in our own research, grounding these questions in ethnographic vignettes from our work with Navajo, Hopi, and Yup'ik youth. In presenting the vignettes, we speak with our individual researcher voices, but collectively we employ the vignettes to consider (a) how we can listen to youth with "ears to hear" their testimony (Nietzche, 1883/2006, p. 258), (b) how we may learn more about strengths than losses when researching with youth in endangered-language communities, and (c) how we can humanize insider-outsider roles with regard to language use in these settings. We then draw upon all three vignettes to reflect on lessons learned from our wider research experiences in situations of language shift—contexts in which intergenerational transmission of the heritage language has broken down—and with community-driven efforts to reclaim heritage languages. In dynamic situations of language shift, how can we take youth language opportunities and resources into account when analyzing their language ideologies and practices? How can we work in an activist stance with both youth and adults to directly benefit community-driven language reclamation? How can we ensure that youth shape these research and language planning processes and products? We conclude by highlighting the importance of researcher commitment in work with Indigenous youth, arguing for research as a form of praxis that proactively contributes to communities' language development goals.

SITUATING INDIGENOUS YOUTH LANGUAGE RESEARCH[1]

Historically, researchers have tended to position youth as inconsequential to adult concerns or as "not yet" adults. Recent research on youth language and peer culture, however, engages youth as interpreters and shapers of society, with an emphasis on youth agency, youth stylistic performance, and youth as ethnographers of communication (see, e.g., Alim, 2007; Bucholtz, 2002; Mendoza-Denton, 2008). Current youth researchers highlight the role of larger social, economic, and political systems in structuring inequalities, focusing on youth culture to examine "the production of cultural centers or margins" and discursive styles that are "privileged, condemned, or overlooked" (Maira & Soep, 2005, p. xix). This research explicitly recognizes that, like adults, youth "act as agents, resignifying and articulating the different and conflicting messages" they receive (Szulc, 2009, p. 144). Many youth researchers also see the potential for engaging youth in addressing educational and social inequities (see, e.g., McCarty & Wyman, 2009, for ethnographic cases with Indigenous youth).

As suggested above, much of this recent research centers on youth language ideologies and practices. Multiple scholars have shown how youth use diverse languages and language varieties to perform identities within local peer cultures and to position themselves in emerging interactional moments in classrooms, families, and other extra-school spaces. The communicative repertoires of heritage language learners can also vary dramatically within communities, peer

groups, and families. As our own work has shown, Indigenous youth often express feelings of linguistic insecurity, especially if they have been teased or criticized for their language use. Youth also may "cloak" or "hide" their linguistic competencies depending on the social context (McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, & Zepeda, 2009; Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

It has only been fairly recently that these issues—and an activist stance—have been systematically taken up with regard to Indigenous youth. Based on a survey and interview study of 215 Navajo high school students, Diné-Lakota scholar Tiffany Lee (2007) notes the respect with which Navajo youth hold their heritage language, even as they contend with demeaning stereotypes that associate speaking Navajo with "backwardness" and traditionalism. In subsequent research with Navajo and Pueblo college students, Lee documents youth agency and intervention as they developed a "critical Indigenous consciousness" about language shift and began to "intervene through their own research, language practices . . . , and personal efforts to learn their heritage language" (Lee, 2009, p. 317). Similarly, in ethnographic research with Native youth in five southwestern U.S. communities, McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, and Zepeda (2009, 2011) examine the conflicting language ideologies that position Indigenous languages as highly valued by youth—"my cultural language . . . my blood language"—and simultaneously as "just the past" (2011, pp. 41–42).

Looking specifically at Hopi youth, Nicholas (2009, 2011) examined the family-, community-, and school-based dynamics in which these ideologies are nurtured and expressed. In this research, although Hopi youth indicated a desire to learn the Hopi language, they often expressed fear of being ridiculed for linguistic errors. As the vignette we present in the following section shows, Nicholas posits that Hopi oral tradition—"song words, prayer, teachings, ritual performances, religious ceremonies, and cultural institutions"—constitutes a powerful language transmission mechanism that gives rise to "an emotional commitment to the ideals of a communal society" (2009, pp. 337–338).

In a longitudinal study of a Yup'ik village with the pseudonym "Piniq," Wyman (2012) traced how youth brokered changing schooling and migration practices, diffuse language socialization processes, and language ideologies, "tipping" from using mostly Yup'ik to using mostly English in local peer culture, and transforming family and community linguistic practices in 5 to 10 years' time. Youth in the study struggled with linguistic insecurity and painful local claims that they wanted to be White by speaking English. Yet the study also highlighted Indigenous people's *linguistic survivance*, showing how both youth and adults in Piniq used wide-ranging language practices to maintain a unique subarctic way of life, co-construct local knowledge, and creatively express and adapt unique identities under challenging circumstances (for more on Indigenous youth in the Far North, see Tulloch's [2004] work with Inuit youth and Meek's [2007] work with Kaska youth, both in Canada).

In a study of Cucapá youth in northern Mexico, Shailah Muehlmann (2008) documents how, in a context in which "only a handful of elders still speak the

Cucapá language" (p. 34), a national policy shift valorizing Indigenous-language use calls into question both youths' and adults' identity claims. Youth strategically deploy Cucapá swearwords in the presence of outsiders to "negotiate claims to indigeneity" (p. 43). According to Muehlmann, this constitutes a discourse of resistance to a long (and continuing) history of racial, economic, and social injustice.

Finally, an emerging set of studies from around the world evidence how Indigenous youth can use new media skills to play important roles in Indigenous language and knowledge documentation efforts (see, e.g., Kral, 2011), as well as the ways that some youth are bringing Indigenous languages forward through new cultural forms such as hip-hop (Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012; Mitchell, 2004). Each of these studies raises challenging questions about the ways in which young people's existing choices, hybridities, and linguistic strategies relate to the future of their heritage languages as part of unique Indigenous knowledge systems, even as they highlight the importance of youth voices and contributions to Indigenous movements. Many youth express what Wilson and Kamanā (2009, p. 375) call "great yearnings" to maintain their heritage languages as links to specific identities and community practices. Many also provide evidence that today's language learners want to use their ancestral languages for reasons "deeply rooted within local relationships, practices, knowledge systems, and geographical places" (Wyman, 2009, p. 346). Should their circumstances and language-learning opportunities change, youth in these varied discursive contexts may activate their heritage languages to productive levels and become the authorizing agents moving their languages forward in the future. As a growing body of research shows, they may also become actively involved in movements to support Indigenous languages.

Ultimately, this research on Indigenous language ideologies and practices positions youth as part of broader communities of practice that are situated historically within processes of marginalization and countermovements. Desanitizing, humanizing, and creatively employing these histories remain central to fostering bilingualism and multilingualism within Indigenous communities. As we show in the following sections, this work contains important insights for young people's ability to "bring their languages forward" (Hornberger & King, 1996) while learning languages of wider communication. Further, the work contains important questions for all youth researchers to consider. To ground these insights and questions, we turn now to our three ethnographic vignettes.

PRESENTING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC VIGNETTES

Listening "With Ears to Hear"
Youth Testimony: Teresa's Vignette

Jonathan gazed at me intently, his Gothic-style contact lenses mimicking the amber eyes of a cat. A 16-year-old ninth grader at a pre-K–12 Navajo-majority school, Jonathan had been excused from class by his teacher—a co-researcher on our multisite research project—to participate in what the project proposal

described as an "in-depth ethnographic interview."[2] He and I sat next to each other in an otherwise empty classroom, a tape recorder whirring quietly between us. Sunlight streamed through the single classroom window, lighting up the canyon crevasses that crisscrossed nearby "Beautiful Mountain," a pseudonym for the Diné (Navajo) site for which we had named Jonathan's school. His heavy long-sleeve black shirt and red-zippered vest belied the warmth of the brilliant May afternoon scene outside.

I came to this ethnographic moment as a vested outsider, what Julie Kaomea (2004) calls the "allied other." I had never met Jonathan, though I knew his community and teachers well, having worked within the Navajo Nation and in Indigenous education for nearly 25 years at the time. I felt comfortable and welcomed by the educators and families in this place, yet I realized that to Jonathan, I was very much a stranger—a White woman from the university "down there" in the city, whom he had seen in his school hallways and classrooms but did not really know. Despite my longstanding alliances and friendships with older community members, I knew that in this exchange with Jonathan—and more generally with our team's research with youth—I was starting anew.

"So you were saying," I continued gently, "that your early school experiences with a Native-speaking teacher didn't instill in you a good feeling about your language . . ."

"No they didn't," Jonathan replied. "That [teacher] didn't know how to . . . bring out that kind of—I don't know, that kind of pride and the continuation of the language in a positive sense. . . . And she was mainly forcing us to learn English. . . . I don't know, it was a real confusing time, I guess."

A little later in the interview Jonathan related these early language-learning experiences to "what I like to call the Long Walk Syndrome," a reference to the forcible removal of Diné in the late 19th century to a federal concentration camp, where thousands of Navajo people were incarcerated and died. Not long after the Navajos' release from federal imprisonment, the government turned to schools as the primary vehicle for coercive assimilation. "Having all this boarding school stuff and the government trying to force English upon them," Jonathan explained. "And a lot of people are still recovering from that." Gazing downward, he continued in a soft, steady voice, "They [government officials] took the children away from their families at a young age, and they instilled this image that is still alive—this image of self-hate. To be ashamed of who you are. . . . It's all about survival since 1492. . . . It's all about how far will you go to—to survive."

I recalled the words of my late colleague and friend, Galena Sells Dick, who had attended a Navajo reservation boarding school during the 1950s and 1960s. "We were forced and pressured to learn English," she told me. "We had to struggle. . . . Students were punished for speaking their native language. This punishment was inflicted even by Navajo matrons in the dorm. This shows that even for Navajo adults like the dorm matrons, school was not a place for Navajos to be Navajos" (cited in McCarty, 2002, p. 45). Galena's account of her schooling experience more than a generation before echoed in young Jonathan's words.

The purpose of this interview, as of the 61 others our research team conducted with youth from five Native American communities, was to go beyond the bleak projections of Indigenous-language death to understand how language loss and reclamation are experienced in young people's everyday lives. When, where, and for what purposes do youth use the Indigenous language and English? What attitudes and ideologies do youth hold toward their heritage language and English? How do these ideologies shape their developing linguistic, ethnic, and academic identities? The interview protocol had been carefully prepared in collaboration with Indigenous teacher-researchers at each site, and we characterized this as participatory action research (for details, see McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006; McCarty et al., 2009; Romero-Little, McCarty, Warhol, & Zepeda, 2007). The interview questions asked about language. But for Jonathan and many youth in our study—just as for Galena Sells Dick in an earlier generation—questions about language could not be divorced from issues of race, history, land, self-determination, and cultural survival.

"I just . . . it's just a meaning of survival," Jonathan reiterated when I asked him about his memories of learning English, "having to learn how to cope and adjust in this colonial world that we live in. Both sides, no? So mainly I was forced into that out of my own will."

I asked Jonathan whether he felt knowing Navajo was helpful to him now.

"Yes, it helps me, having that as my first language," he replied. "Like, y'know, it helps not lose the identity of who I am, of where I come from, of how . . . that's all linked with survival, y'know."

Jonathan again returned to the theme of the Long Walk Syndrome. His words urged up those from another interview I had conducted eight years before with my longtime Diné colleague, Fred Bia. I had asked Fred what speaking Navajo meant to him. "My language, to me, . . . that's what makes me unique, that's what makes me Navajo, that's what makes me who I am," he reflected. "That's what going to Fort Sumner and coming back, and all that—it was *worth* it. The language, my language" (cited in McCarty, 2002, p. 179).

For Jonathan—of age to be Fred Bia's son—the Long Walk seemed to hold a different kind of meaning. Jonathan spoke of the "inherited trauma" of that historic time, which "has to do with the psyche" and "goes from generation to generation." Internalized colonization, he said, had left an indelible psychological imprint: "You forsake who you are, you give up having to learn Navajo in order to accommodate the mainstream life. It goes back to survival."

"But it goes far deeper than that," Jonathan added. "It has to do with the loss of our homes, having to be removed from here and there and switched around." Turning his gaze out the window to the mountain beyond, he said, "Having to see something so beautiful and so perfect, like the mountain up there, being destroyed [by coal mining] for all eternity. It eats away at your soul."

I wondered if the survivability of the Navajo language was like that mountain. "You were saying how there are economic practices that could destroy this beautiful [mountain] for eternity," I said. "I was thinking that the Navajo language is in that same sort of situation."

"It is," Jonathan responded. "We are so much a part of the land. It is hard for me to see the trash littering the highways, the coal being dug up, all the radio-activity, all the dumping. It really hurts me. It's not a physical pain; it's more of a spiritual anguish."

It was well into the more than two hour interview before I fully "heard" the connections between land, language, and personal and communal survival Jonathan was making. His reflections on language repeatedly returned to the integrity of the human and physical landscape in which Diné identity is rooted—the place where his umbilical cord, following Diné tradition, had been buried. "Everything as a human being [is about] being a child of this earth," he explained. "That's why we don't have floors in our *hooghan* [a traditional family dwelling]. We want to feel the earth, and we want to feel the heartbeat, the power that's within it. We don't want to be separate from it."

Finally it seemed appropriate to ask the last question in our interview protocol. "Forty years from now, when you are a middle-aged person like your parents, do you think people will still be speaking Navajo?"

Jonathan paused, looked down at his hands, sighed. "A part of myself likes to think there would be, but you never know. Yeah, I have some hope; that is all I can say, I have hope. Hope that someday we can go back to living with the sacred-ness a little longer. To continue, carrying on longer who we are, as a people."

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When I first met Jonathan, I did not anticipate the thoughtful, two-and-a-half-hour conversation (in research terms, "in-depth ethnographic interview") that would ensue. I did not expect to be discussing coal mine slurrying, depletion of the aquifer, and environmental racism—all topics he raised in connection with language loss and recovery. And, given portrayals of youth indifference by many adults we had interviewed, as well as by the popular media, I was not prepared for the deep commitment to land and language Jonathan expressed, or for the bold moves of personal vulnerability he evinced—especially in light of the fact that he had just met me for the first time. Moreover, Jonathan was not alone in these expressions. Our interview database is replete with youths' testimonials of their concern and desire to be deserving participants in their heritage language communities—desires they related directly to language, peoplehood, and place (McCarty et al., 2006, 2009).

As researchers and human beings, how do we respond to these deeply felt youth sentiments? How can we be "worthy witnesses" (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) to their sociolinguistic testimony?

Affirming Strength Amid Loss: Sheilah's Vignette

Sheilah: Do you speak Hopi?

Justin: Yeah.

S: Was that your first language?

J: Well, I would say my first because . . . I would mostly speak it until I got into school, and then I started learning English.

S: . . . How old were you when you started school?

J: Head Start [preschool].

S: That means about three or . . .

J: Three or four, yeah.

S: What language did you speak in Head Start?

J: They would mostly teach us some Hopi, and then just regular, regular English.

S: Then when you went to regular . . .

J: Kindergarten, we kinda changed. . . . That most of all, you just dropped, you know, learning about the Hopi language.

S: Who were your teachers? Were they mostly *Pahaanas* [Anglos]?

J: Well, no. They were Hopi, but it's not just that they don't talk it. They wouldn't teach us [Hopi]. . . . From then on [we were taught only in English] until I learned about the Hopi class in high school. . . . until I got to Hopi class and somebody was willing to teach us. That's when I jumped to it.

This ethnographic interview with Justin illustrates the style of interaction—direct question, brief and direct response—between adult and youth, researcher and study participant, that marked the opening to the initial interviews with each of the three youth participants of my study. This particular interaction style also masked a sense of apprehension for both researcher and youth on discussing the vitality of the Hopi language—a heritage language we all shared and to which we each brought a personal, often painful, history of experience. The apprehension lessened as the interviews continued and we recognized the significance of our individual roles in the project: to ascertain the role of the Hopi language in the lives of contemporary Hopi youth and how youth define and assert their personal and social identities as Hopi citizens and members of Hopi society (Nicholas, 2009).

My interest in this work grew out of my personal experience with Hopi language loss at an early age, and my subsequent arduous journey as an adult to reclaim my Hopi speaking ability (Nicholas, 2009, 2011). Investigating language shift among Hopi youth came about through my involvement in providing Hopi literacy lessons to Hopi students in reservation schools. I was compelled to understand why these students, immersed and active participants in Hopi culture since birth, had neither acquired a receptive ability nor become speaker-users of the language. The increasing enrollment of Hopi students in Hopi language classes at

the junior and high school levels spurred in me a sense of urgency to address this linguistic situation for the present youth generation—including my own children.

Elsewhere I have described Justin's shy, soft-spoken demeanor as projecting a gentle and sensitive nature while veiling a strong sense of family and communal responsibility and self-discipline (Nicholas, 2009). At the first interview in April 2003, Justin was 19 years of age, a high school graduate of one year and on the cusp of young adulthood. Early in this interview, I learned that he understood and spoke Hopi, describing his proficiency at "about 75 percent" fluency. This immediately countered my own assumptions and those of elder speakers of Hopi, who perceive and characterize community youth as non-speakers of Hopi. A self-identified fluent Hopi speaker, Justin was unique among his peer-age group and as a study participant.

Fast forward to the topic of Hopi language classes:

S: . . . you took Hopi language as an elective?

J: Hopi language, yeah.

S: How come you decided to take Hopi language [class]?

J: 'Cuz, nobody *teached* [emphasis added] me. I mean, I learned [Hopi] here at home and from my grandma and them [other significant kin], but I just wanted to keep learning . . . more of what's in the Hopi language.

In the introductory dialogue, Justin describes acquiring Hopi as his first language in his home from significant kin, and continuing this trajectory as his Hopi teachers used or "taught" with Hopi during his Head Start experience. He carried this expectation into kindergarten, where things changed abruptly and dramatically; the Hopi teachers in his classroom "dropped" the Hopi language. These teachers may have been Hopi individuals employed as classroom assistants, who, while highly visible in the classroom and school, have a marginal position in the classroom curriculum. What Justin recounts in his expression, "You just dropped . . . learning about the Hopi language," is a seriously distressing experience at an early age associated with schooling. That as a young adult he recalled this memory with these words indicated to me that he remained perplexed and troubled by this experience. This was heightened by the fact that it was only as a high school student that he could learn "more of what's in the Hopi language" in language classes offered as an elective.

S: . . . you went to that class and you already spoke Hopi and understood it.

J: Yeah.

S: How about the rest of your classmates?

J: Yeah, they could understand and speak most of it. . . . I guess we were all shy [about] how we said it. I guess we were scared about people making fun of us and saying, "That's not how to say it . . . ." But I think we got over that feeling.

S: . . . Did you ever take that Hopi out of class and start talking Hopi to other people?

J: No. . . . I wouldn't go out and speak Hopi to my friends because I was too shy to speak to them in Hopi; I thought they would make fun of me.

This dialogue revealed to me that even among peer speakers of Hopi, Hopi was not a peer-culture language. Instead, youth in the study anticipated and were subjected to peer teasing and criticism of their emerging but limited linguistic competency, an experience widely noted as extremely detrimental to language learners (Lee, 2007, 2009).

S: Did you ever experience a time when the people did make fun of your Hopi?

J: Yeah, lots of times. . . . by my friends, or other people. But, I wouldn't say they were making fun of me. I would say that they're just, you know, laughing 'cuz, you know, a little kid as I was [was] talking Hopi, and they [adults] thought that was the way to do it. They wish they could teach their kids like that. I wouldn't say it was teasing or making fun or nothing, it was just encouragement to do, learn more [build proficiency].

S: Was it [teasing] mostly from family, elders, or . . . ?

J: Well, it would be mostly the friends, the students' friends, and they would be criticizing or laughing at them *'cuz they're talking in Hopi* [emphasis added], not because their parents and their grandmas and them, they don't teach 'em. And that's why they think it's kind of funny. But when you learn it [to speak Hopi], it's not funny.

What Justin conveys in this excerpt is that using Hopi as a language of everyday interaction and communication is a practice reserved for adult and elder speakers. Among peers, using the Hopi language is atypical and unnatural. Attempts to use it elicit embarrassment and discomfort; teasing and laughter, the visible responses, are coping mechanisms employed to ease the tension and lessen linguistic insecurities. These behaviors are perceived by older Hopi as disrespectful toward the Hopi culture and language, a misunderstanding by older Hopi about the profound impact of language shift on youth.

S: You use it [the Hopi language] now. If you use it now, who do you use it with?

J: I would say [with] my uncles, and my dad and them, and everybody when we're out at the field, or in the house, or even at the *kivas* [ceremonial chambers]; that's where I mostly use it, in the kivas.

S: How often do you go to the kiva?

J: I say, all the time, if there's dances down here [at my village] . . . I go to help my dad at his village. I also go to my *kwa'a*'s [grandfather's], so I go to all three of 'em [village kiva activities].

S: You said too that most of the time you hear or speak Hopi is when you're planting?

J: Yeah. And then, you know, if you can, you talk to the plants. They're just like your children, you know. You talk to 'em and they hear you, and they'll grow.

S: Do you hear your dad and your grandpa doing those things too?

J: Yeah. And they'll be singing to them, and we just sing all different kinds of songs as we're planting.

S: . . . Why is it that you get involved in those things?

J: It's just that I was born and raised [in] how to do it and I don't want to let it go.

The study asked: When Hopi youth are no longer socialized through their heritage language, are they still learning the culturally appropriate social knowledge—the important principles and values—of Hopi citizenship? Justin poignantly expresses that being "born [into] and raised" in the Hopi way of life instills a strong cultural identity and resilient sense of responsibility for cultural and linguistic continuity. My in-depth conversations with Justin and two other youth study participants confirmed that most youth continue to be active participants in the Hopi culture transmitted through myriad forms of the Hopi oral tradition, including spoken language. More important, I discerned, these youth affirm that the vitality of the Hopi language and culture is captured in the notion of "language as cultural practice" (Nicholas, 2009, 2011).

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The purpose of these youth interviews—part of a larger study that included ethnographic interviews with parents and grandparents of the three youth participants—was to determine the impact of language shift on contemporary Hopi society. While confirming an upheaval in the cultural and community dynamics of Hopi society, the study also affirmed the strength of Hopi culture. These youth elucidate *what* of the traditions, practices, and religion remains salient and *why*, and perhaps *which* will remain salient in future generations.

Humanizing "Insider-Outsider" Language Use in Endangered-Language Settings: Leisy's Vignette

My interest in Indigenous youth language grew out of early experiences as a young teacher-researcher and later experiences as a graduate student studying language shift in Piniq (a pseudonym), a small Yup'ik village of 600 in southwestern Alaska. From 1992 to 2001, I compared how two consecutive cohorts of youth negotiated a rapid shift to English. Youth in the older group spoke Yup'ik as their main language of peer culture and were described by community

members as the last "real speakers" of Yup'ik. Most youth in the younger group spoke English, but also used bilingualism to "get by," as community members put it, with adults and one another.

Between the two groups, the local school changed its primary language of elementary instruction from Yup'ik to English. As schooling and increased migration placed pressure on young people's language learning networks, dynamics of family language maintenance and shift began to mirror those found in immigrant communities in urban contexts. While adults and older youth verbally valued Yup'ik and voiced strong concerns about language endangerment, youth described increasing insecurities about speaking Yup'ik. Still the potential remained for young people to take up new positions as Indigenous language speakers (Wyman, 2012).

Language is an important way researchers impact the situations they study. Between 1992 and 2001 my ability to understand and use local "village English"—which incorporated different generational styles and code-switching patterns—changed dramatically. Here, however, I will briefly discuss how my own learning and use of Yup'ik, in particular, helped me humanize local youth in language research, and helped adults and youth humanize me as a White outsider working in an Indigenous community marked by historically rooted language ideologies and racialized dynamics of distrust.

The Yup'ik term for English, *kassa-tun*, translates literally as "like a White person/outsider," while the term for the Yup'ik language, *Yug-tun*, translates as "like a human." In my early teaching days, Piniq youth and adults were most comfortable speaking Yup'ik as an everyday language; learning Yup'ik seemed like an obvious way to connect to my students' linguistic strengths. As a young teacher I petitioned for and attended a beginning Yup'ik videoconference class for teachers. Participating in the local church, a hub of village life and Yup'ik use, I also worked on my Yup'ik singing in the choir and performing requested duets and solos. Elders thanked me after my early attempts to sing Yup'ik, and as individual students moved beyond postures of resistance to schooling, and from being *takaryuk*—self-conscious—in my classroom, they often declared, smiling, "I saw you sing in church the other night." Within a year, village friends were taking me to intervillage songfests, where they would tease me by saying they were showing off their "Yup'ik-singing *kass'aq* [Whitey]." From the time I learned to use common Yup'ik phrases, friends also used the fact that I spoke Yup'ik to assure others, especially wary elders or visitors from neighboring villages, that I was not like White teachers of the past who had punished them for speaking their language, or some other contemporary White teachers who denigrated Yup'ik language and culture.

Five years after I left Piniq for graduate school, I moved back to Piniq as a young, married mother of a small child. As a graduate student, I had the luxury of studying Yup'ik with a tutor and worked my way through a Yup'ik grammar book. During 14 months of fieldwork, I continued to learn Yup'ik in nightly steams with a local friend. While I never attained fluency, I understood and told

stories and interacted in Yup'ik as I participated in daily activities. I also spoke Yup'ik with adults and strong Yup'ik speakers in the younger group of youth in the study. In my time away, however, language shift had progressed quickly and unevenly. Many youth in the "get by" group expressed insecurity about "speaking Yup'ik wrong" and negotiated painful accusations from adults that they wanted to "be like *kass'aq*s" (Whites) by speaking English.

Working with the younger group in the study, I paid extra attention to the rapidly changing sociolinguistic dynamics and tailored my language use accordingly. Following young people's linguistic lead, I used Yup'ik as much as possible with the few students who spoke Yup'ik regularly to peers, mirrored local patterns of code-switching with many others, and switched to the local variety of English when working with youth who spoke primarily English.

Language ideologies in Alaska Native communities are shaped by complicated histories and ongoing racial dynamics. Most Piniq youth spoke a local variety of village English, yet many parents had been punished for using Yup'ik in school and associated English with colonization and damaging experiences with outsider White teachers. Many youth voiced strong connections to Yup'ik and fears that "English is taking over our culture." As changes in local youth culture became a driving force of language shift, I was struck by the ways Piniq youth continued to value and use token Yup'ik as a marker of identity. I also noted how my own Yup'ik use made space for youth to position themselves as knowledgeable Yup'ik speakers and teachers. Many youth in the younger group for instance were curious about my efforts to learn and teach my child Yup'ik, and would watch me, taking the initiative to correct and encourage me. In one study hall, for instance, I alternated between Yup'ik and English as I talked with a boy about a speech contest. When the boy commented that the speech contest "was fun," a girl I didn't know joined us and commanded, "Say *anglanarquq* [It's fun]." As the girl supervised me, I repeated the phrase, wrote it down, and double-checked how to say *Mamterillermun ayallemni anglanarqellruuq* ("When I went to Bethel it was fun"). After I checked more complicated statements with the students, another boy I didn't know came over and asked if I knew Yup'ik, to which I responded, "*Naspaaqatartua* [I'm going to try]; *elicupiartua* [I really want to learn]."

"*Qaillun?* [How?]" he asked, smiling.

"*Eli-cu-piar-tua* [literally, Learn-want-really-I]," I repeated a little more slowly.

"Gee, you came over to the school in this?" another girl I'll call Mary asked, also smiling, gesturing to my light clothes on the chilly rainy day as she moved toward our growing group.

"Yeah."

"Say *eli-cug-yari-qua*—I really want to learn," Mary encouraged, coaching me how to swap in a new post-base while adding a necessary proceeding phoneme. "It's the same as *eli-cu-piar-tua*."

As I finished, a third high school boy in the room commented, "You should be a Yup'ik *kass'aq* [White person]."

"She *is* already," Mary declared. "She was born that way."

In this and similar instances, I was struck by the ways that youth in an endangered-language setting came together to talk enthusiastically about their heritage language, and to voice strong positive associations with Yup'ik. Throughout my research, young people's spontaneous comments about *kass'aq*s and Yup'ik also reminded me of my complicated positioning as a White outsider-insider researcher in an Indigenous setting. In another interview, for instance, I asked a pair of boys about their future hopes for Piniq. One boy initially responded with the familiar echo, "All *kass'aq*s out of Piniq," then quickly glanced at me and followed up with, "except those *kass'aq*s who speak Yup'ik." In my work, I and others encourage teachers to move beyond defensive postures to hear in such statements young people's critique of systemic racism, and their longing for teachers who could use schooling to support Yup'ik language and culture (Wyman & Kashatok, 2008).

It is tricky to position oneself through language crossing as a teacher and researcher in an endangered-language setting, or as a White researcher in an Indigenous community. Throughout my research, many educators voiced assumptions about Yup'ik as an unlearnable language. As I gained Yup'ik proficiency, some local adults and youth would also point to my language use, critiquing the ways that outside teachers or even local Yup'ik spouses and children had failed to learn Yup'ik. In these instances, individuals might say directly to others in front of me, "See, even [though] she only taught here for three years, she speaks Yup'ik." Such instances were uncomfortable, since I knew other valued White teachers and researchers who had developed strong local relationships and promoted equity in schooling without learning Yup'ik. I was also learning how youths' and adults' linguistic insecurities often stemmed from circumstances beyond their control, such as childhood migration to urban settings. Many accommodations were afforded me as a Yup'ik-learning *kass'aq*, while villagers often assumed youth should simply be able to speak it well.

* * * * *

Today fewer youth speak Yup'ik in Piniq, though some are still learning it. Multiple Yup'ik teachers have used my unusual Yup'ik language use to stress to youth learners that Yup'ik is learnable. I worry that youth may hear teachers' claims that "*She* learned to speak Yup'ik" as an implicit critique: "If this *kass'aq* can do it, why can't you?" I know that to humanize Yup'ik youth in my research, I must find ways to help educators understand how schooling and everyday interactions can provide or deny youth the opportunities they need to learn to speak their Indigenous languages comfortably, and how young people's seemingly simple language "choices" are anything but simple. I must also remain attuned to the ways young people respond to a multiply privileged Yup'ik-speaking *kass'aq* university researcher.

LESSONS LEARNED IN WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN ENDANGERED-LANGUAGE SETTINGS

Each of the vignettes above illuminates facets of humanizing research—what Paris (2011) describes as "a certain stance and methodology, working with students in contexts of oppression and marginalization" (p. 137). Within this social context and methodological stance, "the researchers' efforts must coincide with the students,' as both the researcher and participants seek mutual humanization through understanding" (Paris, 2011, p. 137). These attempts to listen to youth with "ears to hear" their narratives, counternarratives, and claims about language can elicit meanings that are at once immensely joyful and painful, discomfiting and reassuring, perplexing and edifying. Above all they are teaching moments, and it is to the lessons learned from this work that we now turn.

While our individual experiences, contexts, subjectivities, and positionalities vary, taken together our extensive research experiences point to key areas in which we can humanize research with Indigenous youth in endangered-language settings. First and foremost, researchers should recognize and be sensitive to the commonplace ways that Indigenous youth are positioned vis-à-vis language endangerment. In each of our cases, young people's words highlight the sometimes overwhelming, damaging, and contradictory language ideologies circulating in settings of rapid language shift. In many Indigenous communities, local Englishes are relatively recent, ambiguous emblems of local identities. In contrast, ancestral languages in Indigenous and other communities that value connections to traditions of historical persistence can provide a high degree of focus, or instantiation of mutually constituted beliefs, since, through "long-accumulated convention," the groups who use them develop links among language, community identity, and norms of use over the course of multiple generations (Woodbury, 1993). As Native Hawaiian scholar-activist K. Laiana Wong writes of his own language learning journey, "Learning Hawaiian became an avenue whereby one might access the wealth of [language learning] materials left to us by our forebears" (2011, p. 5). At the same time, as the vignettes above reveal, Indigenous youth in endangered-language communities today are continuously negotiating their linguistic identities amid eroding resources for Indigenous language learning and crosscurrents of local and dominant language ideologies. In such contexts, it is imperative that researchers take youth language opportunities and resources into account when analyzing their language ideologies and practices.

Deeply engaging with young people's perspectives, and paying close attention to young people's circumstances and everyday language use, has helped us—as researchers, language activists, and friends or members of the communities with whom we work—to begin to counter damaging, pervasive assumptions that Indigenous youth are simply abandoning their ancestral languages by "choice." To the contrary, even when they do not claim to be proficient speakers of their ancestral language, the youth in our studies repeatedly express strong attachments

to it, referring to the community language—as in the epigraph that introduces this chapter—as "my cultural language" (McCarty et al., 2009, 2011).

Yet youth face challenging social positionings vis-à-vis their heritage language and heritage community. On the one hand, youth may be viewed as "losers of the language." As Jonathan's Long Walk narrative poignantly illustrates, youth are also receivers of unerasable histories of linguistic and cultural genocide. Further, youth may be viewed as critical carriers of endangered languages while simultaneously being shouldered with this responsibility without sufficient support from local adults, schools, and other social institutions. As Jonathan told Teresa in explaining the tendency of bilingual youth to "hide" their Native-language proficiency, many "teachers don't have any [personal] involvement with the students, so it's hard to bring it [the Native language] out within them."

As Sheilah's and Leisy's vignettes show, youth language use may also be overly scrutinized by both adults and peers. When youth speak primarily English, outsiders and even some local adults may accuse youth of "not caring" about language maintenance and identity issues, yet young people's "choices" to speak English are not necessarily freely made. Alternately, when youth voice Indigenous languages that haven't been spoken by children for decades, their language use can be an especially moving and powerful symbol of decolonization for community members.

Secondly, as Leisy's vignette demonstrates, it is important that everyone in the language learning-teaching-researching enterprise—language speakers and non-speakers, adults and youth, and various types of insiders and outsiders—pays close attention to how their own language use and language ideologies shape research relationships with youth in settings of language shift and endangerment. Community and noncommunity members must also attend to the circumstances in which specific language uses, ideologies, and interactions in the research process help youth interact as language *knowers and users*, as opposed to language losers, hiders, and forgetters (Wyman, 2009). Learning and using a heritage language in culturally acceptable ways can be one of the most effective avenues for demonstrating respect and developing humanizing relationships with youth and adults in language-minoritized communities. Researcher language use, language learning, and youth language sharing can also serve as fertile ground upon which researchers and youth negotiate subjectivities and language ideologies in the research process. At the same time, outsiders' use of a heritage language, especially in cases of lesser-used languages (i.e., Indigenous languages), is also an attention-drawing act—one that may be received with confusion and feelings of loss, suspicion, or anger.

There are many ways, of course, that outside researchers' language crossing, no matter what the intention, could be deeply *de*humanizing, especially if the researcher's lack of fluency undermines accuracy and understanding in the research process, or if community members interpret researchers' use of a heritage language as an act of unwelcome heritage language appropriation. As Sheilah's research shows, even Indigenous researchers studying their own communities must be careful in how they talk about and use Indigenous languages in

the research process with youth who may have been criticized for not speaking their heritage language, or for speaking their language "incorrectly." Youth who feel insecure about their heritage language skills or critical of the lack of local language learning opportunities may not want to use their community language with researchers, or may feel resentful when outsiders learn it. Power dynamics around language in academia and schooling often contribute to heritage language devaluing and loss, making the linguistic interactions between educational researchers and language minority youth complex. As such, researchers in endangered-language contexts must stay attuned to how their words and acts of crossing, and young people's acts of language sharing, are being perceived in light of the intense emotional dynamics of language shift.

Similarly, researchers should take youth language learning opportunities into account when analyzing youth language ideologies and practices. In each of our studies, by listening to youth, attending to their actions, and paying close attention to educational processes and struggles in and out of school, we have highlighted how Indigenous language learning resources can become eroded through changing circumstances in and out of school in "vicious cycles of *doubts about*, and *reduced resources for* bilingualism" (Wyman, 2009, 2012). This erosion of resources places Indigenous youth in deeply challenging positions vis-à-vis their languages, communities, and heritages.

Youth also cannot be expected to reclaim Indigenous languages on their own, since they require the support of a larger nexus of authorizing agents—their families, to be sure, but also educators and the schools in which they spend much of their lives. When youth are held responsible for transforming histories of linguistic oppression, they and the adults around them need a deep understanding of the forces and processes at work that created the shift in the first place. The eminent sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1991) refers to this as "ideological clarification." Scholar-activists Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer write of this process for Tlingit communities in southeast Alaska:

> All of us now inherit the legacy of this unpleasant and even genocidal history, one component of which is that Native languages are on the verge of extinction, and at this point we ask, "What to make of a diminished thing?" (1998, p. 60)

This necessary question asking and dialogic process can in turn open up "ideological and implementational spaces" (Hornberger, 2006) for intergenerational language reclamation. Like a growing number of researchers with longstanding commitments to Indigenous communities, each of us has combined our youth work with a parallel strand of action research focused on opening such spaces in the communities we serve.

This brings us to the final lessons—and questions—we pose for ourselves and our readers: How can we work in an activist stance with both youth and adults to directly benefit endangered-language communities? How can we ensure that youth shape these research and language planning processes and products?

Each of us continues to answer *to* this question in distinct but complementary ways. A core response has been to work in collaboration with Indigenous communities from an activist and co-researcher stance. In the case of Teresa's multisited ethnography undertaken with university colleagues Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Larisa Warhol, and Ofelia Zepeda, this has involved ongoing partnerships with teams of Indigenous educators identified as community research collaborators (CRCs). Originally recruited based on self-nominations and the recommendations of other local site personnel, the CRCs have become the critical change agents positioned to apply research findings to local language planning and education efforts. In several of the study sites, the CRCs are heading up language revitalization initiatives, founding and staffing heritage-language immersion programs, and leading in-school and out-of-school language learning and teaching efforts (McCarty et al., 2009, 2011). In some cases, youth participants from the study—now young adults—are co-leading these initiatives as well. McCarty and her colleagues continue to work with the CRCs, their communities, and schools as this action research evolves in response to ever-changing cultural and sociolinguistic conditions.

For Sheilah, long-term work on Hopi language revitalization led to the creation of the Hopilavayi Summer Language Institute to assist Hopi teacher assistants (TAs) responsible for language and culture teaching in schools. Over seven years, one cohort of language educators has attained a critical understanding of contemporary Hopi linguistic and cultural ecology and the language teaching skills necessary to carrying out tribal mandates for language revitalization. Yet these accomplishments are played out against a backdrop of entrenched ideologies about the viability of Indigenous languages, their place within a history of institutional exclusion, and current policies of high-stakes testing and English-only. In this context, the Hopilavayi Institute has created a space for TAs to redefine themselves as language teachers—an expression of empowerment as they reconcile their own sense of the language's viability, their conception of schools as appropriate sites for Hopi language and culture, and their notions of professionalism with their personal histories of linguistic punishment and a reemerging sense of language pride. In the following quote, institute participants voice a collective understanding of their role in "bringing forward" the Hopi language for contemporary youth:

> We need to prioritize helping our youth; they cannot do this alone. They have found us to be the needed help they have been seeking. Language learners are in need of a comfort zone. We as caretakers of the language can be the ones to offer this space. (cited in McCarty, Nicholas, and Wyman, 2012, p. 54)

For Leisy, in-depth follow-up discussions of youth research findings helped lead to the development of a new, collaborative action research project examining and supporting bilingual programs with Yup'ik educators and "allied others" (Kaomea, 2004). Over multiple trips to the Yup'ik region, Wyman vetted her

research findings, presenting and discussing summaries to incorporate feedback from youth, adults, educators and community leaders in Piniq, and inviting individuals to review and edit their quotes in context. Wyman also visited an array of Yup'ik-serving schools, projects, and university programs, discussing her findings with Yup'ik language educators, activists, and scholars to situate her research in one village within regional dynamics of language maintenance and shift. This process, described elsewhere (Wyman, 2012), took years. Yet over time, the process helped Wyman understand how her research might inform, and be informed by, broader efforts at Yup'ik language reclamation. It also helped her build the relationships to work alongside experienced Yup'ik educators Yurrliq Nita Rearden, Ciquyak Fannie Andrew, and Cikigaq Rachel Nicholai, as well as school district leader Gayle Miller and university colleague Patrick Marlow, in language planning research and program development in a school district serving 22 Yup'ik villages (Wyman et al., 2010a, 2010b).

In these and other ways, each of us has worked to approach youth as members of communities engaged in ongoing, generational decolonization struggles. To humanize work with youth, researchers must invest in developing relationships with young people themselves, holding their own assumptions and positionalities at bay in order to carefully consider young people's positionalities, critical perspectives, and forms of agency. As an increasing number of youth researchers currently emphasize, researchers should also bring their research goals into some kind of alignment with youth concerns in new forms of humanized and action youth research. At the same time, Indigenous communities rightfully demand that researchers recognize and contribute to the ongoing decolonizing efforts of Indigenous adults, which will have profound implications for research (Smith, 1999).

If we take the demands of both youth researchers and Indigenous communities into account, this means that youth researchers in Indigenous and, we would argue, all marginalized and linguistically oppressed communities must develop a form of *triple vision* that recognizes and forwards academic, youth, and broader community projects. In developing such a triple vision, academics must invest considerable effort in understanding and valuing not only youth perspectives, but also the ways that youth practices are shaped by the historical circumstances and ongoing struggles of specific communities. Such a stance takes much longer to develop than the classic ethnographic year, since it requires researchers to develop the relationships necessary to consider their research goals, processes, and products in light of youth and adult community members' concerns. Still, by developing research trajectories within long-running dialogic conversations with Indigenous community members, and by connecting youth research to broader community-focused work, youth researchers can begin to meet Indigenous-inspired demands for a new level of reflexive and careful attention to research ethics in the academy (Lomawaima, 2000; Smith, 1999). Importantly, youth researchers can also use their work to support and foster humanizing, intergenerational relationships within communities experiencing

profound and rapid societal changes and the reverberations of oppressive histories. We hope the activist ethnography profiled here will be an important step in that direction.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Given your reading of the Indigenous youth accounts in this chapter, why is youth research on language, in particular, such a sensitive and challenging endeavor? How would you position yourself as a researcher working with the youth in the ethnographic vignettes presented here?

2. In thinking of a potential research project with youth, how might we envision a process in which we take a critical view of our researcher positionalities and identities that locates youth vulnerability at the heart of our projects? How might this process further help us define and locate ourselves as worthy witnesses to and in the process?

3. In embarking on youth research, how can we pursue "authenticating" and "validating" the ways in which youth attempt to "make sense of a diminished thing"? How can we support their efforts to engage in cultural survivance through their own agency?

4. Thinking of an existing or potential research project with youth, what languages, language varieties, and/or mixes of languages would you try to use in the research process? With whom, and for what purpose? How might your own language choices invite youth to position themselves as language knowers and users? What language uses might be tricky to navigate, or potentially problematic, and why?

5. Considering an existing or potential research project, how might you work toward developing the "triple vision" described by the authors in this chapter? What of your own preconceptions would you embrace or put aside in order to engage youth perspectives? What community histories and enduring struggles would you need to keep in perspective, and how might you take these into account in the research process?

6. What does it mean to take an "activist stance" as a qualitative researcher? What are the challenges and possibilities entailed by taking such a stance?

NOTES

1. This section is adapted from McCarty and Wyman (2009).

2. The Native Language Shift and Retention Study was supported by the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences. Co-principal investigators with Teresa McCarty were Mary Eunice Romero-Little and Ofelia Zepeda; Larisa Warhol served as the study's data manager. At the request of the Internal Review Board that sanctioned the research, we include this disclaimer: "All data, statements, opinions, and conclusions or

implications in this discussion of the study solely reflect the view of the authors and research participants, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agency, tribes or their tribal councils, the Arizona Board of Regents or Arizona State University. This information is presented in the pursuit of academic research and is published here solely for educational research purposes."

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