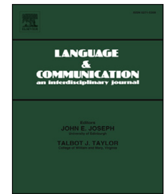
Language & Communication xxx (2018) 1–6

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Language & Communication

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom



Words beyond meaning in Mapuche language ideology

Magnus Course

University of Edinburgh, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Bilingualism
Language ideology
Mapuche
Ontology
Chile

ABSTRACT

What is the difference between the Mapuche language, Mapudungun, and Spanish? Perhaps the term "difference" is a clue to the approach from which my thinking on this topic has emerged. For in using the term "difference" I follow a particular genealogy of anthropologists who have asked the question of whether our difference is the same kind of difference as theirs, with "ours" and "theirs" themselves being relative constructs. Our question thus becomes a question about a question: are we asking whether Mapudungun and Spanish are two different kinds of the same thing? Or are we asking if they are two different things? I suggest that ultimately both questions are pertinent to my Mapuche interlocutors' thinking on this topic.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This paper is about a fundamentally interesting question, and a question which I feel is pertinent to the scope of this special issue as a whole. Unfortunately, although the question is interesting, I don't have a particularly concise or satisfying answer, in fact in many ways I don't really have much of an answer at all. As I hope will become clear, this is partly down to problems with certain assumptions inherent in the question itself, but also because the object of the question itself hovers around an ambiguity, a misalignment, an equivocation (Viveiros de Castro, 2004b). This is very much a first step towards thinking about what an answer might look like, and why, despite everything, we need to ask the question in the first place. So what's the question? Well, it's a deceptively simple one: what is the difference between the Mapuche language, Mapudungun, and Spanish? Perhaps the term "difference" is a give-away to the approach that I'll be taking and the theoretical perspective from which much of my thinking on this topic has emerged. For in using the term "difference" I'm following in the footsteps of a particular genealogy of anthropologists - the triumvirate of Wagner (1975), Strathern (1980), and Viveiros de Castro (2004a) - who, each in their own different ways, have persistently asked the question of whether our difference is the same kind of difference as theirs, with "ours" and "theirs" themselves being relative constructs.[1] This kind of approach has congealed and spread and is sometimes located under the term "comparative relativism" (Jensen, 2011). As the editors of this issue note, it is perhaps surprising how relatively little engagement scholars working within this approach have given to questions of language. From the perspective of this approach, the question is really a question about a question: are we asking whether Mapudungun and Spanish are two different kinds of the same thing? Or are we asking if they are two different things? My rather unsatisfactory answer is that both questions are valid and pertinent to my Mapuche interlocutors' thinking on this topic.

At first glance, this kind of debate about linguistic difference might appear to come under the scope of language ideology (Kroskrity, 2000; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994). But perhaps the question goes a little deeper than that, for we might ask whether language ideology actually skates around the question of what language actually is. One of the critiques of cultural

E-mail address: magnus.course@ed.ac.uk.

[1] I am a disciple, albeit an inconstant one (Course, 2010).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2018.03.007
0271-5309/© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article in press as: Course, M., Words beyond meaning in Mapuche language ideology, *Language & Communication* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2018.03.007

relativism emerging from the kind of approach outlined above is that it leaves unchallenged the unitary identity of the "real" world; distinct cultures are simply different visions of a singular, shared reality, a reality or "world" that is assumed as a given (cf. Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017). We might want to transpose this argument to the realm of language and ask whether the questions we ask about language ideologies (or indeed the entire concept itself) are simply different takes on a singular, given, unitary phenomenon that is language? For if we follow through to their logical ends some of the ideas people hold, we might be forced to at the very least re-consider the assumption that "language" is a self-evident, singular thing in the world. I return to this possibility in the conclusion, but for now let me start with some background information about the rural Mapuche people with whom I work and about the linguistic context.

1. The Mapuche nation and Mapudungun

The Mapuche are an indigenous group of approximately one million people, most of whom live in Chile, but some of whom live across the cordillera in western Argentina. The Mapuche heartland is the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth regions of southern Chile, although due to urban migration, over half of the Mapuche population is now resident in the Chilean capital, Santiago. My own research was in rural communities sandwiched between Lago Budi and the Pacific Ocean in southern Chile's Ninth Region. People there survive through a mixture of government subsidy and subsistence agriculture, and don't live in villages, but in scattered, often quite isolated homesteads (Course, 2011; Di Giminiani, 2012; González, 2016).

Nearly all of the adults with whom I've worked are bilingual in both Spanish and Mapudungun.[2] There are a few monolingual Mapudungun speakers, and significantly more monolingual Spanish speakers. This maps roughly onto axes of both gender and age, i.e. young people are more likely to speak just Spanish than older people, and women are more likely to speak just Mapudungun than men. These days, although one will hear conversations in Mapudungun on a daily basis, most day to day interaction is carried out in Spanish. Thus although Spanish is referred to in Mapudungun as *winkadungun*, "white people's language," it is deeply and firmly embedded in contemporary rural Mapuche life and has been fully embraced by Mapuche poets, musicians, activists, and politicians (Crow, 2013).

2. Mapudungun and ritual

Despite, or perhaps because of, this positive and creative embracing of Spanish, I was frequently struck during my years in southern Chile by the absolute insistence of the people with whom I lived that certain practices must be carried out in Mapudungun, not Spanish. These practices include funeral orations (*amulpüllün*), meetings for organizing the ritual sport of *palin* (*trawun*), and meetings for organizing the great *ngillatun* fertility ritual, and the prayers in the ritual itself. All of these practices correspond roughly to what is referred to in some contexts as *wimtun* "Mapuche customs or traditions", and in other contexts as *ad mapu*, "the way or aspect of the world". Let me give three brief examples of the debates to which language choice in these contexts gives rise:

Alfredo was a young man who, like many young Mapuche people, had spent quite a few years in Santiago. He was the son of the local *lonko*, or headman, and was the child of the polygynous *lonko's* lead wife or *unan kure*. This made Alfredo the most likely candidate to succeed his father, and Alfredo's desire to organize a game of *palin* was understood by many as an opportunity for him to demonstrate his capacity to fulfil this role. *Palin* is a sport somewhat resembling field hockey, but played on a very long and narrow pitch. Its historical importance to Mapuche society, from at least the sixteenth century to the present, cannot be overestimated. I've argued elsewhere that part of its continuing importance and relevance relies upon a kind of fractally-recursive structure, in which the game and the exchanges surrounding it are understood as a nestled series of binary relationships (Course, 2011). And it is here, I believe, that the genius of *palin* lies: it simultaneously encompasses and constructs a series of relations of alterity that occur at a number of distinct levels. This capacity to create and open up these distinct kinds of relations to distinct kinds of potential affines that has assured its longevity and continuing relevance to Mapuche people. It is this importance that makes the act of organizing a match of *palin* such a delicate and fraught task, one which usually only the most verbally precocious will take on. However, in this case, there were several doubts raised about Alfredo's capacity to take on the role of headman, the most frequently voiced of which was his perceived inability to speak Mapudungun fluently. "How can you be a *lonko* if you can't speak?" said one woman. But when the day of the meeting to organize the game of *palin* arrived, Alfredo confidently conducted the entirety of proceedings in Mapudungun, with both fluency and eloquence. With the benefit of hindsight, none of us should have been surprised. He was, after all, the son of a monolingual Mapudungun-speaking mother. The point I want to draw from this is the twofold one that, firstly, *lonko* have to speak Mapudungun, and secondly, that meetings concerned with *palin*, have to be carried out in Mapudungun.

A second example comes from the funeral of Maria Neculhual, the wife of one of my adoptive "uncles" or *malle*. The central component of traditional Mapuche funerals is the *amulpüllün*, literally, "the making go of the spirit" (Course, 2007). This is a series of discourses about the deceased, performed by two orators or *wewpin*. The discourses are basically composed of a series of mutual greetings, introductions, and then a lengthy biography of the deceased. This biographical component of the orations, the *nutramtun*, is said to "complete" the person, and allow their spirit to move on from the world of the living. Once

[2] The genetic relationship of Mapudungun to other Amerindian languages is an issue of no little controversy and as such is probably best thought of as a linguistic isolate. Recent studies of Mapudungun include Golluscio (2006), Smeets (2008), and Zuniga (2000).

Please cite this article in press as: Course, M., Words beyond meaning in Mapuche language ideology, *Language & Communication* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2018.03.007

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10226701

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/10226701

Daneshyari.com