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Borders traversed, boundaries erected: Creating discursive identities and language communities in the Village of Tewa

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A B S T R A C T

Today the Village of Tewa, First Mesa of the Hopi Reservation in Northern Arizona experiences unprecedented linguistic diversity and change due to language shift to English. Despite a wide range of speaker fluency, the now emblematic Tewa language that their ancestors transported from the Rio Grande Valley almost 325 years ago, is widely valorized within the community. However Language factions have emerged andtheir debates and contestations focus on legitimate language learning and the proper maintenance of their emblematic language. Boundary creation and crossing are featuresof discourses that rationalize possible forms of language revitalization and construct communities across temporal barriers. The theoretical implications of these discourseson both local and theoretical notions of language/speech community are explored.

1. Introduction

As in many communities faced with language endangerment, discourses of language and identity have been multiplied and magnified by contemporary transformations in the Village of Tewa. But this is a community wherein language and group identity have an especially long and rich history of linkage in actual practice and in indigenous metalinguistic commentary. Today the Arizona Tewas number around seven hundred individuals who reside on and near the Village of Tewa on First Mesa of the Hopi Reservation in NE Arizona. They are the descendants of those Southern Tewas (or *Thanuuge'in T'owa)* who moved, at the invitation of the Hopis, from pueblos they abandoned in the Rio Grande in the aftermath of the Second Pueblo Revolt in 1696 (Dozier, 1954, 1966). We know, from both historical documents and their own oral history, that their Tewa ancestors played a significant role in the revolt and that they refused to resettle their pueblo, preferring instead to fight a guerilla war against the Spanish until the time of the Hopi invitation in 1700[1]

Their descendants, who reside in the Village of Tewa community (and environs), have been studied most intensively by Edward Dozier (1954, 1966) and me (Kroskrity, 1993, 1998, 2000). It is an especially remarkable community for two reasons

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[1] There is, of course, a scholarly critique of "language endangerment" research and its tendency to portray linguistic attrition as a form of linguistic emergency thereby warranting the deployment of a cadre of linguistic and applied linguistic scientists (e.g. Cameron, 2007). Certainly the rhetoric of language endangerment has been over-used and even abused as in the case of some groups claiming that national and international languages as Spanish and English are threatened (Duchene and Heller, 2007). Such claims on behalf of languages that enjoy official status as national languages as well as international currency may use the imagery of endangerment but they are more about a discomfort with linguistic diversity than a true concern for the possible death of a particular language.

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that are relevant here. One, they are the only group in a pueblo diaspora of almost one hundred villages and pueblos that managed to relocate yet retain its distinctive language. This persistence despite the likely fate of assimilation into the Hopi majority has won for the Arizona Tewas some notoriety in the literature on language endangerment. In works by both Dorian (1998) and Crystal (2000), for example, there is a tendency to depict the Arizona Tewas as paragons of persistence. This view, however, fails to appreciate their actual linguistic struggles and the real work they do in culturally managing their linguistic and cultural resources. Like so many contemporary speech communities surveyed and reviewed by Silverstein (1998), they have undergone great transformation within the past century. Economic incorporation, urban migration, relocation and the reservation-urban orbit (Hodge, 1971), the wired and mediated world (Spitulnik, 1998), the increasingly diverse ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996) now available, and many other consequences of globalization have brought massive change and greater internal diversity to this community than ever before. In my first few summers of field research in 1973 and 1974, First Mesa had no electricity, few radios, and fewer cassette tape recorders. Tewa folks were likely to go off the reservation by car mostly for shopping and to visit kinsmen who might have moved to Winslow, Holbrook, Flagstaff, Tuba City, or Phoenix to find work. Today, with the exception of the conservative Hopi village of Walpi, every home on First Mesa is electrified and many sport satellite dishes that connect the tiny reservation community to the urban centers of the nation and the world. Many upwardly mobile Tewa have sought higher education at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff or Arizona State University in Phoenix and return to the reservation with new skills, degrees, and perspectives.

Concerning language, a community that once unanimously declared that speaking Tewa was a determining attribute of Tewa identity has now had to confront the fact that the vast majority of its children are growing up with English as the main language of the home and *without* the emblematic language the community had successfully maintained post-diaspora for more than three hundred years. A community that once uniformly rejected the possibility of schools as a site for Tewa language socialization, because they viewed this as exclusively the domain of Tewa homes and their associated kin, now debates—with expected generational and inter-clan variation and contestation—the costs and benefits of tempering its hardline stance on Tewa literacy programs, on schools as a site for Tewa instruction, and on the formal instruction of Tewa more generally. I will return to these debates later.

Certainly in comparison to many other Native American and other world indigenous languages, it would be inappropriate to view the Arizona Tewa language as severely endangered, but the community itself now does appear to recognize that there is a crisis evidenced by the fact that most young people are not growing up speaking the language.[1] Informal surveys conducted during the early period of my research (1973–1985) and my most recent research sojourns from 2007 to 2012 indicate that the perception of a crisis is quite well founded, since the past thirty years have produced a decline in the number of homes in which young people were learning and actively speaking the language from 50% to between 5% and 10%.

I want to emphasize that the alarm and crisis imagery in local discourse in the Village of Tewa—the currently preferred self-designation of Arizona Tewa people for their main village often referred to by Hopis and others as Hano—is more indigenous than imported.[2] The Tewa, even those with college educations, are mostly unaware of a larger pattern of language endangerment and equally unaware of what other Native communities, other than their immediate Hopi neighbors, are doing in the name of language revitalization. I returned to this community after a hiatus of slightly more than a decade of minimal involvement from the mid-1990s through 2007, following more than 20 consecutive years of research involvement from 1973 to 1994. What prompted me was a series of email requests and later voicemails from Tewa young adults, who asked me to return to more active involvement in their community in order to provide resources for an emerging language revitalization effort. When I accepted their invitation to return, I was hardly unaware of the controversial nature of much if not most linguistic research in the community. But I was still surprised by the 5 year process it took for me to finally obtain official approval from the community in September, 2012—a process involving 4 public presentations at the Village of Tewa Community Center and about a dozen meetings with various configurations of clan leaders, community service workers, and other members of the Village. Whether in public testimony at a community meeting or in private discourse with old friends, I encountered the voices of about 80 Tewas, male and female, old and young – speaking their minds about the importance of the Tewa language and the best way to revitalize it within their community. In this article, I will examine how comparatively recent discourses of language and identity, emerging in an environment of language endangerment, relate to established language ideologies in the community. I also want to examine these language ideologies and the verbal practices that support them as a necessary resource for possibly rethinking the very concept of language or speech community at a time when contemporary social transformations obscure some of their traditional attributes. Like others discussed in this issue—including the Highland Chontal (Mexico) and secular Yiddish communities, Tewa Villagers have responded to social transformation, language shift, and linguistic revitalization through beliefs and practices of selective boundary creation and crossing that reconstruct these communities through patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

The importance of boundaries in processes of ethnogenesis and the maintenance of ethnic groups is a major contribution of scholars of ethnic identity, like Barth (1969), that resurfaces more recently in the language ideological literature (Irvine and Gal, 2000; Agha, 2007). These boundaries, unlike the ones reified in the early language contact literature, are not objective givens but rather semiotically constructed. For Barth, the critical question was how do cultural groups in regular contact

[2] The term "Hano", which still appears on some First Mesa area signage is a Hopi loanword based on Tewa *Thanu(ge'in T'owa)* which was the original self-designation of the group as the Southern Tewa of the Galisteo Basin in New Mexico. It is a strongly dispreferred term for Tewa people for whom even the designation of Thanu has become politicized. Community members strongly prefer to refer to their group as Tewa.