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OUR IDEOLOGIES AND THEIRS¹

James Collins

1. Introduction

This paper presents a case study from native Northern California that focuses on two linguistic encounters: that of analyst and native speaker in linguistic fieldwork; and that of native community and state in official language renewal programs. I will argue that both encounters reveal divergent beliefs about the nature of language as structure, its place in social action, and its relation to such collective orders as family, 'tribe', and nation-state. The divergencies point to a complex, interlinked history of scientific claim, official recognition, and local contestation which involves field linguists and anthropologists, bureaucratic offices, and an Athabaskan-descended people who've come to be known as 'the Tolowa'. Rather than a general definition of language ideology and an analysis showing how Tolowa language beliefs and language use relates to their social order, I will present a case study of interlinked and often rival assumptions about and interests in language, focusing upon the divergent beliefs and showing how assumptions and interests become authoritative in particular local and nonlocal contexts.

The Tolowa were an Athabaskan-speaking people living in the Smith River valley in Northwest California. They were decimated by White conquest and now their language is nearly extinct. Yet various Tolowa have been involved for the past two decades and more in an ambitious effort at documenting and maintaining their language, as part of more general efforts at reasserting social and political identity. These efforts have involved local initiative, state and federal monies, and claims about language, culture, and tradition at times congruent with and at times at odds with accounts provided by academic researchers.

¹ *Acknowledgments:* Thanks are due to numerous Tolowa people who have extended generous assistance to my studies of their language and life circumstances, especially the late Edward Richards, Jr. and Fred Moorehead and Loren Bommelyn, Berneice Humphrey, Lila Moorehead, and Joe and Loretta Martin. I have often disagreed with my fellow Athabaskanist Victor Golla, but I appreciate and commend his knowledge and intellectual honesty. Funds for research have been supplied by various institutions - Temple University, State University of New York at Albany, the Phillips Fund of the American Philosophical Society, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. All are gratefully acknowledged. The editors of this special issue have provided useful commentary on an earlier draft of this paper.

The current-day Tolowa number about 400-500 people living between Crescent City and Smith River, California. In many respects, they are similar to the surrounding White, rural working-class population - similar wagework, vehicles, clothing, musical preferences. But they are dark-complected, or at least identifiably 'Indian', and hang together more with other Indians than Whites; they have fishing rights, which they exercise, and which put them in potential conflict with commercial or tourist fishermen [both non-Indian]; they go to feather dances and salmon bakes; and some of them speak fully or know fragments of "Indian language", which academics and official types and now increasing numbers of local people call Tolowa², and which is recognized as a language course in the local high school. This persistence of indigenous ways and words is puzzling, given what is known about the postContact history of these people and the academic discussion of the consequences of that history.

The Tolowa were subjected to the same genocidal events and policies suffered by many native peoples in Oregon and Northern California in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century an original population of over a thousand was reduced to 121 on the Government census (Gould 1978; Slagle 1987), from which it slowly rebounded to current figures.

The consequences of massive dying and cultural disorientation have been emphasized in an anthropological literature which repeatedly announces the extinction or near extinction of Tolowa culture and language (Drucker 1937; Gould 1978). Indeed, the Tolowa could earnestly remark "Rumors of our death are greatly exaggerated". They've been reported as dying out or becoming extinct for nearly as long as they've been subject to the gaze of academic scrutiny or in the grip of bureaucratic record-keeping, and yet they've managed to survive into the late twentieth century.

The last 25 years has witnessed a renaissance of cultural activity among the Tolowa, as among many other native peoples in Northwest California. This rebirth has involved political regroupment, cultural assertion, language description, and resource claims. In this multi-faceted resurgence and refashioning of a collective identity, various traditional social forms and processes have re-emerged in more public arenas: the initiative and rivalry of key extended families in organizing cultural and political activities; the continuing practice of ocean and river fishing, despite ongoing conflicts with state Fish and Game agencies and seafront property developers; and the continuously revamped *NedaS*³ 'dance'. Yet the consequences of massive dying and cultural disorientation are also clear. The land base has been reduced to a tiny fraction of its original size, and the Tolowa have relied on wage labor for survival throughout

² The Tolowa term for themselves was simply *x3S* 'people' and for their language *x3S weya'* '(the) people speak' or approximate translation, the current "Indian language". See also fellow-Athabaskan usage such as Navajo *dine bizaad* 'the people's language'). The term 'Tolowa' appears to be a modification of a Yurok phrase which became the name used in academic and bureaucratic description for Smith River Athabaskans. As noted in text, it is now part of local Indian and non-Indian usage.

³ Tolowa examples are in standard IPA transcription except for S = alveopalatal fricative (ʂ), L = voiceless lateral fricative (ɬ), and ʒ = schwa (ə).

the Twentieth Century. Practitioners of cultural-spiritual activities such as dancing have played a game of hide-and-seek with both legal officials and churchmen throughout this century, and now the specialists and organizers are few in number and hard-pressed. The language has not been learned as a *first language* by children since the 1920s, and now the linguistic community is moribund.⁴

This paper is part of a more general effort on my part to understand Tolowa survival and persistence. The effort to understand has required challenging disciplinary perspectives - shifting away from a 'salvage linguistics' that documents for science another dying language, yet trying to understand what losing a language means for those who face that loss; moving away from a 'salvage ethnography' that analyzes 'memory culture', yet trying to understand current social dynamics against the backdrop of long-announced and externally perceived cultural death.

Such questioning of disciplinary perspectives is also necessary, I think, when analyzing language ideologies. For we academics are people who make authoritative pronouncements about language. Our categories of analysis are part of linguistic practices that characterize social realities, and we inhabit positions as specialists in state-certified institutions that make our statements and our silences unavoidably ideological. The two encounters presented and analyzed below should help flesh out this argument. The first concerns fieldwork, and in it academic categories of analysis are quietly though tellingly resisted. The second concerns certification struggles, and in it our institutional position as experts is part of a larger contest to define social and linguistic realities.

2. Field encounter

I began fieldwork on Tolowa late in 1981, having been encouraged to do so because it was an Athabaskan language that had "never been adequately described... and there [were] several living native speakers" - the classic charter for 'salvage linguistics'. Traveling to the Northwest tip of the state of California, I made contact with one of those speakers, who was quite happy to "talk Indian language" with me.

Throughout the next several years of short periods of fieldwork, ranging from 3-4 days to two months, structural questions preoccupied my analysis. I began with a restricted set of syntactic questions derived from earlier work on the evolution of Athabaskan case-marking and verb transitivity. Early on I worked up a short synoptic overview of the grammatical system - the phonology, word-formation processes, and primary syntactic patterns - and spent the next several years writing up expansions of small sections of the overview: recent historical change in the system of alienably and inalienably possessed nominals; a fuller description of linked processes of change in vocalic quality, length, and nasalization; an analysis of syntactic structure and word-

⁴ This historical process of devastation and regroupment is described in an acknowledgement petition prepared by the Tolowa Nation group in the mid-1980s (see Slagle 1985). I have analyzed some of the historical and contemporary dilemmas in a separate work (Collins 1991).

formation. Throughout the interspersed fieldwork and analysis, grammatical structure was a primary object of analysis. Phonology and syntax were investigated to establish the grammatical core of the language. Lexicon was analyzed to establish the complex combinatory mechanisms that lay at the heart of the language, at the intersection of word-formation and syntax as typically understood. Texts were elicited and analyzed as ways of expanding the analysis of lexicon and syntax.

Throughout this period, I noted the good humor of various language consultants with my focused and narrow elicitations of contrastive alternates and distributional possibilities, whether of sound structure, word structure or sentence structure. But I also slowly registered a consistently different orientation to 'language'. Simply put, they were interested in words, not grammar.

At the end of a mind-numbing elicitation session on phonological contrasts, multiple repetitions of the form for 'coyote' /*sk'3m'*/, prompted my first language consultant, Ed Richards Sr., into a story of how *sk'3m'* fell from the skies, told first in English, then in Tolowa, and followed with laughing yet serious commentary on Coyote's sexual misdoings. After a difficult session on the rarely occurring reciprocal, my second primary consultant, Berneice Humphrey, provided one of her "favorite words" made with this reciprocal form, *LuLte'*, 'lovers' [literally: 'they want each other']. Indeed our working sessions often contained a tension, between my efforts at focused paradigm elicitation, and her presentation of diverse lexical constructions, her questioning of the distinction between 'would' and 'could' say X, and her insistence that controlled paradigmatic elaboration was *not* how the "Indian language" operated. Loren Bommelyn, the current teacher of the Tolowa language course in the local High School, and a prime force in the Tolowa effort to document and maintain their own language, has impressed me over the years, both with his interest in structural patterns and, more recently, with his consistent placement of both lexical items and sentences in narrative or conversational contexts. Counterposed to the linguist's presentation and consideration of grammatical patterns in isolation, he always presents a discursive context, and typically a cultural exegesis. Finally, while working with a set of local Tolowa adults whose self-acknowledged knowledge of the language was quite limited, I was made curious by the husband of one such consultant, a man in his fifties whose laconic manner, jeans and pickup made him seem the typical western farmhand. Yet while we three talked about "old words" and their loss, he commented on his memory of the older folks, their continuous stories that he missed, and most pointedly, that they had names for every feature of geography in the Smith River drainage, as he put it: "a name for every riffle in the creek".

What do we make of these differing orientations, to grammatical regularity versus lexical particularity? It is a familiar story among fieldworks, and our linguistic discipline gives one explanation. Since Boas (1911) and Saussure (1916/1959), we have known that grammatical patterns are abstract, and speakers are rarely aware of them although [the story goes] those patterns form the constitutive preconditions for their speech behavior. The folk, it is often said, are aware of and preoccupied with words, only the comparative analyst will recover the grammatical configuration (Silverstein 1979; Whorf 1939/1956).

There have been various counter-arguments to this structural doctrine, I want to consider one which does not just argue for contending accounts of the domains of inquiry (*langue* vs. *parole*) but which attempts to locate the historical conditions for the production of structuralist knowledge. Simply put, structuralist abstraction and generality results from a historic removal, a distance and distancing, between analyst and object of analysis. Voloshinov/Bakhtin in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* argued that Saussurean linguistics, "abstract objectivism" as he termed it, results from the development of grammatical analysis through "encounters with the alien voice" (1973: 65-82): medieval and early-modern grammarians analyzing the texts of non-vernacular classic languages; comparative philologists working with the texts of extinct prior stages of national languages; imperial explorers collecting word lists from the languages of a world they so casually subjected to dominion and analysis. Bourdieu has put the matter more sharply: removed from actual engagement in the worlds it studies, structural analysis substitutes "the logic of intelligibility" for "the logic of practice" (1977; see also, Fabian 1983, for similar arguments). But what of this "logic of practice" in the case at hand, what can we say about this orientation to the native, that is, non-alien word. First, we may note that the words are indexes of stories and situations, they are embedded within and associated with the art of remembering, a remembering interested in desire and sexual malfeasance, and a remembering concerned with a relationship to land. For that knowing of names for places - "every riffle in the creek" - is tied up with knowing what occurred at those places, why they are called by that name. It is a geography that is also a history. As Kari (1986) has argued for the Alaskan Athabaskan peoples, placenames are a mnemonic, a 'storage and retrieval' system for oral cultures. As Basso (1990) has argued for the Western Apache, placenames encode an evaluative stance, a moral tradition tied to a memory of place.

Second, these stories and situations change. The Tolowa have faced the imminent loss of their language for the last several decades; their story traditions are more endangered than those of the Western Apache, their sense of place even more embattled than that of the Alaskan Athabaskans. So there is a new story, rendered in English, a tale of collecting words. Two of the most active members of the local language program volunteered accounts of such collecting in a general discussion of the origins of this program. Loren Bommelyn had several stories of "lost words" being recalled, confirmed, or corrected by aunts and uncles, typically hours or days after an initial language query. Berneice Humphrey told of an older neighbor, "an elder", who would often come several days after an initial query, bringing an "old word" to Berneice for it to be written down and included in the language documentation effort. Old words have value, and it is through relations of kinship and other closeness that the collecting occurs.

There is more at issue, however, than an academic concern with systematic regularity leading to a neglect of linguistic practice, its historical situation, and sociocultural implications. For there is another encounter, that between the Tolowa community and a network of official institutions concerned with legitimating language. Those institutions are concerned with the relation between language and culture seen as the rights of officially defined groups.

This concern with the nexus of language, culture and group raises a problem: What kind of description of language is to take priority? Is a structuralist analysis of grammatical and lexical resources to be preferred? Perhaps. But the structuralist paradigm briefly discussed above leaves unresolved a fundamental question: what is the location, in social or cognitive space, of structural-grammatical knowledge? Is the 'language' to be seen as an abstract, asocial knowledge located in the head individual speakers, as current grammatical theory suggests, or is it a 'community grammar', an organization or distillation of aggregate linguistic knowledge and practice? The close linkage of language and social group suggested by the notion 'community grammar' has proven problematic, however, and the individual-speaker option simply avoids the issue. Perhaps another sort of description should take priority, for example the local description and compilation of the language, drawn from years of consultation with speakers, but organized on different principles from standard grammatical analysis. If the latter is preferred, then what about claims that this is not a scientific description of the language? Whichever option is chosen, the question remains: How does language map onto social groups?

In the Tolowa case, this question is particularly vexing, for this community has faced linguistic extinction as the last speakers for whom this was a first language have passed away. Schooling, Christianization, incorporation into a white-dominated wage economy and a century of pervasive anti-Indian sentiment have tested and transformed Tolowa resource bases, patterns of kinship, forms of ritual celebration, and language learning. Since the 1920s ethnic Tolowa children have learned English first, and Tolowa only if specially situated and specially inclined. The result is that today many adults and children know some of the language, but very few speak it fluently or regularly. Social interaction in family or larger social gathering may involve selective use of Tolowa words and phrases, but English is the shared and dominant medium. It was out of awareness and concern about the trend toward this state of affairs that a group of Tolowa began efforts at resisting linguistic extinction some 25 years ago. Those efforts have resulted in a description and a program that is a claim about language and tradition, in the past and in the present. That claim has not gone uncontested.

3. Contesting Tolowa: Community, academy, and state

If individual Tolowa speakers have faced a dismissal or ignoring of their lexical interests by a field linguist confident in and unselfconscious of his disciplinary assumptions, the Tolowa in their collective efforts to document and preserve their language have faced a questioning by academic linguists and management procedures by state offices charged with administering bilingual and bicultural education programs.

Prior to my fieldwork, as well as that of other academic linguists, various Tolowa people had jointly undertaken to document and analyze their language. Working with a local university-affiliated Indian community development funding consortium, they used a non-IPA transcription system, the Unifon Alphabet, and a basic set of English grammatical categories for their descriptive framework. They proposed and initiated

a Tolowa Language course in the local high school, which they have conducted continuously since 1973, and they published in 1984 a first edition and in 1989 a revised and expanded second edition of *Tolowa Language* (Bommelyn and Humphrey 1989). This is a 400+ page linguistic compendium, an English-to-Tolowa dictionary plus various cultural-linguistic sections on geneologies, placenames, and so forth.

This local and self-initiated effort at language preservation has proceeded apace with low-key and continuing controversies over authentic versions of 'Tolowa'. As I began fieldwork a decade ago, I was warned to work with "real speakers" and not with those who ran the language program, who only had "limited knowledge of the language", being people who had learned Tolowa as a second language. And as I worked with my first consultant, an elder whose first language was Tolowa, I was told by academic contacts that he was good but did not know the language as well as 'X' and 'Y', who had passed away. Like some linguistic will-o'-the-wisp, the real Tolowa was always just receding on the historical horizon.⁵ The local language program efforts at language documentation and teaching have also been questioned for over a decade, although never, to my knowledge, in print. Since before beginning fieldwork with this group, I have heard dismissive comments about the value of the Unifon script by various prominent Athabaskanists. One derided it as "look[ing] like a batcode", another warned me in the mid-80s against lending any academic credibility to the Unifon script as a system for linguistic description.

There is some justification for this questioning. The last two decades have seen the last generation of native speakers of the language pass away. Those who died in the 1970s had been experienced raconteurs and singers, as well as consultants-of-choice for mid-century linguistic fieldwork; those who died in the 1980s had felt quite clearly their linguistic isolation. Those who continue the language program have learned the language as a second language, albeit with a singular dedication and impressive results. Similarly, an analysis of either edition of *Tolowa Language* shows that the Unifon script, which is fundamentally based on English orthography and phonetics, fails to make certain consonantal distinctions found in Tolowa, and it overdifferentiates in the vocalic system. In addition, as noted, the grammatical analysis (in *TL*) is based on a simplified English plan, a past-present-future tense scheme, for instance, although this Athabaskan language has aspect as its fundamental temporal category, with tense a secondary derivative. In both cases, however, there is a similar academic maneuver: locate the real language prior to or away from current speakers; locate an 'adequate description' elsewhere than in the one currently available, a product of local language activists.

This controversy, already complicated, is further overlaid with another knowledge interest. The language program has not existed in isolation. From its inception, it has received financial support from the California State University affiliated Center for (Indian) Community Development. Teachers in the local high

⁵ As I have gathered material from various consultants, and assembled, transcribed, and checked tapes which have been collected by various linguistic foraging parties over the past three decades, the historical and sociological, as well as cognitive, location of 'Tolowa Grammar' grew more complicated.

school language course have received special Indian Teacher Education and Eminence credentials from the California state educational system, with the assistance of the Community Development organization. And if academic linguists have been dismissive of local efforts at language documentation, for its failure to achieve descriptive adequacy, the Community Development organization has also had its axe to grind, for it was deeply enmeshed in the business of getting and administering federal and state monies for a variety of Indian-aimed programs, prominently programs for bilingual and bicultural education.

In the Fall of 1987, shortly after a fieldtrip, I was contacted by an Associate Director of the Development organization. Under increasing pressure to legitimate their linguistic efforts, in the wake of "English Only" legislation in California, they wanted to bring in university-affiliated Athabaskan linguists, for workshops on Comparative Athabaskan, the structure of the local Athabaskan languages, and the curriculum of the local language programs. But there was a price-tag. They wanted not only expertise for workshops, but also positive academic evaluation of testing materials for an Indian Teacher Education credential. In my case, they wanted evaluation of the Tolowa section of the test.

The materials were sent to me. They were interesting documents, revealing an official conception of 'exotic' language and social life. The Indian Cultures section of the test asked a series of questions about various cultural domains - traditional kinship, flora, fauna, and domestic-food gathering activities - for a variety of Northwest California Indian groups. Students were tested for knowledge of vocabulary drawn from these domains. The Language section presented the Unifon script for each language, a short list of grammatical features, and a story in each language. The Tolowa examples illustrated verbal paradigms in terms of English tense categories, and the syntax of sentences difficult to determine from the examples given. I checked the roster of consultant linguists and saw listed Algonkianists and Hokanists affiliated with California universities, but no one who worked on Athabaskan languages, that is, no one who had worked with the relevant language family.

I wrote back to the Associate Director, expressing my interest in conducting a workshop, my commitment to working with the Tolowa folks who ran the local language program, but also laying out my criticisms of the test as it existed and offering to work on its revision. Shortly thereafter I was contacted by the Associate Director and told that they needed a positive evaluation if they were to keep monies for their teacher education program. I said that I had to stand by the criticisms of existing materials. Shortly after that conversation, I was contacted by the local Tolowa Language teacher, who was checking a report from the Associate Director, that I, along with other linguists, was trying to "wreck everything they had done". We talked, I explained my position, and I found out that he had never seen a copy of the Teacher's Certification Test. I sent a copy and we subsequently discussed some of the Tolowa

examples, the oddness and ungrammaticality of which he also found puzzling.⁶

The lesson of this incident is that not only the local Tolowa people and distant academic linguists have a stake in defining an 'Indian Language'. Local funding consortiums also have a stake in such an enterprise, especially as they encounter and interact with the certifying and credentialing operations of the state, that is, as a given representation of language is called into question or maintained as legitimate. In the case just discussed, although the treatment of culture was extremely simple, and the description of language bungled from the perspective of native speaker or linguist, that did not matter. What mattered for ongoing legitimacy was rendering a claim, a representation of cultural and linguistic knowledge of 'the Tolowa', in the appropriate, stipulated format of a test, and then obtaining expert support, in the form of academics on an advisory board, regardless of their particular linguistic specialization.⁷

We may compare this legitimation effort through professorial and other 'expert opinion', with Tolowa-internal disputes about authority for language. Local Tolowa, both older adults with varying knowledge of the language and their younger kinspeople, do at times question the validity of *Tolowa Language* compendium and the form of the language learned in the local school. They do not criticize it, however, as academic linguists do, as "not really Tolowa" because it is a violation of some stable structural system existing prior to current circumstances. Rather, they say, "That is not how we at Smith River [or Achulet or Elk Valley] speak... that is not how my family spoke". That is, they question the effort to have a *general* linguistic description for the entire valley. They call upon fiercely local definitions of language, the communicative wherewithal of extended kinship groupings, a view of language and collective order apparently found in in much of the aboriginal Pacific Northwest (see Hymes 1981). And indeed, any inquiry into current cultural and political efforts, whether to preserve fishing rights, to obtain services for a Rancheria, or to initiate language preservation, quickly discovers the importance of local kin groupings in undertaking such efforts, albeit in the name of a larger tribal-national social group (see Collins 1991).

4. Conclusion

The preceding analysis raises the hoary problem of emic and etic perspectives. Can we study Tolowa language ideology (*their* emic beliefs about language structure and use in relation to collective order) in some neutral, descriptive, etic metalanguage, or must ideological analysis also interrogate our ideologies (*our* beliefs and practices in relation to partially-shared social arrangements)? I would argue for the latter position. Contemporary American Indian social conditions often involve intricate and volatile

⁶ Shortly after this, the Directorship of the Community Development organization changed hands, and the credentialing program was reorganized.

⁷ This is not an unusual situation, it is common to Mexico and Australia (John Haviland, personal communication).

connections between local lifeways and state-level processes of a legal and regulatory nature. In such circumstances, academic researchers are never disinterested; they are always tied to interests - local interests, official interests, career interests, perhaps all simultaneously and uneasily⁸. Academic beliefs about language and academic words about language, however well-butressed by accepted theory, are part of the social game that links Indian lives to university careers and both to bureaucratic-legal descriptions and decisions.

Let me review the key encounters discussed above and what they reveal about contrasting, contested views of and practices with language. In the field encounter we have an orientation to words, as cultural indices in a situation of enduring alarm about the state of traditional linguistic culture - a culture of stories and dance songs, of names "for every riffle in the creek", of an "Indian Language" now spoken by very few. This contrasts with an orientation to grammatical pattern, our structuralist legacy, which bequeaths us both a powerful theory of language description and fundamental ambiguities about the social mooring of linguistic systems. In the local/nonlocal encounter over 'authentic' Tolowa we have a multiparty conflict: academic linguists undermine local efforts in the name of an always-earlier, more systematic system; certifying officials seek expert opinion, to validate an image of ethnic cultural-linguistic tradition-as-test; and local people question the presumption of a general representation, while recognizing that without efforts at such representation, the language tradition is indeed 'lost'.

In such encounters, ideology is found: in basic assumptions about what counts and practices which build representations (documents, descriptions, images, and stories) reflecting those assumptions; in efforts to authorize one representation and undermine another, efforts rooted in conflicting and complicit institutional, disciplinary, and local-political commitments to define tradition and language. Such assumptions, practices, efforts and commitments define the academic 'us' as well as the ethnographic 'them'. We do not escape ideology with a science that studies language use rather than grammar, that considers power as well as context, but we may sharpen our historical appreciation of the overlaid and often conflicting visions of language and doings with language that comprise our ideologies and theirs.

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⁸ As Indian scholars such as Vine Deloria, Jr. have argued for the past several decades (Deloria 1969).

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