Youth Culture, Language Endangerment and Linguistic Survivance

BILINGUAL EDUCATION & BILINGUALISM

Series Editors: Nancy H. Hornberger, *University of Pennsylvania, USA* and Colin Baker, *Bangor University, Wales, UK*

Bilingual Education and Bilingualism is an international, multidisciplinary series publishing research on the philosophy, politics, policy, provision and practice of language planning, global English, indigenous and minority language education, multilingualism, multiculturalism, biliteracy, bilingualism and bilingual education. The series aims to mirror current debates and discussions.

Full details of all the books in this series and of all our other publications can be found on http://www.multilingual-matters.com, or by writing to Multilingual Matters, St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

Youth Culture, Language Endangerment and Linguistic Survivance

Leisy Thornton Wyman

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS
Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Wyman, Leisy Thornton.
Youth Culture, Language Endangerment and Linguistic Survivance/Leisy Thornton Wyman.
Bilingual Education & Bilingualism: 85
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Education, Bilingual--Alaska. 2. Yupik children--Languages. 3. Yupik children--Education. 4. English language--Study and teaching--Alaska--Foreign speakers. 5. English language--Study and teaching--Yupik speakers. 6. Linguistic change--Alaska. 7. Alaska--Languages. I. Title.
LC3733.A5W96 2012
370.11709798–dc23 2012009133

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-740-0 (hbk)
ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-739-4 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters
UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.
USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.
Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

Typeset by Techset Composition Ltd., Salisbury, UK.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Short Run Press Ltd.

Contents

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, *quyanaqvaa* to the people in the pseudonymous village Piniq for the privilege of working on this study and book. Many, many people in Piniq have supported me and my family, and generously shared their lives, stories and concerns. Every day in my teaching and research I have used wide-ranging lessons learned from my former students in the Real Speaker group, even if I have only offered a selective version of my experiences with them here. The families, community leaders, and the Get By youth within deserve my deep thanks, as well, for allowing me to research their language use and everyday lives. I am grateful to the principals, teachers, associate teachers and teacher aides in Piniq for sharing observations, granting access to classrooms and providing feedback along the way.

In this book, I share information collected for the narrow, yet important, purpose of helping educators and scholars understand young people's language learning and language use. All my experiences with community members in Piniq, however, helped me make sense of this work. Over the past 20 years I have been profoundly moved by the warm reception I have received upon each return visit to Piniq. It would have been easier to write a book solely about community members' strength, wisdom, generosity and humor than a book that also focuses on the challenging situation of rapid language shift and endangerment, as I have done here. I pray that I have lived up to the responsibility that comes with so many accumulated acts of friendship and trust, and with my choice to write this book, in particular.

Many additional Alaskan colleagues deserve my thanks. Alice Fredson graciously and patiently provided translation assistance with good humor and attention to detail. Paul Ongtooguk shared valuable advice about how to work as an outsider in Alaska Native communities, and helped me place the Piniq case in historical perspective. I am especially grateful to have deepened my understanding of Yup'ik language education through work with Patrick

Marlow, Fannie Andrew, Abby Augustine, Elena Dock, Grant Kashatok, Mary Jane Mann, Veronica Michael, Gayle Miller, Rachel Nicholai, Paul Paul, Nita Rearden and Tim Samson. I am also thankful for the feedback and insights of Walkie Charles, Oscar and Sophie Alexie, Ray Barnhardt, Phyllis Morrow, Chase Hensel, Bev and Carl Williams, Ann Fienup-Riordan, Michael Krauss, Steve Jacobson and Yup'ik educators in the LKSD bilingual institute and SLATE language planning and assessment classes.

Many scholars at Stanford University provided key support and helped lay the groundwork for this study. Shirley Brice Heath inspired me with her studies of the ethnography of communication and youth language, and mentored me as I designed and carried out my original ethnographic research. Guadalupe Valdés profoundly influenced my understanding of bilingualism and the Piniq study through her research and teaching, and many helpful discussions. My thanks go to Penny Eckert for her critical insights and enthusiasm, and her work on language, gender, youth and language shift. I thank Joshua Fishman, in addition, for his many relevant contributions to sociolinguistics and for feedback on research design and preliminary findings. For early feedback, I also thank Ray McDermott, Mica Pollock, Lissa Soep, Jane Collier, Miyako Inoue, Kenji Hakuta, Melissa Brown, Les Field, Jacqueline Shea Murphy and Jason Raley.

While working on this book, I was very fortunate to collaborate with a talented group of researchers on a series of comparative conference panels, volumes, chapters and articles on Indigenous youth language. For their collegiality and scholarly contributions, I thank Teresa McCarty, Sheilah Nicholas, Tiffany Lee, Pila Wilson, Kauanoe Kamana, Jacqueline Messing, Shelley Tulloch, Deborah Augsberger, Mary Eunice Romero, Barbra Meek and Ofelia Zepeda. Over the past six years at the University of Arizona, I have also had the pleasure of working with an outstanding group of colleagues and students. I thank the LRC community for support and many enlightening discussions. For feedback on this book, I especially thank Perry Gilmore, Norma González, Iliana Reyes, Brendan O'Connor, and students in my classes on Language and Youth Culture, Educational Linguistics, and Indigenous Languages, Cultures and Schooling. I also thank fellow faculty members and students of the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) for helping me learn about Indigenous language educators in 'the Lower 48'.

The research within was made possible by funding from a Spencer Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, National Science Foundation Linguistics Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant #BCS-0001914, and the College of Education at the University of Arizona. Sections of Chapters 6 and 7 have been adapted and expanded from a previous article with permission from the

Journal of Language, Identity and Education (Wyman, 2009). For permission to conduct the formal study within and help during the sharing of research findings, I thank the 'Piniq' Traditional Council and local school board, and the Lower Kuskokwim School District. I also greatly appreciate the team at Multilingual Matters, including Nancy Hornberger and Colin Baker, Tommi Grover and the anonymous reviewer, for their feedback and patience.

Heartfelt thanks go to friends in San Francisco, Vancouver and Tucson for supporting my young family during my many research trips away from home. I am indebted to my parents John and Julia Thornton for decades of consistent interest and encouragement, and my in-laws Bob and Sue Wyman for help with childcare. Last but not least, I thank my unusual husband Michael for supporting me in too many ways to name, and my children Jules and Evy for bringing me tremendous joy and perspective throughout their lives.

Mistakes within are solely the fault of the author.

Introduction

Young people play pivotal roles in shaping the most dramatic sociolinguistic phenomena of our times, including the global consumption and employment of new technologies (Sefton-Green, 2009), the negotiation of language practices in immigration (Dorner *et al.*, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, 2008) and the spread of new cultural forms such as Hip Hop (Alim *et al.*, 2009). In this book, we will consider young people's roles in yet another key worldwide sociolinguistic phenomenon: the increasing endangerment of the large bulk of the world's languages. Scholars predict that 50–90% of the world's languages will no longer be spoken by the end of this century (UNESCO, 2003) and recent decades have seen an upsurge of scholarly concern and discussion over what to make of the phenomenon. Many books and articles discuss the loss of global linguistic diversity and the trend toward language shift and endangerment in specific communities. Researchers are also describing efforts to document, teach and reclaim languages on the brink of disappearing (for recent examples, see Harrison, 2007; Hornberger, 2008). College-level courses, international conferences and websites devoted to related topics, such as the documentation of Indigenous ecological knowledge, have multiplied in recent years. In the burgeoning field, academics have now begun to analyze the very discourses of language endangerment and accompanying arguments for linguistic rights (see, for instance, Duchêne & Heller, 2007; Hill, 2002; May, 2005).

Few studies to date, however, have investigated how youth broker language maintenance, shift, endangerment and/or language revitalization. Unless young people learn heritage languages and grow up to raise new speakers, language shift can progress rapidly within the course of a generation (Fishman, 1991, 2001). Scholars note that young people's individual and collective language decisions can 'ripple through societies to create a tidal wave' of sociolinguistic change (Harrison, 2007: 9), and are beginning to attend to the ways in which youth act as 'everyday language

policymakers', in endangered language communities (McCarty *et al.*, 2009). Still, we have much to learn about how such 'tidal waves' happen, and how young people navigate and transform the sociolinguistic worlds around them.

Once youth under a certain age have uniformly stopped speaking their heritage language, collective changes in patterns of language use may appear to evidence a concise 'choice' on the part of a particular generation to abandon a heritage language. If we see youth speaking mostly English, for instance, we may assume that their parents chose not to pass on a heritage language at home. On the other hand, if we see young people wearing clothes or singing lyrics related to global media flows, we may also – based on the most superficial observations – assume that youth themselves have been lured away from marginalized communities and linguistic practices by the promise or imagination of a flashier, more privileged life elsewhere. Yet these assumptions are problematic. Adding a second language to a community does not mean that a community or even a subgroup of a community will inevitably stop speaking their heritage language. A growing body of research further demonstrates that many Indigenous youth in rapidly shifting communities are not simply abandoning their heritage languages by 'choice', but rather express powerful yearnings to become confident heritage language speakers (discussed in McCarty & Wyman, 2009). As we will see in this book, youth may value and actively attempt to maintain heritage languages with one another, even as their own changing peer practices drive processes of language shift and endangerment. Further, as this book demonstrates, vicious cycles of reduced *resources for* and *increasing doubts* about bilingualism can emerge quickly and become the force behind the 'tidal wave' of change described above *in spite of* young people's, as well as adults', efforts to maintain heritage languages.

To understand how youth, families and communities move along trajectories of language endangerment in such settings, we must examine how language learning and beliefs about languages change over time within complex *linguistic ecologies* – social networks of language use that root within, and extend beyond specific communities and geographical places (Hornberger, 2002; Kramsch, 2002). We must additionally consider how educators and community members look to youth to gauge the prospects for the future of heritage languages, and consciously and subconsciously tailor their practices over time accordingly. Importantly, we must further recognize how youth themselves negotiate challenging positions vis-à-vis their heritage languages, demonstrating what I will call *linguistic survivance* – the use of languaging and/or translanguaging to creatively express, adapt and maintain identities under difficult or hostile circumstances – as they (1) grow up in rapidly

changing sociolinguistic environments and (2) are educated in schools under pressure.

Overview of the Study

Central Alaskan Yup'ik Eskimo, commonly referred to as Yup'ik, was one of only two out of 20 Alaska Native languages still spoken by children in 1980 (Krauss, 1980). Between 1980 and 1995, the number of Yup'ik speakers dropped from 13,000 to 10,000, indicating that Yup'ik was rapidly disappearing. In 1995, children spoke Yup'ik comfortably in only 14 out of 64 Yup'ik villages (Iutzi-Mitchell, 1992; Krauss, 1997). By 2007, veteran Yup'ik educators reported that increasing numbers of children in some of these villages, as well, were beginning to speak mostly English (Wyman *et al.*, 2010a, 2010b).

This book examines a decade in the life of Piniq (pseudonym), a remote Yup'ik village with less than 700 residents located roughly 500 miles off the road system in southwestern Alaska near the Bering Sea. Portrayed within is a community in a rapidly evolving, yet early and uneven stage of language shift. Told here is also the story of two cohorts of youth in Piniq. Youth in the older group spoke mostly Yup'ik with one another in the mid-1990s, and were later described by local Yup'ik teachers as 'the last real speakers' of Yup'ik. The majority of youth in the younger group, in contrast, spoke mostly English with peers *only five years later* in 2000 and 2001, even as they used bilingualism to 'get by', as community members put it, with adults and one another.

Over the course of the book, we will follow individuals and groups in Piniq, witnessing how young people used language as they participated in schooling, moved in and out of village and urban spaces, interacted with teachers, peers and family members, attended church, consumed global forms of media, interpreted village political struggles, took their first jobs and learned gendered subsistence practices. Additionally, we will consider how youth in Piniq responded to strong local messages about the importance of speaking Yup'ik as their own heritage language skills diverged and eroded in a context of ongoing language shift. Examining the changing contours and internal complexities of bilingual peer culture over the course of a decade, we will explore the ways Piniq youth navigated the interstices of global, State, school, community, family and peer practices, brokering both linguistic continuities and language endangerment. Importantly, we will also see how adults and youth used language to mediate broader societal changes, as local youth culture emerged as a driving force of language shift.