



Mehrsprachigkeit

Vom Alten Orient bis zum Esperanto

Herausgegeben von
Sebastian Fink,
Martin Lang und
Manfred Schretter

dubsar 2

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Orality Overwritten

Power Relations in Textualization

Sonja John

Introduction¹

Language is a fundamental site of struggle for Indigenous² discourse because language has itself played such a leading role in the colonization of Indigenous nations.³ The colonial process itself begins with language; the very wiping out of distinctive collectivities under an undifferentiated term such as “Indian” is an example of this process in operation. The control over language by the settler society—usually achieved by displacing Native languages with the language of the colonial power and by installing itself as a “standard” – remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. In this chapter I will analyze the debate over the external introduction of a different orthography that aims at “saving” an Indigenous language. Yet, some of the Indigenous people concerned criticize this foreign orthography and the same old mechanisms of domination and control that are applied to install this orthography as the “standard.”

In 2004, two Europeans, an anthropologist and a linguist, founded the so-called Lakota Language Consortium (LLC) to fundraise for and market their products – Lakota language books. The new orthography the Czech linguist advocates resembles the Czech orthography – making it easier for Czech people to read. The Europeans predominantly use the internet to give the impression that this “Czech orthography” is a Lakota product and the standard for writing Lakota. This pro-

¹ For critique and shared reflections on this article I thank Magdalena Freudenschuss, Brigitte Bargetz, Claudia Brunner and Christine Hentschel.

² I prefer the term “Indigenous” over “Native American” or “American Indian” because of the implicit notion of coming from the land, which is both an accurate self-description of most Indigenous peoples’ origin stories and a political declaration about claims to the land. The concept of Indigenous also challenges the anthropological and legal preoccupation with the focus on the question of “first occupancy” or “prior occupancy.” I also occasionally use “First Nation” or “Native” interchangeably with “Indigenous.” Whenever possible I use the self-referential expression, in this case Oglala Lakota.

³ The labeling of Indigenous societies as “nations” is standard in the USA and Canada. Recently, this nation-to-nation relationship has been acknowledged by U.S. president Barack Obama in the Declaration of the National Native American Month (The White House 2013).

voked protest from even the more reserved community members and language teachers. In classrooms, homes, internet forums, and over the local reservation radio, Lakota people voice concern over this external system for spelling their language. The question of this paper is not the quality of this orthography but the coercive process of its implementation, its impact in Lakota communities, and how the LLC uses the internet in this case of the oral/literate equation.

This paper intends to contribute to the discourse about the tension between textualization and oral traditions. While linguists developing a different orthography might be intensely thoughtful of linguistic details, they, at times, continue making languages subject to colonial practices of appropriation, subordination, and control. The act of introducing a different orthography of a Native language into the Native community carries implications beyond linguistic specifics; it is not an intervention into empty space as this language revitalization project implies intervention in the independence of the Lakota in cultural, political and economic dimensions – theoretically as well as practically. A population that has experienced its language being threatened and altered by colonial processes tends to read a subtext to external language politics. The case looked at here is one where artificially stored knowledge in books and on the internet may once again privilege the written (modern) over the oral (traditional).

The Power of Textualization

Eric A. Havelock (1989) has already drawn attention to the fact that the so-called computer age has essential influences on language, especially in the oral/literate equation. The invention of the computer has raised the issue of the production of an artificial memory:

“It is the issue of memory and its relation to language and its use, oral and written, that the computer has thrust into the forefront of our consciousness.... Until we face psychologically and instrumentally the problem of accumulating memorized language, we have not yet got to the root of the issue as between orality and literacy”.⁴

He refers to John Dewey and Greek language behavior before Plato, to argue that states of mind are connected with conditions of communication.⁵ Applying these thoughts to the oral/literate equation, one could assume that the oral is performed by an “agent/patient, a doer, a sufferer, and an enjoyer” (ibid.) while the literate is performed by the thinker. He mentions that Harold Innis critiqued the invention of the roller press, which, through its mass production of newspapers distorted the mind to focus on the moment, and, as a consequence, caused readers to lose the

⁴ E. A. Havelock, *Orality and Literacy. An Overview*. In: *Language and Communication* 9 (2/3), p. 88.

⁵ Havelock, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 89.

“capacity to think forwards and think backwards”.⁶ For anthropologists the tape recorder, then, brought the possibility to record original voices, primarily to preserve for future anthropologists to interpret. One question of the oral/literate equation is if the anthropologist can appropriately interpret and translate this knowledge. Another question – for the anthropologist – is if this Indigenous knowledge has been approached too late to be original and is not partially influenced by Western literacy. Various trends reflect a reaction to a fundamental technological change (press, tape recorder, computer, internet). Eric Havelock closes: “And the structure of language is acoustic Meaning is derived from sound . . . [and] many linguists have not exploited the theoretic possibilities of this enough. They are always tempted to go back to the text, the script”.⁷ Concerned with the concept of storage, he poses the questions: “How is memory preserved under oralism? What methods are used to preserve it under literacy? What are the differences? As you change the need for a given form of memorization, do you not also change the content of communication?” (ibid.). Hence, does the LLC by storing a different orthography of the Lakota language in a new book and in the internet also alter the memory of the language? Facing the problem of accumulating memorized language psychologically, what is at the root of the issue as between orality and literacy in the Lakota context? How does storing in the internet affect the oral/literate equation? And does the internet distribute the power to access and alter equally?

Although the LLC targets all of Lakota speaking country and beyond with its products, I focus on the Pine Ridge Reservation, home to the Oglala Lakota, since that is the region with which I am most familiar. As a graduate of the master’s program in “Lakota Leadership and Management” at the tribally controlled Oglala Lakota College, I have been sensitized to matters of appropriation and became familiar with numerous Oglala decolonization attempts. In fact, the pure existence of the college was an act of decolonization. My critique of the LLC’s attempt arises from this focus on sovereignty and decolonization in Indigenous matters. I intend to bring the debate I have witnessed in the community into the academic discourse where the continued applications of these neo-/colonial strategies also need to be discussed.

When using the term colonialism, I refer to the process by which the European and Euro-American powers reached a position of economic, military, political and cultural domination in much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. According to Philip G. Altbach (1977), neocolonialism differs from traditional colonialism in that it does not involve direct political control, leaving substantial freeway to the respective country. I understand neocolonialism as colonial policies performed by imperial powers with new hidden mechanisms in order to reinforce influence and dominance over Native communities. The outright destructive policies of elimi-

⁶ Ebd. p. 90.

⁷ Ebd. p. 97.

nation and assimilation changed to more indirect and subtle forms of domination. The Dakota writer Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (2012) argues that the concepts of neo-colonialism or post-colonialism do not apply in the Native American context, since the USA still treats the Native nations as dependent colonies; the political independence of Native North American societies has never been formally recognized after the USA unilaterally declared the end of the bilateral treaty era on a strictly nation-to-nation relationship in 1871. Despite the ongoing colonial relationship, I find the post-colonial language helpful in identifying the root causes and processes at work and to indicate which similar aspects of domination still remain. The works of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Paulo Freire have provided a language widely used in the field of Native American studies to articulate Indigenous struggles against ongoing colonization. Indigenous peoples exist in relation to their dominant societies, in several realms quite similarly to the situation of colonized countries. The Lakota, as well, contest the power of the USA by struggling for the recuperation of their cultural difference and by making strong claims for more autonomy and sovereignty. One of the fields of struggle is the revival of Indigenous languages. Further, research into the occasions, practices and effects of epistemic violence helps to grasp the problematics of knowledge appropriation, interpretation, and representation that delegitimize Lakota epistemologies.

Applying a political methodology of listening, I have conducted interviews with community members, language teachers and have exchanged emails with Jan Ullrich, the linguistic director of the LLC. In line with Michael Jackson's (1988; 1996) anthropological method of radical empiricism, interviewing Lakota people involved with language revitalization acknowledges the partiality and shifting nature of knowledge and lodges "anthropological subjects" as active agents in the representation of their culture rather than static objects of scholarly contemplation. Oral history provides a useful tool to reconstruct, recover, and publicly memorialize local history, a history from below. While many historians regard oral testimony as secondary to archival sources, its validity has been insisted upon by Indigenous scholars (A. Wilson 2004; Miller 2008; L. Smith 1999; Denzin/Lincoln/Smith 2008). Since the grand narratives of struggle capture only a fraction of its lived reality, I asked how the Lakota society react to the introduction of a different orthography, thus incorporating Lakota epistemology and knowledge production. I have also analyzed an online chat room on the social media platform Facebook. In this "Lakota Language Group" different positions regarding the "Czech orthography" engage in discussion and tendencies become visible.⁸

⁸ I use these chat room discussions as a resource very carefully as they express personal opinions that might change. I also only consider posts by group members I know to be authentic.

The “Czech orthography” was developed to save Lakota language and culture. The question of how non-Natives can help Natives is continuously posed at talks relating to Native Americans. The Dakota Indigenous studies scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has replied to this question that “little can be done about history except to know it there is nothing ‘fair’ in a colonial and imperialistic history that oppresses Native populations. Rather, this history expresses elimination as a solution.” She concludes that what Native Americans want is a fair playing field.⁹

To a lot of Native Americans the question of how to retain the Indigenous language is a highly emotional one. To understand this one has to take Cook-Lynn’s advice and look at the imperialistic history of elimination and oppression, and at the U.S.-Native relations of forced assimilation that aimed at breaking tribal affiliation and identity. Three historical facts are important to bear in mind when non-Natives regard it as their mission to “save” a Native language via replacing an accepted and widely used orthography: firstly, the loss of Native languages is a result of colonialism, forced assimilation and oppression. This loss constitutes an historical wound that continues hurting throughout generations. Secondly, revitalization efforts have been pursued since the 1960s and 1970s, primarily as a means of decolonization. Language revitalization is still a topic, but not a new topic for community members, linguists and hobbyists¹⁰. Thirdly, an orthography of Lakota has already existed for more than 150 years. Stephen Riggs published a Dakota dictionary in 1852. Adapting Riggs’ style, Eugene Buechel collected Lakota words systematically and wrote a dictionary and a grammar book in an orthography which (with minor variations) is still accepted and used on a daily basis among fluent speakers and writers and in language learning materials. This spelling system does not originate from within the Lakota community, it constitutes colonial knowledge. However, Lakota people made this orthography their own and relate to it in an affirmative way. In the following I will recall the introduction of the written Lakota, refer to language politics from the past, and mention prior Lakota language revitalization projects before analyzing LLC’s strategies, how they affect the oral/literate equation in Pine Ridge, and how the community responds.

Introduction of the Written Dakota/Lakota

Like many Indigenous languages, Lakota existed orally and was first transcribed by missionaries and later reworked by linguists. Prior to contact with Europeans, Lakota history was documented through winter counts, that is, paintings on deer or buffalo hide. In the mid-1800s Stephen Riggs (1852) wrote a Dakota dictionary

⁹ E. Cook-Lynn, *A Separate Country*. Postcoloniality and American Indian Nations, p. 72.

¹⁰ On hobbyism compare Colin Taylor, 1988: *The Indian Hobbyism Movement in Europe*. In Washburn, W.E. (ed.): *Indian White Relations*, vol. 4 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by W.C. Sturtevant. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 562–569.

– one of the three dialects of the language of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. A few decades later the Jesuit Eugene Buechel further developed Rigg’s orthography for the Lakota dialect, which is the now the one – with minor variations – that is accepted and used among the Lakota. Buechel spent most of his adult life among the Lakota on the neighboring Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations in western South Dakota. He wrote a Lakota translation of the Bible (Buechel 1924) and a Lakota grammar book (Buechel 1939) as well as – published post mortem – a Lakota dictionary (Buechel 1983) and a collection of Lakota tales and texts (Buechel 1978). These resources, along with the orthography, are used today by those who are fluent Lakota speakers and writers. Through a process of appropriation the Lakota made this orthography their own. There are minor variations of the spelling system (some use a few diacritic markings while others do not) but in general Lakota off and on the different reservations can read each others’ spelling. This commonly used orthography is referred to as “Buechel orthography,” whereas the new spelling system promoted by the non-Lakota “Lakota Language Consortium” has been referred to as “Czech orthography.” For the purpose of simplification I will use the terms “Buechel orthography” and “Czech orthography” to distinguish between the established and the latest orthography in the following.¹¹

Historically, cultural opposition, enforced assimilation, government exploitation, and missionary efforts succeeded in reducing the use of many Native American languages. For centuries, European colonial powers and their successors showed their respect for the essential role of Indigenous languages in affirming distinctive cultures and identities by trying to eliminate them. Separate cultural and political identities hindered the settler societies’ ability to exercise plenary control in order to annex land and exploit resources. Hence, the colonial strategies utilized were to either transform Indigenous societies or to extinguish them. In the U.S. context, Christian mission schools were put in charge of “civilizing” the Natives. “Kill the Indian to save the man,”¹² was the mantra. At mission schools children were not allowed to speak their Native languages. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported in 1887, “Deeming it *for the best interest of the Indian* [...]: In all schools conducted by missionary organizations it is required that all instructions shall be given in the English language. [...] This provision must be faithfully adhered to, and no books in any Indian language must be used or instruction given in that language to Indian pupils in any school where this office has entered into contract for the education of Indians”.¹³ All that was Indigenous – language, history and culture – was constantly undercut with physical and psychological punishment (Trafzer/Keller/Sisquoc 2006; Bowker 2007). In the case

¹¹ The term is used in parentheses throughout the paper to indicate its shortcomings.

¹² Well-known quotation of Richard Henry Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian School. For example in Jeffrey Ostler, 2004: *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 151.

¹³ F.P. Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, p. 175f.; emphasis added.

of the Lakota speakers, the older among the Lakota have experienced this form of violence firsthand, while for the younger generation it became part of the collective memory of colonial legacy and intergenerational trauma. This culture shock resulted in the loss of or restrictions in participating in Indigenous cultural practices. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon made an epistemic foundational statement about language; stating that the colonized person “will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being” in direct ratio to his mastery of the colonial language.¹⁴ English became the preferred language because of the negative association with Lakota culture.

Since the 1970s, in tandem with the emerging Red Pride era, local Native American initiatives have attempted to revive their languages and to reduce the social distance from these languages that still exists even on the reservations. Reversing language shift and language loss remains a crucial issue in many Native American communities; it is a matter of maintaining a unique culture while strengthening tribal identity and sovereignty as a separate political entity. These language programs vary in methods and materials; while projects from off-reservation institutions usually focus on written materials, on-reservation projects center on the oral, for example through immersion courses in which only the Native language is spoken.

Revitalizing Efforts

On the Pine Ridge Reservation as well, Lakota fluency was a negative marker in the local hierarchy until the 1970s. The negative socio-psychological aspects tied to the language use are seen as the main reason why first language Lakota speakers discontinued speaking it to their children – to make it easier for the children growing up. Today, a number of older Lakota still speak Lakota with each other, but the younger generations grow up with English as a first – and oftentimes only – language. Another reason is the pervasive presence and sheer dominance of English outside and even inside the home through television and other media. Hence, language disuse and language loss are not effective choices but results of oppressive policies, language politics, and the situation of coloniality. Nevertheless, against all odds, the Lakota language did not vanish. Many fluent speakers were unwilling to assimilate fully and resisted silently, resigning themselves to a surface compliance while covertly keeping their own language and cultural practices.

The early revitalization movement was in the beginning closely intertwined with the political struggles for self-determination and decolonization of the 1960s and 1970s. The Lakota have used their language as a tool for uniting their communities, which today are scattered on and off reservations throughout several

¹⁴ F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 18.

U.S. states and Canadian provinces.¹⁵ With higher levels of self-determination they aimed at increasing their ability to make effective decisions about their culture, identity, religion, economy, and legal system without interference from external actors. Indigenous languages are important tools for emphasizing the cultural and historical uniqueness of Indigenous communities as well as Indigenous peoples' cultural distinctness from non-Indigenous governments when it comes to gaining recognition from nation-state governments in order to increase Indigenous sovereignty.

Oglala Lakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation addressed the language loss again in the 1980s and 90s. "Lakota language is your identity and if you lose it you lose your identity," said Oglala elder Marie Randall at a conference.¹⁶ The language has been identified as crucial for mental health, identity, productivity, and community well-being. John Around Him added: "Young girls and boys lost their language. Anything that is going to be culturally related (involves our) Lakota language. ... We need to teach our Lakota language now"¹⁷. At said conference there was a strong consensus that there must be reinvigoration of the Lakota language in order to drive the renaissance of the traditional culture and values necessary for functioning societies. One of the organizers, Elgin Bad Wound, at that time president of Oglala Lakota College, changed the curricula of the college's departments accordingly, offering Lakota language classes and strengthening Lakota content and methodology in the programs of study. On the master's level Lakota is to be utilized in the classroom as much as possible and language classes have been made a requirement for non-cultural related degrees as well (Oglala Lakota College 2005). The continued use of European languages is one of the most important aspects of neocolonialism and the impact of the colonial heritage on Native populations. However, as the linguist Jon Reyner stresses: "Just translating a non-Native curriculum into the Native language and focusing on vocabulary and grammar is in no way part of a decolonization agenda. In fact, it could be viewed as nothing more than a new way to approach colonization". (Reyner 2010, 143).

The second organizer of the Lakota Elders Traditional Government Omniciye conference, Gerald One Feather, also the former president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe among many other positions, highlighted these perspectives as a delegate to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues within the United Nations. After fourteen years of drafting and diplomatic concessions, in 2007 the United Nations adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by a vote of 143 to

¹⁵ I.e. meetings of the traditional Oceti Sakowin Okolakiciye, the Seven Campfires; compare Elgin Bad Wound, 2000: Oglala Lakota Tiospaye Association. Reclaiming our Heritage and Building a Better Way of Life. Martin, SD: Oglala Lakota Tiospaye Association.

¹⁶ Bad Wound, Elgin / One Feather, Gerald, A Report on the Lakota Elders Traditional Government Omniciye. Kyle, p. 22

¹⁷ Ebd. p. 26.

4, with only the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in opposition (United Nations 2008). These four major settler states signed the declaration four years later after protests from within their nations. In general, the Declaration supports Indigenous societies in their efforts to decolonize and regain self-determination. Several articles relate to language issues. Article 14 declares specifically “the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” Lakota people – some well-known like Gerald One Feather, others less so – have worked on this issue on the local as well as the global level for many decades. As a result, today, on the Pine Ridge Reservation educational institutions at many different levels offer Lakota language classes. Immersion classes are offered at kindergartens and during summer holidays. From Head Start through the school system and into college, students who wish to can learn the Lakota language. However, despite these various attempts and programs, the vast majority of children/learners do not achieve fluency. The various explanations for this situation are multi-causal, including the psychological effects of intergenerational trauma and shame.¹⁸

In addition to the disregard of psychological aspects, linguists have paid little or no attention to the social and cultural aspects of orthography. Jan Ullrich stated he found the root cause of language loss: “untrained Lakota language teachers use inconsistent ad-hoc spelling” (December 12, 2012; email). The LLC spelling reform would offer higher quality language instruction. Linguists tend to see the issues as practical ones of getting an orthography accepted by its potential users. In the past, linguists concerned with Native American languages have largely considered the transformation of an oral community into a literate one as a neutral cultural process, depending exclusively on the existence of a phonological orthography. Thus, language is treated scientifically and reduced to writing. Yet, orthography and literacy itself can be understood in terms of social practice since reading and writing are situated within a social process. Lakota people had to make this process their own twice; by first learning English and then also learning to write Lakota according to Buechel’s orthography.

The relationship between linguists and Native people has not always been easy, partly because of the linguists’ focus on description and analysis for scientific purposes instead of on helping to produce readily accessible, understandable teaching materials for language restoration. Oftentimes, linguists do not address the Native community they are studying but speak rather to the scientific community. In terms of orthography, linguists were concerned with representation in the writing of a spoken language; the focus was thus laid on phonology and phone-

¹⁸ B. Charging Cloud, *Lakota O'un. Lakota Immersion through a Cultural Camp*, p. 6; T.L. McCarty / M.E. Romero / O. Zepeda, *Reclaiming the Gift. Indigenous Youth Counter-Narratives on Native Language Loss and Revitalization*. In: *American Indian Quarterly* 30 (1/2), p. 36f.

mics since the researchers' interest in orthography was mainly the transcription of spoken language. Most language revitalization conferences feature presentations on topics such as grammar, vowel systems, orthography, and curriculum development; they are more concerned with preservation than with revitalization. "Preservation" aims at documenting the language for future efforts via oral recording with the remaining speakers and collecting documents. "Revitalization" refers to studying contemporary language use and restoring it as a living language in the community. Jon Reyhner, a well-cited linguist in the debate over Indigenous language revitalization, suggests enhancing the "Three Ms" of language revival: methods, materials, and motivation (Reyhner et al. 1999, xviii). Given the great need for learning materials, linguists can make a great difference in language re-growth.

For the Lakota, financial resources for language revival were not readily available. Only within the last decades have U.S. government agencies supported efforts to address reversing the language shift among Indigenous peoples. They have been criticized as offering too little and too late. With the U.S. signing of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in late 2011, Indigenous leaders will put more pressure on the federal government to fulfill its obligation to secure Native languages as spelled out in articles 13, 14, and 16. For the present, there are already more financial resources available for language revitalization than there have ever been. With these resources available, language restoration has become a priority in many Native communities. But who is in the best position to obtain this financial support? Non-Natives are often more successful in applying for grants than Natives are, as it takes a certain language, experience, and institutional affiliation to write successful applications. For example, after previous unsuccessful village-level Haida language funding requests, an application for a Haida language project by the non-Native linguist Jordan Lachler was funded as proposed.¹⁹ On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation local activists who already worked as volunteer teachers put in funding applications that were rejected, while non-Native organizations like the LLC or the "Iyapi Glukinipi Lakota Immersion Childcare" receive funding through the Administration for Native Americans and other institutions. Both organizations substantially serve non-Native audiences. LLC products are mainly purchased by non-Native customers, and two of the four children serviced in the Lakota immersion daycare are the white daughters of the white director. These cases exemplify that non-Natives are more successful in gaining funding for operating Native language projects. These projects, in turn, promote them to take more powerful and institutionalized positions to bring external agendas and orthographies into Native communities.

Why did Indigenous language revitalization work become a prioritized matter with support from federal departments and solidarity groups in the Global North?

¹⁹ J. Breinig, Alaskan Haida Stories of Language Growth and Regeneration. In: *American Indian Quarterly* 30 (1/2), p. 114.

Natives and non-Natives alike often view Indigenous languages as legitimate representations of “authentic” pre-Columbian culture, nonmarket economy, and ecological harmony. This perception is founded on non-Native colonial conceptions of Indigenous languages as indicators of an Indigenous group’s “authenticity” – the stereotyping of Indigenous culture as unchanging and unaltered. This discourse establishes that valid Natives are only those who speak a Native language. In the eye of many anthropologists and linguists, the authenticity of Lakota identity is evaluated in direct ratio to the mastery of Lakota language. To paraphrase Fanon: who speaks Lakota will come closer to being a real Lakota being. This “othering” of Native Americans continues today, as the political scientist Karl Markus Kreis pointed out critically. In much of the sympathy for Indigenous peoples he witnesses, he identifies most of the elements of the paternalistic authority formerly promoted by the missionaries: “Indians are viewed as ‘good,’ simple, peaceful, close to nature, ‘like us’ or rather ‘like we ought to be,’ and therefore we know what is good for them”.²⁰ Non-Natives know that it is good for “Indians” to speak “Indian.” And, non-Natives know how to best write Native languages. The diverse motivations of non-Natives to “help” Native Americans have been discussed extensively elsewhere (Calloway/Gemünden/Zantop 2002).

The policy of exoticizing requires that Native Americans embrace this restrictive notion of their cultural identity, narrowly defined and specified by the non-Native eye. In this process the Natives’ cultures have been re-coded along selective, exotic and homogenizing lines, so that only one (usually the most “traditional”) element of what is in fact a number of modes-of-being for members of a particular community becomes acknowledged and sponsored as the only legitimate cultural marker and common denominator for all members of that Native community. In this way, the political category of whiteness is once again reconstituted as a universal norm, which operates as the invisible but defining center. Culture has thus been “redefined as something that characterizes [only] non-western or minority groups”.²¹ Racialized others are reconfigured as lacking in agency and individuality.

Indigenous languages used to provide perhaps the most tangible indicator of Natives’ cultural and historical uniqueness to outside audiences. In North America, Indigenous language revitalization has assumed a greater significance with the growing phenomenon of “white wannabes” – culturally and genetically non-Indigenous individuals who claim Indigenous identity. In this context, language has served to separate Natives from white hobbyists and further solidifies the notion that language is the ultimate proof of cultural legitimacy. The sentence “Become fluent or die trying” on the LLC (2013a) website might sound like a joke to some, like a challenge to others, and like an affront to many. Viewed in the context

²⁰ K.M. Kreis, *Indians Playing, Indians Praying*. In: Calloway, Colin G. / Gemünden, Gerd / Zantop, Susanne (eds.): *Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. p. 209.

²¹ A. Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, p. 29.

of the elimination of Indigenous societies unwilling to acculturate to European norms of living, this slogan is more than cynical. Equating language ability with success or deadly failure also poses the covert question of who is more Native – the Native by blood who does not speak the language or the non-Native hobbyist and wannabe who has learned it to some fluency level. Further, these neocolonial mechanisms of knowledge appropriation, self-authorization, exploitation, and exoticizing manifest the existent set of power relations of paternalism without challenging the ways in which they are configured and maintained, while at the same time individualizing “failure” to speak fluently and depoliticizing its structural causes. As a result, new dependencies on outside experts are installed; Native experts are silenced and eliminated from their positions, thus experiencing repetitive trauma and structural violence.

In Lakota country language revitalization has first and foremost been a grassroots affair. Immersion programs started after middle-aged or elderly Lakota discovered that the use of their languages had become restricted to them and would vanish as collective cultural knowledge once they had passed on. Many Indigenous nations adopted immersion programs, which teach a language as a major part of the school curriculum (Johansen 2004). Most of these schools rely on elders as teachers and substitutes. Many Lakota first language speakers who were not formally educated as teachers made the effort to obtain teaching certificates so that they could work as substitute teachers. Opening a venue for first language speakers to work as teachers was a long-lasting struggle; even more so for many of the first language speakers are the least formally educated in a system that for decades discriminated and outlawed Native language and cultural practices.

Ivan Star Comes Out, Robert Two Crow and Bryan Charging Cloud are among the Lakota first language speakers and educators who spend their free time at the radio station KILI to talk about the language issue, share stories in Lakota, and give lessons on the air (Kalloch 2014). They and others endeavor to create summer camps and to start immersion programs in schools (Charging Cloud 2012). They try to install language nests for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren who will hopefully become fluent first language speakers. In order to achieve these nests, Lakota elders are needed as the primary resource, active teachers and authority for Lakota language and culture.

Lakota Language Materials

Profound linguistic research into the Lakota language was pursued by the Jesuit Eugene Buechel, who lived and worked at the missions on the Pine Ridge Reservation (Holy Rosary mission) and neighboring Rosebud Reservation (Saint Francis mission) from 1902 to 1954. In general, most work on Indigenous languages represents efforts to analyze and categorize these languages into linguistic families. Outsiders primarily wanted to be able to communicate well enough to teach the Christian religion and European ideas. Eugene Buechel’s motivation was also

to Christianize the Lakota, but his aim was not to completely substitute Catholic for Indigenous belief; instead, he sought to understand the underlying Lakota worldview, values, and belief systems in order to identify what was compatible with Christian values and hence worth fostering from the missionary's perspective.²² Consequently, Wanbli Sapa (Black Eagle), as Buechel was called among the Lakota, became a serious learner and examiner of the Lakota language. Several books resulted from his research, which form the foundation of most of the Lakota language materials in classrooms today: a Lakota-English dictionary, *A Grammar of Lakota*, and *Lakota Tales and Texts*. The last was written and compiled by Ivan Stars, Peter Iron Shell, and Eugene Buechel, and dictated by members of the Oglala (on Pine Ridge) and Sicangu (on Rosebud) Lakota. Buechel further developed an orthography that has a relatively consistent relationship with pronunciation but also recognizes regional differences in pronunciation.

Later collections of Lakota stories were also written down in Buechel's orthography, for example those by the Dakota author Ella Deloria (Rice 1994; Rice 1993). In fact, most children's books written in Lakota use Buechel's orthography (Rose/Sokolow/Looking Horse 1992). Lakota themselves develop variations in writing and teaching styles, and in terms of language learning materials slight differences are noted at various on-reservation and off-reservation institutions. While the University of South Dakota uses language materials from the "Lakhota Project" at the University of Colorado (1976) the tribally controlled colleges utilize knowledge from within the reservation communities. Language books in Albert White Hat's orthography (an adaptation of Buechel's style, yet distinctively different) are used at Sinte Gleska University on the Rosebud Reservation, in addition to the language books used within the Lakota studies department at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge reservation, which are based on Buechel's orthography. The language book *Hecetu Yelo* used on the Pine Ridge Reservation was developed by community members Karen White Eyes (aka Karen Lone Hill) and Charmaine Wisecarver (Oglala Lakota College 1989). The material used at the off-reservation Black Hills State University (1978), developed by David J. Mathieu, Bertha Chasing Hawk, and Elgin Bad Wound, uses Buechel's orthography.

Of course, if a language is to be living, it has to change and move. Lakota themselves have been listing more modern words and putting them into writing, continually evolving their own teaching materials. Two of the grandsons of Ivan Stars, who co-compiled *Lakota Tales and Texts* with Buechel, actively publish about and in the Lakota language. In order to develop a vocabulary that is not stuck in another century, Edward Starr (1994) composed the *Dictionary of Modern Lakota* including terms for items of modern daily use that had become part of Lakota life. His brother Ivan Star Comes Out (1996) published columns bilin-

²² K.M. Kreis, *Indians Playing, Indians Praying*. In: Calloway, Colin G. / Gemünden, Gerd / Zantop, Susanne (eds.): *Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, p. 47f.

gually in the *Indian Country Times*; a number of his essays were later compiled in the book *Lakota Eyapaha*. These are just a few examples of Native Lakota language speakers and Lakota language writers on the Pine Ridge Reservation who are engaged in broadening Lakota language use in Lakota communities, from within these communities themselves.

Hence, a profound body of texts and documentation exists in the Lakota orthography developed by Buechel: among them transcriptions, notes on public figures and common people, personal letters and meeting minutes. Eugene Buechel also collected, sorted and catalogued Native plants in the Rosebud area. He preserved these plants and herbs and listed them by their Latin botanical terms along with their Lakota and English equivalents (Rogers 1980).²³ More importantly, Buechel's orthography of Lakota lives on in Lakota communities. Most fluent speakers today write their letters, diaries, emails, or even Facebook posts in Lakota. These are observations from communities on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The situation on Standing Rock where Jan Ullrich did most of his field work may be different, as he has stated that "Lakota language literacy has been nearly non-existent in the 50 to 60 years" (December 12, 2012, email). However, when I read communication from literate Lakota from Standing Rock I am not so convinced that they are non-existent.

The So-called Lakota Language Consortium

Jan Ullrich, linguistic director of the LLC, started travelling from the Czech Republic to the USA and to Lakota reservations in 1992. He later studied education and linguistics and received a Master's of Science degree from the University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. While studying linguistics, Jan Ullrich focused on Lakota. Today he teaches English in a small town in the Czech Republic. Once a year he travels to the United States to teach the Lakota how to write their language. To make it easier for himself to read Lakota texts written in the "Buechel orthography," he added markings to the letters, very similar to the ones used in the Czech language. He found the different spelling systems based on Eugene Buechel's dictionary inconsistent and confusing and aspired to install a standard orthography. Hence, he set forward to further develop the orthography used by the "Lakhota Project" at the University of Colorado (1976). Ullrich paired up with the European anthropologist Wilhelm Meya and formed the "Lakota Language Consortium." Through an affiliation with the University of Indiana, they received funding through the Administration for Native Americans to publish language books. Jan Ullrich rewrote Eugene Buechel's dictionary as well as parts of Ella Deloria's *Dakota Texts* in the "Czech orthography" before producing LLC's own language learning materials, which the consortium is selling to educational insti-

²³ Digitalized and online available under: <http://groups.creighton.edu/sfmission/museum/documents/plants/01.jpg>.

tutions and interested learners throughout the USA and abroad. When changing the orthography, the LLC mainly changed the phonetic notations and added extra letters to the words. Three examples are as follows:

“Buechel”:	“Czech”:
Wicohan	Wičhó h’aj
kokipesni	khókíphe šni
honitaninpi	hónithaj’iŋpi

The LLC unilaterally declared this orthography as the standard for writing Lakota, naming it SLO (Standard Lakota Orthography).²⁴ While non-Native linguists and other second language learners welcome the many diacritic markings, which assist them in proper pronunciation of the words, Lakota first language speakers and Lakota language teachers criticize the “Czech orthography” for being overloaded with markings and – foremost – for the way it is being brought into Lakota schools. What seems like a minor matter of a few diacritic markings is in fact a touchy subject – that of neocolonial domination. The term *orthography* stems from the Greek *orthographía* and means literally *correct writing* – corresponding to the German *Rechtschreibung*. Who has the authority to decide the standard orthography of a language? And who decides there has to be a standard, one correct way of writing? On their website the LLC announces the Czech Jan Ullrich as “the foremost authority on the Lakota language” (LLC 2015). Despite Indigenous demands for sovereignty and self-representation, some anthropologists and linguists cling to their professional authority to represent other cultures and adjudicate authenticity.

Ethnocentricity might very well have played a role in the LLC’s favoring of the phonemic system used in the Czech orthography. While explaining the cultural and political connotations orthographies carry, the linguist Mark Sebba notes: “It is surely not a coincidence that the very scholars and scientists who ‘discovered’ the superiority of phonemic writing systems are virtually all speakers of languages which use alphabetic (i.e. quasi-phonemic) scripts”.²⁵ From a scientific standpoint, Sebba cannot find unquestionable advantages of this system. In linguistic academia, the “[c]ontroversy continues over the question of whether a phonemic orthography (on the principle ‘one sound one symbol’) is necessary,

²⁴ Compare the website of the LLC at: <http://www.lakotadictionary.org/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=1316> (February 12, 2013). One member of the online Lakota Language group recommended “that ‘SLO’ should be an acronym for ‘suggested Lakota orthography’ until such time as the Lakota people themselves arrive at a consensus on how to write their own language. Anything beyond that could rightfully be perceived as aggression” (FBLLG-LT1, March 16, 2012).

²⁵ M. Sebba, *Spelling and Society. The Culture and Politics of Orthography Around the World*, p. 16.

beneficial or simply irrelevant to learners and/or mature readers”.²⁶ He reports that researchers have produced experimental evidence to show that diacritic marks above letters in a phonemic script actually decrease reading fluency.²⁷ This statement refers to language learners. Many literate Lakota have stated that they find the “Czech orthography” very difficult to read because they hardly recognize the word underneath the many markings. Yet, while fluent Lakota, in their majority, dislike the “Czech orthography,” the external linguistic community favors LLC products; one plus factor being the phonemic spelling that makes it easier for outsiders to pronounce the words.²⁸ The LLC adds quality products to the corpus of materials available for teachers and learners to use. These materials include storybooks, videotapes, and textbooks aimed at enhancing language abilities through a focus on reading and writing. Most Indigenous peoples, however, do not focus on preserving language in a presumably natural state as it is known that languages and cultures change. Instead, the focus of most on-reservation language programs lies on revitalization, on bringing the oral back into daily use. Fluent speakers do not become tired of stating “that families must retrieve their rightful position as the first teachers of Native languages”.²⁹ In contrast, the LLC takes knowledge, rewrites it, stores it and defines the altered knowledge as allegedly authentic and as the standard.

The main selling-point of the LLC products using the “Czech orthography” is the argument that they help save the Lakota language. One selling strategy and method of authorization is to make it appear as if the products originate from within Native communities. On the LLC’s Facebook page they describe themselves as: “A nonprofit organization made up of Native community leaders, linguists and volunteers” (LLC 2013e). That the organization’s name is misleading indicate several comments by their Facebook users which imply their assumption that the LLC is a Lakota organization. Another selling strategy and method of authorization is to make it appear as if the products originate from collaboration with Lakota language experts. A tribal member and language instructor recalls that Wilhelm Meya and Jan Ullrich from the LLC had traveled through Lakota country to gather support for their orthography. He and numerous other community members and Lakota language experts complain that the LLC came only once to chat with them but their names were listed as resources in the LLC books without their approval (EI-RWB-2013). Bryan Charging Cloud, an activist in Lakota immersion and revitalization, said he did not offer any information nor did he lend

²⁶ Sebba, *Spelling and Society*, p. 11.

²⁷ Ebd. p. 20.

²⁸ The German linguist Rebecca Netzel (2012, 95), in her book *Kontrastive Linguistik. Ethnologische Analysen*, regards LLC’s dictionary as a standard reference.

²⁹ B. E. Johansen, *Living and Breathing: Native Languages Come Alive*. In *American Indian Quarterly* 28 (3/4), p. 570. This is also a common position among the first language speakers of the Lakota Language Group forum.

support to the LLC, but his name was listed as a resource (December 14, 2012, email). Like Bryan Charging Cloud, many Lakota who had been designated by the LLC as supporters have distanced themselves from the organization and their products. With the long list of names acquired in this questionable manner, the LLC approached tribal council members and tribal education boards to get formal letters of support, giving the misleading impression they work closely with Lakota community members and gained their consensus (EI-JYS-2013). Through the list of alleged cooperators and the letters of support by tribal officials, the LLC receives plenty of financial support, as its website declares: “The publication of the *New Lakota Dictionary* was made possible through the generous contributions of the Dakota Indian Foundation of Chamberlain, SD, the Tatanka Oyate Foundation of Germany, the Grotto Foundation of Minneapolis, MN, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community of Lake Prior, MN, and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe” (LLC 2013c). On its website the LLC continuously asks for donations: “The most important thing you can do is to contribute generously. Your donations help us produce essential and otherwise unfeasible revitalization materials. Your generosity helps us undertake important projects that could otherwise never be done” (LLC 2013d). Of course there are other ways to produce language materials, but such local efforts do not have the institutional backing and resources behind them. Post-colonial theorists would call this the privilege of whiteness.

To obtain money from the ANA grant, the LLC has to partner up with reservation schools and it has in fact been successful in convincing administrators to purchase its products. But why do reservation schools buy these products? Disregarding the controversial orthography, LLC products are of high quality in content and design; most of the previously extant materials mentioned earlier are in plain black-and-white ring binders, due to lack of funding. In addition, many school administrators are not Lakota speakers; the irritation a different orthography brings along may not be obvious to them. Yet another explanation for the preference of non-Native products and personnel is referred to in Indian Country as the “great white father syndrome” (FBLLG-FL3, December 29, 2012), the experience that Indigenous people tend to have more confidence in non-Natives than in themselves. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn called this effect of colonialism “internalized oppression”.³⁰ The phenomena of differing positions according to race was described as sociological literature as early as 1903 by W.E.B. Du Bois who coined the phrase “double consciousness,” which he described as follows: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by a tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”.³¹ On the Pine Ridge Reservation, Wounded Knee District School and Red Cloud Indian School (the former Jesuit Holy Rosary

³⁰ M. Gonzalez/E. Cook-Lynn, *Politics of Hallowed Ground. Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty*, p. 87.

³¹ Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Soul of Black Folk*, p. 3.

mission) have bought LLC products. While they are used in class at Red Cloud, Wounded Knee District School teachers refuse to use them. At Red Cloud, a first language speaker and long-time teacher with the school who refused to switch to the “Czech orthography” has lost his job (EI-RWB-2013).

The LLC entered into a partnership with Sitting Bull College (at Standing Rock Reservation) to offer a Lakota Language Action Education Program based on LLC products (LLEAP 2013). The program motivates students on the emotional level – “Graduating students will be at the forefront of educating the next generation of fluent speakers” – as well as on the wallet level – “You must teach for the same amount of time that you were funded” – thus, motivating students to stick with the program and move on to become language teachers (*ibid.*). Through the certification of language instructors literate in the “Czech orthography” this spelling system is likely to gain more ground.³² The LLC is thus building up a market and dependency on their materials in the long run.

Despite the misleading name of the “Lakota Language Consortium” the LLC products are not Lakota products but imports into Native communities (and non-Native markets). The LLC depends on local educators to identify the market and to serve as door-openers for non-Native institutions. The Lakota schools and students buy these books and the LLC gets to sell them, finance their jobs and boost their careers. “So who benefitted? Certainly not one Lakota,” a Lakota instructor says (EI-KI-2012). Promoting these books to Lakota schools is profitable to non-Native organizations and individuals. There are two prominent terms for *white man* in Lakota. First was the Lakota descriptive term *wasicu* (*wasi icu*) which means literally “takes the fat.” Later Lakota also took up the self-referential term of the settlers, white man, *ska wicasa*. Historically, the white man made himself noticed for taking what is of value. Today, value is put on the rare resources left; in this case the cultural resource of an Indigenous language. Again, outsiders appeared to take this resource, define it, and tell the original owners how it is really done. The Native language is once again alienated, this time through a “Czech orthography” and offered on the market. Now it is the LLC that tries to dominate and control the Lakota language by standardizing and “normalizing” its orthography – to “normal” Czech spelling.³³ In postcolonial studies terms I identify the exploitation mechanism, including strategies of creating dependency on financial support and technical assistance and the obligation to buy certain products from the dominant society. LLC products written in a foreign orthography reflect the

³² Lakota members of the LLC Board of Directors continued writing in the Buechel style and did not adopt the Czech style (i.e. Ben Black Bear).

³³ Declaring this system as a norm is somewhat ironic since the Czech style is itself marginal; in Europe the Czech language had to assert itself against Russian and Slovenian, and the phonemic writing as used in Czech is used in only a few languages worldwide, not to mention the experiences Czech people encountered in revitalizing their own language on their own terms.

needs of external people trying to learn Lakota, rather than those of the Indigenous population. The European linguist and anthropologist announce themselves as having the normative authority to declare the one correct way of writing this language, thus illegitimizing writing systems already in use and illegitimizing Lakota first language speakers and writers. I regard the LLC's strategies as reflecting a deep continuation of domination.

Internet and Epistemic Violence

The LLC uses the internet to present its organization as the ultimate Lakota language authority, well rooted in Lakota communities. On its website the LLC (2013a) presents its members as saviors of the Lakota culture: "The Lakota language is everybody's responsibility. With your help we can prevent the deterioration of this beautiful national treasure." Which nation does the LLC refer to? They seem to refer to the Euro-American settler state that formed a nation on the North American continent – and on Lakota land. The very expropriation of land and resources led to the weakening and, at times, destruction of Indigenous societies and their governing systems. Through U.S. colonialism the Lakota are not regarded as a sovereign nation today which, in effect, leads to the assumption among many non-Lakota that the Lakota do not possess the authority and capacity to deal with their own issues. The fact that the Lakota themselves did not form their own consortium or announce a standard orthography does not mean that they do not debate language issues, which have in fact been discussed in informal meetings for decades. While lamenting about language loss, the LLC website does not mention the political reasons for this state of affairs. The group is either uninformed about the destructive effects of settler colonialism on the American continent or does not regard the politics of elimination as relevant to language. In a short summary on "The Status of Lakota," they recognize that Native American "languages have been steadily and undeniably disappearing," which they categorize as a "historical fate" (LLC 2013b). By adopting rather than questioning the rhetoric of this historical "fate," these linguists argue they are driven by ethical prerogatives and position themselves as saviors and rescuers of the Lakota. By representing Native Americans as victims in need of rescue from losing their culture, linguists not only re-echo missionary logic of imperialistic discourses but deploy it politically in the sense that they avert attention from the destructive agendas pursued by the USA. in the past that led to the current situation of financial, political and cultural destabilization. With the various U.S. assimilation policies targeted at Native nations, these societies were constituted either as recipients of development or its instruments, but never as agents of their own development as they might understand and conceptualize it. With its historical overview, the LLC obscures and enforces persisting paternal histories and asymmetrical power relations affecting the ability of local language teachers to define a curriculum comprised as an exercise of community-based intellect. This leads to the

construction of a homogenized image of all Natives as victims and prisoners of their history, not able to take action, dependent on *white* educators to save them. *White* here is to be understood as a political definition, which represents historical, political and social privileges of a certain group that has access to dominant structures and institutions of society. The LLC, too, is privileged through the institutional backing the two white scholars receive vis-à-vis local Indigenous initiatives. This case demonstrates how dominant power structures operate discursively through a “politics of pity” (Naylor 2011) which (re)creates and perpetuates hierarchical, co-constituted relationships between and among these actors, and which (re)constitutes the identities and abilities of actors. Indigenous scholars have unraveled the mechanisms at play here as mainly epistemic violence. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) is often credited with developing the field of Indigenous scholarship as an area of focused study through her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Her work draws on and builds upon many traditional critiques of the relationship of the academy to subaltern groups, including the work of scholars in postcolonial studies and Native American studies as well as the writings of feminist women of color, feminist anthropologists, and postmodernists.

In the USA, whiteness operates alongside and in tension with, multicultural “others.” These racialized cultural “others” – both ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples – are called upon to perform official multiculturalism as an indicator of US-American benevolence as well as to be the recipients of tolerance. At the same time, they are denied agency and subjectivity (Bannerji 2000). The Lakota language, as soon as it was textualized, became incorporated in the archives of colonial knowledge, to be verified and interpreted by non-Lakota scientists. The term “epistemic violence” has been used by postcolonial researchers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987) when speaking of a form of violence produced in “knowledge.” Violence and damage can be done under the authority of science and knowledge production since their interpretations have practical and ethical consequences for people. Such epistemic violence committed by scientists cannot easily be countered by public rejection because the name of science – linguistics, in this case – has a higher status than the theoretical criticism expressed by a subjectified and marginal Other (Breinig 2006). In the Indigenous context, the suppression and erasure of Native knowledge has been recognized as a form of epistemic and cultural genocide.³⁴

The idea of epistemological responsibility has already been considered by Lorraine Code (1987), who argued that researchers need to be conscious of the consequences of their interpretations on the “other.” The American Anthropological

³⁴ B. de S. Santos / J.A. Nunes / M.P. Meneses, Opening up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference. In: Santos, Boaventura de Sousa: Another Knowledge is Possible. Beyond Northern Epistemologies, Verso, xix.; B. Duran / E. Duran / M. Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Native America and the Trauma of History. In: Thornton, Russell (ed.): Studying Native America. Problems and Prospects, p. 64.

Association has given itself a *Code of Ethics* (AAA 2009), which influenced the drafting of the *Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics* (Decoloniality Europe 2013). While the question of epistemic violence has been discussed in various postcolonial discourses on decolonizing knowledge and methodologies, Indigenous peoples are still largely erased in the language of anti-racism (Lawrence/Dua 2005). Hence, there is a need for people who are racialized to be allies; Indigenous groups tend to focus on settlers when looking for support, solidarity and allies.³⁵ When discussing resistance and revitalization, the autonomy and cultural systems must be understood in relation to the nation state and the capitalist economic system that dominate Indigenous people, historically and currently. Indigenous academics have criticized Western orthodoxies on the grounds that many Indigenous people operate multiple subject positions with regard to Indigenous identity (Green 2009). However, various representations of Native people tend to hold them captive in their perception of helpless and powerless people. In the following I will argue that the LLC commits epistemic violence through its aggressive invading of web space by altering the Wikipedia entry for “Lakota language” and by using social media as a battle field to win orthographic dominance.

Internet Chat Room Lakota Language Group on Facebook

For an analysis of the strategies of the LLC and Lakota responses I found an internet chat room on a social media site helpful. The Facebook “Lakota Language Group” is a place where differing positions regarding the Lakota orthographies come together. As of December 2012, the open group consists of over 2,000 members, most of whom do not actively engage in the discussions. The majority of the actively posting group members can be divided into three factions: (1) a few fluent, first language speakers, several of them Lakota language instructors; (2) a few LLC affiliates; and (3) many Lakota language learners or sympathizers, mostly non-Lakota. This group was founded in March 2011 and the members use the platform to discuss questions. (The question posted most frequently is how to say “I love you” in Lakota.) Lakota writers answered in the “Buechel orthography” and LLC affiliates used the “Czech orthography.” During the group’s first months, LLC affiliates frequently posted a link to the online LLC dictionary to answer vocabulary inquiries. One LLC affiliate suggested that fluent speakers should stop adding English translations to their Lakota posts and that people should look up the words themselves – in the LLC dictionary of course (FBLLG-LC1, March 23, 2011). Overall, LLC affiliates have criticized spelling differing from the Czech system to the extent that several group members were discouraged from participating in the forum at all. The confusion over spelling at times reached the level of an open controversy. One very active learner started to add to each of

³⁵ A. Smith, *Native Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change*. In: Green, Joyce, (Hg.): *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Winnipeg (MB), p. 103.

her daily “exercise sentences” the explicit remark “I ask the Lakota Elders and First Language Speakers to please help or correct me,” discouraging postings of links to the online LLC dictionary written in Czech style (FBLLG-NP1). A Lakota first language speaker wrote: “We never had a written language. So, to those of you who just now are learning how to speak, and already know how to spell the words: Leave us who spoke Lakota as our first language alone. I don’t go on to the site, because someone is always correcting a Lakota misspelled error” (FBLLG-FL4, May 8, 2011).

While the LLC points out mistakes, first language speakers encourage people to write any way, stressing that most important thing is to speak, not to write:

“Long ago, we learned our language, through thought, word and deed, through demonstrations, hearing and speaking the language. Not through book learning (wasicu way), spelling and reading is why today we sometimes don’t agree on the subject of our language. The process of learning our language is a three-step process: hearing the language spoken, understanding the language and speaking the language. The spelling is not foremost but speaking the language is” (FBLLG-FL1 (February 9, 2012).

Another Lakota first language speaker prefers the orthography based on Buechel and expresses feeling offended by the LLC:

“We might strive for minimum markings. We were smart enough to learn English that has a variety of sounds for the same letters. ... Although they have no markings, we learned the sound variations rather easily. Even for Lakota speakers that Indiana orthography is hard to read and I feel somewhat insulted for our people that it’s dumbing down our intelligence” (FBLLG-FL2, December 22, 2012).

In the education field, neocolonialism can be quite open and obvious, such as the distribution of foreign textbooks in Native schools. This new orthography is a more subtle mechanism that includes the use of foreign technical advisors on matters of policy and future teacher training and the continuation of foreign administrative models and curricular patterns. Hence the reliance on foreign experts continues, experts who seem to ignore local needs, traditions, and sensitivities. In the online Lakota Language Group one member posted:

“(O)rthography is a touchy subject for some people who are promoting their way of writing Lakota. We also have some very aggressive non-Lakota people that push for their books to be used, like it was the bible.... Many of us Lakota fluent speakers have been writing a certain way for years and years then someone comes along and says ‘no, you must write it this way.’ So it is hard for some to write a new way but I will continue writing the way I’ve been taught and the way my Lala [grandfather; SJ] wrote Lakota” (BLLG-FL1, March 16, 2012).

With its products, extensive online activities, and self-proclamation of its orthography as the standard, members of the LLC install themselves as Lakota language experts. With the “Czech orthography” available through the online LLC dictionary, more and more learners copy and paste words written in the “Czech orthography” into online forums, increasing its visibility, thus cementing the seeming norm of this new, alienated orthography. The modification of the entry for “Lakota language” on the popular online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* was an important and effective step in this direction. Now the entry itself – most likely altered by LLC affiliates – uses the “Czech orthography,” lists LLC products as first references for self-study, and presents the “Czech orthography” used in LLC products as the “Standard Lakota Orthography” (Wikipedia 2013). Wikipedia readers get the wrong notion that the LLC is a Lakota organization, and they get the wrong notion that the “Czech orthography” is the standard orthography developed from within Lakota communities. Thus, the Indigenous knowledge is expropriated from the respective Native communities by European hobbyists, linguists and anthropologists. To counter this expropriation, Lakota would have to enter into an equally aggressive *white* online battle to claim web territory and knowledge. The – mainly older – Lakota first language speakers engage offline in revitalization projects. Several Lakota fluent speakers opposing the “Czech orthography” in the online forum criticize the self-authorization of the LLC:

“There are many Lakota who are spending their energy putting together the pieces it takes to revitalize/help/learn Lakota. ... To say there is no Lakota working towards helping the language is being deliberately blind or just flat out stupid or mean. Either way, it’s not true. There are many Lakota who spend their time and energy helping more than just posting on Facebook” (FBLLG-FL5 (July 16, 2012)).

Eric Havelock points out that when language has already been surrendered by some overriding authority, then “[c]onsequently, what survives tends to be restricted to entertainment rather than to its original functional purpose of preserving law, and technology and custom” (Havelock 1989, 92). LLC, with its emphasis on the written instead of the oral, focuses on learning methods that are rather artificial to the Oglala Lakota. By using characters foreign to English as well as to the accepted and used Lakota alphabet, the LLC further alienates the written Lakota and requires writers to download a certain software to write “appropriately.” The knowledge is taken and altered to please external hobbyists, making it harder for Lakota to revitalize the traditional spoken word.

One main strategy of neocolonialism is self-authorization and disregard for existing and persisting local knowledge bases and local authorities. Being left out and disadvantaged in this way is damaging enough for Lakota elders. Given the historical fact that they themselves were not allowed to speak their language in boarding schools but maintained it against all odds, yet now are being put in a situation where non-Lakota tell them they cannot teach their language or should

write it in a different style revives collective trauma and goes once again into this historical wound. Here we come to the elimination component ascribed by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn to imperialistic policies. While the LLC declares the “Czech orthography” to be the standard and thus puts itself in the position of Lakota language experts, it eliminates the Lakota elders from their role as the ultimate language authorities and teachers. This appropriation of the written Lakota language is neocolonial continuation of colonial practices. While previous generations were silenced by violence in the boarding school for speaking the “wrong” language, current Lakota learners are being silenced for writing their language “wrong.” As a consequence, several Lakota quit participating in the internet forum after their spelling was extensively corrected by LLC affiliates. The Native language has been silenced once again.

Devaluing Orality and the Elimination of Elders

The LLC states on its website: “Native languages are important for the same reasons language is important to any group. It is a fundamental human right of expression – a right that arises out of thousands of years of linguistic cultivation, wherein each generation carefully passes on its language to the next” (LLC 2013). However, through the new orthography this generation of fluent first language speakers is cut off from “carefully passing on their language” because their role as experts when it comes to their own language is taken from them. This has concrete consequences on the subject level to a point when they cannot even help their children and grandchildren with their homework, as a community member recalled:

“Me and my son, he’s a junior at Red Cloud [High School], get into a lot of conflicts over proper pronunciation, wording, meaning etc. Our old language is fading to new Czech style orthography. My son was given a D for writing a paper the way I know and not how the school required and taught them. He had to re-enunciate his paper to ‘proper wording.’ What the heck is up with that!” (EI-CMLFT-2012).

A Lakota instructor at Oglala Lakota College feels that the “Czech orthography” is being forced onto the Lakota (EI-CMOLC-2012). She does not want to use the materials produced by the LLC in the classes she teaches and is wondering what is going to happen when the first high school students who have had to switch to Czech writing at Red Cloud go on to college. In these ways, the new orthography creates a lot of irritation and conflicts.

The LLC website also states that “Lakota is unique from languages like English because of the intimate way it is tied to the pre-reservation world.” However, it excludes this link to the pre-reservation word, the elders who have heard the oral history from their grandparents in their Native language. The LLC consciously targets Lakota children for they are more “open” to their orthography.

Jan Ullrich states: “And though there are some ‘old school’ people that claim it [the “Czech orthography”] shouldn’t be used, there are tens of thousands of young people that rely on it and more and more each day” (December 12, 2012, email). The head count has begun, again. The Lakota elders are – though not intentionally – eliminated from the role of the teacher and ultimate language authority. Given this context, the LLC-credo “Revitalizing Lakota, One Child at a Time” (LLC 2013a) is perceived more like a threat than as a salvation by first language speakers.³⁶ In addition, former language politics have focused on children – most prominently the boarding schools but also the numerous solidarity groups raising money “for the children,” seemingly harmless pedagogic “help” under the mantle of humanitarian care. Facing the problem of (externally) accumulating memorized language psychologically, as Havelock suggests, the root of the issue between orality and literacy in the Lakota context lies in the repeated delegitimizing of Lakota epistemologies and the repeated targeting of Lakota children to introduce colonial knowledge – the “Czech orthography” – into Lakota communities.

Orality Overwritten

The deep conviction of the LLC’s self-authorization became evident when Associated Press author Kristi Eaton (2013) was looking for contact persons to inform her article on the decease of the Lakota linguist Albert White Hat, Sr. in June 2013. Albert White Hat, Sr. from the Rosebud Reservation, worked for the tribally controlled Sinte Gleska University for decades, and produced language materials with a consistent orthography developed from Buechel’s style. However, in her article Eaton did not quote White Hat’s family, friends, or colleagues at the college, but rather the LLC. Based on its web presence, Eaton regarded the LLC as having the authority to speak on Albert White Hat’s behalf. Ironically, through the work and promotion of LLC products the organization actually disregarded and devalued the work of White Hat, and at conferences criticized White Hat’s orthography as “wrong.” However, the European anthropologist Wilhelm Meya was contacted and cited in the article, calling White Hat a “warrior” and hoping that “White Hat’s legacy won’t go unrecognized” (Eaton 2013: A3). Stating, “We are, after all, losing speakers every year,” Meya included himself in Albert White Hat’s Lakota first language speakers’ community (*ibid.*).

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe was the first of the Lakota tribes to take legal action against the self-authorizing practices the LLC committed by utilizing names of Lakota language experts without their consent to obtain funding for their projects. On December 5, 2008, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe adopted Resolution No. 2008–295 stating:

³⁶ In addition the residential schools aimed at separating children from the influence of their parents in order to educate them in the non-Native way.

“WHEREAS, issues of non-native American sources entering the reservation and school systems with their own welfare in mind; and their entities are utilizing individuals’ names without consent for the sake of contributors lists to mislead the public and further receive support of unsuspecting school districts, school boards, or programs

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that any individual, entity, or any other source that wishes to research or document any information regarding the Lakota Language, History, and Culture must first go through the approval of the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council and Administration or designated entity such as Education Committee, RST Tribal Education, local Collaborations Groups, or Advisory Committee.”

In a next step, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe adopted Tribal Resolution No. 2012–343, on December 13, 2012, declaring Albert White Hat’s Lakota orthography to be the standard on the Rosebud reservation: “THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe hereby adopts the Official Rosebud Sioux Tribe Lakota Language Orthography recommended by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Education Department.” The tribe thus banned the LLC and its “Czech orthography” from the reservation and its educational system.

In Pine Ridge, a debate on introducing a law to protect intellectual and cultural property did not yet result in tribal council action. In a newspaper article, however, critique on the “Czech orthography” was softly voiced. While giving an account of his own negative experiences as a Lakota speaker at Holy Rosary Mission (nee Red Cloud Indian School), Ivan Star Comes Out warns of the negative effects of the “Czech orthography”: “I believe another deterrent to language acquisition and a contributor to language loss is the continual introduction into our dilemma new and ‘better’ orthographies or alphabets and grammar books” (Star Comes Out 2014).

There is no doubt that efforts to revitalize the Lakota language are important for several reasons as outlined above, including strengthening Lakota identities and political sovereignty, and as a means of communication. I have argued that the approach of the LLC is a reflection of a thinking that is still rooted in colonial and racist structures. Why make such a fuss about it? I have focused on this debate over the introduction of the different orthography – a seemingly harmless and good cause – because it is just one example of a persistent trend to depoliticize Native American issues in both academia and solidarity work. Why are Native Americans being treated as the subordinate – or at times superior – and exotic “other”? Discussions about racism usually have a macro-political perspective. In this case, too, Natives’ realities experiences, thoughts, and feelings have been ignored. But these realities should be at the center of contemplation. Theoretically, the Lakota have the option to choose between colonial textualization or fostering oral traditions. But practically – do they have a choice? Or are they disadvantaged vis-à-vis the neocolonial power structures benefitting non-Native organizations?

Through the focus on the written language to “save Lakota” the attempts to revitalize oral Lakota are weakened. Whereas the sheer dominance of English marginalized Lakota, now the “Czech orthography,” through its dominance, marginalizes the Lakota speakers and writers using the Buechel style who stress that the first priority is to hear and speak Lakota before reading and writing. The act of overwriting the local orality via the internet reflects the continuing epistemic violence and brutality of colonialism in language politics.

Language revitalization was a political matter, a means to decolonize and to make decisions without interference from external actors. But with the LLC attempt interference and dependence are at the center. I wish then to close with a perspective from within the Lakota language discourse and to let a language instructor have the last word:

“LLC is a form of hegemony – language takeover. As a first language (Lakota) speaker I prefer not to use their Czech orthography as we already have one established for many, many years. The Buechel dictionary may not be perfect but it contains a lot of information from our proficient Lakota speakers of the past. Anyone or any Lakota who wishes to learn and speak our beautiful language must consult and work with those of us who are first language speakers. Remember this tradition – passed on from one speaker to another” (FBLLG-FL3, December 29, 2012).

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