The Role of Language in Ideological Construction of Mayan Identities in Guatemala

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This paper describes the ways in which Mayan identities are ideologically constructed through language practices. It explores language ideologies based on the analysis of metalinguistic commentaries and code switching incidents in Momostenango, a K'iche' Maya town in Guatemala. This study demonstrates how the K'iche' Mayan language serves as an icon that portrays and as an index that marks Mayan identities. I argue that social categories are constructed based on typification of certain forms of speech onto which ethnoracial distinction is projected.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of language in ideological processes of Mayan identity formation in Guatemala. Recent studies of language ideology and identity have made a major contribution to theorizing identities both as ideological constructions of difference (Gal and Irvine, 1995, 2000) and as fluid, plural, and ambivalent subjectivities (Irvine, 1996; Rampton, 1999; Woolard, 1998). Using semiotic tools for the investigation of the practice of language, known as 'iconic processes' (Gal and Irvine, 1995, 2000) and 'indexicality,' (Silverstein, 1976), I examine the interplay between language ideology and ethnic boundaries.

In order to describe how differences are ideologically constructed, I utilize the concept of 'iconicity.' In doing so, I pay attention to how sociocultural differences are constructed as seemingly inherent distinctions. According to Gal and Irvine (1995), we tend to take the 'typical' people, objects, and events to be the 'real' world, ignoring the complexities of the real world. Gal and Irvine's (1995, 2000) discussion of three iconic processes suggests how distinctions are made between 'self' and 'other' in perceiving language variation. First, 'iconicity,' the seemingly inherent connection between a language and a group of people; second, 'fractal recursivity,' the projection of an opposition onto some other level, intra onto inter-community level or vice versa; and third, 'erasure,' the process of ignoring any variation within a group, thereby typifying individuals as a homogenous group of people.

The connection between identity and ideology is mediated by the process of "indexicality" (Silverstein, 1976). The notion of 'indexicality' can be applied to language choices that "carry information about the speaker's identity" (Urciouli 1996: 7) depending on certain contexts. The model in which identities are context-bound allows us to see language as a resource to be appropriated to construct ideological representation (Hill, 1995a; Bucholtz, 2001; Chun, 2001) which expresses multiple or contradictory identities (Hill, 1995b, 1998; Woolard, 1999; Rampton, 1999; Irvine, 1996). This paper demonstrates how the dichotomous distinction between Maya and Ladino (non-Mayan, Spanish speaking ethnic group) is projected onto the ideological construction of 'self' and 'other' and how iconic objectification of the K'iche' language and its speakers informs the choice of K'iche' language in various contexts.

The focus of the analysis in the present paper is creative or performative aspects of indexicality (Silversterin, 1976) found in code switching occurrences. Employing Goffman's (1974) detailed subcategorization of speakers and Bakhtin's (1981) concept of 'double-voicing,' I will demonstrate the coexistence of multiple identities in code switching utterances. Goffman (1974) classifies participants of talk as 'Figure' (theatrical character or persona projected by the actor), 'Animator' (actor), and 'Author' (composer of the play). This typology allows us to expand the categories of participation in a reported speech (Irvine, 1996). Bakhtin's notion of "double-voicing" (Bakhtin, 1981) is utilized by Rampton (1999) in his analysis of code switching incidents. Rampton shows how "speakers speak someone's else's code, but make the semantic intention of the discourse opposed to the original one" (Rampton, 1999: 305). In my study of reported speech and political speech among code switching incidents, the notions of Goffman and Bakhtin will allow me to analyze the coexistence of two identities or personae of one speaker.

In what follows I describe ethnic relations and sociolinguistic situation in Guatemala, the perspectives and concepts utilized in my study of code switching, and a brief introduction to Momostenango. In the third section, I will examine (1) how objectified personae are indexed by code-switching in reported speeches and (2) how multiple personae are claimed through code switched utterances.

2.   Ethnic Relations and Sociolinguistic Situations in Guatemala

The Guatemala case has received attention in historical, anthropological, and political accounts of ethnic relations, civil war, and recently of Mayan cultural activism. In particular, scholarly attention has focused on the rigid distinction between ladinos (non-Maya, Spanish speaking ethnic group) and Mayans (Fischer and Brown 1996). The dichotomy is often linked to cultural and social discrimination and "a system of racial ranking," (Smith 1990: 4). In particular, language has served for the past century as a primary symbolic medium of discrimination against the minority Mayan Indian groups. Mayans have been represented as "pre-modern" people because they speak "archaic" languages (Nelson, 1999), and therefore, their presence is an "obstacle" for national development (Smith, 1990). More than half the Guatemalan population who speak roughly 22 distinct Mayan languages are blamed for 'lack of national unity' by the Guatemalan state. Recently Mayan intellectuals have come forward to demand the transformation of Guatemala into a multicultural state through the institutionalization of

Mayan cultural rights. In the recent Mayan cultural activism, maintenance of Mayan languages has been promoted in an attempt to support "unified Mayan identity" (Fischer and Brown 1996). However, there is a complex array of perceptions about Mayan language and identity among Mayans who I researched in Momostenango, a highland Mayan community in Guatemala. On the one hand, Mayans denigrate K'iche' and have doubts about its potential to continue as a viable language because the command of Spanish is an economic and political necessity. On the other hand, they do recognize the value of Mayan language when they wish to claim the 'authentic Mayan identity'. It is this conflation of conflicting and ambivalent ideologies that inform language choice to be presented in this paper.

The data presented in this paper are drawn from the fieldwork in the town center of Momostenango where I spent a total of 12 months in the summer of 1999 and from August 2000 until May 2001. Field techniques include a sociolinguistic survey, formal and informal interviews, the matched-guise test, and participant observation. Momostenango is a K'iche' Mayan community located in the Western highland of Guatemala. The municipality of Momostenango is a bilingual (K'iche' and Spanish) town with the population totaling approximately 60,000 inhabitants (FUNCEDE, 1997). More than 95 percent of the population belongs to the K'iche' Mayan ethnic group. The town center is surrounded by several rural hamlets, some of which are quite remote and isolated. The distinction between the center and *aldeas* in Momostenango is not only a regional, but a socioeconomic differentiation based on the unequal distribution of economic and social resources such as water, electricity, and education. The people of the town center refer to themselves as "center people" whereas they refer to people from rural hamlets *aldeanos* ('rural people') or *la gente de la montaña* [I italicized Spanish words in the main text, but K'iche' words in transcribed texts.] ('people from the mountain'). The urban Mayans in the town center characterize rural Mayans as being 'primitive, traditional, and backwards'. In contrast, the center is considered to be "a place of change and opportunity."

3. Ideological Construction of Two Mayan Identities

In this section, I examine bilingual language practices in order to understand how the social category 'Maya' is conceptualized by Mayan Indians themselves. The distinction between Maya vs. ladino is projected onto the distinction between rural Maya and urban Maya in terms of their socioeconomic status, but the difference between urban vs. rural disappears when cultural authenticity is significant.

3.1. Indexing Maya as a Dangerous Other

In Momostenango, urban Mayans' perception of 'class' can be found in racializing discourses in which rural Mayan people are portrayed as the lower class that is the 'dangerous cultural other.' Interestingly, Momostecans' discourses reproduce common stereotypical discourse made by ladinos (I am following AAA style guide which informs that 'black', 'white', or 'mestizo' is not capitalized.) about Mayans. They replicate the categorization of 'Maya' as a binary partner of 'ladino' in understanding their position in the society. The sense of 'class' membership is expressed in many discourses about life styles such as food habit, clothing, and language use. The perception of 'other' in terms of 'class' is deployed particularly in comments on language use. Although rural Mayans are

not the only people who use K'iche' in urban Mayans' metalingusitic discourses, K'iche' is associated exclusively with rural Mayans. For example, when Germán, a rural-born urban Mayan, attended an elementary school in the town center, he felt he was discriminated against by his teachers and classmates because they made fun of his way of speaking. At that time he lived far away from the center. He said, "at that time K'iche' was just a *lengua* ('tongue')[1] for delinquency, that's all."

The association of rural Mayans with negative moral qualities such as 'delinquency' is expressed in the form of quoting rural speakers. The following example illustrates how the K'iche' language is chosen to portray an image of rural Mayans. One urban Mayan man judges Xekemeya, a remote rural hamlet, as a 'primitive and violent' place. After commenting on Xekemeya as a typical rural region, he takes the following example:

(1)   Speaker: German, an urban Mayan Indian, male, 30[2].
         He was in a county office in order to ask about the matters related to
         telephone service. In that office there was a ladina secretary and two Mayan
         Indian men whom Germán identified as 'rural' people.

01 Estuve en la oficina, esperando	I was in the office, waiting for
02 mi turno.	my turn.
03 Habían dos aldeanos pidiendo	Two rural men requested
04 que la secretaria atendiera.	that a secretary woman help them.
05 Pero ella dijo,	She said,
06 "Esperen un momentito!"	"Wait a moment!"
07 Entonces, ellos, bien enojados,	Then they seemed annoyed.
08 y el dijo,	And one man said,
09 "*we ri' are' la numial,*	*"If she were my daughter,*
10 *kinch'ay.* Puchica"	*I would beat her up.* Damn it."
11 Y despues, ellos se rieron.	Then they giggled.
12 Qué violente! Los aldeanos son	How violent! Rural people are
13 así.	like that.

This example shows the way in which a code carries a visual image. The quote in K'iche' invokes an image of patriarchal authority, violence and ignorance that urban Mayans associate with the notion of rural Mayans as the lower class. The culture of class, however, is indexed by the culture of the ethnic group: K'iche'. The K'iche' language that is closely linked to rural Mayans' culture indexes an image of typical rural people. By quoting a rural speaker, the speaker animates the rural Figure (Goffman, 1974). Furthermore, in lines 12 and 13, the speaker adds his comment on 'rural people' as a

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[1] *Lengua* is a pejorative term to refer to the K'iche' language. There are other names such as *dialecto* (dialect) or *el K'iche'* (the K'iche' language).
[2] Transcription conventions are as follows:
:: = lengthened vowel, hhh = laughter, (xxx) = uncertain, CAPS = loud speech, **bold** = word highlighted for analytic purposes, underline = utterance highlighted for analytic purpose, (.) = pause, *italicized* = utterances in K'iche', "text" = quoted speech, ( ) = description of speech situation or omitted phrases, (( )) = transcriber's comments or non-literal translation.
Spanish transcription followed the speakers' ways of speaking as much as possible although some parts can be ungrammatical.

homogeneous group who share the negative trait. Thus, appropriating K'iche' in this case means taking on a ladino's voice rather than a Mayan voice.

The following instance of code switching also occurred as a reported speech, representing a 'vulgar and tough' persona. Veronica was in her in-law's house while her in-laws had a conversation. Veronica quotes her mother-in-law who was angry at her husband because she knew that he went to his lover's house. His lover's house is located several blocks away from his house which she refers to as 'down there (*ikim*)'. Her mother-in-law was born and grew up in a rural place until she was married.

(2)   Speaker: Veronica, an urban Mayan Indian, female, 33

01 Don Victoriano vino muy tarde	Don Victoriano came really late
02 esta noche, entonces,	that night. So,
03 ella se enojó.	she (his wife) was really angry.
04 Ella le preguntó porqué.	She asked why ((he was late)).
05 El dijo que vino tarde	He said he was late because he
06 porque el fue al mercado,	was at the market,
07 pero ella dijo,	but she said,
08 *"Xinchomaj xatb'e ikim rech*	*"I thought you went down there*
09 *XU::T' T'O::T."*	*to BLO::W SHE::LL!* ((to have a
10 hhhh.	sexual relation))"

Note that Veronica translated their conversation in K'iche' into Spanish for me except the last utterance that has the obscene expression. In addition, before the code-switched quote, there are two indirectly reported speeches (lines 04- 05) which are not encoded in K'iche' although the two people reported in her story normally converse in K'iche' at home. She quotes only the woman's vulgar expression in K'iche'. In addition, she, the transmitter of the story, exaggerates the code-switched utterance by lengthening vowels and making the main part louder. The speaker of K'iche' in the story is animated as a character of the lower class in a the rural area.

While in the above two examples real K'iche' speakers are quoted, in the following example, a North-American English speaker is quoted in K'iche'. The speaker comments on my friend who was supposed to come and visit me in Momostenango, but he was not able to come because of his work schedule. It was the second time that he had to cancel his plan. Upon hearing that he would not come, my close friend Angelica got very upset about it. Then she makes the following comment.

(3)   Speaker: Angelica, urban Mayan, female, 33

01 No me gusta. No tiene palabra.	I don't like it. He doesn't keep his promises.
02 *"Kinpetik, kinpe ta,*	*"I am coming, no, not coming,*
03 *kinpetik, kinpe ta."*	I am coming, I am not coming"
04 No tiene palabra.	He doesn't keep his promises.

This example illuminates the following two aspects. First, the quoted speech (lines 02-03) was not even what the quoted person really 'said.' Therefore, this speech is imagined by the speaker. Second, the speaker quotes a non-K'iche' speaker in K'iche', as if my friend were a K'iche' speaker. The speaker animates the Figure as an unreliable persona by encoding the message in K'iche'. Thus, K'iche' was used in order to portray the Figure's conduct, which was conveyed by the Animator who transmits the original speaker's intention 'not to come.' This is related to her negative attitudes toward K'iche' and its speakers in general. The speaker portrays an imagined persona based on my story about my friend, but by appropriating K'iche' the speaker takes on a ladina's voice to judge a K'iche' speaker. That is, she projects the typical moral quality of rural speakers onto an unreliable persona's behavior.

I have demonstrated how the dichotomous distinction between K'iche' and Spanish is projected onto the ideological construction of 'self' and 'other' and how iconic objectification of the K'iche' language and its speakers informs the choice of K'iche' in various contexts. The urban Mayan speakers in the above examples are the Actors who portray Mayan identity as a lower class by using the K'iche' language. In other words, the urban Mayan speakers take on a non-Mayan's position when they distinguish 'others' from themselves. The above examples illustrate how the dichotomy of Maya vs. ladino is projected onto the distinction between rural vs. urban as primitive vs. civilized. In certain contexts, however, K'iche' conveys a positive face of Mayan identities. More importantly, K'iche' indexes 'we' instead of 'they' as shown in the next subsection.

3.2. Indexing Authentic Maya as a Regional Identity

In Momostenango the *ANN*[3] is a relatively new party which consists of three progressive parties, the leftist party, the *URNG*, and the other two parties. The ANN arose during the election in 1999, and the main goal of the party was to receive many votes from the Mayan Indians who are the majority of the population in Momostenango. Therefore, it was crucial for the *ANN* to emphasize 'Mayan-ness,' which will be discussed in my analysis of political speech in this part of the paper. 'Mayan-ness' in the following political meeting means the local (Momostenango) identity, whether one is from a rural place or the town center. The following excerpt is taken from political speeches by two pre-mayoral candidates from different parties in alliance. In this political meeting, about 60 members both from rural and urban areas gathered in order to select a mayoral candidate for the election. A(lfonso) and B(aten) are two pre-candidates each from a different party. A is a traditional Maya religious leader and primarily spoke K'iche' in this political meeting. B is a merchant who was born in Momostenango, but currently resides somewhere else for his business.

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[3] *la Alianza de Nueva Nación* (The Alliance of New Nation)

(4)   Speaker: Alfonso, a premayoral candidate of the URNG party, 45

01 A: *saqirik, tat , saqirik nan*.	*Good morning, ladies and*
02 Este momento es historico	*gentlemen.* This moment is historic
03 porque nuevamente *chanim*	because *right now*
04 *kaqab'an* seguir,	*we are going to* newly continue,
05 *kaqabanoq* que **qa**tat y **qa**nan	*we are doing what **our** ancestors*
06 *xba'noq (xxx)*.	*did*.
07 *Wechanim k'o jun* compromiso,	*Now there is a* commitment,
08 no compromiso pues, personal	which is not personal commitment,
09 solamente, sino que *k'o jun*	but there is *a*
09 compromiso *rech nu tinimit*,	*commitment for my people*,
10 verdad.	right.
11 *K'o jun* compromiso[4],	*We have a* commitment ((because))
12 **qech** *k'o meb'aa*'[5].	***we** are poor*,
13 **qech** *k'oli na taj* escuela	***we** don't have schools*,
14 *k'oli na taj* identidad.	*((we)) don't have* our identity.
15 Lo mas importante es que	The most important thing is that
16 *kaqab'an* seguir,	*we continue*,
17 *wechanim* como organizacion	now as an organization.
18 *are wa' nu jun tzij*,	*This is what I wanted to say,*
19 *we k'o* preguntas, o alguna cosas,	*if you have any* question or
20 pregunten.	anything, please ask.
21 *Maltiox chawe*.	*Thank you*.
	(Applause from the audience)
	(After A's speech, now it is B's turn)

(5)   Speakers: Baten, a pre-mayoral candidate from the party *Día*, male, 45
                    M(anuel), the moderator, male, 50
                    C(olop), a member of Baten's party, male, 45

22 señoras y señores,	Ladies and gentlemen,
23 muy buenos dPas,	good morning.
24 Quiero pedir un aplauso	I would like to ask you an applause to
25 a nuestro candidato presidencial	our presidential candidate
26 Alvaro Colom Caballeros,	Alvaro Colom Caballeros,
27 el candidato del presidente	the ((party)) presidential candidate of
28 guatemalteco.	Guatemala. (Applause)
29 Siempre agradezco que ustedes	I always appreciate that
30 trabajan como comunidades.	you work as communities.
31 Poca palabra, compañeros, yo,	Just a couple of things, comrades, I,
32 como pre-candidato de alcaldía	as a pre-mayoral candidate
33 de Masa(.) de aquí Momostenango	of Masa, from here Momostenango.
34 Soy PURO Momosteco de PURA	I am pure Momostecan with

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[4] I included the excerpts that is relevant to what is discussed in this paper among what I transcribed.
[5] Lit. 'there is poverty to us'.

35 sangre, tejedor de chamarra	pure blood, and I am a blanket weaver.
36 Solamente, muchas gracias.	That's all, thank you very much
	(Applause)
37 M: Ahora, si hay alguna pregunta,	M: *Now, if you have* any questions for
38 a Alfonso o Baten, pregunten	*A or B, please,* ask questions.
	(C raises his hand, then he is selected
	to say something)
39 C: lo unico es que yo pido que	C: The only thing I would like to ask
40 el candidato Andres Baten salude	is that Baten greet us
41 en **nuestro dialecto**.	in **our own language**.
	(then B briefly greets in K'iche')

Notice that A starts his speech in K'iche', although it is not devoid of Spanish words and phrases. However, his use of K'iche' is aimed at marking Mayan authenticity. B gives his speech only in Spanish (excerpt 5), which is not a problem in a normal situation in which the party members conversed mostly in Spanish. In addition, in A's speech, note that the phrases encoded in K'iche' mostly express 'we', 'our ancestors' or 'our people' (lines 04, 05, 12, 13, 16) which shows that his choice of words and phrases in intersentential code switching was aimed at emphasizing a local identity. In contrast, B tries to stress his local identity by saying 'I am pure Momostecan…' (lines 34 - 36). Specifically, B stresses the local identity by using the rhetorical themes such as 'purity' and 'blood,' and by stylizing the phrase (line 34) with repetition and loudness. In addition, he highlights his occupational identity as a 'blanket weaver' which is a key trait that characterizes the majority of men in Momostenango.

In addition, in line 39, Colop requests that Baten speak K'iche'. This request for code switching suggests us that Colop is highly aware of the role of K'iche' in this political meeting. That is, the function of K'iche' is to create Mayan and regional identity which guarantees political legitimacy. In addition, by making the request, he is constructing B's persona appropriate for this political meeting. Such a highly conscious code switching practice is repeated in the form of declaring that he will give a speech in K'iche' as the following excerpt shows:

(6)   Speaker: Colop, a member of the party, Día, male, 45
         After two candidates' speeches, Colop is gives a recommendation speech for
         Baten.

01 **Voy a hablar en dialecto**.	**I will speak in dialect**.
02 *la are' k'o* Masatenango,	*He lives* in Masatenango,
03 pero momosteco.	but he's Momostecan.
04*Kinchomaj* que el maneja	*I think* he can manage
05 organizaciones (xxx)06 entonces *are*	organizations. (xxx)
*la' kin*recomendo.	so, *I* recommend *him*.

In his recommendation speech, he declares that he will speak in K'iche' before starting his speech. His utterance precedent the code switching contextualizes this speech situation itself as well as his political persona. Furthermore, note that Colop is B's

supporter who knows that B has little proficiency in K'iche'. By using K'iche', C makes a point that B is 'capable' of being a mayoral candidate to represent the party. Thus, both B and C's voices coexist in this speech: C is an Animator who takes on B's voice or political legitimacy in this political speech and B is the author of C's utterance.

Code switching incidents in the above examples illustrate that K'iche' indexes political personae. Utilizing the framework of participant roles to see how identity is created in speech events, I demonstrated that 'who' is talking or 'who' is represented is contextually defined. Negotiation of multiple identities is more visible in political speeches because political speech is filled with rhetoric that is aimed at claiming one's political identity. The iconicity of K'iche' in political speech crystallizes the connection between K'iche' and social identity: Mayan authenticity. Code switching is thus a linguistic form of "indexicality" (Silverstein, 1976) used in order to define a context of language use and a persona in the context. In particular, the creative and performative aspect of indexicality is used by speakers in the construction of the Mayan ethnic identity in the interpretive context in which participants create various personae "whose voices are echoed, commented upon, or responded to." (Irvine, 1996: 135)

4.   Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated how Mayan identities of social class and of ethnicity are ideologically constructed based on the analysis of bilingual language practices. Racializing discourses rank groups of people as if they had different moral qualities. However, urban Mayans' language ideology is contradictory because it seems that they refuse to be authentic Maya when they racialize rural Mayans, but they choose to be authentic Maya when they include themselves within the category 'Maya' as a whole. Thus, K'iche' is not only an icon of what is 'primitive' in order to represent only rural Mayans, but an icon of 'authenticity' in order to represent political Mayans without class differentiation. My findings show that the idea of 'Maya vs. ladino' as a class distinction still prevails in Guatemala. In Momostenango, Indians' socioeconomic conditions are better than those of poor ladinos (Carmack, 1995). However, their self-perceptions still have not changed as we saw in their distinction between urban and rural Mayans. To conclude, the local language ideologies about the K'iche' Maya language in Momostenango construct two different, but inseparable Mayan identities: one is a lower class, and the other a de-classed or valorized ethnicity. I argue that the coexistence of the two Mayan identities reflects and reproduces the ethnoracial stratification and class differentiation among Mayans in Guatemala.

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