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We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in a Northern Athabaskan Community. By Barbra A. Meek.

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politics,” politics do enter the text in ways both subtle and obvious. Throughout the second half of the book Silko is concerned with a new neighbor who has just built a McMansion up the hill. He repeatedly bulldozes the nearby arroyo for landscaping materials. Though Silko apparently never speaks directly to this “machine man,” she understandably obsesses over his gouging and shifting the landscape she loves. After referring to him as a “dickhead” and several times wishing him dead (269), she finally settles for the comfort of knowing that despite his actions, the arroyo’s powerful seasonal wash will naturally heal the damage over time. Somewhat abruptly, she immediately remarks that this is “a good place to end” the memoir, and does so (319).

In *The Turquoise Ledge* Silko admits that “the process we call ‘memory,’ even recent memory, involves imagination” (1). As a fiction writer she is not interested in representing autobiographical truth, but is most comfortable making herself a fictional character through bits and pieces of memory and her rich imagination. Often humorously, and always genuinely, Silko shares impressions of her inner world with us, offering up her deep relation to and loving observations of the natural and spiritual world in which she lives.

Elizabeth McNeil

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We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in a Northern Athabaskan Community. By Barbra A. Meek. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010. 232 pages. \$29.95 paper.

The difficulties that accompany indigenous language revitalization are often not readily apparent until one has spent time researching and working in the field, as Barbra Meek has done with the Kaska language. *We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in a Northern Athabaskan Community* examines the difficulties and rewards of working in the field of Native language revitalization. Providing an in-depth study of the theoretical and practical questions involved, *We Are Our Language* revolves around the connections and disconnections between theory and methodology as language revitalization programs are actually applied in indigenous communities and classrooms. In bridging theory and application the difficulties of language revitalization become salient, and Meek does an excellent job contextualizing this phenomenon.

Meek positions herself early on: we learn that she spent time visiting and living with Kaska families in the Yukon over the course of a decade, and volunteered and worked with school and community language programs. Meek’s American Indian identity, university training in language revitalization, and

knowledge of an Athabaskan language (Navajo) aided her in gaining trust and building relationships with Kaska speakers. Kaska is one of a handful of Northern Athabaskan languages still spoken in the Yukon Territory. All of the Athabaskan languages in the Yukon, like most indigenous languages across Canada and America, are endangered. Given this stark fact, the goal of any indigenous language revitalization program is the same: the creation of new Native language speakers who can, in turn, pass on the language at home to their children. Even though elders, scholars, ethnologists, and linguists who work on language revitalization share the same end goal, disagreement comes when deciding on what pedagogical approaches—methods and curricula—may best achieve this goal.

Meek states the aim of her book is to “show how the practice and ideologization of Kaska have influenced Kaska language revitalization, focusing especially on moments of disjuncture and the semiotic processes that coconstruct and mitigate such contradictions” (x). This notion of disjuncture as the gap, or separation, between an ideal and its reality, between ideology and application, is key to understanding Meek’s analysis. These disjunctures affect how individuals, tribes, and governments view Native languages and language revitalization programs, and in turn “affect the ways in which the ‘health’ of the linguistic environment is diagnosed, and, ultimately, the health, or success, of language revitalization” (153). Perhaps the greatest strength of Meek’s work is her honest assessment of such disagreements and disjunctures—and her ability to illustrate how, if we orient ourselves differently, these disagreements and disjunctures can be viewed positively, as opportunities rather than setbacks.

The book’s main title is taken from the Yukon Territorial Government’s Aboriginal Language Services logo, which was created in 1991 to promote intertribal unity and support for Native language revitalization. Meek’s analysis of this logo illustrates her overall approach. Oddly for a slogan promoting indigenous languages, the logo places Native languages on the periphery as it foregrounds English. Meek also points out that the logo’s “We” unintentionally divides First Nations people who speak a Native language (mostly elders) from all First Nations people who cannot speak their Native language, reinforcing the notion that native identity is tied to speaking one’s native language and intimating that if one tries and fails to learn it, one cannot truly claim a native identity. Meek applies such nuanced analysis to all aspects of language revitalization programs.

The first chapter examines the history of colonization in Canada with a focus on how indigenous languages, Kaska in particular, have survived eras of suppression and assimilation, and also reviews the current health of native languages in the Yukon. Meek identifies various forces that over the periods of intense colonization and assimilation have worked in concert to devalue

native languages, such as boarding and residential schools and federal legislation, and then examines the growth of First Nations' language revitalization programs from the 1970s onward. The overview provided by the first chapter aids immensely in situating the Kaska language and its speakers within a historical context that is unique and yet still similar to other indigenous groups across North America. Meek also analyzes indigenous language shift economically and politically, providing the reader with a fuller understanding of the entwined forces that affect the health of native languages.

The second chapter offers a literature review and theoretical framework for evaluating indigenous language revitalization programs. Of special interest here is Meek's analysis of how current revitalization practices, programs, and ideologies actually might further language loss instead of language revitalization. She notes that what is missing in the work done by prominent linguists in the field is a detailed understanding of the politics of language revitalization, the "social, political, and ideological conditions" that cause many language revitalization programs to fail to reverse language shift (46). To navigate the difficult field of the politics inherent in indigenous language revitalization, Meek turns to linguistic anthropologists, who examine hierarchal social roles and interactions, in order to gain a greater understanding of the sociocultural processes that inhibit language revitalization.

The later chapters build upon the history and theory set out in the first two chapters. Meek examines many facets of Kaska language revitalization such as patterns of language interaction across generations and contexts, classroom practices, language iconization, attitudes toward language shift and revitalization, and the relationship between language and identity. Having done work on American Indian language revitalization, most recently in the Great Plains area, I can attest that Meek's analysis of the political and economic interests surrounding language revitalization, and the difficulties these interests create, is spot-on and will be familiar to anyone in the field. Yet Meek is not content simply to examine and analyze difficult problems and questions. After diagnosing part of the problem in reversing language shift by identifying the current orientation toward revitalization rather than socialization, in her last two chapters Meek provides avenues and potentialities for change predicated on the notion of socialization, that is, putting Native languages at the center of the socialization process for Native people in general and Native youth in particular. Meek also questions traditional notions of successful language acquisition, and deflates the notion that older students cannot acquire ancestral languages.

One of the strengths of Meek's text is the writing itself. Whether explaining theoretical concepts or personal interactions with Kaska elders, Meek's writing is clear, cogent, and captures the poignancy, vibrancy, and humor of Native communities. Academic, yet very readable, Meek's narrative seeks in often very

subtle ways to identify what has and hasn't worked in language revitalization programs, and ultimately to suggest new approaches and methodologies in the field. In short, *We Are Our Language* is linguistic ethnography at its finest.

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The Work of Sovereignty: Tribal Labor Relations and Self-Determination at the Navajo Nation. By David Kamper. Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press, 2010. 260 pages. \$34.95 paper.

In this impressive book, David Kamper explores the interrelationship between federal labor relations laws such as the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), the Indian tribes' right to self-government and self-determination, and the tribal work force. He accomplishes this through an in-depth analysis of union organizing and labor relations issues on the Navajo reservation, focusing on how Navajo health workers organized when the Navajo Nation decided to take over health care programs from the federal government pursuant to Public Law 638, the Indian Self-Determination Act.

Kamper's book is well worth reading on many levels. Although the book's focus is described as "tribal labor relations," and more specifically on union organizing within the Navajo Nation, more largely it is about how Indian nations are being incorporated into the United States political system, or how they should be. Although some may argue that Indian nations should not be incorporated into such a political system and remain separate sovereigns, this may no longer be a politically viable option. As legal scholar Charles Wilkinson once put it, the policy of the United States towards Indian nations is more one of "measured" separatism. As such, the question is not "whether" but "how" Indian nations fit within the United States' political system. In this view, there are three options for the incorporation of Indian nations: as economic entities such as corporations; as local units of governments such as municipalities; or as third sovereigns within our federalist system, or in other words, as governments with a certain amount of independent sovereignty.

Today, with the high visibility of tribally owned casinos in the forefront of economic development on Indian reservations, there is a danger that tribes could be viewed by many as mostly economic entities or, more likely, economic competitors to non-Indian entities in the marketplace. Acknowledging this issue, Kamper focuses instead on non-gaming-related labor relations within the Navajo Nation and shows why the third option, incorporation of tribes as sovereign entities, is the preferred solution. Incorporating Indian nations as