



# Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

---

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 12 Issue 2

**2018**

## AMAE Invited Special Issue

### Linguistic Hegemony and Counterhegemonic Discourse in the Borderlands

**Guest Editor**

Brendan H. O'Connor  
*Arizona State University*

**Editors**

Patricia Sánchez  
*The University of Texas at San Antonio*

Antonio J. Camacho  
*AMAE, Inc.*

**Associate Editors**

Julie L. Figueroa  
*Sacramento State*

Lucila D. Ek  
*The University of Texas at San Antonio*

**Spatiotemporal, Geographic, and Linguistic Fixity:  
(Counter)hegemonies in the Pueblo Borderlands**

**Erin Debenport**

*University of California, Los Angeles*

**Abstract**

Discussions about migration, geography, and Indigenous language use are key ways that community members perform, negotiate, and contest identities and politics in multilingual Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, a federally-recognized Native nation located within the city of El Paso, Texas. This linguistic anthropological piece illustrates how tribal members creatively use local ways of speaking and the indexing of language ideologies to critique hegemonic discourses that constrain tribal members' Native identities and call into question the tribe's status as an Indigenous community. Through "indexing"—or pointing to—dominant and emergent narratives about place and language, Ysletans are able to enhance their visibility as a nation and their political and social influence in the region and beyond. Speech genres focusing on the 17<sup>th</sup> century Pueblo revolt, the seizure of lands near the U.S.-Mexico border, and the loss of the tribe's Indigenous language allow community members to assert sovereignty, belonging, and indigeneity in the face of these criticisms by Indian and non-Indian audiences.

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.12.2.395>

## Introduction

Discussions about migration, geography, and Indigenous language use are key ways that community members perform, negotiate, and contest identities and politics in multilingual Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, a federally-recognized Native nation located within the city of El Paso, Texas. The Pueblo was established following the 1680 Pueblo Revolt and eventual reconquest by Spain when many Pueblo people and Spanish settlers fled the Northern Rio Grande Valley. Unlike the almost unquestioned sovereignty of the other Pueblo Nations, Ysleta del Sur's status is frequently challenged by both Indian and non-Indian peoples and polities, with the tribe's history of migration, challenges to maintaining a large land base, multilingualism, and urban location on the U.S.-Mexico border used against them to deride and characterize their experiences as being incompatible with being "real Indians." In this article, I show how tribal members creatively use local ways of speaking and the indexing of language ideologies to "call out" such slights and "set the record straight" as ways to critique these hegemonic discourses. Through "indexing"—or pointing to—dominant and emergent narratives about place and language, Ysletans are able to enhance their visibility as a nation and their political and social influence in the region and beyond. The use of very local—and very political—ways of speaking not only challenges the prevalent view that there are no longer any Indians in Texas, but also calls attention to the relative invisibility of the Indigenous people who live in the borderlands region, a familiar type of absence-making that stems from the "logic of elimination" that constitutes the ongoing process that is settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006).

For Ysleta del Sur, Indigenous invisibility can be partially attributed to the power of dominant binaries to erase the cultural and linguistic complexity of the region. The importance of distinctions such as Spanish/English, U.S./Mexico, and the global North/South help focus the majority of scholarly and popular attention to the border on issues such as cartel violence, political resistance, and immigration policies. However, Ysleta del Sur's invisibility is not an anomaly. Indigenous invisibility pervades other U.S. contexts as well, where Indians are depicted as out of place in modernity, as Philip Deloria describes in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004), or constrained by non-Native temporal frames (Rifkin, 2018). Ethnolinguistic examples from Ysleta del Sur highlight the Pueblo's presence in the region while also contesting the hegemonic language ideology that situates nations as ideally speaking a single, standard language (Lippi-Green 1997;

Silverstein, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Instead, community members work within a multilingual, multiply-colonized context to assert sovereignty<sup>2</sup> and belonging. Everyday interactions at the Pueblo show how new forms of language use, land management, social action, and associated language ideologies—most of which are performed or imagined by younger members of the tribe and represent new ways of inhabiting what are considered to be “authentic” Pueblo identities and stances—are not inherently counterhegemonic, but also index nostalgic discourses and established Pueblo linguistic ideologies.

In this article, I begin with Ysletans’ critiques of and discourses about migration, land loss, urbanism, multilingualism, and linguistic purism designed to “denaturalize” people in their community (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), and how historical, geographic, and linguistic discourses have been mobilized to spatially, politically, and ideologically differentiate them from other Pueblo people. Three examples of everyday talk exemplify how community members from Ysleta del Sur directly challenge the dominant model of nationhood, place, and language that these divides represent. First, one example challenges the idea that in order to truly be Native, your tribe’s population must be stable across time and space, with no history of political rupture, out-migration, or resettlement. Second, a spoken text centers on issues of land accumulation and property redress, as speakers critique the received expectation that a Native nation must possess an ample, rural, contiguous land base. Third, talk about the importance of the tribe’s Southern Tiwa language program allows community members to critique language ideologies that promote monolingualism and elevate language purity, privileging tribes and individuals that use a single heritage language that is devoid of borrowed words or neologisms. These three examples convey

---

<sup>1</sup>The study of language (or linguistic) ideologies is one of the most significant literatures in recent linguistic anthropological scholarship. Language ideologies are defined as: “[S]ets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193), and, “[C]onceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices. Like other kinds of ideologies, language ideologies are pervaded with political and moral interests and are shaped in a cultural setting. To study language ideologies, then, is to explore the nexus of language, culture, and politics” (Irvine, 2012, p. 1). Two edited volumes collect works about this topic and method: *Linguistic Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998); and, *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Kroskrity, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> It is outside the scope of this article to engage with the literature on Indigenous sovereignty, and federal and state Indian law, but the two senses of sovereignty presented here should be parsed. First, deciding one’s membership is a right of inherent sovereignty. Numerous other tenets of inherent Indigenous sovereignty have been constrained in many ways, including the supposed “right” to pursue gaming compacts with states, which limits inherent sovereignty as the U.S. Constitution places “Indian affairs” as a federal responsibility. As a very astute reviewer cleverly said when presenting this oversight to me, “In strict principle of federal Indian law, states have no business in Indian gaming but Congress cut them in (sorry, pun intended) in response to heavy state lobbying.” I am grateful to them for noticing this conflation.

powerful lessons about the social flexibility of genre conventions and the indexing of multiple language ideologies, the co-existence of hegemonic and counterhegemonic stances, and the politics of Indigeneity along the U.S.-Mexico border.

### **Community and Project Background**

The Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur had its start in a mass-migration following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, an Indigenous uprising among Tiwa, Towa, Tewa, Piro, and Keres-speaking peoples living around the colonial capitol of Santa Fe.<sup>3</sup> After the fall of Santa Fe to the combined Pueblo forces, people from present-day Isleta Pueblo (located 20 miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico) fled to the south. Those living at Isleta had not received word of the revolt in time and had therefore had not participated, and, along with Spanish survivors of the attacks, retreated to the missions at El Paso del Norte.

Why did this Indigenous migration occur? The question is controversial today for Ysleta del Sur community members, Pueblo people generally, and scholars. Some argue that the Isletans were slaves of the Spanish, or they were used as human shields during the trip to El Paso; while others argue they were willing accomplices to Spanish aggression and colonization. Like many other colonial examples, there are indications that the Spanish had partnered with local elites at the Pueblos, who benefitted from the preferential treatment they received during the occupation and were allied with the colonizers (Beltzer, 2009). One hypothesis holds that disenfranchised Isletans and refugees from other Pueblos were led to Spanish Missions in El Paso del Norte by a group of Indigenous and Spanish elites to seek protection in the wake of the violence of the revolt. This history of Pueblo migration is not limited to Ysleta del Sur, as people from many of the Pueblos fled to Hopi lands and other parts of the region following the 1692 Spanish reconquest of New Spain. Aside from a Tewa-speaking Pueblo at Hopi in eastern Arizona (Kroskrity, 1993, 1998, 2000), most of those who fled repopulated their previously-inhabited lands. While such details and controversies might seem to be of interest only for historians of Spanish colonialism, this event continues to exert influence over the relationships between people

---

<sup>3</sup> The Pueblo Revolt refers to a complex period of uprising and re-conquest that has been covered generously (if not uncontroversially) in the historical literature (Brooks, 2002; Espinosa, 1998; Knaut, 1985; Preucel, 2002; Roberts, 2005; Weber, 1999; Wilcox 2009). Indeed, many of my colleagues at Ysleta del Sur are avid readers of this literature, thus the focus of this article is not to lay out the details of these events but to describe how contemporary accounts of the Revolt and its aftermath contribute to understandings of sovereignty and indigeneity in the Pueblo borderlands.

at Ysleta del Sur, their relatives at Isleta Pueblo, the other Pueblo nations, the State of Texas, and the City of El Paso, keeping the practical, political, and emotional stakes of this 350-year old event high for tribal members and people from other Pueblos.

This migratory history, the very different sociopolitical climate for Indians in Texas as compared to New Mexico, and their status as an urban tribe, have set Ysleta del Sur apart from the other Pueblos, slowing their ability to obtain the same rights and recognitions. The tribe was federally-recognized relatively recently in 1968 (the New Mexico Pueblos were recognized as part of the 1924 Pueblo Lands Act) and was only inducted in 2013 to the All-Indian Pueblo Council, which serves as a governing body for all nineteen tribes in New Mexico. In addition to the loss in cultural capital this timeline entails, the perception of impermanence and precarity continues to have material consequences. For example, in 2016, after presenting a successful land claim, the Pueblo of Isleta was able to successfully take into Federal trust over 90,000 acres, doubling their land base. By contrast, Ysleta del Sur's only option has been to buy up small parcels of land in East El Paso, slowly assembling a larger reservation. At the "lowest point" in the tribal history, as one of my colleagues there put it, they were down to approximately 35 acres of reservation land. Elders at the Pueblo often tell stories about how "Indians were the lowest of the low" in El Paso, facing intense discrimination and pressure to assimilate. While my colleagues at the New Mexico Pueblos also recount stories of extreme poverty and marginalization, especially through forced assimilation at federal Indian schools, their comparatively larger numbers and the many socioeconomic challenges they shared with rural Hispanos in the area, prevented these groups from being completely cut out of state politics and associated fights for land, water, and political resources. Currently, many New Mexico Pueblo tribes run successful gaming operations, raising their political and social profiles within State and regional politics.

Political differences and tensions also exist between Ysleta del Sur and the State of Texas. While space does not permit detailing Texas's Indian policies, their histories, and impacts, the situation can be characterized as particularly unfavorable to Indigenous people. Texas has a clause in their constitution stipulating that there will only ever be three Indian tribes in the State (Kickapoo, Alabama Coushatta, and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo), and the descendants of Comanche, Apache, Piro, and Cherokee peoples not killed or expelled from the region have had a difficult time trying to gain federal recognition. The state opposed Ysleta del Sur's efforts to obtain recognition for years, and agreed to "allow" them to have this economically, and symbolically,

critical status if they promised not to pursue tribal gaming and agreed to impose externally-defined “blood quantum” limits determining who could be included on tribal rolls. Both of these acts fly in the face of two important ways that tribes exert their sovereign status in U.S. contexts—through their ability to enter into gaming compacts and their ability to regulate their own tribal membership—tribal leaders at Ysleta del Sur pushed back, opening Speaking Rock Casino in 1993 and successfully petitioning President Obama to issue a presidential order allowing the tribe to determine their own membership requirements, which essentially doubled their enrollment. In 1999, the State shut down Class III (high stakes) gaming, markedly limiting casino revenues, and the tribe is in litigation to try to reverse this decision. Fortunately, community members regularly point out the good relationship they have with other El Paso residents, evident in the outpouring of positive media coverage and support the tribe received after a sacred statue was desecrated in Fall of 2017 on Indigenous Peoples’ Day (formerly Columbus Day).

In addition to fielding critiques about their history, land, and rights, community members at Ysleta del Sur point to linguistic differences that exist between their community and other Pueblos as a reason for their marked status, despite possessing many of the same experiences with language loss. Like the New Mexico Pueblos and many other Indigenous communities in the U.S. and beyond, Ysleta del Sur has experienced pronounced language shift since the arrival of European colonists. English is the default code used at the Pueblo, followed closely by Spanish, both of which have replaced Southern Tiwa outside of ceremonial contexts. The reasons for this include a Spanish- and then English-speaking educational system, language-based discrimination, and the dominance of English language mass media. Compared to other Pueblos, tribal members at Ysleta del Sur were not forced to attend federal Indian schools in large numbers—institutions that aggressively promoted language assimilation—but their distance from other Southern Tiwa-speaking Pueblos resulted in fewer opportunities to learn and use the language. While community members grieve the loss of Southern Tiwa and work assiduously to reverse these trends, Ysletas are comfortably multilingual, expressing positive views about using English and Spanish and raising bilingual children. This contrasts with prevailing language ideologies in other Pueblo communities that elevate the use of a single Indigenous language, impose the tight control of access to Indigenous language materials, and reject bilingualism and code mixing as appropriate expressions of Indigenous language use (Debenport, 2015; Kroskrity, 1998).

The history of this research intersects with applied linguistic projects. I began my work at Ysleta del Sur in late 2011, when I was contacted by the tribe's language coordinator to collaborate on a Southern Tiwa alphabet and other language documentation and revitalization efforts. I had spent seven years working as part of the San Ramón Pueblo<sup>4</sup> language program and have advised projects at Pojoaque and Nambe Pueblos, which provided me with knowledge of the grammar and phonology of Kiowa-Tanoan languages, the family to which Southern Tiwa belongs. Like my previous work (Debenport, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017), I simultaneously conduct ethnographic fieldwork and contribute to community language projects at Ysleta del Sur, focusing on the social conditions surrounding language revitalization movements rather than analyzing and circulating features of the Southern Tiwa language itself. A major focus of this work has been looking at how local ways of viewing language use (language ideologies) and structuring language (speech genres) provide resources for the indexing of Indigenous identities and enacting sovereignty.

### **Challenging Spatiotemporal Continuity**

During the last twenty years, the study of language (or linguistic) ideologies has emerged as an integral part of linguistic anthropological theory (Irvine, 2012; Kroskrity, 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998; Silverstein, 1979). Language ideologies are beliefs that individuals and groups have about the value of particular languages, their speakers, certain language varieties, and the appropriateness of language to context, such as ideologies that elevate the importance of using "Standard" English in school or those that cast French as particularly well-suited for love poems. Multiple, and often seemingly contradictory ideologies co-exist within contexts (Gal, 1998), as I have discussed with respect to competing Pueblo ideologies about Indigenous language literacy (Debenport, 2015).

Simultaneous with the development of this theoretical tradition, linguistic anthropologists building on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b) have productively used the concept of "speech genres" to describe how everyday forms of talk are shaped and understood. Speech

---

<sup>4</sup> I use a pseudonym for the name of this Pueblo and for the Indigenous language spoken there in all published work to reflect local language ideologies that privilege tight control over linguistic and cultural materials. In addition, I obscure all Indigenous language data and only present my examples and analyses in English and in some cases, Spanish to adhere to these same preferences. While I use the real name of the tribe for Ysleta del Sur and the name of the language, I obscure Indigenous language examples.



genres, which Richard Bauman (2004) defines as “one order of speech style, a constellation of systemically-related, co-occurring features and structures that serve as an orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse” (p. 84), allow for ethnographically-informed descriptions of how social actors tailor talk to imagined or actual audiences in order to accomplish various social ends. At Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, community members use both established and emergent speech genres that focus on the Pueblo Revolt and geographic expansion to indirectly challenge hegemonic language and geographic ideologies that privilege the link between permanence and Indigenous identity.

One morning last summer, I arrived early at the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Cultural Center, an adobe building perched on the edge of the “Mission Road,” a state highway that contains three colonial-era churches (all still in use), and serves as a thoroughfare between the two main parts of the reservation, both of which consist of non-contiguous lands amidst a working class Mexican-American neighborhood. In addition to housing the tribal museum and gift shop, the Center houses an adult language classroom, tribal offices, and the space where my colleagues and I work as part of the language program. That morning, several people from the community were adding mesquite wood to the *horno* in preparation for a morning of baking Indian bread to sell to visitors and employees. As I visited with the group gathered in the bright El Paso sunshine, I struck up a conversation with David, a tribal member who also serves as the Center Director. We caught up briefly about our families, talked about how long I would be in town, and traded gossip from other Pueblos. Before too long, the conversation turned to politics, specifically to Ysleta del Sur’s precarious position relative to other regional Indigenous nations, and David launched into what I immediately recognized as an example of a prominent local speech genre that focuses on the Pueblo Revolt.

The genre is characterized by a presentation of a historical account of migration that rejects the idea that Pueblo people were willing Spanish pawns and emphasizes the community’s ability to maintain cultural and linguistic practices in the face of discrimination, violence, and the pressure to assimilate. Often, people talk about surviving away from large numbers of other Native people and within a climate of intense racism in order to protect their right to practice their religion, inhabit their ancestral lands, and speak their language, echoing many of the properties of *testimonios* that have been described by scholars working in Latin America (c.f. Beverley, 2004). The genre is used by men and women of all ages at the Pueblo, but especially by

those who are active in tribal government or cultural and linguistic preservation efforts. It can be performed in English or Spanish, and can include Tiwa words for emphasis or explanation depending on the language abilities of the speaker. As David said that morning:

- (1) In the community
- (2) we know we were **brought** here by the Spanish
- (3) When we leave the community
- (4) especially when we go to other Pueblos
- (5) they perceive us as traitors
- (6) allies with the Spanish as guides who helped them escape the revolt
- (7) This is **totally** not the case
- (8) From our history
- (9) we here at the Pueblo
- (10) have been told by **our** elders
- (11) that we were captured by Spanish forces who entered the Pueblo of Isleta
- (12) Our people wanted to attack
- (13) but the other Isletas were scared
- (14) What ended up happening was they fled to the mountains
- (15) but they were no match for the Spanish
- (16) They were pissed because they had gotten their butts kicked
- (17) The Spanish used us as hostages when they saw their opportunity
- (18) Eventually it went our way
- (19) They saw the light, I guess?
- (20) Well, 300 years of history had already passed
- (21) the Spanish are gone
- (22) and we kept our traditions
- (23) One of the things we have
- (24) we have an original Spanish cane given to Isleta for their chief
- (25) We have the Governor's cane and those for other *capitanes*
- (26) The only thing we don't have is the Lincoln cane because of Texas!

This slim passage is densely packed, which, while appearing as part of the speech genre of what we might call “catching up,” simultaneously stands apart as a Bakhtinian “secondary” genre (Bakhtin, 1986a, p. 62).

The first notable feature is how David adopts a common popular and academic register/genre to structure his text—that of the person correcting the historical record—a stance characterized by contrasting a previously-held “fact” with one that is presented as being more complete and therefore accurate. In addition to setting up this overall juxtaposition between truth and falsity, David also skillfully employs other contrastive elements within his story, creating a multi-faceted us/them dichotomy. As part of this, he deftly differentiates the ancestors of current tribal members at Ysleta del Sur (“our people,” Line 12) from those whose ancestors now live at Isleta Pueblo (“the other Isletas,” Line 13), augmenting this contrast with using the first-person plural to refer to the former (Lines 17-18), and the third person plural to refer to the latter (Lines 14-16; 19). At the same time, David is drawing a discursive line between Pueblo people and Spanish colonists, apparent in Line 15 where he differentiates between people from Isleta Pueblo and the colonizers, and when he identifies the Spanish in opposition to the ancestors of community members currently living at Ysleta del Sur (Lines 2; 17). These shifting divides point to a feature of the linguistic ideological landscape at play in the Pueblo borderlands: social actors’ simultaneous indexing of proximal and distal relationships with their ancestors in New Mexico as part of claims to sovereignty and Indigenous identity. By shifting the alignments between himself and his community and other polities both contemporary and historical, David draws upon shifting relationships of closeness and distance with Spain and Isleta Pueblo when asserting his own Indigenous identities and rights.

Several other features of this speech event stand out. In their article, “Mrs. Patricio’s Trouble,” Hill and Zepeda (1992) analyze a conversation between Zepeda and the titular speaker, who successfully mitigates the stigma of having a child who has not yet finished high school by artfully distributing responsibility throughout her narrative. Using techniques that include burying anaphora and denying having adequate access to knowledge to prevent the outcome, the authors show how Mrs. Patricio is able to downplay her agency to maintain a positive face and indirectly deny her own culpability. David accomplishes a similar aim in his text, apparent in Line 2, where he emphasizes the verb “brought,” stressing the word and pausing for emphasis afterward, forgoing the possibility that Ysletas *chose* to migrate. He also effectively uses this construction

(stress + pause) to index Pueblo ideals of knowledge production and transmission in his use of the possessive pronoun in Line 10.

In addition, in Pueblo contexts, knowledge—especially ceremonial or linguistic—is appropriately held by elders and transmitted orally to younger tribal members. By asserting that Ysleta has its own group of elders, David is challenging the idea that Pueblo cultural knowledge and sanctioned forms of its diffusion are the sole property of the New Mexico tribes. Finally, we locate another assertion of Ysleta strength and independence when he discusses the tribe's possession of ceremonial canes (Lines 23-26). In the Spanish colonial period, canes were given to tribal leaders by the Crown at many of the Pueblos and in other Indigenous communities, and carry enormous ceremonial importance. Much like the genre of *filiaciones*, records of service which chronicled “the basic categories of identity for presidial soldiers” in the Spanish colonial borderlands (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2017, p. 57), these canes serve as citations that help to cement definitions of indigeneity for individuals and groups through bureaucratic practices of categorization and differentiation. Interestingly, within David's narrative, Spain is presented as both the enemy that was expelled and as a legitimate polity whose gift helps to legitimize the sovereignty of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo to this day. David manages to accomplish another discursive move, a critique aimed at the State of Texas, which is a popular target for political ire because of their restrictive Indian policies. Mirroring the gifts from the Spanish Crown, during the Civil War, President Lincoln bestowed ceremonial canes to tribal leaders throughout Indian country, skipping Ysleta del Sur because Texas was part of the Confederacy at the time. This dig at Texas, whose leaders are often characterized by Ysletas as being racist (hence the indirect reference to the Confederacy), combined with the other discursive strategies David uses, answers back to popular conceptions of the tribe as inauthentic and its members by virtue of their migratory history and distance from other Pueblos, and positions Ysleta del Sur as a culturally-robust, sovereign nation.

### **Challenging Geographic Paradigms**

In addition to their diasporic history, when community members at Ysleta del Sur talk about the reasons people take issue with their perceived authenticity or their sovereign status, they often bring up what some see as their geographic shortcomings: the size of their land base, their non-contiguous reservation, and the Pueblo's urban setting. While their migratory history

and location along the U.S.-Mexico border certainly enable and constrain particular forms of socioeconomic, linguistic, and political action, ideologies that link Indigenous identities and sovereignties with geographic spaces figure prominently in the way indigeneity is understood, practiced, and experienced in contemporary U.S. contexts more broadly. Thomas Biolsi (2005) critiques the prevailing idea of the nation-state as the sole “political geograph[y] imagined, lived, and even institutionalized under modernity by American Indians” (p. 240), presenting additional but not incompatible ways of imagining spaces that are implicated in political and cultural struggle within Indian country. The four central “imagined geographies” that he identifies within Indigenous North America are:

- (1) “tribal” or Indigenous-nation sovereignty on reservation homelands;
- (2) co-management of off-reservation resources and sites shared between tribal, federal, and state governments;
- (3) national Indigenous space in which Indian people exercise portable rights beyond reservations; and
- (4) hybrid political space in which Indian people exercise dual citizenship and assert rights as tribal citizens under treaty and other federal Indian law, as U.S. citizens under the Constitution, and as social or cultural citizens within a multicultural U.S. society.

Biolsi’s (2005) framework helps to situate the ways that Ysleta del Sur Pueblo is criticized for its geographic qualities and the ways that tribal members draw on different imagined geographies as part of challenging hegemonic ideologies connected to sovereignty, indigeneity, and authenticity.

Two features of Ysleta history and geography are most-often cited as deficits by non-tribal members: the tribe’s relatively small, non-contiguous reservation and its urban setting in the middle of the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez metropolitan area. This indexes the ideologically-preferred status of Biolsi’s (2005) first type of imagined geography across contexts, a “homeland” that has been federally-recognized and has remained visible as a sovereign nation over time, illustrated by describing movement between and through various Pueblo lands. Any visitor to the New Mexico Pueblos is struck by their shared aesthetic qualities: low-slung adobe buildings circling a central *plaza*, usually anchored by a mission-era church and dotted with round *hornos* used to bake bread and pies. These icons of Pueblo aesthetics and identity are echoed in artistic and technical

depictions of the American Southwest. Georgia O'Keefe's intense blues capturing the immense New Mexico skies and long brown walls topped with stark white crosses; cartographic representations of the State neatly outlining each discrete, Native nation; the vast, sparsely populated stretch of Interstate 25 between Albuquerque and Santa Fe, whose immeasurable, enveloping dark skies are only briefly marked by small, "You are now entering San Felipe Pueblo" or "You are now entering Cochiti Pueblo," signs. Despite the ever-encroaching spread of suburban developments and the City of Albuquerque and the social and material realities of inhabiting this colonized space, as a traveler you are always aware when you are on Indian land, and your ability to imagine pre-colonial geographies is often supported by the land's immense scale and the way the land is presented to you.

These enduring depictions and experiences of vast Pueblo geographies is incompatible with how people experience being on the Ysleta del Sur reservation. Although the tribe has been able to increase the size of the land base in the last 25 years, it is, what many people call, a "checkerboard" reservation, a pattern of land distribution where "Indian land under federal trust status and non-Indian deeded land are interspersed (Biolsi, 2005, p. 244). Consider how a traveler moves through this reservation space: after taking the easternmost El Paso exit off of I-25, you can either move with the flow of traffic through the Americas Port of Entry (POE) to Mexico and join the semis on their way to Juárez, or take the Mission Road (Texas State Highway 20) either east or west which loosely follows the border. If you turn right on this road you will pass the "old rez," a neighborhood that is sovereign, Indian land on a block-by-block basis, with tribal buildings co-existing with gas stations, day care centers, and *taquerias*. If you head left, you pass an old Kmart building and a Walgreen's as you move into "Area 2," or, as community members call it, "the new rez" which contains the education building, a tribally-owned concert venue, and new single-family homes the tribe works with local families to finance and build.

These geographically-constrained, enclosed Indigenous geographies are also inarguably urban ones. Although the traveler may encounter empty fields and glimpses of big skies, this is not the stuff of Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce brochures, and, as is regularly pointed out to tribal members at Ysleta del Sur, indexes a marked form of indigeneity compared to the social landscapes of the northern Pueblos. As Renya Ramirez (2007) outlines in her book *Native Hubs*, the majority of Indigenous people in the U.S. live in urban areas. However, images of Native

peoples inhabiting contiguous, rural spaces continue to circulate as symbols of authentic Indigenous settings and the homelands of authentically Indigenous people.

Concomitantly, both the small, non-contiguous nature of the Ysleta del Sur landbase and its urban setting render it invisible compared to the difficult to ignore presence of the nation states of Mexico and the U.S., whose prominence is (re)created in material realities and everyday interactional practices. When I am working at Ysleta del Sur, I often have coffee at a café off the I-25 feeder road between my hotel and the reservation. One morning, I struck up a conversation with an employee who was bussing tables. “Hey! Weren’t you here, yesterday? Are you from El Paso?” I filled her in on why I was in town. After expressing an interest in linguistics and anthropology, and talking about the classes she was taking at UTEP (University of Texas, El Paso), she said, “I had no *idea* there were Native Americans in El Paso! That’s so cool!” Interestingly, she had grown up less than a mile from the Ysleta del Sur tribal offices.

Much like challenging dominant narratives that position Native nations as prototypically unchanging through time, everyday forms of talk at Ysleta del Sur push back against these essentializing imaginaries about the relationship between indigeneity and land. Like the previous speech genre I presented, this type of speech event is animated by men and women of all ages, but most frequently by those involved in some way with planning tribal economic ventures. It can occur in any of the three languages at the Pueblo, although English is by far the most commonly used code, perhaps because of the association with the register of “business speak” present in other English-speaking contexts. Speakers engaging in this type of speech event focus on their opinions of current and proposed tribal economic ventures, but spend most of their time discussing what should be done with the profits in terms of what would strengthen tribal sovereignty and increase its visibility (and therefore influence) in the region. These features were evident in another conversation I had with David later last summer. He said,

I would really like to see the tribe gain control of properties by the Americas POE. All that area used to belong to my family. When we had the illegal incursion of 1871, we lost land where the railroad was gonna be run. Talking to one of my uncles, he was telling me that when his mother, my grandfather’s sister, she lost his land which was around 20 acres for not paying taxes. For 20 acres, she lost it for 2 dollars! He used that property to provide for his family, growing corn, beans,

squash. I would like to see the tribe purchase property to be used by our people to sustain ourselves.

This narrative illustrates a common theme among examples of this speech genre: how a larger reservation would enable a return to, as community members describe it, “traditional” practices. Interestingly, he specifically targets the Americas Port of Entry rather than describing the section of land in relation to other features on the reservation. This accomplishes several things simultaneously: mounting an argument for a return of traditional lands, critiquing the presence of a militarized no-man’s land along the Rio Grande, and creating an intertextual link between this text and another popular way of joking about tribal sovereignty at Ysleta del Sur: suggesting that the tribe open a Port of Entry of their own as part of its right to enjoy a nation-to-nation relationship with Mexico based on their status as a sovereign entity. Like all forms of expansion, this depiction depends on increased mobility, describing a vision of future tribal members farming or living in what is now a depopulated, militarized zone, a situation that threatens to become even more fraught under the current U.S. presidential administration. Returning to Biolsi (2005), another way that this type of interaction serves as a challenge to critiques that depict Ysleta del Sur as disparate and non-sovereign is through David’s successful indexing of the remaining three ways that Native people are able to engage in political struggle. Here, Ysleta people are portrayed as the appropriate stewards of the land along the border, people who could successfully manage a nation-to-nation relationship with the U.S., Mexico, and the City of El Paso, uniquely capable of returning what some people call a “no-man’s-land” to productive, sustaining, farmland.

### **Challenging Monolingualism and Language Purity**

Like land and resource rights, sovereignty, and the ability to determine one’s tribal membership, the preservation, maintenance, and use of Indigenous languages can serve as tools to construct difference, belonging, and sociopolitical influence. While community members at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo have been working to promote the use of the Southern Tiwa language for years, in 2011, the tribe moved to create a separate language program with its own director and support staff. Stemming from language ideologies that emphasize tightly controlling access to Indigenous Pueblo languages, Southern Tiwa is one of the least-documented North American Indigenous languages, but using scant archival materials along with help from fluent speakers from



the other two Southern Tiwa-speaking Pueblos in New Mexico, the language program has been very successful. There are now two advanced adult speakers of the language, classes are being held on both the reservation and at area high schools, and a pre-kindergarten curriculum with Southern Tiwa words and phrases has been developed—considerable feats considering the grammatical and phonological gulf between the language and English or Spanish and the drastic level of language shift that has occurred. Also, the first edition of the tribal dictionary came out in 2016, and the committee is now working on short stories, songs, and prayers for limited circulation. When talking to tribal members at Ysleta del Sur about these developments, there is a feeling of pride and optimism mixed with concern about how other Pueblos will react to their language policies.

Some of this unease is a result of long-standing critical stances towards the value of multilingualism in both Pueblo and non-Pueblo contexts. In his chapter chronicling the basis of Arizona Tewa language ideologies, Paul Kroskrity (1998) presents four “cultural preferences” (p. 105), that have their roots in what he calls “kiva talk,” ways of using language in ceremonial spaces that become blueprints for everyday uses of language in this community. These four proclivities help to contextualize the broader social meanings of Ysleta del Sur language revitalization and how these efforts connect to issues of visibility, sovereignty, identity, and rights. One of these preferences, what Kroskrity (1998) calls “strict compartmentalization” (p. 109), is the inclination to keep different languages and registers separate, favoring Indigenous Pueblo languages among other possible codes such as English or Spanish. This language ideology is still very prevalent in the New Mexico Pueblos, often reflected in derogatory comments about tribal members at Ysleta del Sur as “really just Mexicans,” or people who “can only speak Spanish,” or even more pointedly, are “not even Indian [Tiwa].” Interestingly, this feeling that it is better to speak one language exclusively rather than attain fluency in several languages aligns with a wider generational language ideology in the U.S. and beyond that positions Standard English as “correct” compared to non-Standard dialects and registers such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and other “foreign” languages, forms that were thought to confuse children and limit their economic and educational attainment. However, dominant language ideologies in the Pueblo borderlands diverge from these views, presenting Spanish-English bilingualism—and by extension, fluency in other languages in addition to English and Spanish—as both authentic linguistic traditions of the region and as useful social tools. A colleague from the Pueblo whose wife’s family is from

Durango, Mexico, and whose children are growing up speaking English, Spanish, and Tiwa, said to me recently, “I mean, how could it be any other way around here? We have relatives all over and we need to talk to each other!”

Two of the other cultural preferences Kroskrity (1998) details also help to explain the ways that language ideologies at Ysleta del Sur differ from those at other Pueblos and how these differences are often used to level critiques against tribal members. “Linguistic purism” (Kroskrity, 1998, p. 107), or the preference for not switching between codes within interactions, and “regulation by convention” (p. 111), or the avoidance of linguistic innovation or change, are not as central to the linguistic ideological landscape or to language practices at Ysleta del Sur. Since I started working in 2003 as part of language documentation and revitalization efforts at various Pueblos in New Mexico, I have noticed that my colleagues put a lot of effort into purging language materials of any English, Spanish, Keres, or Navajo words (Debenport, 2015). In addition, they also continue to place an emphasis on recording and teaching, as one of my friends and teachers recently said, “the real, *old* words,” and to avoid “making stuff up,” or, coming up with new words in Tiwa for terms that are not directly expressed in the existing vocabulary. Unsurprisingly, these preferences are not emphasized to as great a degree at Ysleta del Sur. Last August, I sat in on an adult language class being taught at the Cultural Center. As the tribal member who was teaching the class led the students through various exercises, he switched effortlessly between English, Spanish, and Tiwa, encouraging his students by saying, “*Muy bien*, great job, and good job! (‘good’).” Or pointing to an object and asking, “*Saben que cosa es un bracelet* (‘[redacted]’) in Tiwa?”<sup>5</sup> Those working as part of the Ysleta del Sur language program are also more likely to create neologisms, especially for contemporary words and expressions and those that younger tribal members would like to be able to say. One afternoon last summer, Alex, a colleague working as part of the language program, showed me a short video he had made with one of the summer language interns, high school and college-age students who work for the tribe over the summer. The video showed the intern—a basketball enthusiast—carefully explaining the Tiwa names for “court,” “ball,” and “backboard.” Alex explained, “Man, we were able to use the words for ‘field’ and ‘ball’ for the first two, but don’t know what to do with the ‘backboard’.” He then got to

---

<sup>5</sup> This sentence adheres to syntactic rules in Spanish, substituting the Tiwa word for “bracelet,” and then including a clause in English (“in Tiwa”).

work, and successfully came up with several creative options for a Tiwa word that they could use.

These sometimes subtle differences not only index linguistic ideological variations, but, like the previous examples of speakers contesting prevailing ideas about migration and land, can be read as tools for community members at Ysleta del Sur to contest regional, Pueblo, and national hegemonic discourses. At other times, speakers are much more direct in forging the connections between language rights, Indigenous identity, sovereignty, and regional visibility. When I asked David why he thought participation in the language program was important, he answered:

I guess for my part, the use of Southern Tiwa in the region. We were basically almost considered a dead language, and now, we've recovered a lot of our language. I want to see us regain the level of fluency in Southern Tiwa that was spoken within the original lands we had in 1751 before they were illegally taken from us. At that time, it [Southern Tiwa] was just spoken and a little Spanish. I guess from a cultural perspective—our language—we are going in the right direction.

In this short passage, David manages to pull together each of the three themes I have outlined in this article—migration, land, and language—into one, powerful narrative. In his depiction, it is the robustness of the language combined with the history of migration, land dispossession, and struggle that will act as a path forward to an idealized future for the tribe.

### **(Counter)hegemonies in the Pueblo Borderlands**

Ethnolinguistic vignettes from Ysleta del Sur Pueblo exemplify how language impositions are not linear, nor are they necessarily easily or readily accepted by those subject to those processes. Turning this around, we might say that these social actors' responses to impositions are not linear, and flexibly adapt to the specific historic, ideological, discursive, geographic, and sociopolitical contexts that constitute the Pueblo borderlands. In these examples, tribal members depend on local speech genres to critique hegemonic ways of thinking about the relationships between mobility, land, and language, on one hand, and identity, sovereignty, and indigeneity on

the other. Stories about the Pueblo Revolt challenge enduring ideas about the meaning of this event as a lesson about stability, loyalty, and permanence and reframe it as a narrative about endurance, ingenuity, and strength. Similarly, talk about tribal economic and land policies becomes an opportunity to imagine a future community that has ameliorated past wrongs, and a language class can be an exercise in modeling the utility of multilingualism.

This varied use of speech genres is mirrored by another type of semiotic agility: the flexibility that allows community members at Ysleta del Sur to counter dominant language ideologies in order to enact sovereignty, authenticity, and personhood. This is accomplished during interactions where social actors are able to highlight the previously unmarked status of received language ideologies. These dominant ways of viewing the relationships between languages, speakers, and contexts include the assumption of an unchanging view of language use among an easily-designated group of people, an ideal that runs counter to Alex's facility with coming up for basketball vocabulary, for example. Relatedly, tribal members are constantly calling into question the importance of using one language to the exclusion of all others, apparent at even the sentence level, as seen in the classroom example. Finally, the necessity of solidifying and teaching only linguistic forms that are felt to be unchanged from forms used before European arrival is both impossible and undesirable in the borderlands region, where speakers must be able to use English, Spanish, and now, Southern Tiwa. In this context, tribal members are presenting the migratory, multilingual history of the Pueblo as contributing to, rather than subtracting from, their strength as a nation.

Challenging dominant language ideologies, however, also involves indexing their dominant status. For instance, Ysletas still revere the pan-Pueblo emphasis on controlling access to Indigenous linguistic materials, and utilize nostalgic discourses commonly used to talk about pre-European language use. As such, these examples of the flexible, creative use of both local speech genres and language ideologies necessarily invoke the power that inheres in Pueblo and non-Pueblo discourses that criticize migration, diaspora, small or non-contiguous reservations, multilingualism, and linguistic innovation. This relationship between marked and unmarked genres and ideologies is not only theoretically interesting, but also has real and anticipated consequences for people at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. Even as new forms of enacting tribal sovereignty emerge, the unspoken respect for the federal recognition process and the reservation system is also performed and strengthened. In each moment that multilingualism and mobility are celebrated,

such acts are also wrapped in a faint apology and set of expectations for not adhering to the Standard, a pattern evident in other ethnic, racial, linguistic, national, and sexual minority communities in the U.S., where individuals and groups are compared to supposedly neutral criteria. Recalling Daniel Suslak's (2009) study of generational language ideologies among Mixe, Mexican youths, hybrid uses of language and other semiotic resources, in whatever forms, do not always count as counter-hegemonic acts, insofar as they may not fundamentally challenge (or have the potential to change) prevalent sociopolitical structures and practices. Despite the myriad ways that tribal members at Ysleta del Sur have creatively responded to over three hundred years of staggering social change, the enduring power of ideological, material, and national borders continues to enable and constrain particular subjectivities and actions.

Reflecting on this article's central argument—that interactional practices at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo both challenge and reaffirm extant ways of thinking about movement, geography, and language—I will conclude by considering conditions of indigeneity in the borderlands region and in U.S. and global contexts. Ysleta's history and location does position its citizens as members of a polity more likely to be overlooked amidst the complicated geopolitics along the U.S.-Mexico border than the other New Mexico Pueblos as a result of the presence of dominant binaries and the ways that sovereignty and visibility are produced and understood. At the same time, Ysleta del Sur's potential for unexpected or innovative nation-to-nation relationships that foster economic and material changes is also notable because of the reservation's location by a busy, international border. Furthermore, the tribe is successfully reversing patterns of language shift without the aid of many fluent speakers and sufficient descriptive materials. However, these distinctive features more closely align with many contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous people than the ossified models against which Native people are frequently measured. For example, prior to the onset of large-scale tribal gaming, many urban Indigenous peoples and their histories were effectively erased, with this new form of visibility creating new socioeconomic and political opportunities. In addition, American Indians are no strangers to border politics, having to negotiate and maintain relationships with Mexico and Canada, but also with other Native nations, municipalities, and the federal government. As linguists and historians have long-shown, multilingualism and dynamic language contact and change were essential components of pre-colonial periods, and, that like all contemporary populations, Indigenous people are creatively engaged with new ways of using and circulating languages and ways of speaking, including

reintroducing spoken Indigenous languages using scant descriptive material. As such, these ethnolinguistic examples from Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, while unique, do not differ markedly from countless other contexts where the dominant ways of defining and enforcing the borders of indigeneity are not equal to the descriptive, linguistic, social, or political tasks experienced and imagined by Indigenous people themselves.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. (1986a). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986b). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, R. (2004). *A world of others' words: Cross-cultural perspectives of intertextuality*. New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Beverley, J. (2004). *Testimonio: On the politics of truth*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Biolsi, T. (2005). Imagined geographies: Sovereignty, Indigenous space, and American Indian struggle. *American Ethnologist*, 32(2), 239-259.
- Beltzer, M. (2009). 'Pueblos without names': A case study of Piro settlement in early colonial New Mexico. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist University.
- Brooks, J. F. (2002). *Captives and cousins: Slavery, kinship, and community in the southwest borderlands*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2004). Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research. *Language in Society*, 33, 469-513.
- Debenport, E. (2010a). The potential complexity of 'universal ownership': Cultural property, textual circulation, and linguistic fieldwork. *Language & Communication*, 30(3), 204-210.
- Debenport, E. (2010b). Comparative accounts of linguistic fieldwork as ethical exercises. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2010(206), 227-244.
- Debenport, E. (2011). As the rez turns: Anomalies within and beyond the boundaries of a pueblo community. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(2), 87- 109.
- Debenport, E. (2012). Continuous perfectibility: Pueblo propriety and the consequences of literacy. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 22(3): 201-219.
- Debenport, E. (2015). *Fixing the books: Secrecy, literacy, and perfectibility in Indigenous New Mexico*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Debenport, E. (2017). Perfecting publics: Future audiences and the aesthetics of refinement. In P. Kroskrity, B. Meek, & M. Nevins (Eds.), *Future Indigenous publics, current linguistic anthropological engagements*. London: Routledge.
- Deloria, P. (2004). *Indians in unexpected places*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.
- Espinosa, J. M. (1988). *The Pueblo Indian revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico: Letters of the missionaries and related documents*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Gal, S. (1998). Multiplicity and contention among language ideologies: A commentary. In B. B. Schieffelin, K. A. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Linguistic Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (pp. 317-323). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, J., & Zepeda, O. (1992). Mrs. Patricio's trouble: The distribution of responsibility in an account of personal experience. In J. Irvine & J. Hill (Eds.), *Responsibility and Evidence in oral Discourse* (pp. 197-225). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Irvine, J. (2012). Language ideologies. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved from

<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>

- Knaut, A. L. 1985. *The Pueblo revolt of 1680*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Kroskrity, P. (1993). *Language, history, and identity: Ethnolinguistic studies of the Arizona Tewa*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Kroskrity, P. (1998). Arizona kiva speech as a manifestation of a dominant language ideology. In B. Schiefflin, K. Woolard, & P. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kroskrity, P. (Ed). (2000). *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*, Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge.
- Preucel, R. W. (2002). *Archaeologies of the Pueblo Revolt: Identity, meaning, and renewal in the Pueblo World*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Ramirez, R. (2007). *Native hubs: Culture, community, and belonging in Silicon Valley and beyond*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rifkin, M. (2018). *Beyond settler time*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Roberts, D. (2005). *The Pueblo revolt*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Schieffelin, B., Woolard, K. & Kroskrity, P. (Eds). (1998). *Linguistic ideologies: practice and theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Silverstein, M. (1979). Language structure and linguistic ideology. In P. R. Cline, W. F. Hanks, & C. L. Hofbaer (Eds.), *The elements: A parasession on linguistic units and levels* (pp. 193-247). Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Silverstein, M. (2000). Whorfianism and the linguistic imagination of nationality. In P. V. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities* (pp. 85-138). Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Suslak, D. (2009). The sociolinguistic problem of generations. *Language & Communication*, 29, 199-209.
- Vélez-Ibáñez, C. G. (2017). *Hegemonies of language and their discontents: The Southwest North American region since 1540*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Wilcox, M. V. (2009). *The Pueblo revolt and the mythology of conquest: An Indigenous archaeology of contact*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409.