Outside-in: How 'super' and how 'new' is ethnolinguistic diversity in the United States?

Organizer: Terrence Wiley  
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Colloquium Abstract:

The term “‘super-diversity’ is intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything previously experienced in a particular society” (Vertovec, 2007). This panel examines the utility of the constructs of ‘super-diversity’ and ‘assimilation’ by drawing on examples from the United States context. Each panelist will conduct a 20 minute presentation followed by 25 minutes for overall questions. The first presentation will describe historical and contemporary analyses of the positioning of immigrant and Indigenous peoples in reference to the expectation of assimilation to illustrate how ideologies of purported legitimacy have been constructed, imposed, and re-imposed on the linguistic and cultural diversity of Indigenous and immigrant groups across time, from the colonial to contemporary periods of history, thereby giving the impression that diversity of the present is always “new” and, therefore a threat to an imagined normative, homogenous past (Wiley, 2014). The second presentation presents findings from analyses of demographic data related to ‘super’ language diversity ‘ and shift among heritage and community language speakers in the United States. The third presentation examines the Indigenous Mexican population in the United States and its influence on ethnolinguistic diversity. Given the multilingualism and multidialectalism among Chinese, the fourth presentation discusses findings from the U.S. Census data and a study of Chinese immigrants and international students regarding their attitudes toward Mandarin, other dialects, and Chinese language diversity. The final presentation illustrates the extent to which the educational language rights of minority speakers have been severely restricted in Arizona. A Discussant will delineate syntheses across the four presentations and identify salient issues as they relate to ethnolinguistic diversity, as well as facilitate interaction between the audience and the panel during the question and answer session.

Summary: The term “‘super-diversity’ is intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything previously experienced in a particular society” (Vertovec, 2007). This panel explores how ‘super’ and ‘new’ ethnolinguistic diversity is in the United States as illustrated by five papers. These investigate the following: historical and contemporary analyses of the immigrant and Indigenous peoples of the United States; review of demographic data related to language diversity; exploration of the Mexican Indigenous population and its influence on ethnolinguistic diversity in the United States; Chinese multilingualism and multidialectalism; and, restricting access to multilingualism for language minority students through the implementation of educational language policies.
Participants:

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**Dr. Terrence G. Wiley** is President of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC, and he serves as Special Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership and Graduate School, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. He is also Professor Emeritus at Arizona State University, where he served as Executive Dean of the Mary Lou Fulton Institute and Graduate School of Education and Director of the Division of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. He has also served as a Visiting Professor in the School of Foreign Languages for Renmin (Peoples’) University of China’s International Programs.

Professor Wiley’s teaching and research have focused on educational and applied linguistics, concentrating on educational language policies; language diversity and immigrant integration; teaching English as a second and international language; bilingualism, literacy and biliteracy studies; and bilingual, heritage and community language education. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California in Education with an emphasis in Linguistics, has two Master’s degrees, in Linguistics and Asian Studies, and a B.A. in History. He has won numerous awards for scholarship, teaching, and service, including the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award (2014).


I. Assimilation v. Super-Diversity in the U.S. Past and Present: Myths and Realities

Terrence G. Wiley,
Center for Applied Linguistics

This presentation examines the utility of the constructs of ‘super-diversity’ and ‘assimilation’ by drawing on examples from the U.S. context. It addresses the efficacy of the construct of ‘super-diversity’ both in historical and contemporary contexts. The term ‘super-diversity’ is intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything previously experienced in a particular society” (Vertovec, 2007). This paper provides a historical and contemporary analysis of the positioning of immigrant and indigenous peoples in reference to the expectation of assimilation to illustrate how ideologies of purported legitimacy have been constructed, imposed, and re-imposed on the linguistic and cultural diversity of indigenous and immigrant groups across time, from the colonial to contemporary periods of history, thereby giving the impression that diversity of the present is always ‘new’ and, therefore a threat to an imagined normative, homogenous past (Wiley, 2014).

Through the ideological primacy of ‘assimilation’ as “the master concept in both social theory and public discourse to designate the expected path to be followed by foreign [or minoritized] groups” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), this paper explores how the concept of assimilation derives from Eurocentric notions of the purported unity of racially and linguistically homogenous nation states (Bronfiglio, 2010). As noted by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), “the concept [of assimilation] conveys [an alleged] factual predication about the final outcome of the encounters between foreign minorities and the [presumed] native majority and, simultaneously, as assessment of a socially desired goal (pp. 41-45).

The paper demonstrates how ideologies of alleged legitimacy and linguistic hegemony have been imposed on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the indigenous and immigrant groups across the colonial, formative nationalist, nationalist, and contemporary periods of U.S. history. In conclusion, the suppression of linguistic and cultural diversity as core goals of ‘Americanization’ will be discussed.
II. Heritage and Community Languages in the U.S.: Demographic Realities of Linguistic Diversity and ‘Super-Diversity’

Nancy Rhodes,
Center for Applied Linguistics

This paper provides an overview of the demographics of language diversity and language shift among heritage and community language speakers in the U.S. and considers the applicability of theoretical notions of ‘super-diversity’ (Blommaert, 2010) to the U.S. context. National school enrollment data were analyzed as well as U.S. Census American Community Survey data related to language diversity among U.S. families. The authors demonstrate the importance of drawing on family and community linguistic resources that exist within the population and the need to connect these languages with the effort to promote language instruction more broadly. The paper shows that the languages spoken in heritage language communities in the U.S. are very different from those taught in public and private schools.

In response to studies (Rumbaut, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2004) that point to rapid language loss among heritage speakers, this paper notes that the mismatch between demographic reality and school language offerings is significant and counter-productive. If recent trends in foreign language education continue, the United States will not only have fewer students with proficiency in another language but will also experience a continuation in the decline of language proficiency among heritage speakers. U.S. Census data show that more than 21% of school-aged children are living in homes in which a language other than English is spoken. This provides an enormous pool of students who enter school with some degree of proficiency in another language, and there is a tremendous potential for these students to continue to develop their language skills. The paper concludes by suggesting ways that ‘foreign’ language education in U.S. schools can better accommodate and incorporate heritage languages and their speakers in programs and course offerings.

Summary: This paper analyses demographic data related to language diversity/‘super-diversity’ and shift among heritage and community language speakers in the U.S. It analyzes surveys of national school data for instruction in languages other than English and reviews U.S. Census American Community Survey data related to language diversity in American families.
III. Language maintenance in two school communities enrolling indigenous Mexican immigrants.

M. Beatriz Arias,  
*Center for Applied Linguistics*

“The person who speaks two languages is worth two people... but the person who speaks more than two languages is worth many more people. To live like an indigenous-Mexican-American means to be worth many people.” This paper will explore linguistic diversity within the US Mexican Origin population and how two communities reclaim rights and legitimize school space for multilingualism. When we think about indigenous communities in the U.S., we often think about US Native American communities who have inhabited this land long before the U.S. existed as a country. Yet when we think of indigenous communities, we rarely think about contemporary immigrants who are members of indigenous tribes and who speak indigenous languages.

Migration and proximity to the border have contributed to the linguistic diversity of the Mexican US population. It has been acknowledged there have been major migrations of Maya and Nahuatl speakers since the 1980’s. For example, there are over 200,000 indigenous from Oaxaca in California (Hidalgo 2003) and there are now second and third generation Mexican of Mayan speaking background residing in the US. Researchers who have studied migration shifts, report that Mixtec, Nahuas, Purepechas, Triques, and Otomi indigenous immigrant communities are among the largest indigenous groups migrating to the U.S.

According to Trueba (2004), language maintenance, that is, the ability to maintain one’s own language(s) as well as English is important in maintaining transnational ties; he states that “a transnational person cannot afford to lose her language and culture because her contact with home and culture is intensive” (p. 40). Therefore, maintaining one’s language is not a luxury but a need.

The paper specifically focuses on indigenous language minorities (Zapotec, Miztec, and Yaquis) who have immigrated to the U.S. and their efforts to maintain their languages and cultures in spite of restrictive language policies in the U.S. states of California and Arizona. This paper explores how schools react, adapt or resist to the indigenous languages spoken by Mexican immigrant students by focusing on two indigenous school communities: the Yaqui community in Guadalupe Arizona and the Maya community in Redwood City, California.

**Summary:** This paper explores how schools react, adapt or resist to the indigenous languages spoken by Mexican immigrant students by focusing on two indigenous school communities: the Yaqui community in Guadalupe Arizona and the Maya community in Redwood City, California.
IV. Superdiversity within the Chinese-origin population: What data from a national survey and the U. S. Census can tell us?

Na Liu  
*Center for Applied Linguistics*

Chinese is the 5th commonly taught foreign language in the U.S. schools (Fee, Rhodes & Wiley, 2014). In addition, 2.9 million people over age 5 in the United States speak Chinese at home as of 2011 (Ryan, 2013). When we analyze data related to “Chinese,” this label is problematic (Wiley et al. 2008). “Chinese” as a language encompasses a number of regional “dialects” (Norman, 1988) including Mandarin, which are not mutually intelligible. Despite the unintelligibility among Chinese dialects, all Chinese speakers use one writing system. However, even with this writing system, there are two versions: simplified characters used in mainland China and Singapore and traditional characters used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Given the multilingualism and multidialectalism among Chinese, this presentation discusses findings from the U.S. Census data and a study of Chinese immigrants and international students regarding their attitudes toward Mandarin, other dialects, and Chinese language diversity. The study involves two levels of analysis. The first phase involved on-line survey research regarding the attitudes of 766 Chinese immigrants and international students in the United States toward Mandarin and other major Chinese dialects. The second phase involved in-depth focus group interviews with selected participants from the initial survey.

Among respondents in our survey and participants in the focus group interviews Mandarin is used often, especially in public situations, is highly regarded, and is seen as a functional and valuable language to be promoted as a national language, despite high levels of multilingualism, and multidialectalism in China. The majority of these participants hold favorable attitudes toward linguistic diversity and dialect/language maintenance generally, which includes the seven groups of Chinese dialect families and ethnic minority languages in China.

**Summary:** “Chinese” as a language encompasses a number of regional “dialects,” which are not mutually intelligible. Given the multilingualism and multidialectalism among Chinese, this presentation discusses findings from the U.S. Census data and a study of Chinese immigrants and international students regarding their attitudes toward Mandarin, other dialects, and Chinese language diversity.
V. A Contemporary Response to Historic Super-diversity: Language policy in Arizona

Sarah Catherine K. Moore  
*Center for Applied Linguistics*

Joanna Duggan  
*Center for Applied Linguistics*

The American Southwest and Arizona, in particular, are the site of rich historical linguistic and cultural diversity. First inhabited by peoples from an assortment of Indigenous backgrounds, it remains today a vibrant region in which languages are representative of its history—those of Native peoples, conquerors, immigrants, and transnationals, among other settlers.

This paper illustrates the extent to which the educational language rights of minority speakers have been severely restricted in Arizona. In part, these restrictions emerged due to the state’s adoption of the most extremist version of English-only educational language policy in the country. Language policy in Arizona confronts what researchers and scholars generally believe about how children learn, learn languages, and do well in educational settings.

Findings presented are framed within a perspective informed by critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzona, 1998; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2006). Results from this sociohistorical analysis of educational language policy in the state of Arizona are presented as either Majoritarian or Counter narratives. In this way, findings give voice to the viewpoints of language minority students, parents, community members, and teachers who are working to maintain their linguistic and civil rights amidst extreme restriction.

Findings presented in this paper demonstrate the impact of broad-reaching and entrenched policymaking on access to educational equity for language and ethnic minority students in diverse settings. In particular, the case of Arizona shows how states have successfully passed legislation that theoretically violates the federal Civil Rights laws intended to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity. While they may, in due course, be unveiled as violations of U.S. law, in the intervening period they are harming language minority children and families and impeding access to educational equity and language maintenance for marginalized populations in the state.

Panel Discussant: Shereen Bhalla, *Center for Applied Linguistics*

**Summary:** In the context of a region rich with historical linguistic and cultural diversity, this paper demonstrates how language policies targeting minority language speakers in Arizona have resulted in extreme restrictions on language rights and are arguably functionally in violation of U.S. Civil Rights mandates.
References


