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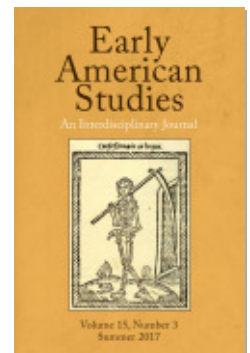
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# Colonial-Indigenous Language Encounters in North America and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World

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**ABSTRACT** Early American archives abound with references to episodes of communication, translation, and interpretation, and with a diverse array of Native-language texts. They provide evidence both of practical and philosophical colonial projects and of the ways in which Native people used their languages to mediate colonization. Scholars have uncovered a range of methods that diverse peoples employed to communicate with one another, the contexts that shaped the meanings of the words and messages exchanged, and the broader significance of those exchanges for figures far from the point of encounter. The texts and commentaries that flowed from efforts at language learning and linguistic collection bear testimony to ways Native languages shaped Euro-American intellectual, cultural, and religious history. They also transform previous rubrics for understanding American Indian resistance to linguistic imperialism into a social fact with an archive and a material history. Colonial-indigenous language encounters influenced the cultural and intellectual history of Native individuals and communities, providing new media for linguistic expression and new frames through which to consider their own tongues.

One of the most striking aspects of the colonization of North America was the number, variety, and significance of the language encounters between Natives and newcomers. The imperial contests among Spain, Portugal,

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France, the Netherlands, and England that took place from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, as well as contests the United States joined after its independence, rested on ideologies of linguistic conformity or vernacular translation into a multiplicity of tongues, and sometimes forms of each simultaneously, as foundations for imperial, colonial, and national cohesion.

European and American Indian encounters resulted in a vast colonial archive of indigenous language texts: Christian didactic texts in indigenous languages from Nahuatl to Huron to Mi'kmaq, legal records of sale and land exchange, and understudied genres such as the grammars and vocabularies compiled by missionaries and traders and collected by statesmen and philosophers such as Thomas Jefferson and Peter S. Du Ponceau. Circulating throughout the early modern Atlantic world, such documents shaped European intellectual, political, and imperial history through perceptions of Indian origins and migrations, spirituality, and a "savage" mind, while also serving the practical purpose of facilitating conversion, trade, and communication.

The translation of the Bible into Massachusett in 1663 might be thought of as an act of colonization through the printed word, or as a moment in which a new field of cultural production opened in North America. The opus, *Mamussewunneetupanatamwe up biblum God*, could not have been produced by John Eliot alone, for neither Eliot nor his Puritan missionary contemporaries had adequate language skills to accomplish this task. Eliot relied on a Nipmuck convert, James Printer, and the Massachusett Praying Indian Job Nesuton to translate, compile, and print the Bible and various other Christian-Massachusett texts. Besides being exposed to new ideas and acquiring new skills, these two men were also in a unique position to shape Eliot's message.<sup>1</sup>

More than three centuries of English print circulation inspired the Cherokee nation's Sequoyah to invent a writing system for his language. Some of the characters in the syllabary took their shapes from the Roman alphabet, though there was no connection between the sounds and values from one system to another. The invention frustrated whites who had hoped to impose a standardized alphabet on all Native peoples. Cherokees rejected that project, instead writing Cherokee laws and Christian scripture in Sequoyan and publishing a newspaper in parallel columns of Cherokee and English. Sequoyah himself, however, sought cultural and physical distance from whites. Though he was among the first Cherokee emigrants west of

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1. Philip Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

the Mississippi, his first substantial piece of writing in the syllabary addressed the question, fraught amid pressure for removal, of the Cherokees' boundary with neighboring states. The syllabary was designed for Cherokee alone, but in Indian Territory, according to one account, he worked on a similar writing system for Choctaw. Some opponents of removal held up the syllabary as a mark of Cherokee "civilization," but many whites recognized that the syllabary rejected assimilation. Although the appeal of syllabaries to Cherokees, Crees, and other Native peoples fueled theorization of the linguistic aspects of racial difference, these writing systems also contributed to the cultural and political strength of Native communities.<sup>2</sup>

This essay reflects on some of the conclusions drawn from recent work on colonial-indigenous language encounters in North America. While using the historiography of Latin America as an essential context, it focuses primarily on North America because there the circumstances of colonization were different and the indigenous languages spoken in North America differ from those of Latin America. Consequently, the preserved record of indigenous languages takes a strikingly different shape. Whereas colonial Latin America maintained an indigenous elite of authors writing histories and codices, a parallel culture did not exist in North America. While the comparative hemispheric context is intrinsically interesting and intellectually useful, the conclusions that can be drawn from the historiography are in many ways geographically specific.

The concept of colonial-indigenous language encounters links indigenous studies to Atlantic transit, empire building, religious studies, and intellectual history. As Ian Steele explained in 1998, the long-standing assumption of disappearing American Indians created an outmoded anthropological perspective within the fields of early American studies.<sup>3</sup> Though studies of

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2. George Lowery and John Howard Payne, "Notable Persons in Cherokee History: Sequoyah or George Gist," *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 2, no. 4 (1977): 385–93. See also Willard Walker and James Sarbaugh, "The Early History of the Cherokee Syllabary," *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 1 (1993): 70–94; Ellen Cushman, "'We're Taking the Genius of Sequoyah into This Century': The Cherokee Syllabary, Peoplehood, and Perseverance," *Wicazo Sa Review* 26, no. 1 (2011): 67–83; Sean P. Harvey, *Native Tongues: Colonialism and Race from Encounter to the Reservation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 113–44.

3. Ian K. Steele, "Exploding Colonial American History: Amerindian, Atlantic, and Global Perspectives," *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (1998): 70–95. For a retrospective account of the success of this idea a decade later, see Paul Cohen, "Was There an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the Limits of a Historiograph-

Native people have moved well past this view, the notion persists in some measure with respect to Native languages. Despite the well-established fact that Christianity and nation-states disparaged and destroyed indigenous tongues,<sup>4</sup> early American archives abound with references to episodes of communication, translation, and interpretation, and with collated vocabularies, dictionaries containing thousands of indigenous words, grammars brimming with rules for intelligible communication, and scripture, catechisms, Psalms, Bibles, and prayer books in dozens of Native languages. These works, in print and in manuscript, formed a linguistic base for massive projects directed at the recording, description, translation, and classification of Native languages in which Native people frequently played prominent roles. The “alchemy of interpretation,” in James Merrell’s compelling formulation, was “the very essence of the American encounter.”<sup>5</sup> The crucible of colonization transmuted its distinct elements into something new.

At the same time, Native people used their languages to mediate colonization. Old words that were applied to Christian ideas, for instance, often retained older meanings, thereby molding new concepts into shapes that fit indigenous frames of reference. How Native communities named European trade goods reveals how they incorporated new items into older ways of life. Confused and often contradictory attempts at classifying languages and their speakers reveal Europeans’ efforts at control and their failure to achieve

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ical Concept,” *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008): 388–410. More recently, Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000–1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), has provided an answer.

4. Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16–39; David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Eric Cheyfitz, *Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998); Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). For a global perspective, see Frances Karttunen and Alfred W. Crosby, “Language Death, Language Genesis, and World History,” *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (1995): 157–74.

5. James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 32.

it, even as they occasionally alluded to Native understandings of linguistic relationships. Fifteen years ago, Laura Murray identified the Indian vocabulary as an “elusive” literary genre.<sup>6</sup> Her article evokes the contradictory facets of colonial attempts to grasp, use, and even transform indigenous languages. Yet in uncovering the range of methods that diverse peoples employed to communicate with one another, the contexts that shaped the meanings of the words and messages exchanged, and the broader significance of those exchanges for figures far from the point of encounter, a remarkable interdisciplinary effort has made those texts more intelligible. Indian tongues were not only erased through colonialism but also preserved in ways that demonstrate the significance of language encounters—efforts at translation and taxonomy, the varied uses of divergent literacies, and the transit of information from borderland to metropole—to the histories of Native America and the Atlantic world.

Scholars of early America have been less attuned to these issues, and their cumulative significance, at least in part because relevant studies have appeared across a range of disciplines and historical subfields. Linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, literary criticism, intellectual history, the histories of several European empires and the early United States, ethnohistory, and Native American and indigenous studies have all addressed facets of linguistic contact, exchange, and negotiation, but seldom in conversation with one another. As early as 2000 Edward Gray noted that many episodes and pursuits—from kidnapping potential interpreters to evangelization to philosophical conjecture—should be understood as different facets of “the language encounter in the Americas.” But little has been done to consider those multifarious projects in light of another, even as studies of each have proliferated and deepened.<sup>7</sup>

Colonial-indigenous language encounters and the texts and commentaries that flowed from efforts at language learning and linguistic collection bear testimony to ways Native languages shaped Euro-American intellectual, cultural, and religious history. Meanwhile, they transform previous rubrics for understanding American Indian resistance to linguistic imperialism into a social fact with an archive and a material history. Those same

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6. Laura J. Murray, “Vocabularies of Native American Languages: A Literary and Historical Approach to an Elusive Genre,” *American Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2001): 590–623.

7. Edward G. Gray, introduction to Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering, eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492–1800: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 1–11.

encounters influenced the cultural and intellectual history of Native individuals and communities, perniciously in many instances, but also by providing new media for linguistic expression and new frames through which to consider their own tongues.



Scholarly awareness of early American interest in indigenous languages is not entirely new. There has been long-standing interest in European languages' incorporation of thousands of indigenous words into their own lexicons.<sup>8</sup> Sporadic calls for increased attention to other linguistic facets of colonization appeared in the middle decades of the twentieth century, emanating in no small part from scholars familiar with the extensive linguistic collections of the American Philosophical Society, the preeminent learned society of colonial British America and the early United States, and the one most closely linked to American Indian philology and linguistics.<sup>9</sup> In these same years, historians of linguistics began to draw scholars' focus to the richness of available materials for studying missionaries' struggles, preoccupations, and successes in the study of Native languages.<sup>10</sup> By the last quarter of the century, scholars working on Mesoamerica began using Native-language texts to reevaluate understandings of colonization as part of a

8. For a concise and lively overview of the "new world of words," see Colin G. Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 172–77. See also Charles Cutler, *O Brave New Words! Native American Loanwords in Current English* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

9. Franklin Edgerton, "Notes on Early American Work in Linguistics," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 87, no. 1 (1943): 25–34; Mabel Morris, "Jefferson and the Language of the American Indian," *Modern Language Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1945): 31–34; John C. Greene, "Early Scientific Interest in the American Indian: Comparative Linguistics," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104, no. 5 (1960): 511–17; H. Christoph Wolfart, "Notes on the Early History of American Indian Linguistics," *Folia Linguistica* 1, nos. 3/4 (1967): 153–71; William Cowan, "Native Languages of North America: The European Response," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (1974): 3–10; Raoul N. Smith, "The Interest in Language and Languages in Colonial and Federal America," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 123, no. 1 (1979): 29–46.

10. Victor Egon Hanzeli, *Missionary Linguistics in New France: A Study of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Descriptions of American Indian Languages* (The Hague: De Gruyter, 1969). For a review of the surge in attention to missionary linguistics beginning in the 1990s, see Otto Zwartjes, "The Historiography of Missionary Linguistics: Present State and Further Research Opportunities," *Historiographia Linguistica* 39, nos. 2/3 (2012): 185–242.

scholarly movement that has been called the New Philology. By employing Nahuatl sources, mundane local records in addition to the well-known codices, James Lockhart and other ethnohistorians recovered Native roles in the Spanish conquest and the contours of Nahua culture in colonial Mexico, and they inspired other scholars to turn to sources in other indigenous languages.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars of northeastern North America also turned their attention to compiling texts, as Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon did those composed in Massachusetts, for the purpose of illuminating historical changes both in the language and in the lives of its speakers. The increased attention to the documentary record of Native literacy—at this point imagined in a singular, alphabetic sense—pushed scholars such as James Axtell and Peter Wogan to examine in greater detail initial, and changing, Native reactions to European uses of writing.<sup>12</sup> Further, the “linguistic turn” in history and literary criticism, which built on the theories of language and power in the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Edward Said to open language philosophy and linguistics as fruitful fields of research, converged with the quincentennial of the Reconquista and Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Americas to draw substantial attention to linguistic features of intercultural encounters and colonization, the content of philosophical theories and ideologies regarding Native languages, and how these intersected with language-based national, imperial, theological, and philosophical projects in early modern Europe and early America.<sup>13</sup>

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11. Matthew Restall, “A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History,” *Latin American Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2003): 113–34, points to the beginning of this scholarship in two works: Arthur Anderson, Frances Berdan, and James Lockhart, *Beyond the Codices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart, *Nahuatl in the Middle Years: Language Contact Phenomena in Texts of the Colonial Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

12. Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988); James Axtell, “The Power of Print in the Eastern Woodlands,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1987): 300–309; Peter Wogan, “Perceptions of European Literacy in Early Contact Situations,” *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 3 (1994): 407–29.

13. E. F. K. Koerner, *Toward a History of American Linguistics* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 18–19, observes the importance of the five hundredth anniversary. For important work in this line, see the works cited in n. 4. For calls to approach language philosophy and linguistics as a field of intellectual history, see Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (1967; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), v–vii, 3–11; Wolfart, “Notes on the Early History of American Indian Linguistics,” 153, and as an area of social history, see Karttunen and Crosby, “Language Death, Language Genesis, and World His-



Scholars have demonstrated how varied empires used language as a means to power over indigenous populations. For some, such as Stephen Greenblatt and Walter Mignolo, the relationship between language and empire was straightforward, as officials and missionaries sought to impose their own language—and in so doing their faith, their social practices, and their political order—on Native communities. Although Native languages were occasionally conceived as vernaculars comparable to those of Europe, one of the most pervasive forms of ethnographic description to emerge from colonization was the definition of indigenous languages through what they lacked relative to colonizers' tongues. From the sixteenth century onward, however, European empires also appropriated indigenous languages as vehicles of cultural transformation, as *lingua francas* for imperial administration, as a foundational form of knowledge that allowed deeper understanding and more effective control of peoples.<sup>14</sup> Recognition of these goals, methods, and ideologies is necessary, but not sufficient, for understanding colonization.

Another set of scholars has sketched the contours of various linguistic borderlands within and between imperial claims. However much traders, missionaries, officials, or scholars might imagine the continent as a blank

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tory." See also Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970; repr., New York: Vintage, 1994); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); John E. Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987): 879–907.

14. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 16–39; Mignolo, *Darker Side of the Renaissance*. For the Americas, see also James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 179–84; Frances Karttunen, "Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: The Successful and the Others," and Kathleen J. Bragdon, "Native Languages as Spoken and Written: Views from Southern New England," both in Gray and Fiering, *Language Encounter in the Americas*, 215–29, 173–88. Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning and Power* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008), provides an excellent overview of the broader pattern. See also Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 2; Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814–1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

canvas, the reality was far different. Linguistic anthropologists, sociolinguists, and ethnohistorians have done much to elucidate the forms of nonverbal communication and the use of jargons and pidgins—tongues dramatically simplified in lexicon, morphology, and in some cases phonology—that allowed linguistically diverse Natives and newcomers to bridge the communication gap and facilitate trade and other forms of exchange. In the sixteenth century Portuguese trade with speakers of closely related Tupi-Guaraní languages on the coast of Brazil led to the spread of a lingua franca (the *língua geral*), which Jesuit priests later used in the region's missions (*reducciones*). Over the course of the seventeenth century, European explorers and colonists to North America infused the indigenous landscape with Dutch, Swedish, English, and French, creating numerous pidgin forms of Algonquian.<sup>15</sup> Other forms of contact communication that could very well have preceded colonization, such as Mobilian Jargon and Plains Indian Sign Language, also served these functions.<sup>16</sup> In some places, over time, new forms of linguistic intermixture arose, as Natives adapted the words of the

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15. On *língua geral*, see Denny Moore, "Historical Development of Nheengetu (Língua Geral Amazônica)," and M. Kittiya Lee, "Language and Conquest: Tupi-Guarani Expansion in the European Colonization of Brazil and Amazonia," both in Salikoko S. Mufwene, ed., *Iberian Imperialism and Language Evolution in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 108–42, 143–67. For overviews of North America, see James Axtell, "Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians in Eastern North America," and Ives Goddard, "The Use of Pidgins and Jargons on the East Coast of North America," in Gray and Fiering, *Language Encounter in the Americas*, 15–60, 61–78; Michael Silverstein, "Dynamics of Linguistic Contact," in Ives Goddard, comp., *Handbook of the North American Indians*, vol. 17, *Languages*, gen. ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996). On nonverbal communication, see Céline Carayon, "Beyond Words: Nonverbal Communication, Performance, and Acculturation in the Early French-Indian Atlantic" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 2010); Justyna Olko, "Body Language in the Preconquest and Colonial Nahua World," *Ethnohistory* 61, no. 1 (2014): 149–79. For a look at one trader's experiences amid diversity, see Sean P. Harvey, "An Eighteenth-century Linguistic Borderland," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 136, no. 4 (2012): 495–98.

16. On precolonization Native contact languages, see Sarah Grey Thomson, "On Interpreting 'The Indian Interpreter,'" *Language in Society* 9, no. 2 (1980): 167–93; Emanuel J. Dreschel, *Mobilian Jargon: Linguistic and Sociohistorical Aspects of a Native American Pidgin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Allan R. Taylor, "Nonspeech Communication Systems," in Goddard, *Handbook of the North American Indians*, vol. 17. On a European pidgin, see Peter Bakker, "'The Language of the Coast Tribes Is Half Basque': A Basque-American Indian Pidgin in Use between Europeans and Native Americans in North America, ca. 1540–ca. 1640," *Anthropological Linguistics* 31, nos. 3/4 (1989): 117–47.

newcomers into their own languages and as indigenous words for things previously unknown in Europe transformed the tongues of the colonizers. Beyond the proliferation of linguistic borrowing, even more dramatic were those cases in which Europeans and Native people jointly came to use forms of speech that emerged from the collision of diverse tongues. In some instances, exchange and intermarriage among diverse populations over the course of generations gave rise to creole languages (pidgins that acquired increasing grammatical complexity and became, in effect, the native tongue of communities, as some argue is the case with Chinook Jargon, or Chinuk Wawa) and, in at least one instance, Algonquian and Romance languages so thoroughly “intertwined” that Michif, spoken among Métis in the Red River region, is composed primarily of Cree verbs and French nouns. Records of, and in, these tongues are evidence of linguistic aspects of broader patterns of ethnogenesis.<sup>17</sup>

Both reflecting and contributing to a broader reevaluation of the degree to which Native people incorporated colonies and empires into preexisting structures of power, some scholarship has stressed how Native people controlled networks of information and much of the space that they crossed, as Katherine Grandjean and Alejandra Dubcovsky have shown for New England and the southeast, respectively.<sup>18</sup> Some groups even controlled the

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17. For overviews, see Calloway, *New Worlds for All*, 172–77; John K. Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 315–41. For focused accounts of linguistic intermixture, see Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); George Lang, *Making Warwa: The Genesis of Chinook Jargon* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008). For comparative views, see Karttunen and Crosby, “Language Death, Language Genesis, and World History”; Natalie Zemon Davis, “Creole Languages and Their Uses: The Example of Colonial Suriname,” *Historical Research* 82, no. 216 (2009): 268–84. On ethnogenesis, see James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra et al., “Forum: Ethnogenesis,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2011): 181–246.

18. On Native information networks, see Alejandra Dubcovsky, “One Hundred Sixty-one Knots, Two Plates, and One Emperor: Creek Information Networks in the Era of the Yamasee War,” *Ethnohistory* 59 (Summer 2012): 489–513; Dubcovsky, *Informed Power: Communication in the Early American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). For particular emphasis on Iroquois control of space for the transit of information, see Jon Parmenter, *The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534–1701* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011). On the significance of Native, especially Wabanaki, spatial conceptions, see Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On the changing balance of control of communications

medium of communication in the first centuries of colonization. Nahuatl and Quechua, for instance, served as the respective lingua franca in the Aztec and Inca empires and, in turn, became crucial to the imposition of Spanish rule in Mexico and Peru. Besides being a language that officials and missionaries relied on for their particular colonial purposes, Nahuatl was also widely used by less influential men and women in Mexico, though significant distance separated the literary Nahuatl of friar-linguists from the far more limited language, centered on useful words and phrases, acquired by ordinary Spanish colonizers in an indigenous world.<sup>19</sup> Farther north, as Native powers—such as the Comanches of the southern Plains or the Anishinaabeg of the Great Lakes—rose, they could effectively impose their tongue, at least temporarily, on those who sought to trade with them. Even after decades of colonization, Native languages were still used as mediums of intercultural communication in places where settlers were outnumbered by Indians. Settlers communicated with Wampanoags, Narragansetts, and Mohegans in one or another of mutually intelligible southern New England Algonquian languages in the mid-seventeenth century, often in the Pequot learned from the enslaved people who were widely held in settler households after the Pequot War.<sup>20</sup>

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in space, see Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage: The Communications Frontier in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), chap. 3.

19. For a vivid description of the significance of linguistic difference and shared speech in the precolonial Andes, see Inca Garcilasso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentaries of Peru, in Two Parts*, part I, trans. Paul Rycout (London, 1688), 10, 251. On Quechua, see Bruce Mannheim, *The Language of the Inka since the European Invasion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 6; Alan Durston, *Pastoral Quechua: The History of Christian Translation in Colonial Peru, 1550–1650* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2007). On the use of nonliterary Nahuatl in Mexico, see Martin Nesvig, “Spanish Men, Indigenous Language, and Informal Interpreters in Postcontact Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 59, no. 4 (2012): 739–64, esp. 747–50. This article appears in an excellent special issue titled “A Language of Empire, a Quotidian Tongue: The Uses of Nahuatl in New Spain,” which also features articles by Yanna Yannakakis, John F. Schwaller, Mark Z. Christensen, Robert C. Schwaller, Laura E. Matthew and Sergio F. Romero, and Caterina Pizzigoni.

20. On Comanche and Ojibwe as lingua francas, see, respectively, Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 171; Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 11. On settlers’ knowledge of southern New England Algonquian languages, see Julie Fisher,

With increasing appreciation of the mechanics of intercultural communication has come a growing awareness of the importance of those figures who acted as conduits among linguistically diverse peoples as well as a deeper examination of the ways in which language barriers provided dangers and opportunities for Natives and settlers. This may have been especially true in places where no single Native language possessed wide geographic breadth or preponderant political authority, or where neighboring tongues were not mutually intelligible. Scholars have stressed the importance of official interpreters and other intercultural go-betweens for creating the means of communication, exchange, and conflict resolution between Native communities and European colonies. Many of these were traders who took Native wives or the children who resulted from those unions. In other instances, Euro-American children who grew up near or within Native communities—as captives, children of missionaries, boys learning the fur trade, or youths being groomed as mediators—learned to speak indigenous languages.<sup>21</sup> Through such figures information flowed, not all of it reliable. Native languages, like their European counterparts, often conveyed rumors, which motivated decisions and often provided Indians the means to influence settlers, traders, missionaries, and officials, and for those groups to exert pressure on Native communities.<sup>22</sup> These same figures were also crucial for the formal, ritualized diplomacy that structured official relations of Native peoples with empires and their colonies. At these treaty councils, trained orators spoke, and the peoples who assembled expected to hear the sentiments of other attendees in their own language,

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“Speaking ‘Indian’ and English: The Bilinguals of Seventeenth-century New England, 1636–1680” (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, forthcoming).

21. On intermarriage and language learning, see Laura J. Murray, “Fur Traders in Conversation,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 2 (2003): 285–314. On cultural brokers and go-betweens, see Daniel K. Richter, “Cultural Brokers and Intercultural Politics: New York–Iroquois Relations, 1664–1701,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 40–67; Nancy L. Hagedorn, “‘A Friend to Go between Them’: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker during Anglo–Iroquois Councils, 1740–70,” *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 1 (1988): 60–80; Margaret Connell Szasz, *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); Frances E. Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Merrell, *Into the American Woods*.

22. On rumor, see Gregory Evans Dowd, “The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina–Cherokee Frontier,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (1996): 527–60; Tom Arne Midtrød, “Strange and Disturbing News: Rumor and Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley,” *Ethnohistory* 58, no. 1 (2011): 91–112; Grandjean, *American Passage*, chap. 3.

which made the services of a reliable interpreter crucial to the often tense coexistence of diverse peoples. Moments of communication were frequently moments when diverse peoples performed perceived differences for themselves and their counterparts, and the very fact that relatively few could match the linguistic virtuosity of interpreters made the translating and recording of what was said a fraught process, both for those at the time and for modern scholars who wish to find Native voices in the documentary record. Occasionally interpreters deliberately conveyed sentiments that differed from what an orator had expressed, and scribes sometimes recorded what colonial or imperial officials wished to hear.<sup>23</sup>

The linguistic exchanges that emerged in Christian missions have been the subject of an especially deep and impressive body of work. One set of scholars, those interested primarily in historical documentation of indigenous languages and in the history of linguistics, have focused considerable attention on the linguistic efforts of Franciscans, Jesuits, Puritans, Moravians, and other missionaries in the Americas; numerous articles have appeared in specialized journals such as *Historiographia Linguistica* and in essay collections, including the five volumes (and counting) of *Missionary Linguistics/Lingüística misionera*.<sup>24</sup> Historians have turned their attention to

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23. On the forms of diplomacy, see Francis Jennings et al., eds., *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985); Patricia Galloway, "Talking with Indians: Interpreters and Diplomacy in French Louisiana," in Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp, eds., *Race and Family in the Colonial South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987); Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 253–301. On performance of differences, see Jane T. Merritt, "Metaphor, Meaning, and Misunderstanding: Language and Power on the Pennsylvania Frontier," in Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds., *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61–81. On deliberate mistranslations, see David L. Ghere, "Mistranslations and Misinformation on the Maine Frontier, 1725–1755," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 8, no. 4 (1984): 3–26. On the need for scholars to triangulate multiple accounts of a given speech, see James H. Merrell, "'I Desire All That I Have Said . . . May Be Taken Down Aright': Revisiting Teedyuscung's 1756 Treaty Council Speeches," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 777–826.

24. Hanzeli, *Missionary Linguistics in New France*, ranks among the first and most important. For especially strong collections, see Even Hovdhaugen, ed., . . . *And the Word Was God: Missionary Linguistics and Missionary Grammar* (Münster: Nodus, 1996); Elke Nowak, ed., *Languages Different in All Their Sounds . . . : Descriptive Approaches to Indigenous Languages of the Americas, 1500–1800* (Münster:

missionaries' linguistic work for different reasons. Missionaries' approaches to language learning have offered insight into the efforts of Euro-American evangelists to make their message intelligible to the indigenous peoples the missionaries hoped to convert. Eschewing pidgins and jargons, Catholic and Protestant missionaries sought ways to convey what they believed to be universal truths. On a practical level, acquiring indigenous languages required diverse efforts aimed at distinguishing sounds and choosing characters that could represent them, and not only learning words but also rules for modifying them to denote particular circumstances, arranging them intelligibly, and using them in socially appropriate ways. Beyond a matter of simple pragmatism, some scholars see in these efforts important examples of missionaries' accommodation to the expectations of Native people. Others, however, urge us to recognize that the increased familiarity that fluent communication allowed could produce heightened tension when it elucidated incompatible goals among Indians and evangelists. Euro-American efforts at learning languages depended on Native participation. Certainly, not all Indians chose to be teachers. European accounts are littered with references to Indians unwilling to provide the services that Europeans sought. In such cases impatience, distrust, or recognition of the desirability of cultural distance prevailed. Instead of teaching Euro-Americans, these Indians mocked their efforts, refused to answer their queries, or deliberately fed them misinformation.<sup>25</sup> In other instances, however, Native individuals chose to bridge the linguistic gap. Native men and women offered names for things, though unclear questions or unknown phenomena frequently stymied collectors and consultants. Whether seeking desirable goods, spiritual power, or influential friends, Native tutors—too often, when considered at all, misunderstood as “assistants”—instructed missionary students in sounds, words, grammar, and usage.<sup>26</sup>

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Nodus, 1999); Otto Zwartjes and Even Hovdhaugen, eds., *Missionary Linguistics/Lingüística misionera: Selected Papers from the First International Conference on Missionary Linguistics, Oslo, 13–16 March 2003* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004). Zwartjes, “Historiography of Missionary Linguistics,” surveys this work.

25. For examples, see Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: Burrows Bros., 1896–1901), 7:57, 61; George Dixon, *A Voyage Round the World; But More Particularly to the North-west Coast of America: Performed in 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788, in the King George and Queen Charlotte* (London, 1789), 227–28.

26. On (limited) missionary accommodation, see Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 71–72, 81–83; Margaret J. Leahy, “*Comment peut un muet prescher l'évangile?*” Jesuit Missionaries and the Native Languages of New France,” *French Historical Studies*

The individuals, Native and European, who met in these language encounters and acted as intermediaries, moreover, produced a wealth of Native-language texts, which a number of scholars have examined with important results. An impressive body of research has demonstrated that these texts were the products of cross-cultural exchanges and the means for furthering such exchanges. Scholars have found in these texts convincing evidence of how Native people used their languages to mediate Christianity, using them to “filter,” in David Silverman’s useful formulation, missionaries’ teachings of components too much at odds with traditional views. Indigenous “assistants,” therefore, played crucial roles in shaping Native Christianities.<sup>27</sup> Native linguists, such as the Nahua priest Antonio del Rincón, who produced the first Jesuit grammar in New Spain, were Native intellectuals. As the interdisciplinary work of Alejandra Dubcovsky and Aaron Broadwell has shown, moreover, careful attention to the content of a given text, such as unwitting changes in dialect by a missionary author, can provide evidence of Native coauthorship that has been silenced in the historical record.<sup>28</sup> Just as significantly, as Philip Round has stressed, Native instructors, translators, and printers learned strategies of resistance and resignification through their linguistic labors, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and beyond.<sup>29</sup> These coproduced texts aided Euro-Americans who sought to communicate messages, but they also facilitated—and provide evidence of—missionaries *listening*. As Robert Michael

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19, no. 1 (1995): 105–32. On increased communication producing widening senses of difference, see Merrell, *Into the American Woods*; Robert Michael Morrissey, “‘I Speak It Well’: Language, Cultural Understanding, and the End of a Missionary Middle Ground in Illinois Country, 1673–1712,” *Early American Studies* 9, no. 3 (2011): 617–48.

27. David J. Silverman, “Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation: Creating Wampanoag Christianity on Seventeenth-century Martha’s Vineyard,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2005): 146; John L. Steckley, *Words of the Huron* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier, 2007); Tracy Neale Leavelle, “‘Bad Things’ and ‘Good Hearts’: Mediation, Meaning, and the Language of Illinois Christianity,” *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 363–94; Glenda Goodman, “‘But they differ from us in sound’: Indian Psalmody and the Soundscape of Colonialism, 1651–75,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2012): 793–822. On Rincón, see Kelly S. McDonough, “Indigenous Intellectuals in Early Colonial Mexico: The Case of Antonio del Rincón, Nahua Grammarian and Priest,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 145–65.

28. Alejandra Dubcovsky and George Aaron Broadwell, “Writing Timucua: Recovering and Interrogating Indigenous Authorship,” in this issue.

29. Round, *Removable Type*.



Morrissey has perceptively noted, dictionaries in which the Native words are arranged in alphabetical order, such as that of Illinois composed by the Jesuit missionary Jacques Gravier, aided missionaries seeking to understand Native speakers.<sup>30</sup>

Moving beyond older debates about the awe that European writing inspired in Indians and when it yielded to more critical or pragmatic views, and older narrative trajectories of the replacement of orality with literacy, it seems increasingly clear that Native responses to and uses of such texts were shaped by Native use of graphic systems that long predated European colonization. Ethnohistorians have documented indigenous use of multiple graphic systems from the quipus of the Andes and the syllabic glyphs and pictographic codices of Mesoamerica to the petroglyphs, painted buffalo hides, *doodem* representations, birch bark scrolls, and wampum in use farther north.<sup>31</sup> Influenced by such approaches, literary scholars such as Walter Mignolo, Germaine Warkentin, Matt Cohen, and Andrew Newman have challenged the traditional binary between oral and written cultures. Going further, Kristina Bross and Hilary Wyss, Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Philip Round, Robert Gunn, and Sarah Rivett have pushed scholars to recognize the variety of nonalphabetic indigenous literacies that coexisted alongside, and were actively integrated into, selective learning and use of European literacy and its accompanying textual forms.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Morrissey, "I Speak It Well," 639.

31. For an excellent sample of ethnohistorical work on graphic pluralism, see the contributions of Frank Salomon and Sabine Hyland, Heidi Bohaker, Kathleen J. Bragdon, Kevin Terraciano, David Tavárez, John F. Chuchiak IV, Galen Brokaw, Gary Urton, Sabine Hyland, and Margaret Bender in a special issue of *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 1 (2010).

32. Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians and Colonial America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Kristina Bross and Hillary E. Wyss, eds., *Early Native Literacies in New England: A Documentary and Critical Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Birgit Brander Rasmussen, *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Round, *Removable Type*; Andrew Newman, *On Records: Delaware Indians, Colonists, and the Media of History and Memory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Hillary E. Wyss, *English Letters and Indian Literacies: Reading, Writing, and New England Missionary Schools* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Robert L. Gunn, *Ethnology and Empire: Languages, Literatures, and the Making of the North American Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Sarah Rivett, "Learning to Write Algonquian Letters: The

Many scholars have looked to Native language texts less to examine instances of religious exchange and more to recover indigenous cultures and how they received and adapted European things and people. Indeed, in some studies, not only such texts but even Native languages themselves have been used as evidence. John Steckley's studies of Huron have been based on deep knowledge of Jesuit materials about those people and linguistic knowledge of the Huron language. Kathleen Bragdon has been especially explicit about not only using commentary in Native languages as a source for her studies of southern New England Algonquians from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, but also analyzing languages themselves as lenses into the lives and beliefs of Native speakers.<sup>33</sup> That cultural-anthropological premise, the subject of continuing debate among scholars in a variety of disciplines, has emerged from centuries of linguistic and psychological theorization, much of it involving Native languages, but the ethnohistorical combination of linguistic virtuosity and mastery of the archival record has yielded tremendous insights.<sup>34</sup> Even when based on more superficial familiarity with Native words for particular things, other scholars have turned to colonial-era Native-language texts for Native terminology. Brett Rushforth has recovered conceptual links between slaves and dogs in Algonquian and Siouan languages; Heidi Bohaker and Michael Witgen have explained understandings of kinship, place, and alliance among Anishinaabeg; and Robert Michael Morrissey has sketched the adaptation of buffalo hunting among the Illinois. Those indigenous frames of reference, in turn, shaped the forms that colonization took.<sup>35</sup> In the intention to use

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Indigenous Place of Language Philosophy in the Seventeenth-century Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2014): 549–88.

33. Steckley, *Words of the Huron*; Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native Peoples of Southern New England, 1500–1650* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1650–1775* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

34. For recent salvos in the debate on linguistic relativity (also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), see Guy Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages* (New York: Picador, 2010); John H. McWhorter, *The Language Hoax: Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

35. Bragdon, *Native Peoples of Southern New England, 1500–1650*, 29–30; Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 15–71, 383–91; Heidi Bohaker, "Nindoodemag: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600–1701," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2006): 23–52; Witgen, *Infinity of Nations*, 371–73; Robert Michael Morrissey,

Native-authored texts to provide a fuller understanding of colonization and, more particularly, how Native people understood it, experienced it, and shaped it, this work resembles the New Philology most associated with colonial Mesoamerica. In studies of ethnographic North America, however, comparatively fewer scholars have moved beyond examining discrete words to become more deeply conversant in indigenous languages.

Arguably the greatest linguistic effect of colonization was the dramatic spread of English, Spanish, French, and other European languages at the expense of the Native languages of the Americas. By the late seventeenth century this process stoked the frustration of those opposed to the practices and increasing influence of colonizers. According to one account of the Pueblo Revolt, for example, a prohibition on the teaching of Castilian accompanied the expulsion of the Spanish and the destruction of Christian symbols.<sup>36</sup> The process of what is often sanitized as “language shift” or grimly prophesied as “language death” was complex and uneven, the product of the demographic consequences of the Columbian exchange; the increasing usefulness and prestige of European languages and literacy, especially in Native communities subject to the political power of settlers or imperial officials; and the deliberate efforts of settler colonies and nations to impose their own tongues on the colonized. The United States, from the late nineteenth into the twentieth century, even sought to eliminate Native languages altogether.<sup>37</sup> Though few would dispute the claim that Native people used the languages of colonizers for their own ends, and some have even called for the recognition of language shift as a means of resistance, others have stressed the importance of language preservation and revitalization for maintaining the cultural and political strength of Native communities. Those linguistic programs have gained strength from the perceived connectedness of peoplehood, place, and speech.<sup>38</sup>

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*Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 20–25.

36. “Declaration of the Indian Juan,” in Charles Wilson Hackett, ed., *Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Otermin’s Attempted Reconquest, 1680–1682* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1942), 235.

37. On the English colonies and the United States, see Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 179–84; Gray, *New World Babel*, 80–84; Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 115–19, 169–80; Ruth Spack, *America’s Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English, 1860–1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

38. On English as an Indian language, and on language shift as a form of resistance, see Simon J. Ortiz, “Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism,” *MELUS* 8 (Summer 1981): 7–12, esp. 10, and Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Allen Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism*

When viewed as a whole, variegated work on linguistic aspects of colonization provides glimpses of cross-cultural exchanges and language as an instrument of empire in the Atlantic world. The rubric of the encounter links the histories of ideas, religion, and colonialism to different forms of indigenous resistance, perseverance, and survival, as these ideologies were enacted on the ground. They also prod us to examine how these confrontations and exchanges posed questions to Natives and newcomers alike and influenced the answers that individuals devised.



The language encounter occurred at a significant moment in the intellectual and cultural history of Europe. Given the confluence of intellectual shifts in Europe with colonization, connections between the two demand deeper examination, particularly in light of our dramatically expanded understanding of the dynamics of the language encounter. Evidence suggests the language encounter produced new forms of knowledge, but work remains to be done.

Protestant reformers believed in language's mystical potential; they promoted the recuperation of an Adamic language consisting of words that would have a clear and unequivocal referent in the natural world, which would in turn signify new knowledge of God.<sup>39</sup> Soon after they arrived on the Eastern Seaboard of North America, the religious quest to reestablish the moment in Genesis 11:1 when a great harmony existed between word and thing became a philosophical project as much as a Christian millennial enterprise. To collect the Earth's disparate languages, to trace derivative

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(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), xviii, 120. For a contrasting emphasis on the necessity of maintaining Native languages for cultural and political strength, see Scott Richard Lyons, "There's No Translation for It: The Rhetorical Sovereignty of Indigenous Languages," in Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda, eds., *Cross-Language Relations in Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 129, 139.

39. See Allison Coudert, "Some Theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century," in Wilhelm-Gottfried-Leibniz-Gesellschaft, ed., *Magia naturalis und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978), 56–114; David Cram, "Linguistic Eschatology: Babel and Pentecost in Seventeenth-century Linguistic Thought," *Language and History* 56, no. 1 (2013): 44–56; and Daniel Droixhe, *De l'origine du langage aux langues du monde: Etudes sur les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1987); Patrick M. Erben, *A Harmony of the Spirits: Translation and the Language of Community in Early Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

dialects to mother tongues, and to translate key Christian texts into a diversity of tongues both effectively spread the gospel among the Earth's inhabitants and advanced humanity toward a collective millennial hope for the second coming.

In Europe's primarily Catholic nations, Latin maintained its stronghold more firmly as the primary international language than it did in England, Scotland, and the Netherlands. This was due largely to the primacy that the Catholic Church placed on reading sacred texts in Latin and to the usefulness of a medium common to the republic of letters, especially for scholars whose vernaculars possessed relatively few speakers. Its use began to decline in the mid-seventeenth century and plummeted a century later. Latin faced competition from vernaculars, especially, in the early modern era, those dialects spoken in the lands of ambitious monarchs. Antonio de Nebrija's linking of language and empire, for example, resonated in the Americas, but it appeared in his grammar of Castilian, the first published grammar of a vernacular tongue, which appeared in the same the year as the final stage of the Reconquista and of Christopher Columbus's first voyage. In the mid-sixteenth century Spanish missionaries began a massive effort to compile, organize, and record indigenous tongues. One text among dozens that came out of Mexico City in the 1540s and 1550s, Pedro de Gante's *Doctrina Cristiana*, translates Christian doctrine into Nahuatl in the hopes of increasing knowledge of Nahuatl among missionaries in New Spain. Spanish translation efforts set the stage for parallel endeavors among the French, English, Dutch, and Germans in North America. French became codified through the Academy of Language in 1635, which consolidated efforts to eliminate impurities within the language and thus shore up and standardize the vernacular.<sup>40</sup>

In the mid- to late seventeenth century missionary language activity spiked in confluence with a European devotion to reexamining the semiotic resonance of words as links between the natural and the spiritual worlds. Languages became one of the most important skills that a missionary could have. Beyond the practical challenges of language learning, missionaries were called on, through trial and error, to reevaluate what they thought they knew about the relationship between word and spirit as promoted by Reformation and Counter-Reformation theologies, while also maintaining their commitment to a notion of language as residing between natural and

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40. Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48–60, 94–100.

supernatural, visible and invisible realms. To manage the problem that missionary linguistics presented to the seamless transparency of the Christian cosmos, clerics produced a wealth of texts, including dictionaries, catechisms, prayer books, vocabularies, grammars, Indian primers, and Bible translations. The language encounter provided both an enticing epistemological opportunity for increasing Christian knowledge and an unsettling way of challenging that knowledge.

European travelers and traders sought words to ease communication, facilitate exchange, and satisfy curiosity, but what they learned could prompt deep reflection. Even the pidgins that came into use in the seventeenth century prodded missionaries to consider everything from colonial social relations to the origin of language. These hybrid forms of speech could seem to represent a linguistic middle ground and a form of degeneracy. According to Joseph-François Lafitau, the French and Iroquois were out of necessity “forced, equally on both sides, to approach each other in their own language,” which led them to a combination of gesture and “words, which are of neither language because they are corrupted, forming a speech without rhyme or reason.” Familiarity with it, combined with his knowledge of the considerable grammatical difference of European tongues from Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Siouan languages, challenged Lafitau’s understanding of language and its significance. He acknowledged the reality of the confusion of tongues at Babel, but he also granted that “languages can be multiplied to as many as there are nations.” He saw “God’s finger” in Indian languages, but he recognized that words were “arbitrary . . . only signs adopted to represent the things to which they have been attached.” He thought a distinctive “way of thinking and tricks of expression” characterized all Native speech and distanced the Indians from Europeans, but he continued to assert that the “operations of the soul” were common across humanity and that “ideas . . . are everywhere almost the same for all men.”<sup>41</sup>

Although initially stunned by the linguistic diversity of North America, Europeans deployed classifications to organize indigenous tongues to colonial, imperial, and national advantage. Numerous scholars have cataloged the attempts of the learned to link indigenous languages with those of the old world, particularly Hebrew but also Phoenician, Welsh, Chinese, and vaguely known Tatar tongues. Aural differences and complexities thwarted the process of language collecting, undermining both traditional notions

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41. Joseph-François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared the Customs of Primitive Times* (1724), ed. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore, 2 vols. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1977), 2:261, 253, 267, 264.

of how the world's tongues might be reduced to a scriptural account and Enlightenment theories of discernable linguistic links between the Americas and Asia. Scholars have paid comparatively less attention to Euro-American efforts to use language to determine relationships among Indians. Yet linguistic similarities suggested avenues for the extension of trade and evangelization, and, for many, they promised a key to understanding lines of alliance. From the seventeenth century onward, colonial accounts are littered not only with observations about the linguistic similarities of neighboring and even of widely separated peoples, but also with the accompanying deduction that those similarities were the result of speakers sharing a common lineage. Iroquois, Hurons, and Neutrals represented a "family," Wampanoags and Powhatans a "race."<sup>42</sup> As Sean Harvey has shown, classifying relations among Indians remained a crucial goal for colonizers through the nineteenth century. In the early U.S. republic, recognition of linguistic difference provided a basis for denominating particular groups as "nations" or "tribes" that could cede land, though the taxonomic attempts to use language to simplify complexity outweighed occasional efforts to rely on linguistic difference to exploit diversity. Repeatedly spilling beyond the boundaries of any taxonomic scheme imposed on them, moreover, indigenous languages defied such efforts. In addition, Native people often frustrated Euro-Americans' impulse to map homologies among linguistic, cultural, and political differences, which hindered colonialist administration and the coherence of developing notions of race. Indians possessed their own understanding of linguistic relationships, which did not always correspond to the theories of scholars or more practically minded classifiers. Ambitions to reduce Native diversity were thus frustrated both by linguistic multiplicity and by Native communities' determination to maintain their Native tongues. Classification was as ambivalent a project as the task of translation, but we would benefit from a deeper understanding of Euro-American ideas—both correct and incorrect—about relationships among Native languages and how they thought those connections corresponded to Native peoples.<sup>43</sup>

42. Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 21:195; Champlin Burrage, ed., *John Pory's Lost Description of Plymouth Colony in the Earliest Days of the Pilgrim Fathers, Together with Contemporary Accounts of English Colonization Elsewhere in New England and the Bermudas* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 50.

43. Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 65–79, 185–94, 204–19. On classification in imperialism, see Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in Paul V. Kroskrity, ed., *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000); Sara Pugach,

Importantly, language encounters and conjectures were not limited to individuals of Native and European descent. The historical record offers glimpses of African Americans facing, and overcoming, linguistic multiplicity and the reflections that followed from such experiences. *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785) contains details of his learning Cherokee from a hunter and using it in prayer to avert a pending execution. While a previous examination of this account has cast it as a “Pentecostal moment,” it might be seen, rather, as a striking instance of Native linguistic instruction and canny strategic deployment of a linguistic skill, though one that prompted Marrant to ponder diversity, Mosaic writings, and global evangelization. He closed the narrative with a set of hopes, which included one that a “vast multitude of hard tongues, and strange speech, may learn the language of Canaan.” The contours of such exchanges, and their significance for African American intellectual history, await deeper study.<sup>44</sup>

Those engaged in projects of learning indigenous languages transmitted their ideas across the Atlantic in official reports to superiors and in accounts aimed at the reading public of their journeys, their work, and the peoples they encountered. Philosophers, in turn, drew on circulating knowledge of Native tongues as components of diverse theories about the nature of speech, the progress of society, and the ancestry or abilities of peoples. The primal scenes of linguistic origins that were peppered throughout eighteenth-century language philosophy borrowed from the travel accounts of others. Greek and Roman authors were certainly a mainstay of human histories, but the Americas also became a key scene for envisioning the origins of language in the long eighteenth century. Apart from a general

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“Carl Meinhof and the German Influence on Nicholas van Warmelo’s Ethnological and Linguistic Writing, 1927–1935,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (2004): 825–45; Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 83–88.

44. John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (Now Going to Preach the Gospel in Nova Scotia) Born in New-York, North-America . . .*, 2nd ed. (London, 1785), 21–24, 38. On the “Pentecostal moment,” see Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 103. On Marrant, see also Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 206–8. On the significance of Indians in black intellectual history, mainly in a slightly later period, see Arika Easley-Houser, “‘The Indian Image in the Black Mind’: Representing Native Americans in Antebellum African American Public Culture” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2014).



acknowledgment of this pattern and a deeper sense of particular leading philosophers such as John Locke, considerably more work is needed to trace how the intellectual results of particular social interactions in the colonies flowed as information to European capitals, courts, and colleges.<sup>45</sup> The bonds of empire facilitated but did not limit circulation, as some of the era's most influential texts demonstrate. Locke's editions of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690; 1706) cited Peter Martyr's *De orbe novo decadés* (1530), Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578), and Nicolás del Techo's *Historia provinciae Paraquariae* (1673), among others; references to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales de los Incas* (1609), Joseph-François Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux moeurs des premiers temps* (1724), and Sébastien Rale's *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (1723) appear in Johann Gottfried Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772). By the time Johann Severin Vater published the third volume of the polyglot philological compendium *Mithridates, oder allgemeine Sprachkunde mit dem Vater Unser als Sprachprobe in bey nahe fünf hundert Sprachen und Mundarten* (1816), which treated the languages of North America, he cited information from U.S. explorers such as Lewis and Clark, as well as U.S. publications such as Jonathan Edwards Jr.'s *Observations on the Language of the Mubhekaneew Indians* (1788) and Benjamin S. Barton's *New Views of the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America* (1797).

Whether peered through like windows into the minds of indigenous peoples, or imagined as lasting evidence of their origins, migrations, and kinships, languages became crucial bases for scholars, officials, missionaries, and settlers to narrate justifications of conquest and control. What resulted was a constellation of (thoroughly inconsistent) European notions concerning the peculiarity and rudeness of Native languages, conceptions frequently molded to be compatible with scriptural accounts of the confusion of tongues and dispersal of nations at Babel. Though some conceived of these

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45. For a general overview, see Gray, *New World Babel*, chap. 4; Lieve Jooen, "Descriptions of American Indian Word Forms in Colonial Missionary Grammars," and Rudiger Schreyer, "'Savage' Languages in Eighteenth-century Theoretical History of Language," in Gray and Fiering, *Language Encounter in the Americas*, 293–309, 310–26; Céline Carayon, "The Gesture Speech of Mankind: Old and New Entanglements in the Histories of Indian and European Sign Languages," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016), 461–91. For a good study of a specific philosopher's debt to particular sources, see David Paxman, "Adam in a Strange Country: Locke's Language Theory and Travel Literature," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 4 (1995): 460–81.

traits in terms of essential and fixed racial difference, many philosophers, philologists, and linguists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries insisted on a hierarchy that ranked the speech and thought of colonizer and colonized, while also viewing “savagery” or “barbarism” as reflecting either some imagined postlapsarian nadir or an origin point for humanity. Native languages provided the mirror with which to gaze on an “Indian mind” and European modernity at the same time.<sup>46</sup> While often distorted from the original account to serve the ideological aims of the language philosopher, these theories were not fabricated from whole cloth. Native strategies in intercultural communication, diplomatic incorporation, and missionary translation, in turn, played a central role in what Europeans came to know about Native languages, from notions of linguistic poverty to stereotypes of eloquence or harangues, to comprehension of the substantial differences that characterized indigenous and European languages.<sup>47</sup> Peeling back layers of history allows scholars to discover anew not just the primary texts undergirding Enlightenment philosophy and ideologies, but also the parameters of the original encounter.

These diverse Euro-American linguistic projects depended on Native people’s willingly sharing their linguistic knowledge. Even beyond the work of Native interpreters and so-called assistants to missionaries, as the desire to obtain more “philosophical” or “scientific” understanding of Native languages grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Native consultants provided detailed knowledge of which Native languages they recognized to be related to their own and of variations in the grammatical features that different indigenous languages shared or that separated one from another. Peter S. Du Ponceau, arguably the most important philologist of the nineteenth century, was particularly explicit about such debts. Not least, he recognized that indigenous sources provided a foundation for philosophical

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46. On ideas of the deficiency of Native languages, see Julie Tetel Andresen, *Linguistics in America, 1769–1924: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 83–119; Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 126–40; Mignolo, *Darker Side of the Renaissance*; Gray, *New World Babel*; Schreyer, “‘Savage’ Languages in Eighteenth-century Theoretical History of Language”; David B. Paxman, “Language and Difference: The Problem of Abstraction in Eighteenth-century Language Study,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 19–36. On primitiveness as a crucial component of language ideologies, see Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the spiritual importance of Babel among Moravians and other pietists, see Erben, *Harmony of the Spirits*.

47. For an overview see Harvey, *Native Tongues*, chap. 1.

authority once filtered through a Euro-American savant. After discussions with Wyandot and Chickasaw consultants, Du Ponceau became convinced that Iroquoian and Muskogean languages, seemingly unrelated to Lenni Lenape and other Algonquian languages, shared the latter's grammatical organization. Some missionary-educated Native scholars, however, bridled at Du Ponceau's homogenization of all indigenous tongues and corrected erroneous representations of "Indian" tongues and minds. Numerous Native scholars found their philological opinions cited in print, such as David Brown (Cherokee), Eleazer Williams (Mohawk), and Peter Jones (Missis-sauga Ojibwe). Others, even those unengaged in scholarly philology, published texts themselves. The first published Native-authored grammar of a Native language north of Mexico, for instance, was the Ojibwe grammar of John Summerfield (Sahgahjewagahbahweh).<sup>48</sup> This Native information, in turn, shaped how European scholars understood not only the "American languages" but also the range of human speech, whether imagined in developmental, essentialist, or even broadly relativistic terms. Recognizing the degree to which Euro-American linguistic knowledge depended on Native participation, therefore, demands affirmation of the degree to which Native knowledge and Atlantic networks shaped the development of this realm of European and American intellectual history.<sup>49</sup> Such work has only just begun.

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48. The first published, Native-authored grammar in North America is John Summerfield, alias Sahgahjewagahbahweh, *Sketch of Grammar of the Chippeway Language, to Which Is Added a Vocabulary of Some of the Most Common Words* (Cazenovia, N.Y.: Fairchild & Son, 1834). See also Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 5–6, 14–15, 101–2, 111–14, 160–62.

49. For considerations of Native people as producers of knowledge, see Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to Be Red," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997): 625–44; Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Neil Safier, "Global Knowledge on the Move: Itineraries, Amerindian Narratives, and Deep Histories of Science," *Isis* 101, no. 4 (2010): 133–45. On European dependence on indigenous knowledge in philology and anthropology, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, "Introduction: Locating the Colonial Subjects of Anthropology," in Pels and Salemink, eds., *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Harvey, *Native Tongues*. On Native participation in political-ethnological debates, see Harvey, *Native Tongues*; Scott Michaelsen, *The Limits of Multiculturalism: Interrogating the Origins of American Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography*,

Answering questions about what one recent conference called “Translation and Transmission in the Early Americas” entails closer examination of how Natives’ understandings of language, languages, and literacies shaped their experience of the language encounter.<sup>50</sup> Natives’ views about the intellectual and aesthetic traits of their language, its connection with the people and their land, and its relationship to other tongues must have had some bearing on their views of, and actions in, the language encounter, and all beckon deeper investigation.

There certainly was no single “Indian” understanding of speech: Native traditions reveal a range of conceptions about languages, their origin, and their social significance, though all suggest the degree to which language was crucial to Native senses of peoplehood.<sup>51</sup> Some recall ancient times, when human beings shared language with animals. Many others recorded the separate emergence of different peoples speaking different languages. For some, it was not the Great Spirit but, rather, another figure who invented language. Certain peoples recalled instances of teaching their own

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1827–1863 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

50. “Translation and Transmission in the Early Americas: The Fourth Early Americanist Summit” was held in Washington, D.C., and College Park, Md., June 2–5, 2016. This excellent gathering of scholars of Ibero- and Anglo-America was cosponsored by the Society of Early Americanists, the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, the Kislak Family Foundation, the Buckner W. Clay Endowment at the University of Virginia Institute of the Humanities & Global Cultures, the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., the Mexican Cultural Institute, and the University of Maryland.

51. For considerations of language and identity, see J. Leitch Wright Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500–1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 320–23; Amy C. Schutt, “Tribal Identity in the Moravian Missions on the Susquehanna,” *Pennsylvania History* 66, no. 3 (1999): 378–98, esp. 389–92; Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 69–70, 74–75, 191–92. For an overview, see Teresa L. McCarty and Ofelia Zepeda, “Native Americans,” in Joshua A. Fishman and Ofelia García, eds., *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*, vol. 1, *Disciplinary and Regional Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On language and peoplehood, see Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, no. 1 (2003): 7–24, esp. 11–13; Thomas Belt and Margaret Bender, “Speaking Difference to Power: The Importance of Linguistic Sovereignty,” in Ulrike Weithaus, ed., *Foundations of First Peoples’ Sovereignty: History, Education and Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Lyons, “There’s No Translation for It.”

language to another people, or the adoption of one group's language by another. Some traditions suggest that new forms of speech developed as man and woman first met or when peoples speaking different languages encountered one another and intermarried. Yet others describe linguistic divergence over time, as rivalries divided peoples, or as different groups moved apart.<sup>52</sup> Whether language was originally different or became so over time, unintelligibility tended to produce cohesion among some and conflict with others. Building on the excellent work by Steven Hahn and Joshua Piker, who have provided models of how Native stories about the past could represent attempts to project power in the present and order the future, scholars can examine these stories as aspects of Native intellectual and sociopolitical history.<sup>53</sup>

As much as scholars must take seriously those Native perspectives that seem to differ most sharply from those of the Europeans they encountered, confronted, and worked with, there is also the important question of seeming correspondences between Native and Euro-American ideas. To take one example, in the early twentieth century an "old Indian now dead" told the anthropologist John R. Swanton about the emergence of Alabamas and Koasatis, two indigenous peoples of the Southeast who eventually became Creeks: "The Alabama and Koasati came out of the earth on opposite sides

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52. Examples of such traditions can be found in Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1851–57), 4:229 (Ho Chunk); Nicolas Perrot, "Memoir on the Manners, Customs, and Religion of the Savages of North America," in Emma Helen Blair, ed. and trans., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1911), 41 (Anishinaabe); Geo. Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians . . . Written during Eight Years' Travel amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America . . .*, 2 vols. (London, 1841), 2:128 (Choctaw); J. G. Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami: Wanderings round Lake Superior* (London, 1860), 195–97; John Heckewelder, "An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States," *Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society* 1 (1819): 29–35; John Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816*, ed. Carl F. Klinck and James J. Talman (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1970), 91, 98, 110 (Onondaga), and 46, 82 (Cherokee).

53. Steven C. Hahn, "The Cussita Migration Legend: History, Ideology, and the Politics of Mythmaking," in Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge, eds., *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Joshua Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9–15.

of the root of a certain tree and settled there in two bodies. Consequently these differed somewhat in speech, though they always kept near each other.”<sup>54</sup> In its reference to peoples who only “differed *somewhat* in speech,” the tradition conveys these peoples’ recognition of the nearness and apartness of their respective tongues, a simultaneous status maintained through continued proximity or relationship. Although the reference in the story is to the Cosmic Tree or Tree of Life at the center of the world along the Alabama River, the association of speech with the roots of a tree, as Swanton well knew, is remarkably consonant with the metaphor that shaped Euro-American philology: that of the branching tree of languages. This is just one story that seems to convey the cross-fertilization of indigenous and Euro-American ideas about language that came about as a result of the language encounter. Elsewhere in the historical record one can find a Delaware Christian describing the origin of linguistic diversity in a way that strikingly parallels the Tower of Babel story, or Ojibwe contentions that their language expresses the essence of nature in Anishinaabewaki.<sup>55</sup> Such claims call out for investigation as something more than Indians asserting European ideas as traditional knowledge.

Besides Native views of the origins of language and linguistic diversity, evidence for the tremendous significance of the language encounter for Native tongues and societies can be found in Native-language texts and in other sources produced by speakers of indigenous tongues, particularly missionaries who worked closely with Native instructors and translators. Experience Mayhew, who learned Wampanoag as a child and used it regularly from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, observed that dialectical “difference was something greater than now it is, before our Indians had the use of the Bible and other Books translated by *Mr. Eliot*.”<sup>56</sup>

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54. John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors*, BAE Bulletin no. 73 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 192. See also Sheri Marie Shuck-Hall, *Journey to the West: The Alabama and Coushatta Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 27–29.

55. Charles Beatty, *Journal of a Two-Months Tour; with a View of Promoting Religion among the Frontier Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, and of Introducing Christianity among the Indians to the Westward of the Allegheny Mountains* (London, 1768), 90; Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby), *History of the Ojebway Indians; with Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (London, 1861), 179. See also Lyons, “No Translation for It”; Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 49–51, 162–63.

56. Experience Mayhew, *Observations on the Indian Language* (1722) (Boston: D Clapp & Son, 1884), 6; emphasis in original. On literacy and dialectical flattening, see Bragdon, “Native Languages as Spoken and Written,” 181.

Apart from the changes brought by missionary elevation of a particular dialect as the standard through the production and dissemination of texts and the spread of alphabetic literacy, other changes occurred merely as a result of contact with European tongues. Commenting on scriptural translation into Cherokee in the early nineteenth century, Daniel Butrick noted that despite its absence in the “ancient language . . . since the inroads of the whites, the *m* sometimes occurs,” though he added that it did so “but seldom, and always grates on the ear of a Cherokee.”<sup>57</sup> As a result of Senecas’ “intercourse with the Whites,” Asher Wright observed around midcentury, “Younger Indians . . . not unfrequently apply the same forms which denote the male and female of the human species, to animals, but the older Indians regard this as a corruption of their language.”<sup>58</sup> It would be a mistake to overstate the social and cultural significance of changes to the neglect of recognizing the underlying patterns by which Native people incorporated new linguistic practices for their own ends and sometimes in the service of old ways, just as they did material and spiritual practices. Suggesting the degree to which some Anishinaabeg understood alphabetic literacy to be analogous to their own modes of making physical signs to convey information, an unnamed Ojibwe informed the traveler Johan Georg Kohl that his people used the same word, *masinaigan*, to refer both to birch bark scrolls and to white people’s books.<sup>59</sup> The question of how Native individuals and communities experienced these dialectical, phonetic, grammatical, and graphic changes, and to what extent they either altered or were reconciled with previous conceptions of their own language or linguistic relationships with others, however, is an important one.

Some of those same texts, designed for the transformation of Native peoples, have also become resources for linguistic and cultural revitalization. A Mashpee tribal member, Jessie “Little Doe” Baird, has recounted a dream in which, over three consecutive nights, she heard a sacred message and saw the faces of her ancestors. Interpreting her dream as a sign that the ancient language of the Wampanoag tribe should be reclaimed, she worked in collaboration with the late linguist Kenneth Hale to reconstruct Wampanoag

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57. John Howard Payne, *The Payne-Butrick Papers*, ed. William L. Anderson, Jane L. Brown, and Anne F. Rogers, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 1:11.

58. [Asher Wright], *Go' wāna gwa'ih sat' bah yon de' yās dab' gwah: A Spelling-Book in the Seneca Language: With English Definitions* (Buffalo-Creek Reservation, N.Y.: Mission Press, 1842), 81–82.

59. Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 145.

from the printed seventeenth-century colonial records. The Myaamia Center in Oxford, Ohio, received a grant to transcribe and translate the contents of two Miami-Illinois dictionaries composed by Jacques Gravier and Jean-Baptiste Le Boullenger. Against prevailing narratives of language death, such projects have established what Bernard Perley calls “language life” for the people who spoke these languages.<sup>60</sup>



Language, as a topic of inquiry, is remarkably multivalent. It is a means of communication, but it also functions as a way to draw lines of inclusion and exclusion. Learning another language demonstrates a commitment to understand another person or people, yet increased familiarity can produce a firmer conviction of underlying difference. Translation implies the commensurability of words, thoughts, and feelings, while also insisting that what is foreign or different can and perhaps should be converted into terms more useful for another. One Lakota story tells that Iktomi, a trickster known for wisdom and foolishness, was responsible for human language.<sup>61</sup> It is fitting that its origin would lie in a dualistic figure since language is both an inborn faculty and a learned institution, which can serve to speak sincerely or to deceive, to unite people or divide them, as an aspect of colonization and of resistance.

A focus on language offers a unique point of intersection between early

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60. Baird, for her work on the Wópanâak Language Reclamation Project ([www.wlrp.org](http://www.wlrp.org)), and Daryl Baldwin, for his work at the Myaamia Center (<http://myaamia.center.org>), have both been awarded MacArthur grants. On the importance of conceptualizing “language life,” see Bernard Perley, “Remembering Ancestral Voices: Emergent Vitalities and the Future of Indigenous Languages,” in Elena Mihás et al., eds., *Responses to Language Endangerment: Essays in Honor of Mickey Noonan* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013), 245. For overviews of revitalization programs and their theorization, see Michael Harkin, *Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Kenneth Hale and Leanne Hinton, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization* (London: Academic Press, 2001); Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); and Hinton with Matt Vera and Nancy Steele, *How to Keep Your Language Alive* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

61. Thomas Tyon, William Garnett, Thunder Bear, George Sword, and John Blunt Horn, “Foundations,” in James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1980; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 106. For examples of varied traditions, see Harvey, *Native Tongues*, 7.



modern Atlantic and Native American studies. The linguistic diversity of both continents lends itself to examining the multipolarity of early America, moving us farther beyond old binaries of “red” and “white,” European and Native, Old World and New. Questions of religious translation, diplomatic interpretation, and intercultural communication networks, however, provide crucial points of access into deeper processes of Native adaptation of Euro-American words and ways, ideas and institutions. The sounds, words, and forms of speech, as well as methods of physical preservation and transmission, became crucial elements in how diverse Native people and Euro-Americans understood and articulated perceived differences. The indigenous language collection and translation projects from the colonial period to the early nineteenth century in North America speak more broadly to the function of language within human societies. Such projects indicate a will on the part of Europeans to know and to order languages and speakers, while at the same time rejecting that effort by demonstrating that any endeavor to possess another culture’s language can never be complete. An Atlantic discourse on indigenous languages became crucial to developing evolutionary notions, nationalist ideologies, and racial theories. All were facets of broader processes of linguistic colonialism. Native-language texts also undermined processes of translation, Christianization, taxonomies, and colonialism. Today such texts have proven instrumental in programs of linguistic revitalization and the maintenance of cultural sovereignty. The documents that have been preserved in archives as integral to such revitalization movements have become so because of incipient forms of linguistic sovereignty present in colonial indigenous language encounters all along.