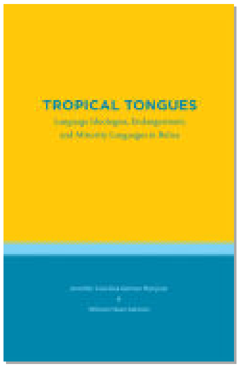
CONCLUSION: Forces of Change



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Conclusion

Forces of Change

As in other dynamic linguistic contexts, the factors driving language change, language shift, and endangerment on the Central American Caribbean coast have largely been unexplored. As an organizing principle in this book, the concept of "language ecology," has allowed us to consider the relationships and place of a language in its larger social and cultural contexts. According to Haugen (1972: 325), one of the earliest thinkers on the subject,

> Language ecology may be defined as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment. . . . The true environment of a language is the society that uses it as one of its codes. Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e. their social and natural environment. Part of its ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another part of its ecology is sociological: its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication.[1]

The emerging body of work on language-contact issues in the Central American Caribbean coastal region focuses on contact-induced change in the phonologies and morphosyntactic systems of area minority languages. This scholarship has shed light on the intensity of the contact in question, but it has focused on attitudes of the speakers in the contact situations.[2] While attitudes and intensity are certainly constituents of the linguistic ecologies of the languages we have examined, our attention to social factors conditioning language attitudes in coastal Belize has highlighted factors that have not been thoroughly explored in the fields of linguistics and Latin American studies, and certainly not in an interdisciplinary fashion.

Anne Sutherland (1998) highlights Belize's abrupt transition from colony to postmodern nation "influenced by strong transnational movements and ideas such as environmentalism, liberalization of the economy, democracy, international tourism, and the international drug trade" (3). The young nation remains one of the most ethnically diverse in Central America, and the country's transition into independence ushered changes in the ways that the new citizens identified themselves and their compatriots. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) reported on the changing conceptions of identity between ethnic Creole, Mayan, and Garifuna groups, as well as the multilingual identities of these same minority groups in the Cayo District at the dawn of independence. Decades later, our 2012–16 fieldwork on Kriol, Mopan, and Garifuna in coastal Belize has allowed us to identify several factors that constitute the ecologies of minority languages in an empirically different context. In the discussion below, we examine the most significant aspects of these ecologies and their contribution to the state of transitional bilingualism (and likely language loss) in which these languages currently reside.

1. **Integration into the National Fold.** Belize gained its independence from Great Britain in 1981. The Belizean Constitution was signed in September 1981 and went into effect immediately. This document provides criteria for determining citizenship and specifies the rights, protections, and responsibilities of its citizens and, notably, contains an explicit protection against slavery and discrimination on the basis of sex, race, place of origin, political opinions, color, or creed. The important acknowledgement of (1) marginalization arising from a rural/urban and coastal/inland "place of origin," as well as (2) "color" as a result of the legacy of a pigmentocratic system that has been in place since the era of slavery are important aspects of this constitution.
2. **Cultural Prominence of Creoles.** Historically, Belize ex-

perienced an atypical institution of slavery, which saw small groups of slaves in mobile logging camps, often working alongside whites, rather than the large sugar plantations found elsewhere in the Caribbean. As such, the social position of slaves and their descendants in Belize, which included many Creoles, was less regimented than other Caribbean slave experiences. Some of the Creoles ultimately enjoyed a better relationship with colonial whites, and this has had lasting ramifications in terms of cultural prominence. For example, most high-ranking elected officials—including former and current prime ministers—continue to be Creoles today, even though ethnic Creoles are a minority in the country. It is well known that when a group is prominent or prestigious, their language will typically share in this high regard. Finally, since independence in 1981, it has been the Creole identity to which the country has turned to distinguish itself from that of British colonialism; again, this is in spite of the fact that ethnic Creoles are not a majority in the country.

3. **Citizenship and Foreignness.** The Belizean Constitution signed in 1981 provided for an "economic citizenship" provision that granted citizenship to individuals who made "a substantial contribution to the economy and/or well-being of Belize." While Belize was the destination of Honduran, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan immigrants fleeing civil wars in their countries of origin, it also became the destination for a large number of retirees from the United States and Canada who settled in Belize. The provision was repealed in 2001 following widespread criticism, and tension between groups over "rightful citizenship" in Belize is permeable to this day. The tensions are felt in rural areas, where the Belizean government is said to have granted plots of land to Spanish-speaking Central Americans, as well as seaside urban areas where landownership is dramatically concentrated in the hands of Anglophone U.S.-Belizean and Canadian-Belizean dual citizens. Meanwhile, ongoing bor-

der disputes with Guatemala contribute to a growing sense of Belizean nationalism, which is symbolized in Creole culture and language.

4. **Tourism and Private Property.** Villas, cattle ranches, seafront lots, golf courses, private islands, and private cays are available for purchase to foreigners (with or without Belizean citizenship) with little to no restrictions, promoting large-scale construction of condos, beach homes, resorts, and retail centers to attract tourists. At the time of this writing, Sotheby's—with headquarters on Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro Town, Belize—lists properties for US$9.9 million, and even a much more "modest" website advertises a 5,000-acre property boasting "a spectacular display of wildlife, with thousands of Mahogany and Royal Palm trees" in Ladyville, home to the Belize City Airport, for $10 million. Meanwhile, U.S. actor Leonardo DiCaprio and an associate purchased Blackadore Caye, a 104-acre private island off the coast of Belize, for $1.75 million, with the intention of developing it into an ecoresort, with houses built on the island expected to sell for $5–15 million. To put those prices into perspective, the Central Intelligence Agency listed Belize's GDP per capita at $8,600 in 2015 and stated that 41 percent of the population fell below the poverty line. As census data and observers have noted, owning a home, particularly in the coastal Belizean districts, is beyond reach for many Belizean nationals.
5. **Decline of Traditional Livelihoods (Fishing and Hunting).** As in other countries where tourism contributes greatly to the nation's GDP, environmental decisions in Belize are made to serve the expanding ecotourism industry. This has had an impact on local fishing industries, in addition to the competition between small-scale fishermen and a large-scale industry in the same ocean waters. Poaching is also common, leading to depletion of the commonly sought species. Further, and perhaps most alarming, is the designation of an increasing number of rural areas as national parks, nature reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries. While na-

ture parks and sanctuaries are appealing to foreign tourists, this kind of action has led historically to displacement of indigenous Mayan and Garifuna communities and has had a direct impact on food security as hunting and fishing become restricted at best, and prohibited at worst.

6. **Educational Institutions.** The Belizean Constitution guaranteed free public education for its citizens, and made schooling compulsory for children aged six to fourteen. Ten years after independence, the Belizean government expressed in a World Bank report its plan to promote economic growth by "providing its citizens with a sound foundation of basic education on which effective future employee training programs can build" (cited in Murnane, Mullens, and Willet 1996: 146). Though it was originally modeled after the British system, U.S. educational systems and Jesuit missionaries have had a strong effect on private and public Belizean education. For example, it is commonly believed that St. Catherine Academy and St. John's College High School (which held its 2014 prom at the prestigious Radisson Fort George in Belize City) are the best high schools in the country. These educational institutions reinforce overt and covert language attitudes toward English and Kriol, since teachers are not only pillars of society—especially in rural contexts—but also are responsible for the educational baseline of Belizean citizens.
7. **Religious Institutions.** Bolland (1988: 210) writes that along with race and language, religion "defines and overlaps 'ethnic groups'" in Belize. Protestant British colonialism had a lasting impact on the Creole community, whose enslaved and emancipated ancestors practiced the Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist traditions. Catholicism first arrived on the shores of British Honduras as it did elsewhere in the Americas—as a weapon of colonialism. Mayan struggles against Spanish settlement on their lands in British Honduras halted a long-term establishment of Spanish friars and Catholic churches. By the time British Honduras became independent Belize, however, 60 percent of the popu-

lation identified as Catholic.[3] Since then, the number of Belizeans affiliated with all of these religions has dropped significantly. Results from the most recent census indicate that 40 percent of Belizeans identify as Catholic, 18.3 percent practice fundamentalist and evangelical religions, and 15.5 percent indicate they are not religious, leaving much smaller percentages of Belizeans who practice other ancestral or Protestant religions. The spectrum of beliefs from agnostic to evangelical is broadest among the Creole community, Mayas are likely to be practicing Catholics or evangelical Christians, and Garifuna communities are the least involved in the growing evangelical missions in the country.

8. **Generational Differences in Religion, Education, Social Relationships.** Whereas religion was central in the lives of their grandparents and parents, for most teenagers in contemporary Belize (with the exception of those who practice Pentecostal religions) religion is just one among many factors influencing their decision making. For these youth, "educational markers are eclipsing religious and subcultural rituals regarding movement from childhood to adulthood" (Anderson-Fye 2007: 77). Although grandparents and parents believe that young people are more independent than they were, this is not perceived as a negative attribute; instead, it is generally correlated with educational attainment. Family networks continue to be important to Belizeans across generations, even as transnational emigration and migration over the last thirty-five years have had an impact on how often family members see each other. Furthermore, young people's friendships are no longer limited to their cousin-kin but extended to include Belizean peers met in high school—from different ethnic and class backgrounds—and even foreigners met through online chat rooms and social networks.[4] Perhaps one of the most important features of the young people in Belize is that "personal identity is tied to national identity for most Belizean adolescents. Great pride is taken in being Belizean" (Anderson-Fye 2007: 79).
9. **Gender Dynamics.** Educational opportunities have signifi-

cantly affected gender dynamics, since they provide young Belizean women with alternatives to early marriage and young childbearing. Mass media has likewise had a major influence on teenagers and their mothers, since talk shows and reality television have given women vocabulary and emotional patterning (Anderson-Fye 2003). Certain behaviors, such as spousal maltreatment or male infidelity might have been normative in the romantic relationships of grandparents, but expectations of partners have changed for parents and teenagers today. Similarly, preferential treatment of boys over girls in many aspects of life, from schooling to household tasks, has changed as foreign media and the changing composition of the Belizean workforce alters former conceptions about men and women. Belizeans are aware of global discussions about gender equity, and this is certainly a driving force, but the most salient force at work here is economic, as it becomes evident that the service industry requires female workers and that those workers must have a high school education at the very least. Creole and Garifuna families have historically had female heads of household, while Spanish and Mayan families have traditionally had male heads of household, but across ethnic groups, most young people have expectations of personal economic success and gender equity in relationships (Anderson-Fye 2003). Belizean women take great pride in their femininity, and curvaceous bodies are valued as Wilk's (1993) study of Belizean beauty pageants demonstrates, yet so too are women's industriousness and intelligence.

10. **Bi- and multilingualism.** Belize is a highly bi- and multilingual country, with most of its citizens able to speak two or more languages. The Kriol language is the mother tongue of ethnic Creoles, but it also serves as a lingua franca for the rest of the country. Thus, regardless of their native language—whether it be Spanish, Mopan, Kekchi, Garifuna, or other tongues—most Belizeans can speak Kriol. In the last few decades, however, since independence and given the factors listed in this section, the Kriol language has taken on

> the social meaning of "authentic" Belizean identity. Furthermore, the number of informal and formal contexts in which it is used has grown significantly in the last thirty-five years. This social elevation and ubiquity of Kriol has consequences for the other minority languages in the country. As discussed above, bi- and multilingualism can lead to permanent language shift under certain circumstances. This current state of affairs, which could be called a "transitional bilingualism," is one of the most significant factors leading to an increase in the number of speakers. Concurrently, we observe a rapid decline in speakers' use of other Belizean minority languages.

It is not lost upon us as we reach the end of our study that several of these factors overlap. Nor do we claim that this is an exhaustive list of all the factors that constitute the ecology of the languages, especially the minority languages, of Belize. We do hope, however, that the sketches we have provided of these factors—bi- and multilingualism, shifting gender dynamics, widened generation gaps, changes in religious and educational institutions, the rise of tourism, the decline of local fishing industries, the cultural prominence of Creoles, and the "integration" of hitherto isolated geographic areas—present a more systematic picture of language shift and language endangerment. The complexity of these processes cannot be understated, especially in lush contexts where growing and emerging tourist economies are persistently driving change in geographic and linguistic landscapes.

As we have suggested in our study of minority languages in Belize and in our discussion of minority languages across the Americas, the socioeconomic and political contexts of tropical tongues are subject to a plethora of variants, making it difficult to develop and test hypotheses about the development of the languages. To complicate matters further, no two minority languages are on equal footing, even when they are spoken in the same geographically bound site. Linguistic hierarchies come into play during key historical turning periods when national and regional identities are called into question. And yet, as we have seen, the linguistic vitality of any tropical tongue at the very minimum depends on the stability of four pillars in its environment: language policy and the mechanisms for its implementation, passionate proponents of the language at the forefront of a grassroots language movement, ideologies about the linguistic dimension of national identity, and positive language attitudes rooted in the belief that the language is vital to those whose lives and livelihoods are at stake.

Herodotus advised his readers to read geography historically and to read all history geographically. In a similar vein, we have suggested that geography be read linguistically and that linguistics be read geographically in order to examine the complex ecologies of tropical languages. Geographically situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, the (linguistic) climate of "the tropics" has never been temperate.[5] Subject to a variety of negative attitudes and policies aimed at taming their growth, so to speak, the indigenous and creole languages of the tropical Central American Caribbean coast have been razed for centuries, from the colonial period through the postindependence period, in order to till the soil for the English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese. In spite of this, many of the lush tongues of this coastal strip thrived until recently. They have been spoken on linguistic islands, in jungles, at the foothills of "mountains" concealing ancient pyramids,[6] on rimlands where European ships couldn't dock, in swampy areas, and in settlements around lagoons. Just like the mangroves of these very same tropics, they have lived a rich life "on the edge," enabling those who depend on them to become brilliant adaptors to changing tides. And, in a manner even more analogous to those very same mangroves, the vitality of tropical tongues is threatened by encroaching tourism, as the sites in which they have hitherto flourished become depopulated or leveled in order to facilitate the construction of the housing developments, roads, port facilities, hotels, golf courses, and ecoresorts that are the hallmark of the bourgeoning service and tourist economy of Belize.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Nicholas Spykman (1944) first used the term *rimland* to describe the maritime fringe of a country or continent, contrasting it with *heartland*, with its geopolitical focus on the interior of a nation or continent. Literary critic Ian Smart (1984) used the concept of rimlands to develop a theory of black Central American literature.

2. For a fascinating discussion of language ecologies in Brazil, see Mufwene 2014.

3. The language status of Miskito as measured by *Ethnologue*'s EGIDS is 2, which indicates that the language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of Nicaragua. It is spoken as a mother tongue mainly by adults, who also use English, Nicaraguan Creole English, and Spanish, and it is spoken as an L2 by speakers of Mayangna and Spanish-speaking Mestizos. In addition, there are published materials, including a dictionary, grammar, and Bible in the language. *Ethnologue* 2017c.

4. The language status of Nicaragua Creole English as measured by *Ethnologue*'s EGIDS is 3, indicating that the language is used in work and mass media and, like Miskito, it is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community. Speakers of the language also use English and Spanish, and the linguistic community has grown to include Garifuna, Miskito, Rama, and Spanish-speaking Mestizos who use it as an L2. *Ethnologue* 2017d.

5. For detailed analysis of annexation and its repercussions, see Hale 1994. For an account of the six coastal communities (Mestizo, Criollo, Miskito, Garifuna, Rama, and Sumo) in Nicaragua, as well as details about the development of creole languages on the Nicaraguan shore, see Holm 1983; and López Alonzo 2016.

6. The precedent for this language was Decree 571 promoted by an organization called MISURASATA (Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas, and Sandinistas United Together) and passed by the Sandinista government in 1980. The decree stated that "the maternal language constitutes a fundamental factor in the existence of persons and peoples and is a determining factor in the process of integration and consolidation of National Unity." Article 1 authorized "instruction at the pre-primary and in the first four grades of primary in Miskitu and English languages in the schools in the zone" where the respective indigenous and Creole communities resided (Arnove and Ovando 1993).

7. Extraordinary work on language contact in Mexico and Paraguay is developed by Carol Klee and Andrew Lynch. We direct the reader to their *El español en contacto con otras lenguas* (2009) for a more comprehensive history of Nahuatl and Guaraní and their lexical, syntactic, phonological, semantic, and pragmatic impact on the Mexican and Paraguayan varieties of Spanish.

8. There was a paucity of Spaniards living in New Spain and this monolingual Castilian-speaking community seldom ventured out of the capital, resulting in the virtual absence of interaction with monolingual and bilingual indigenous populations (Hidalgo 2001: 59).

9. The language status of Kaqchikel as measured by *Ethnologue*'s EGIDS is 4 (Educational), indicating that it is a recognized language, that nearly all parents pass Kaqchikel to their children, and that it is used among all age groups. In addition, it is used as an L2 by speakers of K'iché. It is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported primary and secondary schools. It is also used in radio programs and online in a variety of social media platforms.

10. Barbara Cifuentes and José Luis Moctezuma (2006: 204), for example, describe a steady increase in the number of people who identify as bilingual in Mexico, from 37.7 percent of the population to 81.4 percent of the population in 2000.

11. According to *Ethnologue*, the languages spoken in Chiapas are, by category, Chiapanec (9 Dormant), Chicomuceltec (9 Dormant), Chol (5 Developing), Chuj (6b Threatened), Jakalteco (8a Moribund), Kanjobal (6a Vigorous), Lacandon (5 Developing), Mam (5 Dispersed), Mocho (8a Moribund), Tectitec (7 Shifting), Tojolabal (5 Developing), Tzetzal (5 Developing), Tzotzil (6b Threatened), and Zoque (6a Vigorous).

12. An excellent resource with a full description of the official, governmentally decreed language policy in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela since the 1990s can be found in García, López, and Makar 2010.

13. See note 7 above.

14. Despite decades of research, many unresolved questions remain as to the roles of internal or external motivations in language change. As Sarah Thomason (2010: 33) writes, "In spite of dramatic progress toward explaining linguistic changes made in recent decades by historical linguists, variationists, and experimental linguists, it remains true that we have no adequate explanation for the vast majority of all linguistic changes that have been discovered. Worse, it may reasonably be said that we have no full explanation for any linguistic change, or for the emergence and spread of any linguistic variant. The reason is that, although it is often easy to find a motivation for

an innovation, *the combinations of social and linguistic* factors that favor the success of one innovation and the failure of another are so complex that we can never (in my opinion) hope to achieve deterministic predictions in this area" (emphasis ours).

15. From the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, internally motivated change was considered the rule by most historical linguists. Beginning in the early 1950s, however, the importance of contact and resulting social implications have begun to be recognized as playing a, if not the, major role in language change. See Thomason 2006 for more detailed discussion of this shift in thought over the decades.

16. Even beyond creoles, however, clear examples of contact affecting the structure of the recipient language can be found. For example, if numerous lexical items are borrowed from one language to another, there can be systematic repercussions for the phonology or morphosyntax of the recipient language. See, for example, discussion in Sankoff 2004; Thomason 2006; and the many sources therein.

17. The Toledo Maya Council—as well as many of our participants—uses both *the Maya* and *the Mayas* to refer to members of the community. For instance, the Council's resolution states: "The Maya will have rights to develop and own this land," and that "the Maya have the right to promote their culture" (1998). Although *Mayans* would be more prevalent in the field of Latin American studies, our goal in this book is to be faithful to the terms most commonly used by the communities we surveyed. In the same vein, we capitalize the term *Mestizo* as it most often appears in Belize (although it is written in lowercase in many other Latin American contexts), and we spell the language spoken by the majority of indigenous people in Belize *Kekchi* (as opposed to Q'eqchi') since our participants have done so in our surveys.

CHAPTER ONE

1. The arrival of thousands of immigrants to Belize throughout the twentieth century may have contributed to the vitality of Spanish in some areas of the country, though more research is needed in this area. It is particularly important to examine Spanish in the context of the uneven development the country has experienced, since the economic growth experienced in Belize has been concentrated on the coast instead of the interior.

2. As Hildo do Couto (2014: 76) explains, the term *language island* was coined in 1847 and incorporated into the German linguistics tradition by about 1900; the term *enclave* commonly used by Anglophone and Romance linguists is actually a translation of the German word *Sprachinsel* (language island).