

## **Indigenous Identity and Language: Some Considerations from Bolivia and Canada**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is on indigenous identity and language in Bolivia and Canada. In both these contexts there is great reluctance to treating indigenous peoples as those with internationally recognised juridical rights. The original inhabitants of North and South America have been referred to by a variety of labels (stemming from their distinct colonial histories) including “Native,” “Indian,” “Indigenous,” “First Nations,” etc. These group labels, when chosen and/or accepted, represent core symbols of culture and express meaningful identities. Moreover, identity may be formed, experienced and communicated through such labels. Education is an important means by which such labels are accepted and identities are formed. In this paper the relationship between identity, language and education is explored amongst indigenous communities in Bolivia and Canada. The Bolivian situation, where Aymara and Quechua speakers constitute a majority of the population, and where Spanish is replacing these languages at the national level, is discussed first with reference to the appropriateness of the language education policies and identification. The Canadian situation, where indigenous peoples are in a small minority, and where English and French are the national languages, is considered next. The discussion is extended and complemented by a small-scale social psychological study in Bolivia (amongst Aymara in Tiwanaku) and Canada (amongst Fisher River Cree in Manitoba and Haida in British Columbia). Overall, having considered the Bolivian and Canadian contexts, it is argued that the education and linguistic survival of indigenous peoples must clearly engage with self-determined categorizations in their appropriate socio-structural and temporal contexts.

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## Introduction

*Names speak who we are and who we do not wish to be.... Some days I just don't know anymore. I have grown hyperconscious of the labels available to nuance human identity in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, educational access, educational attainment, gender preference, religious practice or other variables. Some days I worry that I don't pay enough attention to the (dis)empowerment encoded within the woven text of the terms... (Calliou, 1998, p. 28)*

In this paper the relationship between identity, language and education is explored amongst indigenous communities in Bolivia and in Canada. The first part of the paper raises important issues to do with self-identification and language in Bolivia. The second part pursues these issues amongst indigenous peoples in Canada. The two national contexts differ in many important ways, such as relative population sizes of the original inhabitants, different specific histories of colonisation, different levels of socio-economic and political development etc. However, the focus in this paper is on the similarities of the processes of colonisation and the implications of this on issues of language, identity and education. The third part of the paper reports on exploratory social psychological data obtained amongst members of the Fisher River Cree (Manitoba) and Haida (British Columbia) communities in Canada, and the Aymara community in Tiwanaku, Bolivia. All the field sites for the empirical data collection may be considered rural (or 'almost-rural' at best).

## Bolivia

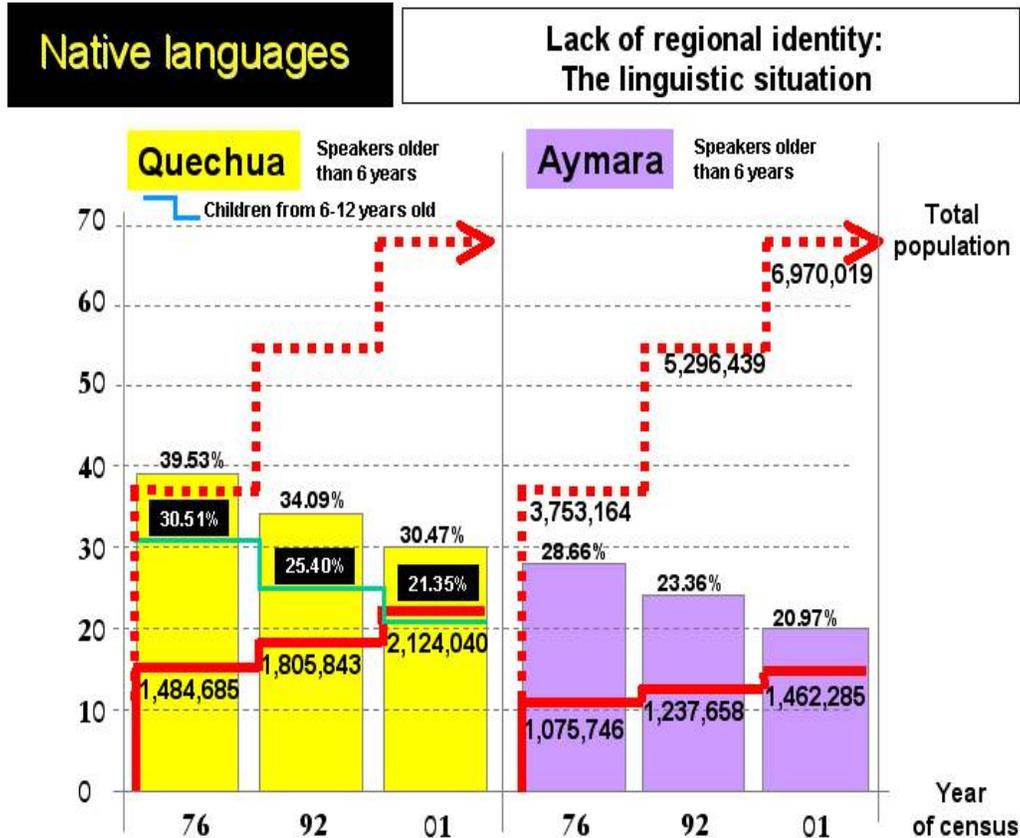
Together with Mesoamerica, the Andes is one of the two great regions in the Americas, where 80% of the indigenous populations of these continents live. The Andes stretch from the south of Columbia to the North of Chile and northern Argentina, and include Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and a part of Venezuela. In this vast territory two languages are dominant: Quechua with about 12 million speakers and Aymara with 3 million (Albó, 1995).

The 2001 Bolivian National Census provides interesting information concerning language and identity. Responses to questions in this Census suggest that 20.97% of the national population is Aymara (with 1,462,285 speakers over 6 years old), that 30.47% is Quechua (with 2,124,040 speakers over 6 years old), showing these two groups represent over 50% of the national population. The remaining indigenous languages in Bolivia are a combination of other Andean groups (Uru-Chipaya or Ucha maa taqu), and smaller Amazonian groups (10%), of which the largest is Guaraní (with 62,000 speakers). This means that the mestizo-criollo groups, living mainly in the cities, make up less than 30% of the total.

With the question “What language do you speak?”, the official figures estimate a total of 49.95% of speakers of native languages in the country in the total population (INE, 2003). With the question about identification “What group do you belong to?”, the official figures give 62% of the national population that considers themselves “indigenous”. These official statistics are currently in debate, since the linguist Xavier Albó, working with the same figures, reaches a total indigenous population of 65%, just taking into account the languages they speak, and a higher figure still in questions of self-identification (personal communication).

Even so, these figures reveal an alarming situation with respect to the majority languages spoken in the country. Despite the efforts of the Educational reform at primary level, the 2001 Census shows a reduction in the total number of speakers of Aymara and Quechua since the 1992 Census (in a period of 9 years) that is equal to the whole previous period between census taking from 1976 to 1992 (that is to say a total of 16 years). Even more worrying is the fact that the number of children from 6-12 years old who speak native languages, has diminished by the same proportion in the same period. So, even though the total number of speakers has risen, for demographic reasons, this increase is much less so proportionally than that of the national population in general (shown by a broken line in the following Fig. 1).

It could be argued that the census results are the consequence of national politics, especially in education, that fail to give priority to regional identity in systemic terms. Although there have been advances at primary level, these questions of identity through language and culture are still ignored at higher levels. According to the 2001 census results, the adolescent population is a total of 1,111,405 persons. Of this total, 45% are monolingual Spanish speakers, while 35% are bilingual in Spanish and native languages, and 6% are monolingual in native languages. If we add the bilingual and monolingual speakers, then a total of 41% of young people in secondary education speak a native language. That is to say, almost half of the population going through secondary education speak at least one native language.



(Figure drawn by Víctor Villarroel)

When we consider the maternal language learned by this same group of adolescents, 63.49% learned to speak in Spanish, and 34.47% in Aymara and/or Quechua. But there is a marked difference here between urban and rural areas. In the urban areas, 80.17% of the total adolescent population learned in Spanish and 19% in native languages, where in the rural areas, 35.17% learned to speak in Spanish, and the great majority of 61.19% in a native language.

In this demographic context, it is also pertinent that 23.39% of the population older than 6 years, with an indigenous self-identity, are monolingual indigenous persons (7.32% of the total of the indigenous population live in the urban areas and 37.38% in rural areas), 3.10% are monolingual in Spanish and other foreign languages (of which 2.76% of the total indigenous population are in urban areas, and 3.39% in rural areas), and the great majority of 73.49% of the self-denominated indigenous populations are bilingual (of which 89.91% of the total indigenous population are in the urban centres and 59.19% in rural areas, INE, 2003). In all of these cases, it should be taken into account that these figures might be much lower than in reality, according to Albó's analysis.

There are a number of other issues to be taken into account. Calla Ortega (2003) suggests that even though the 2001 Census shows that self identity criteria give a higher indigenous population in rural areas (77.73%) as opposed to urban ones (53.3%), probably the greater majority live in a situation of double (or triple) residence, moving between these two poles in constant migrations between urban and rural areas, which also promotes the bilinguality of these migrant populations.

There are also wide differences in language use between the regions and departments of Bolivia. For example Potosí is more monolingual in native languages (above all Quechua), whereas Beni is more monolingual in Spanish, Oruro more bilingual (55% of the total population in this department) and in Pando more foreign languages are spoken (especially Portuguese as it is on the frontier with Brazil). This suggests that different language policies might have to be developed across the country.

Support for these kinds of initiatives comes from the body of soft laws and other recommendations at an international level, the result of decades of struggle by indigenous groups to have their languages recognised at an official level. Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization is perhaps the best known of these. These recommendations apply to the educational curriculum taught, which should include a content relevant to the values and history of the region in question, the textual practices to be used at a daily level, which should include traditional practices such as weaving and braiding, as well new technologies (ITC), regional pedagogical practices, teacher training according to regional values, the institutional setting in which all of these take place, and the communication media at their disposition.

These kinds of issues have come to the forefront again recently with the newly elected government of the coca growers' leader, Evo Morales, the first indigenous President of a Latin American country, and the movement which he leads, called MAS: the Movimiento al Socialismo. Their proposed governmental programme produced before the election, aimed to reform all levels of education, and teach a new and valid curriculum, using native languages where possible. But since being in government, something else has happened. Let us go back then over the ground leading up to these decisions.

### ***Bolivian Educational Reform and Failure of Indigenous Identification***

There have been attempts by grass roots organizations to make Aymara and Quechua official languages in Bolivia since the 1970s. Various legal instruments were passed during this period but none of them with the status of law. The only way to achieve deeper linguistic changes was with real political reforms at a constitutional level. This happened in 1994 with the first government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who met the demands of both structural adjustment and social change by passing three laws which changed

many aspects of Bolivian society: the Law of Popular Participation, an Educational Reform at primary level, and the INRA Land Law, accompanied by a new Constitution that recognised for the first time the multicultural and pluriethnic nature of Bolivian society.

However, despite the wide support in the country for social change, in practice the Educational Reform (promulgated by Law No. 1565, on the 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1994) was widely rejected by teachers and parents alike, especially in the Bolivian highlands and altiplano, the heartland of Aymara and Quechua languages, and it came to an end officially in 2004. Yapu (1999) had already criticized its administrative failures in rural areas; the CEBIAE team (1999), the same kinds of failures in urban areas; Alavi (1998) and Yapita (1998) the pedagogical and linguistic criteria used for planning and producing educational materials at primary level; and Arnold, Yapita and López (1999), Arnold and Yapita (2000) and Medina (2000), the ideological failures at the heart of that former reform programme. These criticisms were also accompanied by an incipient backlash on the part of regional elites, as to whether it is desirable to have bilingual education at all, particularly in Aymara language, for the supposed inability of this language to express abstract concepts, or the demands of the new technologies.

In practice though, the existing repertory of many rural children, who work with complicated three-dimensional weaving designs, inspired by a semiotic and logical language to combine weaving elements, rather than being backward looking, in fact provides many elements of the training needed to use the new information technologies based on visual and semiotic languages (Arnold & Yapita, 2000). The existence of these alternative textual practices also makes educational reform for Aymara and Quechua more complicated, since you are dealing not just with issues concerning the learning of mother tongue, as L1, and a second language of Spanish, as L2. You are also dealing with the relationship between two forms of textual practices, the maternal one of weaving and braiding, and the learnt one of reading and writing in alphabet script. These kinds of issues also make any drive to “weed out illiteracy” more complicated, since many people, through weaving and braiding, have what many scholars have called “alternative forms of writing” (beginning with Derrida, 1976).

In practice too, the Educational Reform never underwent an external and unbiased process of evaluation. This was in spite of the many criticisms by Bolivian intellectuals and NGOs specialised in educational issues, that the reform process, despite its focus on bilingual and intercultural education, was not dealing with fundamental classroom issues, such as literacy, fluid reading and the understanding of reading material, or the degree of respect necessary toward indigenous peoples, their languages and cultures. Meanwhile, the supposed beneficiaries of the Reform (children, parents, teachers and school and district directors) showed nothing more than a generalized apathy toward its programmes, and teaching materials. In the “Multimedia project” that we

carried out for PIEB (Proyectos de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia) in 1998-9, we recorded numerous interviews with teachers, district directors and parents, in which they expressed this apathy in terms of their disconformity with the language variants imposed by the Reform: “This is not *our* Aymara”; “We don’t understand *this* Aymara”; “This is now *ours*; it is Reforma Aymara (*Riphurm aymara*).” (Arnold & Yapita, 2000, p. 7). This same lack of identification with the variant of Aymara chosen to be taught at school (that called Paceño of the La Paz region, chosen as a grafolect for Aymara), is also behind the widespread rejection of the Reform’s teaching materials. So many educational materials given by the Reform to rural communities were returned, abandoned, hidden, or simply locked away and only brought out when a school inspector happened to visit the school.

These deficiencies indicate a lack of identification on the part of the altiplano populations to the Reform’s objectives, programmes and teaching materials. This is not surprising considering that almost all of the terms and labels applied by the Reform to its beneficiaries have been coined from outside these territories and not from inside: “Indian”, “Amerindian”, “Andean”, “Indigenous”, “*campesino*” and so on.

In part, this lack of identification with imposed group labels—what Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) calls “self definition”—has its roots in the ways in which the Bolivian State planned and executed the Reform process, from “above” and from “outside” of the linguistic and social reality of its so-called beneficiaries. Also the consultation procedures that should have occurred were slow in implementation, and involved a widespread co-opting process rather than real dialogue and debate (Arnold, in press). Criticisms of this top-down approach was specially common in the complaints by the teaching unions about the number of foreign experts who ran the Reform, without knowing much about the languages and cultures they were dealing with. The same criticisms were applied to one of the principal didactic guides of the Reform: that it does not cite one Bolivian book, nor even a cultural or pedagogical text dealing with Bolivian reality, nor one single author that speaks a Bolivian native language. Another common criticism was that, despite the Reform’s “intercultural” posture, in practice, the design of the teaching texts in native languages was prepared in Spanish, tried out in elite urban schools, and then translated to Aymara and Quechua by a team of technicians (the UNST-P), without taking into account the distinct conceptual and didactic needs when teaching these languages, the very issues that an intercultural approach should have applied. In this context, a rural teacher commented to us in those years about the way the Reform was being managed:

*The Reform began in the rooftops, now it’s trying to build the walls, and finally we have to build the foundations... It’s an impossible task!*

At the same time, these kinds of criticisms by the supposed beneficiaries of the Reform indicate a linguistic consciousness on their part that not all that was passing with Aymara or Quechua languages, under the Reform, was conducive to their own interests. This kind of reasoning was behind the constant criticisms that the Reform was taking advantage of the framework of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IEB) simply to disguise another attempt to integrate politically indigenous populations into a homogenised and mestizo Nation-state. Evidence for this assertion was the fact that Intercultural Bilingual Education was based on transitional programmes of teaching native languages only in the first years of schooling; it was as if the ulterior motive of these programmes was the greater hispanization of these populations.

Two directions in the Reform's implementation confirmed these suspicions. One was that despite the original Reform law of 1994 having as its objective a "Bolivian education" for all its citizens, in practice the application of Intercultural Bilingual Education was only directed at indigenous populations, and not at mestizo (mixed) and criollo (white) ones, neither was it applied in urban areas where a greater degree of interculturality is necessary to relieve the everyday experiences of racial discrimination in these settings. In this context, the experts have gone on talking about an "indigenous Bilingual education" (López, 1998, p. 38 and following), even though it is evidently not in the hands of indigenous populations. The other direction in the Reform's implementation that casts suspicion on its ulterior motives was its abandoning of the initial attempts to achieve literacy in L1 (the maternal tongue), in favour of a parallel process in both L1 and L2 (the second language of Spanish), a technique that has been widely criticised in other parts of the world.

### ***Profiles of Self-identity in the Andes***

This hierarchical manner of formulating and then implementing the Education Reform of 1994-2004, on the part of Bolivian elites, has other implications concerning the questions of self-identification for the beneficiary populations. Schermerhorn's (1970) rather reactionary criteria of self-definition for "ethnic" groups within a nation, might serve as a starting point: real or putative ascendancy, memories of a shared historical past, a cultural focus on one or more symbolical elements that reinforce group identity, and so on. But, we must take into account that in the context of the Bolivian *altiplano* we are not talking about "ethnic groups" or even minority groups, but rather the incipient Aymara and Quechua nations, according to the political discourse that emerged with the blockade of La Paz in the great Aymara uprising of September 2000.

The questions of identification in the Andes are no less problematic than in Europe or the East. The complex history of Andean populations was almost

always written by outsiders, and with a terminology imposed from outside. As Starn (1994, p. 19) amongst others observes, the very term “Andean” is absent in the self-descriptions of the majority of inhabitants of the region, whose own self ascriptions tend to be by family, ayllu, hamlet, city, province or country. For Starn, “Andean” is just another invention by anthropologists who seek an uncritical essentialism that allows them to exercise intellectual authority over their domain of study. In reply to Starn’s argument, the English anthropologist Olivia Harris (1994, p. 27), points out that this is not exactly the case, since the term “Andean” forms an important part of the study of archaeological horizons, above all the Late Horizon which describes the expansion of the Inka state, in such a way that “Andean anthropology” in fact embraces the limits of Tawantinsuyu (the Inka empire; cf. Stein, 1998).

The same happens with the terms “Aymara” and “Quechua”, which until few decades ago, did not figure in the self-identifications of the majority of the inhabitants of the region. And even though these terms were applied to some of the linguistic communities of the Colonial period, their historical use served rather fiscal ends, being applied to different groups to determine their degree of tribute payment. In the 1940-50s, it was the combination of a gradual process of identification by rural migrants, now living in urban shanty towns, with their own indigenous groups rather than with the mestizo-criollo populations already living there, and the emerging politics of Katarism, fomented in part by the dissemination back into rural areas of the communication media, above all radio San Gabriel (“the voice of the Aymara people”), that resulted in the new social movements that reclaimed these terms to express their emerging collective identities (Arnold & Yapita, 2004).

In this situation, the failure on the part of these populations to identify with the Educational Reform of 1994-2004, had to do in part with the frequent use by experts of the terms “indigenous”, which highland populations associate with lowland groups, or “*originario*” (“originary people”, another fiscal term historically), or “linguistic and cultural groups”, as defined by these same experts, with the juridical implications that this implies: that they are minority groups produced by migrations or diasporas, with very limited linguistic rights in their own territories. These terms are all quite inadequate to describe the historical nations of Qullasuyu that spoke these languages in the past, in the extensive territories of the Inka empire, or the incipient Aymara and Quechua nations that are crystallising in the present, with their own demands for territorial and linguistic autonomy. In this sense, the root of the Reform’s failure lies in deeper questions about the relation between language, political economy, and above all the juridical question of rights, which have to be negotiated at the table in any large-scale political changes that might occur.

Let us examine a little more this linguistic disjunction between the Bolivian State and the populations under its auspices. A central question here was whether or not the construction of what was called in 1994 a ‘pluri-ethnic and multicultural’ nation—and is now called a ‘multilingual and

multinational' one—had the political will to forge national unity and identity, while recognising linguistic and cultural diversity, and what others now are calling even societal and civilizational diversity (Hamel, 1994, p. 272; Patzi, 2003; Tapia, 2002). In this sense, one of the main obstacles to an Aymara or Quechua intent to apply its own education in its own languages, and with its own institutions, is the whole Hegelian project of constructing homogenous, monolingual and monocultural nation-states, based on the European model.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century roots of this situation in the creation of the Latin American Republics are well known (Heath & Laprade, 1982). In the case of Bolivia, from 1825 onward, the political Constitution of the new Republic was based on imported liberal and positivist philosophies, which extended the general principles of liberty and equality to all the new citizens of the nation, but which excluded women, the poor, the illiterate, and above all Bolivia's indigenous populations, now demoted juridically to "indigenous communities". This contradiction between an equality postulated formally and a lived inequality, turned an abstract legal principle into its opposite, in such a way that it set up a model of discrimination for the next 180 years (cf. Hamel, 1994, p. 273).

Thus the dominant groups of the new Republic interpreted the linguistic and ethnic differences in the country in terms of backwardness, marginality, and an obstacle to communication within national society. In this context, the programmes to develop the so-called "indigenous communities" were based on strategies of national integration at a socio-economic, cultural and linguistic level. The same situation continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, despite the Bolivian revolution of 1952.

### ***Emerging Changes versus the Bolivian State Apparatus***

It is these historical roots that have led to a situation where parents and teachers alike rejected the Bolivian Education Reform. Basically, parents wanted better jobs for their children, and teachers did not want to teach what they saw as backward-looking languages. A central question here was access to labour markets. According to studies by Jiménez (2000), indigenous workers do only 4% of qualified jobs, but a total of 67% of the most vulnerable and precarious jobs. This is just another facet of a Bolivian State whose internal structures tend to be monocultural, monolingual (in Spanish) and mono constitutional, in that they do not represent the interests of the vast majority of the population. Higher status jobs then, are related to what García Linera (2003) has called "the accumulation of linguistic capital". In the highest status jobs we find those mestizo-criollo Spanish speakers who read and write in this language, or else speak and write English. While in the low status jobs are monolingual speakers of native languages. In the intermediary levels, are the generations of rural migrants who first struggled to learn to

speak Spanish, others who learned to pronounce it well, so as not to be ridiculed, and then other generations that have gone on to read and write Spanish in years of formal education. The clear message for all these generations was that to get on in life, you have to speak Spanish, so their rejection of learning to read and write in Aymara is not surprising.

With the presidency of the Aymara and Quechua speaker Evo Morales, elected in December 2005, there was a widely held hope that educational and linguistic policies in the country would change in favour of regional languages and values. When García Linera, who had paid a great deal of attention to linguistic issues in his political writings leading up to the election, was chosen as the Vice-president of Bolivia, and the sociologist, Félix Patzi, who criticised the Educational Reform because of its failure to take into account Andean civilisations (1999), was elected as Minister of Education, these kinds of changes seemed imminent. They had also already been included in the MAS party's manifesto (of 2005).

But in practice something else has happened. For ideological reasons, another group of foreign experts has been called into Bolivia, this time Cuban ones, with the objective of "wiping out illiteracy within 30 months". They plan to do so by using monolingual methods based on Spanish, and with the aid of thousands of computers with pre-set teaching programmes in Spanish, being sent from China. Is this a socialist ploy on the part of MAS, which will involve a party programme of ideological change, besides teaching reading and writing? Have the many members of MAS, including the new President, who suffered years of linguistic discrimination decided that enough is enough, and that a switch to Spanish is preferable? Or have the activists of the MAS party simply come up against the very same Hegelian apparatus of the monocultural and monolingual Bolivian State, whose own form of colonising does not allow it to recognise any diversity in its interior? Or, like the changes proposed by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada a generation ago, can the new wave of changes only come about through an even more radical constitutional change, this time through a Constituent Assembly where all of these issues must be debated and accorded at length? Only time will tell.

The above discussion focussed on how the language (and other assimilation) policies imposed by members of the dominant groups severely restricted (and may continue to do so) the opportunities for development (including political, social, educational and economic) of indigenous peoples in Bolivia, where indigenous peoples are in a majority. The next part of the paper examines how indigenous language and cultures have fared in Canada, where indigenous peoples constitute a minority of the population today.

## **Canada**

In precolonial times, indigenous languages flourished within the boundaries of what is now Canada (and U.S.A). Many indigenous people were multilingual (Hebert, 1984) and for several millennia, their languages were the main means by which culture, identity and spirituality were articulated, shared and passed on to successive generations. Late in the last millennium, in a relatively short period of European colonisation, a much cited study alarmingly concluded that only three out of fifty-three indigenous languages had an “excellent chance of survival” by virtue of having more than five thousand speakers, while the rest were endangered with some verging on extinction (Foster, 1982; Task Force for Aboriginal Languages and Cultures - TFALC, 2005). Critiques of this narrow demographic approach have painted a more complex picture, arguing that the likelihood of survival of languages should not be based on the sheer numbers of speakers, especially as small but linguistically thriving indigenous communities may be denied access to supportive resources (see Assembly of First Nations, 1990; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples - RCAP, 1998; TFALC, 2005).

Indigenous people constituted the majority of the population in Canada probably until the middle of the last century (e.g. Denevan, 1976). Since then, European expansion involving warfare, the spread of disease, land alienation, displacement, isolation in reservation systems, enforced assimilation and various other governmental measures including large-scale non-indigenous immigration, has led to a situation where indigenous peoples comprise well under five percent of the population of Canada today (see Sachdev, 1995; Statistics Canada Census, 2001; APS., i.e. Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2001; Perley, 1993; TFALC, 2005).

As in South America, European colonisation of North America aimed to totally assimilate indigenous peoples and deny them any vitality as distinctive groups or nations. It was accompanied by a powerful racist ideology which characterised such peoples as ‘uncivilised’, ‘barbarian’ and ‘backward’ (e.g. Kaegi, 1972; Perley, 1993). The last one hundred and fifty years have seen perhaps the most deliberate and cruel governmental policies, implemented by various educational agencies, and several religious and missionary groups, designed to eradicate indigenous languages and cultures in North America (e.g. see Perley, 1993; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; see also Stevenson, 1995; Sachdev, 1995; RCAP, 1996).

A system of segregated schooling (industrial, residential, boarding) for indigenous peoples was well in place before Canadian confederation in 1867. The early schools were run by various religious groups intent on assimilating and “civilising” indigenous peoples. In terms of language education this meant the teaching and use of English (or French) accompanied by a derogation of, and often severe punishment for even the minimal use of indigenous languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; RCAP, 1996).

Following Confederation the situation changed little with the newly created federal “Department of Indian Affairs” (DIA) taking overall responsibility for indigenous education, but essentially continuing (and even expanding) previous assimilation efforts of the missionaries and governmental agencies. Perley (1993) argues that there was little change in the policy of devaluing indigenous languages and cultures either when the federal government took direct control of the residential schools (previously operated by missionaries) in the 1940s, or when it moved to the establishment of day schools on reserves. This policy of assimilation continued with the introduction of ‘English-only’ schooling for indigenous children in the 1950s (RCAP, 1996). The fact that indigenous languages have not been completely eradicated despite the long-term and cruel enforcement of ‘English-only’ government educational policies is testimony not only to the depth of indigenous resistance, but also to the strong link between languages and identity.

In 1969, without explicitly acknowledging previous assimilationist policies, the Canadian Government published a white paper proposing the phasing out of government responsibility and authority for “Indian” affairs to local indigenous groups and provincial governments, with all educational services to be provided by the provinces (Gardner & Jimmie, 1989). This paper also indicated a complete turn-around from a policy of ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson, 1992) that overtly suppressed indigenous languages to one where indigenous languages and cultures were to be ‘valued, encouraged and assisted’. Gardner and Jimmie (1989) provide a powerful analysis of the failure of this policy due to a severe lack in the provision of the means and resources to implement indigenous cultural and language programmes in the curriculum. Indigenous peoples’ opposition to the white paper led the government to accept (in principle) a policy of “Indian Control of Indian Education” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Although this policy made important strides in helping to revitalize Indigenous languages and to valorise identification with Indigenous communities, educational, financial and political constraints imposed by federal and provincial governments severely impeded change and reinforced the low status ascribed to indigenous languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; AFN, 1990; RCAP, 1996).

As an illustration of this, the AFN (1990), who surveyed 593 indigenous communities covering a population of about half a million people, reported that indigenous language instruction was available to less than half of all students. It was generally not available in the provincial school system (except in a few bilingual programmes in Ontario and immersion programmes in Quebec) even though approximately half of all indigenous students were enrolled in the provincial system. Indigenous language instruction was found to be largely reserve based, available only as a subject for an average of two hours per week, and largely confined to the lower elementary grades. In financial terms, the AFN (1990) estimated that the

federal government spent only 2 million Canadian dollars on 262 language retention programmes for over fifty Indigenous languages between 1983-87, but a massive 626 million Canadian dollars promoting official bilingualism and official minority language rights in 1989-90. It is noteworthy that in 1999-2000, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (2000) reported that approximately 4.4 million Canadian dollars were used to support initiatives under the category of 'Language and Culture Programming' for First Nations peoples.

The status and institutional support of languages in modern Canada was laid down in recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and legislated on in the form of the Official Languages Act of 1969. This Act made no reference to indigenous languages and enshrined English and French as the official languages of Canada. In a parallel move, the English and French have been referred to as the "Founding Nations" of Canada by the government of Canada, with little reference being made to the nations that existed before the arrival of the Europeans. The use of this label has been controversial. Labels represent complex, socio-political aspects of identities, and vary considerably over time and as a function of a variety of factors. Members of many indigenous communities currently tend to refer to themselves collectively as "First Nations", though different nations often choose to refer to themselves by more specific labels such as "Cree", "Mohawk", "Haida" etc. In the recently completed 'Task force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures' (TALC, 2005) even "the term 'Aboriginal' is avoided as it may blur distinctions between First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples..." (p.i).

The Canadian Constitution by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) affirmed the dominance of English and French. Minority language rights of those speaking these official languages were entrenched, but in spite of intense negotiations, First Nations' linguistic rights were not articulated in the final version of the Canadian Charter (AFN, 1990). Speakers of non-official languages have received very little attention in the Canadian Charter and effectively have to rely on those sections of the charter which refer to equality rights and the recognition of Canada's multicultural heritage (AFN, 1990; Blanc, 1985). Across Canada (excluding Nunavut), speakers of First Nations' languages have received little official recognition except from the Quebec and NWT legislative assemblies. In the former, they are exempt from various language regulations, and in the latter, six First Nations' languages have been declared official languages in addition to French and English. The struggles towards a national policy designed to boost the status and institutional representation of First Nations' languages (see Kirkness, 1998) remains to be effectively recognised and supported by the government, though some recent events, initiatives and reports provide reason for some optimism. For instance, in 1997 the Canadian government's *Statement of Reconciliation* acknowledged that its historically oppressive,

assimilative policies, institutions and actions “resulted in weakening the identities of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures...”. The influential Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) had concluded that revitalisation efforts must shift from formal institutions to Aboriginal communities, families and social networks” (RCAP, 1996, pp. 616-7). To assist the language revitalisation process, the Aboriginal Languages Initiative in the Department of Canadian Heritage was created in 1998. In 2002, the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that the government would provide over \$160 million dollars over 10 years to create a centre to help preserve, revitalise and promote Aboriginal languages and cultures. A Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures was appointed to articulate a future strategy and reported in the summer of 2005 (TFALC, 2005).

The TFALC (2005) report provides the most recent and comprehensive analyses of the state of Aboriginal languages in Canada. Fluency in First Nations’ languages is seen as an essential contributor to self-determination, in addition to being a consequence of it (Brandt & Ayoungman, 1989; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Kirkness, 1998; AFN, 1990; RCAP, 1996). The report also clearly recognises that the knowledge about the state of Aboriginal languages is insufficient, and recommends conducting a baseline language survey amongst more than twenty recommendations that range from macro-level policy oriented ones to specific micro-level ones about the composition and specific work of the suggested Aboriginal Languages and Cultures Council. The Task Force Report is considered to be “the first step of a 100 year journey to revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Metis languages and cultures...” (TFALC, 2005). The guiding principles underlying this step continue to focus on the centrality of language to the identities of indigenous peoples.

### **Some exploratory social psychological data on language and identity labelling in Bolivia and Canada**

Much social psychological research suggests that language use and group identity appear to be related reciprocally: language use influences the formation of group identity, and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage (see Giles, 1977; Fishman, 1989; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990, 2005). Group identity is a complex matter and how members of a group self-label or are labelled by others varies considerably. The original inhabitants of Canada specifically, and North America generally, have been referred to by a variety of identity labels including “Indigenous”, “Indian”, “Native-American”, “American-Indian”, “Aboriginal”, “Status Indian”, “First Nations” etc. The discussion above detailed similar variation amongst indigenous group identification and labelling in Bolivia. Group labels, when chosen and/or accepted, represent core symbols of culture and

express meaningful identities. Moreover, identity may be formed, experienced and communicated through such labels (Larkey, Hecht & Martin, 1993). Given the strong relationship between identity and language, the association of identity labels with the use and attitudes towards specific languages was explored empirically amongst members of two indigenous groups in Canada (Haida in British Columbia and Cree in Manitoba; all data collected by Sept., 2003; also see Sachdev, 1998) and one group in Bolivia (Aymara in Tiwanaku; all the data were obtained by Sept., 2005). As discussed above, the two national contexts differ in many important ways, such as relative population sizes of the original inhabitants, different specific histories of colonisation, different levels of socio-economic and political development etc. However, this part of the paper explores potential social psychological similarities across the two contexts in terms of the relationship between identities (colonially imposed vs. ingroup determined), and attitudes and use of languages (colonial vs. ingroup).

The specific group labels under consideration in this research in Canada and Bolivia were colonially imposed identity labels (“Indian”/ “Indio”) and ingroup determined identity labels (“Cree”/“Haida”/“Aymara”). For each of the identity measures, responses to two questions were obtained and combined: a) “How often do you consider yourself to be “\_\_\_\_\_” (identity label)?” and b) “How proud are you to be “\_\_\_\_\_” (identity label)?” Respondents were also asked about their attitudes, use and proficiency in the colonially imposed languages (English in Canada/Spanish in Bolivia) and the ingroup languages (Cree/Haida/Aymara). All questions were answered on 5 point Likert scales that ranged from “not at all” (score 1) to “extremely” (score 5). Data were collected from adults and adolescents using surveys about their self-categorisations that had questions about their self-rated proficiencies, use and attitudes concerning own-group languages and English. 198 participants (all above 13 years old; 77 Haida, 78 Cree, 43 Aymara) were recruited randomly from indigenous communities in Fisher River (Manitoba, Canada) and Haida Gwaii (British Columbia, Canada) and Tiwanaku (Bolivia). It was hypothesised that as the self-categorisation “Indian”/“Indio” is a colonial categorisation, its acceptance would be associated with positive attitudes and behaviour about colonial languages, and negative attitudes and behaviour about ingroup languages. Conversely, the acceptance of ingroup indigenous labels was expected to be associated with more positive indigenous language attitudes and behaviour, and negative attitudes and behaviour about colonial languages.

In terms of identification with labels, the highest levels were reported with the ingroup labels (“Cree”/“Haida”/ “Aymara”): average score of 4.5 on a 5 point scale). Levels of identification with the label “Indian” were moderate in Canada (average of 3.8) and low in Bolivia (average of 2.0). These findings suggest that the indigenous participants we surveyed had the highest identification with a label that could be considered to be determined

by the ingroup. However, the moderate level of identification with the colonial label of “Indian” in Canada suggested that the dominant group had been successful to a certain extent in imposing such labels (note that the current federal government department responsible for indigenous affairs in Canada is referred to as the “Department of Indian and Northern Affairs”). Interestingly, Kim, Lujan and Dixon (1998) in their study of indigenous peoples in Oklahoma (USA) had reported that the term “Indian” is the label “most commonly used by the population to refer to themselves and each other” (p.134). However, the label “Indio” was not a label Aymara participants (in Tiwanaku, Bolivia) identified with much at all. Nevertheless, correlational analyses reported in Table 1 between identity labels, language use and attitudes revealed a moderate level of support for our hypotheses.

**Table 1: Correlations between Identity Labels, Language Use and Attitudes**

	Bolivia		Canada	
	Colonially Imposed Identity	Indigenous Identity	Colonially Imposed Identity	Indigenous Identity
Colonial Language use	.13	-.23*	.09	.03
Indigenous language use	-.19*	.34**	.01	.29**
Colonial Language Attitudes	.08	-.35**	.19**	-.29**
Indigenous Language Attitudes	-.21*	.35**	.00	.33**

\*\* p < .05; \* p < .10

Findings shown in Table 1 suggest that (as expected) indigenous identities were most frequently and positively associated with indigenous language use and attitudes, and least frequently and/or negatively associated with colonial language use and attitudes. Though colonially imposed identities were not as frequently associated with variation in language use, the significant correlations were in a direction consistent with our hypothesis. Thus, colonially imposed identities tended to be negatively associated with

indigenous language use in Bolivia, while being positively associated with attitudes about the use of the colonial language in Canada. Overall, the findings of this small-scale study suggest that the identification with indigenous labels appears to predict patterns of language use and attitudes more strongly than identification with colonial labels. Thus, an important part of a positive future for Aboriginal languages and cultures includes a clear rejection of colonially imposed categorisations (cf. “Nation-to-Nation” relationship in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1998).

### **Concluding Notes**

Our research focussed on the situation in Bolivia and Canada as representing two instances of exploring the relationship between identification and language amongst indigenous peoples in the Americas. In both these countries, it has been argued that the state apparatus have thus far failed to address the juridical status of indigenous languages and cultures, and the rights of indigenous peoples to define their own educational policy, materials and curricular development according to their own criteria. Consistent with this notion were the findings in our small empirical study that showed that identification with indigenous labels appeared to predict patterns of language use and attitudes more strongly than identification with colonial labels.

It is important to emphasize that language education needs to be considered within the broader context of empowerment in indigenous education. Critical theorists (e.g. Cummins, 1986) have argued that the linguistic and educational failure of students can be explained by the degree to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society. Specifically, empowering students by promoting and valorising their linguistic and cultural talents (e.g. Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Cummins, 1986), actively encouraging community participation in student development and moving away from the dominant “transmission-oriented” teaching model, will lead to significantly better linguistic and educational progress.

Incompatible cultural assumptions and practices underlying formal study and language programmes are clearly implicated in affecting linguistic and educational outcomes. In the broadest terms, cultural assumptions about schooling and the learning of languages formally are based on European and not indigenous values, and generally focus on literacy and knowledge *about* languages (Perley, 1993). In contrast, indigenous cultures give primacy to oral traditions, informal language learning, and to the actual use of languages for everyday purposes. This mismatch in cultural assumptions may also affect the relative success or failure of language programmes. As several researchers (e.g. Kirkness, 1998; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Cummins, 1986; Sachdev, 1995) have argued, the success of revitalisation efforts by the

communities will also depend crucially on the wider valorisation and support (specifically by governmental agencies, and generally by non-indigenous communities) of indigenous languages and cultures.

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