Mediated Intertextuality in Pretend Play among Nicaraguan Miskitu Children[1]

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One April afternoon in 2003, a group of indigenous Miskitu children—mostly siblings and cousins from the same extended family—gathered for a pretend play activity in an open space between their modest houses on Corn Island, off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. They were playing school, with one child enacting the role of authoritarian teacher and the others her wayward students. The young teacher was addressed as "Maestra Carluta," a character from a comic Costa Rican television show staged in a primary school classroom. The children used a Spanish language arts textbook brought from one of their houses as a source of material for instruction and testing; the somewhat dated passages they read aloud and copied in their notebooks were about media of communication such as letters and telegrams. In their real classrooms at their real schools, these children were supposed to speak mostly Spanish and they studied texts written in Spanish; in their pretend classroom, they spoke not only Spanish but also Miskitu and Creole English, two vernacular languages of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua.

In playing school, these children brought together their observations of mass-mediated social interaction with their embodied experiences of interaction at school and in the neighborhood. The communicative practices in these three spheres—television, school, and neighborhood—are not merely juxtaposed but inter-animated in the pretend play activity. The characters and conventions drawn from mass media and from the children's school experience are re-voiced and embodied in the heteroglossic play of the neighborhood peer group.[2] A key concept for understanding these transformations is intertextuality, defined by Julia Kristeva as the transposition, or passage, from one signifying system to another (Kristeva, 1984, p. 60). Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman

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[2] Bakhtin (1981) describes heteroglossia as the stratified diversity of languages and speech styles in any utterance or social encounter. Sawyer (1995, 1997) insightfully applies the concept to North American preschoolers' pretend play.

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(1992) suggest that intertextuality is not a formal property of fixed texts but a communicative process of creating relations between bodies of discourse.

In my analysis here I focus on several overlapping levels of intertextuality that are constructed in the pretend play discourse. At the broadest level are the relations between different media of communication such as face-to-face interaction, written texts, and television. Each medium encompasses a diversity of organizational forms, and in making connections between one medium of communication and another, children often reconstruct or invoke these forms of discourse, implicitly entextualizing them as genres (Briggs and Bauman, 1992). In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, this episode of pretend play must surely be a complex secondary genre, like the novel, drawing together and cannibalizing such diverse primary genres as recitation, note-taking, testing, teacher talk, and a particular kind of subversive reading and writing called "copying" or "cheating." The next level of intertextuality that I will discuss is the interactive level, in particular the use of code-switches between languages that are structured, for example, by personal histories of language socialization, techniques of framing discourse and highlighting opposition, and the achievement of discursive coherence. Finally, I will discuss intertextuality at the linguistic level, in the use of conventional and improvised loan words brought from one language into another, implicitly encoding other histories and contexts of language use. Intertextuality, in all its forms, is a central technique in the maintenance of linguistic diversity, which finds fertile ground in children's peer group play.

The Miskitu children involved in this pretend play activity are migrants or the children of migrants to Corn Island, which historically was populated primarily by English-speaking Creole people. These children are the first generation of their families to have steady access to television, and, through their interaction with Creole–English and Spanish-speaking people on the island, they have the broadest communicative repertoires. They also occupy the most vulnerable socioeconomic position on the island. Their parents aspire for them to be fluent in Spanish and English in order to further their educational and socioeconomic achievement. Several of the children attend schools which are dominated by Spanish or Creole English speakers, and where their Miskitu language skills and cultural affiliations are often stigmatized.

Below are two excerpts from the pretend play activity on which I focus my analysis. A 10-year-old girl whom I call Olivia is playing the role of Maestra Carluta, a character from the Costa Rican television comedy *Cero en Conducta* (Zero in Conduct). In the first excerpt, Olivia, as Maestra Carluta, reads questions and answers from a Spanish-language textbook which the children playing the role of her students copy in their notebooks, re-enacting the most common literacy routine in Corn Island classrooms.[3] Olivia's use of corporal punishment and her unclear instructions prompt her cousin Jeson to pronounce that she is a bad teacher. In the second excerpt, the children are supposed to be taking an exam over the material that was recited for them earlier, and Maestra Carluta slips away to use the bathroom. Although these children are usually docile and hardworking students in their real classrooms, in this part of the pretend play they enact the role of bad students, copying each other's papers while their teacher is out of sight. Olivia quickly returns, however, and catches them in the act, comparing them to two other characters—Chavo and Chilindrina—from yet another television show, the classic Mexican comedy series

[3] The ages of the other participants follow: Mariana (8 years), Coral (7), Lula (11), Jeson (10). All names of children given are pseudonyms.

Chavo del Ocho. She also compares them to Satan, drawing a character type from their local constellation of cultural knowledge, referring not only to the Biblical figure but also to evil spirits who may be blamed for misbehavior.

(1) The Bad Teacher[4]

1* Mariana: ↑*OY! Yo-yo voy a-yo estoy haciendo mi exámen*, gyal. ((laughing)) *Mi exámen parcial.*
↑OY! I- I'm going to- I'm doing my exam, girl. ((laughing)) My partial exam ((at the end of the year to pass to the next grade)).

2 Olivia: [*Rápido!*
[Hurry!

3 Mariana: [*Y mi Maestra Carluta me va a pegar.*
[And my Teacher Carluta is going to hit me.
((Olivia swats her with a stick))

4* *Mentira mentira Maestra Carluta! Aush, Olivia uba karna.*
Lie lie Teacher Carluta! Ouch, Olivia, ((that was)) really hard.

5 Olivia: *De vuelta vas a coger.*
You're going to get it again.

6 Coral: ((reading)) [*Carta, carta.*
[Letter, letter.

7 Lula: ((reading)) [*Carta, carta. El telegrama.*
[Letter, letter. The telegram.

8 Mariana: ((to toddler underfoot)) *Ah-ah, pipi agarrá-*
Uh-uh, baby grab-

9 Lula: *El ve-* ( )
The ve- ( )

10 Olivia: *El verso.*
The verse. ((...))

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[4] The following are the transcription conventions used:

Brackets	[	Simultaneous utterances
Single Parentheses	( )	Unclear utterance
Double Parentheses	(( ))	Transcriber's comments
Equals sign	=	Interlocking utterances
Arrow	↑	Dramatic shift in pitch
Asterisk	*	Key lines in analysis
Capital letters		Increased stress for emphasis
Underlined italics		Spanish
Italics		Miskitu
Underlined roman		Nicaraguan Creole English

See Salamanca (1995, 2000) for a discussion of Miskitu orthographic conventions.

11 Mariana: *Oke, número uno.*
Okay, number one.

12 Olivia: *Son? Son?*
Are? Are?

13* Jeson: *Ese* ticha *es malo=*
That teacher is bad=

14 Lula: *=Ah, witin? No estás las dando la pregunta. Hhh.*
=Ah, she? You're not giving them the question. Hhh.

15 Olivia: *Eh, caja número dos ba SON.*
Eh, box number two is "*SON.*"

16* Lula: ***Respuestika!*** ((*respuesta* + construct state *-ka*))
The answer!

17 Olivia: *Hm-mm.* ((laughter)) ( )

18 Lula: *Ent man bila-*
Didn't you say-

19 Olivia: *Ah-ah, número dos nahara ulba.*
Uh-uh, write number two here.

20 Lula: *Ent yang pat ulbri!*
Didn't I already write it!

21 Coral: ((reciting softly as she writes)) *Carta.*
Letter.

22 Olivia: [*Número tres.*
[Number three.

23* Jeson: [Ticha *MAlo naha, dia smalki ni ai alumnoka ra.*
[This is a BAD teacher, what is she teaching to her student. ((...))

(2) The Bad Students

24 Olivia: *ApúrENse! Cuando yo vengo de urinar Ustedes ya terminar.*
Hurry up! When I come from peeing you should be finished. ((...))

((Olivia leaves; quiet whispers are audible as the kids look on each other's papers, followed by raucous laughter when Olivia suddenly reappears.))

25 Olivia: *Man nani-* ((broken up by laughter))
You all-

26 Mariana: *Yang kop takras,* [*ent Amanda?*
I wasn't copying, [was I Amanda?

27 Olivia: [*Man nani wal sut <u>cero</u> briaisma kop tak-*
[Both of you are going to get zero cop-

28 Coral: *<u>Ha-ah, los tres! Los tres, los tres, los tres estábamos copiando así=</u>*
Huh-uh, three! Three, three, three of us were copying like this=

29 Lula: =*<u>YO no!</u>*
=Not ME.

30* Olivia: *Yang balri* ((laughing)) *si Chavo bak-*
I came ((laughing)) it's like Chavo-

31 *Mariana! Man, man, naura bara, Coral cuadernoka kat sma.*
Mariana! You, you are there right next to Coral's notebook.

32 Coral: *<u>No lo copié.</u>*
I didn't copy it.

33* Olivia: *Hhh. Iskiki sut prakan na nani setan kan.*
Hhh. I couldn't pee these ((kids)) were satan ((i.e. misbehaving)).

34 Coral: *Yang iskiki ai daukras.* *<u>Vaya, no</u>* [*<u>vamos a copiar!</u>*
I don't feel like peeing. Go, [we're not going to copy!

35* Olivia: [*Isti!*
[Hurry!

36 Coral: ((reading, with effort)) *<u>Comu-comunicación. Comu, ni,</u>*
Commu-communication. Commu, ni,

37 Olivia: *Bal, bal! Bal Mariana, <u>vamo allá!</u>*
Come, come! Come Mariana, let's go there! ((moving Mariana away from other kids))

38 Mariana: *Ent man nara* [*ai blikras!*
You're not [sending me here, are you!

39 Olivia: [*Ah-ah, naura yang plîski ra kaha man, aha,*
[Uh-uh, let's go to my place you, aha,

40* *bukkam ni kop taki kapram* ***mochilikam*** *aik, Mariana.*
((*<u>mochila</u>* + possessive *-kam*))
you were copying with your book, give me your backpack, Mariana.

41 Mariana: *Apia!*
No!

42* Olivia: *Ah-ah, [Mariana. Así no juego.*
Uh-uh, [Mariana. I'm not playing like this.

43 Mariana: [*Ah-ah, yang brikaisna.*
[Uh-uh, I'm going to have it ((the backpack)).

44* Olivia: *Den kaiki kaisna yang man naurkam ba KAT man uba,*
Then I'm going to be watching right UP to your things, you're just,

45* *Chilindrina baku*, ***kop takaia*** *baman.=*
((*copiar* + *takaia*))
like Chilindrina, you only copy.=

46 Coral: ((reading)) =*Que, es, la, car, ta, y, el telegrama?*
=What, is, the, let,ter, and, the telegram?

47 Mariana: ((reading)) *Que es, [la carta-*
What is, [the letter-

48 Coral: ((reading)) [*Son medios, de co, mu, ni, ca, ción.*
[They are media, of co, mmu, ni, ca, tion.

49 ((Mariana makes a move to copy)) ↑*Oy!* ((laughter))
↑Oy!

50 Olivia: *Mariana! No juego-*
Mariana! I'm not playing-

51 Mariana: *Ah-ah, Yang nu apu yang* ***stadi takras kapri****,*
((study + *takaia* + neg *–ras* + BE 1st person past))
Uh-uh, I don't know, I didn't study,

52 *man balram taim lika yang naura, kau stadi takras kapri ulbi kapri.*
when you came I, still hadn't studied, I was writing. ((...))

At the broadest level of intertextuality, the invocations of television characters function as both presupposed and emergent aspects of the play frame (cf. Silverstein, 1976). At the beginning of the play activity, it was decided that Olivia would play the role of Maestra Carluta; the other children were not given special names but rather performed their roles more generally as students in a classroom. The comic nature of the television shows featuring classroom interaction probably inspired a certain outrageousness in the performances of both teacher and students. In the second excerpt, Olivia's spontaneous comparison of the students with the characters Chavo, Chilindrina, and Satan creatively connects the children's performances as students with characters emerging from other bodies of discourse, the first two mediated by television and the last by local religious practices.

The children's appropriation of televised classroom scenes is further mediated by their own embodied experiences in classrooms, their knowledge of instructional routines, and their emergent literacy skills. The Spanish language textbook with which they were

playing served as a material link between their mostly Spanish-speaking classrooms on Corn Island, and the Spanish-speaking television shows they watched at home. The enactment of power, subversion, and punishment are also common to both local and mass-mediated classrooms. However, in their classrooms on Corn Island, the real teacher would not have been hitting her students, and these particular children would not have been cheating. The space of play and performance provides an opportunity for acting out unsanctioned forms of behavior, partially influenced by mass-mediated classroom scenes. At the same time, the Spanish-language discourse of mass-mediated classrooms and the children's local classrooms is re-voiced in the local heteroglossic vernacular of the neighborhood peer group. The limits of unsanctioned behavior are periodically challenged and negotiated not only by critiques within the performance frame, such as Jeson's labeling of the "bad teacher," but also by breaking the performance frame, such as Olivia's threat, "I'm not playing like this," that is, if the other children don't follow her directives.

I approach the interactional level of intertextual relations by focusing, in this analysis, on code-switching. It is important to emphasize, first of all, that not *all* switches in language use are interactionally meaningful, and not all are shifts in alignment or footing (Auer, 1998; Goffman, 1981). Particularly in the case of switches that co-occur with the change of speakers, divergent language use can simply reflect different histories of language socialization (Schieffelin, 1994). The children involved in this activity have different language competencies and preferences. Coral is Spanish-dominant and speaks Miskitu relatively rarely although she understands it when spoken by others. After raising several children who were Miskitu-dominant, her parents decided to speak to her only in Spanish with the intention of facilitating her educational achievement. Olivia and Jeson, on the other hand, spent their early childhood years in Miskitu villages on the mainland where Spanish and Creole English were not commonly spoken; thus their linguistic repertoires have a stronger foundation in Miskitu.

While some instances of code-switching can be attributed to differences in linguistic competencies, other switches *are* strategic and interactionally meaningful. In fact, when children have active competence in multiple languages, switching between languages *or* sustaining discourse in a single language can be strategic interactional moves. Between lines 1 and 12, it is the sustained use of Spanish that is significant, as Olivia enacts the role of Maestra Carluta and the other children enact the roles of her students. The Spanish discourse is briefly interrupted, however, in line 4, by Mariana's clear shift in language and footing. In line 3, Mariana's performative utterance in Spanish, *mi Maestra Carluta me va a pegar* (my Teacher Carluta is going to hit me), compels Olivia to hit her. At first Mariana stays in character to protest in Spanish, but then she switches to Miskitu for an off-stage complaint, addressed not to the character Maestra Carluta but to the actress, her cousin Olivia, saying, "Ouch, that was really hard." As Jennifer Reynolds has suggested, the off-stage, out-of-frame complaint is a metapragmatic move to regulate the norms of performance, especially when the boundary between play and not-play becomes blurry in "overzealous enactments" (Reynolds, 2002, pp. 430-31).

In addition to intertextual constructions within a single turn, intertextuality on the interactive level can occur over the course of several turns. The achievement of discursive coherence depends on a speaker tying together his or her utterances as well as linking them to the utterances of others. For example, in line 13, Jeson follows the preceding stretch of discourse in Spanish by saying "*ese* ticha *es malo"* (that teacher is bad). This utterance is essentially in Spanish but uses the Creole English term of reference for

"teacher" that is common among Corn Island children, regardless of the languages they are speaking. The next few turns are centered more in Miskitu, and in line 23 Jeson recapitulates this shift. He reiterates his initial judgment of the *ticha malo*, using Creole English and Spanish, and then expands it in Miskitu, linking his utterance not only to his previous comment, but also to the Miskitu utterances that came between the two comments, all criticizing the behavior of the teacher:

Ticha *MAlo naha, dia smalki ni ai alumnoka ra.*
This is a BAD teacher, what is she teaching to her student.

Where switches are interactionally meaningful, the switch itself may be more important than the particular language that is switched to (Jorgensen, 1998; Zentella, 1997). Although they are enacting a classroom scene inspired by a Spanish-language television show, the children do not exclusively make on-stage comments in Spanish and off-stage comments in Miskitu. For example, in line 42, after a turn in which the voice of Maestra Carluta was enacted in Miskitu, Olivia makes an utterance in Spanish that is clearly off-stage and out-of-frame. The switch could be interpreted as heightening the confrontation between her and Mariana (Cromdal, 2004). In line 41, Mariana's strong refusal in Miskitu—*apia* (no)—is countered by Olivia's out-of-frame rejection in Spanish, *Así no juego* (I'm not playing like this), which threatens to derail the entire play activity if Mariana does not conform to Olivia's directives. Both Spanish and Miskitu can be employed for authoritarian and other purposes, suggesting that one-to-one correlations between language and function are problematic in this context.

Multilingual and interlingual constructions cannot always be understood in terms of deliberate strategy; often they are more accurately employed as possible resources in the tricky maneuvers of spontaneous talk (Zentella, 1997, p. 97). In the following example from the school-play activity, Coral directed the following utterance to Maestra Carluta, as performed by Olivia:

Que que que yo no-quiere- yu wan did put mi *cero conducta*?
What what what I don't-you want- you wanted to give me a zero in conduct?

Coral stumbles over her words in Spanish, then finds her way through a Creole insertion. While Coral's code choice may not be deliberate, her question does suggest a deliberate meta-communicative play on the play frame, since the television show from which Maestra Carluta was adapted is called *Cero en Conducta*.

Finally, at the linguistic level, intertextuality follows a long history of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contacts on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, where Miskitu people started learning English and incorporating English loan words into the Miskitu language in the 17th century. In line 35, a good example of an English word that has long been phonologically adapted and thoroughly integrated into Miskitu is *isti*, or "hasty." The endurance of the Miskitu language over centuries of cross-cultural exchange is also indebted to morphological techniques of integrating loan words, which the children employ in adapting words associated with their Spanish-speaking classrooms. For example, in line 16, the Spanish word *respuesta* is attached to the Miskitu construct state suffix "–ka" to form *respuestika*. Possessive suffixes can also be attached to loan words; for example, in line 40, *mochilikam*, "your backpack," is derived from the Spanish *mochila* (backpack) plus the Miskitu 2nd person possessive suffix "-kam." Verbs adapted

from other languages are often conjugated by attaching them to auxiliary Miskitu verbs such as *takaia* and *munaia* (Jamieson, 1999). In line 45, *kop takaia*, fuses an abbreviation of Spanish *copiar* with Miskitu *takaia* in a compound verb that means to copy or cheat. In line 52, *stadi takras* is the negative verb form of *stadi takaia*, from the English verb "study."

The children not only draw Spanish and English words into Miskitu; they also draw Creole English words into Spanish. Prime candidates for this kind of borrowing are personal terms of address and reference, such as *gyal* (girl), in line 1, and *ticha* (teacher), in line 13. Borrowed words enable children and other speakers to integrate knowledge from different spheres of social interaction, and they are never simply borrowed but always "re-accentuated" in the emerging discourse (Bakhtin, 1986). Often outside the realm of awareness, borrowed words encode histories of intercultural social relations and inflect speech with resonances of other contexts of use.

Through the various overlapping levels of intertextuality I have discussed, children make discursive connections between play and reality, between oral and literate expression, and between mass-mediated and face-to-face interaction. As textual layers move across signifying systems and become recontextualized in children's play discourse, the children themselves are re-positioned in new "places of enunciation" (Kristeva, 1984). The mobile texts and forms—what Anne Haas Dyson (2003) calls "textual toys"—are also re-positioned, which problematizes an overly simplistic interpretation of this multilingual discourse as a stage in the process of language shift. Watching Spanish-language television shows and incorporating them into play activities does not necessarily entail a shift to Spanish monolingualism. At various times throughout the play activity, Olivia voiced the character of Maestra Carluta in Miskitu as well as in Spanish. Even more significantly, in line 33 when Olivia uses Miskitu to explain that she couldn't go "pee" because the kids were cheating, Coral responds to her in Miskitu, a notable occurrence because Coral usually spoke Spanish or Creole English. The more recent arrival of Olivia, Jeson, and other fluent Miskitu speakers of the family to Corn Island has re-shaped the linguistic norms of this peer group.

Undoubtedly, the informal play of children's peer groups is one of the most lively and flexible contexts for maintaining linguistic diversity. As Kathryn Woolard (1999) suggests, the organization of codeswitching and other forms of multilingual speech may reveal the kinds of identities that are simultaneously inhabitable in a given community. Beyond the techniques and structures of multilingual intertextuality I have reviewed here, Miskitu children on Corn Island simply pull in the resources of communication that surround them, without regard for which linguistic system or communicative medium those resources supposedly "belong" to. In doing so they may be marking off a generational space specifically for Miskitu children of Corn Island. Most of the children's parents have at least some bilingual or trilingual competence, but they do not move as easily across social and linguistic boundaries as do their children.

I hasten to add that these boundaries are crossed most easily in the sheltered neighborhood spaces of informal play and performance. These children completed their early primary school years before the introduction of Miskitu into some island classrooms as part of a regional bilingual-intercultural education program. As they grow older, their practices of speaking, reading, and writing will be increasingly subject to scrutiny; their vocational pathways will be shaped by other norms of communication, other hierarchies of

linguistic value. In closing, I want to balance my own fascination with the creativity and beauty of heterogeneous ways of speaking with a recognition of the links between language use, language ideology, and social inequality. The maintenance of these heterogeneous speech practices is intertwined with the uncertain possibilities of their institutional legitimation and, crucially, a transformation in the opportunities for socioeconomic advancement of their speakers.

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