Newt Gingrich, Bilingualism, and "Ghetto Language": Online Constructions of Language Ideology

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1. Introduction.

Considering the shift toward reflexivity that has taken place across the social sciences in recent years, it is not surprising that linguists have begun to focus more attention on the meta-dimensions of language. Recent work on language performance, stylization, and metalinguistic discourse have worked toward developing models that connect micro-level instances of language use to macro-level representations of the social order (e.g., Agha, 2007; Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Coupland, 2007; Jaworski, Coupland and Galasinski, 2004; Rampton, 1995). One area of inquiry that has made significant contributions toward theorizing how reflexive dimensions of language structure, sociocultural aspects of language use, and social relations have influenced each other is the study of language ideologies.

In this paper, I attempt to gain a better understanding of *how* language ideologies are constructed in unfolding discourse by investigating the structure of metalinguistic discourse, or explicit talk *about* language. Specifically, I examine the use of three discourse strategies – personal reference, constructed dialogue, and metaphoric language – in a public debate about language politics and consider the indexical work these strategies do as they construct, reaffirm, and contest naturalized beliefs about language in interaction. The debate I examine revolves around public comments made by former U. S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich on the topic of bilingual education, which provoked strong reactions in the national news and in several online contexts (e.g., political blogs, news-related discussion boards, amateur digital videos). The analysis of these reactions addresses three questions that interrogate the nature of language ideological discourse: First, what are the common linguistic resources that people use to express language-related beliefs in metalinguistic discourse? Second, what forms do these discourse strategies take in various computer-mediated contexts where participants are afforded different

communicative modes for self-expression? And finally, by *what indexical means* do these strategies produce linguistic 'common sense'?

2. Defining Language Ideology

Before going any further, some definitions are in order, as the term 'language ideology' has taken on perhaps as many meanings as there are studies on the notion. I define language ideologies as *beliefs about the structure of language and theories rationalizing observed usage, which are expressed through both explicit talk about language and the implicit framing of discourse*. This definition synthesizes broader points of agreement between previously offered definitions (see Woolard, 1998 for an overview) and allows for the location of ideologies at different levels of language use, including implicit manifestations in the organization of talk as well as explicitly expressed beliefs in the content of talk. By combining these perspectives, we arrive at a concept with more analytical force that expresses how ideologies constructed at one level are mirrored at other levels of use (c.f. Gal and Irvine, 1995 on 'recursivity').

In addition to locating an appropriate site for ideology analysis, another dimension along which theoretical perspectives on language ideology have differed is the extent to which issues of power are centrally figured in the notion. As several researchers have pointed out (e.g., Eagleton, 1991; Woolard, 1998), in restrictive formulations of the concept, '[ideology] is the tool, property or practice of dominant social groups; practices of subordinate groups are by definition nonideological' (Woolard, 1998:7). However, I argue that placing such great importance on one aspect of ideology at the expense of others would be a mistake. As Woolard (1998:8) emphasizes, 'if by ideology we mean signifying practices that constitute social subjects, surely we should also attend to, for example, affiliation, intimacy, and identity, all of which are complexly imbricated with but not directly and simply equitable to power.' So while addressing issues of power is undoubtedly important, questions of *identity* are also crucial to understanding the nature of commonsensical, socially naturalized beliefs about language. In fact, metalinguistic discourse can be seen as an identity practice itself, where Self and Other are distinguished by symbolic isoglosses, and imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) are constructed through a shared linguistic code. In this respect, explicit talk about language can be understood as both a relational practice, where Selves construct alliances with certain Others through the bond of language, and one of differentiation, where social differences between Self and Other are naturalized as a result of language differences, or as iconically represented *through* them.

3. Data and Methodology

Defining language ideologies as multifaceted and emergent at various levels of discourse points to the need for a method that focuses on the framing and contextualizing of language in ongoing talk. The approach taken here is rooted in interactional sociolinguistics and incorporates models for understanding how meaning, power, and both 'situated' and 'global' identities are negotiated in interactional contexts. This approach draws upon the work of Goffman, including his early reflections on the presentation of self (1959) as well as his notions of framing (1974) and footing (1981), which elucidate how interactional participants draw on schemata for interpreting meaning in social interaction

and construct speaker-hearer-utterance alignments through the productive and receptive management of talk. Also relevant to this approach are the notions of contextualization cues and situated inference, put forth by Gumperz (1982), which provide a framework for analyzing how speakers and hearers draw on appropriate linguistic and paralinguistic resources in order to infer intended meanings and produce culturally appropriate responses. Considering the success of this approach in analyzing where and how *mis*communication occurs (e.g., Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1984), the advantage of taking an interactional sociolinguistic approach in language ideology analysis lies not only in allowing us to see if and where language ideologies are shared or in conflict in unfolding discourse, but also in providing a vantage point for understanding *how* these beliefs are variously indexed through language.

The data examined below consist of contributions to a public language debate fueled by remarks made by former U.S. Republican Representative and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. On March 31, 2007, Gingrich delivered a speech to the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW) in which he asserted that bilingual education should be replaced with English immersion 'so people learn the common language of the country and so they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto' (Hunt, 2007). The remark provoked a barrage of criticism in the following days, including reports and commentaries in national newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, and internet news forums, many condemning Gingrich for his 'racist' remarks, some attempting explanations of what Gingrich 'really meant', and others providing extended arguments in support of or in opposition to bilingual education.

Gingrich responded a few days later with a 3-minute video apology on Youtube.com, delivered in Spanish with English subtitles, in which he expressed regret for his choice of words at the convention, which he acknowledged had offended many, but maintained his stance toward bilingual education. Once again, Gingrich's actions inspired a media buzz, both through institutional outlets and through user-powered sources, including lengthy debates on news discussion websites and video responses to his apology. The following analysis examines two such forums for discussion: The first is a discussion generated on Digg.com, a news-sharing website where users post and comment on news links, containing 256 comments posted in response to the CNN article reporting Gingrich's original speech to the NFRW. The second set of data consists of several video responses to Gingrich's apology posted on Youtube.com, a popular video sharing website.

4. Analysis

The three discourse strategies investigated in the Digg and Youtube responses - personal reference, constructed dialogue, and metaphoric language – were chosen at the expense of others not only because they stand out in the data as particularly powerful rhetorical devices for the overt expression of language ideology, but because they have also been widely studied in past sociolinguistic work, which has either directly or indirectly pointed to their ideological capacities. For instance, Schiffrin (2006) has shown how variation in personal reference constructs situated Self and Other identities in Holocaust narratives, and De Fina (2006) shows how the use of outgroup referring terms for the Self (e.g. the use of 'Hispanic' vs. 'Latino') constructs ideologies of immigration experience in interview narratives. Tannen (1989), who coined the term 'constructed

dialogue', has illuminated how the device creates involvement and performs identity work in conversation, and Hamilton (1998) has considered its function specifically in online discourse as a means for claiming authority and constructing power differentials between archetypal figures in recounted interaction. The ideological potential of metaphoric language (which I am defining broadly as marked non-literal figures of speech, including simile, metonymy, and analogy[1]) has been highlighted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who state that 'the very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another… will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept' (10). This description of metaphor recalls Gal and Irvine's work theorizing language ideological processes (1995, Irvine 2001), in which they identify the semiotic process of 'erasure', whereby an ideology 'simplifies the sociolinguistic field' by imagining a group as homogenous and disregarding or explaining away variation within the community (Irvine, 2001: 33-34). Santa Ana (2002) has explicitly considered metaphor as an ideological tool in constructing racist representations of Latinos in the press, captured eloquently in the title of his monograph, *Brown Tide Rising*. In sum, the documented relational and differentiating functions of each reference, constructed dialogue, and metaphoric language motivate a need to examine more closely the indexical processes by which they construct ideologies in explicit debates about language.

Before delving into an illustration of these strategies in action, it should be stressed that although the strategies are considered separately here for theoretical purposes, they are clearly not as distinct in actual discourse – that is, metaphor often functions as a figurative type of personal reference, constructed dialogue may contain metaphor and certainly contains personal reference (when referring to the speaker in the quotative construction), and so forth. The benefit of structuring the analysis in this way lies in highlighting the disparate *means* through which each strategy functions as an ideological tool, positioning Self and Other in relation to language in distinct ways. Furthermore, it should be noted that this discussion is illustrative and by no means exhaustive of the numerous discursive ways in which participants take part in language debates online. It is hoped that this analysis will spur further interest in the ideological analysis of language debates with an eye toward seeing these practices from analytical angles that can be unified through a theoretical model which schematizes the way in which they situate Self, Other and language in persuasive discourse.

4.1. Personal Reference

The following example of personal reference from the Digg.com discussion is one of the initial comments posted in response to the linked CNN article reporting Gingrich's speech. The user, Radiant, advocates teaching immigrants the 'ways' of American society in (1), implying that one of these 'ways' is the English language:

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[1] I use the term metaphor in the sense of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which includes four types of figures of speech under the subheading of metaphor: 1) 'genus for genus' (which would correlate most closely to Lakoff and Johnson's 1980 definition); 2) 'genus for species' (metonymy); 3) 'species for genus' (metonymy/synecdoche); and 4) analogy.

(1)   Teaching **immigrants our** ways is how **we** welcome **them** into **our** society. It is only in the interests of **separatists** and **politicians** to create **separate linguistic classes**[2].

Radiant's statement represents a fairly straightforward case of personal reference constructing a Self-Other distinction in relation to language through the use of 'Us' and 'Them'-type referrals (in bold), constructing the issue of language differences as one of U.S.-born English-speaking citizens versus non-English-speaking immigrants, thus 'erasing' a wide array of lived linguistic experience in the United States.[3] Radiant also constructs the position of those on the other side of the debate (i.e. those in favor of bilingual education), by referring to them as 'separatists and politicians' – as agents creating this separation between linguistic 'classes'. By contrast, this reference positions Gingrich, through his insistence on English immersion, as a non-political unifying agent, evoking the rhetoric of 'one nation, one language' that has circulated in American political discourse at least since the Americanization campaign of the early twentieth century (Ricento, 2000). In addition, Radiant constructs differences of language as an economic issue by referring to speakers of different languages metonymically as 'separate linguistic *classes*', constructing the support of bilingual education as a means of hegemonic control which amplifies socioeconomic gaps between speakers of English and other languages.

Compare Radiant's use of reference as a differentiating device to reinforce a boundary between Self and Other to the following example extracted from a Youtube video posted by Victor, who performs a parody of Gingrich's apology. Example (2) contains the opening line of Victor's apology, which he performs in Spanish with English subtitles as in the original apology. However, Victor's rendition is performed in a hyper-anglicized and approximated version of Spanish, and the English subtitles are not totally faithful to the spoken utterance:

(2)   Victor: Hola. /Mi/ llamo Newt Gingrich.
     Literal: *Hello. My name is Newt Gingrich.*
     Subtitles: **Old Gringo.**

In this excerpt, Victor also creates a Self-Other distinction through the use of personal reference; however, in this case it is done multimodally, in which a supposed Self-reference reveals the presence of the voice of an Other via the derogatory reference 'Old Gringo' in the subtitles. This example of vari-directional double-voiced discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) in the Self-reference performs several functions in this video: first, it frames Victor's video as a parody; in addition, it mocks Gingrich's non-native Spanish accent in the original apology; finally, it serves an ideological function which both calls into question the validity of Gingrich's authority on the topic of bilingual education and directly opposes the language ideologies expressed in his speeches and elsewhere in institutional forms of media.

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[2] In all excerpts from the Digg data, original spelling, grammar, and punctuation have been maintained.

[3] Among those whose experience is erased are the 21.5 million native-born U.S. citizens who speak a language other than English at home, comprising close to half of the total U.S. population who speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

In (1) and (2), language ideologies are constructed by drawing distinctions between Self and Other and positioning each in relation to language in ways that naturalize other (political, economic, ethnic) ideologies. In the first case, this was done by designating players in the debate via full noun phrases and pronominal reference, while the second case added an element of language play and parody, which manipulated both a prior text (Gingrich's Youtube apology) and the multiple modes available (spoken language, written subtitles, image) to make the reader *actively* reflect on the line drawn between Self and Other. This strategy is common throughout the Digg and Youtube data; it also reflects findings regarding the discursive construction of language ideologies espoused in institutional discourses on language and education policy, from the advertising material of the language legislation lobby U. S. English (Espinosa-Aguilar, 2001) to the news reporting practices in national newspapers (Santa Ana, 2002).

4.2. Constructed Dialogue

Now let us consider some examples of constructed dialogue in the data. This discursive resource has been discussed by Clark and Gerrig (1990), who emphasize the *demonstrative* nature of directly reporting speech, as opposed to the descriptive quality of indirect report, noting that demonstrations are also necessarily selective in nature. In the Digg comment shown here, the user Detritus directly voices a non-native English speaker, selecting certain aspects of the speech to connote in his narrative:

(3)   When I'm in a Chinese restaurant I'll try to chat up the people behind the counter just to give them an opportunity to practice English beyond the mechanized **"What you order? Ok, pickup or delivery?"** They're usually very grateful for the opportunity, and I've seen a dramatic improvement in the accent of one such new found friend.

In this excerpt, the speech that is reported (in bold) is an example of what Tannen (1989) has called 'dialogue as instantiation', or dialogue used to illustrate a recurring interaction. Detritus is not voicing a particular employee at a specific Chinese restaurant here, but gives the impression that this type of interaction happens quite frequently through the use of indefinite and general referrals, such as 'a Chinese restaurant', 'the people behind the counter', and 'they'. This is also supported by the use of the adjective 'mechanized' to describe the nature of the speech reported, which could refer to the repetitive nature of the talk or the representation of Chinese-accented English phonology, or possibly both. In this example, Detritus vivifies the Other in relation to the Self by embodying the Other through 'accented' and syntactically simplified speech directed at the Self. Through this strategy, Detritus constructs a particularly American political ideology of civic involvement in which he takes personal responsibility for teaching immigrants English through his interactions with them in service encounters; however, the construction of this interaction and dialogue with the Other can also be said to evoke a White Man's Burden ideology of language education in which the English language plays the role of a civilizing mechanism of racialized and linguistically unruly Others within the United States.

Let us now compare the Digg example of constructed dialogue to a multimodal example of constructed dialogue in the following Youtube clip from the Young Turks,

who perform regularly on a daily internet talk show. In this clip, they discuss and negatively evaluate Gingrich's decision to apologize in Spanish by playing a clip of the apology and making comments as the clip runs:

(4)   Gingrich: El fin de semana pasado, hize unos comentarios que reconozco
        Subtitles: Last weekend,   I made some comments that I recognized
        Turks: DAH?!   [giggle]

        Gingrich: produjeron un mal sentimiento entre la communidad Latina.
        Subtitles: produced a bad feeling   within the Latino community.
        Turks: hahahaHAHAHAHAHA   Come on,

        Gingrich: Las palabras que elegí para expresarme no fueron las mejores,
        Subtitles: The words I chose   were not the best,
        Turks: how do you not love this? <mocking> ma:l sen[tʰ]imien[tʰ]o.

        Gingrich: y lo que quise decir es esto.
        Subtitles: and what I wanted to say is this:
        Turks: <mocking> es: es:to.

Rather than verbally reconstructing Gingrich's words for us as Detritus did in (3), the Young Turks reproduce Gingrich's apology and vocalize *over* it, ridiculing him, laughing, and mocking his accent by exaggerating phonological features like sibilant /s/ and aspirated /t/. Here, the reported speech is actually *in* dialogue with the reporters themselves, who are able to ad lib as in a real time conversation due to the multimodal and multimedia nature of Youtube.

The Young Turks also perform a dialect of what Jane Hill (1998, 2005) has called 'Mock Spanish' in this example and the remainder of the clip. Hill characterizes Mock Spanish as a jocular subregister of colloquial English used by non-Spanish speakers which incorporates Anglified pseudo-Spanish constructions to portray a laid-back, easy-going persona, but which also reproduces racist stereotypes of Spanish speakers. The variety used by the Young Turks in (4) and by others who ridicule Gingrich's apology is a variety of Mock Spanish that I call Mock *Gringo* Spanish. This Mock variety depicts white non-native versions of Spanish in a parodic tone, which calls into question the parodee's Spanish language ability, intentions, and authenticity. In other words, it is non-native Spanish reframed as Mock Spanish. The Mock Gringo Spanish in this and other Youtube video responses, which most often appears in constructed dialogue, functions as an ideological tool in subverting common-sense beliefs about language, bilingualism, education, and the intents and effects of language policy put forth by Gingrich in his two speeches.

In both these examples, constructed dialogue indexes ideologies of language by embodying the Other and drawing the reader/viewer into the *lived social world* as the speaker/actor sees it. Refuse constructs a Self-Other distinction by voicing a non-native speaker's English in a narrative of personal experience, and the Young Turks subvert ideologies constructed in Gingrich's metalinguistic discourse by providing a running

Mock Gringo Spanish commentary over it to produce a 'lamination' (Goffman, 1974) of ideological meaning.

4.3. Metaphoric Language

I now turn to the ideological import of metaphoric language in the Digg and Youtube responses to Gingrich's report and apology. The following example contains the entire Digg comment posted by a user named Artifical:

(5) You have to teach immigrants English. You have to walk before you can run.

Notice that the contribution is relatively short[4] compared to the Digg examples in (1) and (3); as many scholars of metaphor have pointed out (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Sapir, 1977), metaphors are efficient ways of producing meaning and doing ideological work because they have the generative capacity of indexing broad conceptual systems through singular images. This example of metaphoric language (technically analogy) constructs the English language as a basic necessity on which all personal accomplishments depend, and conversely, as the sole prerequisite for all other forms of personal success (since 'walking' is a prerequisite to 'running'). In this sense, immigrants[5] are portrayed as not fully functioning, immature, or crippled habitants until they learn to speak English. Interestingly, despite the structural parallelism in (5), it should be noted that the 'you' of the first and second sentence are not co-referential; agency is assigned to the *teachers* of English in the first sentence, while the second sentence focuses on the responsibility of the *learners*. This capacity to fluidly change referent and maintain coherence while avoiding deictic ambiguity also speaks to the power of metaphor in language ideological discourse; the metaphor highlights broader discourses on immigration and language in the U. S., overcoming the normal discourse constraints of pronominal reference (Schiffrin, 2006). Furthermore, this Digg comment can be said to perform the semiotic process of erasure in two ways: first, it disguises the alternative ideology of multilingualism as a personal resource by ignoring the benefit of speaking another language (which would presumably be likened to 'crawling' according to the logic embraced by Artifical), and second, it effaces the reality that many monolingual native English speakers in the United States are economically disenfranchised and by no means 'running'. On a similar note, it obscures the fact that knowledge of the English language alone is not a great economic benefit if not complemented by literacy, technology, and a multitude of other life skills.

Compare Artifical's comment in (5) to the following multimodal metaphor from a Youtube video. This example is an excerpt of a Youtube video clip from the ABC late-night talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live!,* which was posted on the website under the title 'Newt Gingrich apologizes and says crazy stuff in Spanish'. The clip contains Gingrich's original apology, but the subtitles have been altered for humorous effect (the original subtitles are provided below for the sake of providing translation but were obscured by the altered subtitles in the clip):

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[4] Mean length of the Digg comments is 66 words.
[5] Note again that other non-English speakers, including the millions born in the United States, are not referenced in this statement.
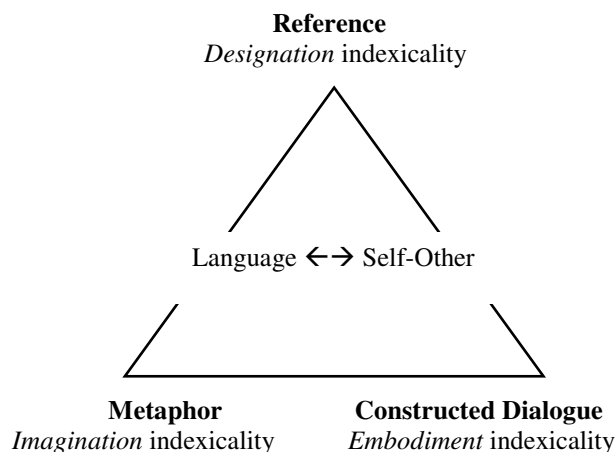
(6)   Gingrich: Y espero que aceptan este comunicado
       Original: *And I hope you accept this communication*
       Altered: **My heart feels like a piñata**

       Gingrich: que estoy brindando con un corazón sincero.
       Original: *that I am offering you from a sincere heart.*
       Altered: **that has been kicked apart by a donkey.**

If we read the altered subtitles as a metaphorical translation of Gingrich's attempt in his apology to connect with Spanish speakers by using language they are familiar with, we can better understand the ideological work this strategy is performing. First, the reference to the piñata evokes an image of Spanish speakers as a generally festive and relaxed people rather than serious or hard-working. The donkey, on the other hand, conjures up stereotypical images of Latinos as backwards or less sophisticated (because the donkey is an older, less efficient mode of goods transportation), annoying loud (like the donkey's bray) and wild, hard to control, and possibly violent (like the animal's powerful kick). The discourse function of such imagery and the use of words of Spanish origin can be likened to the function of Mock Spanish as described by Hill (2005: 114), in that they carry 'a presupposition, a "deep background", a fully naturalized set of understandings of persons in Spanish-speaking populations', which is required in order to appreciate the humor of the language play. It should be noted that the language use in (6) carries an additional lamination of meaning since it is framed as a parody of Gingrich's apology; thus, it works similarly to the prior Youtube examples in (2) and (4) by *subverting* language ideologies expressed by Gingrich and calling into question the intention and authenticity of Gingrich's use of Spanish.

5. Discussion

Bringing the three discourse strategies discussed above back together, let us consider for a moment the indexical processes through which each strategy functioned as a resource for constructing language ideology in the examples taken from the Digg comments and Youtube videos. Personal reference served as a differentiating device, creating and naturalizing social distinctions between speakers of English and other languages, between opponents and proponents of bilingual education, and between divisive and unifying forces; in general, reference created distinctions between Self and Other by **designating** individuals as members of categories, in particular places, with particular attributes, and most importantly, speaking particular languages. By contrast, through constructed dialogue speakers evoked the Other through the process of **embodiment**, displaying their likeness *through* their words, accent, and syntax, whether sincerely or mockingly. Finally, the use of metaphoric language positions Self and Other with respect to language though the process of using language to **imagine** the Other in calculated ways, highlighting similarities and hiding differences between the non-literal images and their intended referents and addressees. The following triad schematizes this typology of indexical processes:

Figure 1. Triad of language ideological discourse strategies

Reference
Designation indexicality

Language ←→ Self-Other

Metaphor   **Constructed Dialogue**
Imagination indexicality   *Embodiment* indexicality

In the case of each of these strategies, both the Digg and Youtube example constructed ideologies of language through similar indexical means; however, the communicative modes through which they did so were different due to the primarily textual nature of the Digg forum and the multimodal affordances of the Youtube videos. If we compare the Digg and Youtube examples with each other, a pattern regarding the spatio-temporal configuration Self, Other, and language emerges. In the textual examples from the Digg data, Self and Other are juxtaposed quite clearly spatio-temporally via the written language used to indicate them, whether through the use of distinct referring terms, through the visual and linguistic framing devices of direct quotation, or through the structural parallelism of analogy. In the Youtube examples, on the other hand, users manipulate Web 2.0 technologies and play with these spatio-temporal boundaries, layering subjects, propositions, and dissonant stances through the use of multiple modes and codes, making the viewer question the boundaries between Self and Other. As the viewer attempts to determine the voice of the primary 'author' in the Youtube commentaries, he/she must evaluate where competing conceptions language stand in relation to the layered frames of parodic meaning.

Additionally, while the excerpts from the Digg discussion and Youtube videos have provided concise examples of how reference, constructed dialogue, and metaphor perform language ideological work through the processes of designation, embodiment, and imagination, it should be reinforced on a concluding note that these examples have been extracted from larger debates in which these resources integrate each other in complex ways. In order to understand the degree to which the specific language ideologies constructed in these brief examples are shared or in conflict in discourse, we must also take into account how such statements are responded to by other users in each forum. For instance, how do the many Digg users who self-identify in the discussion as immigrants or native-born U.S. citizens who speak first languages other than English respond to the Us-Them distinction Radiant sets up in (1), which designates these users in a nebulous third space? Do they accept the role of 'Us', do they take on the position of 'Them', or do they contest these alliances by reconfiguring the identity boundary lines in their responses? It is through detailed analysis of this type of discursive action that we can reach a better

understanding of the dynamic life of language ideologies in both interactive computer-mediated contexts and other forums for language-oriented debate.

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