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Language and conflict in the Mapuche context

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19.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between two phenomena in the history of the Mapuche, the people indigenous to much of what is now southern Chile and Argentina. The first is the conflict between the Mapuche people and Chilean settler society. (This conflict is often called “the Mapuche conflict” in the Chilean media; in order to avoid attributing the conflict to the Mapuche, here I simply write “the Conflict”, capitalised.) The second is the more recent phenomenon of Mapuche language revitalisation. To bring these two phenomena together probably constitutes a rather different contribution to the theme of language and conflict to many others in this volume. This is for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, the chapter specifically addresses language revitalisation. To this author’s knowledge, the only work on language revitalisation in a similar context of violent conflict is that of Mac Giolla Chriost (2012) on Northern Ireland. Secondly, it concerns a language indigenous to the Americas: Mapuzugun (the Mapuche language). The Americas are a region generally overlooked in the study of ethnic or political conflict in relation to language (with the exception of French in Canada), because there are few cases where one particular language is “contiguous” with a party to a large-scale conflict. There are conflicts where a more general concept of indigeneity plays a role (e.g. in the Zapatista region in Mexico), but it is an indigeneity encompassing multiple ethnolinguistic groups, with the result that no single indigenous language is considered emblematic.

The chapter begins by providing a brief introduction to both of those phenomena, laying the ground for arguments to follow. Section 19.3 asks “what is the relationship between the conflict and language revitalisation?” This question has the twin aims of helping to determine (a) strategies for language revitalisation and (b) strategies for conflict reduction. In this section, I put forward five lines of analysis to help think about the question:

1. language is one arena in which the Conflict plays out: both language loss and language revitalisation are a result and manifestation of the Conflict
2. there is an apparent contradiction, or at least tension, between support and oppression of Mapuche culture by the Chilean state. I argue that this tension can be (at least partly)
explained using Hale’s (2002) concept of neoliberal multiculturalism as a strategy to defuse ethnic conflict in order to continue with a fundamentally neoliberal economic model.

3. The language revitalisation movement is different from the broader conflict, insofar as the “goods” that it seeks – namely knowledge, use and promotion of the Mapuche language – are not considered particularly valuable in the value system of settler society. This stands in contrast to the movement to recover Mapuche land, which leads to great opposition from settler society since land is a valued good in the settler value system.

4. The relationship between the conflict and language revitalisation depends on the degree of institutionalisation: the more language revitalisation is incorporated as a responsibility of the state, the more distant it becomes from the broader conflict.

5. There is a distinction between “shallow” and “deep” versions of language revitalisation, with the “deep” version being more likely to provoke conflict.

Section 19.4 of the chapter asks what effect language revitalisation might have on the Conflict, looking at possible scenarios for the future according to two perspectives. The chapter ends (Section 19.5) with a reflection on the practical value of exploring these issues to further both language revitalisation and conflict resolution.

19.2 Background

This section gives only the briefest of overviews to the Conflict and to Mapuche language shift and language revitalisation, since both topics have been amply addressed elsewhere (the reader is referred to further literature below), and the novel contribution of this chapter is instead to examine the relation between the two. In order to allow a more precise focus on sociopolitical dynamics at a national level in Chile, it does not attempt to address European-indigenous contact before Chilean independence, nor does it address the situation in Argentina.

19.2.1 The Conflict

West of the Andes, the Mapuche are the original inhabitants of the land from around the Choapa river in the North to the island of Chiloé in the South (Smeets, 2008, pp. 6–7). Several decades after Chilean independence from Spain, the Chilean army invaded the part of Mapuche territory that had remained independent, between the rivers Bio-bio and Toltén, in a campaign between 1879 and 1883 known to most Chileans as the “Pacification of the Araucanía” (Bengoa, 1985, Mariman et al., 2006). This region is now known as the Ninth Region, or La Araucanía, and is where the present-day conflict is most acute. The imposition of the neoliberal economic model upon Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, and therefore also upon Chile’s indigenous population, is commonly cited as the third wave of aggression against the Mapuche people (e.g. Haughney, 2006).

Who, or what, are the parties to the Conflict in the 21st century? For the purposes of this chapter, let us call them “the Mapuche people” and “settler society” (see Wolfe, 2006 on the latter term). These terms by no means have hard and fast boundaries, and in fact, someone who in one instance (e.g. the in the defence of traditional Mapuche land) might seem to belong to one category, may in another instance (e.g. willingness to use the Mapuche language) belong to the other. They are perhaps best understood as orientations, which may be present to different degrees in different situations in the same person or same institution. This is particularly important in the case of language since many ethnic Mapuche hold negative attitudes towards the Mapuche language, attitudes that have been adopted...
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from settler society; conversely, many Chileans of mainly European descent hold positive attitudes towards the language and are active participants in the revitalisation movement.

Before going further, therefore, some comment is also needed on the term “conflict” itself. The facts that call for the use of this term are acts of “collective violence”, as explained by theorists of violence such as Tilly (2003) (although, in keeping with the terminology of this volume, I keep to the term “conflict”). These have included raids, shootings, torture and imprisonment of Mapuche individuals by the Chilean police and military, and several instances of burning of timber trucks and attacks on landowners of European descent by Mapuche individuals. Many writers would extend the use of the terms “conflict” and “violence” to something more structural (Dilts, 2012, Galtung, 1969) – patterns in Chilean society, culture, politics and economics to which it is helpful to apply the term “conflict” – and this line of thought is followed up briefly in Section 19.3.1.

The Conflict has been a subject of much debate in academia as well as in public discourse, and not all of this can be reviewed here (see Bengoa, 1985, Haughney, 2006, Mariman et al., 2006, Nahuelpan Moreno et al., 2010, Enrique Pineda, 2014, Pinto Rodríguez, 2015, Saavedra, 2002). Much of this debate concerns aspects of the Conflict that have little direct relation to language (e.g. demands for ancestral land) and these will not be considered here except insofar as they intersect with linguistic phenomena. Nonetheless, it is essential to mention at least the part of the Conflict that we might call “sociocultural”: the suppression (earlier in the 20th century) and then neglect (in recent decades) of indigenous cultures and languages, in favour of a Spanish-speaking, homogenous national identity. This is discussed further in the following section.

19.2.2 Language shift and language revitalisation

Since the colonisation of the Mapuche territory, Spanish has been encroaching on the Mapuche language in all the ways commonly seen in language shift (e.g. Austin and Sallabank, 2011a). These include encroachment on sociolinguistic domains, restricted demographics, lexical (and maybe structural) impoverishment of the language – all processes that have been best documented in the Ninth Region and adjacent communes since the Chilean invasion (Gundermann et al., 2008, 2009, 2011), although it seems likely that similar processes took place in much of Chile from the arrival of the Spanish onwards (Adelaar, 2004). Around half of the Mapuche population in Chile is monolingual in Spanish, with the remainder bilingual to varying degrees; of these “bilinguals”, less than half (45,206) can speak and understand Mapuzugun without difficulty (Gundermann et al., 2008, pp.13–15). Gundermann et al. also report the high endangerment of Mapuzugun on the basis of age distribution and contexts of usage (see also Gundermann et al., 2009 and Lagos, 2012 for further information on the sociolinguistic situation).

One lens through which to tell the story of language shift is that of language policy considered as one aspect of the Chilean nationalist project. The Chilean state has maintained a default policy of Spanish monolingualism, similar to other countries in the Americas implementing a European-inspired language policy; in fact, in this respect Chile has lagged behind shifts in language policy and planning in favour of indigenous languages that have taken place in other countries in the Americas, particularly Ecuador and Bolivia (Lagos and Espinoza, 2013). Relative to other Latin American contexts, issues of ethnicity or race in Chile have to a great degree been “elided” (Richards, 2013, p.8) or subsumed within socio-economic issues (e.g. the analysis in Saavedra, 2002). That is to say, Chilean nationalist discourse has often claimed that the problems facing the Mapuche people are fundamentally
the same as those facing poor non-Mapuche Chileans. Given the dominance of this nationalist paradigm in Chile, it is hard to demand rights – such as language rights – based on any group identity other than a Chilean national identity.

Government-sponsored revitalisation efforts for indigenous languages have focussed almost exclusively on what is called “bilingual education” (“EIB”, according to the Spanish initials), and for this reason, education-based language policy is the only aspect of language policy discussed here. Chile’s bilingual education program actually involves only the teaching of indigenous languages as second languages; there is no bilingual education in the sense that some classes are taught through Spanish, some through the medium of an indigenous language. Needless to say, there are also no options for education solely through the medium of an indigenous language. Lagos (2015a) and Lagos and Ojeda (2013) have shown in detail that this bilingual education program is ineffective, and even harmful, for revitalisation purposes. There is a lack of awareness that there even exists an important distinction between second-language teaching and immersion (Penman, 2015); correspondingly, there is a lack of awareness that second-language teaching on its own is an inadequate revitalisation measure (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006, pp.50–1). Worse, this second-language teaching is ineffective even on its own terms (Lagos and Ojeda, 2013, p.4). Nonetheless, there have been signs of change in Chilean language policy since at least 2014, when the movement to officialise the Mapuche language in Chile’s Ninth Region began.

More recently (since at least 2014) there has been a surge in grassroots language revitalisation efforts: most notably, language-learning activities held in Santiago and the main towns of southern Chile, and residential language camps in more rural locations. Here I understand language revitalisation to mean “bring[ing] endangered languages back to some level of use within their communities (and elsewhere) after a period of reduction in usage” (Hinton, 2011, p.291). Also following Hinton (2011, p.292), in this chapter I use “revitalisation” as a cover term for language maintenance (for languages with greater sociolinguistic vitality) and language revival (for languages with less sociolinguistic vitality), since there are speakers and communities at both ends of this spectrum in the Mapuche case. I use the term “grassroots” in the sense of not having been organised by any academic or state institution; this is discussed further in Section 19.3.4.

19.3 The relationship between language revitalisation and the Conflict

What is the relationship between language revitalisation and the Conflict? In this section I lay out five approaches to thinking about this question. These are not only “approaches” in a methodological sense – i.e. “ways to think about the question” or “perspectives on the question” – but also particular strategies available to either language activists or the state.

19.3.1 Language as one arena of conflict

Many commentators on the Mapuche movement consider that it has three main concerns: land, (political) autonomy and culture (Mariman, 2012), with language included under the rubric of culture. Following this analysis, one may consider language as one among several “arenas” of the Conflict: one way in which the Conflict is manifest (alongside others such as acts of physical violence, land occupations, legal battles, political campaigns and so on). Looking to the past, this perspective reflects and highlights the historical parallel between military-political-socioeconomic subordination of the Mapuche and linguistic subordination, leading to language shift. It would be presumptuous to assume that what happens in
the arena of language will parallel what happens in other arenas (and a few cases present possible challenges to such parallels, such as the maintenance of Guarani in Paraguay). Yet, at least in the context of European settler-colonialism, language shift may be considered a fairly accurate “canary in the coalmine” that signals (non-linguistic) historical processes (Ostler, 2005). Or, we might expect demands regarding language also to be a direct source of conflict, comparable to demands for ancestral lands (which often lead to violent police repression). To justify this expectation, we must note that, as in other nation-states founded on a monocultural/monolingual ideology, language rights have been taboo in Chile because they are “communal rights” (May, 2011, 2012) and therefore threaten the project of creating a homogenous national identity (based on a European model) pursued in Chile since independence from Spain. The denial of cultural-linguistic diversity has been more severe in Chile than in almost any other Latin American country (Haughney, 2006, Lagos and Espinoza, 2013). Despite all this, demands for language rights in the 2000s have not provoked severe opposition from the state or associated interests, as explored in Section 19.3.2.

Considering language as one arena of conflict captures some important truths about the situation, but also overlooks a few fundamental differences between Mapuzugun and other arenas of conflict. Firstly, it overlooks the fact that language shift is much harder to reverse than “ethnicity shift”; in Chile today, it is much easier to begin identifying as Mapuche than to become fluent in Mapuzugun. Secondly, to see language as one arena of conflict is to understand language as a resource (cf. Ruiz, 1984) over which the Mapuche and settler society make rival claims. Yet there is a significant disconnect in the way the state treats language resources versus political and economic resources, as I examine in Section 19.3.2. Thirdly, it sets up action on language in opposition to action on land recovery or action on political autonomy, and when these are presented as “either-or” choices, language often comes last – perhaps because of values imposed by settler society (see Section 19.3.3).

19.3.2 A “cheap and easy” solution – neoliberal multiculturalism

Given the context of conflict described above, we are faced with an apparent paradox. On the one hand, the Chilean state is largely responsible for language shift from indigenous languages to Spanish; on the other hand, this same state provides support, at least in some contexts, for language revitalisation. This support includes:

- workshops/conferences on the future of Mapuzugun
- statements from officials (especially the former intendente of the Ninth Region, Francisco Huenchumilla) supporting the officialisation of the language
- funding for grassroots language camps
- intercultural bilingual education programmes
- signage in Mapuzugun

One explanation of this paradox is that for the Chilean state language policy seems a “cheap and easy solution to conflict” (Sallabank, 2010, p.166). This corresponds to Hale’s concept of neoliberal multiculturalism, a “limited version of indigenous cultural rights” (Hale, 2002, p.487) employed as a strategy to defuse conflict based on ethnic difference in order to continue with a fundamentally neoliberal economic model. Postero (2007) provides a similar analysis of Bolivian “postmulticulturalism”. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) have described the same dynamic in the US in terms of a “safety zone”, outside which indigenous culture is disallowed because it is seen as a threat to settler society. Yet another relevant analysis is the distinction between language policy that is “tolerance-oriented” (“authorities
not interfering with what minorities do with their language in the private domain”) and language policy that is “promotion-oriented” (“authorities promoting minority language through institutional use in law, administration, and public education”) (Kloss, 1968, quoted in Minasyan, 2014, p.397).

How do we know that such analyses are applicable to the case of the Mapuche in Chile? State support for revitalisation of Mapuzugun is largely “symbolic” rather than “substantial”, if we use these terms to refer to the difference between simply affirming the value of the language (including through symbolic displays such as bilingual signage) and actually changing everyday linguistic practices. The bulk of language revitalisation efforts so far have achieved only the first of these, constituting much less of a threat than the second to the status quo in Chile (Lagos, 2013, 2014, 2015b, Lagos and Espinoza, 2013, Lagos et al., 2013).

19.3.3 Taking advantage of neoliberal multiculturalism

A third perspective to consider regarding the relationship between language revitalisation and the Conflict draws on the metaphor of language as a resource (Ruiz, 1984) and the value attributed to that resource by different parties to the Conflict. The state, and settler society more generally, does not value control over language as much as it values control over land or political power. In other words, for the state, it seems less of a concession to allow (and even promote) the use of Mapuzugun, than to return land or to grant political autonomy. Thus, demands for language rights meet with less opposition than demands for land. This perspective provides a more fundamental explanation of Hale’s “neoliberal multiculturalism”.

One implication of this analysis – for believers in the broader project of self-determination, autonomy and sovereignty – is that focussing on language revitalisation may be a wise strategy. The state “dismisses” language as relatively unimportant (see Section 19.3.2), but this may be a short-sighted strategy given that (a) language is considered an important factor in Mapuche identity (Gundermann et al., 2008, pp.67–97) and (b) identification as Mapuche is an important factor in the Conflict (e.g. Pinto Rodriguez, 2015) – as in many inter-group conflicts across history worldwide (Ashmore et al., 2001). Since language shift is relatively advanced in the Mapuche context, language revitalisation must mostly focus on interactions between friends and family (corresponding to around level 8a on the EGIDS scale (Lewis and Simons, 2010)). This focus, by “happy coincidence”, avoids any confrontation with state institutions or actors. Therefore, by focussing on language revitalisation, activists may see greater results for less effort, with less conflict on the way. As Graeber (2004, p.61) says:

One need only glance at the historical record to confirm that most successful forms of popular resistance have [...] not involved challenging power head on […] but [involved] one or another strategy of slipping away from its grasp, from flight, desertion, the founding of new communities.

However, two words of caution are in order about this proposition. Firstly: even if the state undervalues control over language choice (see above), when language revitalisation activities are meeting points for people who hold broader concerns regarding Mapuche rights, these meeting points present an apparent threat to the state, and so these activities may be subject to state opposition (e.g. surveillance, denial of funding, etc.). This perceived threat has certainly been a motivation in the past for governments – such as the
Spanish government under Franco – to oppress movements to demand language rights (Mar-Molinero, 2000). Secondly: this proposition overlooks any actual or potential changes in what the state sees as strategically valuable. For one thing, the state may not see language as a valuable resource at present simply because Spanish is so hegemonic; if the balance of power between Spanish and Mapuzugun were to shift, things might change. For another, value systems are constantly changing, and there is evidence for worldwide shifts towards post-materialist values (Randers, 2012, Wilber, 2007); the increasing valorisation (however problematic) of endangered languages may be part of such shifts. One might hope that this shift in perspective might lead towards more genuine appreciation of the value of indigenous languages in the Americas. However, it may also lead to a more utilitarian appreciation of these languages, as with the US military’s use of Navajo as a secret language in the Second World War.

19.3.4 Institutional or grassroots revitalisation?

A fourth factor that determines the relationship between the Conflict and language revitalisation is the degree to which language revitalisation is institutionalised within the state. Institutionalisation is a common factor to consider in discussions of language revitalisation, and in discussions of language policy more generally (e.g. Mar-Molinero, 2000, p.165), although it apparently has not been considered in relation to ethnic conflict in the sense discussed in this chapter. Attitudes to institutionalisation are also an important fault-line among branches of the Mapuche movement: some condemn cooperation with state institutions, others accept it as necessary (Mariman, 2012). For those involved in language revitalisation, as with other demands for Mapuche rights, a constant question is: to what degree to engage with state institutions?

The obvious benefit to an “institutional” approach to revitalisation is that in this way revitalisation faces less opposition, and receives more support, from the state (indeed, this more or less follows from the definition of institutionalisation given above). Having the language present in state institutions will create contexts for language use (status planning) and increase the prestige of the language (prestige planning).

The possible disadvantages of institutionalisation, from the perspective of language revitalisation, are as follows. Firstly, symbolic support may, in fact, be even more destructive than no support, as it allows the state to be “seen to be doing something”. By co-opting revitalisation in the Mapuche context, where intergenerational transmission is far from ensured, the state may ensure that revitalisation fails; Fishman (1991) warns that language revitalisation should only consider state involvement after having ensured use of the language within the family and local community. Even if a revitalisation movement successfully conquers all intermediary sociolinguistic domains (family, community, school, etc.) before addressing state policy, placing the responsibility for revitalisation onto the state may lead people to reduce their own revitalisation efforts (e.g. Henare, 2010). Indeed, in comparing language revitalisation efforts in Chile with those in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Gallegos et al. (2010, p.101) cite the grassroots nature of Maori efforts as one of the main factors in the success of Maori as opposed to Mapuzugun language revitalisation. Another potential disadvantage to institutionalisation, observed even in contexts where there is a much less conflictual relationship between state and minority, is that “divergences between institutional revivalist policy and local retention strategies can […] reinforce older dominant/dominating diglossic language beliefs in the minority-speech community” (Ó hIfearnáin, 2014, p.33). A second (and perhaps the most feared) disadvantage is that institutionalisation will mean that the
state and dominant society end up moulding the language to their image – this is discussed in Section 19.3.5.

19.3.5 “Shallow” versus “deep” language revitalisation

In this section, I propose a crude heuristic: that language revitalisation may vary between two extremes: “shallow” and “deep”. What I call “shallow” language revitalisation assumes the “ontological equivalence” of Mapuzugun and Spanish (Course, 2018). It means respecting Mapuche phonology and morphosyntax, but not any other aspect of language that would be present in a fuller ethnography of speaking in the Mapuche context. Shallowness has been much discussed, using other terms, in the literature on language revitalisation: Austin and Sallabank (2014, p.14) note that “language-revitalisation movements often unthinkingly follow what Dorian (1998) has called a ‘western language ideology’ of how languages ought to (be) develop(ed) and increase their domains”. Urla (1995, p.246) notes that the literature has tended to assume, rather unquestioningly, that institutions of the state and capitalist economy should be targets for status planning. Woolard (1998, p.17) writes that “movements to save minority languages are often structured, willy-nilly, around the same received notions of language that have led to their oppression”; Lagos et al. (2013) describe this phenomenon specifically in the Mapuche context. Shallow language revitalisation is summed up by a quote from a Māori educator saying “the elders complain, ‘Sure we have a new generation of speakers – but all they talk about is English concepts’” (Hinton and Ahlers, 1999, p.57). This goes hand-in-hand with literal translation or calquing from the dominant language: for example, using a neologism for “mental health” while continuing to take the Western concept of mental health for granted (cf. Baker (1992) and Munday (2001) on equivalence in translation). Luykx (2004, p.152) notes this trend for Quechua in Bolivia:

[...] there is virtually no official concern for preserving traditional Quechua language forms above the level of the phrase. The language practices and genres currently being promoted are completely modern and rooted in western urban society [...] the policies being implemented in the name of Quechua revitalisation, despite their ideological appeals to historical virtue, are aimed at producing unprecedented patterns of Quechua usage that are in fact modelled on Spanish discourse patterns.

Shallow language revitalisation is a facet, or corollary, of neoliberal multiculturalism: the respect for indigenous ways of being (including ways of speaking) only goes as far as is necessary to stave off violent protest.

How is all of the above relevant to the Conflict? It is undoubtedly easier for the revitalisation movement to win shallow concessions from the state (e.g. bilingual signage for a mental health institution) than to win deep concessions (e.g. the recognition that “mental” health is not a relevant category in Mapuche language-culture). More tentatively, one might expect that demands for shallow concessions are less conflictual than demands for deep concessions. Demands to respect the phonology, morphology and syntax of a language are basically equivalent, in political terms, whether the language is Mapuzugun, Basque or Uyghur. The fact that Catalan is structurally very similar to Spanish has not made Catalan demands for language rights seem any less threatening to the Spanish state than Basque demands for language rights.

However, if we are to consider the relationship between conflict and deep language revitalisation, then language-specific (or culture-specific) characteristics do indeed become
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relevant: in talking about deep language revitalisation, we cannot assume that the relationship between Mapuzugun and Spanish is politically or culturally analogous to the relationship between Basque and Spanish, Kurdish and Turkish, or Uighur and Chinese. Rather we have to consider the specific characteristics of these two language-cultures. Are there features of Mapuche language-culture and of (Chilean) Spanish language-culture that make conflict especially likely (or unlikely) to arise between the two, relative to any other pairing of language-cultures in the world?

An answer to this question would require entering into the territory of linguistic analysis in addition to political theory, and so is beyond the scope of this chapter. Little secondary research is available on the relevant characteristics of Mapuche language-culture, and extrapolating from these characteristics to their relevance to the Conflict on a wider scale would be a task of some speculation. However, examples from other parts of the world such as Wierzbicka (1991) and O’Driscoll (2007), who show how cross-cultural differences at the level of pragmatics can lead to conflict, suggest avenues for further research.

19.4 What effect could language revitalisation have on the Conflict?

In Section 19.3, we have seen some of the ways in which the Conflict shapes language revitalisation, including how it shapes people’s understandings of language revitalisation. To take the converse approach, let us now imagine a “successful” outcome for Mapuzugun revitalisation, defining “success” rather crudely as an increase in instances and domains of language use (cf. Hinton, 2011) and imagining Māori, Hawaiian or Basque as comparable examples. What impact would this have on the Conflict, if we assume that language revitalisation and the Conflict can unfold in relative independence? Below I suggest two answers to this, though undoubtedly more are possible. The first is the answer provided by the “monolingual nationalist” ideology dominant in Chile, and the second follows from a criticism of this ideology. As a third point, I bring up an additional complicating factor in answering the question, namely the issue of Mapuche political autonomy.

19.4.1 The monolingual nationalist ideology

There is a widespread language ideology holding that (a) linguistic diversity leads to conflict (O’Driscoll, 2002), and (b) that the natural and best condition for a nation-state is monolingualism (e.g. Schiffman, 1996, Shohamy, 2006), with (b) being partly a deduction from (a). Let us call this the “monolingual nationalist” ideology. O’Driscoll (2002) traces the logic of this ideology from the supposition that linguistic diversity is abnormal, to the deduction that difference is undesirable, and to the conclusion that expressing linguistic difference is to be avoided. It is undoubtedly related to broader Western language ideologies (Dorian, 1998) and to the idea of mestizaje (roughly, “mixing”) in Latin America (e.g. Baldauf and Kaplan, 2007) and can also be found in academia and policy-making (e.g. Olson and Pearson, 2001). It corresponds to what Ruiz (1984) has called a “language as problem” orientation. This ideology is common worldwide and has been so widely discussed (e.g. Grenoble and Whaley, 1998, Jones, 2015, Sallabank, 2014, Shohamy, 2006) that it needs no further elaboration here. We need only note that it is at least as prevalent in Chile as elsewhere in the Americas (e.g. Lagos and Espinoza, 2013), and that when applied to the Mapuche case this ideology holds that language revitalisation, which is by definition an increase in linguistic diversity, would exacerbate conflict.
19.4.2 Problems with the monolingual nationalist ideology

There is evidence that the first part of the above ideology – i.e. that language diversity necessarily entails conflict – is untrue. Fishman (1989) finds no clear association between linguistic heterogeneity and reported conflict. Horowitz (2001, cited in Spolsky, 2004, p.176), studying ethnic riots, “finds a linguistic component in [no] more than two recent Indian disturbances”. In addition, as advocates of linguistic diversity often note, “some of the worst violence in human history has occurred where language was not a factor at the start of the conflict, e.g. Rwanda or former Yugoslavia” (Austin and Sallabank, 2011b, p.10), although such cases on their own constitute no evidence that linguistic diversity does not contribute to conflict.

In a more micro-level study of multiracial urban youth in Britain, Rampton (1995, p.21, cited in O’Driscoll, 2002) gives:

numerous examples of members of one group using features of the code of another group, not simply accommodating to their interlocutors in an effort to minimise the salience of their different backgrounds but rather ‘recognis[ing] and even exaggerat[ing] the differences in their communicative repertoires in a set of stylised and often playful interactions’.

In explanation of such evidence, Varshney (2001, p.4810), citing Taylor (1997), writes:

Ethnic, or national, identity can well be a source of meaning and security, without implying hatred for another ethnic or national group. These two aspects of ethnic or national identity – positive and negative – are by now well understood and clearly distinguished.

From a conflict-reduction perspective, Ashmore et al. (2001, citing Citrin, Wong and Duff, 2001 and Gaertner et al., 1999) write that:

the benefits of superordinate identities [e.g. Chilean] occur even when subordinate identities [e.g. Mapuche] are also strong. These findings suggest that intergroup conflict reduction does not require that people give up their ethnic identity or other relatively specific collective social identities.

Aside from the empirical or logical validity of the monolingual nationalist ideology, there is also an increasing problem regarding its implementation, as Chile, like “Western” countries, is being pushed towards the recognition of diversity due to non-European immigration, mainly from other Latin American countries (see e.g. Belliard Quiroga, 2015). In the case of Haitians and Quechua-speakers from Bolivia and Peru, this entails linguistic diversity.

Having said all of this, if language revitalisation leads to an increase in the perception of ethnic difference, this may exacerbate conflict in current circumstances – the above evidence merely shows that increased conflict is not a necessary or inherent consequence of ethnic difference. Therefore, we must first consider the circumstances. What are the relevant aspects to consider? Brewer (2001, p.36), writing from a social-psychological perspective, puts forward at least one:

When outgroup attitudes are characterised simply by lack of trust rather than active distrust, there is opportunity for capitalising on common interests and identities.
But when intense distrust has already developed, common group identities [e.g., Chilean national identity] are likely to be seen as threats (or opportunities) for domination and absorption.

And in the following sentence, Brewer suggests a solution: “In this case, the prescription for conflict reduction may first require protection of intergroup boundaries and distinctive identities”. One example of the implementation of this perspective is the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is “primarily a security organisation, and its interest in national and linguistic minorities comes from the perspective of conflict prevention” (Spolsky, 2004, p.125); although there is admittedly a significant difference between the Mapuche case and many minorities in Europe, in that Mapuzugun is no longer spoken by the majority of the ethnic group.

19.4.3 A third variable – Mapuche autonomy

To understand the actual and potential relationship between language revitalisation and the Conflict, we have to turn to a geographical and political factor somewhat overlooked so far in this chapter: the movement for Mapuche autonomy, most elements of which aim for autonomy in a geographically defined region centring on the current Ninth Region (Mariman, 2012). The autonomy movement needs to be considered in relation to language revitalisation, since proposals for autonomy are founded on ethnic difference, and language plays a role in constructing that ethnic difference. At the same time, the autonomy movement must be considered as a separate factor from language revitalisation, since language is of highly variable importance among different proposals for autonomy: some proposals make no mention of language and leave the impression that an autonomous Mapuche government would augur no better for the language than the current Chilean government (Mariman, 2012).

Given this context, we can imagine various possible relationships between language revitalisation, autonomy and the Conflict. The monolingual nationalist perspective would hold that language revitalisation will support the goal of autonomy, and thereby increase conflict. There is some validity to the first part of this argument, as the same effect has been seen to operate elsewhere: for example, the use of language by the Quebecois “to gain group recognition, status and power within Canada” (Shohamy, 2006, p.28). The counter perspective would hold that revitalisation will support the goal of autonomy, and thereby lessen conflict, for the reasons given in Section 19.4.2 (especially the evidence from Brewer (2001)). Another perspective, probably most closely aligned with the counter perspective, is that language revitalisation will decrease conflict, by increasing mutual understanding in society – and it remains an open question whether such a decrease in conflict would increase or decrease demands for autonomy. Yet another perspective is that language revitalisation may neither support nor hinder the autonomy movement, but proceed somewhat independent to it, at least for the time being. These are only some of the logical possibilities, and it is probably too early to say with any certainty what the relationship of language revitalisation is to other political phenomena.

19.5 Conclusion

This chapter has suggested some perspectives with which to think about the relationship between language revitalisation and conflict in the Mapuche context. These perspectives,
laid out in Section 19.3, are not necessarily mutually exclusive; all contain some truth, and none is a claim to the complete truth. Moreover, we are still very far from a complete picture of the relationship, partly because some questions fall beyond the area of language (e.g. “will an increase in conflict decrease or increase demands for autonomy?”), and partly because of the recent nature of language revitalisation in Chile and lack of empirical research on the relevant questions. For example, are revitalisation initiatives, including the very act of speaking Mapuzugun, seen as conflictual? Does it make sense to address negative attitudes towards an ethnicity before proceeding with the teaching and promotion of that language? Since perceptions and attitudes determine the success or failure of revitalisation movements, it is crucial to understand how people perceive revitalisation initiatives in relation to conflict, especially since the theme of conflict plays such an important role in popular Chilean conceptions of the Mapuche (Pinto Rodríguez, 2015). Investigating these issues should promote transformation of the conflict by raising awareness about the relationships that are assumed to exist between Mapuche language revitalisation, proposals for autonomy and the Conflict. This chapter has, if nothing more, highlighted that the causal relationship between these phenomena are open to question. Moreover, it should be clear that fear of exacerbating conflict is not an adequate justification for opposing language revitalisation, and that reconciliation with the linguistic heritage of Chile would offer a more promising solution to the Conflict than continued language shift.

Note

1 Although see Mac Cioinigh et al.’s contribution in Chapter 30 of this volume.

References


