Exploring a Heritage Language:
Linguistic Ideologies, Identity, and Revitalization of Belizean Mopan

Yuki Tanaka

Yuki Tanaka is a PhD student of linguistic anthropology at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Her research focuses on the interrelationships of language and culture, language ideologies, language shift and documentation, language maintenance and revitalization, identity, and the affect, with an areal focus on the lowland Maya. Currently, she is working on the documentation of Belizean Mopan spoken in Toledo district, Southern Belize. As a heritage speaker, she is also interested in documentation and revitalization of Miyako, a Ryukyuan language spoken in the Miyako Island, Japan. She holds an MA in Anthropology from SIUC and a BA in History from Ibaraki University, Japan. At SIUC, she has taught introductory linguistic anthropology and Japanese classes as an instructor of record and introductory anthropology classes as a TA.

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Abstract
This paper explores the current interaction of linguistic ideologies, identity, and revitalization of Belizean Mopan, a Mayan language spoken in Toledo District, Southern Belize. Inspired by two theoretical frameworks: Kroskrity’s (2009) notion of multiple language ideologies as a means of forming social and individual identities; and Webster’s (2010b) “intimate grammar” that focuses on a speaker’s felt attachment to a language, I consider individuals’ linguistic biographies as an effective means to understand ongoing linguistic practices in the area. Analyzing the linguistic biographies of three Mopan-Q’eqchi’ teachers who participated in the creation of a Belize Mopan dictionary, *Kamb’al Ich T’an Mopan Maya*, I argue that the individual’s emotional attachments to their language and the sense of belonging to their linguistic community are the crucial keys for effective language documentation and revitalization.

Resumen
Esta presentación explora la interacción entre las ideologías lingüísticas, la identidad y la revitalización del mopan de Belize, una lengua maya hablada en el distrito de Toledo en el sur de Belize. Inspirada por dos marcos teóricos: La noción de múltiples ideologías lingüísticas de Kroskity (2009) y la noción de gramáticas íntimas de Webster (2010), la cual se enfoca en los sentimientos de arraigo a las lenguas, yo considero las biografías lingüísticas de los individuos como medios efectivos para comprender las prácticas lingüísticas en esta área geográfica. A través del análisis de las biografías lingüísticas de tres maestros de habla mopan y q’eqchi’, quienes participaron en la creación de un diccionario Mopan, yo propongo que el arraigo emocional a sus lenguas y el sentido de pertenencia a sus comunidades lingüísticas son elementos cruciales para la efectiva documentación y revitalización de sus lenguas.
Introduction

This paper explores the current interaction of linguistic ideologies, identity, and revitalization of Belizean Mopan, a Mayan language spoken in Toledo district, Southern Belize. Inspired by two theoretical frameworks: Korskrity’s (2009) notion of multiple language ideologies as means of forming social and individual identities; and Webster’s (2010b) “intimate grammar” that focuses on a speaker’s felt attachment to the language, I consider individuals’ linguistic biographies as an effective means to understand ongoing linguistic practices in the area. Analyzing the linguistic biographies of three Mopan-Q’eqchi’ teachers who participated in the creation of a Belize Mopan dictionary, *Kamb’al Ich T’an Mopan Maya*, I argue that the individual’s emotional attachments to the language and the sense of belonging to one’s linguistic community are crucial keys for effective language documentation and revitalization.

The Relationship between Language and Identity

Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 585–586) state that identity is a “relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories”. According to Kroskrity (2000a; 2000b), social identity is a socially constructed membership in a social category or group. Thus, all speakers in a society would have multiple levels of social roles and categories as well as different kinds of identities that are negotiated, hidden, or emphasized according to speakers’ social interaction, environment, and relation to others.

It is assumed by many sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists that the negotiation of an identity has a close connection to language varieties such as dialects, jargons understood only within certain social networks, and languages that are not mutually intelligible, such as English and Spanish (Mesthrie 2000). For example, Bailey’s (2000; 2001) study on the language of Dominican Americans shows that their identity construction strategy is primarily done by switching their languages. Barrett (2008) demonstrates that younger Sipakpense speakers of Guatemala adopt more linguistically Mayan speech patterns as well as hyper-differentiate between Spanish and Maya with iconic grammatical markers of “authentic” Maya identity. Fuller (2007) also argues that full- or semi-bilingual grade school children strategically choose their languages to construct social identity while also accommodating themselves to the social occasion and expectation. As Shenk (2007) reported, being “pure” not only by blood but also by
language fluency is often considered as an important factor for constructing ethnic identities.

However, the ways that people understand their language in relationship to other languages and why such a relationship matters is not always the same. As Webster pointed out, assuming a relationship between language and identity is deeply connected to ideological positions (Webster 2010a, 2010b, 2011). For example, traditional language ideologies found among multilingual Native American tribes historically did not link language to identity (Bunte 2009, Loether 2009, and Kroskrity 2009). Navajo youths in a reservation or Miyakoan descendants in Japan including myself, who cannot speak their heritage languages, would still claim themselves as Navajo or Miyako, respectively (Webster 2010, personal communication; Tanaka 2010). Yet still in many cases, those Native non-speakers of a given indigenous language often express a nostalgic felt attachment to their heritage language (Ahlers 2006, Cavanaugh 2004, Tanaka 2010) and a belief that language can iconically and indexically mark ethnic authenticity (Barrett 2008, Shenk 2007). This nostalgia is clearly articulated in examples of the loss of aesthetic expressions and terms that cannot be translated into another language (Woodbury 1998). In these cases, the loss of language is deeply connected to the ways in which people express and identify themselves. For example, examining affective suffixes in Cup’ik, one of Central Alaskan Yup’ik Eskimo dialects, Woodbury (1998) argues that certain suffixes have great rhetorical effects in Cup’ik speech and cannot be replaced by equivalent English terms. Even though “in a situation of language shift, a language of wider communication (such as English) can be adapted ideologically, if not always structurally, to communicative ends that are continuous with those earlier fulfilled by an ancestral language (Woodbury 1998: 235),” such rhetorical, aesthetic and expressive suffixes are nearly impossible to transfer and maintain, and thus will probably disappear because this affective suffixation is a “form-dependent expression” (Woodbury 1998: 256).

Taking examples from Navajo poetic practices in Navajo, Navlish, and Navajo English, Webster (2010a) extended Woodbury (1998)’s notion of “form-dependent expression” and suggest that understanding “intimate grammars” is key to understand real Navajo linguistic practices among the Navajo speech community. He also argues that individuals’ engagement with languages varies; yet the concept of “intimate grammars” reveals that language is “not purely an abstract system” (Webster 2010a: 202) and there are always people involved in their expression. It is through “intimate grammars” that people build emotional attachments to their
languages even when those languages are stigmatized or negatively viewed (also see Webster 2011). For them, intimate grammars can be a form of resistance, an icon of ethnic identity and a means of indexing “Navajoness”. Based on Irvine (1990)’s notion of “affective registers,” Webster (2010b) also argues that in a heteroglossic multilingual society, “the choice of language or languages can be seen as an affective display. In such cases, languages can sometimes become affective registers (Webster 2010b: 44).” The concepts of “intimate grammar” (Webster 2010b), “the intimacy of language ideologies” (Webster 2010a) and “affective registers” (Irvine 1990) suggest that speakers’ attitudes towards languages are affected by their felt attachments to their languages. Such affects are constructed through language ideologies and the emotional bonds between individuals and their heritage languages are informed by the multiple language ideologies that contribute to social and individual identities (Kroskrity 2009, Webster 2010b: 40).

**Language Ideologies and Linguistic Biographies**

Silverstein defines linguistic ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use (1979: 193).” To extend this more socio-culturally, language ideologies can be viewed as multiple and constructed from specific political economic perspectives that influence “the cultural ideas about language” (Kroskrity 2009: 11). This suggests that language ideologies may differ and conflict even for a single individual (Field 2009: 46, Irvine and Gal 2000). Kroskrity (2009) expands this notion of individual differences by means of understanding language ideology of a particular individual. He suggests that individual’s life history can be a crucial key to understand language ideological change and the identity construction of that individual (also see Basso ed. 2010).

The notion of the multiplicity of language ideologies calls attention to individuals’ linguistic biographies. Linguistic biography could capture the dynamics of language choice, linguistic preferences and competence in a multilingual individual (Verschik 2002: 40). In this respect, linguistic biographies can be a crucial tool for understanding complexity and multiplicity of identity formation processes. By the same token, I believe that the degree and kinds of speakers’ felt attachments to languages could also be analyzed through their linguistic biographies.

In summer 2011, I conducted interviews with Mopan speakers who engage in language revitalization efforts in multiple locations in Toledo, Belize. The main questions addressed were:
1) How they view “Belizean” Mopan, and how that affects their language revitalization strategies; 2) What kind of linguistic ideologies are found among them and the degree to which they are shared; and 3) How individuals’ linguistic biographies affect their language ideologies, engagement in the Mopan language and their identity as “Belizean” Mopan.

**General Information**

Mopan Maya is a member of the Yukatekan branch of the Mayan language family spoken in the southern Petén region of Guatemala and in the Maya Mountains region of southern Belize (Hofling 2009: 97). According to Ethnologue, it is spoken by 8,375 people in Belize as of 2000 and by 2,600 people in Guatemala as of 1990 (Gordon 2005). Although the estimated number of remaining Mopan speakers both in Belize and in Guatemala has increased (9200 as of 2006, according to Lewis 2009, and 3000–4000 as of 2008, according to Hofling 2011, respectively), Mopan is still classified as a severely endangered language (Moseley ed. 2010). Guatemalan Mopan has been fairly well documented by the missionary based language documentation program of the *Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc* (SIL) (Ulrich and Ulrich 1976) and by the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (ALMG) (ALMG 2001, 2003, 2004; also see England 1998). Its distinct grammatical features have also drawn attention from several linguists (Danziger 1996, 2001; Hofling 2007, 2009, 2011; Kaufman 1991, 2003; Schumann Galvés 1997). However, no intensive dialect variation study and documentation has been conducted on Belizean Mopan, despite the fact that many Mopan speakers in Belize claim that each Mopan village has distinctly different variants that are also different from Guatemalan Mopan (TKCL 2009: 1).

All existing Mopan dictionaries (ALMG 2001, 2003, 2004), except Hofling (2011), are written in Spanish using the orthography approved by the ALMG. Without having knowledge of Spanish, those dictionaries are not accessible to most English-Mopan speakers in Belize. In response to that, *Tumul K’ín Center of Learning*, a local Mayan high school incorporating heritage languages and cultures into their curriculum, created a small Belizean Mopan Maya-English dictionary¹. However, its purpose is not language documentation, but rather providing a teaching guide based on Guatemalan Mopan.

¹ *Kamb’al Ich T’an Mopan Maya* (TKCL 2009). This book is widely called the “Red Book.”
Belizean Mopan is distinct from Guatemalan Mopan on account of its unique linguistic environment. Located on a borderland, there has been longstanding movement of Mopan populations between Belize and Guatemala. Although English is an official language of Belize and is taught in schools, many elders cannot use English and Spanish is still a lingua franca for them. Immigration of Qʼeqchiʼ Maya speakers into some villages as well as interaction with Belizean Creole speakers in a city also contribute to multilingualism among Belizean Mopan speakers.

Currently, San Antonio, San Jose, Na Luum Caj, Santa Elena, and Pueblo Viejo are considered Mopan villages, while other villages such as Blue Creek are Qʼeqchiʼ villages. However, there are high numbers of intermarriages as well as job-related short-term migrations within the area due to the lack of an efficient transportation system. For example, most of the grade school teachers are relocated within Toledo district every 3 to 5 years regardless of their linguistic background. That means a Creole teacher who does not speak either Mopan or Qʼeqchiʼ may be sent to a Mopan village, or a Mopan teacher who used to teach in a Mopan village can be transferred to a school where the majority of students only understand Qʼeqchiʼ, which the teacher does not speak. There are daily busses from Punta Gorda to Jalacte, a small village bordering Guatemala, via San Antonio, the largest village in the area. However, the majority of villages have only two busses to go back and forth to Punta Gorda four times a week and there are no means of commuting between distant villages unless one has private transportation (which is very rare). Therefore, those teachers who are relocated usually rent a house for the weekdays, or even months until the semesters are over. Interethnic marriages between Mopan and Qʼeqchiʼ are not uncommon. In many cases, a husband and a wife do not speak or understand each other’s language during their courtship or in the beginning of their marriage. Their children usually grow up as either Mopan or Qʼeqchiʼ based on the majority of their residential community. Thus, it is highly possible that even within a village that claims to be solely Mopan, we can find several Qʼeqchiʼ families and good number of people are actually ethnically Mopan-Qʼeqchiʼ mix.
Interviews

In what follows, I compare three young teachers, Ms. Elvia Bo at Blue Creek, Ms. Alora Coc from San Antonio, and Mr. Richard Peck from San Jose. All of them participated in the creation of a Belize Mopan dictionary, *Kamb’al Ich T’an Mopan Maya* (TKCL 2009, also called the “Red Book”). However, interestingly, they are all ethnically a Mopan-Q’eqchi’ mix, hence not “pure” Mopan.

Ms. Elvia Bo (E.B):

Elvia is a 23-year-old Mopan Maya teacher at Tumul K’in Center of Learning/High School. She herself was also a graduate of Tumul K’in. She was born and raised in the village of Pueblo Viejo. Her father is Mopan but her mother is Q’eqchi’. In her house, her mother speaks Q’eqchi’ to the father and he responds in Mopan. According to Elvia, her parents do not really follow “tradition” and did not ask her to speak a certain language. Elvia also speaks Standard English and Creole. She said she is not planning to teach a specific language to her children, it depends on her future husband. She thinks the Mopan language is not dying and that people will keep speaking it. However, the younger generation is more influenced by English and Creole. They have not forgotten their own language but prefer to use Creole and English.

Although she is a Mopan language teacher, Elvia thinks she does not speak fluent Mopan. She often forgets Mopan words and uses Q’eqchi’ instead. Sometimes, in her Mopan language class, her Mopan students point out she is using a Q’eqchi’ term or having different pronunciations. Her boyfriend, who is “really” Mopan, always tells her that her Mopan is funny: it sounds like Q’eqchi. She also thinks her Q’eqchi’ is limited. She said she understands it but does not speak it fluently. In fact, she had to take a Q’eqchi’ class when she was a student of Tumul K’in, because a Mopan class was not offered then. However, she did not pay much attention to the class and failed. That is why she “knows” she is not 100% pure Mopan nor Q’eqchi’. She is a mix and does not speak either language fluently.

For her, getting this teaching position was an accident. After graduation, she went to Cayo in North Western Belize looking for a job, but her mother got sick so she came back home to stay with her. Then, Tumul K’in contacted her. They were looking for someone, preferably a
female and a Tumul K’in graduate, who could go to San Luis, Guatemala for five months to be trained as a Mopan language teacher. She was available at that time, and met their requirements. Needing a job, she accepted the offer. When I asked whether she liked to teach, she said yes, but did not sound enthusiastic about it. She feels she is still learning and developing her teaching skills as she teaches. The available teaching materials are very limited and that was one reason why the “Red Book”—a dictionary—was created as a teaching guide. Eventually, she wants to do something different, getting a job other than teaching Mopan in school.

**Ms. Alora Coc (A.C):**

Ms. Alora Coc is a 33-year-old grade school teacher at San Antonio. She is one of the narrators of the stories on the CD accompanying the “red book.” She is also a head member of the Congress of Maya Teachers (CMT), the organization promoting quality education for indigenous people (UNICEF 2010).

She was born and raised in San Antonio. Her mother is Mopan and her father is Q’eqchi’ but he learned Mopan and speaks it to his wife and children. Currently, she is a single mother, which is very rare in the local community, and has a son with whom she mostly speaks Mopan. Even though she grew up in a household and community where everyone speaks Mopan, she always felt that she does not speak “fluent” Mopan. She said she is “guilty” because her Mopan is quite different. This is not only because she has a Q’eqchi’ father who does not speak “pure” Mopan, but also she mixes her Mopan with English. She thinks she tends to use more English and blend it into her Mopan and that is not proper. If she is speaking Mopan, it should be fluent, meaning “pure” not mixing with English. By the same token, she thinks Mopan should not be mixed with Creole. Mixing languages is the weakness that she has and she sees it in children as well. Developing interests in speaking “pure” Mopan as a marker of her Mopan identity, Ms. Coc decided to take a linguistic class at Tumul K’in taught by teachers from San Luis, affiliated with the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG). She took the class along with other Mopan teachers of San Jose, where she taught for one year. However, there was no feedback or continuation of discussions among teachers who completed the class. She thinks Mopan will die out if they do not look into developing some resources to have children read and learn how to go about using language. That motivated her participation in the “red book” project. Ms. Coc points out that the “red book” is not really “Belizean” Mopan because many materials
are from Guatemala, but it is written in English so that people can understand it. She still uses it a lot, not only for teaching Mopan but to teach children English because it contains the alphabet.

For her, language is who you are. Her parents also put emphasis on the importance of language. Her sister does not understand Q’eqchi’ but she learned it when she taught at Aguacate, one of the Q’eqchi’ villages. Teaching at Aguacate gave her new experiences and affected her perspectives on language, culture and tradition in relation to one’s own identity. She claims that in Aguacate, people have more awareness of who they are and both language and culture are much more embraced compared to San Antonio. Parents also participate and are aware of the importance of promoting language and culture through activities, such as spelling contests and wearing traditional cloth as a school uniform.

“In (Aguacate) everywhere I go, I feel comfortable wearing my cultural clothing. That’s just of me. I’m not afraid to say who I am, but and then in, in this institution (in San Jose), now it’s, it is little different because some people, some teachers say what children should learn is…you just see them not want them to participate in anything. You know…so it is a little…it’s hard. It’s hard to get by. (A.C. 6-21-11)”

Being in both Mopan and Q’eqchi’ schools made her more aware of interest gaps in one’s heritage language and culture. In Aguacate, she felt comfortable to embrace her identity as Maya and all villagers have positive attitudes toward their language and culture. On the other hand, according to her, Mopan schools and their teachers, especially those of San Antonio have a much more apathetic attitude toward revitalization and promotion of their own culture and language. For example, Ms. Coc is teaching first grade children who are mostly still Mopan monolinguals. She uses grammatical English in class but uses Mopan to explain concepts and meanings that children do not understand in English. However, other teachers, even Mopan ones, complain that she speaks too much Mopan to students because they think children should speak more English.

In her view, teachers in San Luis Rey School are different. They came there for a job to get money and everyone goes home after 3:30. Teachers do not meet after school hours and do not discuss academic or school related issues. They only have staff meetings. In contrast, at Aguacate school, teachers get together after school and discussed where the school should go,
what to do to improve the school and what is better for the children. For her, education is not just teaching but it should go beyond that.

“…You need to reach out to parents, you need to reach out to other, involve the community…but again, it’s hard to do that here. It’s really hard to do that here. (A.C. 6-21-11)”

She looks at language and tradition as a whole. She thinks Maya people should appreciate who they are. And they should pass these feelings on to their children through education. For her, it is not only languages but also cultures that encounter endangerment. For example, in Aguacate, elders come voluntarily and teach children how to make a bowl out of a calabash. So now children know what to do with a calabash. But in San Antonio, if you ask children to get a calabash, they will ask you what you would do with it because there is no cultural education at home from parents. These calabash bowls can easily be an indexical and iconic material of Mayan ethnic identity, because the Mayan people have used calabash bowls for long time (Aoyama and Inomata 1997). For her, this calabash case was a striking example indicating that Mopan people do not really have much interest in passing down their language and culture.

“…people they don’t really have that interests. Interest is not here at San Luis Ray School. It’s hard to say that, but you know, it begins from us. (A.C. 6-21-11)”

She said she will not be in San Antonio next year, because she will be done teaching this coming September and will take time to study for about two years to finish her education at the University of Belize.

Mr. Richard Peck (R.P):
Mr. Richard Peck is a grade school teacher in San Jose. He is in his late 20’s and also the chairman of the village. He was also another narrator for the “Red Book” CD. His wife is a Mopan speaker from Santa Cruz and they have a son and a daughter. His father is Q’eqchi’ and his mother is Mopan. His mother cannot speak Q’eqchi’ but his father is bilingual so that they
communicate in Mopan. He speaks Mopan, a little bit of Q’eqchi, Standard English, a little bit of Spanish and understands but does not particularly speak Creole, which he learned in high school in Punta Gorda. He mentioned that when he was at high school, there was a certain discrimination against indigenous students. Because of that, students were afraid of speaking their first language and wanted to fit in to Creole society by speaking Creole. Teachers also encouraged them to speak “English”, by which they actually meant Creole, because they were Creole speakers. Being exposed to the ideologies that indigenous Mayan languages and cultures are inferior than other languages and cultures such as English and Creole, many children want to assimilate to or become more like Americans or Creoles. Mr. Peck said that he feels the higher you go in education, the more you forget your language.

Unlike the majority of teachers in other schools, many San Jose teachers grew up in and have taught in San Jose for a much longer time. Richard has also been teaching in San Jose for 10 years and never taught in any other location. They share interests in promoting language and took the linguistic class in Tumul K’in to learn Mopan grammar and acquire Mopan literacy.

Recently, San Jose was chosen to be a modeling school of Tumul K’in and CMT’s bilingual program, sponsored mostly by UNICEF and UNESCO. This bilingual program does not offer any language immersion class but officially allows teachers to use Mopan to explain things they teach at school. Many San Jose teachers said it had a huge impact on children’s learning ability. There were drastic changes in students’ performance such as on national exams. However, not all teachers are Mopan speakers and therefore they cannot participate in the program. It is also up to teachers to figure out how to incorporate Mopan into the classroom. Some teachers including Richard teach children how to write and read in Mopan using their own materials, while others use Mopan only to explain things.

**Discussion 1—Language Purity**

Belizean Mopan is distinct from Guatemalan Mopan on account of their unique linguistic environments and socio-politico-economical situations. Many studies show that this kind of language contact often results in the emergence of linguistic variation (Anderson 1998, Hill and Hill 1986, Webster 2010a), changes in discourse markers, speech styles, linguistic practices (Brody 1987, Innes 2004, 2006; Kroskrity 1993, 1998; Jackson and Linn 2000) and semantic shifts and extensions (Basso 1990). In fact, Hanks (2010) argues for a strong influence of
Spanish on colonial Yukatek Maya in the Northern Yucatan peninsula. Brody (1995) also reported extensive borrowings from Spanish into Mesoamerican languages. Having been a British colony and exposed to English, the development of contemporary Mopan in Belize must have undergone different processes than those of Guatemala.

In fact, many Belizean Mopan speakers express their feelings that Guatemalan Mopan is very different from Belize Mopan. However, when I asked what the differences are, they often point out that Belizean Mopan contains more Spanish loan words than Guatemalan Mopan, hence it is not “pure.” Some still attribute differences to accents and pronunciations, but it is highly possible that such differences are affected by their second (or sometimes first) languages which are often times either Spanish or English. The differences people notice are actually often not differences between Mopan dialects but rather between English and Spanish. That Mopan Maya teachers from San Luis offer a workshop at Tumul K’in using both Mopan and Spanish to communicate with students also indicates that for Guatemalan Mopan speakers, there are not big differences and both Mopan dialects are mutually intelligible. Thus the dialectal issues of Mopan would not be comparable to the case of Lacandon Maya whose North and South varieties are distinctively different and are reportedly not mutually intelligible (Hofling 2011, personal communication). But if there are not many linguistic dialectal differences between Mopan dialects, why do Belizean Mopan speakers emphasize the differences while Guatemalan Mopan speakers do not? What is the motivation to create the “Belizean Maya” dictionary and learning guide instead of just directly translating Guatemalan Mopan dictionaries and grammar book? Among whom is the idea that Guatemalan Mopan is pure shared? Why do some people still believe that the “Red Book” does not represent “pure Belizean”? I seek the answers for these questions in local language ideologies, in the speakers felt attachments to their language and social identity and in discourses surrounding “language purity.”

All teachers believe that language mixing is bad because it loses the essence of language. Both Elvia and Ms. Coc express that their Mopan is mixed, hence they feel that their language is not “pure.” Such feelings grew after taking the class and learning “how you are supposed to speak.” On the other hand, Mr. Peck thinks that after completing the class, he is more aware of his Mopan and now speaks much more “purely” and even better than before and than other people. He believes mixing is losing the essence of language. Sometimes people laugh at him for using “pure” Mopan because no one understands it. However, he wants to speak the way
Mopan people used to speak—“pure” and “correct.” That makes more sense to him because he is Mopan.

“For example, a term “bridge.” When I was a child, I always wanted to say “my house is over the bridge” but I did not know the word “bridge” in Mopan… Now I know and I can say it in Mopan. It’s maneeb ’ xot-ja’ and that makes more sense. (R.P 6/28/11)”

Hofling (2011, personal communication) pointed out that their strong ideology of language “purity” is probably influenced by San Luís teachers and ALMG who emphasize the idea that Guatemalan Mopan determined by ALMG is the correct form of Mopan and that the language should be “pure”.

The ideology of language purism also cannot be separated from the issue of language standardization. When a language is recorded and made into a dictionary and/or a grammar book, variations tend to be ignored and the choice of what form should be recorded and become a standard one is strongly influenced by local language ideologies. The process also involves the materialization of language, in which a given language is turned into actual physical objects (texts). This making of textual objects is what Blommaert (2008) called “practices of artefactualisation” of languages. The process also relates to indexicalization and iconization of a certain ethnic identity through a language. Since the majority of Mayan speakers speak Spanish, there is a strong expectation for Belizean Mopan speakers to speak Spanish to authenticate their ethnic identity as “Maya”. There is also a widespread ideology that those who engage in the study of indigenous people and languages of Latin America should be literate in Spanish in order to share the results of one’s study, to continue their work and education, or just simply to make materials available to indigenous people. However, such Spanish ideology excludes a country like Belize where the official language and lingua franca is English. For example, there is not much reading and educational material available in Mopan without Spanish literacy. To learn one’s own language (Mopan), one needs to learn another language (Spanish).

Recently, the government of Belize installed Spanish as a second language program in order to promote cooperation with and to strengthen competitive power over other Central American countries. Now, Spanish is taught in school in addition to Standard British English. As
Hymes (1996) argued, all languages are not equal because there are power hierarchies and inequalities among speakers. Ideologies that English and Spanish are more valuable—having superior position in a linguistic market—would negatively affect students’ motivation to keep their indigenous languages. It may also introduce the idea that Spanish is more valuable than English. For example, Elvia mentioned that among young Mayan males, having a Spanish speaking girlfriend is very “hot.” San Luis Peten, Guatemala has been a cultural center for Mopan people for long time. Now, it is the academic center as well. Going to San Luis and taking workshop is more privileged than taking a class in Tumul K’in.

The adoration for Spanish and Spanish speakers, placing their roots in Guatemala and attributing cultural and academic center to San Luis Peten may affect the common positioning of Guatemalan Mopan as “better,” “correct” and “pure” than Belizean Mopan.

**Individual’s Role in Language Documentation and Revitalization**

There have been increasing demands for the documentation of the heritage language and traditional speech genres and oratorical performances among Mopan villagers. However, no distinct language documentation project has been conducted yet. Mr. Juan Mes, another San Jose Mopan teacher who is deeply committing to language revitalization and documentation, is trying to record old stories from elders, but because of the lack of equipment, not much work has been completed. Sometimes, Ak’ Kutan Radio, a multilingual radio station promoting indigenous language and culture, broadcasts local stories, traditional knowledge, and so forth in both Maya and Q’eqchi’. However, no effective archiving of those programs has been done.

Being a member of Tumul K’in and having access to Ak’ Kutan Radio station, Elvia could play a more active role in the revitalization and documentation process. For example, having a radio program promoting Mopan (or even Q’eqchi’) literacy or even offering a language learning class over the radio\(^2\). However, as she described, her appointment was accidental. She is also very self-conscious about her language ability and claims she is not “fluent” in Mopan despite the fact that she teaches Mopan at high school. Webster points out that both iconic relations and felt attachments between speakers and languages are “created” (Webster 2010a), “imagined” (Webster 2010b: 44, also see Agha 2003), or “expected” (Webster 2011, also see Webster and Peterson 2011) through metapragmatic terms that are associated with

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\(^2\) Such language learning courses are one of the most popular programs in Japanese public radio station.
indignity as well as metadiscourses on the role and value of languages. The degree of social and linguistic intimacy is also construed, constrained and constructed through language ideologies. Elvia does not seem to put a strong ideological emphasis on or to express deep felt attachment to a specific language she uses.

On the other hand, Ms. Coc shows strong interest in promoting culture and language. Her attitudes toward language and culture are strongly influenced by the revitalization movement among the Q’eqchi’. Having a son may affect her urgent feeling for passing down cultural and linguistic knowledge. Her motivation seems to be influenced by her sense of frustration and guilt as well as of the responsibility. That Ms. Coc said she is ashamed of not speaking Mopan properly indicates she has strong felt attachment and ideological commitment to Mopan language. Looking for the effective means to promote language and culture, she is inclined toward institutional and communal approaches.

Interestingly, both females do not particularly engage in creating or performing many linguistic activities, such as writing a diary, songs, or poems, or translating English books into Mopan etc. Webster argues that “(l)anguage is more than mere reference. It is more than a communicative tool. It is also a set of poetic, aesthetic, and expressive utterances to and through which individual speakers build felt attachment...individuals create language through use, and such uses create felt attachments to linguistic forms” (Webster 2010a: 204). Such a playful use of language and affects does not seem to be exercised in both Elvia and Ms. Coc’s daily discourse. They have felt attachments to their heritage language but they do not seem to deal with their feelings as individuals. Their attitudes toward Mopan are strongly influenced by the ideology of language purity—how they should speak—not by how they want to utilize and play with their own language.

In contrast, Mr. Peck and other San Jose teachers are much more actively engaging in both inputs and outputs. They utilize their Mopan literacy not only for education but also for entertainment. For example, they write songs about their personal life, emotions, and sensitive feelings or songs encouraging hard work and teaching values of life to the children. Mr. Mes translated English carols into Mopan and sang with his students. They encourage children to use Mopan terms instead of English as well as to engage in creative writing in Mopan. Some of teachers, for example Mr. Mes, also write poems and tell stories for themselves or for the children. In the future, they hope to assemble a Mopan storybook for the children and use it for a
reading class. For them, songs and poems are effective means to index their intimacy to their social, cultural and linguistic identity (Webster 2010b, also see Abu-Lughod 2000, Fox 2004, and Samuels 2004).

Even though there are still limitations in pedagogical materials and funding, they want to expand the “bilingual” program and install more activities, not only language related, but also addressing culture and tradition. They believe the program gave them the opportunity and power to promote a positive view and value of the Mopan language and culture. However, it is they who made the program effective, and hence are the agency of language revitalization.

**Conclusion**

Long ago, Sapir (1949) pointed out that language is a force of socialization and a vocal actualization of the reality that is constrained through culture—an accumulation of individuals’ experiences through time. For him, culture is not a unitary whole and it differs in each individual (Sapir 1949); and language is a summary of individual intuition (Sapir 1921). He suggests that language and culture are inseparable, and so are language and the individual. The individual engagement with language spoken in a given society may differ depending on the degree of attachment to collective identity and culture, of secrecy and formality of situation, and of social status (Sherzer 1983, Woodbury 1998). Understanding multiple factors such as linguistic competition (Barrett 2008), the politics of identity (England 2002, Hill and Hill 1986), and the multilayered linguistic ideologies (Field 2009, Kroskrity 2009, Kroskrity and Field eds. 2009) that influence individuals’ linguistic biographies is crucial for effective language revitalization and maintenance.

Although institutional support provides help for a revitalization movement and people in Toledo ideologically support that, it is the power of individuals that makes true revitalization possible and effective. Webster (2010a: 40) suggested that the iconic relations between speakers and languages are mediated by speakers’ felt attachment to their languages. Speakers’ attitudes towards languages are affected by their felt attachments to each language that are constructed through their language ideologies and identities.

During my interviews, many people who have ethnic backgrounds other than Mopan expressed their sense of belonging to Mopan because they grew up with Mopan culture and speak Mopan as their first language. One thing that distinguishes Richard and other San Jose
teachers from Elvia and Ms. Coc is that they grew up and have taught in San Jose for a long period of time. They not only have an attachment to the language but also to the place and the community in which they belong. They also have a sense of acceptance of other Mayan cultures, that of Q’eqchi’s, and of Guatemalan Mopans. They place their Belizean Mopan identity within Belize’s multilingual multiethnic society. That they are all Belizean, distinguishes them from Guatemalan Mopans. Regardless of their ethnic background, whether Mopan, Q’eqchi’, mestizo or mixed, they know they belong to the land of Belize, and the land of the Maya. Their identity is attached to their Mopan Maya community. It is Mopan language to which they feel emotional attachment and which they consider as their “mother” tongue, and thus are willing to make efforts to pass it onto the next generation.
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