

## **SOCIALIZING HETEROGLOSSIA AMONG MISKITU CHILDREN ON THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF NICARAGUA<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article adapts Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia" as a framework for analyzing Miskitu children's multilingual speech on Corn Island, off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Analysis of naturally occurring speech in this context illustrates the utility of partial competencies and hybridized speech, supporting a view of language not as a bounded system, but as a diverse pool of communicative resources that socialize children into multiple modes of voicing and acting. More broadly, the article examines the relations between language ideologies and language socialization, and the ways that both are articulated within complex histories of cultural interaction and stratified social relations. The article challenges conventional dichotomies of language loss and revitalization by viewing the hybrid linguistic practices that enable children to bridge social and cultural worlds.

**Keywords:** Heteroglossia; Miskitu; Creole English; Spanish; Multilingualism; Code-switching; Peer play; Language socialization.

### **Introduction**

In the past twenty-five years, the cross-cultural study of language socialization has greatly expanded our understandings of the varied ways that children acquire linguistic and sociocultural competence in their everyday interactions. The pioneering studies revealed limitations in developmental research that assumed middle-class Euro-American practices were universal, as well as limitations in anthropological research that ignored language altogether in socializing processes (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b; Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; Kulick and Schieffelin 2004). In postcolonial and multicultural settings, language socialization studies have helped to locate sites of inequality in educational institutions that privilege certain modes of communication and suppress others (Heath 1983; Boggs 1985; Philips 1983). Related studies of children's vernacular language use in marginalized communities have revealed patterns of pragmatic skill and competence, countering dominant discourses of deficiency (Goodwin 1990, 2006; Zentella 1997). Increasingly, language socialization has become a valuable lens for examining language contact, endangerment, and shift, connecting

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micro-level interaction with macro-level ideologies and power relations in a rapidly changing world (Kulick 1992; Schieffelin 1994; Paugh 2001, 2005; Garrett 1999, 2005, 2007; Rindstedt and Aronsson 2002; Meek 2007; Makihara 2005a, 2005b).

The language socialization paradigm has been remarkably flexible in its adaptations to changing theoretical concerns and social realities (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Kulick and Schieffelin 2004). However, language socialization studies have tended to trace coherent relations between language and culture, normatively socialized by adult-child interaction. A very different perspective comes into view when we consider children's peer interaction as a socializing practice. Since play activities often inspire experimentation and transgression, children's peer interaction often pushes the boundaries of linguistic repertoires. Children are not only objects but also agents of their socialization, as Amy Kyratzis has noted: "What children learn is tied to what they are trying to accomplish in terms of identity- and social organization-forming work" (2004: 641). This observation is especially important in contexts of language contact and potential shift (Meek 2007). Even when children are discouraged by adults from using certain linguistic practices, they may acquire competence in those practices through peer play away from adult supervision (Paugh 2005; Garrett 2007).

A different perspective on language socialization is also possible when we loosen our expectations of iconic order - the sense of resemblance between signs, their meanings, and the contexts in which they are used. Studies of Latino children's language socialization and code-switching in the U.S. have raised questions about simplistic correlations between class, ethnicity, and language use, as well as the association of particular communicative practices with particular domains of interaction (González 2001; Vásquez et al. 1994; Zentella 1997). Communicative practices and people often move across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries, and generalizations can obscure considerable variation in a "community of speakers," which is, after all, an analytic construct (Pratt 1987). In situations of language contact and shift, viewing language-culture relations as primarily iconic can obscure areas of cultural continuity and survival despite linguistic change (Bunte 2009; Field 2001; Reynolds 2002; Makihara 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Meek 2007; Samuels 2004).

In our efforts to validate subaltern socializing practices, have we privileged views of order over disorder? Can disorderly communicative practices be productive as means of socialization? To a certain extent, conventionality and shared frameworks may be necessary for meaningful communication, but the idea of unified order in communicative practices is historically contingent on ideological relations between language, culture, and nation (Pratt 1987; Bauman and Briggs 2003). Jane and Kenneth Hill made a seminal argument for studying disorderly as well as orderly communicative practices, foregrounding the utility of M.M. Bakhtin's translinguistic theory for analyzing such practices:

[A] view of multilingualism which admits only order cannot address the fact that different languages bring with them different world views or ideologies, which may engage in battle, an engagement in which rules can be broken in order for one voice or another to achieve domination of the dialogue and impose its own point of view. When rules are broken, there can be disorganization and incoherence, and Bakhtin's translinguistic theory admits such a possibility. (Hill and Hill 1986: 396)

Following this work, I use Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia" to talk about the stratified diversity of languages and styles that appear in any social encounter (Bakhtin 1981, 1986).<sup>2</sup> Since communicative practices have multiple rather than unified origins, heteroglossia is a feature of all language use, but postcolonial contexts often entail especially striking juxtapositions that evade orderly schemes of analysis.

This article examines some contemporary practices of heteroglossia among indigenous Miskitu children living in a multilingual community on Corn Island, 52 miles off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Making sense of children's discourse on Corn Island requires going beyond the immediate interactive context, which is typically the focus in sociolinguistic analyses. I present historical, ideological, and structural perspectives on the heterogeneity of language use in this region, and then examine in detail transcribed excerpts of a children's play activity. The analysis focuses not only on the diversity of "languages" such as Miskitu, Spanish, or English used in their interaction, but also the heterogeneity of expression within and across those languages. Although I use the term "multilingualism" in this article, the speech phenomena are more akin to what Valerie Youssef has called "varilingualism," which entails variable competencies and varied patterns of mixing linguistic systems that may be inter-related (Youssef 1991a, 1991b, 1996; discussed in Paugh 2001).

In the activity I analyze, several older children were looking after a 2-year-old girl, who was socialized into different languages, registers, and genres, at the same time that she was socialized into a hierarchical power structure built around age and gender. Their discourse also suggests an implicit power structure in language ideologies, as they used English primarily for commands and threats. However, distinctions between languages and their associations are not always clear, due to the long history of language contact and creolization in the region, creating "bivalence" and ambiguity in indexical and iconic meanings (Woolard 1999). The heteroglossia of this communicative context suggests a need to carefully examine common assumptions about the relationships between language socialization, peer interaction, and language shift. Not all speakers of marginalized languages are on an inexorable path to language shift, precipitated by socializing interactions with peers or adults. As several recent studies have shown, children may also maintain and expand the use of marginalized languages (or linguistic styles) in heteroglossic peer play, sometimes against the explicit wishes of their elders (Paugh 2005; Garrett 2007; Makihara 2004, 2005a, 2005b).

## **History and heteroglossia**

As Bakhtin wrote, words are never neutral, but bear traces of their histories, inflecting speech with the accents of other voices from other times and places (Bakhtin 1986). Even a casual visitor to the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua will catch echoes of past voices in speech that draws from multiple sources, oddly familiar to an English or

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<sup>2</sup> In his essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Bakhtin makes a distinction between "heteroglossia" - the diversity of expressive forms within a language - and "polyglossia" - the co-existence and "inter-animation" of languages within a cultural system (Bakhtin 1986). In Bakhtin's terms, polyglossia encompasses heteroglossia, because languages are always internally diverse. But for my purposes here, heteroglossia serves as a more intuitive umbrella term, because the root meanings of "hetero" - different and other - are essential to the dynamics of interactive struggle, whereas "poly" suggests simply multiplicity. For a similar approach see Pujolar (2001) and Bailey (2007).

Spanish speaker but not necessarily intelligible. At least since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this region has been a site of cross-cultural contact and linguistic exchange. Indigenous people living near the coast intermarried with escaped African slaves beginning in the early 1640s, forming a group that acquired considerable power through an alliance with the English. By 1679 these people were called Miskitu (or “Mosquito”) Indians, a name which eventually included other indigenous communities that spoke the same language but did not necessarily have the same degree of cross-cultural interaction (Offen 2002, 2010).<sup>3</sup> Miskitu women also formed conjugal unions with European travelers and settlers, often raising their children as Miskitu. Under an informal colonial system, Miskitu kings and their sons received English educations in Jamaica or Belize and sometimes traveled to England. English loan words became especially common in the Miskitu language during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when West Indians poured into the region to work in British and later American companies.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Miskitu leaders were displaced from their position of power by another group identified as Creoles. Corn Island was one of the places on the coast where people of mixed African, European, and indigenous ancestry began calling themselves Creoles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gordon 1998). They were free people of color who spoke a variety of Western Caribbean Creole English as a first language and shared West Indian cultural ties. The Creole population on Corn Island was augmented by West Indian migration throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but remained relatively small and close-knit, with deeply rooted family histories drawing together the “native” Creole islanders. While Corn Island (along with the mainland Caribbean coast) officially became part of Nicaragua in 1894, Creole English continued to be a sign of sociality, intimacy, and in-group belonging for Creoles. Acrolect variants of the creole continuum indexed education and affluence for certain sectors of the community.<sup>4</sup>

Significant Miskitu migration from the mainland Caribbean coast to Corn Island began in the 1960s and increased dramatically from the 1980s onward. Linked to economic and political transformations in the region, these population shifts also included new waves of Mestizo migrants from western Nicaragua to Corn Island. At the time of my research in 2003, the island’s population was almost 7000 people - about half of them Creole, a quarter Miskitu, and a quarter Mestizo. Miskitu residents of the island were close to the bottom of an uneasy social hierarchy, often scapegoated in controversies over land ownership and squatting, decreasing marine resources, and drug trafficking. In this context, the Miskitu language indexed a dangerous difference in the speech of racialized interlopers who could easily disappear in the densely populated migrant neighborhoods. Miskitu was often portrayed as incomprehensible to Creoles

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<sup>3</sup> Linguists have described Miskitu as a Misumalpan language in the Chibcha family (Craig 1985; Salamanca Castillo 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Creole languages are often characterized by a continuum of variants, unevenly distributed across contexts and speakers, that range from the acrolect (closest to the “standard” language) to basilect (furthest from the “standard”). On the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, all of these variants are usually referred to simply as “English,” but most people recognize their distinctiveness from the “standard” varieties of English they hear from international visitors or on television. When making distinctions between varieties, basilect forms are sometimes referred to as “Creole” or (in the recently developed writing system) “Kriol.” Creole speakers with less formal education, including children, could not easily comprehend my North American variety of English, and some kids found it so strange that they were convinced it was not actually English.

and Mestizos, although some people who identified as Creoles were also proficient in Miskitu, and even a few Mestizo children learned Miskitu in their peer play

Miskitu families who settled on Corn Island in the 1970s or earlier tend to have the broadest range of linguistic competencies, with considerable variation in competence and preferences even in the same family. This variation depends on different patterns of language socialization, histories of migration, school attendance, and peer group affiliations (cf. García-Sánchez, this volume). One family that raised seven children on the island serves as an example, represented in Figure 1.<sup>5</sup> The four oldest children began with Miskitu as their first language, and learned Spanish in school. The third oldest, a boy with considerable freedom to wander and make friends in other neighborhoods, soon developed fluency in Creole English, as did the fifth child, also a boy (most of the girls in this family also learned Creole English but at a slower pace). When the fifth child was growing up, the parents determined to speak to their younger children only in Spanish, in an attempt to facilitate their educational achievement. The sixth child, a girl, speaks almost exclusively Spanish. When the seventh child was young, several primary school-age relatives from mainland Miskitu villages came to live with the extended family, thus expanding the Miskitu spoken in the neighborhood peer group and her own Miskitu competence. The two youngest daughters were also influenced by the friendships they formed in a private school on the other side of the island. The second youngest made friends mostly with Spanish-speaking girls, while the youngest daughter made friends mostly with Creole English-speaking girls. The second youngest continued to be Spanish dominant, but the youngest had relatively equal competence in Spanish and Creole English, and considerable (though more restricted) competence in Miskitu.

The heteroglossia of the family household shifted slightly when the second oldest daughter went to study in Bluefields - a Creole-dominant city on the mainland coast - during her late teen years. Her competence in Creole English increased there, and when she returned to Corn Island, she resolved to speak to her next younger sister only in Creole English, to continue practicing, but she always spoke to her two youngest sisters in Spanish, to help them in school. The trajectory of language competencies in their extended family has not merely been a shift from Miskitu to Spanish or Creole English. A male cousin who grew up in a neighboring house began as a Creole-dominant speaker with listening competence in Miskitu; his father was bilingual in Miskitu and Creole English, but thought Creole English would better serve the children's future. However, when this cousin was in his early teens, his parents became involved in the indigenous social movements on the coast and re-valued their Miskitu competence. They started speaking to their children primarily in Miskitu, and their teenage son became a proficient Miskitu speaker.

**Figure 1: Heteroglossia in the family**

Child 1 (girl): addressed in Miskitu when young; lived in Costa Rica as a young adult; fluent in Miskitu, Spanish, and some competence in Creole English.

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of my research, Children 1-4 were young adults in their late teens or early twenties; Children 5-7 were 12, 9, and 7 years old.

Child 2 (girl): addressed in Miskitu when young; lived in Bluefields (Creole-dominant city) as a teen; speaks to parents in Miskitu, to Child 4 and 5 in Creole, and to Child 6 and 7 in Spanish.

Child 3 (boy): addressed in Miskitu when young; learned Creole with peers and Spanish at school; fluent in all three languages.

Child 4 (girl): addressed in Miskitu when young; learned Spanish and Creole English at school and in the neighborhood; fluent in all three languages.

Child 5 (boy): addressed in Miskitu and Spanish when young; learned Creole English from peers and older brother; Creole is preferred language.

Child 6 (girl): addressed in Spanish when young; friends with Spanish-speaking peers at school; Spanish is preferred language; some speaking competence in Creole; some listening competence in Miskitu but speaks it very rarely.

Child 7 (girl): addressed in Spanish when young; friends with Creole-speaking peers at school; learned Miskitu (though not fluent) playing with cousins from mainland villages.

Viewing the language competencies and preferences of this family schematically is important for examining the long-term fluctuation and indeterminacy of shift. This is an upwardly mobile family living in a multilingual community for over thirty years, with a tendency to view Miskitu villages (and their monolingual Miskitu speech) as somewhat backward. Yet out of seven children, only one did not acquire significant competence in speaking Miskitu. The maintenance of Miskitu competencies, in this family and others, was facilitated by the use of Miskitu in the Moravian church, and by the continued arrival of new Miskitu migrants from linguistically conservative villages on the mainland.<sup>6</sup>

The cousin's re-socialization into Miskitu following a period of Creole dominance is one of many accounts that suggest the possibility of resurgence of a language that had been perceived to be in decline. In Kakabila, another multilingual community in the mainland Pearl Lagoon Basin, Mark Jamieson (1995, 2007) has suggested that Miskitu children speak mostly Creole English when they are young, but begin to speak more Miskitu as they approach adulthood, as part of a process of entering the rights and responsibilities of full adult membership in the community. Language socialization is a life-long process, and while children are certainly some of the quickest learners, there is no specific cut-off age for expanding one's linguistic repertoire. The passive knowledge that often comes through listening comprehension in a multilingual community may facilitate later shifts in preference and use. The language revitalization movement on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua is a major impetus for these kinds of shifts as people re-claim linguistic practices and identities from older generations.<sup>7</sup> Leanne Hinton (2005) has described this kind of process as "tip back," an expansion of Dorian's conception of "tip" - the crucial moment in language shift away from an ancestral language. Whereas Dorian's metaphor was the "tip" of an iceberg turning over, Hinton's "tip" and "tip back" are opposite ends of a see-saw. This

<sup>6</sup> German Moravian missionaries established the Moravian church as a central institution on the Caribbean coast beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1972, Moravian churches on the coast have been headed by local ministers and elders. The Moravian church on Corn Island had a Miskitu minister and a Miskitu-dominant congregation at the time of this study.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Koskinen 1995, 2010; Craig 1992a, 1992b; Grinevald 2007; Freeland 1993, 1995, 2004; Benedicto 2010; Salamanca 1984, 2007.

reconceptualization is central for analyzing the fluidity of language use and the possibility of reversing shift.

Understanding these movements of language change in a dynamic heteroglossic setting requires looking at socializing encounters across social and institutional contexts (see other contributions to this volume). On Corn Island, all schools include classes taught in Spanish. There is a long tradition of education in English - mostly through religious schools - on Corn Island; currently, several public schools have designated classrooms for English or Creole English curricula, associated with the regional bilingual-intercultural education program.<sup>8</sup> In 2003, during my research period, Miskitu became an official language in the lower grades of the semi-private, Miskitu-dominated Moravian school on Corn Island, along with Spanish and Creole English. Miskitu children who attended public schools only had access to classes in Spanish or (Creole) English.

Many Miskitu children did not attend school on Corn Island, either because their parents could not afford uniforms or school fees, or because they arrived in the middle of the school year when an investment in education would not necessarily result in passing to the next grade. Those children who attended school spent relatively little time there in comparison to U.S. schoolchildren - usually three or four hours, either in the morning or afternoon, with lots of holidays and absences due to illness or bad weather. Thus, children's peer interactions outside of school took on increased importance in socialization. Since caregiving is usually the responsibility of older siblings and cousins, young children spent most of their time in mixed-age play groups, which served an important role in language socialization (cf. García-Sánchez; Reynolds, this volume). Their interaction was shaped by local ideologies of language and language socialization, as well as by common structures in the linguistic repertoires to which they had access.

### **Ideologies and structures of heteroglossia**

A common local language ideology among Miskitu caregivers on Corn Island was that babies better understood Spanish or Creole English. Some caregivers consistently spoke to infants only in Spanish or Creole English, depending on their own competence and ideologies about which language would better serve their children. Others who had more limited multilingual skills made an effort to use Spanish or Creole English phrases while speaking to their infants in Miskitu. In most cases, parents said they expected their children to grow up speaking Miskitu as well, but Spanish and English seemed to index their transitional status in a migrant community, hopeful for a future with more possibilities of education and employment.

Many parents had an additive rather than a subtractive view of language socialization. They did not perceive the acquisition of English or Spanish as interfering with acquisition of Miskitu, which was considered an important means of connecting with home communities, extended families, and for many, worship contexts. Many of the upwardly mobile families who valued education in Spanish and English took this

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<sup>8</sup> In this bilingual-intercultural education program, Creole English curricula have most often used textbooks in "standard" English, while classroom discourse was in Creole English. In recent years, regional educators have developed a writing system for "Nicaraguan Kriol" and have begun to develop some texts in Creole/Kriol English. See Koskinen (2010).

view. Some continued to maintain contexts for their children to learn Miskitu as well, while others did not. Children who did not have many opportunities to actively practice Miskitu seemed to pick up on more subtle cues from their parents, with Miskitu becoming a less desirable element of their linguistic repertoires. These were the families where some children appeared to be shifting away from Miskitu.

The people who endorsed a “subtractive” view of language socialization - that is, an attempted shift away from Miskitu - were generally the poorest and most marginalized members of the community, who themselves had limited competence in Spanish or Creole English. Ironically, these same people who explicitly endorsed a shift away from Miskitu did not always have the means of realizing that shift. They had the richest stock of Miskitu traditional knowledge, including language, but did not have easy access to formal education and social networks in which they could expand their Spanish or English competence.

For Miskitu children on Corn Island, local languages were not rigidly compartmentalized, but rather fluidly interchanged and fused in daily use. While no language is a pure entity unto itself, some language ideologies and linguistic forms are more open to borrowing than others. Miskitu people have historically embraced cosmopolitan influences while maintaining indigenous identities and practices. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, English loan words in Miskitu have indexed modernity and power, but many loan words have become so naturalized that most people consider them autochthonous. Indeed, they have become autochthonous as a form of linguistic mixture originating on the Caribbean coast.

The Miskitu language has phonological, morphological and morpho-syntactic structures that facilitate the integration of loan words. For example, historically the Miskitu language did not include the fricative; thus Miskitu speakers adapted the English word “fine” with an initial plosive, giving rise to the Miskitu word *pain*. In Miskitu, the possessive is formed with suffixes and infixes in Miskitu nouns, and this morphological system has been used to adapt vast numbers of borrowed nouns (primarily through suffixes). Among Miskitu children on Corn Island, the hybrid loan word *mamiki* (my mother) was at least as common as the indigenous term *yaptiki*:

<i>yaptiki</i>	becomes	<i>mamiki</i>
yapta + 1 <sup>st</sup> p. poss. <i>ki</i>		mama + 1 <sup>st</sup> p. poss. <i>ki</i>

Miskitu verbs are conjugated by means of morpho-syntactic suffixes, which can also be attached to loan words (Salamanca 1992; Jamieson 1999). For example, the English verb “want” is followed by the suffixes *-sna*, *-sma*, or *-sa* for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> person inflection (these are also conjugations of the Miskitu verb “to be”):

( <i>yang</i> ) <i>wantsna</i>	I want
( <i>man</i> ) <i>wantsma</i>	you want
( <i>witin</i> ) <i>wantsa</i>	he/she wants

The pronoun is optional; thus *Dia wantsma?* means “What do you want?” Loan verbs can also be adapted using Miskitu auxiliary verbs, in particular *munaia* (usually used with ergative subject) and *takaia* (used with absolute subject) (Jamieson 1999). Thus, the English word “learn” has been adapted in two different constructions: *lan takaia* (to learn) and *lan munaia* (to teach). Auxiliary verbs are especially useful for speakers who



live between languages, since they can easily integrate loan words without altering them to suit Miskitu morphology. Miskitu kids on Corn Island often used the compound verb *fait munaia* (English “fight” + aux. *munaia*), which, for example, could be conjugated as *fait munisa* (he is/they are fighting). Spanish loan words for bureaucratic processes were also usefully integrated into Miskitu, for example, *matricular munaia* (to matriculate).

Miskitu has not been considered a creole language because the Miskitu grammatical structure has, for the most part, remained intact, for example, in SOV word order. The variability of Miskitu, however, is comparable to the Creole continuum in moving between different contexts of use and social identities. Frequent code-switching and loan words can index peer-group relations and identities of Miskitu children who are growing up on Corn Island, in distinction to the less heteroglossic speech of their relatives in mainland Miskitu villages. Even for Miskitu speakers with limited Creole competence, the Creole tag question *ent?* (“isn’t it?”) is gradually integrated into Miskitu speech within a few months of residence on the island. In contrast, more “monoglossic” varieties of Miskitu - with minimal use of loan words and code-switching - can index village identities. “Purified” registers of Miskitu can also index indigenous sovereignty and rights in formal speech among Miskitu leaders (cf. Makihara 2004: 536). The primary thrust of socializing practices on Corn Island is not towards purification but rather diversification, as is evident from caregiver speech.

### **Enregistered caregiving**

Miskitu speech to young children often includes repetition, vocables, altered intonation, and a specialized lexicon. Discourse directed at young children has long been examined as evidence of the existence (or non-existence) of a “baby talk” or caregiver register - a variety of speech dependent on the social context of addressing young children. One of the central contributions of early language socialization research was to show that simplified registers for speaking to children were not universal, and that children could learn to speak quite well without them (e.g., Schieffelin 1990). In recent years, the study of register has shifted from description of linguistic features to analysis of the social practices of “enregisterment,” influenced by Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia (see Reynolds; García-Sánchez; Kyratzis, this volume). Asif Agha describes the concept of enregisterment as “processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users” (Agha 2005). “Enregistered” performances embody voices that evoke “cultural images of persons as well as situations and activities” (Irvine 1990: 130). As Judith Irvine notes, “the concept of register is inherently heteroglossic” due to the plurality of interacting registers and voices (1990: 128).

Among Miskitu families on Corn Island, using English and Spanish words and phrases became a part of the caregiver register, indexing the ideologies of multilingual socialization mentioned above. For those who spoke English or Spanish as a second language, the use of these languages tended to be simplified, in effect constituting an overlap of a “foreigner talk” register with the “baby talk” register. However, the very incorporation of multiple languages into caregiver speech was not exactly a simplification. Speech directed at young children in Miskitu was not necessarily simplified, either. Miskitu caregiver speech was enregistered through repetition, sound

play, poetics, and a baby talk lexicon, which indexed the age status of young children, and conveyed and shaped affective states.

As Ferguson (1977: 227) pointed out, variability is a common characteristic of caregiver registers, and this variability is probably more pronounced in multilingual and multi-dialectal settings. In Figure 2, I provide a short list of some of the special lexemes employed in caregiver speech to Miskitu babies on Corn Island. Some expressions are also used in Nicaraguan Creole English, either with the same meaning or a different meaning, as indicated below. Many of the lexemes used in the Miskitu caregiver register rely on reduplication, a common feature of creole languages. Some of the expressions do not have precise translations because their meaning is located primarily in the sound of the vocalization and its context of use, indexing the affective stance of the speaker and the infant identity of the hearer. Expressions are often performed with extreme contrasts in affect. For example, *miau miau*, echoing a kitten's meow, is voiced in a high pitch range, and may be used in the following manner to soothe an agitated infant: *Bibi inpara, miau miau miau* (Don't cry, baby, meow meow meow). *Kaka* - a word that may originate from Spanish *caca* - is voiced in a loud, deep manner and is intended to startle an infant and convey strong disapproval.

### Figure 2: Baby talk lexicon

<i>kua kua:</i>	imitation of perceived vocalization by baby (Miskitu)
<i>miau miau:</i>	expression used when playing with or trying to distract baby (Miskitu)
<i>dam dam:</i>	"to eat" (Miskitu)
<i>tap tap:</i>	"to suck" or "to drink" (Miskitu)
<i>nini:</i>	"baby bottle" (Miskitu and Creole)
<i>titi:</i>	"baby bottle" (Miskitu and some Creole varieties)
<i>ti ti ti:</i>	"to walk" (Miskitu)
<i>tatá:</i>	"goodbye" (Miskitu and Creole); "carry me"/"take me" (Miskitu)
<i>kaka:</i>	"dirty," "bad," or "wrong" (Miskitu, possibly derived from Spanish)
<i>nam nam:</i>	"food" (Miskitu)
<i>mumu:</i>	"animal spirit" ( <i>setan</i> ) that can hurt or deceive a small child (Miskitu)
<i>pilum:</i>	"rattle" or "little thing" (Miskitu)
<i>ting:</i>	expression used when knocking on something to get baby's attention
<i>lulua:</i>	expression used to calm baby (Miskitu)

Ferguson (1977) provides a summary of the principal functions of caregiver speech registers which are applicable to the Miskitu context. The caregiver register 1) facilitates communication and self-expression in spite of the limited competence of the younger participant; 2) conveys caregivers' emotions toward the young child and toward the situation; and 3) serves as a medium for language teaching and for socialization more generally. The poetic features of the Miskitu caregiver register (repetition, alliteration, assonance, manipulation of pitch and amplitude) help to accomplish all three functions. These features signal to young children that a strip of speech is addressed to them and convey the affective stance of the speaker. Young Miskitu children are also addressed using the same linguistic resources that are used with older children and adults, but truncation, repetition, and exaggerated intonation are employed to adapt speech to an infant's perceived capacity for comprehension. The Miskitu caregiver register does not only facilitate the acquisition of Miskitu. The use of

loan words and hybrid structures in Miskitu speech to children can serve as a scaffold for understanding and speaking other regional languages.

### **Socializing heteroglossia in children's play**

Studies of caregiver registers have tended to focus on adult-child interactions, but older children also use caregiver registers to address younger children and to enact adult roles in play. In a society in which caregiving is largely the responsibility of children and youth, infants and young children are heavily influenced by their siblings, cousins, and peers (Reynolds; García-Sánchez, this volume). Older children may be particularly adept at scaffolding younger children's actions, because the "zone of proximal development" is somewhat narrower than it is in adult-child interactions (Vygotsky 1978). As new generations adapt to changing contexts, children's peer discourse is also a key context for socializing emergent forms of heteroglossia. Children are more playful and experimental in their language use, and language play facilitates meta-linguistic awareness and second language acquisition (Cazden 1976; Tarone 2000).

To illuminate how these processes and structures unfold in practice, I have chosen a transcription of a peer group activity among some Miskitu-dominant children on Corn Island. Their discourse reveals emergent forms of multilingualism, as well as other kinds of heterogeneity viewed here under the rubric of heteroglossia. These include sound play, micro-genres such as cursing, and the caregiver register. Broadening the analysis from a study of code-switching to a study of heteroglossia helps to consider a range of heterogeneous styles that are meaningful in children's language use, including languages, registers and genres (Woolard 2004). I am interested not only in how children acquire communicative practices in a heteroglossic environment, but also in how those practices are tied to distinct social roles, identities, and the exercise of power. In learning to communicate in heteroglossia, young children also come to perceive the subject positions that are available or possible in their social worlds (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004; Garrett 2007).

One afternoon in 2003, I arrived at the house of some Miskitu children on Corn Island who were involved in an activity that they called *piaki pulaia* - cooking play. The children - siblings from two families who lived near each other - were outside building a real fire and gathering small quantities of food to be cooked and eaten with miniature utensils. It was an activity that they had watched (and helped) their mothers carry out many times, but this time it was enacted in the pleasurable context of peer play, away from watchful adult eyes. After three months of sitting in on children's play activities without a supervisory role, I was clearly not considered a responsible adult, and the kids carried out a number of illicit acts in my presence: stealing bananas from a neighbor's yard, cursing, trying to smoke an abandoned cigarette butt, and upsetting the 2-year-old toddler in their care.

The primary participants were Leyla (12 years old), her younger brother Kori (7 years old), their neighbor Neysi (7 years old), and her baby sister Mirna (2 years, 7 months).<sup>9</sup> Periodically, Kori and Leyla's brother David (8 years) stopped by and joined the dialogue, as did Neysi and Mirna's brother Eric (9 years). These children had lived most of their lives on Corn Island, but their parents were relatively recent migrants. Both mothers were Miskitu-dominant speakers from the northern region. The father of

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<sup>9</sup> All the names of children are pseudonyms.

Leyla and her siblings was from Tasbapauni, a mixed Miskitu and Creole community in the southern region, and he had both Creole and Miskitu competencies and social ties. The father of Neysi and her siblings also had both Creole and Miskitu relations and communicative skills, although he came from the northern region. Neither of the fathers lived continuously with their children, who heard mostly Miskitu at home, lived in a predominantly Miskitu neighborhood, and spoke mostly Miskitu among themselves.

As an older sister, Neysi had the primary responsibility for taking care of Mirna, but the other children also addressed the toddler and watched out for her. Mirna was beginning to talk using brief words and phrases. Her mother told me that Mirna best understood Creole English. However, the only person in Mirna's family who spoke Creole English fluently was her father, who spent 45 days at a time away from the family, working as a cook on a commercial fishing vessel. The children made an effort to address Neysi in Creole English, given their own limited competence in that language. They also addressed her extensively in Miskitu, and occasionally used short phrases in Spanish.

Leyla, the oldest participant, was clearly in charge and ordered everyone else around, directing them to look for food items, gather firewood, and wash dishes. When there was any resistance to her orders, she reminded her subordinates that they would not be given food if they did not contribute to the activity. She performed with relish the role of the Miskitu matriarch, weighted with responsibility but also strengthened by the power to control family members. Mirna was not considered too young to labor in service of the family collective enacted in the peer group. When her father came into sight, the kids sent Mirna to see him, since they knew he would give her a coin which could be used to purchase some item for the play activity. They also instructed her in the skill of washing dishes.

During the course of the cooking play, which lasted a little over an hour, the older children employed at least 146 utterances that were directed at or named Mirna; these were most likely to catch her attention and accomplish the work of socialization. 63 of these utterances were directives or commands targeting Mirna. Others were statements about her actions, sound play and "baby talk," denials or consent to perceived requests, minimal explanations, and threats. The majority of the utterances were in Miskitu. Most of the English utterances were used to command, threaten, or scold Mirna. (This does not include English loan words in Miskitu, which Miskitu speakers would not consider a significant switch.) Miskitu was also used to command, scold, and threaten; thus there was no simple dichotomy between a "power" code and an "intimacy" code (cf. Jorgensen 1998). However, only English and Spanish were used for cursing; this highly mobile, succinct genre enabled children to easily incorporate adult language into their play discourse (cf. Garrett 2005).

### Figure 3: Transcription conventions

<i>Italics</i>		Miskitu
<u><i>Underlined Italics</i></u>		Spanish
<u>Roman</u>		Nicaraguan Creole English
Brackets	[	Simultaneous utterances
Equals sign	=	Interlocking utterances
Single Parentheses	( )	Unclear utterance
Double Parentheses	(( ))	Transcriber's comments

Dash	-	Interruption
Ellipsis	((...))	Deletion

### Emotion and action in caregiving

The older children accommodated Mirna in several ways: they used more Creole English in addressing her than they used among themselves, and they used the baby talk lexicon in their speech to her. To facilitate her comprehension they repeated utterances, translated utterances, and provided multiple forms of an utterance. They also used vocables and sound play with dramatic intonation that would catch her attention, re-affirming that “prosodic and paralinguistic features...contribute to the contextualization of talk” (Reynolds, this volume). In Example 1, Neysi makes a directive to Mirna in Creole English, a language Neysi rarely used with her peers or other members of her family. She switches back to Miskitu to comment to the others on Mirna’s behavior and to repeat the directive for Mirna to sit down.

#### Example 1

- 1 Neysi: Mirna sit daun dea, aha? Aha? Ah, sit daun dea.  
Mirna sit down there, aha? Aha? Ah, sit down there.
- 2 *Na (sika karwaia laik man kau iws.)*  
This one (likes to move around, you still sit down.)
- 3 Leyla: *Wips, eh. Aha, Mirna! Swis, swis!*  
Spank her, eh. Aha, Mirna! Leave it, leave it!

Mirna begins to cry, and Kori tries to distract her by making exclamations and pointing to a supposed *mumu*, the lexeme used in the caregiver register for an evil animal spirit or *setan*. *Aloy* is an affectively charged Miskitu interjection.

- 4 Kori: *Ah! Eh! Tsh! Ent, ini, ah! Mirna, aha Mirna!*  
*Ah! Eh! Isn’t she, crying, ah! Mirna, aha Mirna!*
- 5 *Aha mumu alaia lai, aloy, heh! Heh! Aloy aloy.*  
*Aha look an evil spirit, aloy, heh! Heh! Aloy aloy.*
- 6 Neysi: Kom sit daun dea.  
Come sit down there.

Neysi repeats her directive in Creole English to have Mirna sit down, demonstrating the expectation of a certain amount of comprehension and competence on the part of Mirna.

Example 2 illustrates the conjunction of the caregiver register with multilingual speech and vocal play, all directed at Mirna in an attempt to shape her actions. Mirna is eating a mango which Kori believes rightfully belongs to him, and he tries to persuade her to give him the mango through verbal persuasion, distraction, and offers of exchange. Kori has been speaking Miskitu but in the first line, he shifts to Creole English to say *gimi*, that is, give me the mango, and he draws from the caregiver lexicon

with the word *titi*, or bottle, which is used in both Miskitu and Creole English. Mirna does not take Kori up on his offer of the bottle, so he picks up a chick that is hopping underfoot and makes motions to trade the chick for the mango. In line 3, Neysi, always looking out for her baby sister, says in Miskitu that Kori is lying, that he won't really give her the chick. In line 5, Leyla warns Kori that the chick may die in Mirna's care. Nevertheless, Kori continues to use all possible communicative resources for persuasion, kissing the chick loudly and making sounds that seem intended to attract Mirna's attention and to convey the pleasure of holding the chick, as well as referring to the chick in Creole English as *nais*, in line 8.

### Example 2

- 1 Kori: Gimi, yu want titi? Gimi, gimi dat, gimi. Gimi.  
Give me, you want a bottle? Give me, give me that, give me. Give me.
- 2 Aha? Mirna=  
((Kori picks up baby chick, kissing it and making motions to trade it for the mango))
- 3 Neysi: =*Mirna, kuning mai munisa.*  
=Mirna, he's lying to you.
- 4 Kori: *Rait, lukisma!* ((loudly kissing chick)) *Mm mm mm. Mm-hm, Mirna?*  
For real, believe it! ((loudly kissing chick)) *Mm mm mm. Mm-hm, Mirna?*
- 5 Leyla: *Kalilki ba upla ra yas prubia taim kaikma.*  
Give my chick to people ((and)) when it dies, you'll see.
- 6 Kori: *Mm, mm, mm mm. Mm-hm, Mirna, aha?* ((makes kissing noises)) *Un un un i::h.*
- 7 *A chi chi chi chi? A chi chi chi chi? Ts ts ts ts, mm, mm, mm.*
- 8 *Nais, sh: sh: ((...))*  
Nice, sh: sh: ((...))

In line 9 below, Kori heightens the intensity of his persuasion, making an effort to use his limited Creole English skills to argue that Mirna doesn't want to eat the mango, and closes with the Spanish tag question *oíste*, "you hear?". In line 11 he switches to Miskitu but uses a parallel structure with the same tag question in Miskitu, *walisma?*. This time, in line 12, Neysi supports Kori's persuasive effort through format tying (Goodwin 1990), linking her utterance to Kori's preceding utterance. She speaks to Mirna in Creole English with a Spanish loan word, "yu no wanna eat da comida." Leyla echoes this utterance and closes with the Miskitu expression *wiba*, "he says," which often marks reported speech. Through repetition, parallelism, paraphrase, and translation, the children modify their speech to Mirna in an effort to facilitate her

comprehension.<sup>10</sup> In line 17, Mirna finally responds by asking if she should throw the mango down. She uses the Miskitu directive *lulks*, throw, but pronounces it as *lulch*. The other children re-voice this idiosyncratic pronunciation and reinforce Mirna's participation in speech and interaction. In line 23, Leyla is referring to Mirna when she asks in Miskitu, "What does she say, *lulch*?" and Kori continues to repeat Mirna's expression.

- 9 Kori: Eh! Ju wan eat, no eat, no eat yu. Mirna, aha?  
Eh! You want to eat, no eat, you no eat. Mirna, aha?
- 10 Mirna, dis yu no wan eat yu, oíste?  
Mirna, you don't want to eat this, you hear?
- 11 Ba ah- man biamram banghwaisa, walisma?  
That ah- your stomach is going to get full, you hear?
- 12 Neysi: Yu no wanna eat da comida.  
You don't want to eat the food.
- 13 Leyla: Yu no wanna eat da comida, wiba.  
You don't want to eat the food, he says.
- 14 Kori: Yeah. You want- man piras plun! Man piras!  
Yeah. You want-you don't eat food! You don't eat!
- 15 Leyla: Wel piaisa, Mirna.  
Well she's going to eat, Mirna.
- 16 Kori: Mirna! Rait! [Piaisma, man-  
Mirna! Right! [You're going to eat-
- 17 Mirna: [Lulch? Lulch?  
[Throw? Throw?
- 18 Kori: Aha?
- 19 Mirna: Lulch?  
Throw?
- 20 Kori: Apia, lulks. Yang ra, yang ra, yang ra. Lulch, lulch?  
No, throw. To me, to me, to me. Throw, throw?
- 21 Mirna: ( )
- 22 Kori: Apia, apia. Naku, aha? Naku. ((makes snorting noise))

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<sup>10</sup> See de León (2007) for a discussion of parallelism and repetition in Mayan children's metalinguistic play.

No, no. Like this, aha? Like this. ((makes snorting noise))

23 Leyla: *Dia wisa? Lulch?*  
What does she say? Lulch?

24 Kori: *Lulch? Yang ra aik, yang ra aik. Aha, aha. Lulch? Lulch?*  
Throw? Give it to me, give it to me. Aha, aha. Throw? Throw?

25 ((pause)) *Lulch?*  
((pause)) Throw?

In the preceding excerpt Mirna responds to Kori's persuasions in her own way, but she does not give him the mango. Kori could have easily overpowered her and taken the mango, but the fact that he does not go beyond tools of verbal and gestural persuasion suggests a certain amount of respect for Mirna's status as a person, albeit a small one with limited communicative skills. The older children in this activity adapted their speech to Mirna based on the idea of young children being English- or Spanish-dominant, but they also spoke extensive Miskitu with her, and they used sound play to catch her attention and convey affective states. As they socialized Mirna into heteroglossic speech and positioned her as a "novice," they also acquired competence in the caregiver register, aligning themselves with "expert" roles and actions (cf. Paugh 2005). Through their use of a register often voiced by adults, the children built forms of social organization relevant to the peer group as well as to the larger community (Kyratzis 2007, this volume). Their discourse shows that "registers are living social formations, susceptible to society-internal variation and change through the activities of persons attuned to alignments with figures performed in use" (Agha 2005: 40).

### **Translations and interlingual speech**

Translations for the benefit of Mirna, a young language learner, were a prominent source of heteroglossia in the children's speech. The older children apparently translated utterances in order to facilitate Mirna's comprehension and expose her to diverse linguistic repertoires. In Example 4 below, Kori uses the Spanish loan word *huevo*, integrated with the Miskitu constructive suffix *-ka*. The Miskitu word for egg, *mahbra*, is commonly used in Miskitu households on Corn Island, but knowledge of the word *huevo* is essential for communicating with the largely Mestizo merchants. Following the Miskitu interjection *aloy*, Kori uses sound symbolism to represent the sizzling egg. The expression *yu no* ("you know") is commonly used in both Creole English and Miskitu discourse on Corn Island and can be considered bivalent (Woolard 1999). Leyla switches to Creole English to translate and expand Kori's question directed to Mirna.

#### **Example 4**

1 Kori: *Aloy, huevoka na shhhhhh. Shhhhhh. Piaia, yu no? Mirna, piaia?*  
Aloy, this egg shhhhhh. Shhhhhh. To eat, you know? Mirna, to eat?

2 Leyla: *Mirna wan eat, yu?*  
Mirna want to eat, you?



Example 5 involves a more precise translation of a directive. Neysi directs Mirna in Miskitu to put a small piece of wood in the fire. After a vocalization by Mirna, Leyla translates the directive to English.

**Example 5**

- 1 Neysi: *Aha? Dingks.* ((Mirna makes vocal sounds))  
Aha? Put it in.
- 2 Mirna: Huh-uh.
- 3 Leyla: Put it in.  
Put it in.

Example 6 is an interlingual and intertextual utterance. Mirna was sitting on a special metal seat that Kori considered his possession, and he suggested that she was being presumptuous by addressing her as “plesidente alnordo.” This was a reference to the former president Arnoldo Alemán, who in most public discourse was not viewed favorably at the time as he was being charged with embezzling millions of dollars from the state during his presidency. Like many young Miskitu speakers, Kori still often confused his “l” sounds and “r” sounds. He follows the Spanish word “plesidente,” with the Miskitu word *kuna* (“but”), and then makes the directive in Creole English, “move from there.”

**Example 6**

- 1 Kori: *Au? Plesidente kuna, muv fom deuw!*  
Yeah? But president, move from there!
- 2 *Plesidente Alnordo, muv fom deuw!* ((Neysi is laughing))  
President Alnordo, move from there!

Rather than a code-switch, this example is best characterized as an interlingual utterance that combines phonological and lexical features of Spanish, Creole English, and Miskitu. It is also an example of *intertextuality* in the sense developed by Julia Kristeva, following Bakhtin, which entails the transposition or passage from one signifying system to another (Kristeva 1984: 60). As Briggs and Bauman (1992) have argued, intertextuality is a communicative process of creating relations between bodies of discourse - in this case a relation between adult discourses of national politics and children’s discourses of peer play (cf. Minks 2006). Children appropriate the discourses that surround them in their social and media interaction, recontextualizing them with new meanings in the peer group (cf. Reynolds; García-Sánchez, this volume).

**Cursing across codes**

In addition to using humorous acts of persuasion, the older kids in the cooking play often attempted to shape Mirna’s behavior by scolding, commanding, and threatening her. Leyla, Kori, and David also used strong language by cursing, not necessarily

directed at Mirna, but sometimes associated with her actions. Paul Garrett (2005) has suggested that cursing, scolding, joking, and insulting are speech genres that involve a self-assertive stance on the part of the speaker. In his research context, a multilingual community on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Lucia, these genres were most often expressed in the vernacular, a local Creole language. The vernacular was perceived as being more authentic, true to heightened states of emotion and local, in-group values. Garrett makes the important argument that linguistic heterogeneity is often organized by code-specific genres; what appears to be “code-switching” is often “genre-switching.” For the Miskitu children involved in the cooking play, the relationship between genre and code was not clear-cut. Although their vernacular language was Miskitu, they enacted cursing interjections exclusively in English or Spanish, suggesting that this genre is not always associated with the vernacular language of a community. The primary Miskitu interjection used - *aluy* - could not be considered transgressive in the way that cursing words were.

At the beginning of the cooking play activity, Kori became enraged because Mirna had a plastic Garfield figure which he considered to be his possession. In Miskitu, plastic animal figures of all kinds may be called *mikimaus* (Mickey Mouse), revealing the transnational, translanguistic movement of children’s culture. Kori referred to the Garfield figure as *mikiki* (my mickey), and he held Neysi and Mirna responsible for its appropriation.

### Example 7

Kori: *Fakin as, ba Neysi, ya implikan naha duki? Duki na ya implikan?*

Fuckin ass, Neysi, who stole this thing of mine? Who stole this thing of mine?

By prefacing his demand for information with the English curse “fuckin ass,” Kori expressed his intense anger. A slightly less vituperative curse in English was the word “shit,” used by Miskitu children even in some households that were more strict (though usually outside the earshot of authority figures). Again, Kori directed his strong language towards Mirna’s actions. When Neysi told Mirna to sit down on the chair, Kori responded derisively, inserting *shit* into his comment (although the meaning of his extended utterance is not entirely clear):

### Example 8

1 Neysi: *Mirna, serka bara iws.*  
Mirna, sit down on the chair there.

2 Kori: *An lupia- Iwma apia kuna dan, shit! Yang sika apia sna.*  
And the little-you’re not going to sit but you’re done, shit! I’m not.

Finally, Leyla uttered a Spanish curse that indexed a strong emotional response to Neysi’s action of leaving dirty dishes behind. Her turn was initiated with the Miskitu interjection *aluy*, which was commonly voiced with an extreme rising pitch and extended second syllable.

### Example 9

1 Leyla: *A ↑lu:y! Na dia pletka bal auhbram?*  
A↑lu:y! What kind of plate do you come throwing?

- 2 *No joda, yang dia naha nani plet ka na ya-ya dukia?*  
No fucking way, I what-whose are these plates?

In line 1, *aluy* was a versatile interjection that denoted surprise; in line 2, *no joda* took on a stronger, more antagonistic voice. Both interjections appear in parallel structure, prefacing demands for information with an accusatory tone.

As Garrett argues, emotional states are often expressed using the vernacular language, which may be the most fluid language of uninhibited self-assertion. The emotional utterances transcribed above were mostly in Miskitu (the vernacular for these children), but the utterances attained added force through curse words borrowed from English and Spanish. The curse words themselves may be viewed as a highly detachable and mobile micro-genre that is easily recontextualized in contrasting stretches of speech (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Garrett 2005; Reynolds 2007). Speakers draw on the range of linguistic resources to which they have access in order to convey particular emotional stances and effects, and code-switching and mixing often intensify conflictive stances (Cromdal 2004). Illicit or “bad language” is a key site of appropriation and transformation in children’s peer play as they elaborate their own agendas in negotiating interaction (Evaldsson and Cekaite; García-Sánchez, this volume).

### Teaching routines

Perhaps the most prominent examples of socialization in the peer group were indexical teaching routines, which were not always multilingual but employed other kinds of heteroglossia. These routines used repetition of utterances to enregister a caregiving voice oriented toward Mirna’s participation in the activity at hand. The oil in which Leyla was frying eggs and green bananas was very hot and was popping out of the pan, dangerously close to Mirna. Young Miskitu children are usually not isolated from dangerous objects and situations, but they are taught from an early age to avoid those dangers and to handle dangerous objects with care. In Example 10, the three older children collectively taught Mirna the word *amma* (“you burn”), and at the same time, they also taught her to stay clear of the fire and popping oil. The Miskitu word *kaikram*, “you see,” served as an indexical link between the spoken discourse and the concrete objects and activity at hand. Both Kori and Neysi addressed Mirna directly by name to focus her attention, and they slowly repeated the word *amma* to socialize her understanding of the consequence of standing too close to the fire: “you burn.”

### Example 10

- 1 Leyla: *Aha, kaikram, aha, aha, amma? Amma, kaikram tuktika ba=*  
*Aha, you see, aha, aha, you burn? You burn, you see the kid=*
- 2 Kori: *=Aha, aha, kaikram amma? Amma? Mirna, amma?*  
*=Aha, aha, you see you burn? You burn? Mirna, you burn?*
- 3 Neysi: *Amma, Mirna, aha? Amma, amma, amma?*  
*You burn, Mirna, aha? Burn, burn, burn?*

In this case, repetition and rhythm enregister a caregiving voice that explicitly teaches Mirna a specific relationship between word, action, environment, and physical experience.

In the final example below, Mirna's caregivers take on a variety of voices to socialize her into gendered roles and responsibilities. This excerpt is an especially clear example of the poetic tendency to project the principle of equivalence from the paradigmatic axis (word choice) to the syntagmatic axis (word combination), as theorized by Roman Jakobson (1960). The older children apparently wanted to tell Mirna to wash the dishes. There are various ways to convey this wish other than a direct imperative; thus the children have the option of choosing among various forms. If the caregiver speech register were exclusively characterized by simplification, the children would probably limit their directive to the word *siks*, the imperative form of *sikbaia* (to wash). They do use this form, but it is part of a string of repetitions of different forms of the verb *sikbaia*, including the future progressive (*sikbaisa*) and present progressive (*sikbuya*). Forms that were more or less equivalent choices along the paradigmatic axis are combined in a linear stream along the syntagmatic axis.

### Example 11

- 1 David: *W-witin sin, "aik, yang sikbai," wiba. ((...))*  
H-her too, "give me, I'm going to wash," she says. ((...))
- 2 Kori: *Siks. Bal. Bal bibi, bal siks.*  
Wash. Come. Come baby, come wash.
- 3 Leyla: *Mirna rawi saks! Siks!*  
Mirna wake up and take it out! Wash!
- 4 David: *Sikbaisa, sikbaisa, sikbaisa, mairin lupia.*  
She's going to wash, going to wash, going to wash, little girl.
- 5 Kori: *Siks, siks, siks, bibi siks.*  
Wash, wash, wash, baby wash.
- 6 David: *Sikbaisa, siks, siks, sikbaisa.*  
She's going to wash, wash, wash, she's going to wash.
- 7 *Sikbuya ki, sikbuya ki, mairin lupia. Sikbuya ki, sikbuya ki. Sikbuya ki.*  
See she's washing, see she's washing, little girl. See she's washing, see she's washing.
- 8 Kori: *Nara swis, nara swis.*  
Leave it here, leave it here.

The preceding series of directives begins with David attributing a proposition ("Give me, I'm going to wash") to Mirna, who is not yet a competent speaker. This practice of speaking for young children is a common technique of socializing language and knowledge about appropriate roles and stances (Schieffelin 1990). Also significant is the attachment of the directive "wash!" and the proposition "she's washing" to a

social role: That of the “little girl” (lines 4 and 7). The attachment of the social label “little girl” to a directive for carrying out a gender-marked task carries a “metacommunicative” function that is central to socializing processes. Gregory Bateson (1972) used this term to refer to an explicit or implicit message in which the focus of discourse is the relationship between speakers. The poetically structured utterances directing Mirna to wash the dishes send a metacommunicative message that this is an appropriate activity for a little girl, indexically linking a particular form of labor with a gendered social label even before Mirna has become a competent speaker (Ochs 1990, 1992). The children’s discourse reveals the fundamental sociality of speech and action, the inequality of social relations, and the variability of expressive form in socializing processes.

## **Conclusion**

After I completed my research in late 2003, Mirna’s parents separated and her mother moved the kids back to Bilwi, the Miskitu-dominant city in the northern region of the mainland coast. I lost track of them for a few years, and then in May of 2007, I was surprised to find them again on Corn Island. Mirna was 6 years old and a Miskitu-dominant speaker. She was in a multilingual first-grade class at the Moravian school, where she was beginning to learn to read and write in Miskitu and Spanish, and also heard extensive Creole English from her classmates and teacher. Mirna was prepared for this multilingual setting, in part, by her early language socialization in the caregiving play group.

The examples I have presented clearly demonstrate the forms of input that older children use to socialize younger children into particular ways of speaking and acting. Input includes translations of interrogatives and directives, interlingual utterances, indexical teaching routines, vocal play, and multilingual utterances in the caregiver register. Furthermore, these examples demonstrate the shaping of input by language ideologies, the utility of partial competencies in preparing children for a heteroglossic environment, and the role of peer socialization in multilingual learning. Not all Miskitu children on Corn Island become fully proficient in Spanish or Creole English, but they need to understand and speak a little of both to communicate with other islanders and to learn to *defenderse*, to defend themselves, in a range of social contexts. Through their interaction in caregiving play groups, Miskitu children on Corn Island are socialized into local forms of heteroglossia.

The varied forms of communication among Miskitu children on Corn Island point to the challenge of uncovering normative patterns of acquiring linguistic and cultural competence. It is a challenge that led Norma González to suggest that “internal diversity *within* populations is as great as diversity *between* populations” (2001: 185). She explains, further, that hybrid modes of communication spill over particular domains:

How often have I heard of Latino adults who as children were admonished to speak only English in the school grounds and their unspoken dread that somehow they would not be able to tell the difference. As languages blur, the contexts that they evoke intermingle and blend. (González 2001: 50)

Communicative practices are mobile across social contexts, and malleable in their recontextualization and recombination. This mobility and malleability have prompted Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) to criticize the assumptions of “cultural gaps” or “discontinuities” across contexts, which have been promoted by language socialization studies. The discontinuity thesis, they say, neglects the emergence of bicultural/intercultural subjectivities, which reveal how “interaction is framed within a sociocultural context that draws upon multiple histories, cultures, and languages” (Vásquez et al. 1994:11).<sup>11</sup> As an alternative approach, they foreground “the dynamic interaction of exchange between two or more cultures rather than focusing on two opposing, mutually exclusive systems” (ibid.:12).

Multilingualism in children’s discourse has been approached differently over time, with all the central paradigms still in force in certain contexts. These include linguistic interference and deficit;<sup>12</sup> cultural conflict and mismatch; codeswitching skill and systematicity; and language shift. All of these tend to rely on normative assumptions of language as a coherent, systematic, bounded entity. Even attempts to valorize linguistic heterogeneity through analyzing the pragmatic skill of codeswitching and its patterned uses and functions have often assumed the separateness of linguistic codes that may not be perceived as such by speakers (Alvarez-Cáccamo 1998). Discourses of language shift and endangerment tend to assume an all-or-nothing game of language maintenance or obsolescence, and shift is often viewed as irreversible. However, some studies contain evidence that options are not limited to monolingualism or bilingualism. Rinstedt and Aronsson (2002), for example, note that the Quichua pronoun system penetrates the local Spanish grammar in the Andean communities they studied in Ecuador; local varieties of Spanish also include Quichua loan words. Spanish, in effect, becomes transculturated and heteroglossic when voiced by Quichua speakers and their descendants.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, speaking a variety of Spanish inflected with Quichua forms is not the same as speaking Quichua, and I do not want to diminish the unequal systems of power and ideology that lead to these shifting forms. Nevertheless, such hybrid communicative practices are intimately linked to senses of occupying multiple cultural and linguistic worlds. We need to pay attention to the ways that dominant and subaltern languages are stratified in heteroglossia, as in the unequal framing of language revitalization textbooks discussed by Barbra Meek and Jacqueline Messing (2007). We also need to acknowledge the important work of language activists who develop formal registers, often “purified” of perceived foreign elements, for use in education, political discourse, or media. However, in the everyday practice of many communities, hybrid forms of speech are critical tools for expressing the experiences of moving between languages and cultures, and combining global discourses with the discourses of ancestors. The

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<sup>11</sup> Vásquez et al. (1994) also make the important point that the idea of cultural gaps between home and school obscures other factors in educational success or failure, such as unequal funding and resources. Systematic discrimination becomes a matter of “misunderstanding,” thereby eliminating blame.

<sup>12</sup> Bailey (2007) also links the concept of “interference” to deficit theories of learning that were prominent in the 1950s and 60s. A more recent use of the term, however, focuses on syncretism or simultaneity that “involves more than one level of linguistic organization (such as prosody, phonology, morphology, and syntax)” and does not imply a deficit in resources for communication (Makihara 2004, following Woolard 1999).

<sup>13</sup> I use “transculturated” here in the sense developed by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1995[1940]), meaning the mutual transformation of cultures in contact, as opposed to one-way assimilation or acculturation.

linguistic creativity displayed in the adaptation and integration of loan words in Miskitu has, arguably, supported its maintenance over centuries of cross-linguistic and intercultural contact. A similar analysis has emerged in Miki Makihara's work on Easter Island, where "syncretism can be viewed as an indication of the Rapa Nui language's vitality and adaptability" (Makihara 2004: 531; cf. Makihara 2005a, 2005b). Like the case of Miskitu children on Corn Island, Rapa Nui children actively contribute to re-shaping linguistic norms through syncretic speech styles that cannot be reduced to "bilingualism" or "language loss."

Focusing on children's discourse is essential for understanding "the ideological orientation toward the languages in contact, itself constructed by child peers among themselves, through crossing and defining their own speaking styles" (Kyratzis 2004: 642). The children studied here incorporated key aspects of local language ideologies in their speech, such as socializing infants and toddlers through Creole English and Spanish phrases. However, they also departed from this ideology by speaking extensive Miskitu among themselves and with the toddler. They displayed an ideology of language mixing that reflects their ambiguous positioning in a multilingual community. The children's discourse reveals heterogeneity and inequality within "languages" as well as across them. Heteroglossia does not keep all voices on equal par, but it can facilitate the maintenance of marginalized languages in some form. Socializing heteroglossia creates an indeterminacy in the development of communicative competence, with possibilities of realigning structures of power in the voices of future generations.

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